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To Be a Homeless Man in Portland An Ethnographic Approach to Understanding their Experience of Prejudice

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the intolerance experienced by homeless men in Portland by describing and

ethnographically interpreting their communication in that regard. The study examines what

poverty looks like in America, and then uses established theories to explain the nature of

prejudice and intolerance. This study explicitly sought participants' perspectives by interviewing

a particular subset of people who were living homeless in Portland, Oregon at the time of data

collection. Using ethnographic methods and taxonomic analysis, this study discovered three key

themes in these men's communication code having to do with experiencing prejudice:

understanding labeling, the system, and interactions. These focused findings provide new

insights about how some homeless men in Portland experience prejudice across the barrier of

privilege.

To Be a Homeless Man in Portland

An Ethnographic Approach to Understanding their Experience of Prejudice

Having grown up in an upper-middle class family in an Eastern Washington suburb, I had minimal exposure to any homeless population for most of my life prior to university. All of my friends were of similar socioeconomic status and I rarely ventured into the poor parts of town. Whenever my family and I would go into the city I would be sure to avoid eye contact with anyone who looked suspicious. This attitude of avoidance and fear stayed with me until a few years ago. Upon moving to Portland in 2009, the complexity of poverty started to makes its way into my thoughts and concerns. It is nearly impossible to live in a major American city without interacting with the homeless population. Walking around Portland's Chinatown in the early morning, one will likely find someone asleep on every doorstep. For the last year I have been volunteering at a non-profit organization that works to help alleviate poverty. Through this organization I have gotten to know men and women who spend their nights on the streets. For myself, a barrier of social class has been broken. Yet the barrier between the haves and the have-nots remains generally strong. This divide between people, however, is not purely economic. It manifests itself in the attitudes, stereotypes, and assumptions we make of others. Sociologists, politicians, and academics across the board have sought to explain the prejudice that people feel towards one another. Yet in regards to the barriers surrounding social class, a key voice has been missing: the voice of the homeless.

This study first conducts a literature review to see what poverty looks like in America. It then describes several theories that explain why prejudice and intolerance exist. By tying these understandings together, one can better comprehend how prejudice is connected to societies' treatment of the homeless population. This treatment often stems from an idea called the Culture

of Poverty as well as from messages spread through the media. A key to this understanding is the additional perspective of people who actually live on the streets. If a full analysis of the intolerance homeless men experience is to be achieved, one must look at more than the findings provided by academics. It is also vital to consider the firsthand accounts of people who live in poverty. Through these combined lenses this paper answers, how do homeless men in Portland experience prejudice from more privileged people?

<div style="text-align:center">Literature Review</div>

Homelessness in America

The average American falls asleep with a roof over their head and food in their stomach. However for a growing portion of the population, this luxury of warmth and stability is out of reach. In 2009 Oregon was said to have the highest proportion of homeless people in the nation. In Portland alone there are an estimated 1,700 people sleeping outside and 1,000 more sleeping in shelters, low-rent, or subsidized motels every night (Neves 2011). Even more alarming, it is estimated that the rate of poverty in the United States is increasing twice as fast as the population growth (Mantsios 1998). Social discourse often portrays the United States as a classless society, yet the divide between the rich and the poor has actually grown wider (Allen 2011). In fact the U.S. has the most unequally distributed wealth and income in the industrialized world. About 34.2% of all people are classified as living in poverty at least two months out of the year, while the top 1 percent of American families are taking in more of the nation's income than at any other time since the 1920s (Jilani 2011). With this growing disparity in income, poverty has been shown to dramatically impact the lives of the middle and upper class as well. By maintaining a reserve population of unemployed and underemployed who are anxious for any job at any wage, poverty has a dampening effect on wages in general (Mantsios 1998). It creates systems where

people are easily taken advantage of. Therefore homelessness is to be understood as not solely a problem for individuals or a secluded group, but also for society as a whole.

