

**Discursive Discrimination and Panhandling in Winnipeg  
Newspapers**

by

**Sarah G. MacKinnon**

**Thesis presented to the Graduate Committee at the University of Manitoba in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Arts degree**

**University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB  
November 2007**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA**  
**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
\*\*\*\*\*  
**COPYRIGHT PERMISSION**

**Discursive Discrimination and Panhandling in Winnipeg  
Newspapers**

**BY**

**Sarah G. MacKinnon**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of  
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**Sarah G. MacKinnon © 2007**

**Permission has been granted to the University of Manitoba Libraries to lend a copy of this  
thesis/practicum, to Library and Archives Canada (LAC) to lend a copy of this thesis/practicum,  
and to LAC's agent (UMI/ProQuest) to microfilm, sell copies and to publish an abstract of this  
thesis/practicum.**

**This reproduction or copy of this thesis has been made available by authority of the copyright  
owner solely for the purpose of private study and research, and may only be reproduced and copied  
as permitted by copyright laws or with express written authorization from the copyright owner.**

## ABSTRACT

Panhandlers everywhere are a disenfranchised population. They lack the resources necessary to fulfill their basic needs and they encounter discrimination as they go about their daily business. While some people support panhandlers and advocate on their behalf, others believe that panhandlers are criminal, dangerous, illegitimately needy, lazy, morally lax individuals who are the agents of their own misfortune. This thesis uses qualitative analysis to examine how panhandlers are represented in Winnipeg newspapers. It explores what these representations mean in terms of a phenomenological orientation which assumes that we create the meaning of our world and those around us through social interaction. This thesis finds that panhandlers are predominantly represented in negative ways in Winnipeg newspapers but suggests that reading newspapers more critically, along with advocating for panhandlers, resisting anti-panhandling by-laws, and empowering panhandlers to represent themselves may improve panhandlers' status in Winnipeg.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	pg 2
CHAPTER 1 – Literature Review	pg 6
<i>Part 1 – Panhandling</i>	pg 6
<i>Part 2 – A Phenomenology of Discrimination</i>	pg 25
CHAPTER 2 – Methodology	pg 41
<i>Part 1 – Sample</i>	pg 41
<i>Part 2 – Method</i>	pg 45
CHAPTER 3 – Data Analysis	pg 54
<i>Part 1 – The Sample</i>	pg 55
CHAPTER 4 – Discussion	pg 79
<i>Part 1 – How Newspaper Articles Work</i>	pg 79
<i>Part 2 – A persistent Absence</i>	pg 82
<i>Part 3 – Strategies for Countering Negative Representations</i>	pg 102
<i>Part 4 – Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research</i>	pg 105
CONCLUSION	pg 108
WORKS CITED	pg 111
Appendix A:	
Frequency of Panhandler Representations by Type of Article	

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine that one day you wake up and you have no voice, no communication skills at all. You are completely silenced. Now imagine that there is someone else whom you have never met walking beside you wherever you went telling everyone else who you are, what you are doing and why - often getting it wrong. Frustrating? Unfair? Damaging to your relations with people around you? Yes.

This is what happens in many newspaper accounts of panhandlers. Panhandlers are a minority population, and negative representations of them in Winnipeg newspapers may support and empower discriminatory beliefs against panhandlers as a population, facilitating the maintenance of unequal relationships between panhandlers and other Winnipeg residents. Positive or neutral representations of panhandlers do occur in Winnipeg newspapers, but substantially less often than negative representations. Panhandlers' voices can appear in these accounts, but almost never do. With the omission of panhandlers' voices, newspaper articles have the power to tell the rest of us who panhandlers are - deviant, criminal, illegitimate, or down on their luck. Newspaper articles inform us of what panhandlers are doing - creating problems, using change collected to feed their vices rather than their needs, or minding their own business. And newspapers let us know why individuals are panhandling in the first place - they are lazy, they are drug addicts, or they face insurmountable social and structural barriers in getting ahead. Newspaper articles which describe the situations of panhandlers in Winnipeg have the power to present panhandlers very negatively, and often they do.

