

Seeing the Unseen: A Sociological Look at Homelessness

Introduction to Sociology(SOC-210-OALD2)





Hello! I'm Naomi

This spring semester I signed up to take 'Introduction to Sociology', I've learned to take real world scenarios in my life and look at them through a sociological lens. Recently we've talked about Homelessness in our communities and around the world. Growing up I saw homeless people at every stoplight in my city, so I was interested in finding out what could've led people to this lifestyle. To my surprise majority of these people aren't there from personal failures, but failures within our society—that's why homelessness stood out to me in this course.



Module 1 Reflection

In Module 1, I learned how Sociology challenges the idea of “normal” by showing that what we consider normal is actually shaped by social expectations and cultural rules. This helped me recognize that many behaviors we judge are influenced by larger social forces, not just individual choices.

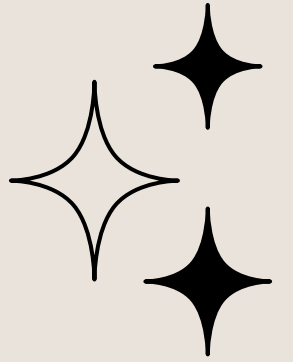
I also learned how qualitative research “seeks to understand human behavior by learning about it through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analysis of content sources (like books, magazines, journals, and popular media)”(Figure 1.4). Instead of assuming why people behave a certain way, qualitative methods reveal the deeper “why” and “how” behind their actions.

Using the sociological imagination, I started connecting personal experiences to broader social structures. This shifted my thinking from “this is just how things are” to “what social forces shape this situation?” That mindset is what prepared me to analyze homelessness as a social issue rather than an individual failure.





Inequality, Conformity, or Social Movements



Inequality became one of the clearest lenses for me when I started looking at homelessness more seriously. Before this project, I mostly thought about homelessness as something tied to individual circumstances, but learning more about social inequality made me realize how uneven the starting points are for people. Some communities have access to stable housing, support systems, and opportunities, while others face barriers that make it almost impossible to stay afloat.

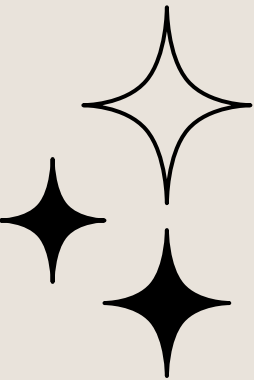
What stood out to me most was how inequality isn't just about income — it's about who gets resources, who gets ignored, and who gets blamed. Seeing homelessness through this lens made me rethink the assumptions I grew up hearing. It pushed me to understand that people aren't "failing" individually; they're navigating systems that weren't built to support everyone equally. That shift in perspective is what made this topic feel personal for me.

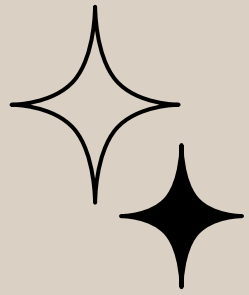
Personal Troubles vs. Public Issues

Personal trouble: A “personal trouble” might be someone losing their job or struggling with mental health, but the “public issue” is the lack of affordable housing, low wages, limited access to healthcare, and systems that fail to support people before they reach crisis.

Public issue: This shift helped me see that homelessness isn't about one person's failure — it's about how society distributes resources, opportunities, and support.

Understanding this made me rethink the assumptions I grew up hearing and recognize how much bigger the issue really is.





Growth Reflection

Labeling theory helped me understand how much the words we use shape the way society treats people experiencing homelessness. Before learning this concept, I didn't think much about how labels like "lazy," "dangerous," or "addict" follow people and limit their chances. But in Module 3, I realized that once someone is labeled, society often stops seeing the person and only sees the stereotype.

In my D6 post, I wrote about how labels can become "a cycle that people get stuck in because others stop giving them opportunities to break out of it." (Module 3, Section 2)

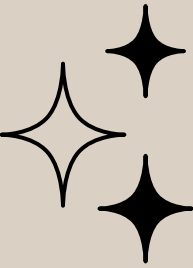
This idea connects directly to homelessness. When people are labeled as "problems" instead of people who need support, it becomes easier for society to ignore them or blame them for their situation.

Learning this made me rethink how I talk about homelessness and how quick society is to judge without understanding the full story. It pushed me to see the human being behind the label, and that shift changed the way I view this issue.



