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Behavioral Intentions and Opportunities among Homeless Individuals: A Reinterpretation of the Theory of Reasoned Action*

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This article applies the social psychological theory of reasoned action to processes of homelessness; this application extends the breadth of the theory and illuminates the study of homelessness. The theory of reasoned action links attitudes to voluntary, unconstrained, temporally proximate behaviors by means of behavioral intentions. It is argued here that behavioral intentions, once formed, also can alter both perceived and actual opportunities for behaviors, thus linking attitudes to a wider range of social behaviors. Hypotheses derived from this intentions-altering-opportunities reformulation are tested with data about homeless persons' intentions for leaving the streets for conventional housing. As hypothesized, intentions for conventional housing predicted, to a significant degree, future departures from homelessness.

Social psychologists have long studied the connection between attitudes and behavior. Early research focused on whether attitudes caused behavior (LaPierre 1934; Wicker 1969), but in the past 25 years researchers have concentrated on identifying the circumstances in which attitudes cause behavior and vice versa. The importance of the attitude-behavior link is both theoretical and practical, because knowing how attitudes cause behavior permits prediction and possible manipulation of behavior (McBroom and Reed 1992:205). Among the major theories of attitudes and behavior, Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action remains "the dominant theoretical framework in the attitude-behavior literature" (Olson and Zanna 1993:131).

THEORY OF REASONED ACTION

The theory of reasoned action postulates that behavioral intentions are the immediate antecedents of behavior (Ajzen and Madden 1986). Intentions represent "the person's motivation in the sense of his

or her conscious plan to exert effort to carry out a behavior" (Eagly and Chaiken 1992:168). They bring about behavior through effort—the attempt to perform the behavior (Ajzen 1985:30).¹ Intentions have two distinct causes: attitudes and social norms. Attitudes constitute a person's evaluation of a given behavior.² Social norms signify the sources of social and cultural pressure, if any, that constrain the individual in performing the behavior.³ The sum of these postulated causal connections is a parsimonious, chained, additive, recursive model illustrating how attitudes affect behavior (Liska 1984).

Since its inception, the theory of reasoned action has received considerable attention in the social psychological literature. Researchers have applied it to diverse

¹ Additional causal mechanisms between intentions and behavior have been suggested, including planning, monitoring activities, guidance and control, and psychological commitment (Bagozzi 1992).

² The antecedents of attitudes are weighted behavioral beliefs: the perceived consequence of the act multiplied by the estimated likelihood that the consequence will arise from the act (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).

³ The antecedents of social norms are subjective norms: the perceived preferences of significant others multiplied by the person's motivation to comply with the preferences of significant others (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).

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outcomes such as blood donation (Bagozzi 1981; Charng, Piliavin, and Callero 1988), recycling (Schultz and Oskamp 1996), substance abuse (Grube and Morgan 1990; Ritter 1988), voting (Granberg and Holmberg 1990; Netemeyer, Burton, and Johnston 1991), and weight loss (Netemeyer et al. 1991). In addition, various modifications have been proposed for the theory, such as altering its causal structure (Bagozzi and Yi 1989; Bentler and Speckart 1981; Liska 1984), adding variables (Zanna and Olson 1982), and introducing potential moderating variables (Bagozzi and Schnedlitz 1985; Bagozzi, Yi, and Baumgartner 1990; Ritter 1988; Schultz and Oskamp 1996).

Various criticisms have arisen from this scrutiny of the theory of reasoned action; the most profound of these question the breadth of its application. Two criticisms in particular make this point. One is that the theory of reasoned action conceptually applies only to volitional behaviors—those requiring neither great skills nor social cooperation (Bagozzi 1992:180; Liska 1984). This limitation is due to the specification of effort as the link between intentions and behavior. In the case of relatively simple behaviors, an individual's effort can be enough to enact an intention. Yet if behaviors are complex, require the assistance of others, or are subject to other external constraints, an individual's effort may be insufficient to bring about behavior; thus the theory of reasoned action would not apply. In these more socially complex situations, attitudes may produce behavioral intentions, but these intentions are difficult to enact as successful behavior. Put differently, intentions to behave are thought to become less relevant without the immediate, explicit opportunity to behave.

The second criticism is that the theory of reasoned action fits best with attitudes and behaviors that are closely linked in time. If intentions reflect only an individual's current circumstances, which are not stable, then the intentions themselves are not stable. Therefore the more time that elapses between attitudes and behaviors, the weaker the link between them should be (Liska 1984:63).

In summarizing these two critiques, Eagly and Chaiken (1992) state that the the-

ory of reasoned action has "largely abandoned the question of how intentions relate over broad time spans to behaviors that are complex sequences of acts and to the attainment of goals that are difficult to achieve" (p. 183). This comment is particularly damning because many, if not most, of the behaviors that interest social psychologists are complex, are difficult to achieve, and require substantial skills, abilities, and social cooperation (Liska 1984:63; Ritter 1988:251). Thus, if the intention-behavior link applies only to simple, immediate behaviors, the theory of reasoned action is less valuable to social psychologists.

