

Homelessness Through Sociological Imagination

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Introduction to Sociology

Personal Connection

As I get older, I have become more and more aware of the homelessness crisis. Living in West Asheville I have had a lot of interactions with the homeless community. The articles I read during this unit I started thinking more about our community's prejudice against homeless people and everything we do and do not do to help homeless people feel more supported.

One concept that I found interesting is the "self-fulfilling prophecy". After reading what it is I realized how much it relates to me and probably many others without even realizing. (sec. 4.3).

How Sociology Changed My Perspective

This course has made me start thinking about other people's perspectives rather than just my own. While thinking about others' perspectives, I realized how much I have in common with people in this class and around the world. All of the different sociological theories can easily be applied to the United States, but I found that the conflict theory represents how I see our country. "Conflict theory looks at society as a competition for limited resources" (sec. 1.3). People typically want to feel like they have power and/or wealth in some form, which is why there are some people who have nothing and others who have everything.



Personal Troubles vs. Public Issues

There are homeless people all over Asheville; they are more prevalent in West Asheville. Not every homeless person struggles with addiction and/or mental illness, but most do. I have had encounters with many schizophrenic homeless people, and a lot of public concern comes from these people who clearly need serious help, and instead of helping, we call the police so we can ignore the reality of our community's state. In the Grants Pass article, the majority of the community was concerned with removing the homeless people from their town. Sociological imagination has helped me look beyond myself and my community. I have connected my experiences to other communities, and I now understand the larger problems in our country.



Inequity, Conformity, Social Movements

& Social forces

In discussion five, I talked about Jim Jones and how, just like most people, he just wanted to feel like he belonged. It demonstrates the lengths people will go to feel accepted. In discussion six, we played an online game to see if we could survive a month with \$1,000. I imagine that is what life would feel like when living in relative poverty, because I was able to afford the necessities, but I had to cut back on a lot of recreational and leisure activities. This brought out people's values and morals; should they put their child above all others, or will they just look out for themselves. Many homeless people need to make similar hard decisions about shelter, food, and child/dog care.



Reflection



In my Module Two reflection, I talked about people's prejudice against others, whether they are aware of it or not. Most people seem to have more passive aggression against homeless people, just like how a person might cross the street if they see someone coming that might cause them to feel fear. I have also started thinking about how I have assimilated some of the "South" norms without even trying. As a female of color, I realized I force a southern accent sometimes when I feel uncomfortable in a predominantly white environment, so that they are more likely to accept me. If I had adapted to different societal norms within the United States, it is interesting to think about a person who is from a different country and how they go about fitting in with the dominant group.

Status

STUDENT 2

I would describe the majority of homeless people's status as an ascribed status because being homeless is typically out of one's control. They are ranked fairly low in society given that they do not own land or hold much power. While there are steps that one can willingly take that will end up with them becoming homeless, they still did not intentionally choose to be homeless.

Role Concepts

Not every homeless person is the same but they are all trying to survive. When I see a homeless person on the side of the road with a cardboard sign asking for money or food I see this as their role performance. When I go to Los Nenes Bakery in West Asheville there are usually homeless people there opening the door for you and asking for some change or food on your way out. Different people will choose different way to express themselves and make a living. I am not sure if it is a strategy but I will always give food and/or money to a homeless person if they have a dog or child.

I often see homeless people looking exhausted and malnourished which can stem from role strain because they are tasked with so much just to stay alive and feel safe in the community. So many homeless people are also parents or have other obligations and they might experience role conflict because they are trying their best to survive, but then adding in other people and obligations can make them feel torn and stressed out.

Looking-Glass Self

In my homelessness discussion one I talked about where I live and how prevalent the homeless community is there. The homeless people in West Asheville are almost treated like vermin because people do not want them near their home and they might even give them their food scraps. When homeless people are treated like wild animals they might start to view themselves that way. In the Grants Pass article the homeless community talked about how the city had taken away public bathrooms and washing stations in an effort to evacuate the homeless people from the park and they were threatened with jail time and/or fines.



