

Shelter Poverty

New
Ideas
on
Housing
Affordability

Michael E. Stone



Temple University Press

Philadelphia

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For Ursula, Erik, and Caleb.

Thanks for your love, your support, your indulgence, and your
endurance.

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Acknowledgments

This book is the culmination of over two decades of research, policy development, and advocacy on housing affordability. My engagement as a housing activist and interest in housing organizing as a potential vehicle for social change began when I was working for the Model Cities Program in Trenton, New Jersey, in the late 1960s. I first came to understand the centrality of mortgage lending to the housing problem, and the primary concern of housing policy with the interests of lending institutions and the financial markets, through a paper I wrote for a course on planning theory and the modern capitalist state at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1971. I conceptualized the shelter-poverty concept of affordability in 1972 while I was working at Urban Planning Aid, an advocacy planning organization in Massachusetts. And I initially formulated a program for non-speculative social provision and capital-grant financing of housing in a paper presented at a conference at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington in 1973.

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Shelter Poverty

Introduction

Housing is not only a necessity of life; it has a pervasive impact on all aspects of our existence. Housing—if it is adequate—provides privacy and security against intrusions, both physical and emotional. It is the principal locus of personal and family life. It defines our community and determines our access to jobs, to services, to stores, and to significant other people in our lives. It contains not only our material possessions, but our dreams and our despair.

Yet despite its intimate and profound significance, in the United States adequate housing (indeed, any housing) is not assured to all as a matter of right. Rather, for most of us, housing must be purchased as a commodity in the marketplace. "Affordability" is the measure of this quest to secure the housing we need and desire with the resources we have or can obtain. Affordability expresses the linkage between the well-being of individual families and the mechanisms of housing provision and income determination. The power and profundity of these relationships suggest that the persistent inability of one-third of this nation to afford decent housing will not be overcome through the idealization of selfish individualism, but through rediscovery of social responsibility and transformation of our economic institutions.

Housing Costs, Markets, and Affordability

It is not incomes alone, but housing costs together with incomes, that determine the overall standard of living of most of us. Why should this be so? Housing is physically quite different from other consumption items: it is large, durable, tied to location, and generally must be purchased as a complete dwelling unit, not as a shopping basket of separately selected items (rooms, facilities, amenities, location) in the way that food and clothing are purchased. Also, because housing is not literally consumed as food is, and hence not purchased anew on a regular and frequent basis, once a household occupies a particular dwelling it is hard to alter the amount and type of housing services consumed. The cost of housing is thus the biggest item in most families' budgets and the hardest to adjust. It usually makes the first claim on our incomes (after taxes), so that everything else has to be paid for out of what is left after paying for housing. When the rent or property tax goes up, a household cannot offset this cost by using the living room less or switching to a cheaper brand of bathroom. It has to pay the higher housing costs and then cut back on food, clothing, medical care, and other necessities. Obviously, in extreme situations people will feed their children even if it means not paying the rent. Soon, though, they will be out of their home—lucky if they can find a cheaper place or move in with someone else, homeless if they cannot.¹

Furthermore, because of the bulkiness of housing, its immobility, and its attachment to land, when people obtain housing they are not just purchasing the services of the dwelling, but the advantages and disadvantages of the location: physical characteristics, neighbors, accessibility, municipal services, and so forth. The amount that a household can and does pay for housing thus determines the entire environment in which it lives.

In our economic system housing affordability reflects the tension between the labor market and the housing market. Most people have to work for wages or salaries in order to obtain the necessities of life. But the inescapable pressure on employers to hold down costs in order to compete and maximize profits means that the labor market in no way guarantees any family that they will have sufficient income to pay for adequate shelter and other necessities.