How prejudice Exists

Prejudice is defined as a negative attitude toward a cultural group, based on little or no experience with them; it may arise from tensions between groups, negative past contacts, status differences, perceived threats, and the need to see one's own group as more positive than others (Baldwin 1998). Many theories help explain human intolerance. In his article "Tolerance/Intolerance, A multidisciplinary view of prejudice", Baldwin (1998) explained some of the perspectives that may be at the root of prejudice. From the evolutionary to the group, individual, and message levels, each approach offers something of value to the conversation. For example, for some evolutionary theorists the strongest subconscious human striving is for the propagation of the species or group (Baldwin 1998). Self-propagation supposedly occurs through fear of strangers, conforming enforcement, anti-predator aggression, or enforcement of group solidarity (Baldwin 1998). Van der Dennen (1987) explained intolerance as, "Fear of the stranger and what the stranger incorporates: the strange, the unknown, the out-of-control, the potential chaos, the potential evil, the potential impurity, contamination and pollution, the potential threat and danger" (Baldwin 1998, p. 43). Through this fear, prejudice persists.

Another approach looks at Group-Level reasons for intolerance. This approach typically focuses on the power relations involved that preserve prejudice. According to this theory, even if we accept that fear and contempt are at the root of all intolerance, these are influenced by the presence of competing goals. Such goals often concern allocation of resources among groups. Aronson (1992) emphasizes political and economic competition. According to this view, "Given that resources are limited, the dominant group might attempt to exploit a minority group in order

to gain some material advantage" (Baldwin 1998, p. 112). At its' core this argument has Marxist tendencies. Marxist arguments state that the owners of production do what they must in order to keep control of production (Baldwin 1998). Therefore intolerance is truly just an issue of class conflict, resources, and a fight over power.

Lastly, prejudice can be understood through Message-Based approaches. Rhetorical studies look at messages as texts, broadly defined to include interpersonal messages, media messages, and so on (Baldwin 1998). Individuals or groups use terms to interpret the behaviors and realities of others. For example, if one refers to people with names that belittle them or describe their characteristics and behaviors negatively, these words will filter and shape the way society views them (Baldwin 1998). Powerful and moldable, words are given meaning by their placement in the sets of ideas in which they are discussed, but groups or individuals can challenge those meanings and offer messages and texts that socially redefine the terms in less oppressive ways (Baldwin 1998). Therefore while prejudice can be influenced by rhetoric, it can also be contested. For some intolerance is seen as evolutionary, for others it is institutional and defined by power relations. Or perhaps it exists at an individual level, in our minds, behaviors, and the words we use. In order to gain a full understanding on the matter, one must consider the various perspectives.

The Culture of Poverty

The Culture of Poverty can largely explain the intolerance experienced by the homeless population. The Culture of Poverty is the idea that poor people share more or less monolithic and predictable beliefs, values, and behaviors (Gorski 2008). Despite the fact that the available evidence has not supported it, this concept has made its way into mainstream thinking as unquestioned fact. It is a kind of deficit theory, suggesting that poor people are poor because of

their own moral and intellectual deficiencies (Gorski 2008). To do so it draws on well-established stereotypes, such as that poor people are drunks, druggies, or lazy, and it ignores systemic conditions, such as inequitable access to high-quality schooling, that actually support the cycle of poverty (Gorski 2008). One way this intolerance manifests itself is in the language people sometimes use to describe homeless persons: "hoboes", "bums", "drunks" "crazy" and "druggies", and the stereotypes that result because of them.

The fact that many people who are homeless may suffer from alcoholism and drug addiction does not entirely account for the stigmatization they receive because of it. One myth connected to the Culture of Poverty is that all poor people abuse drugs and alcohol. Many people use this excuse to blame them for their poverty. This kind of attitude creates an idea called "the undeserving poor", a segment of society who simply don't deserve a fair shake (Gorski 2008). However in truth, poor people are no more likely than their wealthier counterparts to abuse alcohol or drugs (Gorski 2008). In fact, drug use is equally distributed across poor, middle class, and wealthy communities (Gorski 2008). The poor simply don't have the ability to hide or disguise their addictions. While those in the middle and upper class can pay for treatment and proper health care, someone who is homeless clearly does not have these resources. Therefore the homeless are left with a stereotype that leaves the public often unsympathetic to their plight.

Another myth is that poor people are unmotivated and have weak work ethics. This notion exists when people call the homeless "bums" or "hoboes". However on the contrary, 83 percent of children from low-income families have at least one employed parent who works full-time and year-round (Gorski 2008). In fact, the severe shortage of living-wage jobs means that many poor adults must work two, three, or four jobs. According to the Economic Policy Institute (2002), poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their wealthier

counterparts (Gorski 2008). These statistics prove that poverty is not naturally correlated with laziness. Despite common thought, a homeless person did not necessarily give up and let poverty overcome them. In the end, the Culture of Poverty myth distracts people from the truth. It diverts attention from what people in poverty really do have in common: inequitable access to basic human rights. This is no coincidence, because if society is convinced that poverty results not from gross inequalities but from poor people's own deficiencies, they will be much less likely to support authentic antipoverty policy and programs (Gorski 2008). Instead, they will unknowingly support the systems that promote inequality. These and other myths play a huge rule in the intolerance and prejudice the homeless community face.

