

Attitudes and Stereotypes About the Homeless: A Study on Self-persuasion and Stereotype Accuracy

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A study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of self-persuasion to change attitudes about the homeless and to examine the contents and the accuracy of current stereotypes of this group. Participants wrote an essay about the plight of the homeless, an essay about an unrelated social topic, or no essay. Participants in the relevant-essay group subsequently had the most sympathetic attitudes toward the homeless. Stereotypes about the personal and the demographic characteristics of the homeless were not affected by this manipulation. Participants were less likely to attribute positive personality traits to the homeless than to people in general. Their judgments were highly variable, suggesting that the stereotype is not crystallized. Comparison between judgments and objective demographic data revealed modest stereotype accuracy.

KEY WORDS: Attitudes, Stereotypes, Self-persuasion, Accuracy

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Research on the social perception of homeless people has increased since the late 1980s. Some research has been concerned with homeless people as a distinctive social category (e.g., Toro & McDonell, 1992), whereas other studies have focused on a variety of intersections between homeless people and other social categories, such as being elderly or mentally ill (e.g., Whalen & Link, 1998). One general concern of this work is the degree to which homeless people are perceived with sympathy or with contempt (Link, Schwartz, Moore, Phelan, Struening, Stueve, & Colten, 1995). To the casual perceiver, who may have limited experience with homeless people, the image of this group may combine aspects of victimhood, suggesting an attitude of sympathy, and personal failure, suggesting an attitude of contempt. Elements of both attitudes may reside in the same perceiver, as suggested, for example, by findings obtained with Kingree and Daves's (1997) multi-dimensional attitude measure. The first goal of the present research was to test whether a method of self-persuasion can bring about improvements in attitudes toward homeless people.

Whereas social attitudes primarily represent a person's affective orientation toward a group, stereotypes represent the contents of a person's beliefs (Toro & McDonell, 1992). People's stereotypes comprise what they think homeless people are like. Like attitudes, stereotypes about homeless people appear to be characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty. Rosenthal (2000), for example, distinguished among three different stereotypic images. "Slackers" are seen as lazy and irresponsible, and are considered undeserving of aid. "Lackers" are seen as disabled or mentally ill, and are considered more deserving. Finally, "unwilling victims" are seen as homeless for social structural reasons, and thus, as

deserving of help. The second goal of this research was to measure the contents and the accuracy of stereotypes about homeless people.

Attitude Change

Some evidence exists that attitudes towards the homeless can be improved. Hocking and Lawrence (2000) observed attitude change in an applied setting. Participants who worked for some time in a homeless shelter were less likely than controls to perceive homeless people as dangerous or at fault for their homelessness. They were also more likely to perceive homeless people as basically good, as similar to themselves, as intelligent, and as deserving sympathy. Seeking to change attitudes in the laboratory, Kingree and Daves (1997) asked participants to read, under the guise of a comprehension exercise, essays that either stressed personal or societal causes of homelessness. Later responses on the authors' multi-dimensional scale revealed that the attitudes had shifted in the direction of the position advocated in the essay.

In the present study, we took advantage of the method of role-playing to change attitudes. Early reports from the psycho-dramatic tradition suggested that people assimilate their own attitudes to positions they merely "try out." As part of the extensive research project on attitude change, led by Carl Hovland at Yale University, social psychologists began to examine the conditions under which people persuade themselves to adopt attitudes they did not formerly hold (Kelman, 1953). Janis and King (1954) provided their participants with an outline of relevant arguments. They found that those participants who gave an informal talk based on this information showed more attitude change than their listeners. Extending this work, Janis and Gilmore (1965) showed that the provision of arguments was not necessary. Indeed, self-persuasion was most affective among participants who generated their own arguments. The anchoring principles of self-persuasion theory are cognitive processes of "biased scanning," which allow people to generate relevant arguments, and motivational processes of reinforcement,

which allow them to be gratified by the success of their efforts. The theory of self-persuasion survived the challenges of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), and has emerged as an integral part of a contemporary dual-process theories of attitude change (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Leippe and Eisenstadt's (1994) research illustrates how self-persuasion can improve intergroup attitudes. White university students were induced to write essays favoring a financial policy that would benefit Black students at some expense to White students. Even participants who had little choice but to write such an essay, adopted more positive attitudes. In addition to changing the specific policy-related attitude, the effect of writing the essay spread to other aspects of attitudes towards Blacks.

