Escaping Homelessness:
The Influences of Self-Efficacy and Time Perspective on Coping With Homelessness

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This study explored whether self-efficacy and time perspective of homeless adults (N = 82) living in a shelter affected their coping strategies related to obtaining housing and employment. Participants with high self-efficacy searched more for housing and employment and stayed at the shelter for a shorter duration, whereas participants with low self-efficacy were more likely to request an extension of their stay at the shelter. Those high on future orientation had shorter durations of homelessness and were more likely to enroll in school and to report gaining positive benefits from their predicament, whereas those with a high present orientation had more avoidant coping strategies. Despite the predictive power of self-efficacy and future orientation of proactive search behaviors, there were no predictors of obtaining stable housing, which is a scarce resource in the area. However, a high present orientation predicted obtaining temporary housing. A present temporal perspective may be adaptive in finding short-term solutions to an unstable situation, such as homelessness. The role of time perspective in crisis situations is discussed, as well as the severe environmental constraints on the exercise of personal control over reality dictated by social, economic, and political forces.

One of the most sorrowful and challenging national problems is the plight of the homeless. In recent years, the number of homeless people has dramatically increased, with estimates reaching up to 3 million people (Youssef, 1988). Little systematic research has been conducted on the new homeless, composed mainly of young poor families, with many more women and minorities than the earlier generations of homeless (Bassuk & Lauriat, 1986; Rossi, 1989). The rise in

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homelessness is due to recent structural and systemic changes, such as
deinstitutionalization of state mental hospitals, reductions in entry-level jobs,
corporate downsizing, increases in poverty, weakened family support systems,
and decreased availability of low-income housing. Nevertheless, it is important
to identify personal factors that may affect coping with homelessness and success
in reentering mainstream society. The effects of homelessness on psychological
(Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991) and physical health (Winkleby & White,
1992) are extremely damaging and long-lasting, and psychological research has
an important role to play in expanding our understanding of the challenges faced
by the homeless and the factors that enable people to escape homelessness. In
fact, the APA Resolution on Homelessness (APA Council of Representatives,
1991) has called for more research on the psychological coping strategies of
those in this new homeless state, as well as the various psychosocial costs of
homelessness.

Research has identified personal risk factors for homelessness, such as prob-
lems of physical and mental health, substance abuse, and lack of social support
(Rossi, 1989), but we know little about mediating factors that may limit episodes
of homelessness. While it is difficult to disentangle the social, economic, and
personal factors that contribute to becoming homeless, it is feasible and useful to
identify factors that promote success in improving the situation once one
becomes homeless. Personal appraisal of the stressor of homelessness and of
one's resources will affect how people react to the predicament, and in turn
should affect their ability to escape the condition of being homeless (Milburn &

Homeless people vary in how they cope with homelessness and their uncer-
tain futures. Some pursue activities toward regaining stable work and housing.
Others respond with a sense of futility and despondency. One personal factor that
engenders, motivates, and sustains functional coping under adversity is a sense of
personal efficacy to produce desired results by one's actions (Bandura, 1997).
Efficacy beliefs affect how people think, motivate themselves, and make deci-
sions. Diverse lines of research verify that efficacy beliefs contribute to well-
being and personal accomplishments across diverse spheres of life (Bandura,
1997; Maddux, 1995).

Many homeless people also lack stable employment. Research on the role of
perceived self-efficacy in gaining reemployment is therefore of special relevance.
Two studies of unemployed men found that self-efficacy was the best predictor of
success in gaining reemployment (Clifford, 1989; Kanfer & Hulin, 1985). Pro-
grams based on guided mastery that build or restore a sense of efficacy in laid-off
workers increase job search efforts and the likelihood of re-employment (Eden &
Aviram, 1993; Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, & Price, 1991). In mediational anal-
yses, the effects of mastery training on job-search behavior are entirely mediated
through changes in perceived self-efficacy (Vinokur et al., 1991). Thus, among
homeless people, high self-efficacy may also sustain motivation of search behaviors that secure stable housing, in addition to employment.

One's outcome expectations, motivation, and task-related performance may also be greatly affected by another cognitive schema—that of time perspective (Lewin, 1951). Time perspective is the individual's construal of the flow of personal experiences into the temporal phases of past, present, or future. Gonzalez and Zimbardo (1985) have shown that one's cognitive schema of time may become biased, structuring life in predominantly present- or future-oriented directions (they did not measure past orientation).

Both perceived self-efficacy and time perspective play fundamental roles in motivating behavior. Motivation is determined in large part by cognitive representations of future states—by expected outcomes and by cognized future goals (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs about the amount of personal control one can exert over events determines the outcomes they expect to produce and the goals they set for themselves, both of which serve as sources of motivation. In addition, social cognitive theorists have long acknowledged the role of future orientation in motivational processes (Bandura, 1991; Karniol & Ross, 1996; Nuttin, 1985). Those who are more future oriented have a greater ability to set goals and to formulate plans for their attainment, while also enlisting greater functional motivation to achieve their plans (Zaleski, 1994). Indeed, both future orientation and perceived self-efficacy are necessary conditions for developing a realistic sense of achievement motivation.