On the other side, the cost of housing in the market is determined by the interaction of the costs of land, production, financing, marketing, operation, and, in most instances, repeated resale and refinancing. The cost of housing thus bears little relationship, at least in the short term, to

incomes. However, since housing is both a necessity and a commodity, over the long term its price is influenced by the ability to pay, which interacts with the profit expectations of the various housing investors. If the price of housing rises, people generally have to pay, but they obviously cannot pay more than they have or can borrow. That is, even though the private housing market may drive prices so high that many people cannot meet their non-shelter needs, some are forced to share housing, and others are rendered homeless, the price is ultimately limited by incomes. In this way the labor market can restrict the profitability, and hence the quantity and quality, of available housing.²

While the squeeze between high housing costs and limited incomes ultimately has a depressing effect on the housing market, it also exerts an upward pressure on wages. Investors in the housing market may be indifferent about whether the price of housing leaves households with enough income to pay for other necessities, but they do want buyers who can pay their prices. Since housing is a necessity which few people in this country can any longer provide directly for themselves by building log cabins or sod huts on unclaimed land, the need to be able to purchase housing and also obtain the other necessities of life impels the struggle for higher incomes. In this way the housing market tends to drive wages up, in opposition to the pressures of the labor market. Since housing costs are particularly decisive in determining the standard of living of every household, this tension between the housing and labor markets is particularly acute and the source of problems for the entire economy as well as for individual households.

Conventional Versus Critical Perspectives

The housing market and the labor market are socially created and maintained. Yet conservative analysts take them as given, "natural," indeed metaphysical institutions, any tampering with which inevitably mars the "optimal" outcomes they produce, generating undesirable "inefficiencies." (See Bassett and Short, 1980, part 1, for a critical overview.) Put most starkly, according to this perspective every household is by definition paying just what it can afford for housing, having evaluated rationally the manifold housing and non-shelter choices available to it and then allocated its available financial resources in the way that maximizes its satisfaction—or "utility" in the terminology of the economists. At its most absurd, this approach suggests that the homeless are

people who choose to spend all of their money on things other than housing, or, in slightly more sophisticated terms, that the homeless do not place sufficiently high personal priority on housing in comparison with other necessities to allocate enough of their (admittedly limited) resources to obtain even the cheapest available housing.

To the extent that adherents of this general perspective acknowledge any affordability problem, it is attributed to low income, on the one hand, and perverse public policies that impede the ability of the private market to provide more and cheaper housing, on the other (see, for example, Salins, 1980; U.S. President's [Reagan's] Commission on Housing, 1982). Thus, for example, serious arguments have been made, and given considerable public attention, that rent control has been a major cause of homelessness.³

Although a striking number of housing analysts and practitioners hold to the conservative and neo-conservative policy perspective of the allegedly virtuous market, it must be admitted that this is not the dominant perspective on housing markets and affordability. The prevailing, more liberal view does, to be sure, rest on belief in the fundamental efficacy of the housing market (as well as the labor market). However, its adherents also realize that affordability problems are due, in part at least, to "imperfections" in real markets, not merely impediments to their optimal operation. They recognize that the labor market, left to its own, will leave some people too poor to obtain housing and other necessities at the barest social minimum, no matter how many hours such people work and even if the housing market were to work at peak efficiency. They acknowledge that, given the nature of housing—its durability, bulkiness, indivisibility, locational fixity and land consumption, long construction time, and credit dependency—the housing market is inherently incapable on its own of providing an adequate supply at affordable prices for a substantial portion of the population (see, for example, Bourne and Hitchcock, 1978; National Housing Task Force, 1988).

This dominant perspective thus supports considerable government intervention—primarily fiscal but to some extent regulatory—to compensate for imperfections and enhance the private market. Direct subsidies, tax incentives, and risk reduction for investors are seen as necessary supply-side policies to stimulate housing production and reduce, to some extent, the direct cost of housing to consumers. On the demand side, housing vouchers and certificates, as well as homeowner tax benefits, are regarded as acceptable ways of increasing households' effective purchasing power in the private market. Antidiscrimination, tenants' rights, and

homebuyer disclosure measures are viewed as ways of overcoming barriers to equitable bargaining in the marketplace. Zoning and codes are intended to contain and correct for certain externalities or neighborhood effects, in no small measure to protect property values. From this perspective, problems of affordability, while rooted in the housing and labor markets, are seen as capable of being resolved, with assistance, within the existing mechanisms of housing financing, ownership, and production.

