

Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space

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Chris Herring^a 

Abstract

Over the past 30 years, cities across the United States have adopted quality-of-life ordinances aimed at policing social marginality. Scholars have documented zero-tolerance policing and emerging tactics of therapeutic policing in these efforts, but little attention has been paid to 911 calls and forms of third-party policing in governing public space and the poor. Drawing on an analysis of 3.9 million 911 and 311 call records and participant observation alongside police officers, social workers, and homeless men and women residing on the streets of San Francisco, this article elaborates a model of “complaint-oriented policing” to explain additional causes and consequences of policing visible poverty. Situating the police within a broader bureaucratic field of poverty governance, I demonstrate how policing aimed at the poor can be initiated by callers, organizations, and government agencies, and how police officers manage these complaints in collaboration and conflict with health, welfare, and sanitation agencies. Expanding the conception of the criminalization of poverty, which is often centered on incarceration or arrest, the study reveals previously unforeseen consequences of move-along orders, citations, and threats that dispossess the poor of property, create barriers to services and jobs, and increase vulnerability to violence and crime.

Keywords

policing, homelessness, poverty governance, urban sociology, social control

It’s 6am and officers Rodriguez and Sharkey are beginning their morning shift from San Francisco’s Mission Police Station. “Alright, let’s see where we’re off to this morning,” Rodriguez says, switching on the patrol car’s dashboard. The screen wedged between the passenger and driver’s seat lights up a list of 36 calls listing the time, a numeric code delineating the type of call, and a street address. “Hey, not so bad! It’s still early though.” Of the calls on the screen, twenty-one are coded 915, or what is officially called “homeless complaints.” If the 911 dispatcher receiving the call concludes that the reported violation covers one of the city’s 24 anti-homeless laws and does not involve a more serious crime, or a nuisance violation involving a housed person,

they dispatch the call as a homeless complaint.

Officers Rodriguez and Sharkey respond to the calls in the order received. Driving to the first call, a mere five minutes from the station, we pass eleven tents and several more bodies laid out on cardboard, piles of blankets, and the hard-damp concrete, all violating the exact same ordinance we’re chasing after, “illegal lodging.” We pull up to a

^aUniversity of California-Berkeley

Corresponding Author:

Chris Herring, University of California-Berkeley,
410 Barrows Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720
Email: Christoph.herring@berkeley.edu

single tent, tied between two large pillars of the 101 highway overpass across from a 24-hour Fitness club. “They always call” referring to the club, “And of course he’s back!” Rodriguez explains, “There was a big sweep last week on the other side of the thoroughfare by Southern,” referring to the eviction of an encampment carried out by the adjacent police precinct from where this person had migrated.

Rodriguez parks the car, both get out, and Sharkey takes out his baton to tap on the tent pole as if knocking on a door. TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP, “Good Morning. SFPD. Can you pop your head out for a minute?” The fly unzips and a tired face emerges, unfazed. “Hi good morning sir, how are you doing?” Sharkey asks. “Good, thanks,” the man calmly replies. Sharkey continues, “So I guess someone called this morning and complained about lodging here. So, I guess you set up here last night?” The man nods. “You know business is getting started and would be great if you could just you know move-along, otherwise they’re going to just call again, and we’re gonna have to respond.” Without resistance or attitude the man replies, “Yeah ok, I’ll get moving.”

Rodriguez and Sharkey return to the car, clear the run, and drive on to their next call. Already two more homeless complaints have hit the dashboard since arriving at this one. Over the next three hours, the two officers clear ten homeless complaint calls, three of which they simply drove by as the person had moved on by the time we responded. Except for one, a man who refused to move-on and took a citation for blocking a sidewalk, the others followed the same course as the first; the officers explained someone had called to complain and the person residing on the sidewalk, vacant lot, or park agreed to move-along.

As we pulled back into the station for lunch, I ask the officers how they thought the morning went. Sharkey admitted, “Look we’re not really solving anybody’s problem. This is a big game of whack-a-mole. I’ll clear one run, get a person to move, but by doing that I’m just creating another call, right? If we arrested a guy, we’d never clear

these calls, and when we cite them, they won’t be able to pay and they’ll just be out here longer and less willing to cooperate.” Rodriguez, grasping for some sense of redemption. “Look, I get it if you’re paying two million dollars for a house and how much are you paying for property taxes, and then you have to walk past this guy that’s taking a crap right in front of your house, or you’re walking with your kid and you see someone shooting up in the middle of the street or peeing or knocked out, like you don’t want your kid seeing that. So we get why people call, because it’s a quality-of-life issue for them. . . . But then our end, it’s like where are they supposed to go? The shelters are full. What are we supposed to do with them?” (fieldnote, May 2016)

Over the past 30 years, police forces across the United States have adopted forms of quality-of-life policing as a renewed commitment to addressing order maintenance as a policing priority and an instrumental crime-control strategy (Harcourt 2009; Kelling and Coles 1997; Kohler-Hausmann 2018). Central to these efforts have been the passage of local ordinances aimed at curbing visible poverty, “anti-social behavior,” and homelessness (Beckett and Herbert 2009; Vitale 2008). These laws are currently spreading at an unprecedented rate in the United States (NLCHP 2017) and increasingly across the globe (Fernandez Evangelista 2013). The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP 2017) found that over half of the 187 U.S. cities in its study banned camping, sitting, and lying in public, and over two-thirds had bans on loitering and begging in particular places. Between 2006 and 2016, bans on sitting and lying increased by 52 percent, citywide camping bans by 69 percent, prohibitions on loitering and loafing citywide by 88 percent, and bans on living in vehicles rose 143 percent, the fastest increases of such ordinances in U.S. history. Recent statewide studies by legal scholars show that most cities have multiple ordinances on the books (Adcock et al. 2016; Frankel, Katovich, and Vedvig 2016; Marek and Sawicki 2017; Olson, MacDonald, and Rankin 2015). For instance,

California cities have an average of nine anti-homeless laws—Los Angeles and San Francisco have 21 and 24, respectively (Fisher et al. 2015). Each law taken on its own may seem limited in its strictures on targeted behaviors, but collectively, they effectively criminalize homelessness and in doing so create an impossible situation for policing.

Legal scholars have tracked the spread of these laws, but we know little about their on-the-ground implementation and effects. The existing scholarship presents two general characterizations of policing marginality (Herbert, Beckett, and Stuart 2017): “aggressive patrol,” which leverages citations and arrests to curb low-level criminality and is guided by quotas or directives from *police command* (Beckett and Herbert 2009; Mitchell 1997; Moskos 2008), and “therapeutic policing” (Stuart 2016), which combines the stick of legal punishment with the carrot of rehabilitative services. In therapeutic policing, officers utilize *discretionary enforcement* to compel wayward citizens toward self-reform (see also Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010). Missing from these accounts, however, is an assessment of the role of complaints through 911, the primary trigger for police response in U.S. cities, and other means of third-party policing (Desmond and Valdez 2012; Garland 2001). As illustrated in the opening vignette, complaints that result in dispatches create a unique set of dilemmas, dynamics, and outcomes between the police and the policed, as well as between residents and business owners calling for policing. Third-party policing is of growing importance; in San Francisco, for example, the unsheltered homeless population grew less than 1 percent between 2013 and 2017 (Applied Survey Research 2017), yet 911 police dispatches for “homeless concerns” increased by 72 percent over the same period. Although police command and officer discretion remain key aspects of policing marginality, this article addresses the empirical gaps by elaborating an additional approach I call *complaint-oriented policing*.

I evaluate the sources, enforcement, and effects of complaint-oriented policing in three

steps. Through an analysis of nearly four million 911 and 311 records and a variety of ethnographic observations, I first argue that “homeless crises” are produced not only by increased homelessness but also by a *crisis of complaints*. Rather than finding a command-control system of orders and quotas or an enforcement primarily driven by officer discretion, I identify various ways the policing of poverty is a product of third-party complaints. Next, I explain how police officers resolve these complaints in conflict and collaboration with a host of other street-level bureaucrats through a process of *burden shuffling* (Seim 2017). Rather than locking up petty criminals (aggressive patrol) or pushing people into services (therapeutic policing), officers resolve complaints by displacing them spatially, temporally, or bureaucratically—forcing homeless people into new spaces or reclassifying the “homeless problem” as an issue for another agency or institution. Finally, I consider the impact of these policing practices on the survival and subjectivities of homeless individuals. I illustrate how frequent and continual policing through move-along orders and citations amounts to a *pervasive penalty* that deepens poverty and suffering, as well as how homeless campers resist and adapt to this form of policing to secure their survival. Building on work that reveals how the ubiquitous policing of marginal groups has detrimental effects beyond incarceration (Desmond and Valdez 2012; Goffman 2014; Rios 2011), I uncover novel mechanisms through which the marginalized are further criminalized on account of their housing and shelter status. Through police interactions that fall short of arrest, move-along orders and citations collectively work to dispossess the poor of their property; create barriers to accessing services, housing, and jobs; and increase vulnerability to violence and crime by stressing the already tenuous social ties between individuals residing in public space.

POLICING EXTREME POVERTY IN THE CITY

Two general accounts currently exist in the scholarship on policing social marginality

(see Herbert et al. 2017).¹ A number of scholars have characterized quality-of-life ordinances and their associated policing as cornerstones of the carceral city (Davis 2006) and urban revanchism (Smith 1996), which aims to purify the streets and sidewalks of visible poverty for businesses, tourists, and wealthier residents under the banner of reclaiming public space for bourgeois consumption (Mitchell 1997). Absent a welfare response, cities have adopted a policing approach of “aggressive patrol” to hide the social problem of homelessness through banishment (Beckett and Herbert 2009). Underlying this policing philosophy are variants of broken windows policing (Kelling and Wilson 1982), packaged as “order maintenance,” “quality-of-life policing,” “zero tolerance,” or “stop and frisk.” These methods are grounded in a faith in deterrence to curb low-level criminality or as aesthetic interventions designed to signal order and police presence to criminals. Most often, these initiatives are depicted as top-down, command-and-control policing “campaigns,” engineered and directed by police chiefs seeking arrest and citation quotas, most famously by Police Chief William Bratton under the command of then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York City during the early 1990s (see Harcourt 2009; Vitale 2008; Wacquant 1999). For a range of scholars, the recent intensification of anti-homeless laws reflects a “punitive turn” (Garland 2001; Wacquant 2009) in the criminal justice system, under which any previously-existing impulses to rehabilitate and reintegrate criminals has been supplanted by more aggressive and intolerant aims of exclusion.