Time perspective has been shown to be related to a broad domain of outcomes (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1997). For example, future orientation is related to high academic achievement (Karniol & Ross, 1996; Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994; Wolf & Savickas, 1985; Zaleski, 1994), vocational maturity, career decision making (Savickas, Silling, & Schwartz, 1984), delay of gratification (Mischel, 1974; Mischel et al., 1989), and higher socioeconomic status (SES; Lamm, Sanmili, & Trimmoldorf, 1976). In contrast, present orientation is related to higher rates of unplanned pregnancies (Mindrick & Shapiro, 1989; Oskamp, Mindrick, Berger, & Motta, 1978), juvenile delinquency (Landau, 1976), and lower SES (LeShan, 1952; Nurmi, 1991). In addition, high-risk behaviors such as risky driving, substance use and abuse, aggression, and thrill-seeking (Keough, Zimbardo, & Boyd, in press; Zimbardo, Keough, & Boyd, 1997) are also more characteristic of highly present-oriented individuals.

Homeless people tend to fall at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum which, as noted, is usually associated with a present orientation. However, immersion in the daily battle for survival, facing deprivation of basic needs such as shelter, could also induce a situationally based present orientation, regardless of one's dispositional temporal orientation. Thus, present orientation can be both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Biased time perspectives, in contrast
to a balanced temporal orientation, are influenced by many factors—sociocultural, religious, educational, family, and personal experiences—as well as by crises, such as becoming homeless. Regardless of its origins, our concern here is to understand how overly focusing one's subjective time sense on the present or future impacts on current decisions, actions, and outcomes. The present study explores the roles of perceived self-efficacy and time perspective in predicting the success of currently homeless people in securing housing and in finding employment.

For a homeless person with limited resources, finding a job and affordable housing in a region where demand far outstrips availability is a formidable challenge. It requires a resilient sense of efficacy to withstand the likely repeated failures of one's efforts. It also requires planning ahead to ensure that one has the resources and strategies to succeed in that pursuit. Our primary goal was to test the role of perceived self-efficacy and future orientation in escaping from homelessness. We assessed the activities that homeless families engaged in during their stay at a temporary shelter and their success in securing employment and stable housing upon their departure. We predicted that both self-efficacy and a future orientation would lead to search activities, less avoidant coping, reduced vulnerability to despondency, and increased likelihood of finding stable work and housing.

Our secondary goal was to assess the relationship between self-efficacy time perspective. Self-efficacy can be thought of as one's perceived competence to reach a goal, and time perspective can be thought of as one's goal orientation. In this way, self-efficacy can shape time perspective. People who believe they can play a part in bringing about desired changes and thus see a stronger contingency between their actions with future consequences show stronger commitments to the pursuit of their desired futures (Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1990). In contrast, those who distrust their ability to influence the course of events have little incentive to look to the future to set distant goals for themselves. They are more likely to adopt a fatalistic present-oriented outlook in their everyday lives. We thus predicted that a high sense of personal efficacy would be accompanied by a high future orientation and a low present orientation.

Method

Participants and Setting

The participants were 82 homeless adults residing at one of four family shelters. All residents of the shelters were invited by the staff to participate in a confidential study on homelessness for which they would receive a small payment. Data were obtained from all residents over a 6-month period, except from 2 people who declined participation.
The four temporary family shelters were located in the northern California Bay area, where there is great demand for, but severe lack of, low-cost housing. The eligibility requirements of the shelters included having at least one child, following shelter rules (which forbade alcohol, drugs, or visitors on the premises), and attending weekly house meetings to discuss common living issues. The shelters provided private furnished rooms for each family. Each shelter allowed families to stay for a fixed period of either 1, 2, or 3 months for a minimal monthly fee.

Procedure

Five trained interviewers, two of whom were bilingual (Spanish and English), administered the self-efficacy and time-perspective scales, and a survey of background information to participants at the beginning of the participants' stay at the shelter (with prior approval from each shelter's administration). The measures were translated into Spanish for native Spanish speakers. Participants received $10 total for completing both surveys (the initial and follow-up surveys). The interviewers contacted the participants, explained to them the voluntary nature of the study, assured them of the confidentiality of the study, and informed them that the study was unaffiliated with the shelter. Before participants permanently left the shelter, they completed a follow-up Check-Out Questionnaire, labeled only with their identification numbers. This form assessed where they were going and their plans. If they left before an interviewer could receive the questionnaire from them, the participants left their forms in a sealed confidential box at the shelter. Except for a few cases, their stated housing destinations were confirmed independently by the staff at the shelter.