The spectrum of market-based perspectives assumes essentially a tradeoff between efficiency and equity. Those at the conservative end of the spectrum argue that the loss of efficiency resulting from public intervention in housing and labor markets is unacceptably costly in economic terms and ultimately counterproductive in social terms. The liberal end argues that social peace and distributive justice require some careful and limited sacrifice of efficiency as long as the basic institutions and incentives of the market are preserved.

By contrast, more critical perspectives contend that philosophical and methodological idealization of market mechanisms ignores the behavior of powerful actors, the defining force of legal and financial arrangements, and the role of the ideology of individualism and private property in shaping both the experience and the meaning of housing affordability. One critical approach—the institutionalist perspective—identifies the interests, power, and interaction among landlords, developers, realtors, lenders, local politicians, and their most influential constituencies in structuring the choices and constraints that define the housing cost side of the affordability relationship.⁴

The critique provided by radical political economy goes beyond the institutionalist approach in arguing that the agents who shape local housing markets and the households whose residential experiences occur in such markets all are situated within a larger context of the dynamics of capital accumulation, the reproduction of the social order, and the prevailing ideology. This context determines the institutional mechanisms within which the major actors in the housing, land, and mortgage markets shape the objective housing choices, constraints, and conflicts confronting individual households. It also shapes the *perceptions* people have of their housing situations, the relative desirability of the available alternatives, and the likely consequences of opting for one or the other.⁵

As one of the contributors to the development of such a critical perspective, I submit that the affordability problem is the inevitable result of real (not abstract) labor and housing markets. It is a problem that cannot

be resolved through the "natural" workings of these institutions, nor even through social adjustments to temper excesses, sustain profits, and assure social stability. The existing housing system has become both less equitable and less efficient, misallocating material and financial resources, increasing social inequality, exacerbating overall economic instability, and contributing to political cynicism as well as political conflict. Thus, while affordability is, on its face, simply a way of measuring in monetary terms the relationship between people and housing, at a deeper level affordability expresses a link between the social and economic system and the quest for the satisfaction of basic human needs that is not merely monetary. It is both an outcome and a source of tensions, conflicts, and contradictions.

The market-oriented analytical and policy framework is, I contend, an ideological strait jacket that prevents recognition of the nature, causes, and implications of the housing affordability problem, and inhibits thinking about the possibility of a housing system based instead on social principles in which market concepts might at most have a useful but subordinate role in the identification of housing preferences and the allocation of housing. This book develops and presents these arguments in detail.

Organization and Overview

The book is organized into three parts, each attempting to answer a fundamental question about the housing affordability problem in the United States. What is shelter poverty? Why does shelter poverty exist and persist? How can shelter poverty be overcome?

Part I moves in turn from reflection on the implications of housing affordability for the satisfaction of basic human needs, to the formulation of the shelter-poverty scale of affordability, and thence to an overview of shelter poverty in the United States at present. Recognition of the interaction among incomes, shelter costs, and the costs of non-shelter necessities leads logically to an affordability standard that is a sliding scale, rather than a fixed percentage of income. A household paying more than it can afford on this standard is "shelter-poor," the squeeze between its income and housing cost leaving it with insufficient resources to meet its non-shelter needs at a minimum level of adequacy. The shelter-poverty concept of affordability provides rather dramatic and compelling evidence of the inadequacy of the conventional standards (25 and 30 percent of income)—or any other universal percentage—for shelter affordability. It

provides a quantitative standard that can be readily adapted and applied to a whole range of programmatic, policy, and analytical purposes.

