
SOC-210

Homelessness

Through the

Sociological

Imagination

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Homelessness stood out to me from a sociological standpoint because it is such a widespread issue. The fact that almost every country in the world has a homeless population and there's still no widely regarded solution was interesting for me.



Photo by Starr Sariego for the Asheville Watchdog
"Asheville's Homeless Count Climbs despite Concerted Efforts, New Permanent Shelter." *The Asheville Watchdog*, 26 Apr. 2024, <https://endhomelessness.org/resources/sharable-graphics/key-takeaways-from-national-opinion-polling-may-2025/>.

How Sociology Changed My Perspective

The realization that every interaction and experience I have had has shaped me as a person stuck with me and that regardless of how much I think about it, I am being molded by every “[interaction]...and watching others interact” significantly changed my thinking (Conerly, Tonja R. “Socialization.” *Introduction to Sociology* 3e, OpenStax, 2021, p. 5.4).

When I was watching the Superbowl I remember seeing many advertisements about website building A.I.. The idea that it would just build a website, picture, or essay, without either helping you gain the life skills or different perspectives seemed like it was setting people up for failure. A.I. doesn't have the creativity of people. For example, A.I. uses rationalization, ignoring the aesthetic “or tradition” that can be used to draw people in (Conerly, Tonja R. “Society and Social Interaction.” *Introduction to Sociology* 3e, OpenStax, 2021, p. 4.2).

Personal Troubles vs. Public Issues

Individual problems that can cause homelessness include but are not limited to

- Substance abuse
- Employment
- Mental health

General social problems that can lead to homelessness are

- Job market
- Housing availability
- Role strain

Inequality, Conformity, or Social Movements

I think the People's Temple is a great example of conformity. It gave them a sense of unity because they were the future, the people who had to educate everyone else on inclusivity. They were the teachers, the ones who dictate right from wrong. Jim Jones' family was his primary group; but all members of the Temple could see themselves reflected in his family. So, while they weren't his primary group they still felt included. I think that Jim Jones was a subtle authoritarian leader who didn't give people the opportunity to question what he says, regardless of if they wanted to or not. Based on the escapee's accounts it felt like a paradise where no one would judge or discriminate from you ("Jonestown Part 1: Who Was the Peoples Temple Leader Jim Jones?" *ABC News*, 2018., 6:43). I think that it's fascinating how much groups can pressure you into silence (Conerly, Tonja R. "Groups and Organization." *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, OpenStax, 2021, p. 6.2).

Personally, I'm in a class that's very quiet. That is an example of going along with the group, or conformity, because everyone stays silent. It's like an ouroboros. Everyone hears silence and thinks that they must be silent too, because speaking up is intimidating and they don't want to be put in the out group of talking people (Conerly, Tonja R. "Race and Ethnicity." *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, OpenStax, 2021, p. 11.2). It's interesting to me because the teacher is obviously unhappy with the silence. I assumed that the teacher, as an authority figure, showing unhappiness in the silence would encourage people to speak up and participate more but it didn't.

Growth Reflection

When I started this class I was ignorant of most of the factors at play in a society, and I did not understand the complexities of social classes. My thinking about social change is very different from when I started.

First, the fact that I don't have to be guilty of my privilege felt like a leap towards confidence, and secondly, the idea that although social stratification exists it is hard to move between social classes.

It was relieving for me to be told that my worth and accomplishments weren't diminished by my privilege. I didn't ask for privilege to be taken from other people and given to me, but it doesn't diminish my worth (Conerly, Tonja R. "Race and Ethnicity." *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, OpenStax, 2021, p. 11.3).

It was expected but still discouraging to see how many more blocks there were for people in the lower class trying to get to the upper-lower class or middle class (Conerly, Tonja R. "Social Stratification in the United States." *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, OpenStax, 2021, p. 9.2). It made me think of how lucky I was to be born into the middle class.

Status

Homeless people are usually ignored or completely unvalued in a society. Despite homelessness usually not being a personal fault, they are considered unworthy of effort. In the social rung they are on the bottom. They are not given responsibilities in a society, and do not benefit from their role.

Role Strain, Role Conflict, and Role Performance

Role strain happens when an individual has too many responsibilities to keep up with (Conerly, Tonja R. “Society and Social Interaction.” Introduction to Sociology 3e, OpenStax, 2021, p. 4.2).

I notice role strain in my mother. She takes care of gardening, transportation, cooking, some cleaning, and many other things that I’m certain I don’t notice.