Partially in response to the above criticisms, Ajzen and Madden (1986) added the notion of perceived behavioral control to the theory of reasoned action and renamed it *the theory of planned behavior*. Perceived behavioral control is a "person's belief as to how easy or difficult performance of the behavior is likely to be" (Ajzen and Madden 1986:457). The effect of perceived behavioral control on behavior is twofold. First, intentions are formed only when individuals believe that they have the ability and the opportunity to perform a behavior. Second, perceived behavioral control can proxy for *actual* behavioral control, which itself has a direct effect on behavior. This modification, at best, expands the theory of reasoned action to behaviors under "partial" volitional control (Bagozzi 1992:181). Still unexplained, however, are the many behaviors in heavily constrained situations.

INTENTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

I claim here that in addition to previously identified direct links between intentions and behaviors, intentions can also influence behavior through both perceived and objective opportunities to behave, especially in social contexts. Behavioral intentions both create and reflect opportunities for behavior.

Intentions, once formed, can alter *perceived* opportunities for behavior by rearranging perceptions of the world in light of the intended behavior. New opportunities for the intended behavior become more salient; existing situations are reinterpreted

as conducive to the behavior.⁴ A world viewed through behavioral intentions becomes a different world, usually containing more opportunities for the intended behavior.

Intentions also can alter *objective* opportunities for behavior by acting as social cues. A fundamental principle of social psychology, one highlighted by symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1962; Stryker 1980), is that social behavior takes place in the context of social interaction—a give-and-take between individual perceptions, meanings, and behaviors. Communication, in symbolic interactionism, is the exchange of gestures (Stryker 1981:7), and behavioral intentions can be communicated to others with both verbal and nonverbal gestures. Verbally they can be simply reported to others in speech. Nonverbally they can be transmitted through many conscious and even subconscious gestures such as a glance, or reaching for an object, or pausing in conversation. These gestures, in turn, become part of the shared and consensual meaning given to the situation by both occupants. In social situations, according to symbolic interactionism, each person attempts to “take the role of the other,” in part by interpreting the other person’s gestures and discerning the other’s motivations and plans for action. Once interpreted, these perceived plans can be acted on for the purpose of changing the objective qualities of the situation, such as the provision of opportunities for behavior. That is, one person, who controls the opportunities in a given situation, might choose, through symbolic communication with another person and on the basis of the jointly determined definition of the situation, to provide behavioral opportunities for that person.⁵

⁴ This idea parallels and was influenced by Fazio’s (1986) process model of attitudes, a model in which attitudes are held to affect both perceptions and situational definitions of behavior.

⁵ Of course, the person in control also could withhold opportunities for behavior and thus block behavioral intentions. In either case, behavioral intentions can alter external opportunities for behavior via symbolic interaction.

A simple example illustrates these two proposed mechanisms. Suppose a person plans to walk through a door into a room; this is a behavioral intention. If the door is unlocked, the person’s own effort (opening the door) will enable entrance into the room, as per the theory of reasoned action. If the door is known to be locked, the person does not plan to enter the room in the first place, as per the theory of planned behavior. If the person plans to enter the room, and if the door is locked, he or she then might perceive other possible entrances, such as a window, as intentions guide perceptions. Finally, if the person plans to enter the room, and if the door is locked, someone else might become aware of his or her intention to enter the room (for example, by seeing the person looking at the door) and might unlock the door for him or her, as intentions act as social cues.

These two proposed mechanisms—intentions altering perceptions and acting as social cues—extend the theory of reasoned action beyond simple, proximate behaviors. If intentions actually create opportunities for behavior, either perceived or objective, then intentions should predict a large class of constrained, complex, and difficult behaviors. Furthermore, if intentions can alter situations, rather than merely reflecting them, then future situations can align with intentions previously formed, and the temporal reach of behavioral intentions will be extended considerably. As situations are altered over time to fit intended behaviors, the association of attitudes with behaviors actually might increase with time until the time of the intended behavior. In contrast, the theory of reasoned action assumes a steady decrease in the association between the two. In sum, attitudes and intentions might bring about complex, difficult-to-achieve behaviors over long periods; thus the theory of reasoned action, which places intentions before behaviors, becomes a more powerful theory.

Intentions and Behavior among Homeless People

In this paper I examine the above ideas in the context of homelessness—specifically,

homeless people leaving the streets for conventional housing. This transition has been termed *homeless exiting* (Piliavin et al. 1996; Wright et al. 1998).⁶ Since 1985 several studies have indicated that a surprising number of homeless people manage to leave the streets for conventional domiciles: As many as 50 percent of currently homeless people have been on the streets more than once (Culhane et al. 1994; Farr, Koegel, and Burnam 1986; Link et al. 1994; Morse et al. 1985; Rossi 1989). Piliavin et al. (1996) found that about three-fourths of a sample of homeless people left the streets for at least one month during a six-month period.

The value of exiting behavior for this study is that it occurs in a highly constrained social environment. Past studies documented the many difficulties facing homeless people as they attempt to leave the streets, because they possess few of the economic and social resources needed for housing. To receive welfare, for example, a person must supply a home address, provide personal documents such as a birth certificate, keep appointments made far in advance, and meet various other requirements that are difficult for homeless people (Wright 1989). Similarly, to obtain employment a person usually must supply a phone number for the prospective employer (Snow and Anderson 1993). In addition, prospective landlords usually require records of recent conventional housing. Finally, most homeless people come from very poor families, so relatives have few resources to share (Rossi 1989).

