

“TAKING BACK THE PARK”: THE FRAMING OF A CONTESTED
PUBLIC SPACE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Alex Michelle Kempler has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Sociology.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2014, a problem that has long plagued Walla Walla, WA surfaced yet again—the sun came out, and so did the homeless, transients, youth, and street people who gather in Heritage Park on Main Street of the downtown. The park, a small space between Public House 124 and La Colombina, contains public art pieces, sits in front of a parking lot, and accommodates the historically changing demographic of occupiers under a central overhang. In 1998 (when the park occupiers consisted primarily of teenagers), Whitman Student Rebecca L. Hanson carried out informal interviews and participant-observations of park occupiers and community members, revealing the prevalence of youth discrimination in Walla Walla at that time. Seventeen years later, the Heritage Park occupiers are still considered a “social problem” (though a different kind of social problem) by many community members, as they feel that the supposed “rebellious” youth, homeless people, mentally ill, transients, and other “undesirables” have claimed it as their own (Editorial Board 2012). In the last couple of years, the number of police calls increased to such a point that a group of merchants approached the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation and the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance, asking them to conduct a study of the financial impact of park “occupiers” on downtown businesses.

The Heritage Square Park Study,¹ in which I served as a research assistant, began in the summer of 2014, with participant observation of the park along with surveys of the park occupiers conducted by volunteers and directors of the two organizations. For the

¹ I will refer to “Heritage Square Park” as “Heritage Park” throughout this thesis.

next part of the study, my team used online *Qualtrics* surveys to examine the resident, tourist, and merchant perceptions of Heritage Park and the downtown area in general; I was in charge of the merchant surveys. The overwhelmingly negative responses from merchants, juxtaposed with contradictory results from participant observations this summer (observers did not witness many disturbances, aside from marijuana and alcohol use), made me question what was really taking place between the supposed “occupiers” and merchants.

The framing of the Heritage Park “occupiers” as a “problem” constitutes an interesting sociological phenomenon. Merchants, police, and community members label them as “outsiders”—individuals who are not part of the Walla Walla civic system, and who are therefore incorrectly using public space. But, it is precisely the public status of the park that makes such framing problematic. Even if occupiers legally have the *right* to use the public space (as long as they are not participating in illegal behaviors), merchants still search for ways to label their behaviors and the people themselves as deviant. In the process of labeling the occupiers and constructing this situation as a social problem, then, merchants reveal how and why certain frameworks can become successful in persuading others that a social problem actually exists, despite only putative conditions.

In this thesis, I ask: how do Walla Walla merchants frame Heritage Park as a potential social problem? Through surveys with 25 merchants and semi-structured interviews with 15 merchants, I find that they construct the Heritage Park social problem using a series of rhetorical strategies, in order to convince others that the occupiers must be eradicated from the park. This framing took the form of referencing Walla Walla as an idyllic small town, asserting various opinions on where the social problem stems from,

spreading stories and framings throughout the merchant community, and suggesting multiple solutions to the social problem. In referencing Walla Walla as an idyllic town, merchants aimed to demonstrate that the occupiers are a social problem because they are “out of place in the social and spatial order” and therefore do not belong in the park (Tonkiss 2005:74). When asserting opinions on where the social problem stems from, merchants constructed different and sometimes conflicting facts in order to lay the groundwork for the conclusions of their arguments. These facts were disseminated through hearsay, including rumors about who the occupiers are and about what actually happens in Heritage Park. Finally, most merchants conclude that the social problem needs to be addressed by eradicating the occupiers from the park. This research suggests that social problems should not necessarily be taken as objective realities, as different interests might drive certain groups to construct social problems in order to generate change. Furthermore, through this research, we gain a better understanding of framing contests over public space, specifically in thinking about how and why certain groups of people might have access to public space and others might not.

Occupier Demographics

In the Heritage Park study, researchers attempted to determine the socio-demographic profile of the individuals who tend to occupy downtown Walla Walla streets and parks (including both Heritage and Crawford parks) for extended hours during the summer months.² A social service coalition conducted in-person surveys of ten teens

²After many committee discussions about the various terms commonly used to refer to the park occupiers, researchers decided that these terms were often derogatory and inappropriate. Researchers settled on referring to those who hang out in Heritage Park as

and fourteen adults, representing an estimated thirty-five to forty-five teens and adults who regularly occupied the parks and downtown Walla Walla in general in the summer of 2014 (Wollmuth and Agostini 2015:13). While the small sample size makes the demographics fairly hard to generalize to the entire occupier population, the results do provide a glimpse into the lives of some occupiers.

The teenagers ranged between 15 to 18 years, with the average age being 16.6 years. Adults ranged between 19 to 61 years, with the average age being 34.2 years. For both teens and adults, women represented 60% of those surveyed, while men represented 40%. This data can be seen in Figures 1-3.

Figure 1. Average Age of Occupiers

Teens	16.6 years
Adults	34.2 years

Figure 2. Sex, Teen Surveys

Male	4 (40%)
Female	6 (60%)

Figure 3. Sex, Adult Surveys

Male	4 (40%)
Female	6 (60%)

Just less than half of the teens surveyed reported that they regularly slept at the home of a parent or guardian. In contrast, a majority of the adults reported that they live on the streets and that they had experienced homelessness as a minor. This data can be seen in Figures 4-6.

“occupiers,” so as to encompass all varying situations under one neutral term (Wollmuth and Agostini 2015). Thus, I use this term to refer to this population throughout my thesis.

Figure 4. Where Teen Occupiers Sleep

At parent or guardian's home	4 (40%)
At a friend's house	2 (20%)
Wherever I can find a spot	3 (30%)
Somewhere outside	1 (10%)

Figure 5. Current Living Situation of Adult Occupiers

Live on the street	9 (64.3%)
Live in my own home	2 (14.3%)
Live with family	1 (7.1%)
Stay at Shelter	1 (7.1%)
Other	1 (7.1%)

Figure 6. Adult Occupiers' Experiences as Minors

	Yes	No
Foster Care	9 (64.3%)	5 (35.7%)
Homelessness	13 (92.9%)	1 (7.1%)

Less than one-third of the surveyed adults had received a high school degree.

Additionally, 92.9% of adult occupiers surveyed reported living in Walla Walla year-round and 78.6% of adult occupiers said that they live in Walla Walla because their family lives here. When asked why they spend time in Heritage Park and in downtown Walla Walla, adults and teens reported that the number one reason they did was to hang out with friends. This data can be seen in Figures 7-9.

Figure 7. Education, Adult Surveys

Middle School	2 (14.3%)
Some high school	8 (57.1%)
High School degree	3 (21.4%)
College B.S. degree	1 (7.1%)

Figure 8. Reasons Why Teen Occupiers Spend Time in Downtown Walla Walla

Hang out with friends	10 (100%)
To charge my cell phone	10 (100%)
To relax	3 (30%)
Nowhere else to go	3 (30%)
To listen to music	2 (20%)
To be in Heritage Park	2 (20%)

Figure 9. Reasons Why Adult Occupiers Spend Time in Downtown Walla Walla

	Heritage Park	Downtown Walla Walla
Hang out with friends	12 (85.7%)	7 (50.0%)
To relax	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)
Nowhere else to go	2 (14.3%)	2 (14.3%)
To sell drugs	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)
To buy drugs	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)
I like downtown	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)

Evidently, the Heritage Park occupiers and street people in the general downtown area of Walla Walla face challenges that most Walla Wallans do not on a daily basis, already placing them in a marginal and outsider category of the population. Even more, these statistics dispel some myths about who the occupiers are. For example, many feel that the people in Heritage Park are generally transients, when in fact almost all of those surveyed were locals. While it is possible that the actual transient population may have remained undetected, the numbers do demonstrate that a fair amount of them are locals. Additionally, it is hard to say whether the occupiers in the park are actually homeless. The homeless label is not easily definable in this case, as some may be seasonal homeless or may have a family to go home to. However, many of them probably do experience homelessness at some point in their lives, as almost 60% did fall into the traditionally defined category of homeless at the time of the survey. Finally, the occupiers use the park and downtown Walla Walla for the same reasons that many locals do: to hang out with

friends. Ultimately, the occupiers face many challenges and do not seem to be using downtown solely for the purpose of disrupting the social order.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

“When a rule is enforced, the person who is supposed to have broken it may be seen as a special kind of person, one who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed on by the group. He is regarded as an *outsider*.”
(Becker 1963:1)

Howard S. Becker’s 1963 book *Outsiders* provides the foundations for labeling theory, one of four frameworks that prove useful in explaining the situation in Heritage Park. Labeling theory holds that deviance is not a product of an act itself, but rather is dependent on how the general public labels certain acts and people as outside of the cultural norms. Becker focuses on the “process by which that judgment is arrived at, and the situation in which it is made,” denying the “common-sense” assumption that acts that break rules are inherently deviant (1963:4). However, the outsider often has a different view of the matter: “He [sic] may not accept the rule by which he [sic] is being judged and may not regard those who judge as legitimately entitled to do so” (Becker 1963:1-2). Outsiders, thus, view *themselves* as outsiders as well. Secondly, outsiders may continue acting “deviantly” because of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the outsider accepts the label given to him or her and is thus relegated into that deviant category. While I will not focus on the Heritage Park occupiers’ reactions to labels, it is important to consider these concepts when thinking about the relationship between merchants and occupiers.

Because deviance is determined by the labeling of certain behaviors as deviant, it logically follows that these labels and rules are never fully agreed upon and are “the object of conflict and disagreement, part of the political process of society” (Becker 1963:18). Accordingly, different social groups and organizations in Walla Walla (ex: the general public, the police department, and the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation) have

been in conflict for years over the labeling of deviance in Heritage Park. For example, Heritage Park is a public park, meaning that the occupiers are legally allowed to hang out there, and yet social groups that are interested in eradicating the outsiders search for ways to label their behaviors as illegal and deviant.

Becker continues by outlining four types of behavior that can either be perceived as deviant or not deviant. The first is *conforming* behavior, in which others perceive that behavior as obeying a rule or norm. The second is *pure deviance*, when a behavior disobeys a rule and is perceived as doing so. The third is the *falsely accused* deviant, who is perceived as disobeying a rule but has not done so. The fourth is the *secret* deviant, who is not perceived to be violating any rules but in fact has (Becker 1963).

While behaviors in Heritage Park might fall under all of these categories at some point in time, the *falsely accused* deviant is the most useful in understanding the deviant label under putative conditions.

Like labeling theory, social problems construction provides another lens for the framing of Heritage Park. Joel Best's (1990) work on social problems construction³ provides the most contemporary framework for my thesis. Best develops Spector and Kitsuse (1987) and Herbert Blumer's (1971) ideas of social problems as "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions" (Spector and Kitsuse 1987:75). This constructionist approach to social problems means that people must make claims that certain conditions are social problems, while others must respond to those claims. While Best looks at larger scale frames that are constructed and diffused across national or international lines, it is also

³ Used interchangeably with social problems framing.

important to look at how a social problem is constructed and framed in a smaller setting. In this situation, Walla Walla's claims-makers still exhibit the same characteristics that Best outlines: they express interests in promoting Heritage Park as a social problem, they have the resources to make their claim successful, and they have ownership of the problem, or the ability to shape the general public's definition of the problem (Best 1990).

Best continues by detailing the concepts of insiders, outsiders, and the social problems marketplace. The three principal types of claims-makers—the insiders—include lobbying organizations, professionals charged with handling the problem, and official agencies. They usually have direct access to policymakers. In comparison, outsiders include individuals and social movements that have limited access to policymakers. Outsiders hope to make their claims heard by the general public, which usually involves getting coverage by the media. However, both insiders and outsiders must compete in a social problems marketplace, in which there are many different claims-makers vying for attention. Insiders usually have an advantage in this respect because policymakers are more likely to respond to them. Regardless, Best argues that “interests, resources, [and] even ownership are not enough” (1990:17)—claimants need to make compelling arguments if they want to be successful.

In terms of rhetorical strategies, Best outlines Stephen Toulmin's structure of arguments, which includes grounds, warrants, and conclusions. Grounds provide the basic facts that allow for a discussion, and include definitions (domain statements and orientation statements), typifying examples, and numerical estimates (incidence estimates, growth estimates, and range claims). Constructed grounds are followed by

warrants, which are statements that justify drawing conclusions from the facts. Warrants, then, lead to conclusions, or calls to action to address the social problem (Best 1990).

Like labeling theory and social problems construction, moral panic theory treats deviance as an ascribed social category. Stanley Cohen, who provided the groundwork for the theory, defines moral panic as a “condition, episode, person, or group of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest” (Cohen 1972:1). As in labeling theory, something or someone is identified as the threat, labeled, and relegated into that category. And, as in social problems construction, the threat is constructed by mainstream society and is not necessarily founded in an objective truth. While most theorists analyze moral panics on national or international scales (as in Satanism or the War on Drugs), moral panic can be applied on the smaller scale to the merchants’ reaction to the occupiers of Heritage Park, as it corresponds with the five indicators of moral panic, including concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Ultimately, like Becker (1963), Best (1990), and Cohen (1972), I do not “ask *why* these disturbances occurred; instead [I ask] why mainstream *reacted* to these disturbances and on the scale it did” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:23).

Finally, theories of public space also help to explain the social problem of Heritage Park. Don Mitchell’s (2003) work investigates the contestation of rights in public spaces and argues that freedom in public spaces is determined by constructed definitions of the citizen and the non-citizen. Thus, as the general public includes and excludes certain people from the category of citizen, they also include and exclude certain people from having the right to access public space. Mitchell also provides some

detailed case studies of anti-homeless laws, of which he argues that the annihilation of certain behaviors in public spaces leads to the annihilation of certain people in public spaces. For example, a prohibition on sleeping in public spaces could potentially lead to a prohibition of homeless *people* in public spaces (2003).

Overall, labeling theory, social problems construction, moral panic theory, and public space theories work together to explain how the merchants understand and construct the social problem of Heritage Park. To begin with, merchants have the power to label and relegate the occupiers into the category of “outsider.” These labels provide the basis for the construction of Heritage Park as a social problem, as merchants are now able to define the problem as an invasion of outsiders rather than a public space contest between fellow citizens. The outsiders, then, become a threat to societal values, to which merchants react disproportionately to the objective facts themselves. Finally, by relegating occupiers into the category of outsider and non-citizen, merchants can define who has the right to public space and who does not.

CHAPTER 3: WALLA WALLA'S CLAIMS-MAKERS

The merchants are evidently not the only claims-makers in Walla Walla. In fact, I acknowledge that a multitude of different claims-makers and arguments do exist, and I do not view their claims as any less important or relevant to the Heritage Park “social problem.” However, I chose to focus on a small aspect of the issue, so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a specific claim. Furthermore, from the results of the merchant surveys this fall, I understood that the merchants were fairly united in their claims, making that particular group especially enticing when thinking about social problems construction. However, I would like to provide a broader overview of the other claimants that are active in the discussion of this issue. I will outline seven of the most prominent claims-makers on this issue—the police, tourism organizations, social service agencies, residents, tourists, the city, the Sherwood Trust Community Leadership Program Cohort of 2014, and the media—realizing that this is by no means an exclusive list nor does it represent a comprehensive understanding of their specific claims. Each group or set of groups represents different interests and has been active in the formulation of the Heritage Park social problem.

To begin with, the police have been extremely involved with the situation in Heritage Park. In the summer of 2014, between the months of June and September, the Walla Walla police reports indicate that “the number of incidents occurring in Heritage Park was more than five times greater than those occurring at the intersection of 1st and Main Streets, and more than double the incidents occurring in Crawford Park during this same time period” (Wollmuth and Agostini 2015). That meant that there were 71 police

calls to Heritage Park during that period, 34 for Crawford, and 12 for 1st and Main. The magnitude of police calls demonstrates that the police may view Heritage Park as a social problem. As many merchants referenced in their interviews, the police are typically frustrated with the situation, as they feel that there are more important things they could be dealing with. And, because it takes time and manpower to police the area, they might be interested in decreasing the police calls for Heritage Park so that they can police all areas of Walla Walla successfully. Because I did not interview a member of police force directly (although I did have exposure to their viewpoint in various meetings I attended regarding Heritage Park), I do not feel comfortable making a blanket statement about their claims aside from their general frustration and classification of the situation as a “social problem.”

Next, I would classify the tourism organizations, such as the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation and the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance, as running more neutral ground. However, they do have underlying interests, specifically to make Walla Walla attractive and enjoyable for the tourists. These organizations would be classified as insider organizations in Joel Best’s terms because they do have direct access to policy makers and resources, unlike the merchants. They were, thus, recruited by the merchants to conduct a study that would present the correct grounds for which to make decisions in their favor. Regardless of whether or not the results ultimately represented the interests of the merchants or the interests of the foundation, Duane Wollmuth and Elio Agostini argue that they wanted to provide objective data on the situation and recommendations

(rather than decisions) that were grounded in that data (Wollmuth 3/9/2015).⁴ They, thus, strove to find objective solutions and to draw somewhat of a middle ground on the issue in order to unite policy makers, merchants, and others in the final decision-making process. Their meetings included representatives from most of the claims-making groups in Walla Walla.

Despite the intent to keep the report objective and to draw on the different opinions from each group or group of people, some readers were skeptical about whether the report only represented the interests of the tourism organizations. Regardless of whether the report was actually objective or not, it is important to address the possibility of conflict between seemingly aligned organizations. Even if certain claims-makers like the wine alliance and the foundation present their arguments or data (in this case) as objective, they could have underlying interests that align with business owners or just the organizations' goals in general.

