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Sociology, Poverty



Mario Villalpando Professor Chastaine English 102: Essay #2 Draft October 15, 2012 Give to the Solution, Not the Problem Imagine this, you're on your way to work. As you drive down Broadway you see that a local organization has set up a canned food drive to help raise food for those in need. Not thinking too much about it, other than you have no canned foods on you, you keep driving to school. As you approach the next stop light you see the Boise State cheerleaders are holding signs that read, " Car Wash \$2. 00. " You don't need your car washed so you continue to drive. But right before you get to school you see a homeless person holding a sign that says " Will work for food. " You finally arrive at school and make it to class on time. After noticing all of these things which people do you think were panhandling? All three of these people were doing the same thing, asking for money or food. To understand which group was panhandling you must first understand what panhandling is. Panhandling means to solicit an individual on a street or in another public place; and by requesting an immediate donation of money or something else of value. (Scott) The cheerleaders and the organization were doing a type of fundraising to benefit their group or their cause, while the homeless man was only trying to benefit himself. There are also different types of panhandling such as passive panhandling and aggressive panhandling. Panhandlers in the Boise area are typically not homeless, and while giving money to a stranger may seem charitable there are safer and better alternatives to help those in need. According to the, " Problem with Panhandling" by Michael Scott, " Panhandling is a common term in the United States, more often referred to as "begging" elsewhere, or occasionally, as "cadging." "Panhandlers" are variously referred to as

"beggars," "vagrants," "vagabonds," "mendicants," or "cadgers." The term "panhandling" derives either from the impression created by someone holding out his or her hand (as a pan's handle sticks out from the pan) or from the image of someone using a pan to collect money (as gold miners in the American West used pans to sift for gold). " The information by Michael Scott helps you better realize why fundraising and panhandling are not the same. As mentioned before, there are generally two types of panhandling: passive and aggressive. Passive panhandling is soliciting for money or goods without a threat, and usually no words at all. These are the people you see holding the signs or a simply just a cup. Aggressive panhandling is soliciting using threats or verbal abuse, in some cases if the there are extreme acts of aggression it is no longer aggressive panhandling and is now considered robbery. (Scott) Panhandlers vary in their looks, ages, and come in all sizes. A study titled, " Panhandling: A Street Study" was done to find the demographics of panhandlers to help better understand who does it and why they do it. Ken Armstrong was the leader of the project and was chosen because of his abilities to connect with the homeless. Mr. Armstrong interviewed 45 people on the streets in a city nearly the same size as Boise. Of those interviewed, 85 percent were men and 15 percent were women. Ages ranged between 25 and 64. More than half had never been married. Only five had completed grade 12. None of the respondents had any form of full-time or part-time employment. (Armstrong) While conducting this study Mr. Armstrong had many key findings and themes associated with panhandling. In his report he concluded that, " In total, 44 of the 45 interviewed said they had no home. Only one respondent said he shared a

dormitory accommodation in a city shelter. The length of time spent on the street varied considerably. One respondent said he'd been panhandling for 15 years; others for a few months. The average was around four years. Most respondents panhandle on a daily basis. Busiest time of day: between 4. 30 pm and 10 pm. Best days: Friday and Saturday — especially close to Christmas. Respondents were asked what would stop them panhandling for the day. The majority replied they stopped only when they had made enough money. Respondents gave a variety of reasons for starting to panhandle. For many it was shortage of money after becoming homeless; for others it was a fast way to make money without stealing. It was also a quicker way to make money than bottle picking. This amount varied enormously. One respondent estimated he averaged \$180 a day; others were more modest, with estimates ranging from \$50 a day to \$120. " (Armstrong) With almost 100 percent of the panhandlers being homeless and 85 percent of them being men it is important to know why one becomes homeless. It is rare that someone would become homeless for just one reason; however, poverty is a common reason amongst many of the homeless. People become homeless when their housing and financial issues combine with other issues such as domestic violence, physical or mental illness, addiction, transition into adulthood, and relationship problems. (Works) According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development about 26 percent of people who experience homelessness nationwide are mentally ill. The most common assumption of the homeless are that they are drug addicts with a substance abuse problem. But according to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration 38 percent of homeless people are alcohol dependent while