Given these difficulties, it is surprising that any homeless people leave the streets, not to mention so many. How do they do so? Descriptions of homeless people suggest that the formation of plans to exit is a key factor in leaving the streets. In a highly informative account of homeless life, Snow and Anderson (1993) discuss the role of planning in the lives of homeless people. They state that "one major cognitive dilemma that

impedes the life chances of the homeless is their inability to formulate concrete plans of action directed towards getting off the streets" (p. 293). The reason why homeless people have such difficulty in forming plans is that "the very rhythm of street life itself militates against long-range planning. . . it demands a focus on the present: on the next meal, the next night's shelter, enough money to make it through the day" (p. 294). The day-to-day urgencies of homelessness can prevent the formation of plans to find conventional housing, and thus hinder exits from homelessness.

Although Snow and Anderson (1993) do not explicitly discuss how planning (intention) leads to exiting in the heavily constrained situation of homelessness, their analysis of life on the streets is consistent with the mechanisms discussed above. They identify recently arrived homeless people as those most likely to make plans to leave the streets; these recent arrivals also are the most likely to rekindle or develop relationships with domiciled people that might provide needed resources (p. 182). Perhaps planning to leave the streets allows this group of homeless people to recognize most fully the potential exiting resources in their environment. Therefore, one would expect that the longer people are homeless, the less likely they are to formulate plans to leave the streets for their own dwelling.

Snow and Anderson also describe social service providers as incorporating their homeless clients' behavioral intentions into their decisions about resource provision. For example, staff members and administrators of rehabilitation programs "often give preference to those [homeless people] who appear to be sincere about overcoming substance abuse problems" (p. 286). In general, service providers complain that homeless people are unwilling to plan ahead—for example making and keeping appointments, or meeting requirements for assistance (p. 284). This "present orientation" baffles service providers; the implication is that providers might be more willing to assist homeless people who do plan ahead.

⁶ Homelessness is defined here as lacking regular and customary access to conventional housing (e.g., living in parks, cars, abandoned buildings, or homeless shelters); "conventional" housing is that intended for habitation, such as apartments, hotels, or houses (Rossi 1989).

Hypotheses

I develop three hypotheses from the above discussion:

Hypothesis 1:

Longer spells of homelessness should negatively predict plans to leave the streets for one's own place.

Hypothesis 2:

Homeless people's plans to leave the streets should predict high rates of exiting, even with controls for various resources and opportunities present at the time when they state their plans.

Hypothesis 3:

Plans to leave the streets should predict exiting more accurately with the passage of time, at least initially, as future housing opportunities align with previously formed exiting intentions.

DATA

The data analyzed here come from a longitudinal sample of homeless adults (age 18 and older) collected by Piliavin and colleagues (1996) in Minneapolis in 1985 and 1986. This sample has two components. In the first component, the study interviewed individuals who had been homeless for two weeks or less at the time of their initial interview. In the first wave of this study, 113 of these recent arrivals were interviewed. Six months later, 65 (57%) of the 113 respondents were located and interviewed a second time.⁷ In the second component, the study interviewed a cross-section of homeless individuals, regardless of how long they had been homeless. This sampling strategy yielded 338 subjects interviewed at the first wave. Two hundred (59%) of these respondents were located and interviewed a second time.

The respondents in both samples were contacted initially at 17 service agencies in

downtown Minneapolis: four drop-in centers, five free-meal providers, and eight overnight shelters. To be included in either sample, individuals at the time of the first interview had to meet one of several criteria representing irregular and noncustomary access to conventional housing (see Piliavin et al. 1996).⁸

The study collected a variety of measures at the first interview, including demographic characteristics, previous residential and homeless experiences, education and employment histories, social relationships, and personal disabilities. I use these measures in this paper as control variables, to test the net effect of future plans for housing; their content is described in Appendix A. In addition, respondents were asked about their future plans: specifically, whether they planned to live in their own conventional housing one month after the initial interview.

Appendix B presents the correlations among the independent variables. Although many of the correlation coefficients reach levels of statistical significance (all of those in which $p > .14$), none are exceedingly great; in fact, the highest correlation is $p = -.39$ (between family's help and depression), and the next highest is $p = .30$ (between work history and employment skills). In the remainder of the coefficients, $p < .28$. Because of the overall moderate levels of correlation among the independent variables, multicollinearity and its potentially biasing effects on multivariate equations do not seem to be a serious problem here.

Through a variety of follow-up procedures, 58 percent of the Wave 1 sample members were contacted and reinterviewed approximately six months later. The second interview ascertained respondents' housing experiences since the first interview: whether they had left the streets for conventional housing, and if so, how long it took them to do so. The respondents with whom the study did not obtain second interviews are dropped from the analyses reported

⁷ Only the first component was planned originally. After two months of data collection, however, it became clear that not enough newly homeless individuals were coming to the collection sites to generate a sufficiently large sample within the necessary period.

⁸ Of the eligible respondents only about 5 percent refused to be interviewed. Probably the refusal rate is so low because the study paid \$10 to each person who agreed to an interview.

here. In addition, some of the respondents stayed at their Wave 1 interview residences for more than one month: Unknowingly they had already secured housing by the first interview. These respondents were also dropped from the analyses. The resulting sample contained 191 persons.