Stereotypes in the Media

A key factor in how homelessness and poverty is understood in our society comes from the media. Americans spend an average of 28 hours per week watching television, and today countless more on the Internet (Mantsios 1998). Unlike other cultural and socializing institutions, ownership and control of the mass media is highly concentrated (Mantsios 1998). In 1998, 23 corporations owned more than half of all the daily newspapers, magazines, movie studios, radios, and television outlets in the U.S. (Mantsios 1998). Through their newscasts, movies, and television shows, the owners and producers of this media have sent strong and unwavering messages that support the Culture of Poverty. With shows that demonize or make of mockery of the homeless, media messages directly supports the idea that poor people are generally responsible for their troubles. They do so through in several specific ways.

For the most part the news media ignores the existence of the poor completely. When poverty is discussed, statistics and figures monopolize the conversation. Coverage like this desensitizes people to the poor by reducing poverty to a number (Mantsios 1998). It ignores the

human aspect of homelessness, the suffering, indignities, and misery that is endured. Media also sends the message that the poor are undeserving of sympathy. They provide sensational stories about welfare cheats, drug addicts, and greedy panhandlers (Mantsios 1998). This kind of message reinforces the Culture of Poverty and the idea that the poor only have themselves to blame. As a whole, media tells its' viewers that poverty is simply an irregularity of the American way of life, or that it doesn't exist, or it's just another number, or it's unfortunate but temporary. The largest message, however, is that poverty is simply the fault of the poor themselves. By blaming the victim, media hide the fact that poverty is actually systemic. In reality it is a direct result of economic and political policies that deprive people of jobs, adequate wages, health care, or legitimate support (Mantsios 1998). Many middle and upper class people truly believe that the poor victimize them. Their concern is in preserving the status quo and the systems that benefit them. A mass media that did not have its own class interests would acknowledge the inordinate wealth and power that undermines democracy (Mantsios 1998). It would pay attention to the homeless and to the true causes of poverty.

Method

Participants

Around the world there are hundreds of "street papers" that work directly with the homeless population. These papers give people of any income level the chance to start earning their own money by selling the paper. While volunteering at Portland's street paper, I have gotten to know a handful of men and women who currently live in extreme poverty. Many are homeless, in shelters, or have recently been placed into low-income housing. During a day at the office I spoke with five men about their opinions and experiences. While all of them are currently working at the paper to earn money, this has not always been the case. "Harold"

(pseudonyms are used here), "Charlie", "Jose", "Robert", and "Max" all come from different backgrounds of socio-economic status. These men are of varying ages, ethnicities, and they all wound up on the streets for different reasons. From conversations with them, the missing voice of the homeless can be added to the conversation on the prejudice and intolerance they experience. I also spoke with "Augustus", the Director of the street paper. Augustus serves as an excellent gatekeeper into this community. He has a foot in both camps, meaning a deep understanding of what it is like to be homeless as well as an understanding of the history, systems and policies that perpetuate both stereotypes and prejudice. The combined perspectives of these participants gives a firsthand account of what it means to be homeless man in Portland, Oregon.

Procedure

I conducted an ethnographic study that sought to analyze the language homeless men in Portland used to describe their experiences of prejudice. In about hour long sessions, questions were asked of the men such as, "How have you felt stereotyped?" to "Why do you think these stereotypes exist?" and "What do you wish people knew about you?" (see Appendix 1 for interview protocol used). Each conversation was recorded for further analysis. While I asked similar questions of each man, every conversation took its own unique turn. I later went through and picked out key phrases and terms that each of the men repeatedly used. These terms revealed a deeper message on the intolerance homeless men in Portland experience. Through determining the relationships between these words and their meanings, I deciphered three key clusters or themes. These clusters - labeling, the system, and interactions - were revealed through the use of strict-inclusion, function, and attribution, as proposed by ethnographer James P. Spradley (Spradley 1979). By using language as a doorway into my participant's system of meaning, this

analysis uncovered ways that homeless men have started to define their world and the prejudice they endure.

