

2026SP SOC-210-OALD2
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INVISIBLE SYSTEMS, VISIBLE STRUGGLES.

Seeing homelessness
through a sociological lens

INTRO

Homelessness stood out to me in this course because it's something I've actually seen in real life, not just read about. In Asheville, it's very visible downtown and in lots of other places, especially in public areas. Before this class, I didn't think too deeply about it, but now I realize it's a much bigger issue than it looks on the surface.

HOMELSSNESS IN ASHEVILLE

Photos I took from an old homeless camp off a main road

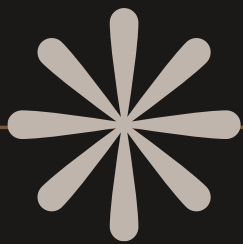


HOW SOCIOLOGY CHANGED MY PERSPECTIVE

Sociology changed how I see the world by helping me understand that problems aren't just individual, they're often caused by larger systems. I will be honest, when thinking about the homeless crisis, I thought that most of them got there by their own actions. Learning about the stigmas and criminalization, like in Grant Pass, where it actively makes it harder for them to get back on their feet.

"My fear is if cities are allowed to criminalize without any limitation, we're going to wake up in a few years, and we're going to have twice as many homeless people as we have right now," Johnson said.

What is taking place in cities like Grant Pass, put into perspective, is that a lot of cities hurt and cause more homelessness than actually help the problem.



PERSONAL TROUBLES VS PUBLIC ISSUES

Homelessness is often seen as a personal problem; they are blamed for choices they often did not even make. But using the sociological imagination, it becomes clear that homelessness is a public issue caused by things like:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Low wages
- Limited access to resources

This shows that it's not just about the individual.



INEQUALITY / SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Homelessness is strongly connected to inequality in society.

Certain groups have less access to housing, jobs, and healthcare. Women and people of color find an increasingly lower chance of getting out of their tough situations. This connects to ideas like structural inequality and social movements, where people try to create change.

The #MeToo movement was an extremely popular social movement that was used to bring awareness to victims of sexual assault. From my D7 Social Movements poster, "The purpose of the movement is to raise awareness, support victims, and push for accountability and change in society."

If a movement for homelessness gained as much traction as a movement like the #MeToo movement, we could see real change.



GROWTH REFLECTION

I used to think about conformity as just something people do to fit in, but now I see how deeply it can shape the way people live and the choices they feel they can make. The poverty simulation we did in D6 especially changed my perspective, because it showed me how difficult it is to prioritize basic needs when resources are limited, and how those situations are not always a result of personal decisions but larger systems. It made me realize how much people have to sacrifice just to get by and how important it is to put others, especially family, first in those situations. Overall, I now understand inequality as something that affects everyday life in serious ways, and I see social change as something that starts with understanding and empathy.



STATUS

Negative Impacts:

Homelessness can be understood as a social status. People who are homeless are often given a lower status in society. This affects how others treat them and the opportunities they have.

“Around 23 out of every 10,000 Americans — 771,480 people — experienced homelessness in January 2024, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development”.

Homelessness is on a constant rise, and as it increases, it can be expected that negative stigmas will continue to be perpetuated.



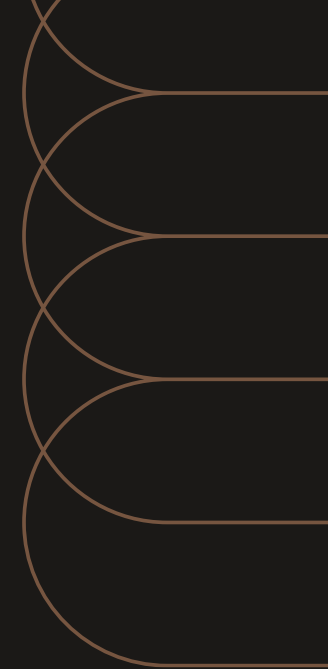

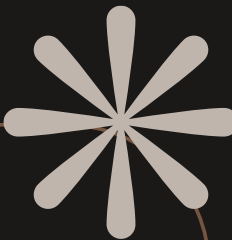
Negative Impacts:

People experiencing homelessness often deal with role strain. For example: Trying to find work while also trying to survive daily, struggling to meet expectations like being a worker or parent. This creates conflict between survival and social expectations. "If too much is required of a single role, individuals can experience role strain" (Ch 4.3).