The next group, social service agencies, took a stance that diverged from the general business framework. Unlike many of the business owners, they felt that the social problem likely stemmed from structural issues and they hoped to provide more services to the occupiers. One example of this approach was the Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Event in November of 2014, held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church by the Interfaith Coalition on Poverty. The invitation for the event stated, "Issues surrounding problems of homelessness in Walla Walla are ongoing and need to be approached from a standpoint of care and concern for challenged members of our society" (Interfaith

⁴Wollmuth, Duane. 2015. Personal interview, Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance, Walla Walla, WA, March 9.

Coalition on Poverty 2014).⁵ The theme was “Stories from Heritage Park” and it featured two Heritage Park occupiers as speakers (they hoped for a larger turnout of occupiers, but these were the only ones who showed up). The event attracted more than 200 Walla Walla residents—they had to move the audience to a bigger room just to accommodate the unexpected number of guests. They featured various speakers, who provided facts and stories, and allowed for small group discussions and comments to the larger audience. The crowd seemed to react in an emotional way, as audience members stood up to talk about their own experiences with homelessness or their disgust with how some Walla Walla residents felt about the situation. One critical audience member pointed out that they needed to stop talking and take action. While it seemed as though this event was a call to action, there seems to have been no follow-up event or concrete actions taken by the Walla Walla resident community (individually, it’s hard to say).

Accordingly, the residents form their own claims-making group. While the Walla Walla residents may be more divided on the issue than other smaller or more unified groups, the Heritage Park Report did hint at some of the perceptions that Walla Walla County Residents have of Heritage Park. Of those surveyed, roughly one-fourth of residents reported that their experience with and/or observations of Heritage Park had an impact on the time they spent in downtown Walla Walla; seventy percent of those respondents reported that that impact was negative. Likewise, roughly one quarter of residents reported having had an unpleasant experience or interaction in or near Heritage Park (Wollmuth and Agostini 2015). These results indicate that at least some Walla Walla residents do characterize Heritage Park as a social problem and find the people

⁵ The Interfaith Coalition on Poverty. 2014. “Stories from Heritage Park” Email Invitation, Walla Walla, WA, November 12.

who spend time there unpleasant. It also indicates that residents are not as concerned or unified on the issue either because they are not around it as often or they have not had any negative experiences with the park. It does not affect their interests as greatly as it affects the interests of other claimants (although I'm sure that there are some residents who would argue that it affects them greatly).

The tourists had similar survey results, although it might be harder to generalize to the tourist population, as it is even larger than the resident population and is comprised of a broader demographic than those surveyed. Of those surveyed, nearly two-thirds of the tourists who had visited downtown Walla Walla reported that they had noticed Heritage Park. Nearly one in five tourists rated the park poorly on a five-point scale ranging from *very good* to *very poor* (Wollmuth and Agostini 2015). Evidently, not a great number of tourists even notice Heritage Park, some even thought of it positively, and none recounted any interactions they had had with park occupiers. Thus, it seems as though tourists would not really have a shared claim for the social problem of Heritage Park.

The city, however, has been greatly involved with plans and meetings regarding Heritage Park. Historically, the city has been more business oriented, tending to look at Heritage Park as a social problem that must be fixed. Because the city interacts with almost all of the other claimants, the other claimants influence their decisions, and, even though they are the final decision-makers on the issue, they do not have total freedom in making those decisions. Instead, the claimants that have the most resources might influence decisions. For example, the Sherwood Trust Community Leadership Program

Cohort of 2014 has been very involved in the plan to redesign Heritage Park because they have the funds to support that kind of redesign.

While the Sherwood Trust Community Leadership Program Cohort of 2014 has been interacting with and involved in decision-making with the city, they have a somewhat different stance than the city typically does. The Sherwood Trust was founded by Donald and Virginia Sherwood in 1991, with the goal to make the Walla Walla Valley reflect the highest sustainable quality of life for everyone. Each year, they sponsor a community leadership project cohort, made up of private citizens of Walla Walla. This year, these citizens have chosen to focus on the redesign of Heritage Park as their community project, with the goal of making the park more open and accessible to everyone; they do not aim to make the park less hospitable for the occupiers. Thus, they are involved with many social service agencies and take a more service-oriented approach to the Heritage Park issue. They do see Heritage Park as a social problem but they do not necessarily see the occupiers using the public space as a necessary part of that social problem (Beckmeyer 3/12/2015).⁶

Finally, the media, specifically the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*, has tended to sensationalize the issue of Heritage Park. While there are some articles in the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* that have tried to take a more unbiased stance on the issue, most of the articles detail the illegal activity, the tattooed and homeless occupiers, and the disruption they are causing to the rest of the Walla Walla (Diaz 2014; Editorial Board 2012; Editorial Board 2014). These articles assume that Heritage Park is a social problem affecting the general population of Walla Walla and sensationalize the framework that

⁶ Beckmeyer, Kelsey. 2015. Informal meeting, Colville Street Patisserie, Walla Walla, WA, March 12.

most merchants asserted in a fairly rational way. For example, as one article states, “It’s all about focusing on behavior. If illegal activity is taking place, it should be handled by law enforcement. Same goes for those using it as a campground” (Editorial Board 2014). Ultimately, the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* tended to take a more conservative stance on the issue and relegated the occupiers into the category of non-citizen.

In conclusion, these seven claimants and frameworks—the police, tourism organizations, social service agencies, residents, tourists, the city, the Sherwood Trust Community Leadership Program Cohort of 2014, and the media—make up the broader claims-making process regarding the social problem of Heritage Park. When these claims-makers come together, there are evidently diverging and converging interests. Social service agencies and the Sherwood Trust Cohort seem to have the most converging interests in terms of providing adequate services for marginalized populations. However, the Sherwood Trust Cohort may diverge with social service agencies, and may align with the city on certain ideas, in order to protect the interests of the city. Likewise, the tourism organizations may try to align with each claims-making group on certain issues, but ultimately has the diverging interest to protect business and the wine industry in downtown Walla Walla. In my view, the media likely would align with whoever provides the best story—perhaps the business owners. Residents and tourists, on the other hand, might be fairly apathetic to the issue, unless it affects their interests directly (for example, if a resident cannot take his/her child to the park anymore). The police might converge with business owners, as they would also like more business and less policing in the downtown area.

Ultimately, “who and what a city is for is a matter of diverse social, economic and

cultural claims. These competing claims open onto conflicts over space and power, cut lines of division and difference in the city, and are fought out in disputes over meaning and representation” (Tonkiss 2005:65). In other words, many different claims-makers are vocal in defining this social problem, specifically in defining who has the access to this public space. These claims are sometimes at odds with each other, and their success in the disputes depends greatly on resources and rhetoric. While there is not necessarily a “winner” in the disputes over the Heritage Park social problem yet, the situation demonstrates how diverging interests might spur groups to construct the problem differently.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

When examining research on social problems construction and public spaces, four primary themes emerge: 1) how occupiers take control of public spaces, 2) behavioral rules in public spaces, 3) exclusionary laws in public spaces, and 4) reactions to outsiders in public spaces. Understandably, many of the discussions of these topics tend to focus on homelessness, including the stigmatization of homelessness, as well as larger organizations' framing of homelessness.

Public Space Literature

Literature on public space overlaps with different disciplines, including geography, politics, history, and sociology. Within this body of literature, researchers explore the ways in which marginalized groups occupy and navigate public spaces. Trouille (2013) examines how a group of Latino immigrant men take control of a public soccer field in West Los Angeles, an area in which they constitute racial and ethnic minorities.⁷ Trouille seeks to understand how group boundaries are constructed and sustained in public spaces, revealing that individuals within this group continuously enforce informal authority in order to take claim over the soccer field. While Trouille's research is useful in understanding how insider and outsider groups are maintained in relation to public space, the research does not lend itself to examining the occupiers from the perspective of the general public, but rather examines how the occupiers view

⁷ While this example does not concern the demographic characteristics of the occupiers of Heritage Park, I think that it is useful piece of research that examines how a marginalized group can take control of a public space.

themselves. While other researchers have conducted similar studies on the ways in which marginalized populations take control of public spaces (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1995; Deener 2010; Suttles 1968), these studies do not capture the reactions to the occupation of public space. Regardless, the theme of the navigation of public spaces by outsiders demonstrates how the occupiers of Heritage Park might take control of a public space that supposedly does not belong to them.

The second pattern in this specific type of public space literature was the idea that the general public can make rules about how people behave in certain public spaces. For example, Dixon, Levine, and McAuley (2006) explore research that has been done on “street drinking” in order to demonstrate how certain activities become classified as “everyday incivilities.” They argue that the categorization of street drinking into an unacceptable or acceptable activity is contingent upon how the public constructs the space in which that drinking is occurring. Thus, public space limits free conduct to the extent that social groups create and enforce rules for that space.

Other researchers expand on this idea of behavioral enforcement by exploring the ways in which policies actively exclude marginalized populations from public spaces; this was by far the prominent pattern in this specific literature. For example, Marcia England (2008) explores the history of exclusionary laws in Seattle. In the late 1980s, Seattle’s business owners were becoming concerned that the growing population of street people would deter shoppers from downtown Seattle. In response, the city implemented laws that aimed at removing prostitutes, drug users, and other individuals from public view. Stay Out of Drug Areas (SODA) were instated, keeping “unwants” out of public spaces, and in turn, “idealizing” public space as well as its inhabitants.

Ultimately, England argues that ordinance excludes individuals who are marginalized to begin with and that different factors work together to construct norms about who can use public space and how that space should be used.

Expanding on the theme of exclusionary and behavioral laws, Randall Amster (2004) looks at the ongoing trend of the criminalization of homelessness by conducting participant observations, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews with city officials, social service providers, and street people. Amster explores gentrification, anti-homeless laws, the erosion of public space, resistance to these trends, and anti-systemic movements. Ultimately, Amster comes to the conclusion that anti-homeless laws are increasing dramatically and that they only work to exclude populations that are already severely marginalized. Likewise, Don Mitchell (2003) takes a historical and geographical approach to examine how social institutions include and exclude specific citizens and behaviors from public spaces. Mitchell uses a series of historical cases—anti-abortion protests, the Free Speech Movement and People’s Park in Berkeley, and anti-homeless laws—to demonstrate how laws surrounding public space in cities are enacted and regulated. Specifically, Mitchell’s exploration of anti-homeless laws provides insight into how anti-homeless legislation can not only annihilate certain behaviors from public space, but can also work to annihilate homeless *people* (rather than simply illegal activity) from public space.

Finally, as most literature on the occupiers of public space deals with these kinds of exclusionary laws, a small amount of research looks at the other ways in which cities and towns have dealt (or could deal) with their “problem” of undesirables occupying public spaces. Baillergeau (2014) looks at the historical responses to the presence of

marginalized groups in public spaces, including the rationalities of public order, public health, and social justice. While criminalization has been the historical reaction to unwanted people and behavior in public spaces, Baillergeau asserts that the public order rationality does not necessarily have to conflict with the public health and social justice rationalities. She uses Montreal as an example, explaining that the city has addressed their homeless situation by using all three rationalities. Ultimately, Baillergeau asserts the theme of differing rationalities, expanding on the other themes in public space literature of the control and navigation of public spaces, behavioral rules in public spaces, and exclusionary laws in public spaces. Like the public space literature, the social problems construction literature on homelessness parallels the situation in Heritage Park.

Homelessness Literature

Courtney Cronley (2010) provides a general outline of how homelessness has evolved over time in America. Beginning in 1965, the government created the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Homelessness was framed as a structural issue throughout the 1960s, during deinstitutionalization and the Civil Rights Movement.⁸ Ironically, deinstitutionalization left many disabled people without a safety net, landing them directly into homelessness. As a result, the 1970s began a shift to cut funding in HUD and endorse the individual perspective, changing homeless demographics to include women, children, and families, while simultaneously increasing the general homeless population. Even the first federal homeless policy (1987) and the

⁸ The deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill from large state institutions was spurred partly by the egalitarian notions of the Civil Rights Movement. Although the intention might have been to free the mentally ill from inhumane hospitals, deinstitutionalization ended up creating more problems for the mentally ill in America (Yohanna 2013).

1995 *Blueprint for Reinvention of HUD* only addressed individual level problems and decreased federal assistance to the homeless. In 2003, President Bush revived the conversation, committing to ending homelessness in 10 years, while advocates for the homeless remained skeptical of his tactics.

Paralleling this history of homelessness in America, research on the homeless increased dramatically in the 1970s and the 1980s, as the homeless population grew and as new groups fell into the homeless category. The literature is broad, incorporating studies of definitions of homelessness, demographic characteristics of homeless populations, causes of homelessness, health among the homeless, media framing of homelessness, policy solutions, the homeless experience, and identity work among the homeless (Meanwell 2012). Because the constructionist approach is perhaps less popular in the broader homelessness literature, there are only a few sources that directly apply social problems construction to the issue of homelessness. Even more, the literature on problem framing that does exist focuses more on macro-level applications, such as looking at media, policy makers', and organizations' roles as claims-makers in shaping homelessness in America and larger cities. The literature provides a general idea of how social problems construction can be applied to the merchants' framing of Heritage Park occupiers, specifically through the lens of the general public's stigmatization of homelessness and larger organizations' framing of homelessness.

Stigmatization of the homeless by the general public. Some studies reveal that public opinion is supportive of addressing homelessness as a structural problem and suggest that citizens are fairly well-informed about homelessness (Toro and McDonell

1992). However, other researchers have reinforced the contradictory finding that the public stigmatizes the homeless as lazy or irresponsible (Meanwell 2012). Accordingly, researchers find that the homeless are stigmatized more severely than the domiciled poor and that the homeless label is equivalent to the label of the severely mentally ill (Phelan et al. 1997). The theme of how domiciled individuals construct stigmatizations of homeless populations parallels the “othering” of Heritage Park occupiers in Walla Walla.⁹

Continuing the theme of stigmatization by the general population, Barrett A. Lee and Christopher J. Schreck (2005) conducted a quantitative study using data from a national survey to find that homeless people are victimized disproportionately and also that different dimensions to marginality, such as disaffiliation, health problems, traumatic events, and lifestyle exposure, all increase the odds of being victimized. Lee and Schreck (2005) also suggest that homeless individuals often alternate between being the victims or offenders of crimes, and that greater levels of victimization may lead to greater levels of crime. While Lee and Schreck locate the stigmatization of homeless people in their level of marginality (coming from within, rather than from an outside influence), it is also the case that domiciled individuals generate this stigmatization.

Accordingly, Hodgetts et al. (2011) use 16 qualitative interviews with domiciled individuals in New Zealand City to demonstrate how these individuals draw on shared characterizations of homeless people, creating ‘social distance’ between the groups. In relation to Heritage Park, merchants may distance themselves from Heritage Park

⁹ “Othering” can be defined as the processes by which dominant groups might label marginalized groups as fundamentally different, therefore relegating them into the category of “other.”

occupiers in a similar way. While these domiciled individuals are not necessarily claimants as defined by social problems constructionists, they represent public opinion and demonstrate a means through which claims are spread. Ultimately, Hodgetts et al. provide a lens to how claims from merchants might diffuse throughout Walla Walla's general population (Best 2001).

Larger organizations' framing of homelessness. The social problems construction literature also explores the role of larger societal groups in framing homelessness as a social problem. For example, researchers have examined how the media influences public opinion and shapes the common frame of homelessness. Rachel Best (2010) uses content analysis of Denver's two major newspapers to reveal that most articles did not present homelessness as a social problem and that routine events (events by government actors, events sponsored by advocates for the homeless, and events surrounding the release of studies), rather than shocking events (such as murders of the homeless), are more likely to present homelessness as a social problem. While Best's findings may not be explicitly applicable to media coverage and framing of Heritage Park, they do underline how media coverage can frame the general opinion of the social problem of homelessness.

Similarly, Philip O. Buck, Paul A. Toro, and Melanie A. Ramos (2004) conducted a comprehensive content analysis of the American media's coverage of homelessness from 1974 to 2003. They reveal a steep increase in media coverage during the mid-1980s, a decline in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and another increase in the mid-1990s. They also reveal a common "sympathetic focus on deinstitutionalization and other structural causes of homelessness" (2004:151) during the spike in coverage in the mid-1980s, as

well as an emphasis on programs and services for the homeless in the mid-1990s. The shifting media frameworks illustrate how media has the power to construct a framework whenever and however they would like in order to serve their own interests. Even more, this research suggests that there are interactions between “media coverage, professional interest, public opinion, the prevalence of homelessness, and policy initiatives” (2004:151).

Other research extends the theme of how *organizations* frame homelessness. David Croteau and Lyndsi Hicks’s (2003) research details how homelessness coalitions must develop a “consonant frame pyramid” (251) that aligns coalition, organizational, and individual frames if they would like to create social change. They find that organizational frames compete in order to be adopted into the larger framework and that sometimes these competing frames clash. Cress and Snow’s (2000) study on the outcomes of homeless mobilization reveals similar findings that organizational viability and the rhetorical quality of frames greatly affect outcomes for social change. Ultimately, research on organizational frameworks demonstrates that these organizations must have the resources and the ability to communicate a unified frame in order to create change. Organizations in Walla Walla, such as the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation or the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance or the Christian Aid Center, do have the power to create these unified frames, given that they also have the resources to be successful. While the merchants may not make up a formal organization, they do share a common framework, which might be diffused through media, organizations, and other entities in order to create change.

Finally, research explores how political frameworks can generate change, with the implication that resources have a great effect on which political framing will succeed. Darren Noy (2009) uses a case study of San Francisco's homeless policy field to reveal that shared framings among a majority of actors in the policy field did not actually lead to a cooperative alliance nor a coherent policy based on shared framings. Unlike the research on social organizations, Noy suggests that a shared framing does not necessarily lead to change. Instead, resources play a major role, as the small minority on the political right shared a differing framework and possessed greater material resources and political influences, and thus had the biggest influence on changes in policy. Noy touches on Best's idea that in order to create change, claimants not only have to use the right rhetoric, but interests, resources, and ownership also factor into whether the claim will be successful.