Stereotype Measurement

Whereas attitude measurement is primarily concerned with the positivity or negativity of people's responses, stereotype measurement faces a broader set of issues, some of which we address in this research. Social stereotypes are commonly defined as "generalizations about the shared attributes of a group of people" (Judd & Park, 1993, p. 110). Thus, the first question is concerned with the contents of the stereotype. What are the generalizations that people make about the homeless? A second question is to what extent these stereotypes are shared by perceivers. At one extreme, a stereotype can be highly social in the sense that stereotyped perceptions are much the same from person to person. At the other extreme, stereotypes can be idiosyncratic in that individuals' perceptions of a group have little overlap. Usually, stereotypes are thought to involve a great deal of social consensus (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds, & Doosje, 2002). A third question is to what extent people perceive differences between a particular social group and other relevant groups or the general population. Here, a common assumption is that a group is stereotyped inasmuch as its perception is differentiated from the baseline of people in general (McCaulley &

Stitt, 1978). A fourth question is to what extent social perceptions are accurate. This has been a thorny issue because of the perennial problem of obtaining credible criteria reflecting what the group is really like (Lee, Jussim, McCauley, 1995). Although it is widely acknowledged that stereotypes may vary in their accuracy, a common assumption persists that stereotypes tend to be marked by inaccuracy (Fiske, 2002)

THE PRESENT STUDY

The first goal of this study was to test the effectiveness of self-persuasion as a means to change attitudes towards homelessness. To this end, we asked some participants to write essays that would persuade the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, to provide more support for the city's homeless population. We hypothesized that participants who wrote such essays would emerge with more positive attitudes toward the homeless than participants who wrote essays on an unrelated topic, or participants who wrote no essay at all. The second goal of this study was to quantify several aspects of the homeless stereotype. Following the assessment of attitude positivity, we asked whether essay-writing also affected the general positivity of the homeless stereotype. Guided by previous work, our exploration of the homeless stereotype then focused on the questions of consensus, similarity, and accuracy. We did not advance a specific hypothesis with regard to the level of consensus among the respondents. Assuming that the homeless are a stigmatized group, we hypothesized that they would not be seen as similar to the general population. To measure accuracy, we employed a method introduced by McCauley and Stitt (1978) and compared participants' responses with published demographic data. Using this method, Toro and McDonell (1992) reported that residents of Buffalo, New York, were rather well informed about the characteristics of the local homeless population. We sought to extend this finding by also examining stereotype accuracy as differential accuracy, that is, to ask how sensitive participants are to differences between the homeless and the general popula-

tion.

METHODS

Participants

Forty-eight female and 32 male undergraduate students at Brown University, ranging in age from 18 to 24 years, participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Procedure

Design. Participants in the experimental condition ($n = 29$) wrote an essay about homelessness and then answered questions regarding their attitudes toward homelessness as well as their attitudes to an unrelated topic (i.e., education). Participants in unrelated-topic condition ($n = 25$) wrote an essay about education. Participants in the no-essay condition ($n = 26$) wrote an essay only after their attitudes toward the homeless had been assessed. If writing a topical essay is critical for attitude change, attitudes toward the homeless should be most favorable among participants in the experimental condition, and there should be no detectable difference between the favorability of the attitudes among participants in the two control conditions. If, however, writing an essay on any socially-relevant topic is sufficient to improve attitudes, attitudes in the no-essay condition should be more negative than attitudes in either of the other two conditions.