More recently, a critique of the assumption that policing poverty is uniformly hostile, punitive, and exclusionary has emerged (see DeVerteuil, May, and von Mahs 2009). In his ethnography of policing LA’s Skid Row, Stuart (2016) presents an alternative policing approach toward these ordinances, which he terms “therapeutic policing.” Rather than rote retribution, strong-armed rehabilitation through coercive benevolence was the underlying philosophy of policing in Skid Row. In contrast to command-control directives, officers use discretionary

enforcement through the threat of arrest and citation to try to compel individuals to avail themselves of various social services that might alleviate their poverty or reduce their dependence on controlled substances (see also Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010). According to this set of scholars, policing is not solely in service of business elites, tourists, and residents, but rather aims at “fixing” the down and out themselves. This model of therapeutic policing fits into a broader set of studies within the poverty governance literature that challenges, or at least complicates, the one-sided rise of a new punitiveness. This includes studies that have drawn attention to the growth of shelters, targeted social services, and housing for the homeless over this same period of increased policing (Cloke, May, and Johnsen 2010; DeVerteuil 2006; von Mahs 2013), as well as research that analyzes how welfare institutions are becoming increasingly punitive and punitive institutions are increasingly filtering welfare services (e.g., Comfort 2007; Garland 2001; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).

However, the police interaction described in the opening vignette problematizes descriptions of both aggressive and therapeutic policing, the key elements of which I outline in Figure 1. For one, the immediate source of the interaction was not an order from SFPD commanders, as often depicted in accounts of aggressive patrol, nor did it hinge on officers’ discretion, as would be the case in therapeutic policing. Second, the sanction of a move-along order did not result in a formal citation or repeated arrests, which one might expect under aggressive patrol, nor was there even the slightest pretense of an outcome that would lead to services or some protection for the homeless camper, as in therapeutic policing. Finally, the role of the officer deviated widely from that of “rabble managers” containing the riff-raff, pushing people into and out of jail, and mitigating violence between homeless people (Bittner 1967; Irwin 1985), or that of “recovery managers” (Stuart 2016), shepherding homeless people into rehabilitative programs to ameliorate individual pathologies. Instead, the modal policing process in my observations of hundreds of interactions

	Aggressive Patrol	Therapeutic Policing
Trigger	PD Command	Officer Discretion
Enforcement Practice	Arrest	Coercive Services
Enforcement Function	Rabble Management	Recovery Management

Figure 1. Policing Social Marginality: Contrasting Approaches

Note: Adapted from Herbert, Beckett, and Stuart 2017.

between officers and homeless individuals (1) was initiated by complaints outside the police force, (2) relied on punitive interactions that most often fell short of arrest and did not involve services, and (3) was aimed at neutralizing the complaint through incapacitation and invisibilization.

During my fieldwork, I certainly witnessed brutal instances of assertive punishment, as well as acts of coercive benevolence by officers toward the unhoused, that reflected approaches of aggressive patrol and therapeutic policing. However, neither paradigm captures the far more common logics and practices of policing homelessness that I call *complaint-oriented policing*. Call-driven reactive policing has been discussed in the policing literature since the 1970s, but little sociological research exists on its role in quality-of-life policing, which is typically portrayed as a proactive method concerning how officers manage the everyday onslaught of calls, and the effect of this policing on the most marginalized.

This article traces the sources, enforcement, and impact of complaint-oriented policing, and in the process draws on and contributes to three broader sets of literatures

on urbanization, poverty governance, and criminalization. First, my analysis of the drivers of complaint-oriented policing builds on debates of urban change and urban government as it relates to policing. Emerging from a series of case studies of New York City (Laniyonu 2018; Vitale 2008), Seattle (Gibson 2004), and Los Angeles (Davis 2006), and explicitly articulated as a hypothesis by Sharp (2014), the postindustrial policing hypothesis argues that intensified policing stems from processes of gentrification. Understudied and undertheorized in this literature is the role of 911 and 311 calls, as well as organizations such as resident associations and Business Improvement Districts that engage in third-party policing. According to Garland (2001:170), third-party policing, composed of “a third governmental sector . . . positioned between the state and civil society, connecting the criminal justice agencies with activities of citizens, communities and corporations,” represents “the most significant development of the crime control field” and yet has been largely unstudied by sociologists (see Desmond and Valdez 2012). I present one of the first empirical analyses of large-scale 311 and 911 administrative records, as recently called

for by O'Brien, Sampson, and Winship (2015).

I do not analyze the direct role of gentrification or attempt to adjudicate between the underlying causes of complaint-oriented policing; rather, I identify the structural and organizational pressures placed on the police to manage marginality that extend beyond the field of criminal justice and how they manifest in police interactions. Following others who analyze policing as a public institution responding to community-based actors (Huey 2007; Vitale 2008), I place police within the dynamics of urban change and the broader field of urban governance to demonstrate how changes in business and resident organizations, other city agencies, new technologies such as 311, and political struggles all ratchet up the policing of social marginality, while homelessness and policing protocols remain relatively constant.

Second, my analysis of the enforcement of complaint-oriented policing builds on the scholarship of street-level bureaucracy in poverty governance. Drawing from observations and interviews with a wide-range of front-line public workers, including school teachers, social workers, and police officers, Lipsky (1980) found that the ultimate dilemma shared by all was an inability to perform their jobs to the highest standard due to chronic scarcities of time, information, and other resources. Lipsky and other street-level bureaucracy scholars (Brodkin 2012; Dubois 2016; Prottas 1979; Watkins-Hayes 2009) reveal how front-line workers not only experience frustration when faced with this scarcity, but they "make policy" in trying to make do. Although most of this literature focuses on how street-level bureaucrats "make policy" in vertical relations with authority from above and a mostly indigent clientele from below, more recent scholarship points to how bureaucrats also relate laterally and are both strained and relieved by the actions and assets of other city agencies (Comfort et al. 2015; Hupe and Hill 2007; Lara-Millán 2014; Seim 2017). In his study of labor relations in the ambulance, Seim (2017:452) sketches a

process of "burden shuffling" to describe how ambulance medics and police officers "unload undesirable work" (very often homeless clients) onto each other. Expanding the analytic lens beyond the question of labor and work avoidance, I identify additional mechanisms of spatial, temporal, and bureaucratic burden shuffling utilized by officers and other front-line workers to reclassify and redistribute poverty in the face of complaints. I also identify additional motives of burden shuffling beyond reducing a worker's caseload, including managerialist goals of improving agency performance metrics and political goals in shaping public perceptions of the state's treatment of homelessness.

Finally, I consider the impact of complaint-oriented policing on the survival and subjectivities of homeless individuals. Since the explosion of mass incarceration at the century's turn, scholars have increasingly traced the penal state's tentacles, which grip the poor beyond the prison walls to the sub-felony floors of the courts (Kohler-Hausmann 2018), debilitating monetary sanctions (Harris 2016; O'Malley 2009), and the ubiquitous policing of poor neighborhoods (Goffman 2014; Rios 2011; Stuart 2016). This article adds yet another set of mechanisms of criminalization to those found in previous studies that particularly affect the unhoused, namely move-along orders and destruction of personal property. These mechanisms comprise a *pervasive penalty* (Herring, Yarbrough, and Alatorre 2019), that is, a punitive process of police interactions that fall short of arrest and are pervasive in both their frequency and lingering impact.

Although the outcome depicted in the opening vignette of a homeless man amiably agreeing to move-along without ticket or arrest may seem banal or even non-punitive, I will show that such moments are part of a much crueler punitive process. Citations seen as nominal to most are nearly impossible for the unhoused to pay, resulting in debt and bench warrants that create significant barriers to exiting homelessness. Property confiscation by sanitation crews deprives people of medical and economic means of survival, and

the mere fear of having one's property confiscated prevents people from receiving medical services or holding a job. The constant churning of move-along orders provoke conflict among individuals trying to survive in limited public spaces. Even though each quality-of-life ordinance, move-along order, and citation alone may seem inconsequential, collectively, the process of pervasive penalty produces a sequence of criminal justice contact that is more powerful than the sum of its parts. This process also diminishes citizenship by cultivating a distrust not only of the police, but of various state institutions of poverty management and the public at large. Even without overtly taking the punitive actions of arrest and incarceration, in what may appear a more compassionate approach to the problem, the failure to deal with root causes of homelessness leads city officials to develop short-term solutions that exacerbate the problems faced by the unhoused and fail to stop the seemingly endless flow of complaints.

CASE AND SETTING

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, an uneven recovery from a deep recession marked by massive deindustrialization, the steady erosion of union rights and benefits, catastrophic decreases in affordable housing, the defunding of public housing, and the deinstitutionalization of mental institutions all combined to produce a wave of new homelessness (Wolch and Dear 1993). In contrast to earlier forms of homelessness, "advanced homelessness" (Marcuse 1988) was no longer a temporary or transitional phenomenon, but a robust feature of the metropolis that spanned booms and busts. The racial composition of the homeless also changed drastically: minority group members were a minority of the homeless in the early 1970s, but today they are over-represented in homeless populations in U.S. cities. Mass incarceration, increasing consumer and homeowner debt, rising housing costs in major cities, welfare reform, and the continual defunding of public housing and mental health services have increased the housing

insecurity of America's poor, furthered racial disparities, and increasingly affected families and those with jobs (HUD 2017).

In response to the growth and persistence of homelessness, federal and county governments responded in two ways. Homeless services have grown nearly constantly over the past 30 years, despite the receding welfare state that feeds the homeless condition itself. Between 1984 and 1988, more than 3,500 new homeless shelters opened throughout the nation (Jencks 1995:15). Since then, the number of shelter beds in the United States increased to more than 198,000, approximately 320,000 supportive housing units specifically for the homeless have been built, and the HUD budget dedicated to homelessness has grown from \$173 million in 1987 to over \$2 billion today (HUD 2017). At the same time, the criminalization of homelessness intensified in nearly every city and county across the country (NLCHP 2017).

San Francisco is a strategic research site (Merton 1987) to study the regulation of homelessness, as it has long been a leader in both the provision of care and punishment toward the unhoused. San Francisco pioneered the "housing first" approach to homelessness in the early 1990s, and today it has more supportive housing units for formerly homeless individuals and has invested more money into homeless services per capita than any other major U.S. city. In the past decade alone, the city has invested over \$1.5 billion, built or leased 2,700 units of long-term supportive housing, and created more than 500 new shelter beds (BACEI 2019). Yet at the same time, in the early 1990s, San Francisco's "Matrix" program was one of the first zero-tolerance policing campaigns aimed at homelessness (Gowan 2010). Today, the city has more anti-homeless ordinances on its book than any other California and possibly U.S. city (Fisher et al. 2015). As I will discuss, I found evidence of both how the expansion of welfare institutions increased the policing of homelessness and the various ways this policing undermined the access and efficacy of welfare provisions to the unhoused.

San Francisco provides a case study of how progressive cities that have pioneered both bold investments in homeless services and criminal justice reform policies—including the elimination of cash bail, financial justice reform of court fees and drivers licenses, closure of juvenile detention facilities, and other innovations—continue to regulate social marginality through policing and criminal justice, albeit through the supposedly less punitive tools of incarceration and arrest.