Phenomenological sociology attempts to explain how we make sense of each other, and how we come to understand one another in the world. But there are times when

we do not want to understand one another at all or when the only understanding one wants to concede is that another is abnormal or deviant. In the case at hand, newspaper articles often claim to know the limitations or failings of panhandlers as an entire population, representing panhandlers as though they have no positive characteristics whatsoever. This is an example of an important form of (mis)understanding: discrimination against panhandlers. For the purposes of my research I am using the term discrimination as Kristina Boreus defines it in her typology of discursive discrimination: “By discrimination, I mean *unfavourable treatment of members of an (alleged) group on account of their membership of that group*” (2006: 408). In this thesis, my argument is this: that a phenomenological approach is capable of explaining how newspaper articles accomplish panhandlers’ selves through the identification of panhandlers with positively or negatively correlated external concepts.

This question is significant because phenomenological theory portrays individuals as active participants in the construction of the world and the meaning of everything around us. If we are aware of the role we are able to play in the constitution and maintenance of relations between individuals, we must also be aware of the potential we possess to alter unjust interactions. The application of a phenomenological sociology to the subject of newspaper representations of panhandlers implies that we do not need to passively accept explanations that are given to us, but can argue against versions of reality to which we do not want to adhere.

The first chapter of this thesis is a review of the relevant literature. This review begins by describing the phenomenon of panhandling, which is defined as the practice of requesting money, food or other goods with little or nothing offered in return (Lankenau

1999, Taylor 1999, Snow & Anderson 1993 in Farrell & Lee 2003: 300). This definition does not distinguish between the practice of panhandling and the act of campaigning for charity except that, in the case of panhandling, donations received are used for individual or personal gain. The research shows that panhandlers in Winnipeg are the subjects of discrimination based on their appearance, their behaviors, class status, membership to specific gender and racialized categories.

The literature review goes on to outline a phenomenological orientation that this thesis will take. This includes the assertions that meaning is not stable or fixed, and that meaning is created by and between individuals in their interactions. Further, normalcy is a form of meaning which is also unstable and must be accomplished through social interaction. On the flip side of accomplishing meaning in order to understand is a description of how we can manipulate meaning if we do not want to understand an object of inquiry as normal. In other words, if we want to hold discriminatory beliefs about something, how we can facilitate and empower these beliefs.

Chapter Two contains my methodology section, which describes my process for choosing, collecting and analyzing my sample, as well as the limitations of the choices I made in completing these tasks. This section also expresses the problems and issues that arose as I performed my data collection and analysis.

My data analysis section – Chapter Three – reports the findings of my analysis: in Winnipeg newspapers, there is a back and forth struggle between portraying panhandlers and their activities positively or negatively. Panhandlers are commonly represented as other, as illegitimate, dangerous and criminal. However, panhandlers are also sometimes

supported and defended as a legitimately needy population that deserves sympathy, not spite. Principally, panhandlers own voices are not included in these representations.

My results section – Chapter Four – explains what those findings mean in phenomenological terms. According to a phenomenological orientation, these representational practices have important implications for Winnipeg panhandlers and their identities.

My thesis concludes with several tentative explanations for this query and the implications of my research for future research and actions concerning panhandlers. On the positive side, the meaning currently accorded panhandlers and their activities is not stable and is subject to change; this implies that we do not *have* to associate panhandlers with negatively discriminatory concepts. Further, if advocates of panhandlers wish to attempt to improve the way panhandlers are seen they can do so simply by making their voices heard and by speaking out against commonly negative ways of representing panhandlers. I believe the lack of panhandlers' voices heard in the debate to be extremely significant. Panhandlers need their own voices in order to accomplish less deviant depictions of themselves, and those offering solutions need to hear panhandlers' voices to determine what supports panhandlers need.