Measures

The assessments consisted of an initial battery, including a background sociodemographic questionnaire, time perspective inventory scales measuring perceived self-efficacy to find housing and employment, and a follow-up check-out questionnaire completed before leaving the shelter.

Background Questionnaire

This questionnaire was adapted in part from one devised by Winkleby and White (1992) to assess history of homelessness, such as date of first episode of homelessness, number of episodes, length of current episode, and reasons for current episode. The questionnaire also assessed basic sociodemographic information, such as age, race, level of education, marital status, and employment history.
**Time Perspective**

Time perspective was measured by the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI; Gonzalez & Zimbardo, 1985), modified slightly by substituting simpler and more concrete words to facilitate comprehension for people with limited education. The scale consists of 32 items that assess whether one is predominantly future, present, or past oriented. The statements depict social situations or attitudes viewed through different time perspectives. For example, a future-oriented statement is, "I believe a person's day should be planned ahead each morning" and a present-oriented statement is, "I think it is useless to plan too far ahead because things rarely come out the way you planned anyway." Participants rated how much they agreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measure has been shown to have high external validity, and satisfactory test-retest, and internal reliability (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; Zimbardo et al., 1997).

**Perceived Self-Efficacy Questionnaire**

The measures of perceived self-efficacy assessed participants' beliefs that they can carry out the activities necessary to obtain housing and employment, and also expectations for success within specified time periods. The scales contain 20 items, 10 items each for assessing housing efficacy and job efficacy. The items were developed after extensive discussions with many homeless shelter residents about obstacles faced in their attempts to obtain employment and housing. The residents who participated in scale development had left the shelter months before the data-collection phase began, and were not included in the formal study. Participants rated on a 9-point scale the strength of their belief that they can construct a résumé, impress employers and rental agents, get others to help them, and find a job and housing within the time frames of 1 month, several months, and 1 year.

**Follow-Up Check-Out Questionnaire**

This questionnaire consists of 17 items regarding progress participants were making toward securing housing and employment. Fourteen questions asked participants to rate on a 5-point scale from 1 (none of my time) to 5 (all my time) how much time they spent engaged in specific activities. The activities were various domestic activities, calling potential rental agents and employers, watching television, being depressed, passing time away, working, and looking for housing or employment. The last page included open-ended questions asking the participants to describe any changes they had made while at the shelter, whether they got a job or housing, what type of housing they will have when they leave, and
the nature of their future plans. Their recorded answers were coded into the relevant categories.

Overview of Statistical Analyses

Factor analyses were conducted to create internally consistent, independent subscales of self-efficacy and time perspective. Correlations were performed to assess relationships between perceived self-efficacy and time perspective, history of homelessness and employment, and amount of time spent searching for housing and employment. All significance tests reported are two-tailed, unless otherwise indicated. One-tailed \( p \) tests were used in testing the directional hypotheses. ANOVAs assessed whether people with different housing outcomes had different initial levels of self-efficacy and time perspective. Finally, multiple regressions were performed to assess the contributions of self-efficacy and time orientation while controlling for baseline variables in determining housing outcome and length of shelter stay.

Results

Demographics of Sample

We were surprised by the relatively high educational level of this homeless sample; two thirds had graduated from high school, and one third had some college education. Five percent had graduated from college. The ethnic distribution was 37% Hispanic, 31% African American, 22% White, and 7% Asian and American Indian (2 participants did not report ethnicity). There were 52 women and 30 men who completed the initial assessment. Women outnumbered men because most of the families at the shelter were headed by single women. There were no gender differences on any of the measures at the initial assessment, except that men reported having higher job efficacy (\( M = 6.8, SD = 1.2 \) vs. \( M = 6.1, SD = 1.7, p < .05 \)) and housing efficacy (\( M = 6.4, SD = 1.4 \) vs. \( M = 5.6, SD = 1.7, p < .04 \)). At the follow-up, women reported spending more time depressed than did men (\( M = 2.5, SD = 1.2 \) vs. \( M = 1.5, SD = 0.67, p < .001 \)).

With regard to employment, 26% were presently employed. The majority (87%) reported that they were looking for a job or for a better job than their current job, and 14% were looking for highly skilled jobs. Over half had held a job for at least 5 years. Sixty-six percent had worked within the last year. Seventy-six percent reported that this was their first episode of homelessness. This was clearly a sample comprised predominantly of the "new homeless," the majority being recently dislodged, employable, relatively educated, of minority status, and female. The most important reasons cited for homelessness were loss of a job (21%); eviction from home (26%); decreases in finances (23%); separation from
or loss of a loved one (8%); emotional distress (4%); and injury, disability, or health problems (4%).

