

# Homelessness Through The Sociological Imagination

- Introduction to Sociology Final Project

Homelessness stood out to me because I've seen it in real life, especially in downtown Asheville. Sociology helped me realize there are bigger systems behind it, not just individual choices.

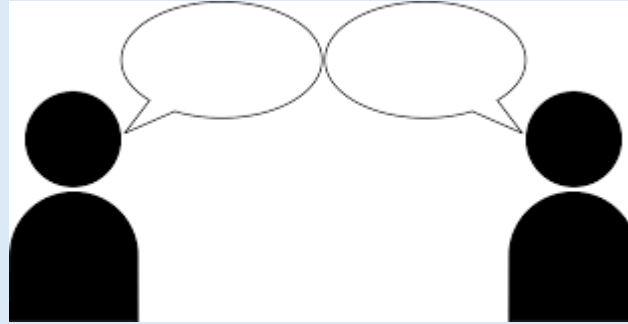


BY: Alexis Varillas

Source: Fox new Asheville  
Carl Mumpower- Facebook

# How Sociology Changed My Perspective

- *THE IDEA THAT CHANGED HOW I SEE THE WORLD MOST IS SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM*
- *I USED TO THINK SOCIOLOGY WAS ONLY ABOUT BIG SOCIAL PROBLEMS*
- *NOW I UNDERSTAND MEANING IS CREATED THROUGH EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS*



"SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISTS ARE INTERESTED IN THE WAY PEOPLE INTERPRET AND GIVE MEANING TO THE WORLD THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION."  
(SEC. 3.4)

- IN MY MODULE 1 REFLECTION, I ALSO LEARNED THAT SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS LIKE FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND MEDIA SHAPED WHO WE ARE
- THESE EXPERIENCES SHOWED ME THAT MY IDENTITY AND BEHAVIOR ARE INFLUENCED BY SOCIALIZATION, NOT JUST PERSONAL CHOICES

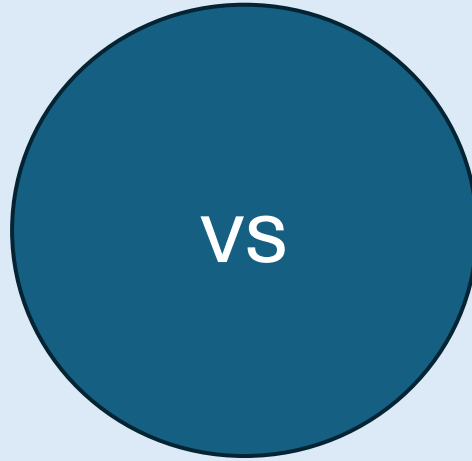
SOCIOLOGY HELPED ME SEE THAT EVEN SMALL EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES ARE CONNECTED TO LARGER SOCIAL FORCES.

- IN MY TIKTOK POST ABOUT "BOI," I EXPLAINED HOW PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE MEANING WITHOUT EXPLANATION.
- THIS SHOWED ME THAT LANGUAGE WORKS LIKE A SHARED SOCIAL CODE
- IT MADE ME REALIZE TRENDS SPREAD BECAUSE PEOPLE RECOGNIZE MEANING, NOT JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE POPULAR

# Personal Troubles Vs. Public Issues

## Personal trouble (Individual)

- HOMELESSNESS IS OFTEN SEEN AS SOMEONE MAKING BAD CHOICES



## Public Issue (Societal)

- LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- LOW WAGES
- LIMITED MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

SOCIOLOGY USES THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION TO CONNECT INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES TO LARGER SOCIAL STRUCTURES

# Conformity, Inequality, or Social Movements

- I EXPERIENCED CONFORMITY DURING A CLASS DISCUSSION WHEN I STAYED QUIET INSTEAD OF SHARING MY OPINION.

- PEOPLE OFTEN CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOR TO FIT IN WITH A GROUP
- THIS IS CALLED CONFORMITY

D5 QUOTE  
" I REMEMBER STARTING TO SECOND GUESS MYSELF AND JUST STAYING QUIET INSTEAD OF SHARING WHAT I REALLY THOUGHT."

- IT FELT EASIER TO GO ALONG WITH THE GROUP THAN RISK BEING JUDGED
- THIS SHOWS HOW STRONG GROUP INFLUENCE CAN BE, EVEN IN SMALL SITUATIONS

PEOPLE "TEND TO CONFORM TO GROUP NORMS" TO AVOID REJECTION (SECTION 6.2)

- THE PEOPLE'S TEMPLE SHOWED HOW EXTREME CONFORMITY CAN BECOME
- GROUP NORMS CAN INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR MORE THAN INDIVIDUAL THINKING

THIS SHOWS HOW SOCIAL FORCES AND GROUP PRESSURE SHAPE INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR.