## CHAPTER 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is my review of the relevant literature. I begin by examining the literature and research on panhandling itself. The literature on panhandling describes both how others view panhandlers and how panhandlers view themselves. Research has also been conducted on the different levels of gender, racial, and class oppression that panhandlers are subject to as well as panhandlers' own strategies for preserving their dignity and protecting themselves despite the negative conditions of their lives. Next I describe the literature on phenomenological sociology, which is a body of social theory indicating that meaning and normalcy are accomplished through social interaction. I continue my review of the literature by describing the literature within phenomenological sociology that examines how discrimination is also accomplished socially and can occur in a variety of ways.

### *Part 1: Panhandling*

The term 'panhandling' refers to public requests from individuals for money, food or other items, offering little or nothing in return to the donor (Carter, Friesen, Polevychok & Osborne 2007: 1, Farrell & Lee 2003: 300, Lankenau 1999: 204, National Anti-Poverty Organization 1999: 4). However, the practice of panhandling is much more complex than that. Successful panhandling "depends not only on choosing the right spot but also on fine-tuning one's appearance, demeanor, and pitch (Farrell & Lee 2003: 302). In Winnipeg, there are an estimated two hundred panhandlers, with an estimated fifty of these individuals posing persistent problems to businesses and pedestrians (Carter et al. 2007: 16). Panhandlers in Winnipeg are most commonly found in the inner city and

downtown areas because this is where they will find the most supports: shelters, food banks, steam vents and high rates of pedestrian traffic (Carter et al. 2007: 15). The act of panhandling also involves a range of methods, from carrying a sign or holding out a cup to threatening passersby in order to intimidate them into giving money (Carter et al. 2007: 1). However, the use of aggressive or threatening behaviour is uncommon. Most panhandlers request money passively and without the use of threats because they realize aggressive requests are not an effective strategy and are more likely to have negative repercussions for the panhandlers who may be arrested or become subject to police attention (Ibid.).

In addition to issues panhandlers have with their own circumstances, there are very different reactions that others have when they encounter panhandlers in their everyday lives. Some people see panhandling as a strategy for dealing with poverty and a lack of services that people need such as affordable housing (Carter et. al. 2007: 1). Other people see panhandling in negative terms, as they believe begging is necessitated by abusive relations with drugs and alcohol, or by family breakdown, and that it is performed by those unwilling to sustain themselves in more conventional ways. Some people believe that begging also negatively affects businesses by keeping away tourists, conventioners and shoppers (Ibid 20). When young panhandlers are unable to find work, they are often seen as being lazy and are judged to be undeserving of assistance (Gans 1994: 270). Youth is assumed to be directly correlated to ability to work and the presence of youth but absence of employment is interpreted as implying a lack of work ethic and deviance from normalcy. Passersby often attempt to ignore panhandlers, leaving panhandlers to deal with a difficult identity of “nonpersons” (Farrell & Lee 2003: 302).

Business owners often view panhandlers as a nuisance to others and as a danger to the economy (Carter et al. 2007: 22).

Prospective donors assess panhandlers' appearance, whether or not they appear to be using alcohol or drugs, and whether or not they appear to be sincerely needy in determining whether or not to give a donation. In Winnipeg, only twenty percent of individuals surveyed indicated that they would give a donation to a panhandler while sixteen percent more suggested that they may consider a donation depending on specific circumstances. Most people surveyed indicated that whether or not they would donate money to panhandlers also depended on their mood and the amount of disposable income they had at the moment (Carter et al. 2007: 21).

