

Sociology:

Beyond the Numbers

**Social and Economic Factors
Contributing to Homelessness**

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Homeslessness stood out to me during this course because I was able to see that many things contributed to it, not only socially but also politically and economically.

How sociology changed my perspective

The theory that has made me see the world differently is symbolic interactionism. This theory emphasizes how interaction and communication between people shape how they view their lives. In chapter 1, it states that “humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society.” (section 1.3) Symbolic Interactionism has kept relating to my reflection along this course, and has been the reason the theory has stood out the most, because it continues to explain how the relationships we build in our lives are essential in determining our perception of life and ourselves.



Personal Troubles Vs Public Issues



Using the sociological imagination to connect personal experiences to society as a whole. When applying it to homelessness, we can see that people tend to jump to conclusions when judging these individuals as to the reason they are in the situation they are in, and usually connect the belief of addiction, instead of the bigger issues that contribute to the situation, such as societal issues like housing costs, job loss, or access to support systems. Overall, the sociological imagination allows us to see how these social problems stem from economic and social policies and is needed to address the root of this situation.

Inequality, conformity or social movements

The concept of the conflict theory relates to homelessness because it enforces the idea that homelessness isn't caused only because of individual issues but issues of society dealing with inequality regarding power and wealth. In discussion 6, I stated, "how those who have a restricted income may face decisions that can lead them to an even bigger financial struggle just because they don't have as many opportunities as the upper classes." during a simulation where I faced a choice of picking a cheap way to fix a health issue or actually get help from a professional but in the simulation I was low in resources regarding money and helped me reflect on how people deal with making choices like these because they dont have those resources available to them.



Growth Reflection

When reviewing my module 2 self-reflection, I noticed how I mostly just talked about the bigger picture regarding inequality in lower-class nations like Africa where I talked about how the country tends to face extreme poverty situations and struggle to have the basic resources, but now I'm able to think more deeply and create questions as to why a nation is considered lower class and what social, economic, and political factors have led the nations to lack resources. My thinking has evolved by being able to have newer thoughts regarding things like why there is a policy that is restricting the help to the homeless, and how a nation handles the situation

Status:

Status regarding homelessness is related to how these individuals see themselves based on how they are perceived based on how society tends to treat them. If society views homeless individuals negatively based on the big beliefs and stigmas, it can lead them to believe that that's how they are viewed, and can cause a shift in self-esteem, and might even feel a sense of insignificance, and prevent them from wanting to reach out for help.

Role Strain, Conflict, and Performance

Role strain is experienced in families, especially single parents, who can feel role strain and are more prone to falling into homelessness because they get overwhelmed with all the factors that come with being a parent and having to deal with their economic issues. Single parents often face role conflict, as the demands from their parental responsibilities can clash with other factors like employment. In the 7 takeaways from 2024, they talk about how the percentage of children experiencing homelessness has significantly increased, which supports this idea. The performance of a single parent's role being a provider can be hard to manage when they have limited resources to be used.

Looking-glass self

Public reactions shape identity

The concept of the looking-glass self affects homeless individuals because if society views them negatively, in my HD1 post, I talked about how it can lead them to believe the idea that that's how they are viewed, which could affect their ability to reach out for help because of the shift in self-esteem, and might even feel a sense of insignificance. The Grants Pass article also talks about a situation where Helen Cruz was one of the individuals who was fined continuously and eventually was swept by the cops, and in the article stated that "Everything was just destroyed," Cruz said. "It took my self-esteem and ... just stomped on it basically." Interactions like these were commonly talked about, and it shows how the individuals who experience this are truly impact them.

Approaches

Asheville (Continuum of Care):	Norway (Housing First):	Criminalization (Grants Pass):
<p>The Asheville plan aims to provide services like healthcare, shelters, jobs, and financial aid first before permanent housing.</p>	<p>Norway's approach aimed to prioritize housing for those who were homeless.</p>	<p>Enforced laws that managed the number of homeless individuals who were in public areas.</p>
<p>Restrained because of policy constraints and the way the system is set up</p>	<p>They implement solutions at the national level, which has created many policies regarding helping to resolve the issue</p>	<p>Makes it seem like they were just focused on controlling where the homeless were rather than providing the solutions/ help.</p>
	<p>The U.S., the rate was 2.3 homeless Americans per 1,000 residents (771,480 nationwide) in 2024 — nearly four times Norway's rate.</p>	<p>The most recent Oregon Point-in-Time count, or PIT count, shows 756 school-age children were homeless in Josephine County in 2023</p>