# Growth Reflection

- AT FIRST, I THOUGHT PEOPLE'S ACTIONS WERE MOSTLY PERSONAL CHOICES
- AFTER MODULE 2, I REALIZED BEHAVIOR IS SHAPED BY GROUP PRESSURE AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS
- I NOW UNDERSTAND HOW INEQUALITY LIMITS PEOPLE'S CHOICES

## SPENT + D5

- IN A CLASS DISCUSSION, I STAYED QUIET TO AVOID BEING JUDGED, SHOWING CONFORMITY
- IN THE SPENT SIMULATION, EVERY DECISION WAS BASED ON WHAT I COULD AFFORD, NOT WHAT I NEEDED
- THIS MADE ME REALIZE HOW LIMITED CHOICES CAN BE WITHOUT RESOURCES

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION SHOWS HOW PEOPLE'S OPPORTUNITIES ARE SHAPED BY INCOME, EDUCATION, AND RESOURCES (SECTION 9.1)

THIS MODULE MADE ME MORE UNDERSTANDING INSTEAD OF JUDGING PEOPLE'S DECISIONS



<https://www.istockphoto.com/photos/growth-chart-arrow>

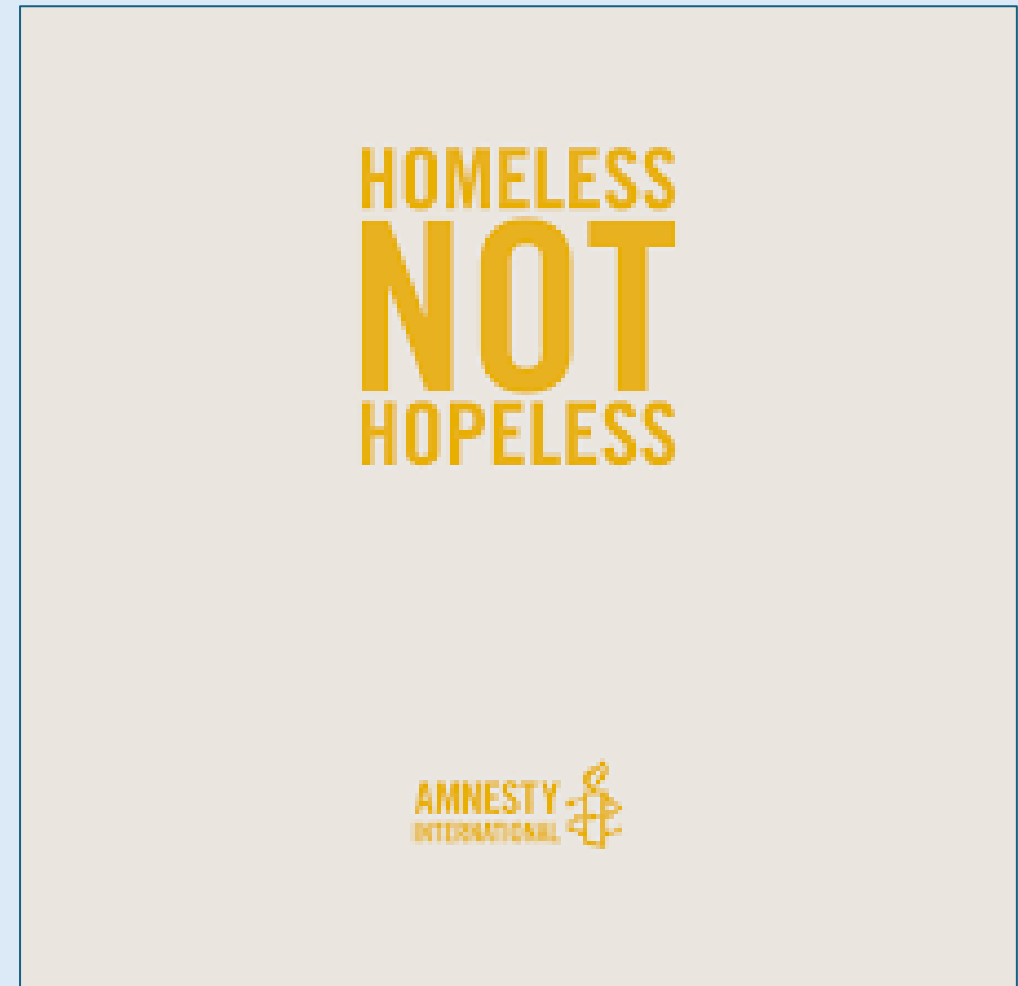
MY THINKING CHANGED BECAUSE I NOW SEE THAT BEHAVIOR IS INFLUENCED BY SOCIAL STRUCTURES, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL CHOICE.