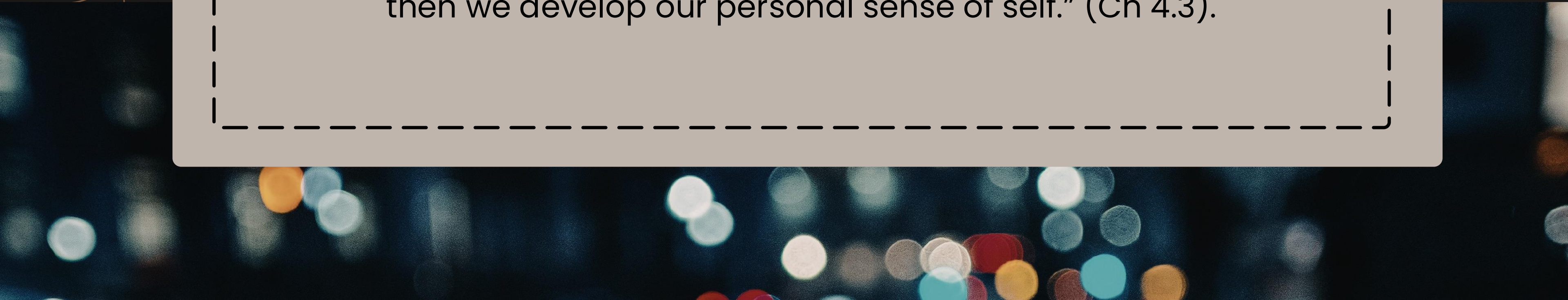
ROLE STRAIN



LOOKING-GLASS SELF



The looking-glass self explains how people see themselves based on how others treat them. Homeless individuals are often ignored or judged. This can affect their identity and self-worth over time. “we imagine how we look to others, draw conclusions based upon their reactions to us, and then we develop our personal sense of self.” (Ch 4.3).



THREE APPROACHES



Asheville

In Asheville, the approach is more gradual through the Continuum of Care, where people get services step by step, but it does not directly aid. "The CoC does not provide direct services to people in housing crises but is a structured way to facilitate collaboration of service providers and other partners to coordinate those services into a shared system with shared goals and increasing effectiveness."