### **1. Who Winnipeg's panhandlers are**

Panhandlers are individuals who are unable to survive on their income assistance, who may have spent years living in homelessness, joblessness and with health problems. They lack the resources or skills necessary to gain formal employment and must supplement their income by begging (Carter et al. 2007: 3, Lankenau 1999b: 314). While panhandlers are men, women, youth, children and the elderly, a study of panhandlers done by Carter et al. provides a profile of panhandlers indicating that most panhandlers are men. Many of these individuals deal with issues surrounding substance abuse and mental health challenges. The female panhandlers studied did not have children in their care but sixty three percent of panhandlers do have children. Many panhandlers were found to have criminal records and almost as many panhandlers have been the victims of crime. Many panhandlers feel that physical and mental disabilities, along with a lack of skills, contribute to their lack of readiness for formal employment, but a remarkable

ninety eight percent of panhandlers indicate that they would like to work (Ibid. 18). Many panhandlers in Winnipeg collect less than ten dollars per day and report that they spent most of their earnings from panhandling on food, followed by tobacco, alcohol and/or drugs (Carter et al. 2007: 4 - 17).

In Winnipeg, understanding Aboriginal issues is particularly key to understanding the living experiences of Winnipeg panhandlers. Aboriginal people have much lower rates of high school graduation and post-secondary school attendance than the rest of Canada's population (Carter et al. 2007: 12). Further, unemployment rates for Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are about three times greater than average rates (Ibid.). Even more, Aboriginal families headed by a lone parent are overrepresented in Winnipeg's inner city and Aboriginal people are one of the most poorly housed groups in Canada because of high rates of in-migration, residential mobility and poverty rates (Ibid. 13). Almost fifty percent of Winnipeg's panhandlers have recently moved from outside of Winnipeg, mainly from Reserves (Ibid. 17). Due to all of these circumstances, many of Winnipeg's panhandlers are Aboriginal (Ibid 14).

North and Smith note that "no one can assume that the experience of homelessness of white people is the same as that of people of color or that the differences between white and nonwhite men are the same as differences between white and nonwhite women" (1994: 640). Their study found that more nonwhite homeless respondents appeared "to have greater externally generated difficulties reflecting socio-economic barriers" than the white respondents, whose difficulties "often seemed internal", such as psychopathology for female respondents and substance abuse for male respondents (Ibid: 646). Further, of their respondents, North and Smith found nonwhite

homeless women to be younger but also more likely than white women to be mothers and “more likely to have children under age 15 in their custody” (1994: 646).

Issues surrounding race are not the only factors influencing the experiences of panhandlers in Winnipeg. Canada’s homeless include young people, families, women, men, and members of various ethnic communities (Donahue et al. 2004: 735). While there is already a perceived division between ‘us’ – mainstream society – and ‘them’ – members of the panhandling population, there are further divisions between ‘them’, with some panhandlers suffering multiple oppressions such as race *and* gender discrimination on top of class oppression. Further, individuals within the panhandling population may be represented as more or less deviant depending on their status within other social categories. An example of this is found in Will’s research, which found that, when given hypothetical representations of families in need, participants felt that individuals with children or disabled adult dependants, as well as individuals “who were unemployed, yet actively looking for gainful employment”, were more deserving of generosity and public assistance than those without these characteristics (1993: 329). The characteristics belonging to individuals, or the category that individuals were assumed to belong to, affected perceptions of the deviance of their behaviour and of themselves.

Panhandling issues related to gender come under the spotlight in studies like the one conducted by Gowan. For example, in terms of treatment, Gowan claims that, because of their frequent status as mothers and or victims of domestic violence, poor women have historically been given limited support in terms of finances and shelter “at the cost of close monitoring by social services” (Gowan2002: 502). Poor women can thus be said to be slightly less likely to be incarcerated for homelessness while

[p]oor unemployed men ... tend to be understood as the source of not only their own but their female family members' problems as well .... They consequently receive little to no financial support and are overwhelmingly caught up in the criminal justice system [and often] cycle continuously through homelessness and incarceration (Ibid.)

Not only are homeless individuals more likely to be incarcerated for being homeless, poor unemployed men are more likely to be incarcerated for being poor unemployed men.