Because of attrition, it is relevant to ask whether the dropouts' personal characteristics varied significantly from those of persons retained in the sample, because nonselective attrition might bias the resulting findings (Berk 1983). The attrition levels associated with each of the independent variables are described in detail by Piliavin et al. (1996). In general the variables used here do not predict selective attrition, with only a few exceptions: The respondents retained in the study were more likely to have been previously homeless, to have been in foster care placement, and to display symptoms of alcoholism. The key predictor of exiting used in this paper—planning to find one's own place—does not significantly predict attrition between Waves 1 and 2 of the data collection ($\chi^2 = 1.23$ at 1 df, $p = .27$).

Specification of Exits from Homeless Spells

Homeless exiting is defined as the reverse of entering homelessness. Homeless people leave the streets when they acquire regular and customary access to conventional housing; this straightforward definition simply reverses the concept of literal homelessness (Rossi 1989). Difficulties arise, however, in measuring homeless exiting. What exactly is conventional housing? How long is regular and customary access? Housing is defined as conventional when it is intended for long-term habitation (Rossi 1989). This includes residence in traditional domiciles such as apartments, houses or hotels; it excludes abandoned buildings, homeless shelters, and open areas. As a duration threshold, exits are defined as 30 days of continuous residence in conventional residences. This period is long enough to require a sustained source of support, and it should entail few (if any) recall problems.

In addition, previous researchers found that different types of exits may involve dif-

ferent causal processes (Piliavin et al. 1996); thus I analyze two types of exit locations:

1. "Own-place" exit: Any exit to conventional housing for at least 30 days, whether to a house, an apartment or a hotel where the respondents consider themselves to be on their own.
2. "Shared-lodging" exit: Any exit to a dwelling unit for at least 30 days, whether to a house or an apartment, where the exiter is supported directly by others such as family or friends.

Own-place exits are particularly important to this paper. The first interview recorded whether or not the respondents intended to move into their own place; the second interview recorded whether and when they did so.

RESULTS

I tested Hypothesis 1—that longer spells of homelessness should predict fewer plans to leave the streets for one's own place—using a logistic regression equation that regressed respondents' plans to leave the streets for their own place, as measured at the first interview, on how long they had been homeless, as well as on several control variables reflecting various skills and opportunities relevant to the homeless situation. As reported in Table 1, the strongest predictor of own-place plans, and indeed the only statistically significant predictor, was how long the respondents had been in their current homeless spell. The logistic regression coefficient of this variable is $\beta = -.345$ ($p = .004$).

I tested Hypotheses 2 and 3 with several event history methods. I used these methods because they allow for censored cases (respondents who did not exit during the period of observation) and because they incorporate the timing of exiting (when respondents acquired conventional housing) (Tuma and Hannan 1984; Wu and Tuma 1991).

Stratified Survival Curve

In the first analysis I tested the zero-order relationship between planning to make an own-place exit and actually exiting to one's own place. I did this by estimating a

Table 1. Logistic Regression Models Regressing Homeless Exits on Background, Skills, Opportunities, and Efficacy ($N = 191$)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Planning to Exit to Own Place in One Month	
Background		
Male	.115	(.854)
White	.628	(.135)
Current spell length	-.345	(.004)
Previously homeless	-.455	(.330)
Skills		
Education in years	-.008	(.935)
Employment skills	-.879	(.063)
Work history	.007	(.461)
Poor health	.027	(.896)
Mental illness	.104	(.853)
Alcoholic symptoms	-.120	(.794)
Drug use	.394	(.352)
Criminal background	.016	(.972)
Depression	-.102	(.750)
Opportunities		
Family would help	.186	(.717)
Homeless friends help	.705	(.206)
Domiciled friends help	1.05	(.094)
Total income	.001	(.721)
Foster care background	-.439	(.290)
Social services help	-.202	(.783)
Efficacy		
Efficacy	.382	(.461)
Model Chi-Square (df)	47.07	(34 df)

Note: The number in the first column is the logistic regression parameter estimate. The number in parentheses is the p -value in a two-tailed test.

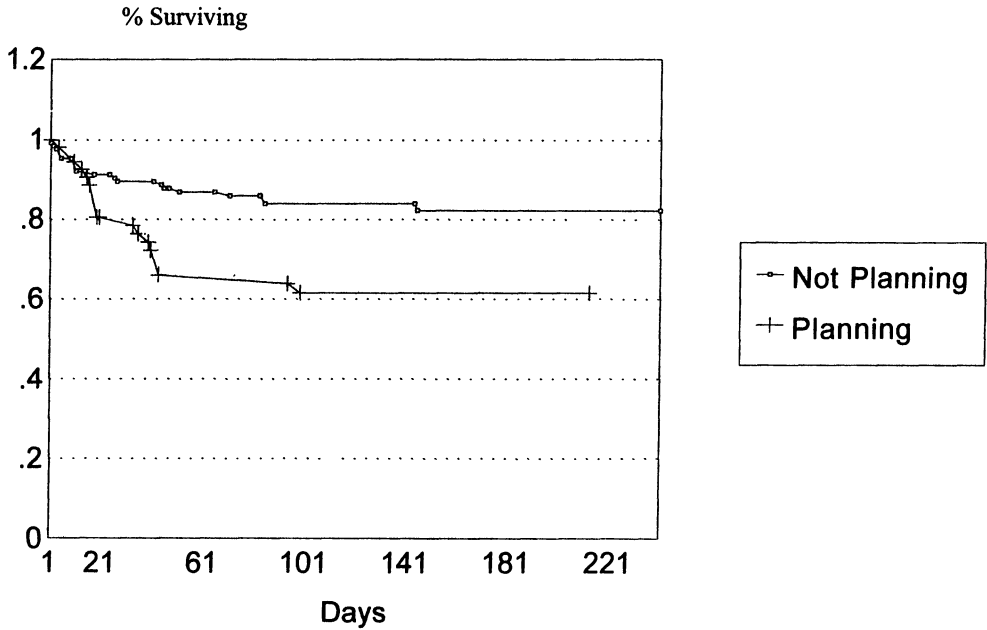
survival curve of exiting that was stratified by respondents' housing plans (see Figure 1). In this approach, the percentage of respondents who exited to their own place is plotted against those who remained homeless or made a different type of exit; the plotted differences in survival rates between these two groups can be inspected both visually and statistically. The advantage of this approach is that it permits a nonparametric analysis of the effects of planning for one's own place on the rate of exiting to one's own place, because it makes no assumptions about the functional form of exiting over time.