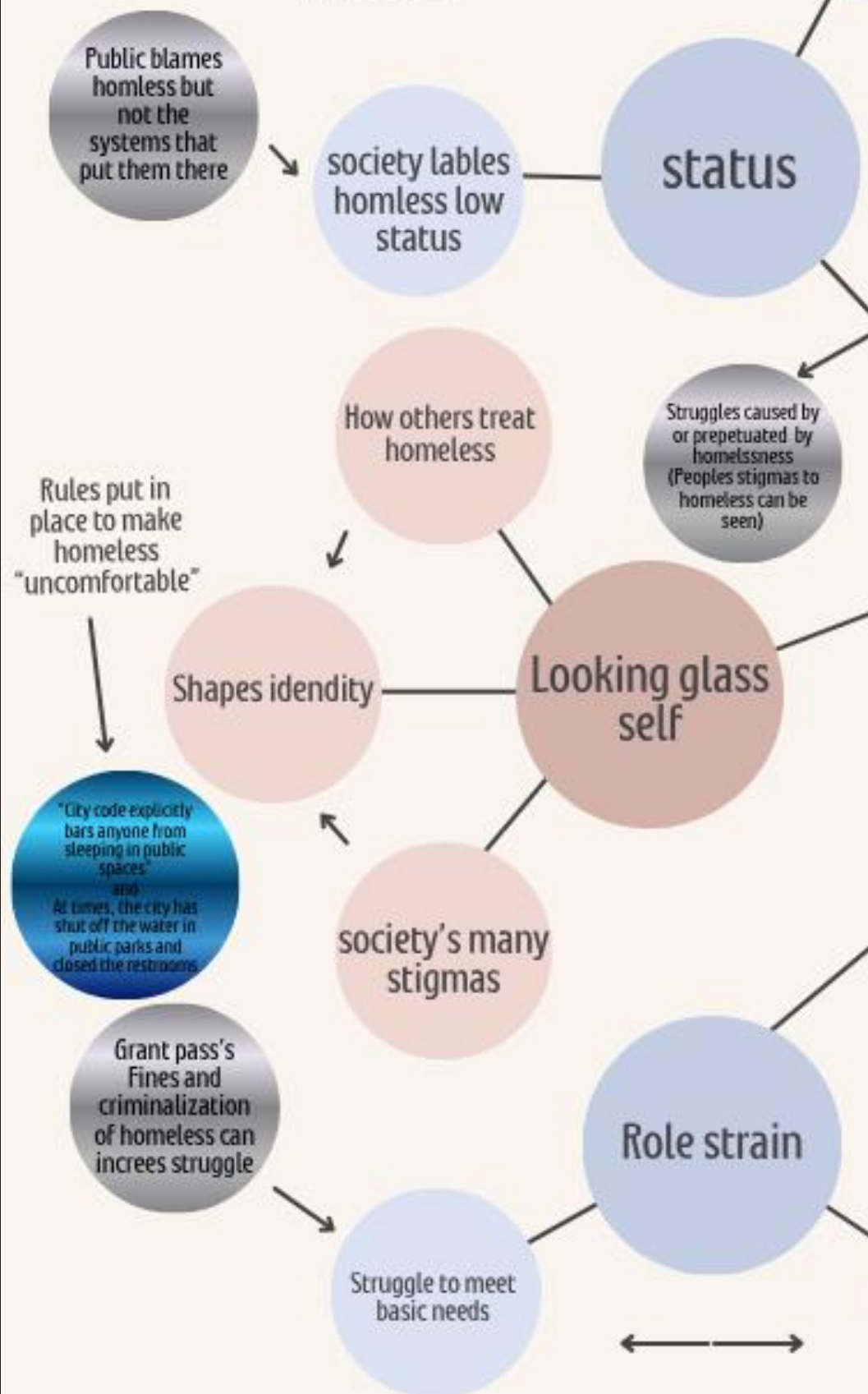
Norway

In Norway, they use a Housing First approach, which means people are given housing right away and then helped with other issues, and this has been highly successful. "The Scandinavian nation has significantly reduced the number of homeless people."