A person experiencing homelessness often faces **role strain**, which happens when the demands of a single role become overwhelming. For example, someone trying to fulfill the role of “job seeker” may struggle because they lack stable housing, transportation, or a place to shower — making the expectations of that role extremely difficult to meet. They may also experience **role conflict**, where two roles clash. A real example is a homeless parent who must choose between going to a job interview or staying with their child because shelters have strict schedules. These competing roles create impossible choices. Finally, **role performance** refers to how someone actually carries out a role in daily life. Many homeless individuals work hard to present themselves as responsible or employable, even while dealing with exhaustion, stigma, and limited resources.

Seeing homelessness through these role concepts shows how social expectations make their situation even harder, not easier.

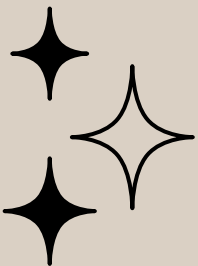


Learning about status helped me understand homelessness in a way I hadn't considered before. Status isn't just a label — it's a social position that affects how people are treated, judged, and understood. When someone is labeled as "homeless," that status often becomes the first thing people see, even before their personality, their history, or their strengths.

What stood out to me is how this low social status follows people everywhere: in public spaces, in job applications, in healthcare, and even in everyday interactions. I realized that the status of being homeless creates barriers that go far beyond not having a place to live. It shapes how others respond to them, and it can make people feel invisible or undeserving, even when they're trying to move forward.

Understanding homelessness as a status made me more aware of how quickly society judges people based on one part of their situation. It pushed me to think about how much dignity and opportunity are tied to the labels we give each other — and how those labels can either help or harm someone's chances of rebuilding their life.

— Status

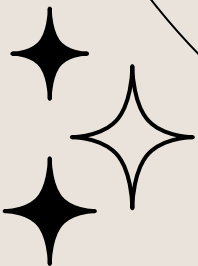


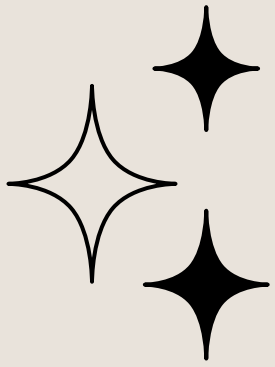
HD1 Concepts Application

In my HD1 post, I talked about how people's early environments shape the way they see the world and respond to challenges. I wrote about how our experiences can either give us stability or make us feel like we're constantly trying to catch up. That idea helped me understand homelessness on a deeper level.

When someone grows up without consistent support, resources, or safety, it affects everything — their confidence, their opportunities, and the way they navigate adulthood. In HD1, I mentioned how “our environment can either build us up or limit us before we even realize it,” and I see that clearly in the stories of people experiencing homelessness. Their situation isn't just about one moment or one decision; it's often the result of years of instability that started long before they became adults.

Connecting my HD1 reflection to homelessness made me realize how important early support systems are. It also made me more aware of how easily people can fall through the cracks when those systems fail. This helped me see homelessness not as an isolated event, but as something shaped by long-term developmental experiences.





“The Obvious Answer to Homelessness”

Reading *The Obvious Answer to Homelessness* shifted the way I understood the issue. The article argues that people become homeless for one main reason — they can’t afford a home — and that the most effective solution is to provide housing first, without making people “earn” it. What stood out to me was how simple the idea is, yet how often society avoids it.

The article made me realize how much we complicate homelessness by focusing on everything except the actual problem: the lack of housing. Before this, I used to think people needed to fix their personal struggles before getting help, but the article showed me that stability comes after housing, not before. When people have a safe place to live, they’re in a better position to work, take care of their health, and rebuild their lives.

This perspective helped me understand why approaches like Housing First are so effective. It made me rethink the assumptions I grew up hearing and pushed me to see homelessness as a structural issue, not a personal failure. The article’s message felt obvious once I read it — but it also made me question why society resists solutions that actually work.



Concept Map-HA1

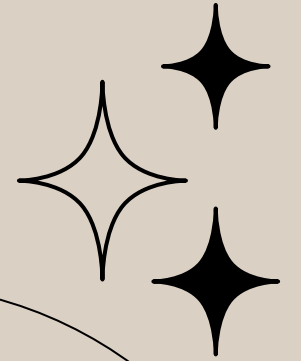
Module 4 helped me understand how much social structure shapes people's lives, especially when it comes to homelessness. Before this module, I didn't think much about how roles, expectations, and institutions affect someone's chances of staying stable. But learning about status and role strain made me realize how people experiencing homelessness are often stuck in positions where society expects things from them that they can't realistically meet.