To create a stratified survival curve, I divided the sample respondents into two groups: those who planned to leave the streets for their own place and those who did not. I estimated survival curves for each group, using the Kaplan-Meier estimator (Namboodiri and Suchindran 1987). The upper survival curve represents the own-place exiting patterns of the respondents

who did not plan to obtain their own place; the lower curve represents those who did plan for their own place.

After one month, only 78.5 percent of the planning respondents survived on the streets or in shared lodging (i.e., did not exit to their own place), whereas 89.5 percent of the nonplanning respondents did so. At two months, 66.1 percent of the planning respondents survived, in contrast to 86.9 percent of the nonplanners. By five months, the survival rate had fallen to 61.6 percent for the planners and 82.2 percent for the nonplanners. The log-rank test for the difference between these two curves was statistically significant at 8.59 ($p = .003$),⁹ indicating that the homeless respondents who planned to obtain their own place at the first interview

⁹ The log-rank test assigns scores w_i to various observations, and the w_i scores are based on the logarithm of the survival function. The resulting test statistic is distributed normally with zero mean and unit variances in large samples (Namboodiri and Suchindran 1987).



$N=188$; log-rank test = 8.5943; $p=.00337$.

Figure 1. Survival until Own-Place Exit by Planning Own-Place Exit

had done so by the second interview at significantly higher rates than those who did not make such plans.¹⁰

Cox Models

In the next set of analyses I tested the effect of planning for one's own place while statistically controlling for other factors relevant to the exiting process. I did so by using the Cox method of semiparametric estimation to estimate competing risk, with multivariate models that tested the effect of planning for one's own place net of various skills, opportunities, and efficacy. Cox's estimation is a continuous-time method, and it assumes that hazard rates are a log-linear function of parameters for the effects of covariates (Cox 1972; Yamaguchi 1991). The distinctive feature of the Cox method is that it maximizes the partial likelihood function of the maximum-likelihood equation. This assumes the presence of a baseline hazard that

changes with time, but the functional form of this baseline need not be specified because the estimation procedure uses only the rank order of occurrences, not their timing (Yamaguchi 1991).

The first Cox model tested whether the effects of planning for one's own place were significant when various skills and abilities of the respondents were controlled. This model was motivated by the possibility that respondents made exiting plans that reflected only their general skills and abilities to find housing. That is, those respondents who had the needed skills and abilities to acquire housing might have made plans to do so, while those who lacked them did not make such plans. This alternative interpretation, which is consistent with the theory of planned behavior, suggests that planning for one's own place simply proxies for individual skills and abilities. Thus, net of skills and abilities, planning for one's own place should have had no unique effect on exiting.

To test this possibility, I estimated a competing-risk Cox model that regressed homeless exiting on own-place plans plus various skills and abilities that are relevant

¹⁰ The two groups of respondents—planners and nonplanners—did not differ in their rates of exiting to shared lodging.

to homeless people. These include education, employment skills, employment history, physical health, mental health, alcohol abuse, drug use, criminal activity, and depression (Rossi 1989). Table 2 presents the results of this analysis in columns 1 and 2. In column 1 the dependent variable is own-place exits; in column 2 it is shared-lodging exits. Respondents' plans for their own place predicted own-place exits net of the control variables. The estimated effect of planning for one's own place was significant ($p = .025$): Among the respondents who planned to exit to their own places, the risks of doing so were 227 percent ($\exp(.8188)$) greater than among those who did not make such plans.

In a second Cox model I tested whether the effect of planning for one's own place remained significant with controls for various external opportunities and resources

available to respondents. It is possible that plans to exit simply reflected opportunities to do so. If this was so, the effects of planning on exiting should have diminished when opportunities and resources were controlled. I tested this interpretation with an equation that regressed exiting on planning as well as on opportunities and resources available to respondents at the first interview. These opportunities included respondents' assessments of their families', domiciled friends', and homeless friends' willingness to help. They also included respondents' total income from both legal and illegal sources, foster care background (indicating a lack of family support), and having sought help from a social service agency. The results of this analysis are presented in columns 3 and 4 of Table 2. The effect of planning for one's own place remained statistically significant ($p = .015$) and undimin-

Table 2. Competing-Risk Cox Model Regressing Homeless Exits on Skills, Opportunities, and Efficacy ($N = 191$)