Factor Analysis of Self-Efficacy Measures

A varimax rotation produced two interpretable factors which replicated the conceptually driven subscales—perceived self-efficacy to find housing and to find a job. Although three items loaded equally well on both factors (“How much can you personally do to convince a potential rental agent or manager that you will be good tenants?”; “How much can you do to find out about where available housing is, besides looking in the newspaper?”; and “How confident are you that you can find a job in 1 year?”), they were assigned to the conceptually relevant factors. Note, however, that the two factors are not entirely independent. The alpha reliability coefficients were .87 for housing self-efficacy and .84 for employment self-efficacy.

Measures of self-efficacy for housing and for employment were computed for each subject based on factor loadings, using a unit weighting method. The mean self-efficacy scores were just above midrange (some confidence) for obtaining a job ($M = 6.3$, $SD = 1.6$) and efficacy for obtaining housing ($M = 5.8$, $SD = 1.6$).

Factor Analysis of ZTPI

Although the ZTPI has been validated on other samples, it had not yet been administered to homeless samples. Therefore, an exploratory factor analysis was performed on the 32 items to see if they formed the dual-factor structure of time perspective typically observed—including present and future orientations. A varimax rotated principal components method was chosen because it tends to be more replicable. A low cutoff point of above .30 on factor loadings was chosen because the factors were expected to share little overlapping variance.

The varimax rotation produced two interpretable factors. Similar to previous ZTPI analyses, Factor 1 was Future Orientation, and Factor 2 was a combination of primarily present with some past orientation (Table 1), which was labeled Present Orientation. All items that were expected to load highly on the Future Orientation factor did so, with some minor exceptions. Item #33, “Hard work is the key to improvement,” loaded higher but negatively on present orientation. Therefore, it was reverse coded and included in the present orientation scale. Item #10, ordinarily a present-oriented item, “I try to live one day at a time” did not load on either factor. It is likely that being homeless forces people of all time orientations to live one day at a time. The high mean on this item of 3.5 ($SD = 1.4$) supports this interpretation. On average, the sample agreed with this present-oriented statement much more than with the other present-oriented
Table 1

*Pattern Weights for Two Varimax Rotated Principal Components of Time Perspective*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>(h^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future perspective (Factor 1), Cronbach’s (\alpha = .84)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe a person’s day should be planned ahead each morning.</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Doing necessary work comes before having fun with friends or family.</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>-37</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thinking about the future is pleasant to me.</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When I want to get something done, I first set short-term goals to reach this big future goal.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I worry if things aren’t done on time.</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am able to resist temptation when I know there is an important task or some job to be done.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I believe it is important to save money for emergencies.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-41</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I complete my work on time by making steady progress.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I keep working at a difficult, uninteresting task if it will help me get ahead in life.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At the start of the day, I generally make lists of things to do.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I try to be realistic about what the future holds for me.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-25</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I put off small pleasures that I know I can have right now if they get in the way of bigger benefits that I might be able to get in the future.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I have fantasies about a better life ahead of me.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Hard work and discipline are the keys to improving my life.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Present/past perspective (Factor 2), Cronbach’s \(\alpha = .79\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I find myself daydreaming a lot about better times in my past. (past)</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I do things impulsively, making decisions on the spur of the moment, without always worrying about the consequences.</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I don’t do things that will be good for me if they don’t feel good now.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*table continues*
Table 1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>$h^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present/past perspective (Factor 2), continued</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I enjoy stories bout how things used to be in the “good old days.” (past)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I take risks to put a little more excitement into my life.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I often think about how it might have been to live in an earlier time. (past)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It doesn’t make sense to worry about the future since fate determines that whatever will be is going to happen anyway.</td>
<td>-34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I feel that it’s more important to enjoy what you are doing than to get some required job done on time.</td>
<td>-29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I prefer old and familiar people, experiences, and ideas instead of the new and changing. (past)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I believe that to be successful you must be lucky.</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It’s fun to gamble on the lottery, or make small bets when I have spare money.</td>
<td>-27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I think that it’s useless to plan too far ahead because things hardly ever come out the way you planned, anyway.</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Items that did not load onto either scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>$h^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I try to live one day at a time.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It gives me pleasure to think about the past.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The past has too many unpleasant memories, so I prefer not to think about it.</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make better what is happening today rather than be concerned about what will happen later on.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had the money, I would invest a substantial amount of my income in insurance.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eigenvalue</strong></td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% variance accounted for</strong></td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. F1 = Factor 1 = Future orientation (14 items). F2 = Factor 2 = Present/past orientation (8 present and 4 past-oriented items). $h^2 =$ communality.*
statements, which had a composite mean of only 2.6 ($SD = 0.68$). Five items that usually load on the present factor did not load highly enough to be included in the subscale, and one item ("If I had the money, I would invest a substantial amount of my income in insurance"), was excluded because it loaded highly on both factors.