Cynthia J. Bogard's *Seasons Such As These: How Homelessness Took Shape in America* (2001) synthesizes the themes of media, organizational, and political constructions of homelessness by illustrating how advocates and activists, government officials, experts, and the media constructed the social problem of homelessness in New York and Washington, DC during the 1980s. Focusing on the social construction of this problem, Bogard argues that it wasn't just the increased numbers of homeless Americans that brought homelessness to the forefront of America's concerns during this time—frames of homelessness by many different actors construct the common national framework. Likewise, different structures in Walla Walla, such as media, policy, and aid organizations may uphold or challenge the merchants' claims.

Ultimately, research on social problems construction and public spaces overlaps with the framing contests over the Heritage Park occupiers by demonstrating how marginalized populations can be excluded from public spaces as well as how different groups of people can frame homelessness as a social problem. However, because the literature tends to focus on larger-scale frameworks and on the exclusionary laws that result from these arguments, more research is needed in order to understand the process by which specific stakeholders construct their arguments around social problems. Moreover, research should investigate how and why certain frameworks can become successful in persuading others that a social problem actually exists, despite only putative conditions.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

In an informal interview session I had with Duane Wollmuth of the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance, he stated simply, “Our intent with this study was to provide more factual data to base decisions on” (3/9/2015).¹⁰ With the Heritage Park Report, Duane and Elio, thus, wanted to generate objective data so that the different claims-makers of Walla Walla could come together and make an informed decision about Heritage Park. While the team did accomplish the goal of generating a fairly objective report, it is hard to know whether the decision-making process on Heritage Park has been completely objective. I wanted to further the research of the larger study to understand the politics behind the decision-making process: how were claims formed about this social problem? How could a claim become successful? I focused in on one aspect of the larger study, the merchant framework, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how one group of claimants in Walla Walla fits into the larger claims-making and decision-making process. In this section, I will give an overview of the methodology of the Heritage Park Study, the connection of the larger study to my own research, and, finally, the methodology of my own research.

Initially, the Heritage Park Study was aimed primarily at determining whether the Heritage Park occupiers were having a negative financial impact on Walla Walla merchants. However, researchers—decidedly focusing on perceptions rather than

¹⁰ I conducted an informal interview with Duane Wollmuth of the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance. I also had an informational meeting with Kelsey Beckmeyer, a Policy Advisor for the Walla Walla Housing Authority and a former member of the Sherwood Trust Leadership Class. I recorded the interview (with the permission of the interviewee as well as the signing of the informed consent form) and took notes in the meeting.

numbers—determined that finding any real financial impact on business was outside of the scope of the study. Instead, the study encompassed a multitude of different objectives, as detailed by Duane Wollmuth and Elio Agostini in the “Heritage Square Park Study Report” (8-9):

1. Determine whether there is a significantly higher rate of illegal activity occurring in downtown Walla Walla parks (i.e., Heritage and Crawford) than elsewhere in downtown Walla Walla.
2. Determine whether reported illegal activity in Heritage Park accurately reflects the true incidence of the illegal activity that occurs in the Park.
3. Determine whether there is any consistent and/or consequential physical or verbal interaction of a negative nature (e.g., confrontation, intimidation and/or aggressive “panhandling”) that takes place between Heritage Park occupiers and passersby.
4. Determine the socio-demographic profile of the individuals who tend to occupy downtown Walla Walla streets and parks (including both Heritage and Crawford Parks) for extended hours during the summer months.
5. Determine and attempt to evaluate the relative importance of the reasons why adults and teens occupy downtown Walla Walla streets and parks.
6. Identify and attempt to evaluate the relative importance of the various social, economic and healthcare needs of occupiers of downtown Walla Walla streets and parks.
7. Determine the socio-demographic profile and downtown Walla Walla visitation behaviors of tourists and Walla Walla County residents.
8. Determine the general attitudes and reactions (if any) of Walla Walla tourists and Walla Walla County residents toward Heritage Park, and whether these perceptions have changed their visitation behaviors in downtown Walla Walla in recent years.
9. Determine if a relationship can be found to exist between the downtown visitation behaviors of Walla Walla County tourists and residents, and their perceptions of problems created by the people occupying downtown parks and streets.
10. Determine merchant’s satisfaction with doing business downtown and people occupying downtown parks and streets.
11. Determine whether downtown merchants believe the presence of occupiers has caused a financial impact on their business.
12. Determine if a correlation exists between downtown merchant’s proximity to Heritage Park and their overall satisfaction with doing business in downtown Walla Walla, and also their perception of whether occupiers are having negative impacts on their business.

13. Determine whether downtown merchants believe the presence of occupiers is creating a negative image for the City of Walla Walla.

Accordingly, the methodology for the study was extensive, incorporating seven components. The first step began this summer, as researchers evaluated the City of Walla Walla Police Department incident reports (from June 1 to September 19, 2014)¹¹ in order to determine whether there was a higher incidence of criminal activity occurring in Heritage and Crawford Parks than elsewhere in Walla Walla. Next, ten trained observers gathered participant observation data during twenty-one 2-hour sessions over the week of August 20, 2014 (Wednesday to Sunday). The observations were concentrated on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and spanned between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 12:00 midnight. Finally, the Youth Alliance conducted in-person surveys at Heritage Park and at social service locations of both adults and adolescents. These surveys were not randomly administered, but were targeted and in-person.

For the next part of the study, three Whitman students, including myself, Jenny Gruenberg, and Brianna Brown, used online *Qualtrics* surveys to examine the tourist, resident, and merchant perceptions of Heritage Park and the downtown area in general. For the tourists, the team solicited the Whitman College Alumni Weekend email list, the downtown Farmer's Market, the Whitman College Parents Weekend front desk, and downtown winery tasting rooms. For the residents, the team randomly selected 800 respondents out of the Walla Walla County List of Voters and mailed out flyers, asking them to complete an online survey. There was no incentive to complete the survey. Lastly, for the merchants, the team distributed flyers to a list of forty downtown Walla Walla merchants within a three-block radius of Heritage Park, asking for the owner or the

¹¹ The time of the year that many occupiers gather in Heritage Park.

manager to complete the online survey. The final and last step of the study was an informal telephone interview, conducted by Duane Wollmuth, with the County Sheriff of one of California's leading wine country destinations.

While the study was extensive, it was not without flaws. Both volunteers conducting the in-person surveys of park occupiers and the team of Whitman students conducting the *Qualtrics* surveys struggled to get a large enough sample size. The in-person surveys resulted in 14 adult respondents and 10 teen respondents. While the information gathered (ex: age, living situation) proves useful for understanding the current situation of park occupiers, it is fairly hard to generalize to the larger population. Likewise, the tourist surveys resulted in sixty-six respondents, almost all of which were Whitman affiliated in some way. Our goal was to get a larger, more representative sample size of around 150 respondents, but our attempts to reach the biggest population of tourists at wineries resulted in zero respondents. For the residents, we had a slightly better response rate at about 12%, but it was also lower than desired. Finally, the merchant surveys resulted in a response rate of 62.5%, with a fairly well distributed sample in terms of location in relation to Heritage Park. While we hoped to get as many merchant opinions as possible, acknowledging that losing a merchant respondent would result in a greater skew of the data than losing a resident respondent, the response from merchants was more generalizable to the larger merchant population. In terms of bias, it is helpful to take into account the possibility that those merchants who did choose to respond to the survey may have stronger views on the situation in Heritage Park.

The Heritage Park Study was, thus, an attempt to understand differing frameworks and facts on a broad scale; I wanted to focus in on a specific framework to

understand it more comprehensively. Ultimately, my work with the merchant surveys and examining outside perceptions of the park occupiers led me to question why the merchants of Walla Walla framed Heritage Park in the way that they did. Despite the fairly small sample size, the merchants evidently had a shared framework, as all but one of them answered that they felt that the park was creating a negative image for Walla Walla. The overwhelmingly negative responses from merchants, juxtaposed with contradictory results from participant observations this summer (observers did not witness many disturbances, aside from marijuana and alcohol use) and resident and tourist perceptions of Heritage Park (only around 25% of both samples demonstrated negative attitudes towards the park and park occupiers)¹² seemed curious to me. The findings led me to my overarching research question: how do the Walla Walla merchants frame Heritage Park as a potential social problem? I generated four additional research questions inductively: 1) Why is Heritage Park a social problem for the merchants of Walla Walla? 2) Where does the social problem stem from? 3) How is the social problem disseminated throughout the merchant community? 4) What are the conclusions of the framework?

I moved forward with semi-structured, qualitative interviews in order to get at the interests, resources, and rhetoric that merchants had and used to try to generate social change. I constructed a list of 27 questions, including demographics, general experience doing business in Walla Walla, experience with Heritage Park and Heritage Park occupiers, and proposed solutions. I contacted the merchants through email, attaching a description of the study and the informed consent form, and followed up with phone calls

¹² I will reference the “Heritage Square Park Study Report” findings throughout my thesis and detail the merchant survey findings in my results section.

to set up interview times. Most interviews were conducted in the merchant's business, with just a couple taking place at downtown coffee shops. I anticipated that interviews would last between thirty minutes to an hour.

The sample consisted of fifteen merchants within a three-block radius of Heritage Park who had volunteered on the merchant surveys in fall of 2014 to participate in future interviews.¹³ The distribution of businesses in relation to Heritage Park was fairly even, with about one-third within one block of the park, one-third within two blocks, and one-third within three blocks. Seven of the merchants interviewed were male, and eight were female. I did not ask for race, ethnicity, or income. All merchants were either Walla Walla or Walla Walla County residents; some merchants had lived here all of their life. Most interviewees were the owners of their business, and just a couple were the managers of their business. Most of their businesses were established within the last ten years, but there were some outliers who had been in Walla Walla for quite a while.

When returning from winter break, I had to edit the interview questions in order to account for changes that had already been made to Heritage Park. I worried that because the city and the Sherwood Trust Cohort of 2014 were already starting to redesign the park—the playground had been taken out—the merchants would think that the problem was resolved and already being addressed. I tweaked my proposed solutions section to include a question about whether they had read the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* in the last couple of weeks and were aware of changes that were already being made. While a couple of them were very aware of what was going on, most of the merchants had not read the articles and had to ask me what the plan was before forming an opinion

¹³ Nineteen had volunteered and provided contact information initially. Two of those never returned my calls and one turned me down.

on the matter. Thus, I felt that this issue really did not affect the merchants' answers to a great extent, with most acknowledging Heritage Park as a social problem that still needed to be addressed.

Another concern I had during the interviews (especially those conducted in local coffee shops) was the presence of others influencing the answers that the merchants gave. Sometimes, if there was a customer close by or many local people around, I felt like interviewees were holding back, trying to be politically correct, and so on. I appreciated those interviews in which I had the full attention of the interviewee and could tell that they felt as though they could let their guard down around me. Also, my first interviewee refused to be recorded, evidently because she was skeptical that her identity could be revealed. While I did take notes during that interview, I was unfortunately not able to transcribe the interview and will not be able to use her statements to their full potential. Finally, interviews varied greatly in length. Some people had plenty to say, with my longest interviews being around an hour, while others were short, with my shortest interviews being around fifteen minutes. Most interviews did fall around thirty minutes. All interviews, aside from the first, were recorded on a smart pen, which I felt was convenient and discreet. While the shorter interviews might not be as rich in data, they did provide valuable insight into the merchants' views of Heritage Park.

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them using the uploaded audio files, my computer, and Microsoft word. I did not use transcribing software. I transcribed every pause, stammer, um, and like, because I wanted to understand what subjects the

merchants were most comfortable talking about.¹⁴ I kept all files on a USB drive that I kept with me at all times and uploaded a second copy to Whitman's *Netfiles*. I then coded them using *Nvivo*. I generated most nodes inductively, by reading through transcripts and picking out themes that I felt were significant. Some codes I generated deductively, by thinking about what kinds of themes could be applied to my theoretical framework. The codes evidently resulted in themes that I expected and others that I did not, allowing me to adjust my theoretical framework accordingly. I edited, added, and collapsed nodes as I went on. Then I prioritized certain nodes and deleted those that did not appear to be as significant. Finally, I assigned pseudonyms to the interviewees fairly randomly, while adhering to the gender of the interviewee.¹⁵ Ultimately, I was happy with my sample and I feel that these merchants were representative of both the diverging and converging viewpoints on Heritage Park.

¹⁴ I edited the quotations that I have included in the written thesis to make them more understandable for the reader. I have included these kinds of breaks in speech in the quotations when necessary and I have indicated when I have made significant changes by inserting brackets around changed text.

¹⁵ Most respondents did appear to be Caucasian, with conventional names like Bob and Jane. I did not choose to adhere to ethnicity of the interviewee when choosing pseudonyms so as not to reveal the identity of an ethnic minority.

CHAPTER 6: MERCHANT SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The questions in the merchant survey were primarily concerned with the perceptions that Walla Walla merchants had of the park occupiers and of the park itself. Overall, the merchants held overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards park occupiers and towards the park itself, demonstrating a shared framework and desire for some kind of change. These results should be looked at as subjective and constructed perceptions of the social problem of Heritage Park, rather than as objective realities.¹⁶

To begin with, we asked a few general demographic questions regarding the business, including when it was established, the merchant's job title, and the address. Four of the businesses had been around for over 120 years, nine of them had been around for 10-25 years, and twelve had been around for under 10 years. Sixty-nine percent of the merchants were the owners of their business, while 31% were the managers. One third of respondents were each one, two, or three blocks away from Heritage Park. Then, we asked some general questions about the merchants' experience doing business in Walla Walla; they were extremely satisfied. On the 7-point likert scale ranging from *very dissatisfied* to *very satisfied*, 92% of merchants fell between *somewhat satisfied* to *very satisfied*. The remaining two merchants responded with *no opinion/don't know*. This data can be seen in Figure 10 below.

¹⁶ While observations might appear as objective realities, it should be noted that merchants do not necessarily report only instances witnessed first-hand. Instead, as will be elaborated on in the merchant interview results, their understanding of the social problem of Heritage Park is shaped by the stories they have heard from other merchants and from the general public.

Figure 10. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with doing business in Walla Walla.

Answer	Response	%
Very Satisfied	11	46%
Satisfied	9	38%
Somewhat Satisfied	2	8%
No Opinion/Don't Know	2	8%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Total	24	100%

Next, we asked the merchants to rate their level of satisfaction on thirteen characteristics of downtown: 1) history 2) small town ambiance 3) types of people likely to be downtown 4) cleanliness 5) downtown events 6) number of shoppers 7) safety/crime 8) condition of the streets 9) quality and availability of shopping options 10) directional signage 11) gangs 12) parking availability 13) transients/street people. Merchants felt least satisfied with transients and street people first, then parking availability, and lastly with gangs.¹⁷ When we asked them their overall level of satisfaction with transients or street people in downtown Walla Walla, 84% responded that they were either *somewhat dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, or *very dissatisfied*. For gangs, 42% responded on the range of *somewhat dissatisfied* to *dissatisfied* to *very dissatisfied*. For parking availability, 60% fell on this range.

Next, we asked whether downtown merchants felt that the presence of occupiers has caused a negative financial impact on their business in the summer of 2014. Again,

¹⁷ The terms *Gangs* and *Transients/street people* were used in the merchant survey prior to adopting the term occupier. These terms were also more accessible and commonly used by merchants.

using a 7-point likert scale, 68% of merchants responded in the categories *slightly agree* to *strongly agree*. Sixteen percent of merchants did not know and 16% of merchants did not believe there had been a financial impact on their business in the summer of 2014.

This data can be seen in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11. Do you feel that there has been a financial impact of transients and street people on your business this summer?

Answer	Response	%
Strongly Agree	2	8%
Agree	6	24%
Slightly Agree	9	36%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4	16%
Slightly Disagree	1	4%
Disagree	3	12%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	25	100%

If merchants answered on the scales of *slightly agree* to *strongly agree* on this question, we used a skip-logic to direct them to a follow-up question asking them to rank the perceived amount of negative financial impact on their business in the summer of 2014. Merchants were not as certain about the impact in these responses, as 40% fell on the *slightly high* to *very high* range, 40% fell on the *slightly low* to *very low* range, and the remaining 20% were not sure. This data can be seen on Figure 12 below.

Figure 12. Please rate the overall level of impact of transients and street people on your business this summer.

Answer		Response	%
Very High		1	4%
High		4	16%
Slightly High		5	20%
No Opinion/Don't Know		5	20%
Slightly Low		4	16%
Low		6	24%
Very Low		0	0%
Total		25	100%

We then asked the merchants to indicate what kinds of activities they had witnessed in Heritage Park in the summer of 2014. We gave them a list of nine activities that were commonly reported, and gave them the option of listing other activities (a write-in response) as well as indicating if they had not witnessed any of those activities. They were asked to check all that apply. Only two merchants responded that they had not witnessed any of those activities in Heritage Park, while the rest of the merchants fell all over the spectrum in terms of activities witnessed. The only option that had zero responses was the physical harm of innocent bystanders. The write-in responses included attempted break-in of cars, sleeping on property, public fighting in the park and on the street, property damage, used syringes and needles left behind, trespassing, not picking up pet feces, infants strapped to strollers all day and every day, speeding cars in and out of the back parking lot, daily drug dealings, pandering and solicitation of cigarettes, alcohol and public intoxication, damage to all the landscaping within the park, loose dogs, vandalism, and plugging in cell phones into city power outlets. This data can be seen in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13. Have you witnessed any of the following activities downtown this summer?