Independent Variables	Type of Exit					
	(1) Own	(2) Shared	(3) Own	(4) Shared	(5) Own	(6) Shared
Background						
Male	-.502 (.288)	.224 (.668)	-.253 (.565)	-.083 (.851)	-.224 (.588)	-.044 (.919)
White	.701 (.054)	-.153 (.658)	.812 (.022)	-.165 (.629)	.795 (.020)	-.204 (.538)
Current spell length	-.100 (.353)	-.160 (.134)	-.090 (.368)	-.128 (.186)	-.033 (.717)	-.079 (.393)
Previously homeless	-.451 (.252)	-.312 (.422)	-.830 (.029)	-.520 (.138)	-.377 (.276)	-.233 (.505)
Skills						
Education in years	-.066 (.348)	-.034 (.602)				
Employment skills	-.402 (.294)	.285 (.474)				
Work history	.011 (.153)	-.003 (.641)				
Poor health	.193 (.273)	.194 (.244)				
Mental illness	-.173 (.713)	.401 (.351)				
Alcoholic symptoms	-.708 (.073)	-.678 (.072)				
Drug use	.142 (.692)	-.271 (.485)				
Criminal background	.325 (.400)	.418 (.272)				
Depression	.401 (.087)	-.554 (.037)				
Opportunities						
Family would help			.126 (.735)	.185 (.641)		
Homeless friends help			-.528 (.176)	.368 (.428)		
Domiciled friends help			-.487 (.257)	.145 (.758)		
Total income			.004 (.001)	.000 (.831)		
Foster care background			-.474 (.197)	.124 (.705)		
Social services help			2.318 (.040)	.505 (.387)		
Efficacy						
Efficacy					.683 (.137)	.399 (.314)
Intentions						
Plan own place	.819 (.025)	.142 (.712)	.896 (.015)	.058 (.881)	.678 (.051)	.017 (.963)
Model Chi-Square (df)	32.57 (26 df)	23.59 (26 df)	43.98 (17 df)	10.58 (17 df)	24.42 (10 df)	7.43 (10 df)

Note: First number in each equation is the Cox estimation parameter estimate. The number in parentheses is the p -value in a two-tailed test.

ished when opportunities were controlled. Among respondents who made plans for their own place, the risks of own-place exits were 245 percent that of those who did not plan.

In a third Cox model I controlled for respondents' sense of efficacy in leaving the streets. It could be that the respondents who planned to leave the streets for their own place were simply those who felt more efficacious in doing so. Thus, plans for exiting might have reflected only levels of efficacy. If this were the case, then controlling for levels of efficacy should have diminished the effect of exiting intentions on exiting behavior. I tested this interpretation with a Cox model that regressed exiting on both planning and efficacy. The results of this analysis are presented in columns 5 and 6 of Table 2. Net of efficacy, planning for one's own place predicted own-place exits significantly ($p = .051$). Among those individuals who planned for their own place, the relative risks of own-place exits were 197 percent of those who did not plan.

As a summary test of the three alternative interpretations presented above, I estimated a competing-risk Cox model that regressed exiting on abilities and skills,

opportunities and resources, and efficacy. The results are presented in Table 3. As in the previous analyses, planning for one's own place remained a significant ($p = .020$) predictor of own-place exits, even net of all the control variables.

In none of the above analyses did planning to obtain one's own place significantly increase respondents' likelihood of exiting to a shared lodging. This is further evidence that making plans for one's own place is not a proxy for more general abilities or opportunities. If this were the case, one would expect it to increase all types of exits.

Piecewise Exponential Models

In the final analysis I tested the timing of the effect of planning to acquire one's own place on actually doing so. When did exiting plans exert an effect? I did this by estimating a piecewise exponential model of the rate of own-place exits. This approach models the duration of a process as divided into distinct time intervals. Within those intervals, the hazard of events is assumed to remain constant; between intervals, however, the hazard is allowed to change (Allison 1984; Wu and Tuma 1991). This model allows the effects of independent variables to

Table 3. Competing-Risk Cox Model Regressing Homeless Exits on Skills, Opportunities, and Efficacy ($N = 191$)

Independent Variables	Type of Exit	
	(1) Own	(2) Shared
Male	-.252 (.599)	.275 (.603)
White	.985 (.012)	-.249 (.471)
Current Spell Length	.001 (.991)	-.125 (.209)
Previously Homeless	-.367 (.349)	-.365 (.335)
Employment Skills	-.707 (.099)	-.225 (.563)
Work History	.001 (.876)	-.002 (.762)
Mental Illness	.133 (.767)	.502 (.240)
Alcoholic Symptoms	-.674 (.094)	-.664 (.078)
Family Would Help	-.024 (.950)	.242 (.545)
Homeless Friends Help	-.400 (.349)	.473 (.318)
Domiciled Friends Help	-.375 (.394)	.213 (.655)
Total Income	.004 (.001)	.001 (.643)
Efficacy	.659 (.173)	.391 (.381)
Plan Own Place	.885 (.020)	.047 (.908)
Model Chi-Square (df)	44.82 (25 df)	19.72 (25 df)

Note: The first number in each equation is the Cox estimation parameter estimate. The number in parentheses is the p -value in a two-tailed test.

