

# Homelessness Through the Sociological Imagination

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Homelessness stood out to me in this course because I see it in my local area, but I never really understood why it happens. Before this class, I thought it was mostly about individual choices, but now I realize there are bigger social factors involved.



(Homeless Man sleeping on a bench to get out of the rain)

Image taken by me

# How Sociology Changed My Perspective

At the start of this module, I thought sociology was just about studying society, but I learned it connects personal experiences to larger social forces. For example, the book explains the sociological imagination as “an awareness of the relationship between a person’s behavior and experience,” which changed how I think. I also learned that sociology is based on research and data, not just opinions, using methods like surveys and observation. During discussions, I started thinking more critically, like when I analyzed ads and noticed messages about gender roles and consumer culture. Before this course, I saw homelessness as mostly an individual problem caused by personal choices. Now I understand it is connected to larger social structures like inequality, housing access, and the economy. Overall, this module helped me think more critically and understand social issues from a broader perspective

Quote:

“**Sociological imagination:** an awareness of the relationship between a person’s behavior and experience and the wider culture that shaped the person’s choices and perceptions” (Textbook, Chapter 1 “Key Concepts”)

# Personal Troubles vs Public Issues

personal trouble is an issue that affects an individual, while a public issue affects large groups of people. Using the sociological imagination, we can see how these two are connected.

Homelessness may begin as a personal trouble, such as losing a job or being unable to afford rent. However, when many people experience homelessness due to high housing costs and limited resources, it becomes a public issue. The sociological imagination helps us understand that homelessness is not just about individual choices, but is shaped by larger social and economic forces.

# Inequality, Conformity, or Social Movements

My experience in the Spent simulation connects closely to the idea that homelessness is strongly linked to inequality. Throughout the game, I constantly had to make difficult decisions because I did not have enough money to comfortably afford basic needs like housing, food, and transportation. Choosing the warehouse job showed how people in lower social classes often take more stressful or demanding jobs simply because they need higher pay to survive. When I picked a small apartment and sold my belongings, it reflected how limited access to affordable housing can force people into uncomfortable or unstable living situations. These choices demonstrate that people with fewer resources are at a higher risk of becoming homeless because they have less financial flexibility. For example, when I had to decide whether to fix my car or risk losing my job, it showed how one unexpected expense could lead to a chain reaction of problems. This supports the idea that people in lower social classes face more barriers and have fewer opportunities to stay stable. The pressure I felt to provide for my child also shows how social expectations can add to the stress of already limited resources. Overall, the simulation made it clear that inequality in income, housing, and opportunities plays a major role in increasing the risk of homelessness.

[“People with fewer resources are more likely to become homeless”] (Textbook, Chapter 9)

# Growth Reflection

At first, I mostly thought about inequality as just people having different amounts of money or resources, but my thinking has become more complex. Through this module, I started to understand how inequality is built into society through systems like social stratification, which affects access to opportunities like education, housing, and healthcare. In D6, I realized that people facing inequality often have to make difficult choices just to meet basic needs, which isn't always visible from the outside. This shifted my perspective from just noticing inequality to understanding the deeper causes behind it. I also began to see how social change happens, not just through awareness, but through collective action and long-term effort. Learning about social movements in D7 showed me that meaningful change takes persistence and support from many people, not just individuals. Overall, my thinking evolved from a surface-level understanding of inequality to a deeper awareness of how it operates and how it can be challenged.

# Status

A status is a social position that a person holds in society.

Homelessness can be seen as a master status because it strongly affects how others view a person and how they are treated.

People who are homeless are often judged or stereotyped based only on this one status.

# Role Strain, Role Conflict, and Role Performance

A homeless parent experiences role conflict when they must choose between attending a job interview and taking care of their children. They face role strain within their role as a parent because they struggle to meet expectations like providing food, shelter, and emotional support. Their role performance may be affected, as they may not be able to fully meet society's expectations of being a worker or a caregiver due to their situation. This example shows how homelessness creates challenges in meeting role expectations beyond just lacking housing.

