



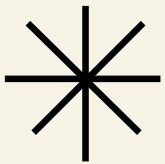
UNDERSTANDING SOCIOLOGY

SOC210 EVY M

Homelessness stood out to me because it connects personal struggles with bigger social systems. It made me realize how close this issue is to everyday life, even in my own community. My photo shows how visible yet overlooked homelessness can be locally. (source: Asheville citizens Times)

HOW SOCIOLOGY CHANGED MY PERSPECTIVE

Sociology helped me move beyond judging individuals to understanding large patterns in society. I now see how social institutions like family, economy, and government shape people's opportunities. One idea that changed my perspective was social solidarity, which explains how society stays connected. As stated in the textbook, "social solidarity is the glue that holds society together" (eBook, 1.3). This made me realize that homelessness is not just an individual issue, but a breakdown in a social support systems.





PERSONAL TROUBLES VS. PUBLIC ISSUES

The sociologic imagination shows how personal problems are linked to public issues. Homelessness is often viewed as a personal failure, such as poor decisions or lack of effort. However, larger forces like rising housing costs and limited job access play a major role. This reflects on how, “society shapes individual experiences” (eBook, 1.1). It changes the way we assign blame and responsibility. (Image source: Asheville Citizens Times)

INEQUALITY, CONFORMITY, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Inequality is a major factor that increases the risk of homelessness. Certain groups face limited access to housing, healthcare, and stable income. The Grants Pass approach reflects social control, where laws regulate behavior instead of solving problems. Social control is defined as how society enforces norms through laws and rules (eBook, 11.2). This shows how responses to homelessness can reinforce inequality instead of actually reducing it. In my D6 post, I did a simulation to see if I could last 30 days given certain circumstances and budgeting. This gave me a clear understanding on how difficult it is to manage life below the poverty line. After experiencing this, I see how being homeless would be even exponentially harder with the addition of the stigma surrounding their social hardships.

GROWTH REFLECTION



At first, I believed that community programs alone could solve homelessness. After learning more from texts like the CoC, I realized that structural issues like housing shortage are the root cause. The readings showed that “access to resources is shaped by social structure” (eBook, 11.1). My thinking shifted from focusing on individual to understanding systemic barriers. I now see that long-term solutions require changes at a societal level.

HOMELESSNESS AS A STATUS

Homelessness can be understood as a social status that affects how individuals are viewed and treated. It is often an achieved status influenced by life circumstances such as a job loss or lack of affordable housing. This status carries stigma, which in turn impacts access to opportunities. Society often labels individuals based on this status, shaping their experience and interactions.



ROLE STRAIN, ROLE CONFLICT, AND ROLE PERFORMANCE

Role strain occurs when individuals struggle to meet multiple responsibilities at once. For people experiencing homelessness, this can include balancing work, childcare, and survival. As explained in the text, role strain happens when, “... too many demands are placed on a single status” (eBook, 4.3). This makes it difficult to maintain stability and improve their situation. These pressures highlight how daily life challenges are intensified by structural issues.

LOOKING-GLASS SELF

The looking-glass self explains how people form their identity based on how others perceive them. For individuals experiencing homelessness, negative public reactions can lead to feelings of shame and isolation. According to the textbook, identity develops through social interaction and how we imagine others see us (eBook, 4.2). In my HD1 post, I explained how policies like the Grants Pass decision can lead to fines or jail time, which reinforces negative labels instead of offering support. These responses show how society can stigmatize homelessness, shaping both self-perception and opportunity. This create a cycle where judgement from others makes it even harder for individuals to improve their situation. (image source: Asheville Citizens time)



THE 3 APPROACHES

ASHEVILLE (CONTINUUM OF CARE)

- This approach focuses on coordinating local services like shelters, healthcare, and job support
- It recognizes that homelessness is caused by both personal struggle and structural issues
- In HD1, I explained how the CoC raises funding and supports housing programs to help prevent homelessness in 1,000 households
- This model works within existing systems, but is limited by funding and housing availability

NORWAY (HOUSING FIRST)

- Norway's approach prioritizes giving people permanent housing before addressing their other challenges
- It is based on the idea that stability is necessary before solving issues like mental health or unemployment
- The reading explains that once people are housed, they are more successful in maintain jobs and improving their lives
- This approach directly targets the root cause of homelessness by ensuring access to housing

GRANTS PASS (CRIMINALIZATION)