The factor analysis results were used to create factor scores. The reliability of the highly loading items on each factor was satisfactory for both the future scale ($\alpha = .84$) and the present scale ($\alpha = .79$). When the mean time orientation of the homeless participants was compared to that of 15 other samples, reported in Keough et al. (in press), the homeless sample was similar in present orientation to most samples, but higher in future orientation, which was unexpected.

**Housing Outcomes**

For 6 participants, their destination upon leaving the shelter could not be determined 1 subject moved away, and the others left the shelter unexpectedly. They were not included in the analyses of housing outcomes. Twenty-seven participants left the shelter before filling out the Check-Out Questionnaire. Therefore, no data on how they spent their time at the shelter was available. However, the shelter staff tried to keep close ties with, and good records of, their residents' progress in obtaining housing, so we were able to obtain data on their new housing situations and the duration of their stay at the shelter. Overall, 38% obtained stable housing (renting an apartment or house), and 19% obtained new transitional housing (transferring to a new shelter, staying with a friend, sharing housing in a transitional program). Twenty-six percent did not know where they would go as of the day before they left the shelter; 13% were asked to leave the shelter for breaking shelter rules, law violations, or were imprisoned; and 4% planned to move to a motel. A "no housing" category was created, consisting of the latter three groups.

**Patterns of Interrelationships**

Table 2 presents the relationships between the different measures of time perspective and self-efficacy. As expected, future orientation was negatively related to present orientation. People with high self-efficacy were more future oriented and less present oriented. High efficacy to gain employment was related to high efficacy to secure housing.

Future orientation was positively related to level of education, and to duration of time employed in current or most recently held job (Table 3). Future orientation was unrelated to number of episodes of homelessness and time since first episode, but was negatively related to length of current episode. The more future
Table 2

Pearson Correlations Between Time Perspective and Self-Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Future orientation</th>
<th>Present orientation</th>
<th>Job efficacy</th>
<th>Housing efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future orientation</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present orientation</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job efficacy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.47**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 3

Correlations Between Time Perspective, Self-Efficacy, and Baseline Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseline variables</th>
<th>Future orientation</th>
<th>Present orientation</th>
<th>Job efficacy</th>
<th>Housing efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of education (n = 82)</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of episode of homelessness (n = 82)</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of last job (n = 62)</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.

oriented the person, the shorter the duration of her or his current episode of homelessness. Although it is impossible to determine whether homelessness reduced future orientation, inspection of the means shows a linear trend of decreasing future orientation with longer durations of homelessness. At the extremes, those who had been homeless for less than 1 month had the highest future orientation (M = 4.0, SD = 0.55, n = 4), whereas those who had been homeless for more than 1 year had the lowest future orientation (M = 2.6, SD = 0.36, n = 3). Future orientation was also marginally related to a shorter length of stay at the shelter.

It was predicted that potentially productive search behaviors and less avoidant or nonproductive coping behaviors (e.g., passing time and watching TV) would be positively related to self-efficacy and future orientation, but negatively related to present orientation. As predicted, participants who had a higher sense of efficacy at baseline spent more time searching for housing and
Table 4

*Correlations Between Time Perspective, Self-Efficacy, and Outcome Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral outcomes (n = 48 for all variables, except for duration at shelter, n = 82)</th>
<th>Future orientation</th>
<th>Present orientation</th>
<th>Job efficacy</th>
<th>House efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration of shelter stay</td>
<td>-.18†</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent working</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent eating</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent watching TV</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent passing time</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.23†</td>
<td>-.23†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time searching for housing</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.22†</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time searching for a job</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.20†</td>
<td>.21†</td>
<td>.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent depressed</td>
<td>-.23†</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01 (one-tailed tests).

employment, passed less time away, and had a shorter shelter residency (Table 4). Future orientation was related to less time spent watching television and passing time. Present orientation was related to less time spent working and more passing time, eating, and watching television.

*Relationships of Time Perspective and Self-Efficacy to Housing Outcomes*

Housing outcomes were categorized into three groups—stable, temporary, and no housing (see Housing Outcomes section for definition of groups). Those who stayed in a motel were categorized separately because it was a more transient housing option than the other temporary housing arrangements, while at the same time it was a more definite future plan than not knowing where they will go after leaving the shelter.