Essays. One to six participants were present in any one session of the experiment. They were told that the study was designed to explore how opinions on social issues affect persuasive writing, and that they would be writing an essay on either homelessness or elementary school education. They were told that the essay would be judged based on the quality of presentation and on the strength of the arguments. Essay topics were randomly assigned to cubicles in the laboratory, and participants were allowed to choose a cubicle to work in. Participants in the experimental group and participants in the unrelated-essay condition found

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instructions on the desk. Participants in the no-essay condition found the survey questions instead; they received the essay instructions previously assigned to their cubicle when they finished the survey.

Participants in the experimental group were instructed to write a letter to the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, to convince him that more services should be provided for the homeless population in the city. They were asked to discuss the hardships that homeless people face in the city and to explain why they need more public assistance. Participants assigned to writing about elementary education were instructed to write a letter to the mayor of Providence to convince him that more resources should be dedicated to primary education. They were told to discuss the hardships that school children face and explain why they deserve more resources from the city. After 20 minutes, the essays were collected.

Questionnaire. Attitudes were assessed by the five-item Public Attitudes Towards Homeless scale (PATH, Guzewicz & Takooshian, 1992; see Appendix). This scale assesses a unidimensional construct of sympathy for the homeless. Scale reliability in our sample (mean interitem $r = .30$, Cronbach's alpha = .68) approached the values reported by Guzewicz and Takooshian (mean interitem $r = .36$, Cronbach's alpha = .74).¹ Stereotypes were assessed as percentage estimates for a set of personality traits and a set of sociological attributes. A list of 10 personality-descriptive words was constructed to represent the five widely used dimensions of extraversion (vs. introversion), agreeableness (vs. hostility), conscientiousness (vs. unreliability), emotional stability (vs. neuroticism), and intellect. One positive and one negative marker item were included for each dimension (John, 1990). A list of 10 sociological attributes was constructed from a variety of data bases with credible estimates for both the homeless and the general population. Except of the item "child," differences in the official percentages exceeded 10 percent. The sociological attributes and their corresponding census and survey data are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Census and Survey Data On Sociological Attributes in Percent

Attribute	U.S.	Homeless
Male	49 ^a	68 ^a
Mentally ill	11 ^b	23 ^c
Veteran	13 ^a	23 ^f
Child under 18	29 ^a	25 ^c
Has been incarcerated	5 ^c	54 ^g
Victim of domestic abuse	31 ^d	50 ^e
Employed	60 ^a	44 ^e
Single parent	16 ^a	73 ^h
White	75 ^a	41 ^e
High School graduate	80 ^a	62 ^e

^a Census 2000

^b National Household Survey on Drug Abuse 2001.

^c US DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics

^d Commonwealth Fund survey (1998)

^e Burt, Aron, Douglas, Valente, Lee, & Iwen (1999)

^f National Coalition for the Homeless (1999)

^g Zorza (1991)

^h U.S. Conference of Mayors (2001)

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For all 20 items, participants made percentage estimates for both the homeless population and the general national population. Items were randomized within both lists. With regard to the sociological attributes, we sought to motivate participants by pointing out that their estimates would be compared with official statistics.

To maintain the credibility of the essay-writing exercise in the control conditions, the questionnaire included several items regarding education. Participants also rated elementary school children in Providence and the U.S. on various personality traits and demographic characteristics. These ratings were not analyzed. Finally, all participants rated the persuasiveness of the essay they had written on a scale from 1 ("highly persuasive") to 5 ("not persuasive at all"). Participants in the no-essay condition received the same instructions as the others, but completed the questionnaire first.

RESULTS

All participants completed the requested assignment. Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences in the gender or age composition of the three conditions. Neither did the order of questionnaire questions affect the findings. We therefore excluded these variables from further analysis. All reported *p* values are two-tailed unless noted otherwise.

