

# Homelessness through sociological lens

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Homelessness stood out to me in this course because I started noticing more things in my community and thinking about it differently. Before learning sociology, I saw it mostly as an individual being lazy and not wanting to work hard, but now I understand it is connected to larger problems like housing costs, jobs, and access to resources. This project showed me how personal situations are connected to bigger social forces and why homelessness is an important issue to study.



# How sociology changed changed my perspective

- ▶ Throughout the first module, I learned how sociologists study groups and how society influences individuals. One idea that changed my perspective was how social institutions shape who we are. Reflecting on my life, I realized how God, my family, and my friends have all played a role in shaping me. I also saw how trends like bottle flipping show how popular culture brings people together and spreads through social media. As the text explains, “popular culture is accessible by most and is expressed and spread through commercial and social media outlets” (Section 3.3). Overall, this module helped me understand that individuals and society are closely connected and constantly influence each other.

# Personal Troubles vs Public issues

- ▶ The sociological imagination helped me understand the difference between personal troubles and public issues in a more real way. At first, homelessness can seem like a personal problem, like someone losing a job or not being able to afford rent. But looking at it more closely, I realized it's actually a bigger public issue too. Things like high housing costs, low wages, and limited resources affect a lot of people, not just one person. This made me see that homelessness isn't just about individual choices—it's also about how society is set up.

# Inequality, conformity, or social movements

- ▶ The Peoples Temple created a strong sense of belonging by welcoming people from all kinds of backgrounds. Jim Jones helped build that connection by making members feel supported and cared for, which brought them closer together. Over time, the group started to feel less like a formal organization and more like a close, everyday community that people depended on emotionally. One moment that stood out to me was when Jim Jones and his wife adopted children of different ethnicities, which went against social norms at the time and seemed like a way to challenge ideas about race. According to *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, “Conformity is the extent to which an individual complies with group norms or expectations” (Section 6.2). This shows that even though some people go against norms, most people tend to follow them because being part of a group gives them a sense of acceptance and identity, which can strongly shape how they think and act.

# Growth reflection

- ▶ Looking back, I can see how much my thinking has changed. I remember a time in my baseball locker room when we caught a mouse and someone suggested we go kill it. At first it felt like a joke, but it quickly became something I wasn't comfortable with. Even though I didn't agree with it, I still went along because I didn't want to feel left out or be seen as not fun. That experience helped me realize how powerful group pressure can be and how much we look to others to decide how to act. At the same time, the Spent simulation opened my eyes to how hard life can be for people dealing with poverty. It showed me that people don't always have real choices when they're struggling financially, sometimes they're just trying to get through the day. Learning about movements like Black Lives Matter also made me realize how much change can happen when people come together and actually care about an issue. Overall, I've started to see that people's actions aren't just about individual decisions, but are shaped by social pressures, inequality, and the situations they're in.

# Status

- ▶ Homelessness isn't just about not having a place to live, it becomes a big part of how someone is seen by others. It can turn into what's called a master status, meaning it shapes how people treat you in a lot of situations. People who are homeless are often judged or stereotyped right away, sometimes without anyone knowing their story. That can make it harder to get a job, find housing, or even be treated with basic respect. It made me realize that status isn't just about your position, but also how society reacts to you.

# Role Strain, Role conflict, And Role performance

- ▶ People experiencing homelessness deal with a lot more than just not having a home, they're also trying to keep up with different roles in life. For example, someone might be a parent but struggle to provide basic things like food or shelter, which creates stress. They might also be trying to find or keep a job while not having a stable place to live, which makes everything harder. Even simple responsibilities become overwhelming in that situation. It really shows how homelessness can affect every part of someone's daily life, not just where they sleep.







# Looking glass Self

- ▶ The way people treat someone who is homeless can really affect how that person sees themselves. If someone is constantly ignored, judged, or avoided, they might start to feel invisible or less important. Over time, those reactions can shape their identity and self-worth. This made me realize that homelessness isn't just physical, it can also affect someone mentally and emotionally based on how others respond to them.