FIELDWORK

This article draws from a larger ethnographic project that investigated the field of homeless management in San Francisco between 2014 and 2017. This project included a year of observations on ride-alongs with police officers, public health workers on street outreach, and sanitation workers on encampment cleanings; sitting in office hours with shelter social workers; and working in city hall as the research assistant to the director of the Mayor's Office of Homelessness. I also draw on observations of community associations, including three years working as a key organizer in the city's homeless advocacy group, the Coalition on Homelessness, and participating in more than 100 public forums, such as community police meetings, homeowner and merchant association meetings, and hearings at city hall. I draw especially from my observations of hundreds of interactions between police officers and homeless individuals in public spaces, my 23 ride-alongs with officers from the San Francisco Police Department's Homeless Outreach Unit, 11 public community police meetings, eight city hearings focused on policing homelessness, and private meetings between activists, police commanders, and policy officials.

I pair these observations from above with an enactive ethnography from below (Wacquant 2015). Over the course of another year, I spent nine full months immersed living on the streets, in the shelters, and daily/weekly "welfare hotels" alongside individuals experiencing homelessness.² This entailed spending

57 nights sleeping out on sidewalks, in parks, and beneath underpasses; 96 nights among hundreds of other men in shelters; and 76 nights in daily or weekly hotels with the marginally housed or more often people just taking a break from the street. I spent most days that year alongside a variety of homeless men and women, acquiring the means of survival through charity, informal work, begging, and the illicit economy, and interacting with the local welfare and justice systems that accompany access to shelter, meals, benefits, jails, and courts. On a weekly basis, and often daily, I would witness interactions between police and unhoused people, primarily on the streets, but also in the shelters and housing programs. I witnessed arrests, citations, and move-along orders. While residing on the streets, I was personally given move-along orders dozens of times and threatened with citation and arrest.

During observations I took notes on a smart phone. When passively observing, as was often the case on my outings with street-level bureaucrats, I could sometimes transcribe in real-time entire conversations and actions. When enactively observing with homeless participants, I would take short notes on breaks, record voice memos every few hours, and when possible and given consent, audio record conversation and action to avoid disrupting the flow of activity and conversation. At the end of each day or week, I would elaborate these into narrative notes.

The multi-sided ethnography created a series of tensions across these positions, particularly between the police and the policed. I had not counted on or even sought permission to ride-along with officers. However, after presenting findings of a report documenting the effects of criminalization on San Francisco's homeless to the city's Local Homeless Coordinating Board, the lieutenant of SFPD's homeless outreach unit approached me and said: "I really wish you'd come out and see the problem from our perspective. I agree, we can't arrest our way out of this issue. This should not be a policing issue. This is a social services issue." I discussed the proposal with

members of the Coalition on Homelessness and with people I had spent time with on the street. Most thought I should see the SFPD at work from “the inside,” although many predicted I would just be given a tempered view of police on their best behavior biased “to please the ethnographer” (Rios 2011:7). To an extent this was certainly true. Although I witnessed citations and destruction of people’s property during my ride-alongs, I never once witnessed an arrest nor any physically aggressive behavior by police. However, because I had already completed the enactive ethnography living alongside individuals on the streets, where I witnessed constant policing firsthand when officers were unaware of my role as a researcher, they all knew I had already seen the reality of policing homelessness.³

What I mainly gained from these ride-alongs was a clearer understanding of the sources of enforcement related to homelessness and how officers understood their work. It also allowed me to discuss with officers critiques I had heard for years from the unhoused and advocates about the policing of homelessness. This follows Duneier’s (2011) call for “ethnographic trials” through “inconvenient sampling,” where ethnographers broaden their observations by including the people and perspectives that are *least* convenient for the impressions developed in the initial phases of fieldwork, in the same way a prosecutor might call potentially hostile witnesses to the stand.

As I began to see how complaints were driving the policing in my qualitative fieldwork, I realized many questions that surfaced—How frequently are calls dispatched for homeless complaints? Are these calls increasing or decreasing? Where are they occurring?—could only be addressed by analyzing quantitative data. After finding no readily available data, I filed a public records act request with the San Francisco Department of Emergency Management (DEM 2018), which provided the date, address, and disposition of homeless-related dispatches. This article draws on analysis of 605,481 911 call records

and 3.3 million 311 records regarding “homeless concerns.”⁴ The 911 data include all calls made between 2011 and 2018 that were dispatched to officers as a “homeless concern,” an official SFPD radio code that “is basically for when anyone reports a homeless person and there’s no other real crime a dispatcher can select” as one officer described it to me.⁵ The data also include calls for aggressive panhandling, sit-lie, and trespassing violations, which are also classified by officials as “homeless related” but have distinct radio codes from the more general “homeless concern” code that includes violations such as camping, obstructing a sidewalk, or loitering. A minority of individuals experiencing homelessness do commit a range of crimes, demonstrate psychosis, and create more serious problems for the city, but I exclude these instances from my quantitative analysis and ethnographic observations, which are exclusively concerned with the quality-of-life nuisance violations listed above.

I also analyzed data from the city’s 311 system, the city’s primary customer service center, where people report anything from curbside cleanup, potholes, or graffiti removal to a host of “homeless concerns.” I accessed the 311 data through the city’s public data portal and included all calls of “homeless concerns” and “homeless encampments” from 2011 to 2018. The final section of the article integrates findings from a community-based study I co-directed with Dilara Yarbrough and Lisa Marie Alatorre (2015) that surveyed 351 unhoused San Franciscans, including 43 in-depth interviews about their experiences of criminalization.⁶ Together, these methods provide a relational ethnography (Desmond 2014) by analyzing the process of criminalizing homelessness through the double-edged perspective of both the police and the policed, and a structural ethnography (Burawoy 2017) by analyzing how, when, and why these interactions occur under the broad structures of state, market, and community institutions that constrain and shape these interactions.

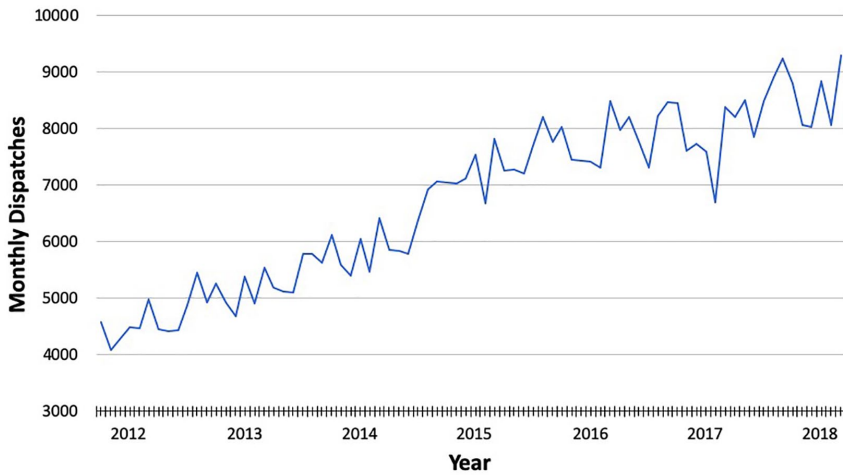


Figure 2. SFPD Dispatches for Homeless Complaints 2011 to 2018

Source: DEM 2018.

A CRISIS OF COMPLAINTS: THE TRIGGERS OF POLICING HOMELESSNESS

Outrage over homelessness has been evergreen in San Francisco since the early 1980s (see Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Gowan 2010), but the situation has taken on a new urgency of social crisis. In 2015, the city's Board of Supervisors declared an official "shelter crisis," following nearly a dozen other west coast municipalities, including its Bay Area neighbors Berkeley, Oakland, and San Jose, as well as Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, Eugene, and others (NAEH 2016). Even in "left coast" San Francisco, there have been increased calls for the criminalization of homelessness, quite literally. In 2012, 57,374 911 calls for quality-of-life violations involved the unhoused. By 2017, the last full year of data collection, there were 98,793 police dispatches for homeless complaints (see Figure 2). This same period saw even greater increases in complaints to the city's 311 service request line. Reports categorized as "homeless concerns" grew from 9,590 in 2012 to 84,486 in 2017. A portion of these calls, between 4 and 9 percent in any given week, are dispatched to police. Most are dispatched to street cleaning crews, which

should also be considered a form of criminalization, as their operations are backed by threat of a police response and, as I will elaborate, result in punitive outcomes that undermine the health and stability of individuals on the streets.

Yet despite this surge in complaints, and news stories that portray San Francisco as in the throes of an unparalleled "homeless crisis," the city's homeless population has remained relatively stable. According to the city's point-in-time count, the overall homeless population grew only 8 percent between 2011 and 2017, from 6,455 to 6,986 (Applied Survey Research 2011, 2017).⁷ Even more significant is the fact that between 2013 and 2017, when 911 dispatches increased at their fastest rate, the unsheltered homeless population increased by only 1 percent. In other words, unsheltered homelessness increased by less than 1 percent between 2013 and 2017, yet 911 dispatches for homeless complaints increased 72 percent and 311 complaints increased 781 percent. As depicted in Figure 3, which shows two typical weeks in 2013 and 2018, police responded to 1,289 911 calls the first week of March in 2013 and just over 2,000 calls that same week in 2018, and 311 requests surged from 201 to 1,514 per week. In San Francisco, the "homeless crisis" as

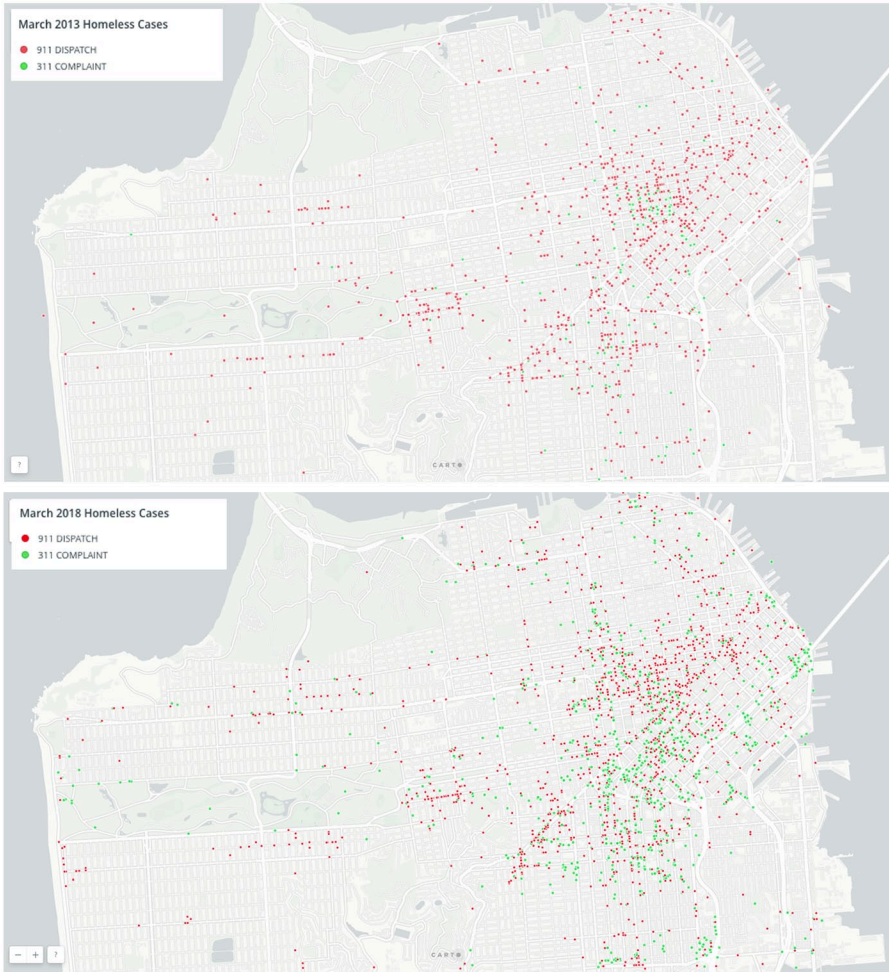


Figure 3. Spatial Distribution of Homeless Complaint Calls for 911 and 311 in First Weeks of March 2013 and March 2018

rendered by the media and state is not so much a product of growing homelessness but growing complaints in a rapidly changing city.