Answer	Response	%
Consumption of illegal drugs or alcohol outside of licensed downtown facilities	18	72%
Nudity or sex acts	3	12%
Physical harm of innocent bystanders	0	0%
Intimidation (physical or verbal) of innocent bystanders	17	68%
Swearing	20	80%
Physical damage to property	14	56%
Urinating or defecating in public	9	36%
Aggressive panhandling	12	48%
Littering	20	80%
Other (please specify)	8	32%
I did not witness any of the above in downtown Walla Walla this summer	2	8%

Next, using the proximity of the business to Heritage Park as our independent variable and merchants' level of satisfaction with transients/street people as our dependent variable, we ran a bivariate correlation analysis to determine if there was a relationship between location and dissatisfaction. We grouped the business location into three categories: one, two, and three blocks away from Heritage Park. A third of the businesses fell into each category. Using SPSS, we assigned these categories the values of 1, 2, and 3 (with 1 being assigned to the category of three blocks away). Ultimately, we found a moderate correlation of +.40, indicating that businesses closer to Heritage Park tended to be more dissatisfied with transients and street people than those located farther away.

Finally, we asked the merchants if they felt that the presence of transients and street people in the Heritage Park area of downtown was creating a negative image for the city of Walla Walla. 96% fell on the scale of *slightly agree* to *strongly agree*, with

only one responding *neither agree nor disagree*.¹⁸ This data can be seen in Figure 14 below.

Figure 14. Do you believe that the presence of transients and street people in the Heritage Park area of downtown is creating a negative image for Walla Walla?

Answer	Response	%
Strongly Agree	14	56%
Agree	7	28%
Slightly Agree	3	12%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	4%
Slightly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Ultimately, the merchant survey results grounded the common framework that came out in the merchant interviews. The merchants seemed to be united on certain questions, notably, in their dissatisfaction with transients and street people and in their belief that Heritage Park was creating a negative image for Walla Walla. On other questions, like ranking the negative financial impact that Heritage Park had on their business, they were uncertain. This contrast between strong opinions and tentative fact-assertion led me to investigate the merchant perspective further.

¹⁸ The final question was a write-in response that asked them to provide any additional comments they might have. Not a single merchant chose to write-in additional comments. However, we did ask them to provide their contact information if they would be willing to participate in future interviews; 19 out of the 25 merchants provided this information.

CHAPTER 7: WHY IS HERITAGE PARK A SOCIAL PROBLEM?

One of the inductive codes that arose as a predominant theme in my interviews was that Heritage Park is a social problem because Walla Walla is a small, idyllic town. Accordingly, merchants felt that the population of homeless, street people, transients, and youth was in some way abnormal to Walla Walla. Merchants upheld this concept of small-town idealism in multiple ways, including referencing how things used to be (60%), discussing the overwhelming support that locals have for their businesses (40%), bringing up memories of the “ideal” Heritage Park of the past (53%), and distancing Walla Walla from larger cities (67%). Every single merchant interviewed spoke about Walla Walla in at least one of these ways. This framework led to the justification that because Walla Walla is a small, idyllic town, Heritage Park and the occupiers are a blemish on an otherwise problem-free community.

A Town of the Past

When discussing characteristics and aspects of Walla Walla that they appreciate when doing business here, 60% of merchants referenced Walla Walla as a quaint, small town. These merchants generally placed value on the old-timey nature and aspects of Walla Walla, such as the slower pace of life, the restored and historic buildings, and the apparent lack of crime. For example, one merchant, Joe, locates Walla Walla in a specific time and space by making a reference to the old television show *Mayberry*,

God, I’m gonna sound like a rich snob. Because, um, uh, because, downtown, so if someone comes here from Seattle, or, another metropolitan area, which is where most people are coming from, Walla Walla to them is *Mayberry* [...] This is what people remember their

childhoods to be like, when they could grow up and they could go anywhere and their kids could go anywhere without them worrying [...] So people, when they come here, they think, wow, this is a throwback, and it is, for many, many reasons—it's definitely a throwback.

Joe's initial concern that he's "gonna sound like a rich snob" demonstrates a linguistic technique used commonly by merchants to justify negative opinions of the park occupiers. By acknowledging his awareness of his own privilege, he excuses himself from taking the blame for any opinions that might be looked down upon by the general public. Goffman (1959) would refer to this as impression management, as this merchant deliberately tries to manipulate my impression of him.¹⁹ He continues by paralleling Walla Walla to Mayberry, a small, utopic—and frankly, fictional and nonexistent—town of the past. In doing so, he reveals his personal expectations that Walla Walla should embody something that is, in his mind, achievable, but which is, in reality, an unattainable and fictional utopia. Ultimately, Joe uses the utopic concept of Walla Walla to justify his opinion that there should be no crime, no street people, and no homeless in this idyllic town. Ultimately, as long as people construct Walla Walla as a "Mayberry," then any disruptions that ideal image would likely be seen as a "social problem."

Likewise, other merchants employ the same kinds of justifications in order to frame their arguments and to assert their view that Heritage Park is a social problem. As Jennifer states, "you come to a small town that has done so much work at restoring their downtown, making it attractive [by] redoing the buildings, doing the trees, doing all of that and then having a nice park there and then allowing it to really be taken over." Like Joe, Jennifer feels that the historic nature of Walla Walla is a quality that attracts tourists

¹⁹ Impression management was evident in most merchant interviews. Merchants used similar and differing techniques in order to manage impressions.

to the town. She also reveals an underlying assumption in her logic—this idyllic town and this potentially idyllic park only belong to a certain type of people. Thus, Jennifer labels the occupiers as “outsiders” that do not deserve access to the park. Instead, she argues that the “undesirables” have taken away ownership of the park from the general public. However, the fact is that, the park is a public park that no one in the general public, including both the occupiers and the merchants, can “own.”

According to some theorists (England 2008), ownership depends on who gets to be counted as a “citizen.” Citizenship can be defined as “a specific type of social bond between members of a community which symbolizes material connections of culture, tradition, and, usually, geography and which also *usually separates one group of citizens from another*” (Jones 1997:3). Citizenship is thus defined through processes of inclusion and exclusion, in which those individuals who are united under the values are included in the category of citizen, while others are excluded from this category. The definition of a “citizen” is inherently subjective, as some merchants may perceive the occupiers to fit into the category of citizen while others may not. Because most of my respondents, like Jennifer, perceive the occupiers to be either secondary citizens or non-citizens, the merchants do typically regard themselves to be the rightful owners of the park.

Merchants expand on this idea of contested ownership of both the town and the park. For example, Victoria talks about moving to Walla Walla about five years back and her experience with the locals who come into her store,

It’s a very small town [and] it was originally a farming town, you know, and so there’s a little bit of that, fifth generation, you know, “are you from here?” No. You know, and I know people who have lived here twenty years and they’re like oh, I’m not even from here, I’m not local yet, I’ve been here twenty years, you know. So there’s a bit of that older mentality

of, you know, the wine people, which, I get it, if I was born and raised [in Walla Walla] and a wheat farmer.

While Victoria does not explicitly reference Heritage Park in this quotation, she does demonstrate her general understanding of Walla Walla as a community. In her mind, Walla Walla does not really belong to the new money, the wineries, or the students, but instead belongs to the farmers who were around when it was, in fact, the small idyllic town from the movies. For example, Victoria highlights some pre-existing divides that may exist between insiders and outsiders in Walla Walla, as the salt-of-the-earth farmers who have been in Walla Walla for many generations have the power to exclude newcomers from the “local” category. But, just as born-and-raised Walla Wallans can exclude her from belonging to her own current place of residence, she (along with the general public as a whole) can exclude park occupiers from belonging to their own hometown. Categories of citizen and non-citizen are, again, subjective and ever-changing realities, as the newly arrived merchant can be an outsider to the long-standing citizen at the same time that the occupier can be an outsider to all merchants. Interestingly, both of these exclusions stem from the belief that Walla Walla should remain an idyllic town of the past—one that is pure fiction (Mayberry) and one that actually did exist (Walla Walla before the wine industry).

Furthermore, Victoria introduces tensions that may exist within the merchant community. Some long-standing Walla Walla residents do not necessarily appreciate the wine industry and do not want Walla Walla to change. The wine industry has created a more progressive and high-end vibe for downtown Walla Walla, which challenges the small-town feel while simultaneously bringing outside money into downtown. Curiously, both merchants in the wine industry and other industries subscribe to branding Walla

Walla as a small, idyllic town in order to target individuals from urban spaces (despite the seeming contradictions between the high-end wine industry and the small-town image).

Support for Local Businesses

Forty percent of merchants expressed the idea that the community provides support for local businesses as a means to maintain the small-town image of Walla Walla. For example, these merchants referenced local support as a way for residents to express the fact that they do not want Walla Walla to grow or to change. Others referenced support from other business owners as something that impacted their own business positively. As Darren states, “the community is very supportive of everyone business-wise; we all really want everyone to succeed because it helps our success as well.”

Likewise, Jennifer states that “there’s a lot of community support for local businesses. People really want to get out and see other people in the community be successful, and they voice that when they come in, so, we know that’s a big part of the smaller community.” Jennifer acknowledges her view that there are certain qualities and values that should be inherent to “smaller” communities and this evidently includes an overwhelming support for local businesses. Another merchant, Mary, provides insight into why this characteristic might be necessary for smaller communities,

Walla Wallans don’t necessarily want the town to grow. Now some of them do—there are always exceptions that want some of the, you know, bigger box stores here so they don’t have to go to the Tri-Cities for things—but for the most part they kind of wanna keep it as the local, smaller businesses, and then they want to support that so that we can stay here, [so that] we don’t have to worry about it.

Mary acknowledges that small local businesses are a thing of the past. Walla Walla has not grown like some other small towns have—it does not have bigger box stores, and the

closest mall is an hour away. And, even if bigger box stores increase the options for locals, residents do not want Walla Walla to change in that way. Instead, Mary argues that residents, too, buy into this brand of Walla Walla as a small, idyllic town, and feel that its “quaint” image must be protected. Similarly, Jennifer notes,

I think that across the United States there’s more of that, want to eat local, you know, use your local farmers, help support local businesses, [...] and so I think that that has caught on even more as we’ve gone along here. Back to the smaller, regular old person, and, you know, eat when you have food in season and help support the local farming and organic and the market and that kind of stuff has taken off so much.

While other merchants contend that small local businesses were never really uprooted in Walla Walla—that they are instead entities that represent the historic Walla Walla—this merchant implies that locals are going back to their roots in supporting small local businesses. Regardless of the validity of her statement, Jennifer communicates a certain amount of nostalgia on the part of locals for the perceived idyllic past of Walla Walla. Phil builds on this assessment by expressing his discomfort at the magnitude of support he received when he opened his business,

One of the things when I built my business plan is I didn’t really count on the huge “support local” contingent out there, who will support local regardless of what you’re selling, and I really, it was kind of, it was kind of embarrassing to me that people were, I felt like, giving charity because, [...] I’m gonna present you a product which is very competitive and I’m gonna provide you with superior customer service and I’m gonna wrap it for you and that’s why you should come after me, not for some other reason, because you’re local. And when that happened I was like wow, this is pretty cool, everyone thinks I’m like a demigod or something. It was weird. By that I mean it was just a very big contingent of people who want to shop local, and that’s had the biggest impact.

Phil had locals coming into his store that were not even interested in his products, but bought them because they felt it was extremely necessary to support local businesses. He states that he felt like a “demigod,” elevating himself to a very powerful person in the

eyes of local customers. Indeed, Phil suggests that small local businesses do have an important role in protecting the idyllic image of Walla Walla, and that local customers have an important role in keeping those small local businesses there. In this way, the Heritage Park occupiers not only create a problem for the tourists, but also act as spatial anomalies in the *resident* construction of idyllic Walla Walla. This is inherently problematic for the merchants because they are interested in protecting the idyllic image of Walla Walla in order to attract business from both residents and tourists.

Memories of Heritage Park

In the same way that merchants referenced local support as a way for residents to express that they do not want Walla Walla to change, merchants also spoke about their memories of Heritage Park to demonstrate that the park was better before it changed. Fifty-three percent of merchants spoke about their memories of Heritage Park before the occupiers hung out there, idealizing the old park in a similar way to their nostalgia for a Walla Walla of the past. Notably, almost all of those respondents made some reference to Heritage Park as a place where they used to take their kids or where kids used to go. Accordingly, those kids generally do not come to the park anymore (aside from one merchant who still took his granddaughter there before the play structure was taken out), and these merchants use this as evidence to frame their argument.

Even more than the other arguments about idyllic Walla Walla, this argument is used as a powerful rhetorical device in order to convince others of their overarching framework. Joel Best (1990) believes that arguments are founded upon socially constructed knowledge, and claimants assert this knowledge using three different

grounds: definitions, typifying examples, and numeric estimates (25-26). These grounds provide the basis for a discussion that follows. Best would describe this strategy as a warrant that allows the audience to make a conclusion based on socially constructed facts (31). Accordingly, merchants argue that even if others are not affected by Heritage Park, the most innocent citizens of Walla Walla—the children—*are* affected negatively, providing ample reason to give the problem attention. The argument is thus intended to provoke action and is alarmist in ways that the other idyllic Walla Walla arguments are not.

When speaking about Heritage Park of the past, merchants used words such as “enamored,” “love[d],” “quaint,” “nice,” “wonderful,” and “enjoyable.” By using words with such positive connotations, the merchants demonstrate that this was not a park that was left unnoticed and unused. Here, the rhetoric is the key to their framing, as it builds on the idea that the occupiers have “taken over” their once useful park. As Kim states,

I used to think it was wonderful, but now it’s got such limited use for it, we used to have customers that would come in and ask, “Where do we go eat lunch at a park?” and we used to send them there. But the tables have come and gone so many times, they’ll have tables there, they won’t have tables there, they used to go have picnics there and have a large group of, or a basketball team would go eat there or something but they don’t, can’t do that anymore, so that’s, it’s just lost its usefulness to a large portion, I guess it is useful to a small portion of people that want to use it.

Kim was one of the only merchants that did not mention the children that used to be able to go to the park. To her, the park was instead a convenient place for picnics and groups of the general public to hang out in. Not only that, but the park was useful for her business, as she had somewhere convenient to send her clients when they wanted to have a picnic. Interestingly, she notes that the park is still useful to a small portion of people who want to use it. Thus, utility has been taken away from one portion of the population

and has been given to another. Evidently, Kim feels that those populations are inherently divided and she does not believe that utility could be possible for both populations at once. Another merchant, Tom, describes how his family used to use the park,

I used to love Heritage Park. My wife would bring our kids down while she was getting her haircut and take them to the park and they could play. I have little ones, they're age four, but this was back, age two, but on up there, and they could play and I would feel safe with it, but over about the last year, I've quit coming, doing that, because my daughter's gone in the bathroom and there's been homeless people sleeping in the bathroom there, we've found a needle in the bathroom, and I will not put my kids in that anymore.

Here, Tom argues that because the park was for kids, it was supposed to be devoid of all crime, homeless, street kids, and transients. As soon as Tom discovered some evidence of the social problem—a needle and a sleeping homeless person—he stopped going altogether. Note that his claim that the park is now unsafe is not founded upon any kind of negative interaction, but is, rather, based on people and objects and the meanings that he could glean from them. He sees these people and objects as inherently problematic, and—regardless of whether they actually are or not—deems them unacceptable for children. Thus, he constructs the social problem partially around the innocent children of Walla Walla who can no longer use the once idyllic Heritage Park.

Even more, Tom hints at the fact that a system of order has been disrupted. As Mary Douglas (1966) wrote in her book *Purity and Danger*, “where there is dirt, there is a system.” In other words, whenever something is labeled as “dirt,” as impure, or as unworthy, there is evidence of the system that constructed those labels. If we construct something as an element of the system that does not belong, like the homeless person or the needle, that construction indicates that there is a system of disorder. In the same way that these labels are constructed, social groups make rules and enforce them in order to

maintain structure. When these rules are breached, outsiders are created to represent a similar system of disorder (Becker 1963:1). Furthermore, Tom's argument acts as an indicator that the Heritage Park social problem is in fact a moral panic, as he demonstrates that there is both a heightened level of concern over and hostility towards the behavior of the occupiers, meaning that there is a disproportionate reaction to the objective facts (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

Reference to Big Cities

The system of order for Walla Walla merchants revolved around upholding the image of Walla Walla as an idealized small town. One of the biggest factors when merchants conceptualized Walla Walla as an idyllic town was that it was removed from urban areas. Accordingly, 67% of merchants felt that Walla Walla evidently must be different from those urban areas in that there should be little crime, homelessness, delinquency, and transients—or at least that element of Walla Walla should not be apparent to the tourists and locals who walk down Main Street on a daily basis. Moreover, these merchants underlined the fact that Walla Walla's tourists come from Seattle, Portland, and other urban areas. When talking about how they think the metropolitan tourists view Heritage Park, merchants had two reasonings, sometimes using both. Thirty-six percent (out of the 67% who referenced big cities) argued that because the tourists who come to Walla Walla are used to seeing this kind of thing on a daily basis, they take little to no notice of the park. The merchants who framed small-town Walla Walla in this way usually argued that, instead, locals were the ones that were the most put out by the occupiers of Heritage Park. For example, Susan states,

I don't know how much the tourists are affected, a lot of people we get are from larger cities and they're used to seeing groups of people after hours hanging out and in the urban setting, so I don't think it necessarily affects them and gives us a bad rep. [But] at this point in time I'm sure [...] there may be instances where it's had...but I don't think it's a major, as having a major impact.

Still, 18% of merchants who referenced big cities argued that because Walla Walla is a small, quaint town, the tourists who come here from large cities are taken aback by the occupiers of Heritage Park. As Andrew states, "I think it's probably something that people would like to not have to experience. Because they live it every day in the cities and then to come to a small town and then to have that going on, I think it's a little disturbing." Interestingly, Andrew goes as far as saying that Heritage Park is "disturbing" to tourists. It is not simply displeasing or annoying; it is instead worrisome or upsetting. Whether or not tourists actually feel "disturbed" when they see Heritage Park, the diction that Andrew chooses paints Heritage Park as significant in determining how tourists experience Walla Walla. Likewise, Nancy draws on the conceptions of idyllic Walla Walla in order to build on this argument,

These are things that you expect in an urban area, and [...] you know we've worked so hard to brand ourselves as this lovely, restored downtown, the friendliest town. What did we win? Friendliest town in America? And [Heritage Park] is taking away from the efforts that have been made on the part of so many entities.