26 percent abuse other substances. (Works) With men being the biggest portion of homeless people, research indicates that 40 percent of homeless men have served in the armed forces. (" National Coalition for the Homeless") The following statement is from an article titled, " Veterans and the Homelessness" by Libby Pearl. " Although researchers have not found that military service alone is associated with homelessness, it may be associated with other factors that contribute to it. There have been an indirect connection found between the stress that occurs as a result of deployment and exposure to war, and homelessness. Veterans who experienced war stress were found to have difficulty readjusting to civilian life, resulting in high levels of problems that included social isolation, violent behavior, and, for white male veterans, homelessness. " (" National Coalition for the Homeless") Factors that contribute to this high number of homeless veterans are low levels of social support upon returning, psychiatric disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, substance use disorders such as opiates, and being unmarried. (" National Coalition for the Homeless") With a better understanding on panhandling and the demographic themes associated with it lets take a local look at panhandling and the homeless in Boise. According to College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs at Boise State, Ada County has nearly 700 homeless people throughout the area, with nearly 20 percent being veterans. (Lindquist) The main cause for homelessness is unemployment followed by unaffordable housing and then substance abuse. The average profile in Boise is a white male in between the ages of 31 and 50. (Lindquist) In the area panhandlers have a different name. " Flying Signs" is the street slang for panhandling.

According to an article by Nishi Gupta titled, " City begins campaign to discourage panhandling" most panhandlers are not in need of money for the basic needs. The city of Boise has many alternatives to panhandling that the homeless choose to ignore. Bill Roscoe with the Boise Rescue Mission took a behind the scenes look at panhandling to see if they are really legit. Roscoe has worked extensively with the homeless and knows the image and the reality often do not match. A lot of guys are out with signs saying they're homeless veterans and they're not vets. (Beres) That is why panhandlers frustrate him. Roscoe stated, " Every dollars that goes to a panhandler goes to a panhandler. " An interview with Carlos Frias, a ex panhandler himself, says, " What percentage are legit? I think maybe one percent, if that. We got guys that go out there and they got a shift and it's like a job. " In fact Idaho On Your Side kept an eye at popular exits at Winco and what they found was fascinating. Panhandlers work like a team to control the most lucrative spots. (Beres) An interview conducted by Boise Weekly concluded that panhandlers in the area could bring in 100 dollars in a successful day but typically only gather 20 to 40 dollars over course of a few hours. Section 6-01-07 of Boise City Code states that a person who begs in a public place with the intent to intimidate another into giving money or goods or obstructs a pedestrian or vehicular traffic in a public place is guilty of a misdemeanor. This does not make panhandling illegal it just allows the Boise police to control aggressive panhandlers. Citations have increased dramatically over the years. In the year 2007 only 15 citations were given out, in 2009 85 citations were written, and in 2011 nearly 130 citations were given to panhandlers. (Beres) Ordinances in Boise are not in place to discourage helping the homeless.

They are in place to encourage that we donate to the right places. People are placing money in the hands of panhandlers that could truly help the homeless. Giving a person on the corner 10 dollars is not considered donating to the homeless. At the Boise Rescue Mission it only costs \$2.05 to prepare a meal, 10 dollars could prepare meals for 5 individuals and not just one. (Beres) The City of Boise just recently launched a public campaign titled, "Have a Heart - Give Smart." Have a Heart - Give Smart encourages people to give more effectively by contributing to these local organizations that can offer real life change to people in need. People should not give money to panhandlers and should instead find a safer and more productive way of donating such as a local organization. Always remember, it's okay to say "no" to panhandling, and "yes" to giving! Works Cited Scott, Michael. "Panhandling." Center for Problem Oriented Policy. COPS, 3 2002. Web. 16 Oct 2012. . Armstrong, Ken. "Panhandling: A Street Study." Boyle Street Community Services. N. p., 18 2010. Web. 16 Oct 2012. . Works, Good. "Why do people become homeless?." A Good Work Staffs Prospective. Good Works, Inc. Web. 16 Oct 2012. . , ed. "Who is Homeless?." National Coalition for the Homeless. National Coalition for the Homeless, 15 2011. Web. 16 Oct 2012. . Lindquist, Eric. "Where are the homeless?." Boise State University. Boise State University. Web. 16 Oct 2012. . Gupta, Nishi. "City begins campaign to discourage panhandling." KTVB. com. King Broadcasting Company, 05 2010. Web. 16 Oct 2012. .