What are behind these complaints and how do they result in the criminalization of homelessness? According to the SFPD lieutenant commanding the homeless outreach unit, over 90 percent of police and homeless interactions across the city are initiated through complaints, with the remainder occurring through officers' discretion on their beats, largely concentrated in the city's Tenderloin neighborhood, which hosts the majority of recovery services and single-room-occupancy units in the city. Complaint-oriented policing is provoked

externally from three sets of actors: it is initiated *from below* directly by the citizenry, businesses, or homeowner associations calling 911 or 311; *horizontally* from city agencies, particularly the departments of public works, public health, and parks; and *from above* by city supervisors and the mayor's office.

The largest volume of complaints in San Francisco derive from 911 or 311 reports. Like most U.S. cities, San Francisco has multiple anti-homeless ordinances under its police code, including bans for sitting and lying on sidewalks, camping, and panhandling (Fisher et al. 2015). As one police lieutenant explained, "If Mrs. Smith continues to

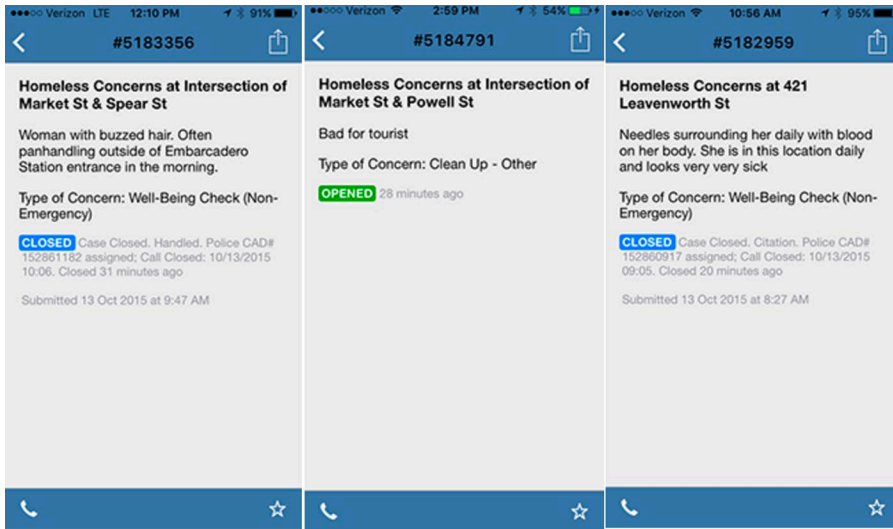


Figure 4. Screenshots of Reports of “Homeless Concerns” on the 311 Mobile App

call 911 because some guy’s sleeping on her door step, we are duty-bound to respond.” In 2018, an average of 7,623 calls were dispatched to police patrol cars in the city each month as “homeless concerns” (DEM 2018).

These dispatches derive from 911, police non-emergency calls, and 311 calls. They are also dispatched through mobile-app reports related to homelessness, a technology quickly spreading in popularity across major U.S. cities. Initially developed to allow residents to report potholes, graffiti, and vehicles blocking driveways, in 2015, following New York City, the app added “homeless concerns” as a category of complaint. The app allows citizens to take photos of the “concern” and choose from a host of subcategories, including “well-being check,” “encampment,” and “clean up.” Although most reports are dispatched to the Department of Public Works, between 4 and 9 percent of 311 reports in any given week are dispatched to the police (DEM 2018). For instance, each month hundreds of “well-being checks” reported on 311 are dispatched to police.⁸ As seen in Figure 4, a caller requested a “well-being check” for a woman reported as having “blood on her body” and who “looks very sick”; the woman was not issued an ambulance, however, but a citation. For these reasons, within days of the app’s release, it

was deemed the “snitch app” by those I was spending time with on the streets.

Anti-homeless laws are mobilized not only through individual residents and workers, but also through organizations, including merchant associations, homeowner associations, and most prominently Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). BIDs garner an additional property tax from all businesses in their area, primarily to fund increased sanitation and security services. In 2000, San Francisco had only one BID; in 2015, there were 15. During my time recycling, panhandling, or simply hanging out with houseless companions in these districts, we would be stopped regularly by BID security and sanitation staff, officially called “community ambassadors,” and told to leave the area or else the police would be called (see also Selbin et al. 2018). In their monthly operational reports, one BID published data on the number of times private security guards and community ambassadors enforced specific homeless-related quality-of-life offenses; these reports show an increase from 24,101 instances of enforcement in 12 months over 2014 and 2015 to 43,907 in a similar period between 2018 and 2019 (Union Square BID 2015:7, 2019:6). This amounts to an 82 percent increase of enforcement interactions between private

third-party security forces and unhoused individuals within this single 25-block commercial district.

BIDs also use the city's 10B program to hire sworn off-duty SFPD officers to patrol their areas. For instance, in 2014, one BID spent \$2 million for an additional 10,000 hours of SFPD coverage (Garnand 2016). Even with all this additional security, hundreds of calls for service were made each week for policing and street cleaning within these districts. Although covering only 5 percent of the city's land area, 28 to 32 percent of all 911 dispatches for homelessness between 2013 and 2018 occurred within BIDs (Garnand and Herring 2019). During my ride-alongs with officers, I observed several community ambassadors and security guards who were on a first-name basis with officers. On my first ride-along with officers, we arrived at the entrance to the Civic Center Auditorium to evict an encampment, and before we even got out of the vehicle, a community ambassador walked up to the car window to tell us, "it's always the best time of the day seeing you guys roll up."

Another collective and privileged mechanism organized groups used to lodge complaints was the monthly community police meetings held in each precinct. In the 11 police meetings I attended across central city police districts, no issue was more frequent, time-consuming, and cathartic than homelessness. The complaints spanned a host of concerns, from the sanitary to public safety, medical, environmental, and economic. Take, for example, residents' and merchants' reports from a meeting in the city's Castro neighborhood:

I have a business at 2299 Market, so we have a similar challenge where someone will be moved from the library and then they end up in front of our store. . . . I care for all of those people and I want them to get help, but I don't want them in front of my store because it's scaring customers away.

. . . a homeless person at 4a.m. rang my doorbell because they were mad at me

because I asked them to move off the sidewalk earlier. And I realized I had to go through a fair amount of effort to get their name. . . . And I don't know where this goes, but if cops are going to get people service, they actually have to know their names and be able to track and identify people.

So two weeks ago I heard screams, I saw a women beating her head against the brick wall of my building, hurting herself. Called 911, the police showed up. The police came to me and told me she was angry because she spilled her coffee. I'm like this is nuts, she was on something. They said "that's all we can do" she'd already been in to the hospital before and turned back out.

These sorts of complaints would be heard directly by captains who took down specific addresses. The encampments would be dispersed by either more frequent policing or harsher ultimatums of citation or arrest. As a captain in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood explained to a complaining resident,

Ok. I hear you've called 911 over and over again and this group of homeless folks keeps coming back, but did you email me personally? No. Did you ever call me? No. So as I say at each of these meetings, if you just call 911 or 311 all we're going to do is address the immediate concern. If we want to get to the root of these issues, I need all of you to help us be vigilant. Reach out to me.

Enlisting the public as partners in policing, the captain made clear the distinction between typical caller complaints and concerted complaints by organized citizens to "resolve encampments." After being dispersed, these clearances would be highlighted at the following meeting in the captain's report as a "resolution," despite the predictable emergence of a new set of encampments that would then be brought to the agenda by nearby merchants and residents (see Photo 1).

Along with citizen complaints, a second trigger to policing homelessness is demands



Photo 1. Park Police District Community Meeting; Officers Showing Proof of a Camp Resolution That Was Cause of Complaint at the Previous Meeting (photo by the author)

from other agencies. During my two years of fieldwork, I observed the departments of public works, public health, fire, parks, and human services agencies all call on police to enforce anti-homeless laws to deal with various problems. Far and away the largest draw on policing resources was the Department of Public Works (DPW), which is responsible for cleaning San Francisco's streets. There was a tight and oftentimes indistinguishable connection between the sanitization and the criminalization of homelessness. Weekday mornings, three "alley crews," each composed of 6 to 12 sanitation workers, would be dispatched to clean areas of homeless encampments; every crew was escorted by a police patrol car with two officers. In this case, the sanitation crews guided the policing of homelessness every morning. The public health outreach workers I observed made it a point to avoid doing outreach amid police presence, so as not to be seen as collaborating with officers, which would stoke suspicion, distrust, and barriers to providing services for

their clients, but several evictions spurred by "health abatements" issued by their department resulted in a police response to remove encampments. These are just two examples of bureaucratic burden shuffling (discussed at length in the next section), in which city agencies concerned with homelessness utilized police to accomplish their goals.