What stood out to me most was how institutions — like housing systems, healthcare, and employment — can either support people or push them further into crisis. When these systems don't work the way they're supposed to, individuals end up carrying the blame for problems that are actually structural. That idea made me rethink how quick society is to judge people without understanding the pressures they're under.

This module made the issue feel more real to me. It helped me see homelessness not as a personal failure, but as something deeply connected to the roles people are forced into and the lack of support they receive. It made me more aware of how much responsibility falls on individuals when the systems around them aren't doing their part.



Community Resources



Homeward Bound of WNC (Asheville)

- Leading nonprofit in Asheville focused on ending homelessness through Housing First principles.
- Their goal is to move people into permanent housing with supportive services.
- Works with individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, mental-health challenges, and long-term instability.
- Their approach aligns closely with Norway's model — housing first, then wraparound support.

Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry (ABCCM)

- Provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, food, medical care, and crisis support.
- Runs the Veterans Restoration Quarters and Transformation Village.
- Focuses on stability, job readiness, and meeting immediate needs for people experiencing homelessness.

Asheville's Continuum of Care (CoC) WORK

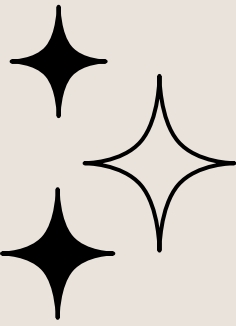
- Coordinates local shelters, outreach teams, rapid rehousing programs, and prevention services.
- Uses local data to track needs, reduce barriers, and connect people to housing resources.
- Their goal is to prevent homelessness before it happens and shorten the time people remain unhoused.

Personal Growth

Module 5 made me slow down and really think about how my views on homelessness have changed throughout this course. At the beginning of the semester, I saw homelessness mostly as an individual struggle — something that happened because of personal choices or bad luck. But the more I learned, the more I realized how many structural forces shape someone's situation long before they ever lose housing.

What stood out to me in this module was how important it is to question the assumptions we grow up hearing. I realized that I used to look at homelessness from the outside, without understanding the systems, labels, and inequalities that trap people in place. Module 5 pushed me to connect everything we've learned — status, labeling, inequality, social structure — and see how they all overlap in real people's lives.

This reflection made the topic feel personal for me. It reminded me that the way we talk about homelessness matters, and that empathy isn't just about feeling bad — it's about understanding the bigger picture. Module 5 helped me see homelessness not as a distant issue, but as something shaped by the same social forces that affect all of us, just in different ways.



Sociological Analysis

All three local evidences perform functions that help stabilize the community, they provide permanent housing, food, shelter, and even medical care. These organizations exist because homelessness disrupts social stability, and their role is to restore order and meet essential needs.

Structural Functionalism

Institutions Working to
Maintain Stability

Asheville's housing crisis reflects structural inequality, where rising rents and low wages benefit those with economic power while harming low-income residents. ABCCM and CoC programs highlight how limited resources force organizations to compete for funding, showing how power and money shape who gets help. Conflict theory helps explain why homelessness continues: the root problem is unequal access to housing and economic power.

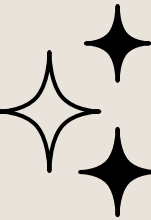
Conflict Theory

Housing Inequality &
Power Imbalances

Local organizations also work against the stigma attached to homelessness. My 3 local resources avoided stigmatizing language and focus on structural causes instead. Labeling theory shows how being called "homeless" can shape how people see themselves and how others treat them — reinforcing the importance of these organizations' efforts to humanize and support individuals.

Labeling Theory

How "Homeless"
Becomes a Stigmatized
Identity



Why Does This Matters?

Working on this project made me realize how easy it is to look at homelessness from a distance without understanding the deeper causes behind it. Before this class, I mostly saw homelessness as something that happened to “other people,” but learning about inequality, labeling, status, and social structure helped me see how connected we all are. These concepts showed me that homelessness isn’t just about individual choices — it’s about the systems people are born into, the opportunities they’re given, and the support they receive along the way.

This matters to me because it changed the way I think about responsibility. Instead of blaming individuals, I now see how much society shapes people’s lives. It made me more aware of the assumptions I used to make and more willing to question them. Understanding the bigger picture helped me develop more empathy and made me realize how important it is to support solutions that actually work, like Housing First and community-based resources.

This project didn’t just teach me about homelessness — it taught me how to look at social issues with more depth, compassion, and awareness. It reminded me that real change starts with understanding, and that the way we talk about people matters just as much as the policies we create.



Thank you!

Thank you!

Do you have any questions?

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