One-third of the people of the United States are shelter-poor. Strikingly, the shelter-poverty analysis does not reveal a more extensive housing affordability problem than does application of the conventional percentage-of-income concept, but does suggest a rather different distribution: the housing affordability problem among lower-income households and among larger households is much more severe than indicated by the traditional standard, but is rather less severe among middle-income and smaller households.

Part II examines the long historical relationship of the housing affordability problem to the economic system up to the early 1990s. It traces the interaction of affordability with short- and long-term economic cycles; housing construction and financing; grassroots organizing, especially by tenants; the promotion of homeownership; and the emergence and development of federal housing policy. I argue that the evolution of the housing system in this country can be understood as a history of attempts to cope with the social, economic, and political consequences of the affordability problem without altering the primary dependence on the labor market to distribute income and the private housing market to produce and allocate housing. In each major historical period these attempts have provided a measure of relief for systemic stresses, and even real housing benefits for some people, but always generated new problems and eventually undermined long-term social and economic stability.

Most particularly, the deepening and broadening of shelter poverty and the erosion of middle-income affordability over the past two decades are traced to both the labor market and the housing market. The responses of business and the government to the weakening international position of the United States and the associated squeeze on corporate profitability have produced widening income inequality, with those at the bottom experiencing declining real incomes and those in the middle barely keeping up with inflation, while those at the top have very substantially improved their standard of living. Meanwhile, housing costs have been driven to dizzying heights by unstable housing markets in many areas, perverse housing policies, and an increasingly volatile national mortgage market, as well as demand for housing from ever-richer households at the top of the income distribution.

This analysis contrasts with conventional explanations for the growing affordability problem. For example, emphasis on recent demographic factors tends to ignore the long-term persistence of shelter poverty and

the institutional context of private, speculative interests in housing and land within which demographic trends are played out. Substantial problems existed before the baby-boom generation matured, and the deep-seated weaknesses exposed over the past two decades provide no evidence that such problems will "naturally" be resolved as household formation diminishes.

In addition, understandable anger and concern about the withdrawal of the federal government from support for additional subsidized housing in the 1980s has all too often ignored both the larger dynamics of affordability and the real flaws in past federal intervention. Even in the era of considerable federal support for subsidized housing in the 1960s and 1970s, the new housing created never fully replaced what lower-income people lost, and rent subsidies have generally been insufficient to bring rents down to what shelter-poor households realistically could afford. Much of the subsidized housing produced in that period provided windfalls to private developers in the form of tax-shelter benefits. Predictably, as the opportunities for private profit from operating such housing for low- and moderate-income people have run out in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, developers have been selling and converting the housing to market rentals or condominiums where demand exists, or, in less desirable neighborhoods, simply defaulting on the mortgages and writing off their losses—except in those too-rare instances where the residents have organized effectively to save their developments as low- and moderate-income housing.

In addition, the widely publicized frustration and political rhetoric about diminishing opportunities for individual homeownership since the 1970s have tended to idealize ownership and overlook its contradictions. The attractions of homeownership are undeniable: most of us desire the security of tenure and control over our living space that only homeownership has seemed to provide in this society, along with the possibility of relatively stable housing costs, some equity accumulation, income tax benefits, and a sense of community membership and social status that homeownership has promised. While high acquisition costs and interest rates have made it difficult for all but the wealthiest to buy their first house, this is not the only, or necessarily the most significant, problem manifested by conventional homeownership. The risks of mortgage foreclosure and tax foreclosure have undermined the security this tenure appears to offer. The popular homeowner tax benefits are highly regressive, flowing mostly to households with the highest incomes. And many homeowners have placed the enhancement of property values

above the enhancement of community, developing resentment toward those regarded as lower in status, and erecting legal and economic barriers such as restrictive zoning regulations that raise housing costs and preclude socially responsible development.