Attitudes

Mean scores on the PATH scale were computed after reversing the ratings of two items ("Many homeless people have themselves to blame" and "Society should not have to support or house homeless people"). Figure 1 shows the means and standard errors for the three conditions. Mean scores in the education-essay and no-essay conditions were virtually identical, thus eliminating the hypothesis that the drafting of an essay on an unrelated social topic can improve attitudes toward the homeless. The mean scores in the experimental condition, however,

were lower, indicating a more sympathetic attitude toward the homeless. A contrast between the mean PATH scores in the experimental condition and the pooled means of the two control conditions was significant, $t(78) = 2.03$, $d = .47$, $p = .023$, one-tailed.

This effect, which was of medium size ($d = .47$) by conventional standards (Cohen, 1988), was remarkable in light of two additional findings. First, even the attitudes of the control participants were fairly positive as indicated by their average scores lying below the midpoint of the scale, $t(50) = 5.01$, $p = 7.12 \cdot 10^{-06}$. Second, even writers in the experimental condition remained somewhat skeptical regarding the persuasive strength of their own essays. Their ratings of essay persuasiveness ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .72$) lay above the midpoint (3) of the scale, where high ratings represented low persuasiveness, $t(28) = 2.43$, $p = .022$. Nonetheless, those participants who felt they had written a strong essay had a somewhat more favorable attitude than participants who felt they had written a weak essay, $r(27) = .28$, $p = .071$, one-tailed (see Janis & King, 1954).

Stereotypes

Personality attributes. To assess the favorability of the homeless stereotype, we subtracted the summed ratings of the negative traits from the summed ratings of the positive traits. The result for the experimental condition ($M = -16.27$) was not statistically different from the result for the other two ($M = -11.76$ and -10.95), $t(77) = .81$. The corresponding means for the general population were decidedly more positive (i.e., 11.19, 15.80 and 17.13, respectively for the experimental and the two control groups). Stereotypes of the homeless in the domain of personality were thus comparatively negative despite participants' favorable attitudes toward this group.

Despite this mean difference, there was some convergence of attitudes and stereotypes in the two control conditions. Here, larger (i.e., more positive) stereotype scores were associated with lower (i.e., more positive) attitude scores

($r(23) = -.46$, $p = .02$, and $r(24) = -.45$, $p = .02$). The corresponding correlation was near zero in the experimental condition, $r(27) = -.13$, $p = .50$. Writing an essay on behalf of the homeless did not improve stereotypes, but it dissolved (for reasons we do not yet understand) the association between attitudes and stereotypes.²

Because the means of the trait ascriptions did not vary across conditions, we pooled the data for further analysis. Table 2 displays the mean percentage estimates for the homeless and the general population for each trait. Cohen's d expresses the effect sizes for the differences in standard units. Inspection of the table reveals a positive-negative asymmetry. The negative stereotype of the homeless resulted mostly from a reluctance to attribute positive traits to this group (mean $d = 1.02$). There was only weak evidence for an inclination to attribute negative traits more strongly to the homeless than to people in general ($d = -.20$).

Interestingly, estimates for the homeless were more variable (mean $SD = 23.91$) than estimates for the general population (mean $SD = 20.03$), $t(9) = 4.35$, $d = 1.38$, $p = .0019$. This finding is noteworthy because it departs from the standard view that stereotypes of stigmatized groups are highly crystallized and thus held with a high degree of social consensus. An alternative way of assessing the variability of the estimates is to examine inter-rater reliability across judgment items. This approach also failed to yield evidence for the idea that consensus in judgments of a stigmatize group is larger ($M = .22$, standard error = .011) than consensus in judgments of the general population ($M = .20$, standard error = .007).