Differences between the dichotomous housing outcomes of any housing versus no housing were tested as a function of self-efficacy, time perspective, and education. Only one variable was found to be significantly different. Those who did not obtain housing reported spending more time depressed while at the shelter (M = 2.6, SD = 1.2 vs. M = 1.9, SD = 0.90, p < .03). Again, it is not possible to identify the causal sequence of these variables. To compare staying in a motel versus all other housing arrangements, Student’s t tests were performed. Although there were only 3 participants in the “motel” category, there were significant differences—those who planned to stay in a motel had significantly
Table 5

Time Perspective, Self-Efficacy, Education, Length of Shelter Stay, and Depression for Each Type of Housing Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means for independent variables</th>
<th>Stable housing</th>
<th>Temporary housing</th>
<th>No housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 29$ (38%)</td>
<td>$n = 15$ (19%)</td>
<td>$n = 30$ (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>3.8 (7.2)</td>
<td>3.7 (0.8)</td>
<td>3.9 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>2.4 (0.6)</td>
<td>3.1a (0.7)</td>
<td>2.4 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing efficacy</td>
<td>6.1 (1.6)</td>
<td>5.8 (1.3)</td>
<td>6.0 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job efficacy</td>
<td>6.6 (1.3)</td>
<td>6.3 (1.1)</td>
<td>6.6 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>10.1 (1.1)</td>
<td>9.9 (3.5)</td>
<td>9.2 (2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of days at shelter</td>
<td>62.0 (29.0)</td>
<td>73.0 (34.0)</td>
<td>90.0a (48.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of days past allowed stay</td>
<td>7.2 (17.0)</td>
<td>15.0 (24.0)</td>
<td>35.0a (57.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent depressed</td>
<td>1.7a (0.87)</td>
<td>2.7 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means with subscript letters are significantly different than the other two means.

lower self-efficacy for housing ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.83$ vs. $M = 5.9, SD = 1.5, p < .03$), lower self-efficacy for employment ($M = 3.4, SD = 0.95$ vs. $M = 6.5, SD = 1.3, p < .02$) and a marginally lower future orientation ($M = 2.6, SD = 0.64$ vs. $M = 3.8, SD = 0.70, p < .07$).

ANOVA$s were used to test for differences between the three levels of housing—stable housing, transitional housing, and no housing. An unexpected result emerged, as shown in Table 5. Those in transitional housing were more present oriented than were those in stable housing and no housing. Those in the no housing group stayed at the shelter for the longest duration, both in total number of days and in number of days past the preset deadline (Table 5).

A logistic regression was performed to see which, if any, baseline or independent variables predicted type of housing obtained, while controlling the other baseline factors. Dichotomous variables of one of the three housing types versus all others were created. Predictor variables were level of education, number of
children, future and present orientation, and job and housing efficacy. Replicating the ANOVA results, the only predictor of obtaining temporary housing was having a high present orientation, \( \chi^2 = 7.1, p < .01 \). There were no predictors of any other type of housing arrangement.

Forward multiple regression analyses were then performed on the continuous variable of duration of shelter stay, with the same predictor variables as used previously (education, number of children, time perspective, and self-efficacy). As might be expected, higher education and higher job efficacy predicted a shorter shelter stay, \( F(6, 78) = 5.2, p < .001, R^2 = .25 \). A similar regression analysis was performed on number of days stayed overtime (by subtracting days of permitted stay from the total number of days). Again, high education and efficacy predicted shorter duration of days stayed overtime. Similarly, a \( t \) test showed that those who asked for a formal extension to stay at the shelter longer had significantly lower initial housing efficacy \( (M = 4.4, SD = 1.2 \text{ vs. } M = 5.9, SD = 0.2, p < .05) \).

**Future Plans**

Future plans after leaving the shelter were assessed from the open-ended comments from the check-out questionnaire. The most frequent plans included starting school, gaining a positive attitude from their shelter experience, saving money, and hoping for better luck. Those who had already enrolled in an educational/vocational program \( (n = 4) \) by the end of their stay had a significantly higher initial future orientation than did the other participants \( (M = 4.1, SD = 0.3 \text{ vs. } M = 3.7, SD = .7, p < .04) \), even though they had similar levels of education. However, participants who stated that they merely planned to go back to school did not differ in self-efficacy or time orientation from those who did not state such a plan.

Shelter residents who reported benefits \( (n = 9) \), mostly that they gained a more positive outlook after staying in the shelter, such as “I became more independent,” “I became more positive about the future,” and “I learned a lot,” were also significantly more future oriented than were the other participants \( (M = 4.2, SD = 0.6 \text{ vs. } M = 3.7, SD = 0.7, p < .04) \).