# Three approaches

- ▶ Different places respond to homelessness in very different ways. In Asheville, the Continuum of Care model tries to help by offering multiple services at once, like shelters, job support, and healthcare. In Norway, the approach is different, they follow a “Housing First” model, where people are given stable housing before anything else, which helps create long-term stability. On the other hand, the Grants Pass v. Johnson case shows a more punitive approach, where laws are used to control homelessness instead of solve it, often punishing people for basic survival behaviors like sleeping outside. What connects all of these is the lack of affordable housing as a root cause. From a sociological perspective, these differences come from larger social structures, like government policies and cultural values. Norway treats housing as a basic right, while the United States often focuses more on individual responsibility. Because of this, Norway’s approach seems more effective since it directly addresses the main cause of homelessness, lack of stable housing, while other approaches can sometimes make the problem worse instead of solving it.

## Comparing Approaches to Homelessness

Location	Approach	Main Idea	Outcome
<b>Asheville</b> 	<b>Continuum of Care</b> 	Multiple services at once (shelter, jobs, healthcare, counseling, etc.)	Helps short-term but doesn't always lead to permanent housing.
<b>Norway</b> 	<b>Housing First</b> 	Housing is given first, then support is provided.	Leads to long-term stability and lower homelessness.
<b>Grants Pass</b> 	<b>Criminalization</b> 	Laws punish sleeping or camping outside.	Makes homelessness worse and harder to escape.

**ROLES & ROLE PERFORMANCE**  
Homeless individuals are often assigned devalued roles by society.  
"People experiencing homelessness are seen as 'outsiders' and treated as less than fully human."  
- Public Opinion

**STATUS**  
Homeless people are given a low status that limits opportunities.  
"They're not just poor, they're disrespected." - Grants Pass Article

**ROLE STRAIN**  
Pressure comes from trying to meet societal expectations with limited resources.  
"It's exhausting trying to hold a job, stay sober, and find housing when everything is stacked against you."  
- HD1 Reflection

**LOOKING-GLASS SELF**  
Stigma shapes how people see themselves.  
"When people are constantly judged, it affects their self-worth and sense of belonging."  
- HD1 Reflection

**ROLE CONFLICT**  
Conflicting expectations from different roles (e.g. parent, worker, community member) create tension.  
"People want to be good parents or employees, but homelessness makes those roles nearly impossible."  
- HD1 Reflection

How do sociological concepts help us understand homelessness?

**HOMELESSNESS:**  
Individual Experiences, Structural Forces, & Societal Responses

How do different approaches respond to homelessness? (HD2)

What does the evidence & our observations show? (HD1)

**STRUCTURAL FORCES**

- Lack of affordable housing
- Income inequality & low wages
- Mental health & addiction services gaps
- Systemic racism & discrimination
- Criminalization of poverty

**HOW IT ALL CONNECTS**

- Structural inequality shapes roles, status, and opportunities.
- Stigma and public opinion influence policy and treatment.
- Society's response can either reinforce exclusion or promote inclusion.
- Solutions that provide housing and dignity create the most lasting change.

**COMPARING APPROACHES (HD2)**

**ASHEVILLE: CONTINUUM OF CARE**

- Coordinates shelters, outreach, housing, & support services.
- Focus on local partnerships.
- Limited affordable housing.

**QUOTE:** "We're doing our best with what we have, but the need is overwhelming."  
- Asheville CoC Report

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**  
Strong collaboration but underfunded and overwhelmed



**NORWAY: HOUSING FIRST**

- Provides permanent housing first, then supportive services.
- High trust, low barriers.
- Proven to reduce homelessness.

**QUOTE:** "Housing is a human right. The rest follows."  
- Norwegian Model Report

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**  
Housing first works because it focuses on dignity & stability



**GRANTS PASS: CRIMINALIZATION**

- Anti-camping ordinance & fines.
- Focus on enforcement over services.
- Displaces people, doesn't solve root causes.

**QUOTE:** "This is about making people invisible, not making communities safer."  
- Grants Pass Article

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**  
Punishment doesn't solve homelessness—it deepens it.



**THE OBVIOUS ANSWER: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

- Invest in affordable, accessible housing.
- Address root causes: wages, housing, healthcare.
- Long-term solutions > short-term fixes.

**QUOTE:** "Build the homes. The evidence is clear."  
- The Obvious Answer to Homelessness

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**  
Affordable housing is the foundation of real solutions.