We next investigated the relation between trait ascriptions to the homeless and trait ascriptions to the general population by computing the correlation between the two sets of estimates for each participant (see Judd & Park, 1993).³ Positive correlations indicate perceptions of similarity, whereas negative correlations indicate perceptions of dissimilarity, or group differentiation. We then converted these correlations to Fisher Z scores, averaged them within condition, and

then transformed them back to correlation coefficients. The mean correlations were positive but modest in size. The contrast between the experimental condition ($M = .25$, $SD = .62$), and the pooled control conditions ($M = .41$, $SD = .70$ and $M = .32$, $SD = .65$), was not significant, $t(77) = -.82$, $p = .42$. Arguably, the positive-negative asymmetry in the mean ratings contributed to these modest values. If participants had viewed positive attributes to be more prevalent than negative attributes among the homeless—as they did with respect to the general population—similarity correlations would have been in excess of .8 for this reason alone.⁴

Sociological attributes. The primary purpose of the personality estimates was to reveal the negativity of the stereotype of the homeless relative to perceptions of the general population. Estimates regarding the sociological attributes of this group permitted an assessment of stereotype accuracy. For each participant, the estimates for sociological attributes were correlated with the corresponding census and survey data (see Table 1 for later). The mean correlations for the three conditions were virtually identical, but overall, accuracy was much greater for estimates regarding the general population ($M = .83$, $SD = .38$) than for estimates regarding the homeless ($M = .31$, $SD = .29$), $d = 11$.

As an alternative approach to measuring accuracy, we examined the mean estimates for each item. Instead of asking whether the homeless were perceived to differ from the general population, we asked whether the perceived differences were larger or smaller than the differences revealed by the census and survey data. As shown in Table 3, none of the perceived differences was close to the mark. On five items, participants overestimated true differences (mental, child, victim, employed, and high school), and on the other five, they underestimated them (male, veteran, jail, single parent, and white). Not surprisingly, the direction of the estimation errors depended on the size of the true difference. The larger the true difference was, the more likely it was to be underestimated, $r(8) = .69$, $p = .014$, one-tailed.⁵

The remaining two analyses paralleled analyses of personality estimates. First, we revisited the question of stereotype consensus. As was the case for personality attributes, estimates regarding sociological attributes were more variable for the homeless (mean $SD = 21.36$) than for the general population (mean $SD = 13.80$), $t(9) = 4.43$, $d = 1.39$, $p = .002$. The difference between the mean interrater correlations ($M = .36$, standard error = .008, for the homeless and $M = .81$, standard error = .007, for the general population) further corroborated the impression that beliefs about the homeless involved greater uncertainty than beliefs about people in general.

Second, the correlations between estimates for the homeless and estimates for the general population were significantly smaller ($M = .07$, $SD = .46$) than the corresponding correlation of .27 for the census and survey data, $t(78) = 3.90$, $p = .0002$. Although the homeless are somewhat similar to the general population, our participants viewed their attributes as being unrelated to the population base rates.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with a long history of research on attitude change, the present study showed that social attitudes improve when participants generate their own favorable arguments. The changes in the attitudes toward the homeless were specific both in their antecedents and in their consequences. With regard to their antecedents, it is noteworthy that attitude change was only stimulated by writing a topical essay, and not by writing an essay on an unrelated topic of social concern (i.e., education). With regard to their consequences, we observed that group stereotypes, that is, general perceptions of what homeless people are like, were not altered.

This specificity is consistent with findings reported by Leippe and Eisenstadt (1994). Although these authors found that Whites' stereotypes of Blacks changed as a result of writing an essay in support of a policy that would

help Blacks, belief changes were restricted to those that were relevant to the essay topic. No changes in belief occurred on their "Anti-Black scale," which included traits such as "unmotivated" and "uncommitted to family values." We suspect that selective belief change reflects a cognitive restructuring that affects beliefs that are most closely related to the focal discrepancy and not beliefs that are closely tied to resilient negative stereotypes.