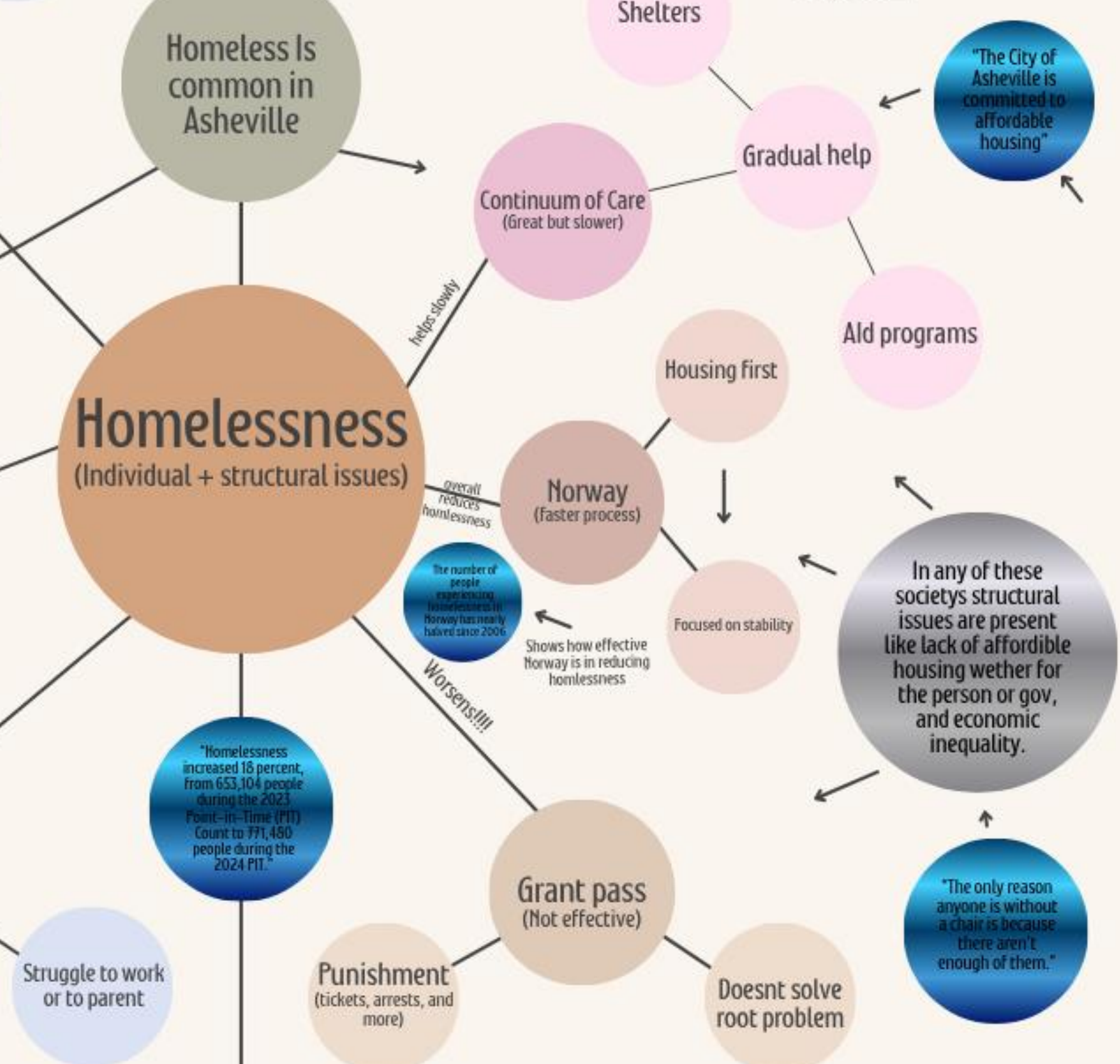
Grant Pass

In Grants Pass, homelessness is often criminalized, meaning people can be fined or punished for sleeping outside, which does not really solve the problem and can make it worse. Citizen of Grant Pass, Helen Cruz, on police cruelty, "Everything was just destroyed," Cruz said. "It took my self-esteem and ... just stomped on it basically." Police and city officials of Grant Pass actively target the homeless.

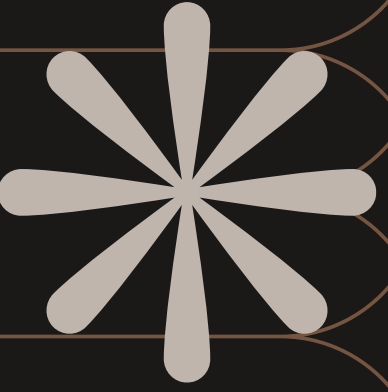
Society & Sociological Imagination HD1



Approaches to Homelessness HD2



STRUCTURAL CAUSES & SOLUTIONS



Homelessness is caused by structural issues like:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Economic inequality

As Jerusalem Demsas explains in *The Obvious Answer to Homelessness*, “Yet when we have a dire shortage of affordable housing, it’s all but guaranteed that a certain number of people will become homeless.” When there are not enough affordable places to live, people will eventually end up without a house, adding to the homeless population. The homeless population is something that most societies want to fix, but most don't go after the root problem. This is why Norway is so successful in its attempts to reduce homelessness, because they directly aid in housing.

LOCAL EVIDENCE



In Asheville and in all of Buncombe county, homelessness is visible in public spaces.

Local Organizations work to provide:

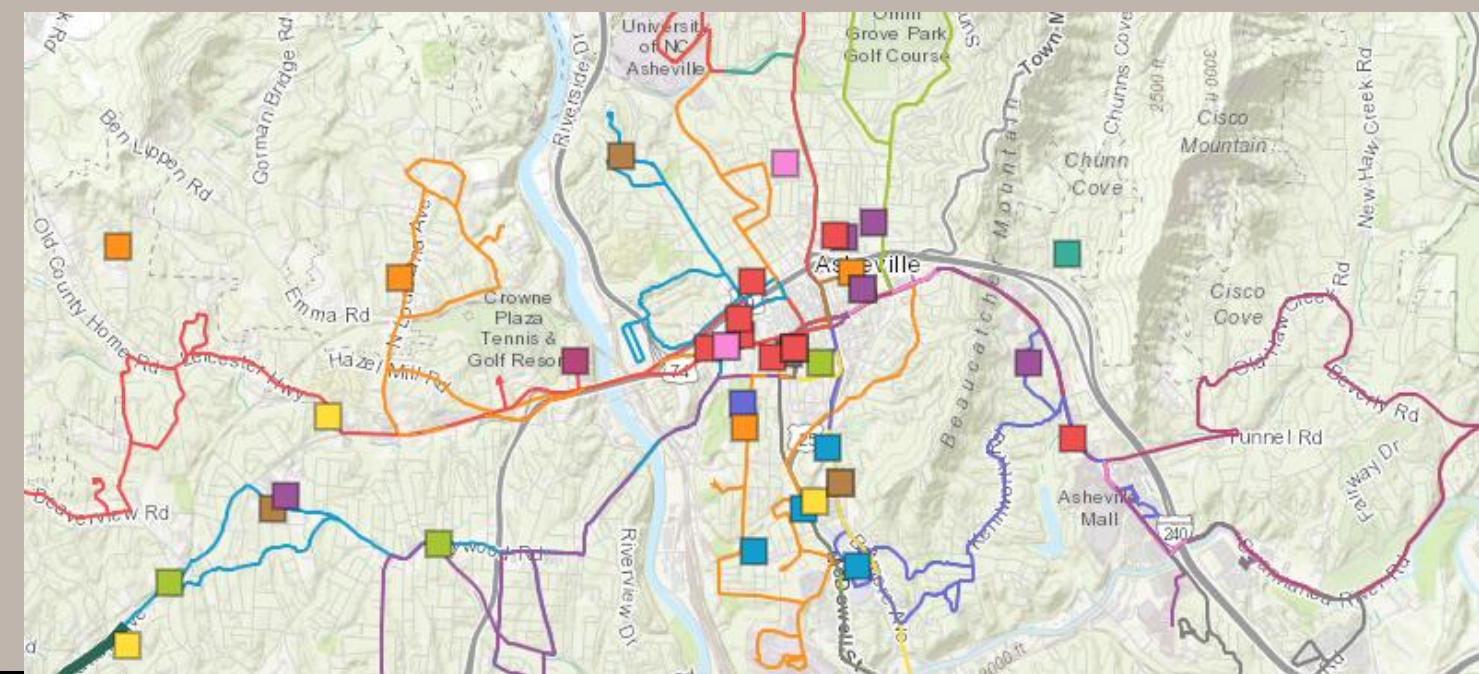
- Shelter
- Food
- Support services

Asheville and Buncombe county are home to several great aid organizations. They also provide a aid hotline for people seeking immediate help, "assistance for those facing issues with homelessness, food instability, and more, call 211."

Homelessness Aid & Organizations

- ▶ AHOPE Day Center
- ▶ Beloved Asheville
- ▶ Crisis Ministry
- ▶ Haywood Street Congregation
- ▶ Rapid Rehousing

local Aid organizations



Map showing many services for homeless in Asheville

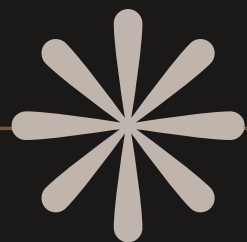


SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Using sociology, we can understand homelessness better.

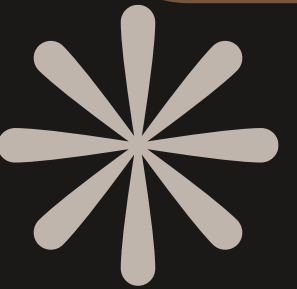
Concepts like:

- Structural inequality → Unequal access to resources (like housing and jobs) based on how society is set up This shows how homelessness isn't just personal problems, it's built into the system.
- Social stratification → The ranking of people into different social classes Helps explain why some people have stable housing while others don't.
- Institutional barriers → Policies or systems that make it harder for certain groups to succeed For example, high rent prices or lack of affordable housing programs.
- Cycle of poverty → When people stay stuck in poverty because of limited opportunities, Homelessness can be both a cause and result of this cycle.



PERSONAL GROWTH

Before this course, I tended to see social problems as more individual issues, but now I understand how strongly they are connected to larger systems. After this last segment in specific, I began paying closer attention to how society shapes people's opportunities and challenges, especially with things like the current economy and housing market making existing problems worse. I have also become more aware of how assumptions and stigmas I repeat can hurt actual progress that someone is trying to make. Now, I see how those ways of thinking can hold people back and oversimplify complex situations.