- This approach focuses on enforcing laws that restricts sleeping or camping in public spaces
- It reflects social control, where laws are used to regulated behavior instead of solving deeper problems (eBook, 11.2)
- In both HD1 and HD@, I noted that this can lead to fines or jail time for people experiencing homelessness
- This approach does not address root causes and can actually make homelessness harder to escape

Sociological Concepts (Ch. 4)

HD1: HOMELESSNESS, SOCIETY, & THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

HD1 Evidence & Quotes

Role Strain
Too many roles + responsibilities create stress & conflict.
(eBook, 9.3)

Ex: single parent balancing work, childcare, sickness, bills, housing, transportation

Thomas Theorem (Looking-Glass Self)
"If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."
(Thomas & Thomas 1928)

Negative labels from society (e.g., "lazy," "criminal") can shape how people see themselves and how others treat them.

Role Conflict
When expectations from one role conflict with another
Ex: need to work but no childcare options

Status & Inequality
Individuals with lower socioeconomic status face fewer resources + higher risk of homelessness.
(eBook Ch. 11.1)

- Race, ethnicity, & gender inequality increase risk by limiting access to resources + opportunities. (eBook Ch. 11.1, 11.2)

HD1: Observations / Examples

1. After Hurricane Helene, Asheville recognized lack of housing + resources and acted as a group to combat it.
2. Grassroot orgs in Asheville grew into professional advocacy groups with federal funding.
3. Despite Grants Pass v. Johnson, Asheville balances stricter enforcement with shelter initiatives to avoid fines/jail.

HOMELESSNESS: Individual Experiences, Structural Forces, & Societal Responses

Public Opinion Article - End Homelessness Poll

- Moreover, 69% of respondents reported that they are concerned about their ability to maintain stable housing."
- "79% expressing concern about the ability of others in their communities to maintain their housing."
- "Rise in housing costs has had direct correlation with unemployment rates, (69% and 98% increases in both in that order)."
- "45% of surveyees recorded lack of available lodging resources and mental health disabilities respectively."
- "Elected officials vote towards long-term investments to fix homelessness rather than strong-armed committees."

Grants Pass v. Johnson Article

- "The ruling does not indicate that this decision be enforced harshly." (NC Housing Coalition)
- "There are still struggles to find balance with this new verdict." (City of Asheville)
- "Temporary housing is only part of a solution."
- "Longterm, community based infrastructure is what is necessary to eradicate the major implications of the Grants Pass decision."

Asheville CoC / Home-ARP Info

- "Over \$35,000 have been raised and put towards the 'Compensation Plan for Subject Matter Experts with Lived and Living Experience of Homelessness' project." (as of Feb. 28, 2024)
- "Selected as one of 10 committees to receive \$5 million dollars over the next 3 years to prevent homelessness in 1,000 households." (as of Apr. 25, 2024)

HD2: COMPARING APPROACHES TO HOMELESSNESS

Asheville's Continuum of Care Approach

- Connects shelters, healthcare, job support, housing programs
- Community driven + funded (Home-ARP)
- Addresses multiple factors: SA, domestic abuse, veterans, at-risk youth, etc.
- Limited by housing availability + funding constraints

Norway's Housing First Approach

- Housing is the first priority
- Based on idea that stability comes before addressing other challenges
- Strong government support + social welfare policies
- Proven to reduce homelessness long-term

Grants Pass Criminalization Strategy

- Punishes homelessness (e.g., anti-camping laws, fines, jail)
- Focus on enforcement not solutions
- Connects to social control (eBook, 11.2)
- Increases barriers, does not address root causes

Structural Solutions: The Obvious Answer to Homelessness

- Main causes: uneven stock market, inflation, getting federal programs, rising housing costs
- Calls for long-term investments in health, stability, opportunity
- Affordable housing is the foundation of all solutions

Structural Forces

- Lack of affordable housing (major driver across all examples)
- Unequal access to resources based on race, ethnicity, gender, class (eBook, 11.1, 11.2)
- Economic instability: inflation, job loss, rising costs
- Cuts to federal assistance programs
- Disasters (e.g., Hurricane Helene) exacerbate vulnerabilities

Impact on Individuals

- Housing insecurity
- Mental + physical health struggles
- Role strain + conflict
- Stigma + negative labeling
- Cycle of poverty + exclusion

How It All Connects



The Big Picture

Homelessness is not just an individual problem - it is created and maintained by social structures, inequality, and policy choices. Solutions must focus on housing, resources, and dignity, not punishment.

Key Takeaway: How society defines homelessness shapes how it responds. Seeing homelessness as a structural issue leads to more effective, humane, and long-term solutions.