She begins with the statement that the occupiers of Heritage Park might be the norm for bigger cities, but cannot possibly be the norm for Walla Walla. She believes that "many entities" have worked together to "brand" Walla Walla as a small, idyllic town. She refers to the chamber, the downtown foundation, the wine alliance, and businesses as the entities that have put in the collective effort to brand the image that they would like for Walla Walla. Notably, these kinds of entities are the ones with the resources to create this

image, while other entities—the occupiers—do not have any say in what the powerful entities choose. Even more, the word choice of “branded” suggests that Walla Walla is a unique commodity, tailored to the interests of different entities (in particular to the business owners’ interests to attract more tourists to Walla Walla). Nancy argues that when tourists experience a part of Walla Walla that does not fit the “brand,” they are less likely to come back, to enjoy their visit, or to tell their friends to visit.

In contrast, 27% of merchants who referenced big cities acknowledged both arguments by stating that they are uncertain about whether or not metropolitan tourists take less notice of the park or are surprised by the park. Some even argue that tourists might be less bothered by Heritage Park than locals, but that they are still shocked to see it in such a small town. For example, Jennifer argues,

I think that a lot of tourists that come from the larger cities [...] expect to see that [in bigger cities], hanging out on the streets, so maybe it doesn't bother them quite as much. But I think that you don't expect to see that when you come to Walla Walla or any smaller community and so I think that they would be more pleased to not see that there, to just see the quaintness. You expect a small area to be much more quaint, you know, cause it's not a town of 3 million people so you don't, you come to Walla Walla to get away from that kind of thing.

Jennifer first acknowledges that the occupiers might not bother people from larger cities quite as much. She then backtracks, stating that tourists would still rather not see that kind of thing in such a “quaint” little town. By backtracking, Jennifer demonstrates her uncertainty in how tourists actually experience Heritage Park; she can only make an educated guess. Thus, she makes her educated guess on behalf of the business community and on her own biases based on her social location, acknowledging that protecting this “quaint” image is in their best interest, as it keeps the tourists coming back to Walla Walla. Finally, she believes that tourists come to “get away from that kind of thing.”

Once again, Walla Walla becomes an escapist Utopia, like Mayberry, that is expected to be free of all unpleasant realities.

Conclusively, merchants argued that Heritage Park is a social problem because of its small, idyllic image. Sixty percent of merchants talked about the historic Walla Walla of the past, bringing up tensions between definitions of ownership for both the town and the park. Forty percent of merchants discussed the overwhelming support that locals have for their businesses, demonstrating that both the merchants and the residents of Walla Walla are interested in maintaining the idyllic and small-town image. Fifty-three percent of merchants brought up memories of the ideal Heritage Park of the past, often invoking the alarmist argument that the innocent children deserve their park back. Finally, 67% of merchants referenced big cities in order to argue that Walla Walla is expected to be free of all unpleasant realities. These justifications address the question of why Heritage Park is a social problem and ground the argument in a believable (yet constructed) fact. After orienting the audience to the problem, merchants are now able to address the question: Where does the social problem of Heritage Park stem from?

CHAPTER 8: WHERE DOES THE SOCIAL PROBLEM STEM FROM?

Joel Best argues that in order to understand claims-making, researchers must examine the claims-making process and the people who make those claims rather than looking at just the claims themselves (Best 1990:24). Furthermore, Best argues against explaining claims by simply looking at the values and motives of the claimants. He writes, “Claims-makers inevitably hope to persuade. Typically, they want to convince others that X is a problem, that Y offers a solution to that problem, or that a policy of Z should be adopted to bring that solution to bear. While the success of claims-making may well depend in part on the constellation of interests and resources held by various constituencies in the process, the way claims are articulated also affects whether they persuade and move the audiences to which they are addressed. Claims-making, then, is a rhetorical activity ” (Best 1990:24). Claims cannot be treated as objective realities; they must be looked at critically, keeping in mind the rhetorical processes behind them.

Merchants constructed the root of the Heritage Park social problem around different—and sometimes conflicting—ideas. Some merchants even employed multiple explanations. According to Best, these ideas are socially constructed and not necessarily social facts, but, instead, represent ways in which merchants frame the problem. Best outlines the claims-making process, which involves three different kinds of grounds statements that “serve as the foundation for the discussion that follows” (Best 1990:25). The grounds include definitions, typifying examples, and numeric estimates. In this section, I will examine the constructed *definitions* used to explain the root of the Heritage Park “problem.”

“It’s the Individual, Not the Structure”

Around 73% of interviewees argued that the problem did not concern the structure of Walla Walla’s available social service agencies, but rather it was surrounding the choice of the individual to hang out in the park and to act in disrespectful ways. Typically, this idea arose when I posed the question, “Do you think Walla Walla provides enough support for these kinds of people?” Surprisingly, some merchants employed this idea along with the contradictory, “it’s the structure, not the individual,” arguing that for some people in the park it was a choice and for others it was not. This kind of framing was used as an impression management technique (Goffman 1959) and gave some merchants leeway to assert the somewhat controversial opinion that a marginalized population can make the choice to be marginalized. It was also used as an orientation statement, as it assessed what sort of problem Heritage Park is according to the merchants (Best 1990:27).

This was evidenced multiple times in the data. For example, Joe states, “there are plenty people who seem very ok, they just have nothing to do, because they’re either not employed or they just have too much free time or whatever.” Note that this merchant acknowledges that they are “not employed” or they have “too much free time” and does not necessarily attribute those states of being to personal choice. However, he does believe they are in the right state of mind to be employed or to fill their time with “normal” activities. Other merchants, like Kevin, factor in personal choice when thinking about the kinds of services available to marginalized populations in Walla Walla,

There are shelters, I mean I know some of those people have places they— and I’ve talked to them—they go, I could go live with my parents, or, I could go live with my brother or whatever, but they choose not to, they

choose to live outside, you know, eight months out of the year or whatever the case may be. It's their choice.

For this merchant, there are private places where these people can go and call their own, allowing him the belief that they do not have the right to occupy a public space as their own private space. Despite the compelling argument that the occupiers have places to go, merchants typically could not explain *why* the occupiers make the choice not to go home or to a shelter, aside from just wanting to “hang out.” As Victoria continues, “the majority of them have a house somewhere, they don't have jobs, they don't have responsibilities or anything else to do, they're just hanging out, killing time.”

Another merchant, Sam, feels that the homeless are pretty well taken care of in Walla Walla: “I think Walla Walla is pretty desirable for someone who's homeless, you know, they take pretty good care of them, there's a lot of programs here that take care of homeless people.” Thus, Walla Walla attracts many homeless people because it has many services available to them. According to the merchants, not only is it their choice to be homeless in Walla Walla, many more choose Walla Walla *specifically* as an attractive place to be homeless. Others employ the logic that if individuals really want to change, there are programs there for them. As Nancy states,

I have empathy for these people but they don't take advantage of—it's like anywhere— they don't take advantage of community outreach because they're users, most of the time. And they can't help you if they're, you know, there's certain things you need to abide by if you take advantage of shelter, and food within that shelter, and care. It's tough.

Nancy acknowledges that the programs that are available to these kinds of people have certain rules for their clients. These rules range from abstaining from drugs and alcohol when in the shelter to being forced to leave the shelter early in the morning and return early in the evening. But some merchants argue that the occupiers should want to change

regardless of the circumstances; in turn, these merchants stigmatize occupiers that cannot follow the rules of the shelters. For example, Jennifer states,

Some people come there just looking for a handout and once they find out that they really have to try to make changes, they don't stay. Some people don't really want to get help, and then there's a lot of them that are really appreciative, they change their life, they give their life to God, all that happens, and they help 'em get back on their feet, help them look for a job, give them a place to stay while they're trying to save some money, so I think our community is pretty lucky that they actually have that.

For Jennifer, “trying to make changes” means giving up a certain way of life and accepting that of the general public. In this way, the occupiers are relegated to outsiders yet again. However, the ones that do accept the changes and adhere to social norms are valued highly. Jennifer invokes the name of God to place positive value on this group of occupiers and to paint herself in a positive light. As she volunteers for the Christian Aid Center, she frames herself as the facilitator who makes a difference in the lives of those downtrodden who make the “choice” to change.

In these cases, the merchants' reaction to the Heritage Park occupiers demonstrates some characteristics of a moral panic, because “a division is made between ‘us’—good, decent, respectable folk—and ‘them’—deviants, bad guys, undesirables, outsiders, criminals, the underworld, disreputable folk” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:34). Because 73% of merchants employed the idea that “it's the individual, not the structure,” there was widespread agreement or consensus that the threat is caused by the behaviors of the occupiers (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Thus, the argument meets three out of five of the indicators for moral panics—concern, hostility, and consensus.

“It’s the Structure, Not the Individual”

A third of the merchants employed the idea that there were structural problems that Walla Walla needs to address: it was not a choice for occupiers to live that way. This argument acted as an opposing orientation statement for the social problem of Heritage Park. Again, some of these merchants blamed the social problem both on the structure and on the individual, depending on the individual situation. Others sincerely felt that Walla Walla did not provide enough support for the occupiers. For example, Kim states,

It seems to me we’re not treating our homeless very well [...], you know, if we don’t want them using the park, we need to find something for them to do. I think that problem needs to be addressed, not just the use of the park but I see Walla Walla a little more negatively, because it seems to me that we’re not addressing that problem, and with all the kids that are hanging out there too, is there something that we could do for them too? So to me that’s a negative, a falling down of the community, just not how they affect us but how we should be affecting them.

Again, merchants typically placed blame on larger entities and ultimately viewed the social problem of Heritage Park as a problem that they are not contributing to. Curiously, Kim refers to Heritage Park as a community problem that “we” should address. She, thus, implies that she must be a part of the solution as well as a part of the problem. The community of Walla Walla—including herself—is not addressing the problem. In doing so, she commits herself to standing behind a solution that addresses structural problems in Walla Walla, but sets herself apart from the Walla Walla community that is contrary to that kind of solution. While Kim places the blame on the Walla Walla community, others place the blame on a national level. For example, Joe states,

I mean homelessness started as a federal problem, right? I have no idea if the city has the resources to deal with it, because obviously—and I don’t speak for everyone that’s in that park because I don’t know, there are plenty people who seem very ok, they just have nothing to do, because they’re either not employed or they just have too much free time or

whatever—but um mental illness is obviously not something that the city of Walla Walla is equipped to deal with, and that is either a state or a federal issue, well what’s federal has been blown off and left for everyone else to deal with. Thank you Ronald Reagan.

Thinking back to this example from the previous section, Joe employs both logics by blaming it on the structure and on the individual according to the situation. This kind of side note, tucked into a very loaded statement about the national level of support for the homeless and the mentally ill, demonstrates the ambiguity in determining the root of the Heritage Park social problem. Even a merchant who certainly has strong views about these kinds of government programs (i.e.: “Thank you Ronald Reagan”), cannot locate whether the problem is a homeless issue, a mental illness issue, or simply an issue of directionless people “hanging out.” Ultimately, he settles on the idea that regardless of who is occupying the park, it must be a structural issue; because the nation faces structural issues, Walla Walla must too.²⁰

“It’s Not a Homeless Issue”

Almost half of the merchants argued in some way that the Heritage Park social problem is not a homeless problem. They blamed it on the kids, on many elements coming together into one park, or on the one or two wrongdoers that ruin it for everyone. At the same time, when explaining how the park has evolved over the years, almost every merchant cited that the homeless population has grown immensely in the last few years. Before that, merchants said that the park was just full of “delinquent kids.” One of the challenges that many interviewees encountered when talking about the people in Heritage

²⁰ This seems fairly contradictory when thinking back to the “idyllic Walla Walla” framing, in which Walla Walla is supposed to be different from the problem-riddled nation. Notably, this is the same merchant who made the Mayberry reference.

Park was defining them as homeless. Merchants acknowledged that the occupiers did not necessarily fall under a homogenous definition of homeless, as they sometimes had homes to go back to for the winter, stayed regularly in shelters, owned items such as cell phones, and had money to buy cigarettes and alcohol. As Andrew notes,

You know just because someone has a backpack with them or a shopping cart doesn't necessarily mean that they're homeless, and if they're looking for power to plug in their cell phones, you know, how homeless can you be? This is one of my problems, you know, cell phones aren't cheap, and, you know, how does a population that doesn't have anything end up with a cell phone? That's the question I have, is, where, you know, where is that line?

Andrew uses “the individual, not the structure” stance to rhetorically—and powerfully—argue that the occupiers have the means to be “normal,” they just choose not to be.

Continuing with this reasoning, he adds the argument that the social problem cannot be about homeless people if these people are not *really* homeless and are not *really* in need.

Accordingly, the solution cannot be for social service agencies to swoop in and save the needy. These justifications, then, lay the groundwork for the solution that Andrew will propose. Mary uses a similar line of reasoning, arguing that it's not a homeless issue, but rather an issue of delinquency,

For me it's really more the negative element of— and I don't know whether they're all gang bangers—but the younger drug user, gang banger type people I believe are a way worse element that can be attracted there more than the homeless sort of element. Those are the ones that, you know, I see those teenagers, especially in the middle of the day when they should be in school. What are you guys doing there? But that's more the element that immediately comes to mind for me as the problem there.

Mary uses the terms “gang banger” and “drug user,” labels that encompass highly stigmatized and criminal “others” in society. In contrast, the label “homeless” is not necessarily looked down upon, but pitied in a way that “drug user” is not. Thus, it is

easier for Mary to place the blame on those that are participating in illegal activity, rather than those who might simply have been dealt a bad hand (when of course all three types of people are capable of participating in illegal activity). Even more, she notes that the kids “should be in school,” and should, accordingly, know better. But, as another merchant states, since the beginning, the kids have been responsible for vandalism, broken windows, and more. She argues that there have not been as many incidents now that there is a larger and older homeless population. Regardless of whether that is true or not, she takes the blame off of the downtrodden homeless and places the blame on those that are easier to relegate into the wrongdoer category. Sam corroborates this idea, stating,

When you see the large groups, it’s not homeless people, it’s the kids that have no direction, you know, and [today]²¹ they’re either in school or you know at their house or at a friend’s house or something like that, cause it’s cold and rainy, but, you know, you don’t see any homeless people over there today, you walk by, you know, you’ll see very few of them over there, there’s two or three of them that will hang out there every day that are actual homeless, so it’s not a homeless, in my mind it’s not a homeless issue, it’s a, I don’t know I guess, the kids and vagrants that really don’t have a place to be, so I don’t think that Heritage Park is...a very small majority of the problems that happen over there are not caused by the homeless.

Thus, the problem stems from many different elements coming together into one park—the homeless, the kids, and the vagrants. This reasoning varies significantly from those who argue that the social problem is just a delinquent issue, because it accounts for the growing homeless population in Heritage Park. In other words, the delinquent argument does not explain why the “problem” has grown dramatically in the eyes of the general public at the same time that the homeless population was growing dramatically.

²¹ The interview was conducted in the wintertime, when few occupiers congregate in Heritage Park.

However, this merchant still chooses not to place the blame on the homeless population in the park, arguing that even when the different elements are combined, the homeless are not the ones that are creating the problems.

Joel Best (1990) would refer to this kind of definition of the problem as a domain statement, meaning that it determines the boundaries of the problem. Best believes that the most important domain statements are those that call attention to a “previously unacknowledged social problem” (26). This specific domain statement seems, at first, just the opposite of this—the kids are the ones that have been around for quite a while, so the problem evidently has been going on for some time. However, the argument does have some novelty to it, as it attracts attention to a problem that has existed for a while but is just now being recognized for what it is (or what the merchants think it is).

“It’s the Illegal Activity, Not the People”

Another domain statement and a fourth line of reasoning, argued by 27% of merchants, was that the occupiers were not the root of the problem, but their *behavior* was the root of the problem. Similar to the “it’s not a homeless issue” argument, this argument takes the blame off of the marginalized population and places it on something that is widely accepted by society as “wrong.” Kevin states,

I never have said, I do not want them—meaning the homeless, or the delinquents— I do not want them there. I never have said that. But I do want them to conduct themselves in a proper manner in which we expect that other people who do use that park for do. I mean, it’s a public park, it’s open to them, and I have no problem with that, but when they do intimidate, when they do, you know, alcohol and drugs, and just stay there for 14 hours sleeping all day long, and throwing their trash everywhere, not picking up after their dogs, you got screaming babies on a 95 degree day when the baby is in the stroller literally all day long in a onesie, you know, you’ve gotta be burning up, I mean that baby’s gotta be hot.

He reasons that anybody who uses the park should be expected to conduct him/herself in a “normal” and respectable way. Some merchants would describe this as placing the same expectations on people from all different backgrounds, or treating all people as equals. Kevin’s argument, then, simultaneously calls for fair treatment as well as ordinance, rendering his conclusion humane and reasonable. However, some of the behaviors that Kevin describes (sleeping, throwing trash, drinking alcohol, doing drugs) are behaviors that a domiciled individual might partake in the privacy of his/her own home. For the homeless and for those who do not have a place to call their own, then, “a local prohibition (against sleeping in public, for example) becomes a total prohibition (for example, on sleeping)” (Mitchell 2003:172). Susan highlights the same issue,

It’s kind of a balance. You don’t have a place for a lot of these people that don’t have homes, or don’t have a safe home environment to go, so it’s nice that they’ve got a spot. On the other hand, they shouldn’t be doing illegal drugs and they shouldn’t be drinking, and they shouldn’t be panhandling, so, and I don’t think anybody really has a problem with them congregating there as long as there’s no illegal activity going on.