The present study was not designed to distinguish between the various mechanisms that have been proposed as underlying self-generated attitude change (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, for a review). It should be noted, however, that attitude change occurred, although participants had no choice (or any illusion thereof) regarding the topic of the essay or whether to write an essay at all. They simply fulfilled an assignment. Therefore, the present result is unlikely to be an instance of dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1957). "Biased scanning" of accessible arguments (Janis & Gilmore, 1965) and the cognitive elaboration (Petty & Wegener, 1999) thereof provide a sufficient explanation. The moderately positive attitudes in the control conditions suggest that the requested essay was not outright counter-attitudinal for the participants in the experimental condition, which means that dissonance was probably not aroused and that enough pro-attitudinal arguments were accessible to work with. Thus, the resulting attitude change was rather an instance of attitude consolidation than an instance of attitude reversal. We suspect that the moderately positive attitudes were, in part, a reflection of the generally liberal outlook of most undergraduate students at Brown University. By comparison, the attitudes expressed by the urban sample recruited by Guzewicz and Takooshian (1992) in New York City were more negative by one scale point.

The stereotypes regarding the personal attributes of the homeless were less favorable than were beliefs about people in general. Nevertheless, participants were reluctant to express downright negative views of the homeless. Instead, they withheld attributions of positive traits, which they otherwise regarded as common in the general population. This positive-negative asymmetry in

intergroup perception is frequently observed, and not specific to stigmatized social groups (Otten & Mummendey, 2000).

Conceivably, participants in the present study regarded the general population as an inclusive ingroup, and the homeless as a specific outgroup. Research on social projection suggests that this aspect of self-relevant social categorization can contribute to differences in perceived group favorability. By and large, people project their own attributes more strongly to members of social ingroups than to outgroups (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). Inasmuch as people's self-images typically comprise more positive than negative attributes, descriptions of ingroups tend to be more positive than descriptions of outgroups (Krueger, Acevedo, & Robbins, 2005; Otten & Wentura, 2001).

The co-existence of negative stereotypes with positive attitudes toward the homeless need not reflect incoherent reasoning or dissonance of mind. The contents of the present measures suggest that attitudes and stereotypes referred to different constructs. Whereas the stereotype measures referred to the assumed properties of the target group, most of PATH addressed the obligations of society, with only one item referring to the those of the homeless. In other words, the PATH scale is a measure of perceived responsibility for a deplorable social condition. Therefore, this scale is conceptually independent of the overall favorability of the stereotype measures.

We suspect that rather than holding a well articulated stereotype of the homeless, most participants only had a general notion that the homeless lack desirable traits that are otherwise common in the general population. In other words, they "filled in" the contents of the stereotype in an ad hoc fashion when estimates for the five positive traits were requested. The finding that these estimates varied a great deal from person to person may reflect the uncertainty experienced by the typical individual. This uncertainty extended to estimates of the sociological attributes. This may be surprising because unlike the personality attributes, the sociological attributes were selected with an eye to their applica-

bility to the homeless population.

The idea that the greater variability of the estimates was a matter of uncertainty, was corroborated by the low similarity correlations. As we have argued, estimates for the homeless were less correlated with estimates for the general population than they would have been if participants had worked with the general assumption that positive attributes are more common than negative attributes regardless of the social target group. This finding was further supported by the estimates for the sociological attributes. Because census and survey data were acceptable criteria in this domain, we could ascertain that the average degree of perceived similarity between the homeless and the general population fell below their actual degree of similarity.

The low perceptions of similarity can be seen as an instance of intergroup differentiation. Although the participants in this study seemed to view the homeless as an unrelated group, it should be recalled that this form of differentiation did not involve the generation of a specific subtype. For this, the variability of the estimates for the homeless should have been smaller, not larger, than the variability of the estimates for the general population. Finally, it is not surprising that perceptions of similarity did not increase as a consequence of essay writing. Participants were asked to discuss the hardships that homeless people face and why they deserve more resources. Arguably, these instructions led participants to focus on differences rather than similarities.