# Looking-Glass Self

When I read the articles, I noticed connections to what I've seen in Asheville. One moment that stood out was walking downtown and seeing people sitting near shops while others avoided eye contact. I remember one man trying to talk to people, but most ignored him, which showed how disconnected people can be. This connects to the Grants Pass article, which explains how cities are making it illegal to sleep outside, pushing homeless individuals out of public spaces instead of helping them. It also connects to the Public Opinion article, where many people blame homelessness on personal choices rather than larger social issues. A concept from Chapter 4 that relates to this is the looking-glass self, which means people develop their identity based on how others treat them. When people experiencing homelessness are ignored or judged, like I observed and like the articles suggest, it can negatively affect their self-esteem and how they see themselves. My HD1 post also described how people avoided interaction, which supports this idea. Overall, this shows that homelessness is not just about lacking housing, but also about social treatment and its impact on identity.

# Three Approaches

Asheville (Continuum of Care)	Provides support services like shelters, job programs, and counseling to help people transition out of homelessness over time. Only about 16% of people in shelters move into permanent housing, showing this approach can be slow and less effective at fully ending homelessness
Norway (Housing First)	Gives people housing first, then provides support for issues like mental health, addiction, and employment. In the U.S., over 771,000 people experience homelessness on a single night, and Housing First programs have helped reduce chronic homelessness by around 30% in some cases.
Grants Pass (Criminalization)	Punishes homelessness through laws, fines, and restrictions on sleeping or camping in public spaces. After camping bans, dozens of people still live in encampments near city centers, showing the policy does not eliminate homelessness. Some cities also issue fines up to \$1,000 or jail time, increasing punishment rather than solving the issue.

# Concept Map



# Structural Causes & Solutions

Homelessness is caused by multiple structural factors, including lack of affordable housing, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare. The most effective solution is the Housing First approach because it focuses on giving people stable housing before anything else. Instead of requiring treatment or job readiness first, it provides housing immediately.

In “The Obvious Answer to Homelessness,” the article argues that housing stability makes it easier for people to address other issues like mental health, addiction, or employment. It explains that traditional programs often fail because they focus on conditions before housing, which keeps people stuck in homelessness longer. The article also points to evidence that Housing First leads to more long-term housing stability and better overall outcomes.

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# Local Evidence

In my local area, organizations like MANNA FoodBank (<https://mannafoodbank.org/>) work to support people experiencing homelessness.

They provide services such as food, temporary shelter, and job assistance.

This shows that homelessness is enough of an ongoing issue in my community that there are multiple locations through out the city.

# Sociological Analysis

Homelessness in my community can be explained using sociological concepts like inequality and social structure.

Inequality limits access to basic needs such as stable housing, healthcare, and steady income, putting certain groups at a higher risk of becoming homeless. People in lower social classes often have fewer financial resources and less access to opportunities, which makes it harder to recover from setbacks like job loss or medical bills.

Social structure also plays a major role because it shapes the systems people rely on, such as the job market, education, and government support programs. If these systems are difficult to access or underfunded, individuals may not get the help they need.

Together, inequality and social structure create barriers that can trap people in homelessness rather than helping them get out of it.

# Personal Growth

Over this semester, my understanding of homelessness has changed significantly.

At the beginning, I mostly saw homelessness as an individual issue caused by personal choices. Now, I understand that it is a much more complex social problem influenced by larger systems like the economy, access to resources, and social inequality.

I have also learned to think more critically by looking beyond surface-level explanations and considering how different factors connect. This has helped me better understand why homelessness exists and why it can be so difficult to solve.

# Why This Matters

Understanding homelessness from a sociological perspective is important because it challenges common stereotypes and assumptions. Instead of blaming individuals, it helps people recognize the larger social forces that contribute to homelessness, such as inequality and lack of access to resources.

This understanding can lead to more effective solutions, like improving social services, increasing affordable housing, and creating better support systems. It also encourages empathy, helping people see those experiencing homelessness as individuals facing systemic challenges rather than just personal failure.

Overall, studying homelessness this way matters because it can influence how society responds and works toward long-term solutions.