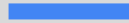


# Homelessness Through the Sociological Imagination



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## Personal Connection

Before this class, I viewed homelessness as mostly an individual problem. Sociology helped me see it as a social issue that is shaped by things like housing costs, mental health systems, wages, and even city/state policies.

(City of Asheville, 2020))



# How Sociology Changed my Perspective

A huge way in which thinking like a sociologist changed my perspective is in my daily life while watching any type of advertisement. Instead of just watching the ad and blindly listening, I now think about who that ad is targeted to, and find the true meaning of the ad and the choices behind it.

This thinking really started during the Super Bowl. This is the topic we were focusing on during that time. Even though that was one of the first times I thought like a sociologist, I now find myself thinking like that much more often.

A theory that changed how I see the world is conflict theory. This is the idea that society is in constant competition for resources. (ebook, 1.3) This changed how I see the world because it shows power dynamics. Instead of viewing society as cooperative, instead it is like a field of battle

# Personal Troubles vs Public Issues

## Personal Troubles

- Job loss
- Substance abuse
- Family conflict
- Mental illness
- Unforeseen events that are uncontrollable(Like weather)

## Public Issues

- Rising rent
- Low wages
- Lack of shelters
- Rising house prices
- Cost of healthcare

Using a sociological imagination helps us see homelessness as more than an individual struggle. It connects personal hardships to larger public issues like poverty, housing costs, and inequality.

# Conformity

**Conformity** is the extent to which an individual complies with group or societal norms.

Society expects people to have stable housing and financial independence. People who are homeless often get judged for not fitting these norms. Then when they are judged, they keep trying to get out but can't. This leads to them digging the hole deeper for themselves without a way to get out. Sometimes when homeless people have a lot of bills to pay, they may need to make difficult choices. They may need to sacrifice their own health or quality of life things to try and stay off of the streets.(D6)

## Growth Reflection

While learning about inequality, I knew it caused people to not have the same opportunities as others, but I hadn't yet connected that as a factor of homelessness. It directly relates because if everyone had the same opportunities, maybe less people would be homeless. Inequality isn't just about individual choices, but bigger social problems like access to education and housing costs. (Mod.2 reflection) These one again are some of the main factors of homelessness, but it is a hard hole to get out of once your there. I also have now realized Social movements can be very powerful, even if they don't get super popular. They can be done by anybody, and have the chance to make a real difference.(Mod.2 reflection)

# Status

Status is the responsibilities and benefits a person experiences according to their rank and role in society.

This relates to homelessness because if someone is born into poverty or an unstable family, they might face a higher risk in homelessness because of disadvantages they couldn't even control. Status affects homelessness because a person's position in society (whether it is income, education, or opportunity) can shape their ability to find affordable housing, and jobs that pay well. If they become homeless, it can change how society views and treats them.

# Role Strain, Role Conflict, and Role Performance

**Role strain** is stress that occurs when too much is required of a single role. This connects to homelessness in many ways. It could be parent struggling to provide food, shelter, and even transportation all at once.

**Role conflict** is a situation when one or more of an individual's roles clash. This also connects to homelessness as a student in school trying to work to provide for their family. It could be a high schooler or college student who is trying to balance getting an education while still providing for their family.

**Role performance** is the expression of a role. A homeless parent may still care about their family just as much, but can't express that care as much because they are worried about other things like getting housing and food. (all definitions from ebook, 4.3)

## Looking-Glass Self

The Looking-Glass self theory is the idea that people imagine how they appear to others, and that makes them view themselves like that. This is similar to how sociologists use the term “status.” Status is the responsibilities and benefits a person experiences according to their rank and role in society.(HD1) This means that if homeless think other people believe they are “worse” than them, this will only push them further down. Public reaction is also a huge factor that affects homelessness and how it is perceived. In the Public Opinion article, a question was asked whether or not your community has invested enough in affordable housing. The most common answer was “No, probably not.” This means that the public knows there is a housing shortage, but things may not be getting done to fix it. (HD1) The public can have a bigger influence than people realize.

