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While insanity and addiction have both been used throughout history to villainize and explain homelessness, creating a stereotype that all homeless individuals are either “crazy” or addicts, these mental disorders are fundamentally different in nature. Insanity, an outdated concept, often refers to a range of severe mental health conditions shown by a loss of reality and coherent thought. In contrast, addiction is a contemporary focus, involving compulsive substance use despite negative consequences on these people's lives, which reflects a different aspect of mental health. While these two mental illnesses are very different, they are used in the exact same way to make housed people feel more comfortable not offering help to those who are not as fortunate.

Insanity was the blanket term used to describe people who were unhoused in the 1850's. There were instances, such as Edward Moore, where these people actually had mental instability and were deemed insane or unable to care for themselves. But many just had to live with the name even while being very capable human beings. In the book *Skid Road* by Josephine Ensign, the words homeless and insane are used interchangeably. While talking about the ongoing question of what to do with those who are unhoused, she says, “Who is responsible for paupers, for insane people, for homeless people?” (Ensign 15). While looking closer at this quote, you realize two of the words used to mean poor or unhoused, but one is just simply a mental disorder. How do these 3 words mean the same

thing in this sentence? It is because, in the 1800s, the word insane was synonymous with unhoused or homeless. The stigma against mental illnesses in the 1800s made it so there was also a stigma against homeless people, which has carried through to today's society.

As time went on and homelessness increased, the mental illness most commonly used to describe homeless people changed. It moved away from insanity and morphed into addiction. While, without a doubt, there is a drug use epidemic going on that involves overuse in the unhoused community, not all homeless people experience addiction, and certainly not all homeless people are on the streets because of it. It is important to mention that that is the case for many unhoused people, but creating these narratives that “all” homeless people are addicts leads to stereotypes that keep these people on the streets. When talking about homelessness, one of the main topics that comes up is criminalization. Criminalization and the Addiction Stereotype go hand in hand since both make unhoused people look like the villains. In the article Criminalization of Homelessness by Eric Tars, they mention the ‘Reducing Street Homelessness Model Bill’ saying, “endorsing the criminalization of ‘unauthorized sleeping [or] camping...’ and making it easier to place psychiatric holds and administer involuntary medical treatment to unhoused people experiencing mental health conditions.” (Tars 43). The police described in the quote reflect a broader societal tendency to tie homeless people to addiction and severe mental health conditions. Instead of addressing the issue of homelessness with support, these policies focus on controlling and punishing behaviors that are commonly associated with unhoused people. These policies contribute to the public's perception that homelessness is caused by personal failings such as addiction rather than a complex issue involving systemic failures. These beliefs lead to less support from the public to create more long-term solutions. As well as an increase in support for the criminalization of the unhoused since, in their minds,

these people are “just addicts” or “criminals.”

The stereotype that all homeless people are either “insane” or “addicts” has distorted the public view of homelessness throughout time. Historically, “Insanity” was used to describe the unhoused, confusing a severe mental illness with homelessness. That outdated view evolved into the modern focus on addiction. This created policies that criminalize and stigmatize homelessness instead of help. These stereotypes do not take into consideration the complexity of the issue and further skew the public view on homelessness. Addressing homelessness requires people to look beyond the false labels that allow them to ignore the problem, and instead find long-term solutions.