Sociological Concepts

1. Looking Glass-Self

- Negative societal views of homeless individuals can lead them to believe the idea that that's how they are viewed, and might even feel a sense of insignificance

“Everything was just destroyed,” Cruz said. “It took my self-esteem and ... just stomped on it basically.” (Grants Pass v. Johnson, Jeremiah Hayden)

- Cities are allowed to remove encampments, and the homeless are being treated as an inconvenience rather than a structural issue

“Grants Pass urges that fines and imprisonment are “standard punishments” with roots that predate the Eighth Amendment and which continue to be valid under the Supreme Court’s precedents.” (City of Grants Pass, Oregon v., vkimber)

Norway's government added support to the individuals by placing policies that provided housing as a priority, which helped address the problem long-term. Asheville also attempts to provide support, but they are restrained because of policy constraints and the way the system is set up, which affects how impactful it has been

2. Role strain

- Homelessness can be caused if an individual is having trouble meeting the expectations of their role, such as employment, a family member, or resident

“Gutowski became homeless soon after her husband died... “It kind of all piled on at the same time” ... “I never expected to be out here for this long.” (Grants Pass v. Johnson, Jeremiah Hayden)

Homelessness

3. Status

Homeless individuals often hold a low social status, society ranks them lower, which affects access to opportunities and respect

Both Norway and Asheville recognize homelessness as a social issue that needs to be addressed

“Certain groups of color continue to be overrepresented among the unsheltered homeless population” (7 Takeaways from 2024 Point-in-Time Count, Soucy&Hall)

Norway's approach aimed to prioritize housing for the homeless. Compared to the Asheville plan, where they aim to provide services like healthcare, shelters, jobs, and financial aid first before permanent housing.

[The UN's Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing...](#) sees homelessness as the “most visible and most severe symptom of the lack of respect for the right to adequate housing.” (How Norway Is Proving That Homelessness Is a Solvable Problem, [Yeung](#))

Structural Causes and Solutions

Housing: The Norwegian approach would address this problem the best because their main priority is providing housing. “What changed that caused homelessness to explode then? Again, it’s simple: lack of housing. The places people needed to move for good jobs stopped building the housing necessary to accommodate economic growth.” (The Obvious Answer to Homelessness, Demsas) Creating a foundation where they can follow up with other issues

Employment: The Asheville approach prioritizes services like jobs before housing, which allows the homeless to create a sustainable income. “some people move to superstar cities in search of gainful employment and then find themselves unable to keep up with the cost of living” (The Obvious Answer to Homelessness, Demsas)

Healthcare: The Asheville provides healthcare before housing, making medical care a priority

Policy: The Norway approach implements solutions nationally, therefore it shows how they have created policies that have helped solve the issue rather than trying to control. “The general public recognizes that housing affordability plays a role in homelessness. Yet politicians and policymakers have generally failed to address the root cause of the crisis.” (The Obvious Answer to Homelessness, Demsas) This shows how even those policies might be created, it doesn't necessarily improve the issue.

Local Evidence:

Beloved Asheville: Their goals are to provide security and a home, improve healthcare access and affordability, food access, and promote racial, educational, and economic equity. Some way they have locally helped is by building a village of 12 affordable homes fully furnished, provide fresh healthy food weekly, and donate school materials to the youth

Sociological Analysis

Social stratification: This applies to the local evidence because it shows how Asheville experiences inequality in access to things like housing and healthcare. The goal of BeLoved is to address those inequalities.

Social Mobility: BeLoved organization has goals that allow social mobility to be more attainable for homeless individuals because it allows them to manage barriers and have better access to resources and opportunities.

Personal Growth

I think my thinking has significantly changed over the semester, especially in understanding social problems. Being able to read about sociological concepts and relate them to society and personal interactions has allowed me to be able to realize that situations that I might perceive as something simple have deeper explanations to these concepts, whether it's how a person interacts with someone or why issues like homelessness aren't fully addressed. Overall, I think it's changed my perception and allowed me to be more open to wondering why certain events or situations happen and why they're set up the way they are.

Why does this matter?

I think being able to understand homelessness sociologically matters beyond this class because it allows people to see beyond the common beliefs and stigmas that surround the homeless community, which is usually negative. I think it would allow people to have a different perception that homelessness is just an issue caused by the individual themselves, but it's connected to social, economic, and political issues that deal with factors like the lack of affordable housing. Being able to see the bigger picture can allow more empathy for the homeless and advocate for changes that will address the root of the cause, rather than being quick to blame the individuals themselves. Overall I also think that it can create a fairer society for everyone