On the other hand, Wardhaugh explains that the "home-homeless binary divide serves to underscore the 'goodness' of those women who consent to maintain the home (almost any home will do), and to be contained within this sphere, and the 'badness' of those women (and marginal men) whose only homes are the streets or the non-homes of institutional life" (1999: 106). Thus, gendered discrimination against panhandlers and poor individuals occurs on different levels and in different manners depending on the gender of the subject and the personal perspective of those confronted by them.

## **2. How Others View Panhandlers**

Because panhandlers conduct much of their daily lives in the streets, and their visibility in the streets is how we know them to be panhandlers, it is difficult to differentiate between those who panhandle but are housed, and those who are without homes. Often panhandlers and homeless persons are considered to be one and the same. It is true that panhandlers, whether they are housed or not, do have very little human and social capital to draw on in order to improve their living conditions (Carter et al. 2007: 4). Contrary to popular opinion, the majority of Winnipeg's panhandlers do have homes, although a substantial minority are homeless (Ibid. 17). Further, Lankenau finds that "negative stereotypes of homeless persons, such as being dangerous, dirty, diseased, and

mentally ill, are often connected to panhandlers” (1999: 203). These concerns enable perceptions that panhandlers are a danger to the economy and also mean that passersby will try to maintain a certain amount of distance from panhandlers in the streets (Farrell & Lee 2003: 300).

Panhandlers and homeless individuals are also linked in research, as evidenced in examples like the following: “[P]edestrians frequently avert their eyes when passing the homeless on the sidewalk, and they often hasten their pace and increase the distance between themselves and the homeless when they sense they may be targeted by a panhandler” (Snow & Anderson 1992: 140). In this example, ‘the homeless’ becomes replaced by ‘a panhandler’ and the individuals described by these terms float between the labels. What we *can* assume is that panhandlers at least endure the same stigmas that the visible poor endure, as well as the stigmas associated with panhandling itself. Thus, some stigmas against the homeless population in general can be said to also apply to panhandlers, whether they are literally housed or not because other citizens cannot differentiate between housed and homeless panhandlers based solely on appearance. For this reason, and also because literature on the experiences of panhandlers specifically is scarce, I have included within this literature review some research on experiences of homeless individuals as well as experiences of panhandlers. The following part of my literature review examines the literature on homelessness that is relevant to examining the experiences of panhandlers, whether they are housed or not.

Snow and Anderson point out that, while during the two to three months surrounding Christmas there is elevated charitable interest in the homeless, for the rest of the year “the homeless tend to be recipients of only negative attention, ignored altogether

or dealt with in a segregated and sanitized fashion that underscores their stigmatized status” (in Holstein & Gubrium 2003: 142). In another study, homeless individuals were found to be the recipients of less negative attention when they appear “despite the hardship, [to be] still actively working to help themselves get out of these difficulties” (Will 1993: 330). Thus, there are small intervals of time, or certain categories of identity, where the homeless population are seen as legitimately needy persons, or as less illegitimate than other homeless individuals, while, for the rest of the time, they are seen as ‘nonpersons’, deviant persons, or they are not seen at all. Applying these findings to the experiences of panhandlers, representations of panhandlers as legitimately needy correspond with representations of normalcy, as it is normal for those who are in need to ask for help. Meanwhile, representations of panhandlers as illegitimate correspond with representations of deviancy since asking for help that is assumed not to be needed is seen as exploitative or as an illustration of refusal to adhere to norms of work and personal responsibility (Gans 1994: 269). As a result of negative interactions with the rest of society, panhandlers “must [learn to] manage their own emotions in addition to manipulating those of passersby” (Ibid.).

Manipulating the emotions of passersby can be especially difficult since there have always been low levels of tolerance for panhandlers and popular assumptions indicate that “poor people act as they do because of moral shortcomings” and panhandlers are undeserving of help (Gans 1994: 269, Carter et al. 2007: 3). Not only viewed as morally lax, “[b]ecause their ... disapproved behavior is ascribed to moral shortcomings, the poor people who resort to it are often classified as unworthy or *undeserving*” (Gans 1994: 270). Collins, Damian and Blomley allude to this attitude.