The third way the policing of homelessness was initiated through complaints was by politicians. One day in the patrol car, as the officer was working down his list of calls on the dashboard, he received a call from the lieutenant. After the call the officer told me: "Well looks like we've got to go clear out the plaza by Scott Weiner's [a district supervisor] place. He's always calling the captain." District supervisors would often email the mayor's office or captains about powerful constituents demanding a camp removal. During my time as a research assistant in the mayor's office, the director's morning typically began triaging complaints in his email inbox and voicemail from agency directors,

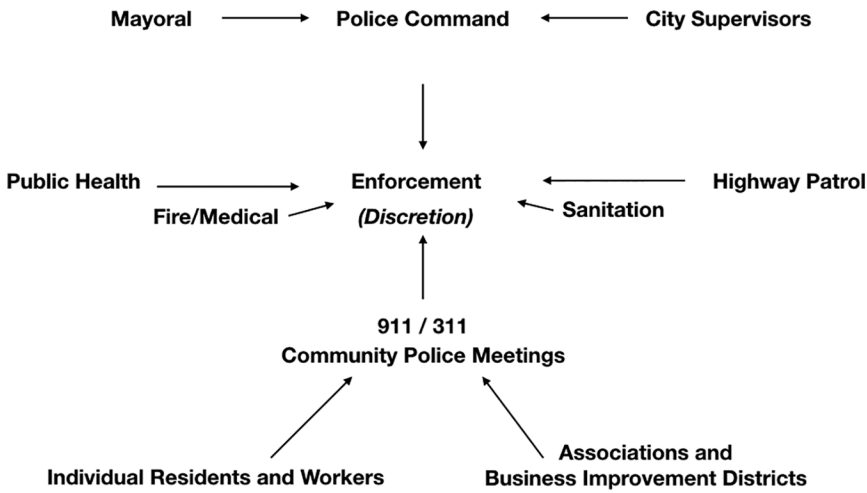


Figure 5. Sources of Complaint-Oriented Policing

politicians, business owners, and residents. Many officers would complain about this privileging of complaints:

I mean, I'm trying to get through this queue [of homeless complaints] and it's like just because the supervisor's friend or supporter has an issue, or some camp near the highway turnoff in his district makes him look like he's not dealing with homelessness we got to deal with it.

In these ways, residents', businesses', agencies', and politicians' complaints, whether individual or organized, triggered the enforcement of quality-of-life laws against the unhoused (see Figure 5). Although the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on any given night remained relatively constant over the past decade, the city they inhabited rapidly changed. Development of luxury condos and corporate offices for the booming tech sector rose on under-developed land in formerly industrialized areas of the city where the unhoused had long camped out of sight and out of mind of public view—as in the areas featured in Gowan's (2010) and Bourgois and Schonberg's (2009) ethnographies of homeless campers in San Francisco. The amount of leased commercial space in the city more than doubled from 5.9 million

square feet in 2009 to 11.9 million square feet in 2018 (Li 2018). The city's residential population grew from just over 767,000 in 2008 to nearly 885,000 in 2018, and the number of jobs in the city grew from 446,447 to 627,915 (U.S. Census Bureau 2018), drawing an influx of daily commuters. This growth in development, BIDs, commuters, and residents made homelessness both more visible and more likely to draw complaints. At the same time, changes in urban governance (e.g., technological innovation with the more convenient 311 phone app), increased staffing of sanitation teams assigned to homeless camps, and growing political pressures to address homelessness all increased demand for policing homelessness, yet the number of police officers, policy, protocol, and criminal justice processing of homelessness remained relatively stable.

**BURDEN SHUFFLING:
DISPLACING POVERTY
TEMPORALLY, SPATIALLY,
AND BUREAUCRATICALLY**

Once dispatched, how are 911 calls for homeless complaints resolved? And how do police officers understand the demands of their daily work? To answer these questions, it is first

necessary to elaborate the structural dilemmas of scarcity faced by officers. Calls of homeless complaints increased rapidly between 2001 and 2018, but the number of SFPD officers remained flat until 2017. During this same time, the city experienced a significant growth of car break-ins and other property crimes that take priority over homeless complaints. Although technically classified as a level C priority in terms of its risk to public safety, the outsized call volume and callers' outrage at homeless "crimes" functionally upgraded homelessness and led to the creation of a homeless outreach unit composed of 15 to 32 officers at any given time. Since 2005, San Francisco, like dozens of U.S. municipalities, has designated specialized patrol units to exclusively respond to homeless complaints (Wexler 2018).

Yet even with the specialized police unit, officers faced impossible dilemmas in working with homeless populations. Not once during my ride-alongs was the queue of homeless complaints ever cleared. Spending more time addressing any single call would result in a growing backlog of new complaints. When police commanders reacted to the growing number of calls by dedicating more officers to the homelessness unit, reducing the response times to homeless complaints, many officers believed complaints increased rather than decreased. As Lipsky (1980:33) observed, "A distinct characteristic of the work setting of street-level bureaucrats is that the demand for services tends to increase to meet the supply. If additional services are made available, demand will increase to consume them." Unable to resolve the homeless problem, police officers are only able to manage it through a process of burden shuffling (Seim 2017). This manifests in three principal patrol practices: displacing homelessness temporally, spatially, or bureaucratically to neutralize poverty.

Spatial and Temporal Shuffling

Officers repeatedly told me two mantras throughout my fieldwork: "we can't arrest our way out of this problem" and "this should

be a social worker's job, not a policing job." Booking a person in jail would take officers off the street, reduce call-response times, and build a backlog of work. Most individuals booked would be released back to the streets in 3 to 8 hours. Shelters were similarly understood as an ineffective means to resolve complaints. Some officers understood homelessness as pathological, a result of poor choices, and people on the streets as service-resistant. Others saw homelessness as a structural social problem and a product of inadequate shelter, housing, and social safety-nets. Most saw it as some combination. Yet, there was widespread consensus that policing people into services was impossible or a waste of time. Expressing a similar sentiment to the inadequacy of jail, an officer described the shelter option as equally meaningless:

I can take a guy to shelter, but it's only going to be for one night and then they're going to be back out on the street. Some of these people are crazy or addicted, and that's like a disease. Who are we kidding in thinking they'll do well sleeping bunked with 200 other guys. . . . Policing these folks doesn't do anything to get them off the streets. If anything, it keeps them there longer.

Recognition of the limits of aggressive patrol and therapeutic policing left officers to handle most complaints through spatial and temporal management. According to police call data, which matched my own observations, 89 percent of dispatches for homeless complaints resulted in a move-along order, rather than a citation or arrest (DEM 2018). As depicted in the opening vignette, in most cases officers first sought to convince the target of a homeless complaint to move without citation, arrest, or an offer of services. One officer explained to me the strategic importance of a dedicated homeless policing unit after a full shift without issuing a single citation or arrest:

The good thing about the homeless unit is that we get to know the folks on the street

and they get to recognize us. You can usually get someone to cooperate more without citing. Though sometimes you gotta cite so they know you're serious or if the camp is just being stubborn and not moving to show the residents calling that we've responded to their call. A lot of unpaid citations turn into a warrant and that gives you real leverage. Then they'll respond because they know we can always run their name and arrest. But we're doing more outreach than anything. I mean we're citing, but a lot of times you get more by doing the outreach part, because people will work with you a little more.

Officers in the homeless outreach unit did not have any special training in social service outreach or crisis intervention.⁹ The unit was largely composed of rookies forcibly assigned to the unit due to their lack of seniority. A common conception of outreach, as expressed above, was not getting individuals on the streets into services, but rather getting them to be "respectful and understanding of their housed neighbors," as one officer put it, by keeping camps clean and most importantly obeying police orders to move-along. When citations and arrests were used, they were not issued as punitive ends to resolve or prevent the offending behavior, or a means to encourage people into services, but as tools to coerce homeless people to move. The primary benefit of having a dedicated patrol assigned to homelessness was their ability to build a personal rapport to cultivate cooperation to move-along.

Officers were not permitted to instruct homeless people on where to relocate, but they often gave tips on where they might avoid future complaints. One morning when I was camping with a small group in the city's financial district in front of the construction site for Salesforce Tower, what would become the city's tallest building, an officer explained, "Look we're starting to get calls like all the time from the shop owner across the street, you got a good spot here, but you'd probably be better off on the other side, which faces another construction site" where people would be less likely to call. When sleeping

out in the city's rapidly gentrifying Mission District, officers would suggest heading further toward the more industrial neighborhoods of Dogpatch and the Bayview where it was easier to stay hidden. As in the statement above and in the opening vignette, officers almost always began their request to move by making clear it was not them personally, or even the police department, who was initiating the order, but a caller. The homeless and officers held a thread of solidarity with a shared frustration of having to respond to caller complaints and a mutual interest in diminishing them. At the conclusion of another move-along order I experienced while camping with a group in tents outside a municipal bus yard, the officer apologized: "I don't know why they're calling, I mean this seems like an ideal spot, out of the way, and you all are keeping this spot clean. I mean, I know this is pointless, but you gotta move." One of the homeless men replied, "Yeah, it's a bummer. It's all good. I know you're just doin' your job. It's a shitty job."

The outcome of these interactions was a constant churning of homelessness in public space. In a community-based survey conducted during the research period with 351 homeless individuals across the city, we asked respondents where they relocated following their most recent move-along order. Only 9 percent of respondents reported moving indoors. Of these, some reported moving to drop-in centers, but the most common responses were moving to a public library or taking a ride on the bus—temporary indoor public spaces with limited nighttime availability. Most respondents, 91 percent, remained on the streets or in parks. Most moved only within a few city blocks (64 percent), and only 21 percent of displaced respondents moved to a public space in a different neighborhood following their most recent move-along order. With so much spatial churn, businesses and residents only get a temporary break from homelessness outside their doors and so call again. Over eight years of 911 call data for homeless complaints, 121 single addresses called an average of once a month,

and 80 addresses called once a week (DEM 2018).

One day on a ride-along, an officer pulled up on his dashboard all the calls at a single intersection:

So right here, we're looking at three months and at this location we're looking at over 100 calls. And you know it could be different situations—different people. Like people might be reacting and moving, but then you get someone new moving in. It's a shell game.

One camp of five people I resided with for three consecutive weeks and followed for over a year within the city's Dogpatch neighborhood had a circuit between three spots they would migrate to when faced with evictions—a piece of sidewalk in front of a U-Haul parking lot, a grassy area under an overpass, and a well-guarded spot behind a stand of trees in a traffic island. In a few instances during my fieldwork, larger encampments of 20 to 40 campers would be tolerated in a single area, and in one circumstance nearly 300. These mass encampments were often seen as mutually beneficial for both the homeless, who had more security and stability, and the police, who saw complaint calls reduced due to greater concentration (see also Herring 2014). However, eventually some event would trigger an eviction and the dispersal would lead to an increase of complaints. For instance, after the mass eviction of the largest tent-city during my fieldwork, citywide calls of homeless complaints increased by 30 percent, from just under 4,000 to over 5,000 in a single month (DEM 2018). Officers I was going on ride-alongs with at the time directly attributed this increase to the eviction.

Another form of spatial shuffling on a broader geographic scale was police officers' use of the Human Services Agency's Home-ward Bound program. I first became aware of the program on a damp January evening sleeping out on the city's Embarcadero waterfront when an officer woke me up to offer a bus ticket out of town. The officer pitched the

program: "As long as you've got someone on the other end of the line who will take you in, and haven't used the program before, we'll give you a free bus ticket to anywhere in the contiguous U.S., some clean clothes, and \$10 a day for food." Such programs are widespread across U.S. cities (see Gee 2017), but I was surprised to receive the offer from an officer, rather than a social worker from the Human Services Department that manages the program. I turned down the offer and luckily was not rebuked with a ticket or arrest, although I was told by social workers and homeless individuals of such instances.