Here, the park is defined as public—or at least it should be treated as public by every citizen of Walla Walla including the occupiers. However, Susan does acknowledge that the occupiers do not have a private place to go, taking the blame off of them once again and placing it on the behavior specific to the location. But ultimately, it is a public space and should be treated as one. As Jennifer concludes, “if you wanna clean yourself up, turn off your music, stop your mouth from talking that way—it’s not respectful and polite to the rest of the people that are walking by—then by all means, stay in the park.”

“It’s Hard to Say”

Finally, 47% answered that it’s hard to know the root of the problem. These merchants may have employed other lines of reasoning as well, but did ultimately come to this conclusion. This uncertainty came through largely when I asked the question, “Do you think Walla Walla provides enough support for these kinds of people?” For example, Mary states,

That’s something I’m not educated enough on the topic to have an opinion, I don’t know my official opinion on that, so I don’t know, I’m not totally up on all of the avenues available for homeless people, or even just struggling people, or even kids as far as what hangout spots, my kids are teenagers but I’m, a little, they don’t get to go just hangout, they have activities that they can participate in but they are never just hanging out without you know something that they’re doing so I’m not as up on lack of activities for kids because my kids are very busy and participating in things but yeah so I don’t know, I don’t know, that’s a long way to say I don’t know.

In her roundabout answer, Mary reveals the ironic shortcoming of many merchants’ arguments: they do not feel educated enough about the facts surrounding Heritage Park, and yet they still make fact-based arguments. Evidently, these facts are socially constructed and they vary between merchants. Likewise, some merchants, like Dianne, begin with the statement that they are not very educated on the topic, and finish with an educated guess,

I don’t know. I truly don’t. I believe that we do, just because I know we have, there’s plenty of family services and the Y and I mean there’s plenty of charitable organizations, social services and things, but like I said I mean you can’t go to catholic family services unless you wanna attend prayer services and get cleaned up and find a job, and a lot of them, or what I see over here, that’s not the avenue they wanna take, so.

Dianne references the rules that individuals must abide by in the Walla Walla social services, again, stigmatizing those individuals that do not choose to take that route.

Additionally, she follows her knowledge of the facts with her “belief,” placing higher value on the latter. Thus, she is simultaneously acknowledging that she does not know how much support Walla Walla provides for these kinds of people while placing her subjective belief over other beliefs. Ultimately, for merchants, it is hard for them to say what the root of the problem is, but it is easier for them to guess.

In sum, merchants employed five prominent explanations for the social problem of Heritage Park, sometimes using multiple contradictory explanations. The first explanation, “it’s the individual, not the structure,” argues that the occupiers are just hanging out and that there are plenty of services available to them, whereas the second explanation, “it’s the structure, not the individual,” argues that Walla Walla needs to be providing more services for the occupiers. The third explanation, “it’s not a homeless issue,” places the blame on drug dealers, delinquents, and others that are easier to label as the “bad guys.” The fourth explanation that “it’s the illegal activity, not the people,” takes the blame off of the marginalized populations and places it on their behavior. Finally, the fifth explanation acknowledges the complexity of the situation by arguing that it is hard to say what the root of the problem is. These explanations act as rhetorical strategies and lay the groundwork for the rest of the merchant framework. Even more, they demonstrate the social construction of the facts surrounding the Heritage Park social problem.

CHAPTER 9: HOW IS THE SOCIAL PROBLEM DISSEMINATED?

In many ways, the means through which merchants constructed their views of Heritage Park revolved around what they heard from others. While that did not necessarily mean talking to Walla Walla city residents about Heritage Park, it did mean talking to other merchants about it. Only the few merchants who were close to Heritage Park reported witnessing incidents on a daily basis. Other merchants had heard stories but had only witnessed the tamer instances of drug and alcohol use, loitering, and swearing. These findings confirmed the Heritage Park Study results from participant observation, in which observers cited many instances of smaller-scale incidents, but no instances of physical or verbal intimidation (Wollmuth and Agostini 2015). Thus, the merchants assert grounds statements that are socially constructed and are either accepted as fact or questioned. In other words, “claims-makers and their audiences may agree to accept grounds statements without question, or one or both parties may have reservations about the statements’ truth, their relevance, the methods used to establish them, and so on” (Best 1990:25). Accordingly, data analysis reveals three types of hearsay that spread throughout the merchant community: stories or “myths” that were passed between merchants; rhetorics of both humanizing and dehumanizing occupiers; and merchant accounts of incidents and non-incidents.

Communication Between Merchants

When I asked the merchants if they ever talked to other business owners or managers about Heritage Park, most responded “Yes” without hesitation. About 40% of

merchants gave more specific answers regarding what they talk to other merchants about. Some recalled talking to other business owners about incidents or police calls, others recalled sharing general frustrations, and others recalled brainstorming and agreeing on solutions. While 18% of merchants perceived that their fellow business owners were all in agreement with them—or at least most of them were—36% of merchants distanced themselves from the common merchant framework and painted a somewhat negative image of their fellow merchants. One merchant, Jennifer, unites all business owners and community members under one framework,

I think everybody is in agreement about what should be done. I mean it, now, I don't know as far as what should be done with the park now, but they are definitely all in agreement now that the problem needs to be removed from the park. The park needs to be taken back over by the community and not just let this group of people that is disrespectful to it take it over. And that's what's happened. I've never spoken to a business owner or a citizen of the community that is not in agreement with that.

Jennifer relegates the occupiers—“the group of people that is disrespectful”—to the status of non-citizen, making their use of the public park, their behavior, even more unacceptable (Mitchell 2003). Thus, in order to make her own argument stronger, she needs to define *who* has the right and access to Heritage Park. Even more, she states, “I've never spoken to a business owner or citizen of the community that is not in agreement with that,” creating a greater divide between the park occupiers and the “citizens” of Walla Walla. The problem is thus defined as an invasion of outsiders (Becker 1963), rather than a conflict between the citizens of Walla Walla over how to use a public space. Ironically, another merchant, Kim, demonstrates that the merchants are not all in agreement about the social problem, even choosing to define Heritage Park as a public space open to the use of the occupiers,

There are a lot of people very upset about it. I know several business owners in the area, but I don't know that they've had any bad experiences, I think they just don't like the people hanging out there, but I don't know if they've caused them any trouble, it's just the fact that they're there that bothers them. And I just feel like it's, you know if you want it to be a place for them to hang out then that's fine with me, but we need to redefine what the use of the park is, if that's the case.

By distancing herself from the other merchants, Kim unwittingly demonstrates the social construction of the facts and beliefs of the merchant framework. Like many other merchants, she has not really witnessed any incidents personally, and realizes that she has not heard of any specific problems that these merchants have had with Heritage Park. Instead, she points out the general distaste for the *people* in the park rather than the *behavior* in the park (Mitchell 2003). Finally, she notes that there are different understandings of how a public space should be used, and thus, the use of the park must be defined before they move forward with any kind of decision. Kim continues,

There are several business owners that are just... what's a nice way to say things, um, they're just not, they're kind of cranky people shall we say, and they're unhappy with it being there but I don't know that it, that they've had any bad experiences, they're just unhappy with the people hanging out there.

Likewise, Joe chimes, "I know there's probably people who say they should all be shipped away to Seattle or something, I'm sure you've heard some horrific things." These merchants, again, distance themselves from the larger merchant framework, placing the "bad guy" label on people who take a more conservative stance on the issue. Even though these merchants might abide by parts of the merchant framework, they poke holes in claims and work to deconstruct the common merchant framework. At the same time, these merchants might also distance themselves from the other merchants as an impression management technique (Goffman 1959) and as a means to make their

arguments more believable. Accordingly, as merchants continue to communicate, their claims are perpetuated and strengthened. As one merchant concludes, “I’ve heard other stories from other merchants that I assumed, but I didn’t know, and that was enlightening.”

Myths. About 40% of merchants referenced stories that were passed along and either held up as fact or questioned. These stories were not necessarily noted multiple times in interviews, but some of them were; if a story was repeated multiple times, the facts usually changed, and the merchants were never quite certain what those facts were. For example, Phil told me, “back in the 80’s and 90’s, cities would buy bus tickets for their homeless and send them to other cities—one-way bus tickets.” Andrew repeated this story to me after our interview, explaining that Walla Walla, specifically, used to practice this and hinting at the fact that however unethical it was, it did get rid of the problem. In a similar way, a few merchants recounted differing anecdotes about what happened in Heritage Park a while back,

Phil: Yeah I, you know I think, the one year they basically, the cops came and were arresting people and eventually there was no one in the park and I don’t know why, that happened one summer, and then the next summer they were back and I don’t know what the difference was, whether somebody sued them and determined that what the police had done was illegal, but there was never anything in the paper about, today the park was completely devoid of anyone, and then the next year they’re all back and it’s, it’s kind of odd, yeah I don’t know what went down with that.

Victoria: Two years ago there was [a meeting] at the barbeque place when it was there, and it was a great meeting. It was in the fall, and everybody, town council and cops and, you know, business owners were all there, and the next day, the next week, they came in and cited for you know a cigarette butt, and they cleared it out, and then the next year, it’s like why, why can’t you do that again?

Kim: You know there were, there was one population I know last summer that the police rounded up and took out of town, yes, there was a whole group of people that I knew on the street, and it was, at that point there was a lot of panhandling going on, and I think they rounded them up. And the groups that we have around town now, I've seen no panhandling.

Notice how many details change throughout the stories. In the first story, Phil is not even sure when the police evacuation occurred, the second story argues that it was two years ago, and the third story argues for one year ago. In the first and second stories, the occupiers are cleared out and then end up coming back. In the third story, the panhandlers are cleared out and never come back. All merchants agree that certainly the police are aware of the situation and have dealt with it effectively in the past. But ultimately, the facts are muddled—the merchants do not really know what happened, why it happened, or why it cannot happen again. Regardless of whether this represents a miscommunication between Walla Walla police (or an attempt to cover up questionable practices) and the Walla Walla community, these three tales do demonstrate how “facts” are constructed and deconstructed by the merchants. While these facts were somewhat believable (at least if only obtaining them from one merchant), there were a few stories that seemed particularly hard to believe. As Phil recounts,

There's all these stories that go on between shop owners and I don't believe most of them. The one guy who drives a Mercedes, parks it three blocks away and comes and panhandles and actually has a house, I don't know whether to believe that or not, I wouldn't think that would be true, but, you know, I've heard these things, you know. Back east, if you're on a good off ramp on a freeway and you can make 30, 40 grand a year panhandling and those have been documented, yeah, 'cause, you know, they're high rent districts, so people have more money to give away, so, a lot of traffic going by.

Despite the fact that Phil does not believe most of the stories he hears from the other merchants, we can actively see him working out how something like that could be true.

He moves from “I don’t believe most of them” to “I don’t know whether to believe that or not,” demonstrating that he is exploring the possibility of believing it. Looking at the facts themselves—that a panhandler can actually make a living and own a Mercedes—it might seem completely ridiculous. But nevertheless, these kinds of things have been “documented” so he guesses it might be ok to believe that this actually occurs in Walla Walla. Thus, these subjective realities are chosen, as merchants might pick what to believe in according to their own opinions. In this instance, Phil demonstrates that these myths meet the fourth indicator for moral panics—disproportionality—meaning that there is a sense that the threat to the social order is more substantial than it actually is (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). In other words, “objective molehills have been made into subjective mountains” (Jones et. al 1989:4).

Who are the Occupiers?

In a similar way, merchants understood the population of the people in Heritage Park through hearsay and through observations, but rarely through interactions with the occupiers. Every single merchant gave at least a general idea of who they thought the occupiers were. Because this information was passed along through hearsay, the facts were different according to each merchant, representing the social construction of a fact that might seem like a given to some. This information surfaced when I asked the merchants, “Do you have a general idea or impression of the kinds of people that hang out in the park?” As Nancy states,

I think it’s a combination of, you know, a transient population, so essentially homeless, I mean there are people there with you know, their sleeping bags and their packs of their belongings. There are a lot of, um, (pause), there are some young mothers that are at risk I guess I would say,

I mean they just don't. (Pause) Um I do think that there is, I do think that there are drug addicts, that that is a place to commune and perhaps um, sell, um I think it's a place where people feel, for whatever reason, like they can, I mean even if it's out of paper bags, like they can drink in public. So I think it's very disadvantaged, some for sure, there are some that are clearly mentally ill there that are not being served, they're not, um, and there is some volatile behavior.

Notice here the pauses, "ums," stammers, and false starts. When speaking about the occupiers, this kind of hesitation was common; it was not an easy demographic to explain, and even when a merchant had an idea about who was in the park, they never felt comfortable asserting that they completely understood the population. For example, Nancy begins with "there are a lot of," pauses, and then changes to "there are some young mothers," demonstrating her uncertainty and hesitation to put a label on the situation. Darren follows a similar line of reasoning, saying "it's not fair for me to generalize" and that he's sure everyone has a "different situation." But, regardless of their uncertainty in exactly *who* the occupiers are, the merchants typically felt comfortable asserting that the occupiers are a problem.

Other merchants responded to this question just as they had to the level of support in Walla Walla question, beginning with "I don't know" and ending with an educated guess. For example, Kim states,

I do not. It seems to be a wide range of people. There's a lot of teenagers and then there's a homeless population that seems to hang out there a lot, (pause) there seems to be a lot of people that like to skateboard, hang out there, lots of bicycles, but I don't know what their background is other than that.

Ultimately, there was a contrast between powerful and opinionated responses when I asked questions about personal beliefs and uncertain responses when I asked questions about the facts of the situation. While merchants felt comfortable asserting their opinions

about the situation, they simultaneously asserted that they did not really know what was going on in Heritage Park. It seemed as if they were, in some respects, trying to sidestep calling themselves experts on the situation—but their overarching opinion that Heritage Park is a social problem came through even in their uncertain responses.

Even more contradictions appeared throughout the interviews, specifically when I asked the merchants to provide three words to describe the kinds of people that hang out in the park and three words that come to mind when thinking about Heritage Park. In these cases, they typically placed labels on the occupiers by dehumanizing or humanizing them. While it might seem like these terms are mutually exclusive, they were not for the merchants, as they could employ both techniques throughout their interview. This kind of rhetoric provided more insight into perceptions of who the occupiers are.

Dehumanization of the occupiers. A third of the merchants dehumanized the occupiers, typically in short asides, as in “just go four blocks that way” or, “when does the bulldozer come in?” Curiously, merchants could begin a statement with “I do empathize with them, but...” and finish it off with one of these asides. In those cases, the first tactic might have been used as a rhetorical strategy in order to assert a somewhat controversial opinion. Other merchants dehumanized the occupiers by “othering” them, treating them as non-citizens, and generally using degrading terms to describe them.

Victoria describes an encounter she had with one of the occupiers,

One of them, there was a new one there this year and she was dressed in different clothes every day. I mean clearly, left at night, went somewhere, has a house, has somewhere to go, but we come down every day and she said, she came in the store once or twice, but the first encounter she asked me for a quarter, and I’m like, I don’t have a quarter, sorry, you know. And I, it just pissed me off and I said, “why a quarter? Why do you need

one quarter?” “Well my fiancé—(the drug dealer is her fiancé, we’ve learned) — my fiancé needs his medicine” and blah blah blah and I said, “what medicine is like a quarter, what does he need?” “Well I’ve got three dollars, he needs three,” blah blah blah and I’m like, “what kind of medicine?” “He needs something, lips, something, Chap Stick,” something stupid, and I was like, “hmm, no sorry.”

To begin with, Victoria does not know the name of this occupier and uses a term that is typically used for objects rather than people—“new one.” Notably, this same merchant stated that she has nicknames for the occupiers—like drug dealer—but does not know their real names. She continues, recounting the occupier’s explanation with “blah blah blah,” demonstrating that she does not feel the explanation has any value or worth. Even more, she calls the medicine “stupid,” invalidating the reason that this woman provides for begging. Victoria argues that this occupier must be up to no good, because she has the means to lead a normal life but chooses to hang out at the park with her “drug dealer” boyfriend and beg for quarters. Other merchants used similar degrading terms and adjectives to refer to occupiers: “dumbshits,” “mischievous,” “unmotivated,” “disrespectful,” “lazy,” “bored,” and “directionless.” These labels work to relegate the occupiers into the category of non-citizen, and categorize the social problem as an issue of outsiders invading the *true* citizens’ public space.

Humanization of the occupiers. At the same time, 60% of merchants showed great sympathy for the park occupiers. Again, that does not mean that they did not dehumanize the occupiers in another part of their interview. Some merchants knew the occupiers personally and by name, but most did not. Often, merchants told stories that demonstrated their empathy for park occupiers along with homeless and marginalized populations in

Walla Walla. For example, Kim speaks about the people she has known who have been homeless in Walla Walla,

Well there was an employee we had here that lost her house for a while and she was staying at one of the shelters and there was a woman—we have several Hispanic speaking people who work here— and there was an older woman that only spoke Spanish and she would come in here in the middle of the winter, freezing and we would give her just some hot water and some food and she would always speak to [the other employee], cause I couldn't speak to her (all she ever did was thank me for stuff) but um she lived in one of the shelters, but they have to be out at 7:00 o'clock and you know in the middle of the winter here at 7:00 in the morning, it's cold.