WHY THIS MATTERS

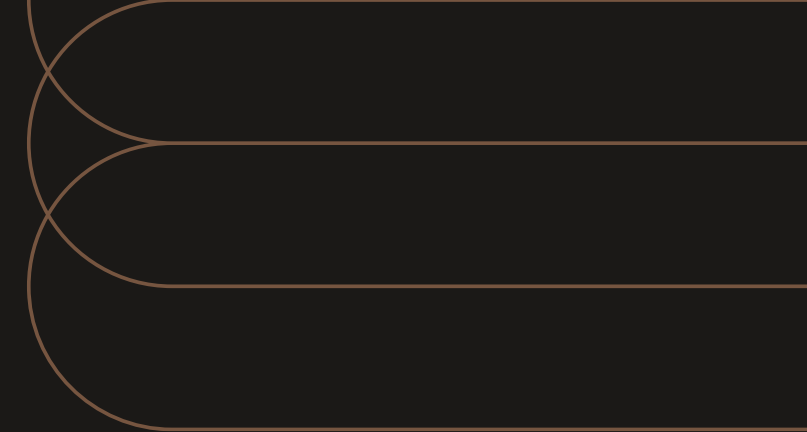
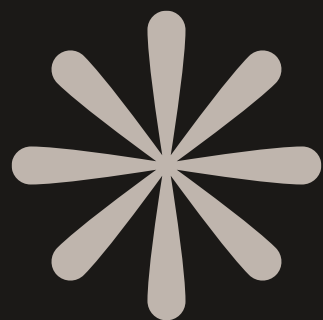
Understanding homelessness sociologically matters because:

- It helps people see the real causes
- It can lead to better solutions
 - It reduces blame on individuals

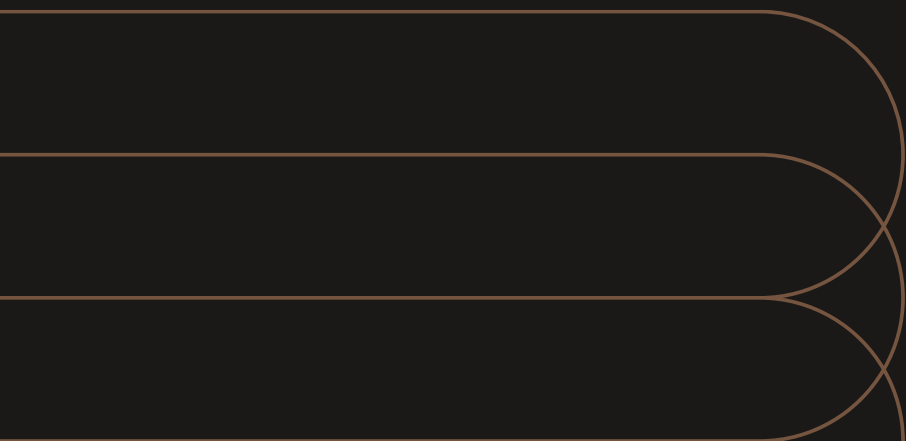
Overall, it shows how society can either help or hurt people depending on how issues are handled.



WHY IT MATTERS?



THANK YOU



Citations:

Slide 1- both photos from Canva elements, and Getty Images

Slide 2- Original photos I took

Slide 3- Original photos I took

Slide 4- Photo From Canva and Stefaunt Sava's Images, quote from

<https://www.opb.org/article/2024/04/04/grants-pass-oregon-homeless-parks-josephine-county-public-spaces-camping-shelter/>

Slide 5- photo, (From Canva, D-Keine, and Getty images)

Slide 6- Photo from Canva, and Airam Dato-on from Pexels. Also My D7: Social Movements and Inequality post

Slide 7- Photo from Canva, and Brett Sayles from Pexels

Slide 8- Photo, (From Canva, Brett Sayles, and Dan Parlante from Pexels) Statistic,

<https://usafacts.org/articles/how-many-homeless-people-are-in-the-us-what-does-the-data-miss/>

Slide 9- Photo, (From Canva, Billion images, and Tim Mossholder) quote, from Chapter 4.3

Slide 10- Photo, (From Canva, and Stocia Adrian's images) quote, from Chapter 4.3

Slide 11- 3 articles , [Asheville](#), [Norway](#), [Grant Pass](#)

Slide 12- My concept map

Slide 13- Photo, (From Canva, and Samar Kaushal from Pexels) quote, The Obvious Answer to Homelessness File

Slide 14- Info and map from <https://www.buncombenc.gov/320/Homelessness-Resources>

Slide 15- Photo from Canva elements, and Getty Images

Slide 16- N/A

Slide 17- Photo from Canva, and Alena Butor from Getty Images

Slide 18- N/A