Later during my fieldwork, I would go on an evening ride-along officially called "Operation Homeward Bound" with a detail of six officers offering bus tickets to individuals on the streets. At the start of the operation, one officer explained to the team:

The big concern tonight is get easy grabs, if we can get 'em and get 'em gone it's a success, because it costs the city dollars, but it's services that are eaten in the department because the people we send out are saving calls for cops tomorrow on the beat.

By the end of the night the officers had sent away three people. One had only just arrived two hours earlier from Seattle where he was also unhoused, but on his way he decided the trip to San Francisco was a bad idea. Another couple, after trying fraudulently to get tickets to New York City, ended up taking tickets an hour south to where one of their mothers lived. Equally telling of the operation's ineffectiveness was that seven of the 38 people I observed receive offers that evening said they had already used the program in the past. Although city officials count the 10,570 program participants over the past 13 years in their statistics of people housed by the city of San Francisco, the program's effectiveness at resolving homelessness, even temporarily, is entirely unproven. During my fieldwork, I met several people on the streets and in shelters who had received bus tickets from other cities to get to San Francisco, and several more who had used the program only to return.



Photo 2. Typical Tag-Team Effort of Police and Sanitation Teams Addressing Homeless Encampments (photo by Kelley Cutler)

Bureaucratic Shuffling

Another process of burden shuffling was bureaucratic: police would reclassify the homeless problem to another agency. Officers primarily saw their policing of homelessness as a misplaced priority that should be handled through social welfare, medical, or sanitation agencies and that distracted them from what they considered “real police work.” Officers would frequently draw my attention to other policing tasks they felt were being undertreated due to the department’s legal requirement to address caller complaints of homelessness. During the Operation Home-ward Bound ride-along, an officer pointed to the dashboard and said, “See that call. That’s code for domestic abuse and it’s been hanging there for over an hour. This is what I should be addressing, but instead I’m on this detail.” On my ride-alongs, I began to realize that whenever officers spoke about policing homelessness, they almost always referred to it in the customer service register of responding to “calls for service.” When they discussed assignments on thefts or violent offenses, they would refer to them as “crimes.” Many

described their assignments to homelessness as a degradation of their vocation, as playing “mall cops” and “maid service for entitled homeowners.” Officers would thus attempt to reclassify homeless calls to other agencies by sanitizing, medicalizing, and socializing homelessness. Yet these efforts were limited and, in most cases, still experienced as criminalization by the unhoused.

In the previous section I discussed how the city’s sanitation department (DPW) criminalized homelessness by travelling with police escorts or calling the police to encourage individuals camping to move from areas they were cleaning (see Photo 2). However, police officers would also shift homelessness onto the DPW by calling for continual cleanings. Having a cleaning crew power wash the sidewalk a few times a week, or even multiple times a day, would often convince campers to find a spot with less frequent disruptions (see also Hopper 1992:781–2). Most individuals I spent time with on the streets feared the sanitation teams more than the police, due to the former’s ability to confiscate and destroy property, which was viewed as a punishment worse than arrest.

In fact, the primary way I observed officers using arrest was to clear property. One day on outreach as a representative of the Coalition on Homelessness, I came across a woman being arrested whom I had known over a number of months. Cindy was in her early 60s, had serious necrosis in both legs, and was always much slower to pack up her cart of belongings than others. As she sat cuffed in the patrol car, I asked the officers about her arrest, pressing them as to why she in particular was being arrested while others had not. One officer replied, "Look, others are cooperating with us when we ask them to move. We've given her multiple warnings and she's accumulating way too much stuff." Rather than driving Cindy directly to jail, the officers waited nearly 30 minutes until a sanitation truck arrived to take away all her belongings. When I tried to save her valuables, the officer ordered me not to "steal" her property. When I caught up with Cindy the next afternoon, who was in the same clothes she had been arrested in after spending the night sleeping without a tent, she said, "I was out of jail in three hours and they didn't even charge me. When I asked where I could get my stuff, they told me that's not their responsibility." Complaint-oriented policing was not void of officer discretion, no policing could be, it was simply more tightly directed and aimed at reducing complaints. On my ride-alongs, outreaches, and time residing on the streets, I observed police regularly target individuals like Cindy who had the most property, the dirtiest tent, or tried to delay cleaning and protect their belongings from being confiscated.

The powers of the police and sanitation departments to criminalize homelessness were intertwined. Cleanings without the threat of police action were meaningless, and arrests were much less effective without the threat of having one's property destroyed during the booking process. In this way, the criminalization of homelessness was often masked as merely sanitizing public space for public health. However, neither workers on sanitation crews nor police patrols described their work in these terms. As one street-cleaning crew supervisor explained, "We just clean, we

don't make anyone move, that's the police's job." The officers saw their role differently. As one officer working alongside this same crew supervisor told me, "We're just here to keep the DPW workers safe. You know they have to wake people up to clean the streets and sometimes there's threats or even assaults."

Another way police would shift the burden of homelessness to other agencies would be to medicalize the condition. In particular, officers could call for an ambulance, especially if a person was unresponsive to a move-along order and not resistant to a ride to the hospital. One day on outreach I came across John, a middle-aged man, nearly passed out at the bottom of a subway staircase, a plastic bottle of vodka in his hand. A police officer was trying to get him to move, but to no avail. Perhaps realizing how difficult it would be to detain John, who must have weighed over 250 pounds, the much smaller officer said, "You don't sound good. Are you having any chest pains? Do you need me to call an ambulance?" John's head nodded and he mumbled something unintelligible. "I'll take that as a yes," the officer said, calling for an ambulance. Although John was clearly unwell, it was unclear if he had what EMS workers would consider a "chief complaint" that would warrant an ambulance transport. Police also medicalize homelessness by issuing 51-50s, the California law code for involuntary psychiatric commitment for individuals who present a danger to themselves or others due to signs of mental illness. This determination relies on the discretion of the officer. Individuals residing on the streets, as well as medics and public health outreach workers I observed, all told me that police would sometimes issue 51-50s to diffuse complaints even when psychotic behavioral symptoms were absent, as a way to avoid the work required for arrest (see also Seim 2017:465). However, like arrest or short-term shelter offers, the vast majority of holds lasted less than 24 hours.

Finally, police would sometimes try to socialize homelessness and get individuals residing on the streets to access social services such as shelter. This strategy was relatively rare compared to sanitizing or medicalizing

homelessness, due to the fact that resources for homeless services in San Francisco, as in most U.S. cities, are quantitatively scarce and qualitatively inadequate. During the time of my research, there was a continuous waitlist of between 500 and 1,200 people for a 90-day shelter bed that would take anywhere from three weeks to two months to access. A single-night bed typically required a 4- to 10-hour wait in line, and some found shelters entirely inaccessible due to their disability, or pets, partners, or property that were all restricted. With nearly 7,000 single homeless adults on any given night, the city had just over 2,000 available spaces in temporary shelters—a ratio of sheltered versus unsheltered homeless populations that falls in the mid-range of western U.S. cities (HUD 2017).

Regardless of an officer's awareness of the scarcity and squalor of shelter, or their diagnosis of homelessness as being rooted in individual pathologies or structural poverty, their prescriptive perspectives were largely the same. Rather than believing it was their responsibility to "cure" homelessness through a paternalistic brand of moral discipline, using punitive ultimatums to pressure the unhoused into shelter, most felt this was ineffective and simply not their job. The few instances when I did observe officers connect individuals on the streets with shelter, the officers were not in the role of enforcer but advocate, using personal relationships with public health workers who could fast-track them inside. However, the scarcity of these outreach workers led officers to avoid even trying in most cases. When officers did advocate for a particular person, this would often frustrate social workers who felt those receiving services should get assistance based on their medical or psycho-social needs as determined by social work or medical professionals, not police officers. As one public health worker expressed to another on an outreach when scarce shelter beds were being offered exclusively for a group of campers targeted for eviction thanks to a rash of complaints, "This isn't how we should be distributing shelter. We should be

prioritizing based on needs and vulnerabilities, not police complaints."

Even when shelter was expanded, which one might expect to shift the burden of homelessness from agencies of criminal justice to social welfare, complaints continued to rise, and I observed a number of mechanisms through which increased welfare provisions instigated increased policing. From 2014 to 2017, when homeless complaints rapidly increased, San Francisco opened five new shelters after a decade of building only one. Although the rhetoric of therapeutic policing rarely circulated among police, it was a dominant discourse in the political and policy fields. Politicians used the new shelters to legitimate increased criminalization. For instance, a city supervisor told the audience at a community forum, "I strongly believe that it is not compassionate to allow human beings to live on our city streets. We're investing a lot more money in services and we need to encourage people to utilize them and be clear that camping is unacceptable." The opening of new shelters resulted in coordinated police crackdowns directly surrounding the facilities, and city supervisors and police officials encouraged residents to call 311. After the opening of a new shelter in the Mission neighborhood, the district captain told a community meeting, "We are opening up 100 new beds . . . so if you see someone on the streets who could use assistance call 311 and we will try to get them inside." Despite the continual inaccessibility of shelter for the vast majority of people on the streets, the new shelters encouraged complaints and penal repression.

THE EFFECTS OF COMPLAINT-ORIENTED POLICING

Most of the officers I got to know did not feel their policing of homelessness was particularly punitive or harsh. As one officer told me after a five-hour shift chasing homeless complaints without a single citation or arrest:

We're just moving people around, we aren't "criminalizing homelessness" [flashing air

quotes]. Look, you've researched other cities. You gotta admit, what we're doing is really soft-glove compared to other places.

Although it did seem San Francisco had fewer arrests for anti-homeless laws than other west coast cities, officers' efforts to move, sanitize, medicalize, and even socialize homelessness was nonetheless experienced as criminalization by the unhoused. These efforts coalesced into a process of *pervasive penalty* (Herring et al. 2019), a punitive process of policing through move-along orders, citations, and threats of arrest that falls short of booking but is pervasive in its reach across a targeted population and in its depth of lingering impact. This section elaborates how complaint-oriented policing fuels this pervasive penalty and perpetuates the urban disorder that it claims to reduce by prolonging homelessness, increasing conflict among vulnerable people, and further disorganizing already chaotic lives.

In a community-based study surveying a representative sample of 351 homeless individuals across San Francisco, we found criminalization to be widespread, frequent, and with lingering effects (Herring and Yarbrough 2015). In contrast to frequent statements by proponents of quality-of-life ordinances who claim that such laws are targeted at specific behaviors and problem individuals rather than criminalizing homeless status, the study found that fully 70 percent of respondents had been forced to move in the past year by a police officer, over a third had this happen at least once a month, and 20 percent on a weekly basis.¹⁰ According to police data, only 11 percent of homeless complaints are resolved through citations, but our survey found that 69 percent of all respondents had been cited in the past year, with 22 percent receiving more than five citations. In 2014, 14,881 citations were issued for homeless-specific quality-of-life offenses.