Three Approaches

Asheville



Asheville is focused on providing affordable housing especially for minorities

Norway



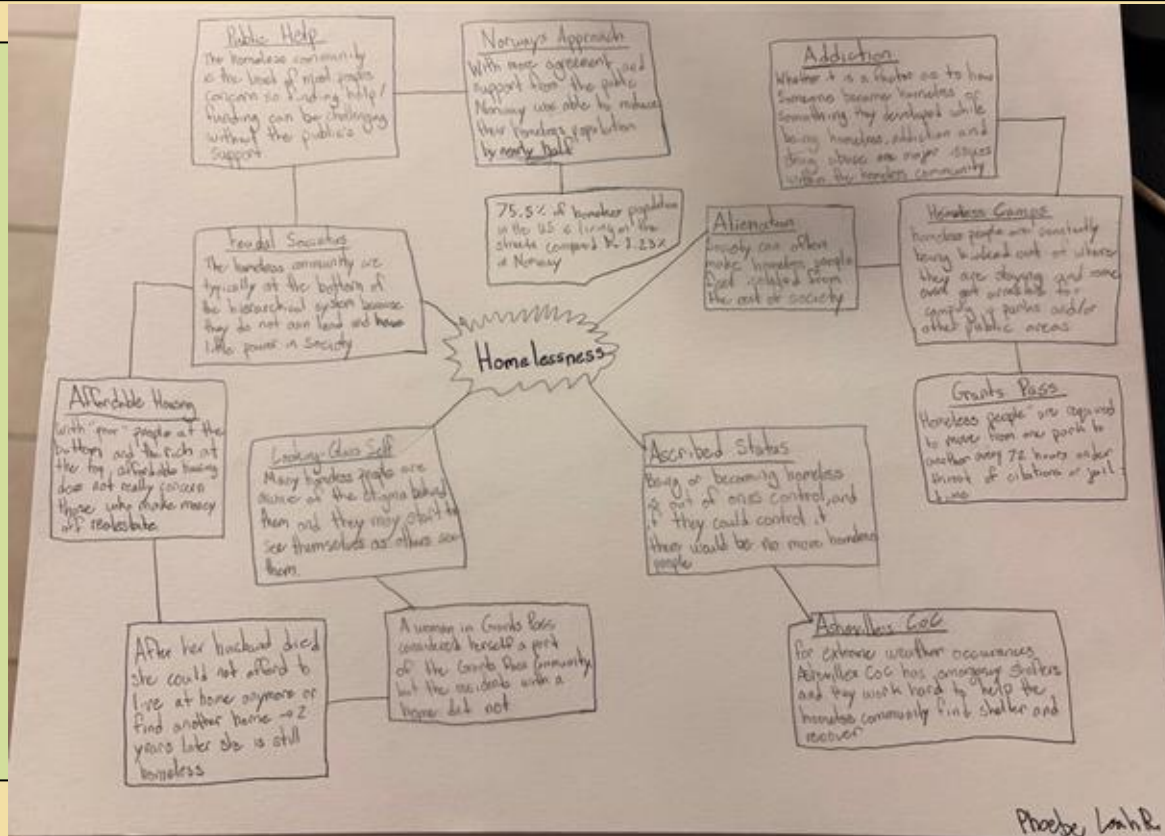
Norway has worked with local governments and non-profit organizations to find housing to those in need

Grants Pass



Grants Pass was working towards evacuating homeless people out of their town so it would not be their "problem" anymore

My Concept Map



Structural Causes

& Solutions

In recent years, more and more people have been pushed out of their homes due to the rise in housing costs. Asheville has especially had an increase in the homeless population since Hurricane Helene. Housing and employment go side by side, meaning it is hard to have one without the other. Minimum wage in the U.S. does not cover the cost of living for most households. In "The Obvious Answer to Homelessness" Demas talks about how the lack of housing is the underlying cause of homelessness. A big part of understanding the homelessness crisis is thinking about those who you cannot see or you do not interact with.

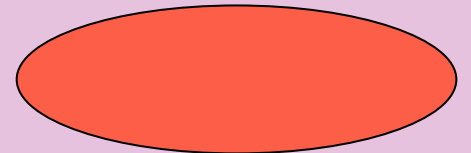
Local Data

Asheville's ultimate goal is to create affordable housing in the community. They are looking for organizations that will help support their strategies. Apart from affordable housing, people also host events where homeless people can come and get food and other resources to help them succeed. Asheville is striving to help minorities find affordable housing, and they have acknowledged the unfair treatment of people of color when it comes to buying and affording homes. 12 Baskets, a nonprofit organization in West Asheville, helps provide the homeless community with free meals and wellness activities.

<https://www.ashevillepovertyinitiative.org/12baskets>

Sociological Analysis

Asheville is trying to bring awareness to the social stratification because the first step in making change is to make others aware of what needs to change and why. The way we see people is usually based on their socioeconomic status so we can assess what their role in the community might be and what they have to offer. In order to begin achieving more affordable housing for minorities we have to look past the amount of money or power someone might have and start thinking about what good they could do with the right amount of support from the community.



Personal Growth

In the beginning of this class I had never thought about different roles in societies and what things have shaped who I am. I learned that I have a lot in common with many people that I do not really know. I began to think about people from different backgrounds and how different their lives are and the different practices they have. This class has made me think outside of my small bubble of friends and family.

Why This Matters

Learning about homelessness through a sociological lens helps one think past one's own perception of what it means to be homeless. So many people have negative feelings towards the homeless community because they see them as mentally ill drug addicts, but learning about the homeless community that we do not necessarily see can help us better understand the underlying causes and problems of homelessness. The more people who become aware of the homeless crisis, the more change we can make.