## 3 approaches

**Asheville Continuum of Care:** Asheville brings together nonprofits, local governments, housing providers, and the community, who all work together to reduce and prevent homelessness.

**Norway's Housing First:** Norway tries to provide housing as the first step of dealing with homelessness. This is a long term term approach to homelessness to get the homeless people back on their feet. This is already working well because studies show the number of homeless people in Norway has been cut in half since 2006. They have also tried to reduce the number of evictions by half, and cut down actual evictions by 30%.

**Grants Pass' Criminalization:** Grants Pass has dealt with these issues differently. Instead of trying to help homeless people, they have made rules to kick them out. They have kicked homeless people out of public parks and added a time limit of 72 hours before they were evicted. They also gave people staying there nearly \$300 citations called "scattering rubbish." This meant any belonging an officer found near a tent. If these citations were left unpaid, the price rose to over

# Homelessness as a Social Problem (concept map)



# Structural Causes and Solutions of Homelessness

## Causes

-Lack of affordable housing, low income, people with disabilities, minority groups, people with uncontrollable situations.

## Solutions

-Build more affordable housing, raise wages, increase access to healthcare, provide better shelters/homes for people in need.

The solution that best addresses the root cause is building more affordable housing. Yes it may be expensive, but it should be done for the good of the people. As said in “The Obvious Answer to Homelessness” article, it “the homelessness crisis in coastal cities cannot be explained by disproportionate levels of drug use, mental illness, or poverty. Rather, the most relevant factors in the homelessness crisis are rent prices and vacancy rates.” This means the most common issue is people not being able to find housing. Not struggling with substance abuse, which is commonly believed.

## Local Evidence

A local group that helped with house loss during Helene is an organization called "[Be Loved](#)." They are a group of people who stepped up to help after the storm. They provided critical supplies to many towns who were affected by Helene. They performed wellness checks, hiking supplies to areas they couldn't get to by vehicle, and even helped repair homes that were damaged or destroyed. They played a huge part in rescue and recovery for WNC during Hurricane Helene.

Local organizations are very important because they can usually help out before bigger organizations can. They are sometimes the ones to get things started and deserve a lot of credit.

## Sociological Analysis

A sociological concept that applies to the local evidence in the slide above is **functionalism**. This is the theory that society is a structure with connected parts in order to meet the needs of the members in society.(ebook,1.3) Many people lost houses and resources during the storm, so these organizations stepped in and provided what was necessary. This is a time when people couldn't control the fact that they were homeless, so it wasn't an individual issue. Instead, the community stepped in to help. Another concept that applies to the local evidence is **social integration**. This is how strongly a person is connected to their social group.(ebook,4.3) From the aftermath of the hurricane, many people's social integration was disrupted. Local organizations were able to build it back, by providing resources and reconnecting communities. It gave people a strong sense of hope and connectedness.

## Personal Growth

My thinking has changed in many ways over the course of this semester. In the beginning, I thought about social issues like homelessness as mainly a result of individual choices. Now I have started to think from more of a sociological perspective, which helps me look at how large social structures can shape people's lives and experiences. Looking from a more broad view, I have learned to connect my own personal experiences to common patterns in society. I now view issues like inequality, education, and access to resources in a more sociological thinking way. They aren't just problems on their own, but part of bigger social systems.

## Why This Matters

Understanding homelessness sociologically matters because it can shift how we respond to the issue. Homelessness is seen as not only an individual problem, but part of larger systems like housing, income, and disaster response. These things all shape who becomes homeless and why. Going beyond this class, this way of thinking could influence how people vote and volunteer, or even how they treat people in their community. It motivates solutions that address root causes, instead of short term solutions.

# Sources and Citations

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Module 2 reflection

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HD1 writing

HD2 writing

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HA1 concept map

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