The lingering effect of enforcement of anti-homeless laws is also pervasive. Over 60 percent of survey respondents could not pay their most recent citation, which resulted in a further \$300 assessment, revocation of their driver's

license, a bench warrant issued for their arrest, and the fine being sent to collections. This negatively affected people's credit and created barriers in accessing services, housing, and work. For instance, having a warrant disqualifies you from section-8 housing and from voluntary drug or mental health treatment through the city's behavioral health services. Move-along orders also frequently resulted in the loss of personal property. Among survey respondents, 46 percent reported having their belongings taken or destroyed by city employees. During my fieldwork embedded within encampments, individuals I resided with had had lost tools, bikes, and computers used for work; expensive medicines for HIV and Hepatitis C; ID and benefit cards that were key to their survival; and their last remaining treasured possessions, such as family photos, letters, and priceless mementos.

Most individuals residing on the streets considered property destruction the greatest threat to their survival; this always involved either a police presence, the threat of police being called, or leveraging anti-homeless ordinances to provide legal cover for property confiscation. This fear pervaded daily routines. In the camps I resided in, people would rotate leaving the camp to work, attend appointments, gather food or supplies, or go to the toilet, leaving their belongings under the watch of fellow campers. However, when a camp clearance occurred, we were limited in the amount of property we could salvage, as sanitation workers and police would prevent us from packing more than we could carry in a single trip, and they sometimes barred us from taking items that were not our own. Photo 3 depicts one such instance: the owner of the tent being disposed was not present when the street cleaners arrived, and we were unable to convince the sanitation workers or officers present to let us take their belongings. In another instance, an elderly man in his 70s had his walker crushed in a dump truck, despite the fact that those present told sanitation workers and officers that he was hospitalized. Another elderly man I resided with for weeks in a camp had all his belongings



Photo 3. A DPW Team Disposes a Tent and Its Belongings Deemed Contaminated (photo by the author)

destroyed by sanitation workers while he was hospitalized for a stroke. Although we demanded the workers follow the department's "bag and tag" policy, storing a person's belongings for 30 days so he might reclaim them, the workers claimed, as they often did, that the tent contained perishable items so the whole tent with all its belongings had to go.

The threat of property destruction resulted in homeless people avoiding the hospital, missing social service appointments, and being unable to hold a job. During my observations with public health workers on outreach and while residing in camps, I witnessed people refuse hospitalization in the face of gruesome infections, debilitating pain, and churning stomach sicknesses, primarily out of fear of losing their belongings at the hands of city workers. One of the elderly men who lost his property while hospitalized had called my cell phone before calling 911, as he lay paralyzed on a city sidewalk during a stroke, in hopes I could get to camp to watch his property before he was taken to the ER. It was common for people to miss appointments with social workers to protect their property, which would result in their benefits lapsing.

Public health outreach workers were often frustrated when clients lost access to medicine or services due to a brief incarceration. Other times, outreach workers could not locate their clients on the streets to distribute medicine or notify them they had been granted access to shelter, rehab, or even housing because they had been relocated during a sweep. The few people I came to know who resided on the streets and managed to get work were all either fired or came repeatedly close to losing their job due to missing or leaving a shift to salvage property from sweeps. In these ways, the criminalization of homelessness undermined other state efforts of socialization and medicalization, as well as individuals' personal efforts to pull themselves out of homelessness.

The constant move-along orders provoked by complaint-oriented policing also resulted in conflict between the unhoused and the housed. The state's theft of homeless people's property sometimes provoked unhoused people to steal in response. In one of the camps I spent months following, the group drew on their work as informal recyclers as a moral boundary of dignity between themselves and

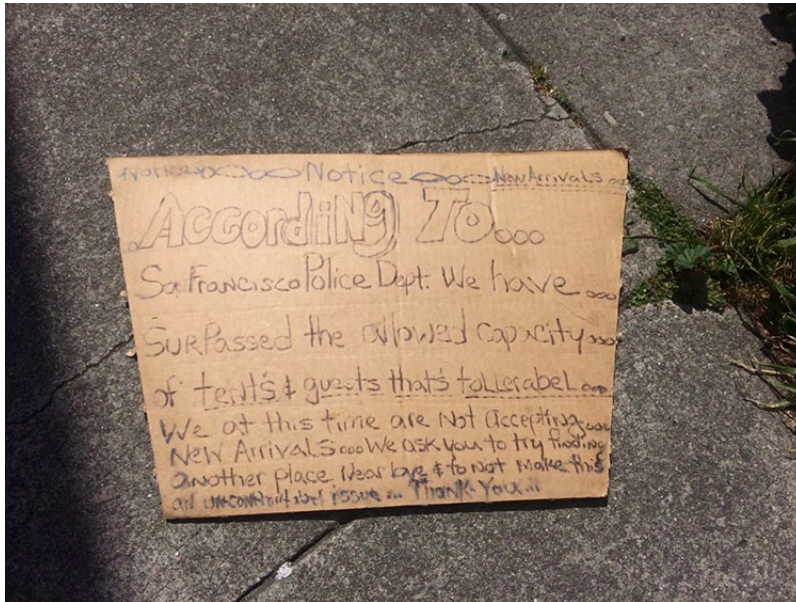


Photo 4. A Sign Posted at the Base of an Encampment That Expresses the Tensions Created between Those Trying to Find a Safe Place to Camp: “According to San Francisco Police Dept. we have surpassed the allowed capacity of tents and guests that’s tolerable. We at this time are not accepting new arrivals. We ask you to try finding another place nearby and to not make this an uncomfortable issue. Thank you.” (photo by the author)

“criminals” on the street who stole and the “service dependent” who relied on charity (see also Gowan 2010). However, after an eviction in which they lost everything, each turned to theft—from people’s vehicles, REI (an outdoor goods store), and the drugstore CVS. When it was clear which business or house had made the complaint that triggered the eviction, campers would sometimes take retribution by leaving trash or feces on their doorstep. What often appeared to officials and the public as street violence emerging from the internal chaos and pathologies of camp life was all too often primed and provoked by the subtle state violence enacted through enforcement.

The policing of homelessness continually sparked interpersonal conflict between individuals on the streets: first, by disrupting the security and trust established within existing encampments through eviction, and second by forcing people into territories of other unhoused people. Camping in small groups served as a shield, providing protection

against property theft and harassment, and created a pool of shared material and moral resources (see also Bourgois and Schonberg 2009). However, it was also a liability, increasing visibility and the likelihood of complaints. Following evictions in camps I was embedded with, we would often break up into smaller factions to reduce our visibility. However, evicted campers usually then ended up near other tents, which indicated a pre-existing tolerance by local residents and businesses. Sometimes these campers worried our presence would “increase the heat” on police complaints, and they would ask, or demand with threats, that we move elsewhere. As depicted in Photo 4, some people would post signs to deter newcomers and avoid the awkward to contentious interactions these requests could provoke. Typically, we were begrudgingly accepted. After all, telling someone they were not welcome on a particular block could result in having your belongings stolen or, as occurred a few times during my fieldwork, burnt to the ground.

Homeless individuals rarely had feasible legal recourse in the face of conflict. One woman who was raped almost immediately following a police move-along order that pushed her into an unfamiliar area in the dead of night explained:

What's the point? If I called them, they would have made all of us move. Would he [the officer] even believe me? The whole camp of new people would hate me, and what would stop him [the offender] from getting revenge? It's not like I've got a locked door to hide behind.

Similar to how Desmond and Valdez (2012: 137) found among the housed that “the nuisance property ordinance has the effect of forcing abused women to choose between calling the police on their abusers (only to risk eviction) or staying in their apartments (only to risk more abuse),” the unhoused avoided calling the police in the face of abuse or theft for fear of eviction from public space.

In response to complaint-oriented policing, individuals on the streets developed a particular “cop-wisdom.” Building on Foucault’s (1977:24) precept that punitive measures not only repress but are productive in shaping their targets’ subjectivities, Stuart (2016:135) describes cop-wisdom as a “cognitive framework designed to reduce unwanted police interactions.” Whereas Stuart found the cop-wisdom on LA’s Skid Row centered around signaling sobriety or working a program to convince police one was not in need of therapeutic policing, in San Francisco I found a cop-wisdom developed around avoiding complaints. This not only involved seeking marginal spaces out of sight to post-up camp, but an awareness of jurisdictional boundaries between the loosely enforced state property of the California Highway Patrol or county Port Authority versus the highly surveilled city land and private property, an astute sensitivity to one’s neighbors, and for most a constant effort at curbing crime and keeping sidewalks clean and clear around campsites. Some of the houseless built relationships with merchants

and residents who promised not to call the police in exchange for keeping the block secure and clean, which often involved shooing away other homeless campers. As previously discussed, campers would dissolve larger settlements to avoid visibility, do their best to stave off new neighbors, and pilfer from the housed and unhoused to protect their territory or simply stay afloat. In summary, the combined effects of complaint-oriented policing and the individualized everyday acts of resistance against them encouraged atomizing practices of material and symbolic distancing through mutual avoidance and lateral denigration. Pitting individuals on the street against each other rather than the police, policies, or publics that oppress them, complaint-oriented policing creates the conditions of an “impossible community,” perpetually divided against themselves (Wacquant 2008:184). In these ways, complaint-oriented policing sets off a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy *producing* that which city officials claim merely to *address*: crime, violence, community “disorganization,” and a “service-resistant” homeless population.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article sketched a policing approach to social marginality I call complaint-oriented policing, which contrasts with existing scholarship in terms of its sources, enforcement, and impact (see Figure 6). First, the trigger of complaint-oriented policing is not rooted primarily under police command, nor does it hinge significantly on officer discretion. By expanding the lens of analysis beyond the traditional field of crime control and situating the police within a broader bureaucratic field of poverty governance, we see how police interactions are initiated by callers, organizations, and a host of government agencies through third-party policing. Second, use of arrest, which one might expect under aggressive patrol, is rare, and punitive sanctions are not used to push the poor into services, as with therapeutic policing.

	Aggressive Patrol	Therapeutic Policing	Complaint-Oriented Policing
Trigger	PD Command	Officer Discretion	Extra-Penalological Demand
Enforcement Practice	Arrest	Coercive Services	Burden Shuffling
Enforcement Function	Rabble Management	Recovery Management	Neutralization

Figure 6. Policing Social Marginality: Contrasting Approaches

Note: Based on Herbert, Beckett, and Stuart (2017) with the addition of complaint-oriented policing.

Instead, enforcement practices of spatial, temporal, and bureaucratic burden shuffling are used to manage homelessness within public space. Third, this policing results in consistent punitive interactions with state officials that typically do not result in incarceration but nonetheless exact material, psychological, and social suffering. These findings complicate existing frameworks for understanding the policing of social marginality, and they make broader contributions to theories of poverty governance, urban sociology, and citizenship.