By mentioning someone she knows personally and by name, Kim puts the homeless woman on a similar level to herself. She demonstrates her empathy by providing a story that points specifically to the hardships of being homeless in Walla Walla. She continues by recounting a story about an ex-employee and her daughters who were homeless for some time and struggled with the rules of the shelters. By doing so, she humanizes the homeless, as she acknowledges that someone she worked with was homeless in Walla Walla, and it could just as easily be her. Even more, she acknowledges that a mother and her children—an atypical demographic for merchants to mention when thinking about Heritage Park—can be homeless. Kim, thus, simultaneously deconstructs a myth and a label. Similarly, Mary talks about the personal experiences she's had with the occupiers,

And all of the fellows that I've met out here, most of them, while they can be annoying, they're usually, my experience has been they're fairly friendly. I have not had any intimidating experiences with them. I know lots of them by name, talk to them when they're out here on our corner, it's, yeah, I wouldn't say that it's been scary.

This adjective choice—"friendly"—contrasts with the adjectives chosen to dehumanize the occupiers (dumbshits, directionless, bored). Mary, instead, is friendly with most of them, talks to them on a daily basis, and even knows them by name—they are in many

ways, fellow citizens of Walla Walla. However, Mary is the same merchant that suggested turning Heritage Park into a parking lot, demonstrating the kinds of contradictions that can occur in one interview. Regardless of whether Mary genuinely feels empathy for the occupiers, this kind of rhetorical strategy lays the groundwork for arguments like “it’s the illegal activity, not the people,” ultimately providing the means to create ordinance for public space. Similarly, Phil makes an empathetic statement while touching on this idea that only certain behaviors should be allowed in public space,

I think it’s appalling that they blast that music into the park, because basically if they’re not doing anything wrong, they should be in the park, if they are doing something wrong, they shouldn’t be in the park, and to try to make it annoying for them in the park is not the right thing to do. It’s totally, I mean it’s just not, it’s not ethical, it’s not legal, it’s not moral, it’s just wrong on so many levels.

Here, the occupiers are regarded as citizens with rights—they, like all other members of the Walla Walla community deserve access to this public space. However, that access is contingent upon behavior, not only for the occupiers, but also for every citizen of Walla Walla. Behavioral laws make sense to Phil, as he is arguing for justice. Thus, the occupiers should be treated as citizens, and if they are taken out of the park, it should not be by force or by sneaky tactics like blasting annoying music in the park. It should be by law. Likewise, Joe tells a similar story of disgust with how the police have handled the situation,

A cop had pulled over and he was, he was talking to the guy, talking kind of, I mean his voice was loud, not that I could hear what was going on, so I don’t know if talking is the right word, and he said, he goes, “why are you homeless anyway?” And it was a really ignorant thing to say to somebody. And, you know, he was like, “well I have my [broken] leg” and I’m like well that’s probably not the reason, I mean I’d hope you’d be smart enough to know that, but that was really, that pissed me off, because that’s not gonna solve or help anything. And if that cop really thought that was an answer to that question, then...

Joe distances himself from the generalizations and labels that the other merchants, law enforcement, and the general public might place upon the occupiers. Instead, he is an outsider looking in on the mistreatment of the occupiers. Again, many merchants placed blame on those in power, those handling the situation, as this kind of statement might give them the comfort of distance from the labeling of the occupiers. In other words, the humanization of the occupiers could function as a rhetorical and impression management tool used to convince others of the correct conclusions.

Finally, some merchants made overarching pity statements regarding the occupiers, as in, “they’ve fallen on hard times.” By laying their arguments out like this, the merchants seem like very rational actors. They understand the hardships and the plight of many of the occupiers, and they are just trying to look out for their own business. Whether these empathetic statements are just rhetorical strategies to make their arguments stronger, or whether the merchants truly feel empathy for these people, these statements still work to humanize the occupiers and to shape their argument into something pretty believable. As Jennifer states, “they’re still humans too, trying to figure out their way.”

What Happens in Heritage Park?

Along with rumors about the population of occupiers, 67% of merchants referenced rumors about what actually happens in Heritage Park. Those merchants that were located close to Heritage Park typically witnessed a fair amount of incidents personally, whereas the merchants located two or three blocks away from Heritage Park usually had not witnessed incidents, but had heard about them from other merchants. I

have divided this section into the subcategories of incidents and non-incidents, realizing that, again, there can be overlap between sections.

Incidents. When I asked merchants what kinds of activities they had witnessed in Heritage Park or what kind of activities others had told them about, there was a range of answers. 67% of merchants referenced at least one incident in Heritage Park. Most of those respondents mentioned drugs and alcohol, public defecation, inappropriate language, and loitering. Sam gave a typical answer: “Oh it goes everywhere from just loitering, drug use, littering, urinating in public, fights, verbal altercations, very widespread, so we see lots of fights over there, so, a lot of verbal altercations also. A lot of drug use, a lot of drug deals.” Sam, who was located closer to Heritage Park, had witnessed many incidents personally. Other merchants, like Jennifer, who were located farther away from the park, recounted incidents that they had heard about,

Well the worst thing I hear in that area is that they have, they’ll have a lot of people using their alley as a bathroom and these are the people that have their businesses right in there. They’ll um have kids sleeping by their backdoor, or not just kids, people, you know, but then they see them hang out in the park during the day.

Merchants upheld these kinds of incidents as true. However, when I asked them if they had ever personally witnessed any incidents in Heritage Park, most struggled to think of anything aside from drugs, alcohol, language, and loitering. For example, “I have witnessed, you know, people camping out there with little kids and dogs, and loud music and obviously they’re, you know, I can smell pot clear over here, you know, and so not the best presentation of downtown Walla Walla.” Merchants used the larger-scale incidents, whether or not they had personally witnessed them, as typifying examples, in

which their atrocity tales became “the referent for discussions of the problem in general” (Best 1990:28). These tales call attention to the problem and also shape perceptions of the problem, meaning that whether or not large-scale incidents are regularly occurring in Heritage Park, they become central to the understanding of the problem. However, despite the ease in describing the typical smaller-scale incidents that occur in the park, the merchants had trouble describing the larger-scale events that were provided as atrocity tales. For example, Andrew recounts a story about an “altercation” he had in Heritage Park,

Andrew: Yeah I mean I’ve had a few, a few instances because if I’m running errands downtown, I will walk through the park, um, part of that is ‘cause I just wanna keep an eye on it, see what’s going on. I have had trouble with some of the youth that hang out there that um, it wasn’t, well it was a very, it was a slight confrontation.

Alex: They just didn’t want you there?

Andrew: Um no it was umm they just wanted to puff up their chests and show who was boss. I was simply walking through and was bumped by some kids. They were testing.

Notice here the quick turnaround in his response; he goes from having had “a few instances” or altercations in the park to having just a “slight confrontation” with some kids. Even more, that confrontation was not by any means violent, and he supplies only vague details. Thus, the nature of these incidents and recounted tales cannot be taken as fact but can be altered according to the listener—the merchant can choose to play it down or to exaggerate. Notably, this confrontation seems like a territorial kind of interaction, demonstrating again the struggle over the ownership over public space. At this moment, Heritage Park—a public space that, in truth, belongs to this merchant as well—belongs to the occupiers. Thus, how “the spatial economy is regulated in terms of access, exclusion

and control” is dependent upon the dissemination and success of certain claims to public space (Tonkiss 2005:74).

Non-incidents. Sixty percent of merchants stated straight away that they had not witnessed any incidents in Heritage Park (while they may still have referenced rumors or may have later conceded to witnessing the smaller incidents). For example, Phil states, “I haven’t heard anybody, I’ve heard people complaining about it, but there’s no specific instances brought up, so it’s kind of one of those things, so if you’re of a certain opinion, you assume those things are going on and you perpetrate a myth that’s not really going on, I don’t think.” Phil acknowledges that the stories he might hear (but in fact has not heard) are not necessarily true. Instead, he distances himself from the other merchants and fights the common notion to list off every kind of disruptive behavior that he has heard about. Also, he acknowledges that the “opinions” and interests of the merchants can sometimes be of more value to them than the actual facts and might drive them to “perpetrate a myth that’s not really going on.” But, regardless of which incidents are true and which are not, most of the merchants still cannot say that they have witnessed them personally.

A few merchants focus on the larger-scale incidents, like physical and verbal altercations, to argue that they really have not had any problems with the park. As Dianne states, “I’ve never had anybody ever say anything to me, they’ve never interacted, so I kind of figure, you know, that’s to me, like I said I’ve never had anything personally done to myself so it doesn’t really bother me.” Dianne has a different understanding of public space: the behavior should not matter unless it is affecting *her* negatively. A few

other merchants feel that the tourists and the residents are negatively affected, and therefore that location specific behavior is unacceptable. Darren (who is located on the same block as the park) talks about the lack of interactions that the occupiers have had with himself and with his guests,

I've never had a negative issue with anyone. They've never, you know, tried to get money from me or be rude to me or anything like that and I really haven't seen that kind of interaction with guests around the patio area, they've never had any kind of interaction, good or bad.

While Darren states that there really are not interactions—"good or bad"—with the occupiers, that does not necessarily mean that he thinks the park is a non-problem. Instead, he raises an interesting question: should the public space only be available for use to people who affect the Walla Walla experience positively? This kind of reasoning demonstrates that Darren, as well as other merchants, might feel that their territory—their town and their park—is being taken over and changed by those who do not have the *right* to do that.

Ultimately, data analysis reveals three types of hearsay that spread throughout the merchant community: stories or "myths" that were passed between merchants; rhetorics of both humanizing and dehumanizing occupiers; and merchant accounts of incidents and non-incidents. These types of hearsay demonstrate how the social problem of Heritage Park is disseminated throughout the merchant community and constructed based on "putative conditions" (Spector and Kitsuse 1987:75). The diffusion of the facts surrounding Heritage Park allows merchants to come to similar conclusions about solutions for the social problem.

CHAPTER 10: WHAT ARE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK?

Meetings to address various community issues are standard in many merchant associations and often range from discussing incoming businesses to police patrols and economic health. One session at a Walla Walla City Council meeting in January to discuss the recent release of the Heritage Park Report, where the Sherwood Trust Cohort of 2014 proposed changes for the redesign of Heritage Park was no exception. These changes were approved and included the following: 1) Removing the existing playground equipment, fence, and bark 2) Laying sod and building a berm to make the site more symmetrical and appealing 3) Installing café seating, children's toys, and benches 4) Installing unique and interactive musical instruments. If funding allows, they will also go forward with removing the existing picnic table and concrete pad and build a new plaza, in the hope of bringing in more community events.²² Although the Sherwood Trust Cohort intends the project to make the park more accessible to everyone in the community (Beckmeyer 3/12/2015), the merchants believe that the intention is to instead make the park less inhabitable for the occupiers.

The merchants, thus, proposed various other solutions. I first asked them if they had read any of the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* articles in the past month on Heritage Park. Most merchants had not read the articles but still had some general idea of the plan to redesign the park. If they did not know the plan, I gave them a general summary of the proposed redesign. Almost all of the merchants were critical of the plan to redesign, and

²² This outline was detailed in the Walla Walla City Council meeting notes for January 12, 2015. The projected costs for the redesign are slightly over \$24,000.

proposed some possible other solutions: 1) “taking back the park” 2) ordinance 3) parking lot 4) no clear or easy solution.

Redesigning the Park

When merchants discussed the redesign plan for Heritage Park, their answers fell under four different categories, with some merchants falling under multiple categories. Out of the twelve merchants who referenced the redesign plan, 33% felt that it would only make the park less pleasing and less accessible for everyone, 16% felt that redesigning the park would not address the root of the problem (the occupiers) and might just relocate the problem, 16% felt that redesign and community events would definitely solve the problem, and 33% felt that community events would not completely deter the occupiers from the park. Ultimately, merchants reveal the underlying assumption that the occupiers need to leave the park in order to solve the problem.

About 40% of merchants noticed that the playground had already been taken out of the park and did not feel optimistic about this first step toward redesign. For example, Victoria states, “they just took out the playground, which [...] I’m sure that’s like step one of this long term goal but keep going, you took out a playground, now what? What else are you gonna do? Keep going!” While Victoria does not necessarily feel negatively about the “long term goal,” she does feel that the plan has not been carried out correctly so far. Another merchant, Kim, talks about her similar frustration with how the plan has been carried out,

Right now the park looks strange with a big shelter with no tables under it and no equipment and it’s just a big empty weirdness right now, so I don’t think that reflects well on the town and it just looks unfinished. Yeah I don’t, you know, so it overall gives the town a bad appearance.

Like Kim, others placed the blame on those involved in the redesign. Thirty-three percent of merchants felt that the redesign did not reflect their wishes for the park. The result was a negative attitude towards Walla Walla, whether that be the city council, the chamber, the downtown foundation, or other entities. Ultimately, these merchants felt that the changes to the park made it simply “uninhabitable for everyone” at the moment.

In comparison, 16% of merchants felt that the redesign was not addressing the root of the problem: the occupiers. When I outlined the redesign plan for Joe, he responded with, “that’s not really positive, that’s not the root cause of the problem though, right?” Merchants who responded like Joe often had a general sense that the occupiers of the park needed to be “attended to” in some way, but they were never specific about what exactly needed to be done to get to the root of the problem. In fact, not one merchant responded to the solution question with the answer that there needed to be more social service agencies or options available to marginalized populations in Walla Walla. As Kim states, “it’s in transition right now to something else, so yeah, what happens to the people that like to hang out there?” There was, thus, a general concern on the part of some merchants for the occupiers, but it was typically not a concern that could be addressed with concrete ideas.

In that same group of merchants that felt that the redesign did not address the root of the problem, some, like Susan, believed that the “problem” would only be relocated: “I know they’ve been talking about it, and wanting to make it less attractive for the people they don’t want to hang out there, but they’re just going to hang out somewhere else, and you need to fix the problem, not the location.” Again, there was a general dissatisfaction towards the way the situation was being handled, but no concrete ideas on how to “fix the

problem.” Notably, others felt that relocating the problem would be fine (as long as the occupiers were not on the main drag of downtown) because that would be better for their business. In contrast, 16% of merchants thought that bringing in community events and redesigning the park would solve the problem. For example, Sam argues,

I think this summer is gonna be much better, it’s gonna be used for weekend events, it’s gonna be used possibly for, you know, mid-week farmer’s markets, and when there’s local people utilizing the park it’s not gonna be desirable to these people that go in and, you know, create chaos. So they create chaos until there’s a group of people that walk in there that are there to use the park, and then they leave, you know, so.

This positive view of the redesign was not common among merchants, as only two of them responded in this way. However, this response overlapped with one of the alternative solutions to “take back the park,” as merchants did acknowledge that the more the community used the park, the more likely the occupiers would be to leave the park. Victoria states that, “to have the community events there, that’s what it should be for, and [...] the more normal activity that goes on in the park, the more you will drive out the abnormal activity.” Both merchants touch on the idea that their social order is in some way being threatened by the occupiers because they “create chaos” and “abnormal activity.” Just as Howard Becker outlines the fact that social groups create and enforce norms, relegating some into the category of outsider, the merchants have demonstrated their constructed norms, leaving the occupiers outside of the normal category (Becker 1963:1). Even more, these merchants bring up the concept of system disruption once again, as the mere existence of abnormal vs. normal activity demonstrates that those labels are in fact constructed (Douglas 1966).

Finally, 33% of merchants believe that community events will help keep the occupiers out of the park—another parallel to “taking back the park”—but they do not feel

that it will ultimately solve the problem. As Darren states, “it seems like trying to re-design the park is just, we’re just spinning our wheels, you know. They’re great ideas but it’s not gonna be a big enough deterrent to keep everyone out of the park.” Merchants who responded in this way usually gave another idea for a solution along with bringing in community events. The alternative solutions are detailed in the next sub-sections.

“Taking Back the Park”

Merchants explore the idea of ownership of public space yet again with a theme that arose a few times in interviews: “taking back the park.” It is uncertain whether this phrase is a commonly shared idea throughout Walla Walla merchants or the general population of Walla Walla, but it did arise several times in the data. Three merchants mentioned this phrase explicitly, and about four others spoke about this concept without explicitly referring to it as “taking back the park.” In general, this expression represented a sort of crusade—an aggressive movement to reclaim a public space that has been wrongfully taken from them. Hence, Don Mitchell explains that the merchants might “see themselves not as instigators of a pogrom but rather as saviors: saviors of cities, saviors of all the “ordinary people” who would like to use urban spaces but simply cannot when they are chockfull of homeless people lying on sidewalks, sleeping in parks, and panhandling them every time they turn a corner. These are our latter-day ‘Little Arnolds,’ and theirs is not simply a good or just cause; it is a necessary one” (2003:172). The eradication of the people from the park, then, becomes imperative, and is framed as a campaign for an inescapable cause. Accordingly, Kevin explains how he understands the concept of “taking back the park,”

The community has to come out and support that and take back the park, because I mean, [...] I will agree with them, with the homeless, [the] transients, the delinquents, that is their park right now and I'm sure you've heard, it's referred to as stoner park, and it's their park and it needs to be taken back by Walla Walla, by the community, by the agencies and so on. So it will take a collective effort, without a doubt, and I know we're willing to do whatever it takes, if it takes our manpower, if it takes, you know, monetarily, assistance there, we're willing to do that. We'll go to meetings, give our two cents worth, what we think would be beneficial, but you know that's, that's how things get done, there's power in numbers, but there has to be action behind the words.

Kevin explicitly acknowledges that the occupiers "own" the park right now. Like other merchants, he feels that the general community of Walla Walla needs to take ownership of the park. Again, the fact that the park is actually public doesn't really matter in this case—to a certain extent, the only people who can hang out there and the only behaviors that can go on there are those that the general public construct and dictate as "normal." The occupiers are, again, relegated into Becker's category of outsider as the merchants and general public enforce a set of exclusionary norms. Kevin continues,

You know I also think downtown's gonna have to come together and take back that park, in other words, you know the community's gonna have to hang out there more. If we get a big group of people who use that consistently for the right reasons, that and with some enforcement, then I think it could change over there.