Finally, inherent weaknesses in the system of housing finance led to expansion of secondary mortgage markets and financial deregulation, contributing to higher interest rates, inflation, and an explosion of debt that grew far faster than the ability to repay it. These problems interacted with speculative investment in existing housing and shifts in housing production toward luxury housing, pushing housing costs and mortgage debt up to outrageous levels, leading to spreading mortgage defaults and foreclosures, and thereby adding to the forces bringing about the collapse of lending institutions.

Once again a crisis point has been reached in which the cumulative effects of private actions and public policies have not only failed to solve the affordability problem for a very large proportion of our people, but have indeed contributed significantly to the broader and serious problems of the overall economy—particularly the instability of the financial system—as well as to the problems of the housing market itself.

Part III of the book builds upon the recognition of the extraordinary significance of housing for our individual and social well-being and upon an understanding of the deep sources and consequences of the affordability problem. This section seeks to bring the implications of the preceding sections together with the theme and goal of "the right to housing"—affordable housing as a social entitlement. It defines a framework for fundamental and long-term changes that can also guide new kinds of progressive and responsible public policies for the current period. The emphasis is primarily on transformation of the systems of housing ownership and finance. I examine the concept and various models of "social" housing—housing under various forms of non-profit, public, and resident ownership—that would ensure affordability, security of tenure, and other social benefits associated with homeownership, but without the possibility of sale into the private speculative market. I demonstrate the advantages of financing the production of new social-sector housing and acquisition of existing private housing for social ownership through direct public capital grants, rather than any form of debt.

I also present a number of specific programs and policies consistent with these long-term principles and goals. Many of these innovations are already being supported and implemented by a growing network of community groups, non-profit organizations, local governments, and even

several state governments—albeit in a limited way. Included are proposals for gradually expanding non-speculative and social forms of housing ownership, instituting public capital grants as well as financial reform to provide affordable and responsible financing, supporting community-based and non-profit housing development, responding to the particular needs of women and communities of color, and increasing private-sector accountability for housing and employment.

I then explore the role of housing affordability issues in the process of social change. The accomplishments and limitations of various homeowner and tenant organizing efforts of the recent decades, issues of gender and race in housing organizing, and the role of ideology in relation to organizing are examined. I conclude, finally, that apart from being a more logical way of defining affordability, the shelter-poverty concept might also have more radical implications. It fits people's experience of housing affordability more closely than does some arbitrary percentage of income. It reveals more clearly the dual bases of the affordability problem—in both the maldistribution of income and the private housing market. In these respects the shelter-poverty notion may not only challenge the conventional wisdom about affordability, but also contribute to building an effective challenge to prevailing institutions of housing provision. Political action around shelter poverty has extraordinary potential for contributing to the growth of consciousness and organization needed for achieving a society that is truly just and democratic, and also equitably and responsibly productive and prosperous.

Part I

What is shelter poverty?

Chapter 1

Human Needs and Housing Affordability

Housing is more than physical shelter. The residential environment consists of not only the dwelling unit but the site and setting, neighbors and community, municipality and public services, habitability and accessibility, rights and responsibilities, costs and benefits. Yet housing is even more than the residential environment, for it is only in relation to those who inhabit and use it that housing has meaning and significance—not only physical and economic, but emotional, symbolic, and expressive. We occupy our houses, and, for better and for worse, they become our homes.

The residence is both the primary setting for physiologic reproduction through eating, drinking, resting, and procreating, and a major realm in which our personality, values, and many of our social roles are defined, shaped, and experienced. It is here that our most intimate experiences and memories—painful as well as pleasurable—are situated. In our dwellings and residential communities we first encounter the definitions, expectations, and contradictions not only of individual identity, but also of class, race, and gender.

In its complexity and contradictions, the residential environment may be the setting of confusion, pain, and violence, yet it nonetheless continues to offer the hope of security, love, and expressive and aesthetic fulfillment. Thus, while many wish they could escape from homes and neighborhoods that are physically or emotionally oppressive, insecure,

unsafe, or unpleasant, few of us would choose to be "nowhere" rather than "somewhere." We quite properly use the term "homeless," not "houseless," to refer to those who are without permanent and personal places of residence, for there are needs beyond physical shelter for which a "home" is necessary, even if not sufficient.