They note that while small change dropped on the street or sucked up by the vacuum may be inconsequential to most people, these same people have generally negative reactions when they are being asked for the same amount of money by strangers in the street (2003: 41). Despite these views, a study of panhandling in Winnipeg found that the majority of panhandlers beg because they lack other alternatives and they must panhandle in order to survive (Carter et al. 2007: 3).

Gans reviews several positive functions served to the better-off population for maintaining representations of the undeserving poor. For one, the use of the label 'undeserving' "distances the labeled from those who label them. By stigmatizing people as undeserving, labellers protect themselves from the responsibility of having to associate with them, or even to treat them like moral equals" (Ibid: 271). Further, the label 'undeserving' reinforces mainstream norms, especially norms surrounding work, and some of the norms reinforced are norms that the mainstream population does not even uphold. For example, "[e]conomists like to argue that if the poor want to be deserving, they should take any kind of job, regardless of its low pay or demeaning character, reflecting a work ethic which economists themselves have never practiced" (Ibid: 275). Thus, labelling the poor population 'undeserving' justifies discriminatory perceptions of poor people, including representations of poor individuals as morally lax; as actively rejecting social norms; as separate, different from and less than members of the rest of society.

On top of this, homeless individuals risk incarceration simply for being in the streets. As Gowan points out:

municipalities have historically responded to mass street homelessness by stepping up the criminalization of 'private' home practices (sleeping, drinking,

urinating) when undertaken in public space .... [L]aws forbidding sleeping or loitering in public places ... increas[e] the likelihood that homelessness would lead directly to incarceration (2002: 500).

This finding also applies to panhandlers, since panhandling requires loitering in areas of the city where they will encounter passersby. Thus, panhandlers and the homeless are identified in terms of criminality simply because they conduct their lives in the streets.

Winnipeg is no exception. In 2005, Winnipeg city council passed a panhandling bylaw severely limiting the areas within the city in which panhandling may occur legally. This bylaw is an amendment of the 2000 Obstructive Solicitation bylaw. The stipulations are as follows:

WHEREAS people need a safe and civil environment in public places within the City of Winnipeg where residents and visitors may freely engage in the usual activities and enjoyments of the urban milieu; AND WHEREAS residents and visitors in the City are entitled not to be obstructed while enjoying public places; .... No person shall solicit in a manner which causes an obstruction ... [or] solicit a captive audience. (City of Winnipeg 2000, City of Winnipeg 2005)

Furthermore, 'captive audience' is defined to include a multitude of people and places such as people around bank machines, pay phones, public transit stops or taxi stands, people "in or on a public transit vehicle", people in elevators, people getting in or out of vehicles or in parking lots, people on patios or people located within "red zones" into which the downtown area of Winnipeg has been divided (City of Winnipeg 2005).

Considering all the areas from which this bylaw excludes panhandlers from legally being, there is virtually nowhere left in the downtown area for panhandlers to remain. Thus, panhandlers become identified in terms of criminality simply for being in the downtown area.

The decision to enact and to continue to pass amendments to Winnipeg's anti-panhandling legislation is especially significant in terms of dictating how the public

should view panhandlers. Collins et al. note that the concerns leading city councils to pass these laws are not based on the fact that people are being solicited for money in public spaces, as billboards and store fronts solicit passersby on a daily basis without raising alarm. Rather, they claim that the central concern seems to be the messenger: “the unsightly and untrustworthy beggar whose presence in public space may variously annoy, frustrate and disconcert” (2003: 42). In this light, passing anti-panhandling by-laws supports the feelings of those who do not wish to be bothered by the sight of marginalized individuals who may signify the instability of the labour market and economic system (Ibid.).