Table 4. Piecewise Exponential Model Regressing Own-Place Homeless Exits on Skills, Opportunities, and Efficacy (*N* = 191)

Independent Variables	Length of Time Segment		
	(1) 0 to 29 Days	(2) 30 to 59 Days	(3) 60+ Days
Male	.262 (.691)	.095 (.949)	9.000 (.899)
White	.879 (.070)	2.219 (.046)	2.199 (.170)
Current Spell Length	.058 (.667)	-.633 (.085)	-.042 (.898)
Previously Homeless	-.071 (.888)	-3.766 (.016)	-.673 (.557)
Employment Skills	-1.455 (.012)	-.828 (.559)	8.864 (.834)
Work History	-.003 (.696)	-.011 (.630)	.021 (.516)
Mental Illness	-1.055 (.181)	2.062 (.091)	3.698 (.042)
Alcoholic Symptoms	-.701 (.181)	-2.290 (.077)	-1.242 (.385)
Family Would Help	-.042 (.935)	-.338 (.741)	2.922 (.089)
Homeless Friends Help	-.571 (.350)	-.429 (.705)	1.273 (.472)
Domiciled Friends Help	.279 (.656)	-2.480 (.049)	8.778 (.881)
Total Income	.004 (.013)	.011 (.026)	-.001 (.718)
Efficacy	1.706 (.034)	-2.215 (.107)	7.808 (.853)
Plan Own Place	.258 (.600)	4.234 (.001)	.615 (.691)
Model Chi-Square (df)	145.97 (77 df)		

Note: The first number in each equation is the parameter estimate. The number in parentheses is the *p*-value in a two-tailed test.

change across time intervals.¹¹ The use of a piecewise exponential model tested the relationship between exit plans and exiting over time. Did this relationship decrease monotonically with time, as would be expected with the theory of reasoned action, or did it initially increase with time as future housing opportunities aligned with previously formed intentions, as hypothesized here?

The estimated exponential piecewise model is presented in Table 4. The equation in column 1 predicts own-place exits in the interval of 0 to 29 days; in column 2, for 30 to 59 days; in column 3, for 60 days or more. The effect of planning an own-place exit changed with time: It had no effect in the first month, a very strong effect in the second month (*B* = 4.234, *p* = .001), and no effect after three months. This finding suggests that respondents' plans to acquire their own place one month after the first interview affected their exiting behavior at one to two months, but not before and not after that period.

To check the robustness of the analyses presented in Tables 1–3, I performed a test

to ascertain whether respondents' censoring experience was nonrandom and biased. I did so by estimating two equations: one with the censored cases recoded as experiencing the event (exiting) at the time of censoring, and the other with the duration times of censored cases set equal to 241 days, the longest duration in the sample (Allison 1984:29). I estimated both of these equations using the piecewise exponential method displayed in Table 4. The effect of planning for one's own place remained unchanged in both equations (analyses not shown): Planning for one's own place predicted own-place exits only in the second-month interval, and then very strongly. Thus it appears that any violation of the assumption of independent censoring did not substantially affect the findings shown.

DISCUSSION

The analyses described above indicate that homeless persons' plans for future housing predict their likelihood of obtaining housing. Furthermore, this prediction remains undiminished with controls for a wide range of relevant abilities, opportunities, and efficacy. Yet other skills and opportunities may exist, which would render spurious the relationship between planning and

¹¹Piecewise exponential models take into account information about the functional form of time dependence (i.e., the hazard level at each interval); thus they generate potentially more precise estimates than semiparametric estimation.

exiting, but which were not included in these analyses.

Although this situation is possible, I view it as improbable for several reasons. First, the control variables used in the analyses reported here are those identified most consistently in the literature on homelessness as relevant to the situation of homeless persons. Second, the addition of these control variables did not at all diminish the statistical relationship between planning and exiting. In fact, if the relationship between plans and exiting were spurious, one would expect these control variables at least to diminish, if not eliminate, the relationship between planning and exiting. Third, the effect of planning on exiting does not decrease monotonically with time. Rather, it is strongest at about two months. This finding contradicts the potential interpretation that behavioral intentions simply reflect an individual's situation at the time of plan making (according to the theory of reasoned action). Furthermore, if the respondents had the wherewithal to leave the streets when they made their plans, one would have expected them to use such resources sooner rather than later. Thus it is unlikely that the plans expressed at the first interview simply reflected existing abilities and opportunities; if they had done so, they should have predicted immediate rather than delayed exits.

The empirical findings presented in this paper are consistent with hypotheses drawn from the reformulation of the theory of reasoned action developed here: that behavioral intentions can alter perceived and objective opportunities for behavior. A limitation of these analyses, however, is that they do not directly measure the causal mechanisms proposed by this reformulation, namely the perceived and objective opportunities for behavior. More direct tests of the reformulation are needed, as discussed below.

This reformulation merits continued study because it holds important implications for the study of attitudes and behavior: It suggests that behavioral intentions can predict behavior in heavily constrained (especially social) situations as well as voluntary situations. Thus the theory of reasoned action applies to a much wider range of social behaviors than previously thought,

although its creators may not have known this. This is not to imply that situational constraints never hinder behavioral intentions, but rather that Fishbein and Ajzen may have overlooked possible mechanisms through which behavioral intentions alter behavioral opportunities.

The findings reported here also bear on the study of homelessness. Most quantitative studies of homelessness focus on either the macro-level environment of homelessness, such as housing availability or unemployment (e.g., Elliott and Krivo 1991), or on the personal characteristics of homeless people, such as personal disabilities and human capital (e.g., Rossi 1989; Wright 1989). In this paper I suggest that in addition to these factors, social psychological processes must be examined more fully to completely clarify the processes of homelessness. The causal links between housing plans and homeless exiting, as discussed here, blur the line between the person and the environment. As people form intentions, their environments and the opportunities present in those environments can change both subjectively and objectively. Thus, as researchers seek to identify the antecedents, consequences, and ways out of homelessness, they should be aware of the social psychological interplay between the person and their surroundings.