Homelessness is the denial of the place where many of our most basic needs must be met. Yet homelessness is inseparable from a particular social context, in which the homeless are clinging to the lowest rung of a long ladder of affordability problems. It is a ladder that includes people who cannot pay for their housing and are displaced but do find other places, those who pay for their housing but then cannot adequately meet their non-shelter needs, those with unsatisfactory housing situations who cannot afford to move, and those who may be adequately housed but cannot afford the social ideal of homeownership.

What people actually pay for housing and what they would have to pay for preferable housing is often the most decisive element driving the quest for income; that is, housing expenditures are not determined simply by their passive expectation of what their income will be over the foreseeable future. For example, women have increasingly entered the paid labor force for a variety of reasons, but the cost of housing certainly is prominent among them. Women and men take on first, second, and third jobs, seek different jobs, work longer hours, play the lottery, and so on, in order to escape from homelessness, pay for their present housing, move to better housing, or save for a downpayment. This housing-driven quest for income may affect their emotional state, their physical health, their interaction with others at home, at work, in the community. In some instances these impacts may be positive—if, for example, a homeless person succeeds in obtaining stable, adequately paid employment in order to be able to afford permanent housing, or if a woman achieves dignity and fulfillment denied her in oppressive domesticity. But, in other cases, the effects on human needs may be less salutary: even if a family finally does financially "afford" a decent home, can it "afford" the non-financial costs of neglected children and family stress resulting from the struggle to pay for it?

Human beings live out their daily lives within a social, cultural, and institutional framework of meaning that is "taken for granted as reality" and "structured both spatially and temporally" (Berger and Luckman, 1966, 23, 26). Thus, while all of us have needs that may be frustrated or facilitated by our actual or potential housing situations, it is impossible to determine "objectively" how well housing "actually" meets a person's

needs. Specifically, this society has created a set of definitions of identity and fulfillment that most people have come to believe can be achieved only through housing, as Rakoff, for example, verified through his in-depth interviews with a sample of middle-income people (1977, 93–94):

First, the house was defined as a place where child rearing occurs; . . . my subjects agreed that it is the presence of children and the activity of family life that makes a house into a home. Second, the house was seen as an indicator of personal status and success, both one's own and others'. In part, this was an obvious variant on conventional status-seeking and conspicuous consumption, in which people were concerned with the judgments others would make of them on the basis of their residences. But more often, people spoke of the self-judging they went through, seeking evidence of their own success or failure in life in the quality or spaciousness of their houses, in the ability or inability to "move up" to better houses periodically, or even in the mere fact of owning some property or a house.

. . . [A] third aspect of the house's meaning revolved around the sense of permanence and security one could experience in his or her own house. In this regard, people spoke of "sinking roots," "nesting," and generally settling down. The house . . . seemed to be a powerful symbol of order, continuity, physical safety, and a sense of place or physical belonging. . . . Closely connected . . . was a fourth aspect of the house's meaning—the common notion that the house was a refuge from the outside world or even a bastion against that world . . . : a desire to escape from other people and from social involvement, the establishment of a place from which others could be excluded, and where, consequently, one could truly be oneself, in control, "more of an individual," capable of loving, and fully human.

In some ways these are legitimate expectations that are being frustrated, not only for lower-income people who have nurtured a receding dream of such fulfillment, but for increasing numbers of middle-income people who can no longer afford the "ideal home" they had come to expect as their birthright. From a more critical perspective, however, even though these desires may reflect legitimate underlying needs, placing such a heavy burden on housing—making it the principal means for satisfying so many needs—is problematical. In a society that is not able to

provide most people with security and identity through work, political participation, or creative recreation, people struggle to be able to afford housing that they believe and hope will meet their needs not only for shelter and security, but for identity. What if these expectations of housing are unreasonable and unrealistic? In these terms, the problems of housing affordability may not only expose frustrated and unfulfilled needs with increasing clarity, but expose at the same time the institutional and ideological illusion that the satisfaction of these needs is possible if and only if you can afford your "ideal home."