References (All Readings & Discussions)

- OpenStax Sociology 3e - Ch. 4 (Roles, Role Strain, Role Conflict, Status, Looking-Glass Self)
- OpenStax Sociology 3e - Ch. 11.1. Race, Ethnic, and Minority Groups
- Public Opinion - End Homelessness Poll
- Grants Pass v. Johnson Article (NC Housing Coalition, City of Asheville)
- Asheville Continuum of Care / Home-ARP Information
- "The Obvious Answer to Homelessness" Article
- HD1 & HD2 Discussions / Reflections (Asheville observations, comparisons)

Key Differences

CONCEPT MAP

- HOMELESSNESS IS NOT CAUSED BY ONE SINGLE FACTOR, BUT BY OVERLAPPING STRUCTURAL ISSUES SUCH AS LIMITED AFFORDABLE HOUSING, UNEMPLOYMENT, RISING LIVING COSTS, AND UNEQUAL HEALTHCARE ACCESS
- THE "OBVIOUS ANSWER TO HOMELESSNESS" ARTICLE EMPHASIZES THAT HOUSING IS THE FOUNDATION FOR SOLVING MANY OTHER CHALLENGES BECAUSE STABILITY MAKES EMPLOYMENT, TREATMENT, AND EDUCATION MORE ACHIEVABLE.
- ASHEVILLE'S CONTINUUM OF CARE HELPS BY CONNECTING PEOPLE TO SERVICES AND FUNDING HOUSING-RELATED PROGRAMS, BUT IT STILL WORKS WITHIN A SYSTEM WHERE HOUSING SUPPLY IS LIMITED
- NORWAY'S HOUSING FIRST MODEL IS MORE EFFECTIVE BECAUSE IT TREATS HOUSING AS A BASIC NEED INSTEAD OF SOMETHING PEOPLE MUST "EARN" AFTER FIXING OTHER PROBLEMS
- IN CONTRAST, CRIMINALIZATION APPROACHES LIKE GRANTS PASS FOCUS ON REMOVING VISIBLE HOMELESSNESS RATHER THAN REDUCING HOMELESSNESS ITSELF.
- ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS SUCCESSFULLY REQUIRES LONG-TERM POLICY CHANGES THAT TARGET ROOT CAUSES INSTEAD OF TEMPORARY SYMPTOMS

Structural Causes and Solutions



LOCAL EFFECTS



- Asheville has taken several local steps to address homelessness through the CoC, which coordinates housing, outreach, and prevention programs
- According to my HD1 research, the CoC has raised over \$35,000 for the “Compensation Plan for Subject Matter Experts with Lived and Living Experience of Homelessness”
- The organization was also selected to receive \$5 million over the next three years to help prevent homelessness in 1,000 households
- Following Hurricane Helene, Asheville saw increased housing strain and resource shortages, which highlighted how environmental events can worsen housing insecurity

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Social structure: Access to housing, healthcare, and employment is shaped by how society distribute resources, not simply by individual effort (eBook, 11.1)

Role Strain: People experiencing homelessness often face overwhelming responsibilities, such as maintaining employment while managing childcare, transportation, food access, and housing instability (eBook, 4.3)



In my HD1 post, I used the example o a single parent balancing ork and family responsibilities while trying to avoid homelessness

Professional Advocacy. Grassroots organizations like Asheville's CoC have evolved into more formal systems with funding and policy influence, allowing them to address homelessness on a larger scale

These concepts show how homelessness is deeply connected to institutional systems and inequalities rather than isolated personal decisions.

Image source: [Ashevillenc.gov](https://www.ashevillenc.gov)

PERSONAL GROWTH

At the beginning of the course, I already valued empathy, but I often approaches issues more emotionally than analytically. Sociology gave me the vocabulary and frameworks to understand why social issues happen, rather than only reacting to their outcomes. My perspective shifted from focusing mostly on individual responsibility to recognizing the influence of institutions, inequality, and social systems. This course strengthened both my empathy and my ability to think more objectively about real-world problems.





WHY THIS MATTERS

Understanding homelessness sociologically matters because it changes how we respond to people experiencing hardship. Instead of blaming individuals, sociology encourages us to examine the systems that create and maintain inequality. Homelessness affects public health, education, employment, safety, and community stability. When homelessness is viewed as a structural issue, solutions become more focused on prevention, policy reform, and long-term stability. This knowledge matters beyond the classroom because it influences how communities vote, advocate, and support one another. Sociology has shown me that social problems are rarely random, and understanding their causes is the first step toward meaningful change.