Those who spontaneously reported that they were able to save money while at the shelter \( (n = 5) \) were significantly less present oriented \( (M = 2.1, SD = 0.3 \text{ vs. } M = 2.6, SD = 0.7, p < .02) \), and reported spending less time depressed \( (M = 1.5, SD = 0.6 \text{ vs. } M = 2.3, SD = 1.2, p < .05) \) than did other participants. Finally, those who spontaneously reported that they hoped for better luck \( (n = 9) \), such as to “win the lottery,” “get rich,” or “be successful,” had a marginally lower future orientation than did the other participants \( (M = 3.2, SD = 0.8 \text{ vs. } M = 3.8, SD = 0.7, p < .07) \).
Discussion

The results of this study clearly suggest that a strong sense of self-efficacy enables one to carry out the complex set of behaviors that theoretically should help attenuate homelessness. Those with higher perceived self-efficacy spent more time searching for both housing and employment, stayed at the shelter for a shorter duration, and were less inclined to pass their time away unproductively while at the shelter. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy were more likely to seek extensions to stay longer at the shelter. It appears that one’s efficacy beliefs upon entering a homeless shelter can help predict some of the coping behaviors enacted while at the shelter. We therefore propose that a brief assessment of self-efficacy beliefs at the time of entry to a homeless shelter can help to identify those who need extra guidance and support to restore some self-assurance and bolster their search skills to increase their prospects of finding stable housing and employment.

The findings on time perspective, some predicted and some surprising, paint a more complicated picture. The following patterns emerged from our survey data. Future orientation was associated with positive outcomes of enrollment in an educational or vocational program; learning valuable lessons from the experience of being homeless; and less depression, passing time, and watching television. However, future orientation was unrelated to search behaviors. In contrast, those more presently oriented tended to spend more time watching television, passing time, and eating, and less time working. They were less likely to save money and hoped for luck or chance to free them from their predicament. These behaviors are not the constructive means that typically lead one to achieve goals.

Although strong self-efficacy and a future orientation predicted proactive coping behaviors, their efforts did not secure stable housing. Further, despite the negative correlates of a present orientation, the main predictor of obtaining transitional or temporary housing was being highly present oriented. This finding is clearly contrary to our expectation that a future orientation would be more adaptive, and thus demands further discussion.

There are several possible explanations for this apparently discrepant finding. Overwhelmingly, research has demonstrated benefits of being future oriented, but this has been according to middle-class standards, within a stable predictable environment. The optimal time perspective depends upon the demands of the situation and its tasks and reward structure. A present orientation is necessary in times of acute crisis. When it came close to the last days of guaranteed shelter, and to a reality that threatened survival, a present orientation may have helped people to focus on the immediate next steps to be taken to ensure temporary shelter. On the other hand, highly future-oriented people who lacked the flexibility to switch to a present-focused time frame may have continued looking for longer term solutions, such as low-cost rentals, which are a very limited resource.
We can further speculate that highly future-oriented people may also have been less flexible in adjusting their standards of acceptable housing arrangements, and more willing to forgo temporary solutions in search of more lasting ones, whereas the more present-oriented people may have settled for less desirable temporary housing. Although the latter appear to postpone rather than solve the housing dilemma, it is hard to judge what decisions and behaviors are most adaptive for people under such constraints.

Time perspective may itself be influenced by personal crises. In stressful situations, it may be highly aversive to dwell on the present and emotionally adaptive to look to a brighter future. For example, a strong future orientation or belief in a better future has been found among prison inmates (Megargee, Cooper, Frohwirth, & Levine, 1970) and among Holocaust survivors and children of survivors (Carmil & Breznitz, 1991). In the present study, those who had been homeless the longest seemed to have given up the hope of having a brighter future. It should be recalled, however, that as a group, our homeless sample had a high future orientation. Such an orientation, in combination with a sense of personal efficacy, may have helped to protect their mood under difficult circumstances. Studies have shown that depression is negatively related to future orientation and positively related to present orientation (e.g., Keough et al., in press). Similarly, in our study, the more future-oriented people were less depressed while at the shelter. Depression, in turn, was the only variable (inversely) related to finding stable housing. Thus, higher future orientation may in some respects be adaptive and stress-buffering in such negative situations.

We can conclude that for adults living in shelters, a future orientation may be most conducive to mental health and active coping behaviors, but a predominant present orientation is beneficial for finding immediate but unstable housing solutions. The profile that seems most adaptive and successful for shelter residents would be to adopt a mixed balance of both high future and present orientation, with the self-efficacy to sustain their efforts. The future orientation would help one to focus on constructive actions and foster more optimistic attitudes and less depressive hopelessness over their stressful life circumstances, but alone could lead to unrealistic expectations or demands that are exceedingly difficult to meet. Having the flexibility to be concurrently present-focused could temper the excesses of a future focus by redirecting attention onto what is realistically possible in the immediate situation (i.e., on the next step to take). This type of dual force is in accord with the prescription by social cognitive theory for optimal self-motivation by goal setting (Bandura, 1996). Distal goals provide the directions for one's pursuits, and proximal goals provide the guides and motivators for what one must do in the here and now to get there.