Looking-Glass Self

People who were displaced during the hurricane stood out to me because they didn't have the same struggles and barriers that people who became homeless in other ways have ("Key Takeaways from National Opinion Polling, May 2025." *National Alliance to End Homelessness*, 19 May 2025, <https://endhomelessness.org/resources/sharable-graphics/key-takeaways-from-national-opinion-polling-may-2025/>.) There was a sense of superiority, I think, and a mental separation between people who lost homes or property during Helene versus any other reason. They lost their homes in a tragedy, an unforeseen event, instead of due to a personal failure of some kind, regardless of how true that is. People who were displaced likely had an easier time finding somewhere to stay and were more likely to receive help from neighbors or their community. If nothing else, I think that would ease the role that typically accompanies homelessness.

Three Approaches

Continuum of Care (Asheville)

In the article, we are shown that simply hiding the homeless people or shipping them off to other cities only prolongs the issue (Demsas, Jerusalem. “The Obvious Answer to Homelessness.” *The Atlantic*, Dec. 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/01/homelessness-affordable-housing-crisis-democrats-causes/672224/>). The Continuum of Care approach (CoC) says that individual care is the best approach. Unfortunately, there are simply too many homeless people for it to be effective, especially when only one place uses this strategy.

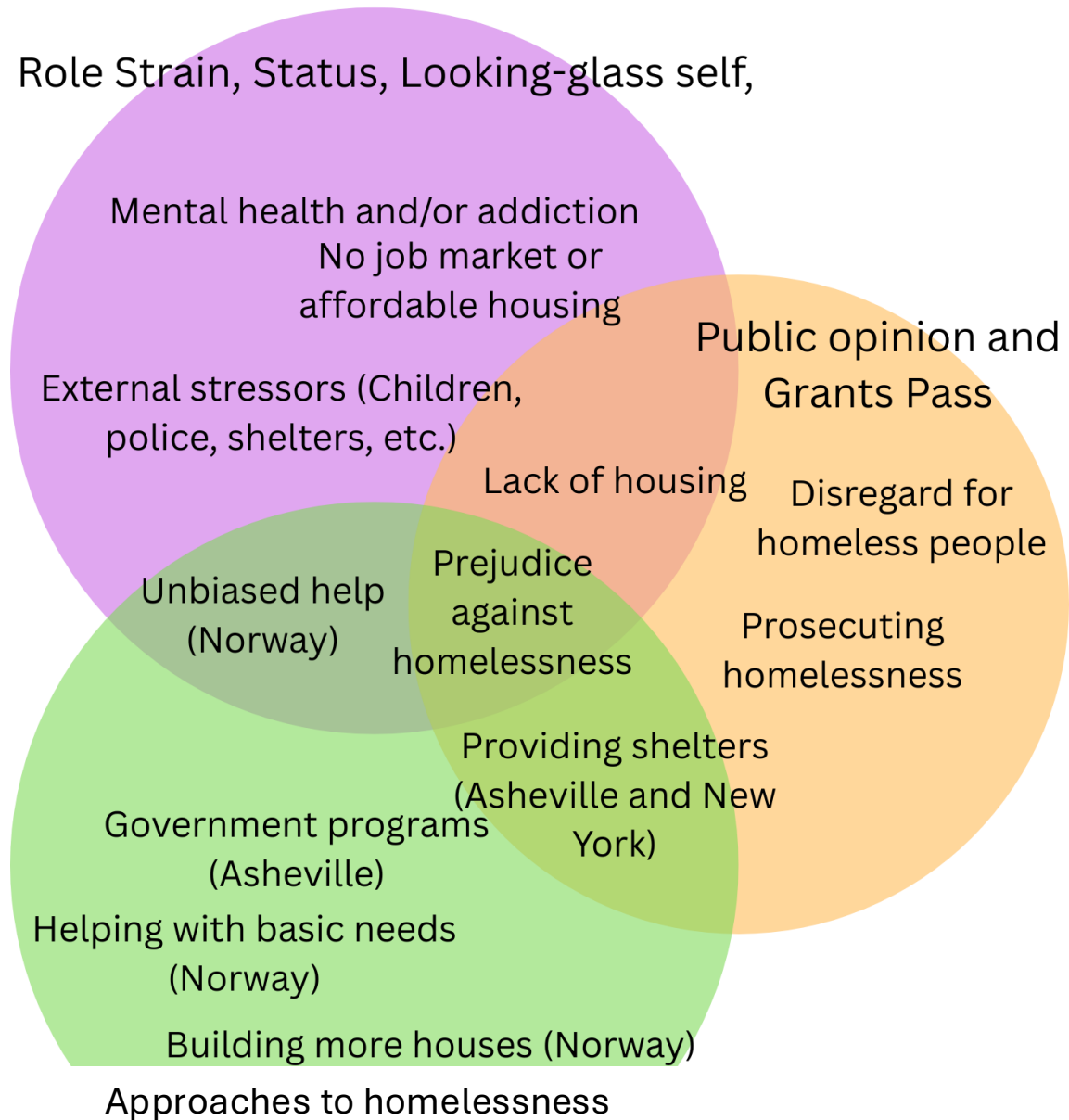
Housing First (Norway)