The Lower Depths of Affordability

The spread of homelessness and growing awareness of the plight of the homeless have led to a deeper understanding of the threshold of importance that housing affordability can have. The deaths of homeless people, most particularly from exposure to the elements, but also from violent assaults, powerfully demonstrate the threat posed by homelessness to survival itself. Even short of this most extreme level, people who are without homes for more than relatively brief or transitory periods suffer from a whole range of medical conditions (see, for example, Bassuk, 1991; Jones, Levine, and Rosenbery, 1991; Fischer, 1992): hunger and imbalanced diets are more likely; there are increased hazards to pregnancy, maternal health, infant and child development; sexual relations are more likely to transmit venereal disease; mental health is impaired. The homeless are especially subject to victimization and crime; they are all, but adolescents especially, "at high risk of sexual abuse, gang violence, rape, early pregnancy, venereal disease, and recruitment into prostitution, criminal activities, or a drug and alcohol culture" (Jahiel, 1987, 112).

The consequences for one's sense of identity are also powerful, as Matthew Dumont has eloquently expressed (quoted in Smizik and Stone, 1988, 229-230):

The fear of losing one's home, of being "on the streets," . . . is not merely the threat of exposure to the elements. The biological need for protection from intemperate weather can be satisfied by public shelters, waiting rooms, and even doorways. What gives the experience its particular horror . . . is a whole ecology of stressed realities. At some deep and central level of our emotional lives we all carry a sense of dread that we will someday be alone and abandoned in the world, like atoms in the void. . . .

The existence of a "home," an address, a place where someone we know can always be found, *where we belong*, is the only source of solace for that universal dread. [Emphasis in original.]

In some instances, "the sharing of a common fate and need to cooperate in some enterprises facilitates socialization among homeless people" (Jahiel, 1987, 113), and sometimes such collective action has actually become a source of empowerment. For the most part, though, self-esteem is undermined by the inability to obtain a home, and by the way a homeless person is regarded and treated by others.

The next level is the experience of being trapped in an unsafe housing environment. The dangers posed by unsafe wiring, plumbing, heating, porches, and stairs, or the presence of lead paint and vermin, threaten not only physical safety but emotional security. Above the basic physical threshold established in building and health codes, one's dwelling may be relatively free from threats to health and physical security, but may be less than fully safe physically and psychologically if there is the real danger of, say, violent intrusion or arson. Outside of the dwelling and structure, there are of course the physical and emotional dangers of being unable to escape from neighborhoods overwhelmed by crime or by noxious noises or chemicals (see, for example, Wilner et al., 1962; Rainwater, 1966; Schorr 1966). The thin line between entrapment and homelessness is captured poignantly by Hirsch (1989) in her tales of homeless women who can afford no emotionally safe alternative to the abusive and oppressive "horror of home" other than "the sanctuary of the shelter."

At the next level, involuntary displacement can undermine people's basic needs. Although some instances of displacement stem from natural disaster, accidental fire, or a similar cause, most involuntary displacement is experienced by lower-income people who cannot pay the price required by the private housing market and its present or potential investors. Whether such displacement is caused by redevelopment, private conversions to condos or luxury rentals, eviction for non-payment of rent, foreclosure, or arson for profit, affordability is implicated directly or indirectly (see, for example, Hartman et al., 1981).

Displacement from one's present housing, even if the housing is inadequate in some respects, is demonstrably threatening to the needs for security and identity. The threat depends upon the degree of attachment to the lost home, which may be due to particular characteristics of the dwelling or the neighborhood and how they are experienced, or simply to the security of a familiar and personalized "nest." For some people the