In addition, the findings reported in this paper empirically support Snow and Anderson's (1993) notion that the development of a present orientation—losing the ability or motivation to plan for the future—can be detrimental. Focusing on day-to-day life on the streets is an understandable response to the difficulties of homelessness, but doing so might ultimately diminish the ability to leave homelessness. Therefore, life on the streets appears, in part, to keep people homeless through this social psychological mechanism.

In expanding on the ideas presented in this paper, future researchers could take several approaches. First, the causal links between intentions and behaviors proposed here, whereby intentions alter perceptions and act as social cues, could be examined more closely in qualitative studies of individuals in different settings. In such studies, researchers could observe the effects of

behavioral intentions on individuals' own perceptions as well as on the actions of others. Do behavioral intentions alter perceptions and definitions of situations? Do others use an individual's intentions as criteria in deciding to offer assistance?

Second, the role of attitudes and intentions in the context of homelessness should be explored more fully. The theory of rea-

soned action and other research have suggested a wide array of factors thought to influence intentions, including attitudes, social norms, and personal identities (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). The study of homelessness would be enhanced by identifying these various factors and the ways in which they influence homeless people's plans and actions.

Appendix A. Description of Variables

Name of Variable	Description of Variable
Background	
Male	Male.
White	White.
Current spell length	Length of time in days of current homeless spell (logarithmic scale).
Previously homeless	Respondent was homeless before current spell.
Skills	
Education (in years)	Highest grade completed in education.
Employment skills	Received vocational training.
Work history	Percentage of time employed between first job and current time.
Poor health	Assessment of health as poor.
Mental illness	Previously hospitalized because of an emotional/nervous condition.
Alcoholic symptoms	Has one or more symptom of possible alcoholism.
Drug use	Uses drugs.
Criminal background	Convicted of a crime as an adult.
Depression	Symptoms of depression.
Opportunities	
Family would help	Perceives family members as willing to give assistance (food, shelter, money) if asked.
Homeless friends help	Perceives homeless friends as willing to give assistance (food, money) if asked.
Domiciled friends help	Perceives domiciled friends as willing to give assistance (food, shelter, money) if asked.
Total income	Total income in last 30 days, from all sources.
Foster care background	In a foster home or group home as child.
Social services help	Has sought help from welfare agencies.
Efficacy	
Efficacy	"If I can make a plan, I am almost sure that I can make it work."
Intentions	
Plan own place	In one month plans to be living in own place.
Exiting	
Own-place exit	Left streets for own place; stayed off streets for 30 days.
Shared-lodging exit	Left streets for lodging; taken in by others, stayed off streets for 30 days.

Appendix B. Correlations among Independent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Male	1.0																			
2. White	.02	1.0																		
3. Current Spell Length	-.11	.10	1.0																	
4. Previously Homeless	.09	.17	-.02	1.0																
5. Education (in Years)	.10	.01	-.14	-.07	1.0															
6. Employment Skills	.16	.15	.03	-.04	.06	1.0														
7. Work History	.10	.27	-.07	-.20	.27	.30	1.0													
8. Poor Health	-.07	-.04	.10	.16	-.09	-.22	-.11	1.0												
9. Mental Illness	.09	-.14	-.04	.06	.02	.02	-.05	.21	1.0											
10. Alcoholic Symptoms	.07	.05	-.02	.15	-.25	-.13	-.20	.04	-.07	1.0										
11. Drug Use	.20	.04	-.05	.25	-.02	.05	-.15	-.09 ^a	.05	.21	1.0									
12. Criminal Background	.07	.24	.16	.10	.02	.12	.00	.01	.11	.28	.16	1.0								
13. Depression	.16	.13	.07	.12	.02	.13	-.02	.10	.18	-.10	.01	-.05	1.0							
14. Family Would Help	-.15	.11	.04	-.03	.06	.00	.03	-.01	-.22	.11	-.10	.15	-.39	1.0						
15. Homeless Friends	-.08	-.03	.18	.11	-.07	-.01	-.09	.09	-.04	.11	.04	.07	-.12	.22	1.0					
16. Domiciled Friends	-.06	-.13	-.15	.12	.12	.07	-.09	-.11	.04	.16	.23	.10	-.26	.25	.26	1.0				
17. Total Income	.03	.01	.07	.13	-.01	.13	.02	-.05	.01	.22	.15	.25	.05	.05	.10	.15	1.0			
18. Foster Care	-.09	.02	.05	.13	-.15	.00	-.12	-.03	-.10	.05	.18	.15	-.02	.04	-.05	.08	.15	1.0		
19. Social Services	.15	.03	.13	.25	-.01	.00	-.02	.15	.15	.09	.19	.10	.04	-.11	.06	.07	.09	.02	1.0	
20. Efficacy	.08	-.15	-.10	-.22	-.02	.22	.10	-.24	.07	-.17	.02	-.09	-.05	.01	-.07	.11	.06	-.01	-.09	1.0

Note: All correlation coefficients $\geq .14$ are statistically significant at $p \leq .05$.

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