Norway’s approach focuses more on building houses and providing necessary care. In Norway people tend to be more willing to build homes and generally more willing to provide necessities that homeless people wouldn’t be able to easily access. (“How Norway Is Proving That Homelessness Is a Solvable Problem.” *Reasons to Be Cheerful*, 26 June 2025, <https://reasonstobecheerful.world/norway-proving-homelessness-solvable-problem/>.) Despite this there are so many policies that even the idea of building more houses rarely gets past the discussion phase.

Criminalization (Grants Pass)

People generally believe that homelessness isn’t something that could happen to them and that it only happens to misfortunate people who have some specific problem that the “normal person” doesn’t have. This promotes hostility towards homeless people as a minority group. Social policy and a dash of cultural norms simply makes the problem worse. Criminalizing people with nowhere to go and minimal ways to support themselves is unethical and it should be the responsibility of the local government to provide alternative solutions.

Concept Map



Structural Causes and Solutions

Housing

Most of the cases of homelessness are caused by lack of housing (Demsas, Jerusalem. “The Obvious Answer to Homelessness.” *The Atlantic*, Dec. 2022,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/01/homelessness-affordable-housing-crisis-democrats-causes/672224/>).

Lack of housing leads to higher prices and rent, could drive up commute, causes role strain, and can make communities defensive.

The Obvious Answer

The answer to homelessness, for the most part, is to build more houses. Building houses lowers the price and creates more jobs. In the long run it leads to more growth in an urban area and lowers the amount of people struggling. While it isn't a perfect fix, no one strategy is, it addresses a root cause that can be semi-easily solved.

Local Evidence

BeLoved Asheville is a local organization that is constructing homes and proving there is a solution. With over 2000 volunteers working to build tiny homes for homeless people, or those who would struggle to get a home, they are showing that a difference can be made, and it isn't hard ("Finding Our True Home: Embracing Authenticity and Belonging." *BeLoved Asheville*, <https://www.belovedasheville.com/focus-area/home/>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2026.).

Sociological Analysis

Homeless people are a prime example of an out group, because they are generally viewed as lesser than the “normal person” and given very little respect (Conerly, Tonja R. “Groups and Organization.” *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, OpenStax, 2021, p. 6.1).

With that in mind, the “normal person” is a member of an in group, that being people with houses, that generally views itself as morally superior.

Homelessness is an example of deviance because it is generally regarded as an undesirable status with a bad role. Deviance is a separation from the social or cultural norms of a community (Conerly, Tonja R. “Deviance, Crime, and Social Control.” *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, OpenStax, 2021, p. 7.1). Homelessness is a prime model for deviance because it is undesirable and generally viewed as a problem of the individual and not one that society must deal with.

Personal Growth

Overall, I'm thankful I took this class because of how it changed my way of thinking. At the start of the semester, I had no idea what sociology was. Over the semester I learned a lot of in-depth information, specifically about social structure and roles.

I do think my favorite subject was learning about discrimination and white privilege because it told me that I was something other than the color of my skin.

My least favorite subject was media and technology because I think classifying countries based on how industrialized they are is an overly simple way of judging a country.

Why This Matters

Sociologically, this matters because you can't solve a problem if you don't know the cause. The only way for things to get better is for people to do something about them, and the only way people do things are if they know there is something to do. Education about homelessness and general raising of awareness would raise the pressure on local governments to do more to help homeless people or consider changing their policies towards housing and lead to an ultimately better community.

Citations

“How Norway Is Proving That Homelessness Is a Solvable Problem.” *Reasons to Be Cheerful*, 26 June 2025, <https://reasonstobecheerful.world/norway-proving-homelessness-solvable-problem/>.

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