Kevin argues that the occupiers are using the park for the wrong reasons, whereas the general public will accordingly use it for the right reasons. This idea of "right" and wrong is evidently subjective, as the behaviors of the occupiers certainly do not seem to be immoral or wrong according to them. Thus, there is a set of rules and norms that the occupiers abide by within their own subculture, demonstrating that the merchants may also be outsiders to the inside group of occupiers. However, the merchants, the police, and the general public make up the majority; they have the power and the resources to

“enforce” their own set of rules onto the occupiers, they have the power to “take back the park.” Below, Andrew describes one way that he feels the merchants and general public can take back the park,

Doing events there like that, and make it a plaza, having music there, and I think that’s great, you know, you simply have to kind of, you need to kind of take back over the park, you know, business people downtown, it’d be a great place to go sit and have lunch, you know, you get out and have some fresh air. But you’ve got that problem, right, you know, you’ve gotta, you don’t wanna do it because of the element that’s there, but you need to do it to maybe help encourage them to move out.

Andrew focuses primarily on activities that he considers “normal” or abnormal, arguing that normal activities will force the occupiers out of the park. For example, he talks about sitting and having lunch and getting out and having some fresh air. These activities seem fairly mundane and harmless as compared to previously mentioned activities of park occupiers (ex: swearing, drinking, smoking). Thus, Andrew frames the problem around the abnormal activities, not the people, leaving out the possibility that the general public is certainly capable of participating in abnormal activities just as much as the occupiers are capable of participating in normal activities (ex: hanging out with friends in a city park). Ultimately, merchants tend to blame behavior rather than the occupiers themselves, so as to demonstrate sympathy for these kinds of marginalized populations. However, that does not change the fact that “taking back the park” explicitly champions the eradication of the people, not the behaviors, from the park.

Accordingly, Don Mitchell (2003) defines homelessness as simply the condition of not having a place to call one’s own, meaning that the only place where homeless have freedom of action is on public property (170). The struggle is thus, “an issue of geography, a geography in which a local prohibition (against sleeping in public, for

example) becomes a total prohibition (for example, on sleeping) *for some people*” (171). Despite the fact that not all of the park occupiers are homeless, most occupiers do not necessarily have a place to call their own, even if they do have a family home. Their behaviors, in turn, may be defined as acceptable in the privacy of their own home, but unacceptable in public spaces. A series of events, then, might work to annihilate the *people* from public spaces along with the behaviors (Mitchell 2003:172). Thus, by casting occupiers as outsiders and by demonstrating that normal space has been disrupted, merchants can justify certain conclusions, such as the creation of exclusionary ordinance.

Ordinance

Forty percent of merchants proposed the solution of creating ordinance or laws for the park. With this proposed solution, the Heritage Park social problem can be characterized as a moral panic because it, by its very nature, is volatile, meaning that it has erupted fairly suddenly, but may, almost as suddenly, subside as a result of a solution similar to ordinance. Thus, as long as the threat to the social order remains, the volatility does as well, but as soon as the occupiers are removed from the park or their behaviors are policed, the volatility will most likely subside (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:38-39).

Merchants went about explaining this solution by first either referencing the problems that the police have had with regulating a public park, or by talking about possibilities of making the park private. These merchants acknowledged that ordinance could not really be enforced as long as the park remained public. For example, Kevin states,

Well I mean I think first and foremost I mean there has to be, and I'm sure it's a lot easier to say than do but there has to be some ordinances or

something. One of the reasons why the police don't do very much is their hands are tied somewhat because it's a public park, so they can't go in and just kick people out without due reason and stuff like that. They're, I've been in some meetings [where they say] well this ordinance could be written [...]. Ok, well let's do it! So while I'm kind of little negative [towards] the authorities from the police standpoint, they're hands are somewhat tied because they don't have the backing to go in and enforce as much as probably they would like to do.

Kevin argues that the solution is relatively simple: make ordinances that the police can actually enforce. Again, merchants accredit the problem to authority figures, like the police, and explain that business concerns are not being addressed. Regardless, they acknowledge that the police's hands are "tied," because, again, it is a public park.

Likewise, Jennifer expresses her frustration with the police department,

Like I said, I don't know all the laws but I feel that there has to be laws out there that can take care of a problem. They need to do something, just not, I know that it's a public park, you can hang out in a public park, but you can write laws and have laws [in place] to remove what they're doing in the park, it's not like just a typical family or person just sitting in the park, I think that they need to address the problem and I think that they don't address the problem.

Here, Jennifer challenges the idea that the city cannot make ordinance for public parks.

She argues that if there is some kind of abnormal activity going on, something that is affecting the general public negatively, it seems logical and legal to put laws into place to prevent this from happening. She states, "it's not like just a typical family or person just sitting in the park." Again, the occupiers are relegated into the category of outsider and non-citizen (Becker 1963; Mitchell 2003). However, regardless of whether the city can make ordinance for a public park or not, they have not made these ordinances. So, other merchants search for ways to get around this predicament,

We questioned why it is a public park, part of the merchants have questioned, what if the park was purchased by a foundation, say Sherwood trust or something from the city, [so] it's now a private park through a

foundation that [has been] gifted to like the children of Walla Walla or something, but it's a private park, and therefore no loitering is allowed.

“Taking back the park” takes on a whole new meaning when money is factored in. In this case, there is not only power in numbers, but there is power in resources. By purchasing the park in order to make it private, the merchants and the town of Walla Walla would symbolically take ownership of public land solely because of their resources. The occupiers of Heritage Park are excluded in a whole new way, as they do not even have the physical means to buy their “own” park back. Ultimately, even in discussions about solutions, the framing of the park occupiers as a social problem never recedes and the solutions focus almost entirely on geographic space rather than on the occupiers themselves.

Parking Lot

Just a few merchants proposed the idea of bulldozing the whole thing and making a parking lot, but they noted others who felt the same way. Most of these merchants felt that the occupiers of Heritage Park were choosing to act out, and it was in no way an issue of whether Walla Walla provides enough support for them. As one merchant exclaimed when I was distributing the survey, “When are the bulldozers coming in?!” Likewise, others noted that they were dissatisfied with both the homeless population and the parking problem, so they suggested that Walla Walla address both of them at once,

Well, when I listed the two problems with downtown at the beginning I said there was [the] parking and the homeless issue. Let's take care of both of them by turning that into a parking lot. [...] You're going to increase your parking and you're also going to be taking that problem (the problem of Heritage Park) away, which the community is not using anymore because of the homeless population.

While these few merchants believed that this would solve the problem in Heritage Park, they did not address the question of where the occupiers would go. When I probed them further, they responded that this was just the most practical step, and, frankly, as long as the occupiers were not on the main drag of downtown, it did not really matter to them. Thus, the interests of the merchants play a large role in this framework, because as long as the occupiers are not in their sight (or in the sight of tourists), it does not affect their business and it does not affect them (Best 1990).

Larger Structural Problems

Finally, a couple of interviewees responded that they were unsure of what the solution could be for Heritage Park. These merchants addressed the problem as a larger structural issue that Walla Walla did not really have the means to take care of. For example, Joe responded that he did not know at all how to fix it, because he does not know “how to fix mental health care in the United States.” Likewise, Nancy referenced more problems that needed to be addressed on a national level,

I don't know what that answer is. We can't make it go away. I disagree with the people though that think that oh well you move it from here, to here, and like again what do you do about the solution? It's not gonna go away. We have this in every community large or small in the nation, and this isn't even including looking into the drug use and meth labs where people aren't congregating in. This is more to me of a homeless situation. There's a lot of stuff going on that's a bummer, but it's totally, it's more behind closed doors, whereas this is very, this is more a homeless population situation, in my mind. Um so, I don't know, I don't know.

Curiously, Joe and Nancy are the only ones who spoke about structural problems when talking about solutions. Accordingly, merchants tended to believe that the only way to

solve the problem of Heritage Park was to find a way to eradicate the occupiers from the park, rather than providing more services to them.

Conclusively, merchants were typically critical of the plan to redesign the park and proposed various other solutions, including “taking back the park,” instating ordinance, and building a parking lot. A couple of merchants felt that there was no clear or easy solution. These solutions, then, fit the business “agenda” and represent “calls for action to alleviate or eradicate the social problem” (Best 1990:37). And, despite attempts to argue that the occupiers in the park did not constitute the social problem, the proposed solutions demonstrate that the merchants would ultimately like to remove the occupiers from the park.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

The merchant surveys as well as the merchant interviews provide sufficient data to answer the original research question: How do the Walla Walla merchants frame Heritage Park as a potential social problem? To begin with, the merchant surveys lend an overview of the overarching merchant framework. In general, merchants hold a negative attitude toward Heritage Park and the occupiers, as 96% of merchants felt that Heritage Park was creating a negative image for Walla Walla. Merchants were less certain about whether Heritage Park and the Heritage Park occupiers had a negative financial impact on their businesses, and, when asked to rank the level of that financial impact, they were even more uncertain. From these results, it is evident that the merchants are united in the belief that Heritage Park is a social problem, but are not necessarily united in their means of explaining that social problem.

Accordingly, merchant interviews reveal the construction of the Heritage Park social problem through a series of rhetorical strategies, with the ultimate objective of eradicating the occupiers from the park. Merchants constructed this social problem in four steps, as follows: (a) referencing Walla Walla as an idyllic small town, (b) asserting various opinions about where the social problem stems from, (c) spreading stories throughout the merchant community, and (d) arguing for multiple solutions to the social problem. By framing Walla Walla as an idyllic small town, merchants could justify the idea that the occupiers are “out of place in the social and spatial order” and therefore do not belong in the park (Tonkiss 2005:74). Merchants added to this argument by asserting different and sometimes conflicting facts regarding the root of the Heritage Park social

problem; these assertions served as rhetorical strategies and provided the grounds for each merchant to draw his/her own conclusions. Merchants disseminated these ideas and conclusions about who the occupiers are and about what actually happens in Heritage Park throughout the business community. From their own constructed knowledge of the social problem, merchants concluded that it needs to be addressed either by redesigning the park, by “taking back the park,” by creating an ordinance, or by turning it into a parking lot, while just a few stated that there is no clear or easy solution.

Sociologically, the results reveal four theoretical patterns: social problems construction, labeling theory, moral panic, and the contestation of public space. In terms of social problems construction, the data supported the constructionist definition of social problems as “the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions” (Spector and Kitsuse 1987:75). The merchants acted as claims-makers, asserting and spreading socially constructed facts in order to generate social change (Best 1990). One way that they did this was through the process of labeling the Heritage Park occupiers as deviant—despite the fact that the great majority of their actions are not inherently deviant—and, in turn, relegating them into the category of “outsider” (Becker 1963). In a similar manner, the occupiers were identified as a threat to societal values and the merchants reacted in a disproportionate way in order to protect these values (Cohen 1972:1). Additionally, by characterizing the occupiers as outsiders, merchants placed them into the highly stigmatized status category of non-citizen, allowing the merchants to argue that certain behaviors and certain people do not belong in public spaces (Mitchell 2003).

This research suggests that social problems should not necessarily be taken as

objective realities, as certain groups might make claims in order to create change that aligns with their agendas. Moreover, “these competing claims open onto conflicts over space and power, cut lines of division and difference in the city, and are fought out in disputes over meaning and representation,” meaning that access to public space depends on the success of specific claims to that public space (Tonkiss 2005:63) and that the success of these claims likely depends on resources and rhetoric.

The Future of Heritage Park

In terms of the future of Heritage Park and the occupiers, the city of Walla Walla and the Sherwood Trust Community Leadership Program Cohort of 2014 are going through with the plan to redesign the park. While the Sherwood Trust Cohort asserts that this redesign is intended to make the space more accessible to all community members, rather than to exclude the occupiers from the park, it is uncertain whether the city has the same intentions. Furthermore, the city aims to release a public decision on Heritage Park in April of 2015 (Wollmuth 3/9/2015). Thus, it is difficult at this point to draw clear conclusions about which interests, resources, and rhetoric have influenced the decision-making process, or to speak to any kind of rationality that has been used to address the problem (Baillergeau 2014). In other words, there is no claims-maker who has entirely “won” the debate yet.

Accordingly, it seems appropriate to address the ways in which this research could inform the decision-making process positively. In Rebecca Hanson’s 1998 thesis, she proposed various recommendations in order to remedy the problem of youth discrimination of the teen occupiers, including unbiased news coverage from the *Walla*

Walla Union-Bulletin as well as the evaluation of school policies at both Paine High School and Walla Walla High School. Even though Rebecca's thesis may have resulted in a reevaluation of the treatment of park occupiers, seventeen years later, there is evidently still a problem. The different claims-makers of Walla Walla, then, should take this research as another acknowledgement of a potentially problematic framing of the Heritage Park occupiers, as well as an opportunity to become aware of and overcome their own biases and work together to create positive social change.

APPENDIX A: MERCHANT SURVEY

Walla Walla Financial Impact Merchant Survey

Informed Consent Form: This is a survey regarding your experience as a merchant in the city of Walla Walla, specifically in conjunction with Heritage Park, located on Main Street, between Public House 124 and La Colombina Women's Clothing Store, and across the street from Subway. Please be assured that the answers that are provided on this survey will be considered anonymous. Please know also that you can discontinue your participation in this survey at any time. Your filling out and submitting the survey is your informed consent that you have agreed to participate in our survey. If you have any questions, please direct them to the contacts provided below.

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What is your primary position with your business?

- Owner
- Manager
- Salesperson
- Accountant
- Buyer
- Delivery Person
- Other (please specify) _____

How long has your business been located in downtown Walla Walla?

Years

Months

What is the address of your Walla Walla business? Please be assured that this information is for the knowledge of the research team only. You may write-in, "decline to answer," if you prefer to keep this information anonymous as well.

Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with doing business in downtown Walla Walla.

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- No Opinion/Don't Know
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied

How do you feel about the state of the following characteristics of downtown Walla Walla?

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	No Opinion/Don't Know	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
History	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Types of people likely to be downtown	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality and availability of shopping options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking Availability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small Town Ambience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safety/Crime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Number of Shoppers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Downtown Events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Condition of the streets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Directional Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transients/Street People	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gangs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This summer, there has been a good deal of publicity about the impact of transients and street people in downtown Walla Walla. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability, as they relate to your business experiences this summer.

Do you feel that there has been a financial impact of transients and street people on your business this summer?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please rate the overall level of impact of transients and street people on your business this summer.

- Very High
- High
- Slightly High
- No Opinion/Don't Know
- Slightly Low
- Low
- Very Low

Please elaborate. (write-in response)

Have you witnessed any of the following activities downtown this summer (check all that apply)?

- Consumption of illegal drugs or alcohol outside of licensed downtown facilities
- Nudity or sex acts
- Physical harm of innocent bystanders
- Intimidation (physical or verbal) of innocent bystanders
- Swearing
- Physical damage to property
- Urinating or defecating in public
- Aggressive panhandling
- Littering
- Other (please specify) _____
- I did not witness any of the above in downtown Walla Walla this summer

Do you believe that the presence of transients and street people in the Heritage Park area of downtown is creating a negative image for the City of Walla Walla?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

It is possible that this study will continue. Would you be willing to participate in an interview with our research team in the future? Please be assured that all interview responses will be treated confidentially.

- Yes
- No

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To “If yes, please provide your name, email address, and/or phone number.”

Please provide any additional comments that you may have. (write-in response).

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX B: MERCHANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions—How Walla Walla Merchants Frame Heritage Park

Demographics

1. Gender of Interviewee:
2. City/town of Residence for Interviewee:
3. Job Title:
4. Name of Business:
5. Year of Establishment:
6. Business Address:

General Experience Doing Business in Walla Walla

1. Why did you choose to establish business in Walla Walla?
2. Tell me about your general experience of doing business here in Walla Walla. What kind of interactions do you generally have?
3. What kinds of people come into your store? What kinds of people tend to cluster around your store?
4. How happy and/or satisfied are you with doing business in Walla Walla?
5. What characteristics and aspects of the community of Walla Walla do you appreciate?
6. What characteristics and aspects of the community of Walla Walla are you less satisfied with?

Experience with Heritage Park and Heritage Park Occupiers

1. Are you aware of the existence of Heritage Park? What are your general impressions of this park? What do you think this park adds or takes away from the community of Walla Walla? What three words or phrases come to mind when you think about Heritage Park?
2. Tell me about your personal experience with Heritage Park. Do you walk by or through the park often? Do you interact with any of the park occupiers?
3. Do you have a general idea or impression of the kinds of people who hang out in Heritage Park? If so, who are these people, why do they tend to be there, do you know anything about their personal backgrounds? Do you think that these are people who deserve sympathy or people who should be punished?
4. What three words or phrases come to mind when you think about the kinds of people who typically hang out there on a hot, sunny summer afternoon?
5. Who do you gain knowledge from about these people?
6. What kinds of activities have you witnessed in Heritage Park in recent months?
7. What kinds of activities have others told you they have witnessed in Heritage Park?
8. Do you feel that there is a financial impact of Heritage Park on your business? If so, how large do you think this financial impact is? Is it measurable? Can you make a financial estimate of the impact? What do you believe the cause is of this financial impact?

9. Do you believe that the presence of transients and street people in the Heritage Park area of downtown is creating a negative image for the city of Walla Walla in general? If so, why?

Proposed Solutions and Final Questions

1. Do you believe that Heritage Park is a community problem that must be addressed by the city of Walla Walla? If so, why is it a problem?
2. If at all, what is the city's responsibility to deal with this problem? What power or authority do they have?
3. How do you think the city of Walla Walla should address the situation in Heritage Park?
4. Do you believe that Walla Walla provides enough support for transients and street people? What rights do these people have to be in the park and live their lives the way they want to?
5. Who do you think the city of Walla Walla should include in the decision-making process concerning Heritage Park? Merchants? Residents? Heritage Park Occupiers? Tourists? Everyone?
6. Is there anything you'd like to share that I haven't asked you?

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