First, complaint-oriented policing complicates the Foucauldian renderings of disciplinary power undergirding the frameworks of aggressive patrol and therapeutic policing that permeate the scholarship on poverty governance. Complaint-oriented policing does not primarily entail “taming” and “training” the homeless into “docile and productive subjects” (Foucault 1977) by using penal repression to push people into jail, as under “rabble management” (Bittner 1967; Irwin 1985), or using penal means toward welfare ends to shepherd homeless people into rehabilitative

programs, as under “recovery management” (Stuart 2016). Instead, under complaint-oriented policing, we observe how a range of street-level bureaucrats engage in burden shuffling, aimed at *neutralizing poverty* through incapacitation and invisibilization (see Marcuse 1988; Wacquant 2009).

I have shown how this post-disciplinary and seemingly ambivalent form of poverty governance results in the reproduction of homelessness, a deepening of poverty, and ultimately suffering. Expanding the conception of the criminalization of poverty, which is most often defined in terms of the disproportional impact of mass incarceration or traditional policing aimed at arresting the poor (Western 2006), I identified a series of mechanisms by which move-along orders and citations collectively work to dispossess the poor of their property; create barriers to accessing services, housing, and jobs; and increase individuals’ vulnerability to violence and crime. I observed variations in this enforcement by officers, and variation in methods of resistance or compliance by the unhoused, on a host of individual and social

differences, including race, age, gender, and disability, which I examine at length elsewhere (see Herring forthcoming; Herring et al. 2019), but this article aimed to connect the most systemic mechanisms of complaint-oriented policing with its most widespread effects on homelessness that I observed during my fieldwork. Many of the mechanisms and outcomes of criminalization identified here are applicable not only to complaint-oriented policing but to the policing of social marginality more broadly, and these findings contribute to our understanding of how governing the poor through the penal state intersects and often undermines efforts of the welfare state.

Second, this article looks beyond changes within policing and criminal justice policy toward its intersection with urban change and governance to explain increased policing by citizen demand through 911 and 311, as well as collective forms of third-party policing that have been largely overlooked in the scholarship. Although the technological implementation of homeless complaints in the 311 app was largely behind the massive increase in 311 calls for sanitation responses that led to widespread property destruction and move-along orders, it only explains a small portion, roughly 6 percent, of the increased police dispatches. To what degree the increase of police dispatches for homeless concerns is due to more people in the city, changing demographics of incoming wealthier and whiter populations who may have a higher propensity to perceive disorder and call the police (see Martin 2008; Sullivan and Bachmeier 2012), San Francisco's new urban development that has significantly reduced the physical space where people can camp out of sight and out of mind (Gowan 2010), or other factors requires further analysis. Furthermore, when considering that San Francisco's African American population plummeted from 11 percent in 1990 to less than 5 percent today (Walker 2018), and that nearly 40 percent of its homeless population is black (Applied Survey Research 2017), complaint-oriented policing provides another

link between urban change, housing insecurity, and racialized criminalization that has been undertheorized by scholars documenting the hyper-policing of people of color on the one hand and those studying the criminalization of homelessness on the other.¹¹

As a final note, complaint-oriented policing exposes new means of exclusion and fractures of citizenship. Widening the analysis of the policing of marginality beyond the police and politicians to encompass the residents and businesses who directly instigate the policing of the poor exposes the inherent yet underappreciated tension between the insecurity of the housed and insecurity of the unhoused. This study illustrates how those with access to private property who feel threatened by those without it are able to call on the police to remove them, which in turn directly increases the insecurity of the unhoused, whose survival is disrupted by criminalization. This relationship reveals the ways "propertied citizenship" (Roy 2003), a rights-based relationship between individual and state premised on one's access to property, is intimately tied to the increasingly popular brand of urban consumer citizenship that envisions the government as corporation, businesses as clients, desirable residents as customers and clients, and the city itself as a product (Brash 2011). The tenets of propertied and consumer citizenship work together to permit and normalize city residents' and businesses' calls on police and sanitation "services" to sweep the poor from city sidewalks, parks, and benches. However, unlike their housed neighbors, when individuals without shelter are faced with far more dire insecurities of theft, violence, and abuse, which are exacerbated by complaint-oriented policing, they have nowhere to turn. San Francisco is a sanctuary city, in part so undocumented immigrants, who may be housed but lack citizenship, may call on and receive protection from the city's police without fear of punishment, but the city's unhoused, regardless of their citizenship status, have no such protections.

In my observations of hundreds of police interactions in San Francisco, complaint-oriented policing was the dominant process of

policing homelessness. This is not to say aggressive patrol and therapeutic policing were not also used, but rather complaint-oriented policing existed alongside these previously well-studied forms of social control. San Francisco has dozens of officers walking the beat daily who exercise broad discretion over when to enforce quality-of-life laws, and every few months during my fieldwork a captain initiated a zero-tolerance campaign in their district. I witnessed officers justify their actions as pushing the “service resistant” into rehab as well as clearing out encampments to deter more serious crime. However, many interactions I witnessed could not be explained by theories of policing in the existing scholarship. Differences in urban conditions and poverty governance will likely determine the degree to which complaint-oriented policing is dominant, secondary, or tertiary to other approaches, and this requires further research. From my own previous comparative research on homeless regulation across eight west coast cities (Herring 2014) and regular correspondence with policymakers and organizers across the country, I have found complaint-oriented policing is ubiquitous in medium and large cities, albeit to greater and lesser degrees. Expanding the analysis of 911 and 311 data, as well as studying complaint-oriented policing beyond the case of homelessness (e.g., drug use and dealing, noise violations, illegal vending, and other offenses that disproportionately affect the poor), would all be fruitful lines of research to better understand the relationship between urban change, poverty governance, and policing.

The recognition of complaint-oriented policing as a mode of governing the poor also requires us to rethink policy approaches to reducing the criminalization of social marginality.¹² Were the locus of policing power concentrated more firmly in the hands of police command, powerful mayors, or the discretion of officers, one might simply aim reforms at these targets. The fact that the power to mobilize policing is much more widely distributed through caller complaints and third-party organizations suggests deeper

structural changes will be necessary. Furthermore, the court reforms emerging around bail, fines, and fees, although mitigating the problems caused by incarceration and citation, will not blunt the punishments of property destruction and move-along orders revealed in this article. In light of the study’s findings, nullifying anti-homeless laws either through constitutional challenges (Foscarinis 1996; *Martin vs. City of Boise* 2018) or legislation would seem more effective. Beyond these defensive maneuvers to decriminalize poverty, the recognition of complaint-oriented policing highlights the need for proactive measures that treat homelessness through increased public health services, social services, and ultimately housing. Otherwise, homelessness and poverty more generally will continue to be displaced into the hands of the police and the criminal justice system, which, through legal mandate or relative resource investment, inevitably become the “service providers” of last resort.

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ORCID iD

Chris Herring  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1873-426X>

Notes

1. Herbert and colleagues (2017) present three approaches to policing marginality: aggressive

- patrol, therapeutic policing, and officer-assisted harm reduction. The harm reduction approach is a nascent model that comprises extremely small teams of officers in early adopting cities, and thus I do not consider it in this study.
2. I took various steps to ensure to the best of my ability that I did not take a shelter bed from someone who needed one. Shelters were at full capacity nearly all the time, but during the first week of each month there were often free beds due to welfare payouts; during the winter months, with shelter expansion, one-night beds also became regularly available. Many nights I would wait for hours and walk out if it was apparent someone may not receive a bed.
 3. My main ethical concerns of observations on official ride-alongs were gaining authentic consent and avoiding traumatizing or losing trust among individuals I had spent time with on the streets, whether as a researcher or an advocate. I worried about the coercive incentive of gaining permission in the presence of law enforcement, but many people later told me that they were grateful I was present and felt I provided a shield from harsher or improper treatment.
 4. The 911 data used in this analysis can be found on my website (<http://Chrisherring.org>) under "Data Sets." Addresses are removed due to privacy restrictions of a data-use agreement I signed with the San Francisco Department of Emergency Management.
 5. I later confirmed the accuracy of the officer's understanding of the radio code with Department of Emergency Management officials. Another benefit of multi-sided ethnography is the ability to fact-check "hearsay" of bureaucrats implementing policies with those supervising and vice versa (see Lubet 2018).
 6. Because of the inherent methodological shortcomings in surveying a hidden population (Dennis 1991; Marpsat and Razafindratsima 2010), the survey used a nonrandom purposive sampling method with the aim of including homeless people from each neighborhood in San Francisco's central city. Survey proctors focused on public spaces where homeless people spend time, such as encampments and parks, as well as social service centers including shelters, drop-in centers, and soup kitchens. This locational assignment ensured a sample that was not biased toward frequent users of homeless services or those disconnected from these institutions, a common problem with surveys that rely on shelter users or soup kitchen patrons (see Dennis 1991). The surveys were completed over two weeks to reduce chances of duplication. The relative frequencies of homeless people by race, disability, sexual orientation, and shelter status in our sample were within the range of the frequencies reported in the two most recent survey samples of 1,200 homeless people conducted by the city.
 7. Although the bi-annual homeless count remained relatively constant during the research period, the recently released 2019 count found an overall increase of 30 percent and a 19 percent increase in the unsheltered population (Applied Survey Research 2019).
 8. This dispatch protocol ended in 2018 after preliminary findings of this research were presented to the San Francisco police commission and recommendations were made to reform call triage. "Well-being check" was removed from the 311 app as an option for users. Subsequently, 311 homeless complaints decreased, as did the portion of police dispatches, which a DPW administrator attributed primarily to this option's removal. This points to the power of technological and bureaucratic classification in the policing of poverty, as well as the role of research and community organizing in targeting these levers of power.
 9. Although homelessness ranks as a top 911 call for service, the only training officers received on the issue was a 30-minute overview of homelessness in the city during their Academy training. By the end of my fieldwork, I had become an instructor for this overview.
 10. Our citywide survey comprised a representative sample of individuals experiencing homelessness across shelter/street status to match the city's official point-in-time count. Only 50 percent of those surveyed resided primarily on the streets; others resided in shelters, vehicles, or hotels. For the sub-population residing in public space, police interactions were much more frequent: over 90 percent had been forced to move from public spaces and 85 percent had received citations, with nearly 40 percent receiving five or more citations in the past year.
 11. In similar disproportions to San Francisco, 12 percent of the U.S. population is African American, 23 percent of those in poverty are African American, and 41 percent of those counted as homeless are African American (HUD 2017).
 12. For a case study of how parts of this research in collaboration with the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness has worked to de-criminalize homelessness in San Francisco, see Alatorre and colleagues (forthcoming).

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Chris Herring is a PhD Candidate of Sociology at the University of California-Berkeley. His research examines housing insecurity, poverty, criminal justice, and urban government. His dissertation examines the causes, practices, and consequences of criminalizing homelessness in the contemporary metropolis. He has also published comparative research on mass homeless encampments across the western United States, housing policy struggles in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, and teaching social theory. Chris's writings, interviews, and links to related research can be found at chrisherring.org.