**EVIDENCE FROM READINGS & OUR OBSERVATIONS (HD1)**

**GRANTS PASS ARTICLE**

- "The ordinance makes it a crime to sit, lie, or sleep in public."
- "Fines up to \$295 and potential jail time."
- "Critics say it punishes people for being poor, not for committing crimes."

**PUBLIC OPINION ARTICLE**

- "Most Americans support helping the homeless, but not in their backyard."
- Support drops when affordable housing might change their neighborhood."
- "NIMBY attitudes block local solutions."

**HD1 REFLECTION (ASHEVILLE)**

- "In Asheville, I see kind people giving food, but also police telling people to move along."
- "Tourism and high rent push people out of the city."
- "Feels like beauty for some comes at the cost of others."

**COMBINED REFERENCES, QUOTES, & STATISTICS**

1. Grants Pass Article - "The ordinance makes it a crime to sit, lie, or sleep in public."
2. Grants Pass Article - "Fines up to \$295 and potential jail time."
3. Grants Pass Article - "Critics say it punishes people for being poor, not for committing crimes."
4. Public Opinion Article - "Most Americans support helping the homeless, but not in their backyard."
5. Public Opinion Article - "Support drops when affordable housing might change their neighborhood."
6. Public Opinion Article - "NIMBY attitudes block local solutions."


**KEY**  
Sociological Concepts (Ch. 4)

# Structural causes and Solutions

- ▶ This article shows that homelessness is not mainly caused by personal failure, but by larger structural problems, especially the lack of affordable housing. It explains this using the idea of musical chairs: even if some people are more vulnerable than others, someone will always be left without a “seat” if there simply aren’t enough homes available. The article argues that high rent prices and low housing availability are the biggest reasons homelessness is worse in certain places, not things like mental illness or drug use. This connects to the idea of social structure, where systems like housing markets and government policies shape people’s lives. Because of this, the most effective solution is to increase affordable housing and provide stable housing first, since that directly targets the root cause. Other approaches, like criminalizing homelessness, don’t solve the problem and can actually make it worse by trapping people in difficult situations. Overall, this shows that homelessness is a larger societal issue, not just an individual one.

# Local Evidence

- ▶ In my local area around Asheville, homelessness is something that is clearly visible in everyday life. Organizations like Homeward Bound of WNC work to help people experiencing homelessness by focusing on permanent housing and support services. Their goal is to move people out of homelessness as quickly as possible and provide stability through housing-first programs. There are also shelters, outreach teams, and community efforts that try to provide food, healthcare, and temporary housing. Even with these resources, homelessness is still a major issue, which shows how complex the problem is at a local level.

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- ▶ Looking at my local area through a sociological perspective, I can see how larger social forces are shaping homelessness. One concept that applies is **social structure**, since systems like housing costs, wages, and access to healthcare all affect whether someone can stay housed. Another concept is the **looking-glass self**, because the way people in the community react to homelessness, like ignoring or judging, can impact how individuals see themselves. This shows that homelessness is not just about individual choices, but about how society is organized and how people interact with each other. It connects back to the idea that solving homelessness requires changes at both the structural level and in how people view and treat others.

# Sociological Evidence

- ▶ Over the course of this class, the way I think about homelessness has changed a lot. At the beginning, I mostly saw it as an individual issue and didn't think much about the bigger picture. Now, I understand how much social forces like inequality, housing costs, and access to resources shape people's lives. Learning about concepts like the sociological imagination helped me see that people's situations are often connected to larger systems, not just personal choices. I also became more aware of how group influence and social interactions affect the way we treat others. Overall, this class helped me become more understanding and less judgmental, and it changed how I see real-world issues like homelessness.

# Why this matters

- ▶ Understanding homelessness from a sociological perspective matters because it helps us see the problem more clearly and respond in better ways. Instead of blaming individuals, we can focus on the root causes, like the lack of affordable housing and unequal access to opportunities. This kind of thinking can lead to more effective solutions and policies that actually help people long-term. It also matters in everyday life, because it can change how we treat people experiencing homelessness, with more awareness and empathy instead of judgment. Overall, sociology helps us understand that real change happens when we look beyond individuals and focus on improving the systems that shape people's lives.