The estimates for the 10 sociological attributes offered an opportunity to explore the contents and the accuracy of the homeless stereotype. The only attribute yielding a mean estimate larger than 50 percent was being male, and the attribute yielding the most extreme mean estimate was being employed (12%). A more complete picture of the homeless stereotype emerged when relative differences were examined. Our data can be inspected with an eye to the simple differences between estimates for the general population and estimates for the homeless and with an eye to corrected differences in which objective differences are subtracted

from perceived differences. As we noted earlier, the largest true differences are the most likely to be underestimated. By the same token, it is easily seen that the largest perceived differences are also the most likely to involve overestimation of true differences. Inspection of Table 3 bears this out. Participants perceived the homeless to be much less likely to be employed or to have a high school degree than people in the general population. Conversely, they perceived them as being more likely to be mentally ill. These perceived differences of 60%, 36%, and -25% amounted to significant overestimations of the real differences of respectively 16%, 18%, and -13%. Taken together, this set of presumed of attributes is consistent with the "lacker image" described by Rosenthal (2000).

The correlational analyses also revealed a modicum of accuracy. To evaluate the size of the effect, it may be noted that for the sociological attributes the correlation between the average estimates and the objective percentages was .51. Toro and McDonnell's (1992) data yield a correlation of .62. These authors concluded that their participants were well informed about the homeless, and we can do the same given the similarity of our correlation. On the other hand, we must reiterate that participants were far more accurate when estimating the attributes of the general population ($r = .91$ for the correlation between average estimates and objective percentages). Judged by this standard, stereotypes of the homeless have ample room to become more accurate.⁶

In summary, we can note that perceptions of the homeless are like other social perceptions in some respects, but different in others. Attitudes about the homeless respond to the induced-compliance method of essay-writing in the same way as other types of attitude do. The stereotypes about this group are marked by the standard positive-negative asymmetry, and the group is well differentiated from the social background of the general population. Perhaps the biggest surprise of this research was the finding that these standard effects can be found for a social group that is being perceived with great uncertainty, ambivalence, and the attendant lack of accuracy. This pattern leads us to conclude that the homeless

remain a social category of comparatively low visibility (Blasi, 1994).

FOOTNOTES

¹For our data, we computed Cronbach's alpha from the mean interitem correlation and the number of items ($N = 5$) such that $\alpha = \frac{N \cdot r}{1 + (N - 1) \cdot r}$. Guzewicz and Takooshian's data, we computed \bar{r}

from alpha and N such that $\bar{r} = \frac{\alpha}{N - \alpha \cdot (N - 1)}$.

²The correlation in the experimental condition was not significantly smaller than either of the correlations in the control conditions.

³One participant in the experimental group was omitted because her estimates were invariant.

⁴A high correlation can easily be obtained in a simulation, in which the valence of the trait is a binary variable (e.g., +1 for positive and -1 for negative traits). Such a correlation is smaller than unity inasmuch as random error (i.e., unreliability) is introduced.

⁵Participants' uncertainty in judging the homeless was further revealed by the low variation in the mean estimates across items ($SD = 12$). Mean estimates for the general population were more variable ($SD = 22$), as were the census and survey data ($SD = 18$ and 27 for the homeless and the general population, respectively).

⁶Toro and McDonell (1992) also inferred the relative accuracy of stereotype estimates from the absolute differences between mean estimates and objective percentages. Their results ($M = 12.06$, standard error = 1.62) lay between the differences for the homeless ($M = 17.75$, standard error = 3.85) and the differences for the general population in the present study ($M = 9.52\%$, standard error = 1.95). We computed the statistical indices for the Toro and McDonell data from the entries in their Table IV (p. 64).

