

the central relevance of ideology to social welfare debates. Much of the social policy literature remains excessively descriptive and technicist, particularly in social work and public policy circles. His book will certainly evoke further discussion and comment. It will also augment the literature that views social policy from a political economy perspective and recognizes its role as an instrument of ideology.

James Midgley
University of California at Berkeley

An Interdependency Model of Homelessness: The Dynamics of Social Disintegration. By Christopher G. Hudson. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998. Pp. 409. \$109.95 (cloth).

Over the past 20 years, the literature on homelessness has passed through a number of different phases. Bringing a new sophistication to the quantitative analysis of the subject, Christopher G. Hudson's book, *An Interdependency Model of Homelessness*, pushes the literature to a new phase.

When observers "discovered" homelessness, they devoted much of their writing to demonstrating that the problem in fact existed. The first books such as Mitch Snyder and Mary Ellen Hombs's *Homelessness in America* (Washington, D.C.: Community for Creative Nonviolence, 1983) were properly indignant, but their narratives were too anecdotal and journalistic to satisfy most academic researchers. Their deficits on this account gave rise to a new kind of literature about homelessness, which sought to ascertain the population's demographic characteristics and tried very hard to count the uncountable. Nevertheless, the best of this genre—for example, Martha Burt's *Over the Edge* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1988)—gave us a plausible estimate of the population's size, while simultaneously avoiding the presumption that the presence of a demographic attribute—mental illness, alcoholism, or drugs—was necessarily a cause.

With some numbers in hand, the stage was set for a long and vigorous policy debate. The books in this tradition came from all over the political spectrum; they include conservative works such as Richard White's *Rude Awakenings* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1992), which stresses the individual failings of homeless people and impugns the usefulness of much government action; progressive analyses like my own *The Visible Poor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), which places primary responsibility for the growth of the homeless population on the political and economic transformations of the past quarter century; and books written from the political center (Christopher Jencks, *The Homeless*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), which seek quite artfully to split the difference. Although I doubt that anyone would be declared the undisputed winner in this debate, these works have covered just about all the likely policy terrain, and as a result, the political lines were clearly drawn.

In the meantime, academic researchers have continued to refine their quantitative analyses. Moving beyond larger projections of the population's size, researchers have turned their attention to a number of delimited issues such as lifetime prevalence and the implication of turnover rates for shelter counts.¹ Although these analyses have added to our knowledge about homelessness, they do not test any major social theory or hypothesis and, unlike the earlier quantitative work, tend to downplay discussing causes. As a result, the literature on homeless-

ness has become increasingly bifurcated between large, qualitative speculations on the one hand and smaller, technically sophisticated quantitative research on the other.

Christopher Hudson's book seeks to bridge this gap. Using structural equation modeling, the author converted 1990 census bureau data obtained on S-night to the 3,141 counties in the United States. The author then examined this data to compare the patterns of correlation and causation throughout the country. In a typical passage, Hudson notes that the rate of homelessness increases from 9.8 to 21.6 per 10,000 between counties with low and medium levels of education, but then drops to 9.0 in counties with high levels of education. This curvilinear relationship prompts the author to comment that

education actually represents the combined effect of at least two distinct and contrasting processes. On the one hand, low levels of education directly contribute to homelessness as we know that most of the homeless originate from those with only a high school diploma or less. Thus, the lack of education contributes to high levels of homelessness through creating a general vulnerability to economic disenfranchisement. On the other hand, the more people with college degrees, the more homeless. But in this case, we know that few homeless are being recruited from college graduates, so instead we are led to hypothesize that the relative numbers of these highly educated workers may make it extra difficult for those with low levels of education to successfully compete in the job market. (P. 107)

A theory about social interdependencies is what drives Hudson's analysis. His book tests the premise that homelessness will arise in areas where the capabilities of the local workforce are mismatched with the needs of the local labor market, and the support system—both family and institutional—is either minimal or declining. In these circumstances, housing becomes too expensive, and the accumulating social and individual deficits bring high levels of homelessness. Although authors writing articles for journals sometimes lay out hypotheses that their data do not subsequently confirm, it is unusual for the author of a full-length book to admit that his hypothesis has only been partly supported. To his credit, Hudson acknowledges that although the data confirm the broad outlines of his theory about variations in the incidence of homelessness, not every variable tests at the predicted level, and, in fact, the impact of disability and institutional supports is unexpectedly modest.

This book is the first major study comparing the incidence of homelessness among the U.S. counties. Although Hudson extracts much substance from this analysis, he is intellectually modest enough to acknowledge that the interrelationships among social variables can never be specified with absolute precision. This blend of intellectual honesty, quantitative sophistication, and a willingness to speculate about larger social causes makes Hudson's book an appealing addition to the literature.

Joel Blau
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Note

1. Bruce Link, Jo Phelan, Michaeline Bresnahan, Ann Stueve, Robert Moore, and Elmer Stuenkel, "Lifetime and Five-Year Prevalence of Homelessness in the United States: New Evidence in an Old Debate," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65, no. 3 (1995): 347-54; Dennis Culhane, Edmund Dejowski, Julie Ibanez, Elizabeth Needham, and Irene Macchia, "Public Shelter Admission Rates in Philadelphia and New York City: The Implication of Turnover for Shelter Population Counts," *Housing Policy Debate* 5, no. 2 (1994): 107-40.