Street people may be more present oriented than our sheltered families, because of their differing needs (La Gory, Ritchey, & Mullis, 1990). People living on the street may be forced to focus exclusively on the present. Wallace
(1986) found that homeless men were present oriented because of the urgency of daily survival and the cyclical schedules of nightly shelters, soup kitchens, and welfare checks. The newly homeless soon abandoned their conventional future orientations to adapt to the harsh reality of meeting their immediate survival needs. Wallace thus concluded that street people cannot look ahead to the future until their basic needs are met.

Taken together, Wallace's research and the current study suggest that a high present orientation can be a double-edged sword for homeless people. It helps them to survive the anxiety, struggles, and strains of making it through each day, and in some cases it leads to staying in other temporary housing arrangements. However, it does not provide the foundation for motivating the complex, adaptive self-regulated behavioral repertoires involved in setting goals and developing strategies to achieve long-term stable housing.

The prospective nature of this study is one of its strengths. However, the loss of some data on how time was spent at the shelter due to attrition and from the people dismissed from the shelter for violations may have removed the most dysfunctional individuals from our sample, thereby biasing our results on coping behavior to some extent.

Depression during the stay was measured retrospectively. Thus, the finding that those who did not find stable housing spent more time depressed must be interpreted cautiously. We cannot determine whether depression impaired their ability to find housing, or whether people who did not find housing reported greater depression.

Similarly, we cannot determine the direction of causality in the relationship between future orientation with homelessness. Did adversity foster a present orientation, or did a lack of future orientation contribute to their homelessness? Most likely, these influences are bidirectional. A low future orientation could serve as a risk factor for homelessness, possibly through not motivating safety-net behaviors, such as saving money. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the causal direction of the relationship between time perspective and homelessness. For example, studies that follow people at high risk of homelessness, or that follow homeless people who reenter mainstream society and continually assess their time perspective, may shed light on the relationship between residential instability and recurrent crises with time perspective. Alternatively, a cross-sectional study that compares the time perspective of those at risk for homelessness, those currently homeless and formerly homeless could address this question.

Additional clarification of the operation of time perspective as a cognitive style influencing attitudes and behaviors of homeless people can be gained by using the newly revised, expanded ZTPI measure (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1997). The revised ZTPI distinguishes factorally between future orientation and two different subclasses of present orientation—hedonistic and fatalistic. The scales also
separate a positive past from a negative past orientation. Future investigations should further our understanding of how one’s temporal perspective varies along these dimensions among those living in a culture of poverty—those at risk of homelessness, homeless sheltered families, and homeless street people. Policy recommendations may benefit from combining the approaches of individual differences, cognitive-social processes, and systems analyses. Institutionalized strategies to alter the detrimental situations and high-risk lifestyles of people may depend on tailoring both psycho-educational public service and clinical information to their dominant time perspective so that they are personally relevant, learned, and later acted upon in the most efficacious manner.

This study examined the power of self-efficacy and time perspective in predicting how individuals cope with homelessness and joblessness. Both time perspective and self-efficacy were related to proactive behaviors and constructive plans, as found among nonhomeless samples.

Disconcertingly, no attitudes nor behavior were related to obtaining stable shelter. Specifically, although high self-efficacy predicted active search behaviors, these behaviors did not lead to secure housing. Thus, “escaping homelessness,” for the many people so situated, may go beyond personal control and involve many other powerful structural factors, such as political and economic climates. These findings underscore that homelessness and unemployment are not just personal problems, but social problems demanding social remedies. The continuing escalation in disparity of wealth, corporate downsizing, and female-headed families in poverty, without increases in low-income housing, is likely to further exacerbate the epidemic of homelessness. Given the environmental constraints, the exercise of collective efficacy oriented toward social solutions may have greater impact on the problem. For example, it is conceivable that with some help and empowerment, people who are homeless can have a hand in pressuring the social system to address the problem through the exercise of organized collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Fawcett, Seekins, Whang, Muiu, & Balcazar, 1984). Nevertheless, it is clear that a structural solution for homelessness will necessarily involve changes at both the social and individual levels—increases in emergency shelters, transitional and low-income housing, service delivery, and job retraining (McChesney, 1990).

To help ameliorate the current tragedy of homelessness at a psychological level, our results stress the importance of service delivery: developing interventions that prevent or reduce depression and increase self-efficacy. Increasing self-efficacy may promote a more future-oriented outlook, since the two constructs are positively related. It may still be necessary to teach the cognitive skills involved in future orientation, as well as inflexible short-term, goal-setting. Given our findings on the limitations of personal control over one’s life when homeless, psychologists need to work in concert with economists and politicians to develop new short-term tactics and long-term strategies for eliminating such
human suffering. The psychological demoralization of homelessness must be countered through innovative social interventions if we are to help homeless people improve the stability of their lives, rather than let them become entrenched in the daily survival of homelessness, which for too many is the vicious cycle of hopelessness and despondency.

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