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Appendix: PATH Scale (Guzewicz & Takooshian, 1992)

	strongly		strongly		
	agree	not sure	disagree	disagree	
a. Society is responsible for people being homeless.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Many homeless people have themselves to blame.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Society should not have to support or house homeless people.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Society is turning away and letting down the homeless.	1	2	3	4	5
e. A nation should be ashamed of its homeless problem.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 1: Census and Survey Data On Sociological Attributes in Percent

Attribute	U.S.	Homeless
Male	49 ^a	68 ^a
Mentally ill	11 ^b	23 ^c
Veteran	13 ^a	23 ^f
Child under 18	29 ^a	25 ^c
Has been incarcerated	5 ^c	54 ^g
Victim of domestic abuse	31 ^d	50 ^e
Employed	60 ^a	44 ^e
Single parent	16 ^a	73 ^h
White	75 ^a	41 ^e
High School graduate	80 ^a	62 ^e

^a Census 2000

^b National Household Survey on Drug Abuse 2001

^c US DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics

^d Commonwealth Fund survey (1998)

^e Burt, Aron, Douglas, Valente, Lee, & Iwen (1999)

^f National Coalition for the Homeless (1999)

^g Zorza (1991)

^h U.S. Conference of Mayors (2001)

Table 2: Mean Percentage Estimates For Personality Attributes

(Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

<i>Positive</i>	U.S.	Homeless	d	t	p
Organized	50.06 (17.41)	25.83 (21.19)	1.12	9.73	3.75 · 10 ⁻¹⁵
Intelligent	56.51 (23.48)	36.44 (28.52)	.82	7.15	3.89 · 10 ⁻¹⁰
Stable	55.25 (20.80)	26.04 (23.54)	1.29	11.23	4.79 · 10 ⁻¹⁸
Helpful	52.99 (19.06)	37.37 (26.48)	.72	6.27	1.75 · 10 ⁻⁰⁸
Energetic	47.95 (19.17)	23.24 (20.87)	1.14	9.94	1.45 · 10 ⁻¹⁵
<i>Negative</i>					
Irresponsible	40.13 (18.76)	45.83 (25.14)	-.23	-1.89	.062
Unfriendly	38.30 (19.10)	35.17 (21.99)	.12	1.07	.289
Quarrelsome	37.53 (21.26)	36.61 (20.46)	.04	.34	.737
Self-pitying	44.54 (24.74)	53.52 (26.36)	-.33	-2.91	.005
Withdrawn	29.25 (16.51)	43.40 (24.53)	-.59	-5.12	2.08 · 10 ⁻⁰⁶

Self Persuasion

Table 3 Mean Percentage Estimates For Sociological Attributes (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

Attribute	U.S.	Homeless	d	t	p
Male	49.43 (6.37)	56.31 (23.53)	.50	4.43	3.00 · 10 ⁻⁰⁵
Mentally ill	13.69 (11.90)	38.40 (25.51)	-.53	-4.74	9.47 · 10 ⁻⁰⁶
Veteran	18.63 (15.76)	21.24 (18.68)	.30	2.72	.008
Child under 18	32.56 (11.86)	21.65 (16.78)	.35	3.17	.002
Has been incarcerated	16.36 (13.50)	31.54 (21.99)	1.51	13.54	2.78 · 10 ⁻²²
Victim of abuse	19.74 (15.67)	31.16 (21.63)	.30	2.70	.009
Employed	71.95 (17.86)	12.01 (15.73)	1.91	17.13	2.56 · 10 ⁻²²
Single parent	34.96 (17.14)	37.96 (25.92)	1.82	16.29	5.58 · 10 ⁻²⁸
White	58.46 (14.54)	34.80 (20.61)	-.46	-4.10	9.80 · 10 ⁻⁰⁵
High School grad	67.23 (13.84)	31.25 (23.18)	.82	6.11	7.42 · 10 ⁻¹⁰

Note. The effect size d refers to difference between differences, i.e., $d = ([U.S. Estimate - Homeless Estimate] - [U.S. Census - Homeless Census]) / \text{standard deviation (U.S. Estimate - Homeless Estimate)}$.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mean PATH scores and standard errors for the three condition