# Status

Homelessness can be understood as a social status.

PEOPLE WHO ARE UNHOUSED ARE OFTEN:

- JUDGE
- IGNORE
- TREATED DIFFERENTLY



<https://www.behance.net/gallery/45535519/Homeless-NOT-Hopeless-campaign-4-Amnesty-Internationa>

THIS SHOWS HOW STATUS AFFECTS HOW PEOPLE ARE SEEN AND TREATED IN SOCIETY.

# Role strain, Role conflict & Role performance

- **ROLE STRAIN**->DIFFICULTY MEETING EXPECTATIONS OF ONE ROLE
- **ROLE CONFLICT**-> CONFLICT BETWEEN DIFFERENT ROLES
- **ROLE PERFORMANCE**-> HOW SOMEONE CARRIES OUT THEIR ROLE IN REAL LIFE

- **ROLE STRAIN:** STRUGGLING TO MEET FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES
- **ROLE CONFLICT:** BALANCING WORK AND PARENTING
- **ROLE PERFORMANCE:** TRYING TO ACT AS A RESPONSIBLE PARENT DESPITE LIMITED RESOURCES

- IN THE SPENT SIMULATION, I HAD TO BALANCE BEING A WORKER AND A PARENT
- I FELT PRESSURE TO PROVIDE FOR MY CHILD WHILE STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY
- THIS MADE IT HARD TO MEET EXPECTATIONS IN BOTH ROLES



<https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/26569504-a-homeless-person-sits-cold>

THIS SHOWS HOW HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO MEET SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS.

# Looking-Glass Self

THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF EXPLAINS HOW PEOPLE SEE THEMSELVES BASED ON HOW OTHERS TREAT THEM

- IN HD1, I SAW A HOMELESS MAN IN ASHEVILLE WALKING WITH HIS DOG
- MOST PEOPLE IGNORED HIM, WHILE FEW INTERACTED WITH THE DOG
- HE SEEMED MORE CONNECTED TO THE DOG THAN TO PEOPLE AROUND HIM

THE READINGS EXPLAIN THAT PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR SELF-CONCEPT BASED ON HOW OTHERS REACT TO THEM

- BEING IGNORED MAY MAKE SOMEONE FEEL INVISIBLE OR JUDGED
- THIS CAN SHAPE HOW THEY SEE THEMSELVES
- SMALL INTERACTIONS, LIKE SOMEONE SMILING OR TALKING, CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

THIS SHOWS HOW SOCIAL INTERACTION AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION SHAPE IDENTITY.