The National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) published a study on the effects and ramifications of passing this legislation and others like it. NAPO maintains that these laws discriminate against the poor since it is only the poor who are being restricted from parts of a city that are supposed to be public areas and the governments who pass these laws criminalize begging while simultaneously creating more poverty by reducing social supports and aid (National Anti-Poverty Organization 1999: 3). NAPO criticizes government for passing anti-panhandling legislation for looking to ‘quick fix’ solutions to remove poverty from public view rather than looking for venues by which to address the underlying issues of poverty (Ibid. 8). Also, anti-panhandling legislation is accompanied by the imposition of “stiff financial penalties on a population which has no or little income to begin with” and this indicates that these laws are in no way intended to assist panhandlers (Ibid. 10).

Those in favour of anti-panhandling bylaws cite preservation of economic vitality, protection of the public’s right to peacefully enjoy their city, and the need to eliminate

panhandlers' unhealthy life practices as justifications for supporting the legislation (Ibid.). However, each justification has real implications for individual panhandlers.

Arguments that the eradication of panhandling will preserve the economic vitality of a city construct a hierarchy in which the rights of businesses and shoppers are favoured over the rights of people living in poverty (Ibid. 11). Upholding anti-panhandling by-laws in order to preserve the public's right to enjoy their city creates even more distance between poor and non-poor individuals. "They effectively exclude people living in poverty from being considered as part of 'the public' and therefore not equally entitled to enjoy public spaces" (Ibid. 12). As noted above, favouring anti-panhandling by-laws as tools for eliminating panhandlers' unhealthy lifestyles is inconsistent with the penalties imposed by the legislation on panhandlers which create more problems for panhandlers rather than assisting panhandlers to change their positions in society.

The NAPO study also offers suggestions for supporting panhandlers in the face of anti-panhandling legislation. The study notes that discussing anti-panhandling by-laws as an abuse of human rights is one way to counter their negative effects. The by-laws prohibit panhandlers from exercising their rights to communicate their need for assistance in the spaces where they are arguably the most likely to be heard (Collins, Damian & Blomley 2003: 41, National Anti-Poverty Organization 1999: 15). Highlighting this fact encourages support for panhandlers and opens up a venue for combating these laws.

When panhandlers are not perceived as breaching criminal laws, they are often still viewed as an example of social incivilities, or "low-level breaches of community standards that signal an erosion of conventionally accepted norms and values" (LaGrange, Ferraro & Supancic 1992: 311). These "minor misbehavior[s]" are linked to

fear: “the fear of being bothered by disorderly people. Not violent people, nor, necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people” (Ibid: 312). These fears, in turn, are linked to people’s fear of crime, “because people associate ‘negative’ neighborhood conditions with criminal activity” placing panhandlers and their behaviour, once again, within a framework and discourse of criminality whether their behaviours are actually illegal or not (Ibid: 313). LaGrange et al. further note the discriminatory bias behind these associations since “assum[ing that] incivilities are ‘bad’ or ‘undesirable’ community characteristics that provide advanced warning of potential danger” overlooks the fact that many of these characteristics are common or unavoidable facets of living in poverty (Ibid: 328).

### **3. Strategies for Survival**

In response to dealing with difficult issues surrounding identity, homeless people and people at risk of homelessness use different strategies to help them “salvage the self” (Wardhaugh 1999: 105). One of these strategies is “role distancing” (Ibid.). An example of the benefits of role distancing for maintaining a positive sense of self is illustrated by the case of Ruksana, who labelled herself ‘not homeless’ although she was without a home. Ruksana’s choice to label herself as ‘not homeless’ “represented a distancing from negative attitudes towards the homeless, rather than from her own experience of homelessness *per se*” (Ibid.). In this case, Ruksana used her agency, thereby “shaking off the passivity expected of social victims” to label herself ‘not homeless’ in order to be seen as ‘not deviant’ (Ibid). Panhandlers may also use role distancing to evade certain stigmas applied to poor people. They may claim that they are simply down on their luck