# Comparing Approaches to Homelessness

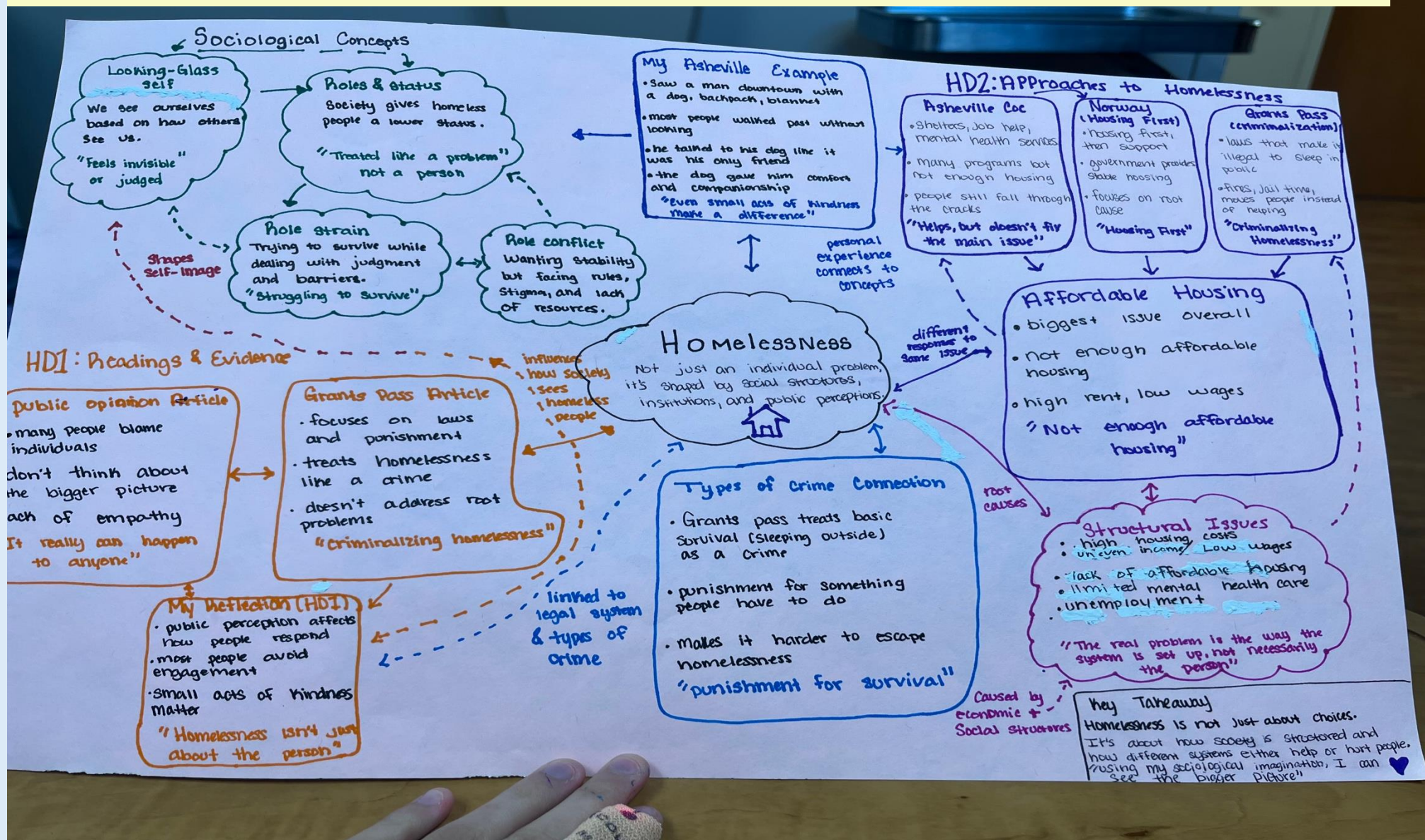
- LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS ONE OF THE MAIN CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS
- RISING RENT AND LOW WAGES MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO MAINTAIN STABLE HOUSING
- COMMUNITIES USING HOUSING FIRST APPROACHES HAVE SEEN BETTER LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- THESE APPROACHES SHOW HOW HOMELESSNESS IS INFLUENCED BY STRUCTURAL FACTORS LIKE HOUSING AND THE ECONOMY
- POLICIES AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN OUTCOMES

NORWAY'S HOUSING FIRST APPROACH WORKS BEST BECAUSE IT ADDRESSES THE ROOT CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS, LACK OF HOUSING.

APPROACH	FOCUS	EFFECTIVENESS
Asheville (Continuum of care)	SHELTERS, SERVICES, JOB HELP, PROGRAMS	HELPS MANY BUT LIMITED BY HOUSING SHORTAGE & FUNDING
Norway (Housing First)	HOUSING FIRST, THEN SUPPORT SERVICES	MOST EFFECTIVE, ADDRESSES ROOT CAUSE (HOUSING)
Grants Pass (Criminalization)	LAWS, FINES, PUNISHMENT FOR SLEEPING IN PUBLIC	LEAST EFFECTIVE, PUSHES PEOPLE FURTHER INTO CRISIS

# Concept Map (7A1)



# Structural causes & Solutions



"THE ONLY REASON ANYONE IS WITHOUT A CHAIR IS BECAUSE THERE AREN'T ENOUGH OF THEM."  
(THE OBVIOUS ANSWER TO HOMELESSNESS)

HOMELESSNESS IS CAUSED BY STRUCTURAL ISSUES:

- LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- RISING RENT PRICES
- LOW VACANCY RATES
- LIMITED ACCESS TO STABLE HOUSING

- THE ARTICLE COMPARES HOMELESSNESS TO MUSICAL CHAIRS
- SOME PEOPLE ARE MORE VULNERABLE, BUT HOMELESSNESS HAPPENS BECAUSE THERE IS NOT ENOUGH AFFORDABLE HOUSING AVAILABLE

- THE ARTICLE EXPLAINS THAT HOMELESSNESS RATES ARE HIGHEST IN PLACES WITH EXPENSIVE HOUSING AND LOW VACANCY RATES
- IT ARGUES THAT MENTAL ILLNESS AND DRUG ADDICTION ARE NOT THE MAIN CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

- THIS SHOWS HOW HOMELESSNESS IS CONNECTED TO STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY, HOUSING POLICY, AND THE ECONOMY
- SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES AFFECT WHO HAS ACCESS TO HOUSING

HOUSING FIRST WORKS BEST BECAUSE IT FOCUSES ON THE ROOT CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS : LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

# Local Evidence: Asheville



IN ASHEVILLE, HOMELESSNESS IS VISIBLE DOWNTOWN.

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE:

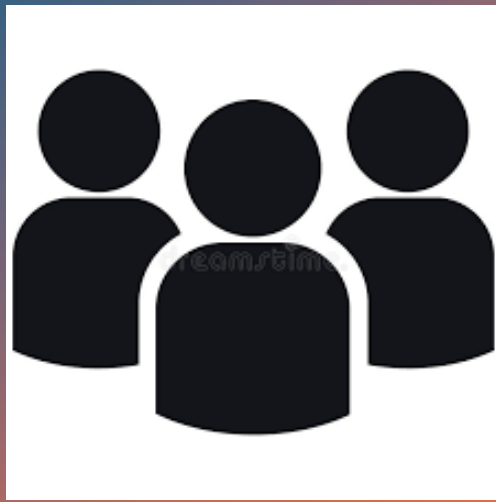
- SHELTER
- FOOD
- SUPPORT SERVICES
- JOB & CASE MANAGEMENT

BUT MANY PEOPLE STILL STRUGGLE BECAUSE HOUSING IS TOO EXPENSIVE AND JOBS DON'T PAY ENOUGH.

LOCAL ORGANIZATION  
HOMEWARD BOUND OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA  
HELPS PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS FIND PERMANENT HOUSING AND  
SUPPORT SERVICES  
FOCUSES ON HOUSING FIRST APPROACHES IN ASHEVILLE  
WEBSITE:  
[HTTPS://HOMEWARDBOUNDWNC.ORG](https://homewardboundwnc.org)

- THIS SHOWS HOW LOCAL HOMELESSNESS IS CONNECTED TO LARGER STRUCTURAL ISSUES LIKE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND INEQUALITY

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS HELP ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS, BUT LARGER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS STILL AFFECT MANY PEOPLE.



# Sociological Analysis

## 1. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO RESOURCES BECAUSE OF THEIR POSITION IN SOCIETY (INCOME, WEALTH, EDUCATION, POWER).

## 2. STATUS & STIGMA

UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS ARE OFTEN JUDGED OR IGNORED, WHICH AFFECTS TREATMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES. THIS STIGMA REINFORCES INEQUALITY.



HOMELESSNESS IS SHAPED BY SOCIAL SYSTEMS,  
NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL CHOICES

# Personal Growth



OVER THE SEMESTER, MY PERSPECTIVE HAS CHANGED IN A BIG WAY.



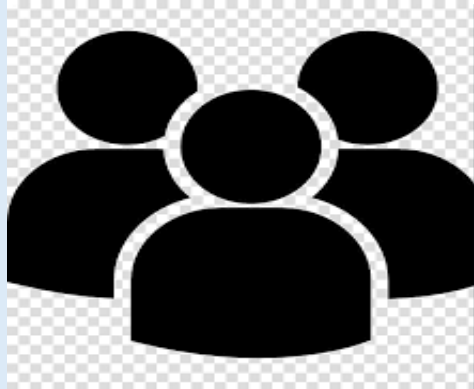
I USED TO SEE HOMELESSNESS AS INDIVIDUAL FAILURE



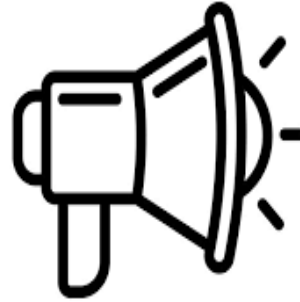
NOW I UNDERSTAND HOW SOCIAL FORCES, STRUCTURES, AND INSTITUTIONS SHAPE PEOPLE'S LIVES.

**SOCIOLOGY  
HELPED ME  
BECOME  
MORE AWARE,  
EMPATHETIC,  
AND  
INFORMED**

# Why this Matters



IT REDUCES STEREOTYPES  
AND INCREASES SYMPATHY.



IT FOCUSES ON FIXING  
SYSTEMS, NOT BLAMING  
PEOPLE.



IT HELPS CREATE BETTER  
SOLUTIONS THAT ACTUALLY  
ADDRESSES THE ROOT  
CAUSE.



IT SHOWS HOW WE CAN ALL  
PLAY A ROLE IN CREATING A  
MORE JUST AND CARING  
SOCIETY.

UNDERSTANDING  
HOMELESSNESS  
SOCIOLOGICALLY  
HELPS BUILD A  
BETTER FUTURE  
FOR EVERYONE.