Results

Labeling

Often the homeless are portrayed in homogenously negative terms. They are often called "bums", "drunks", "druggies", "crazy" or "hoboes" by media and individuals alike. Each man I spoke with expressed having to been referred to as one of the aforementioned terms. However as a rebellion against these phrases, they instead referred to themselves as "on the streets" or "campin' out", each as a term to represent their homelessness. As opposed to a word that refers to their character, an attribution of sorts, these phrases paint a less negative picture. They say something about the situation that homeless men are in as opposed to who they are. Augustus added to this conversation by explaining his perspective on the way our society typically treats the homeless.

> Looking back throughout the history of our country, people experiencing poverty and homelessness have always had a negative connotation thrown upon them by the media, by culture, by the simple fact that they don't have a home or they're living outdoors...the idea of someone being homeless is more or less a "have not". There is a certain sector of the population that is very compassionate and very passionate towards helping individuals. But you have other groups of the population who believe that, ya know, "they should have a job", "they're drunks" or "drug addicts" or this or that. The reality is that [homelessness] is very convoluted and very complex.

In my conversations with Charlie and Robert, we delved into what the words "drunk" and "druggie" mean to them as well as the correlation between addiction, health, and poverty. A recovering alcoholic, Charlie has now been sober for eight months. He explained that his alcoholism was in fact a key factor in his poverty. "When I see someone on the street, and I've experienced that, I know what put me out there," he said. Charlie fully admits that his alcoholism has been a factor in his poverty. Yet despite the fact that he has been sober for almost a year, he has not been able to find steady work or fully rise up out of his poverty. Robert explained that his greatest struggles have resulted from his gout, heart failure, and other subsequent health issues. "As I go through heart failure, it limits me from doin' activities like holdin' a job like I wanna do. Without good health, you can't do good things," he said. Poor health in homelessness can take many forms, including psychological. Along the same lines, Augustus mentioned the correlation between homelessness and mental health.

> We work with such a large variety of people on the streets that are dealing with mental health issues, or have a job injury, or a traumatic brain injury, or a disability that doesn't allow them to be able to work. So being able to find them a place to rest, or be, or just exist in society is a real challenge. I think that people expect there to be this one puzzle, or this one size fits all solution. Really we're dealing with people who are experiencing homelessness for so many reasons. Many people come to us at a very fragile state already. Many of the people that are just becoming homeless are already stressed. They may have been on nervous breakdown 1, 2 or 3 before they even got to the streets. The simple act of living outdoors is enough to send someone over the edge.

The men I spoke with have rejected the typical labels that they feel belittle their character, such as "drunk", "druggie", "bum", "hobo", or "crazy". Instead they have created terms such as "on the street" or "campin' out" that describe an action; something that they are physically doing (sleeping outside) as a result of their homelessness. In this way they have denied the labels they feel that society has placed on them and formed terms that are more appropriate and representative of their situation.

The System

A phrase that each man used at least once during our conversations was "the system". While it can mean many things, "the system" typically refers to some kind of policy or political issue related to poverty. That could be the welfare system, health care, social security, veteran's benefits, or so on. Charlie expressed the difficulty many people experience in finding housing or shelters once they've hit rock bottom, "They don't have no place to go, cause of the way the system is. Places usually always fill up," he said. Jose explained that the inadequacies of "the system" play a role in perpetuating the lazy stereotype many homeless people endure, "People are trying. People went through the system, and the system failed them. It's not as easy as just letting things go." Harold referred to the city of Portland's alcohol and drug free safe zone's as an instrument of the system, "So they're just re-programming the whole damn thing into their own little security world, ya know, of so called alcohol and drug free safe zones and shit like that, and it's a lot of bullshit ya know," he said. While each man had their own individual meaning, these men see "the system" as an instrument of power, as a function of something political that works to keep them down. They also considered politicians as the individuals who hold that power. Augustus added:

People can refer to the system in many ways, whether that's a specific

thing or whether it's more general. I think you will hear that from

individuals who have tried with all of their ability to maintain in the world

they live, and for one reason or another they just can't get it together.

Having been on and off the streets for sixteen years, Jose is one of the most well known

homeless activists in Portland. He consistently engages in rallies, speaks at public events, and he

has even collaborated on several documentaries. When discussing his work he explained, "The

biggest barrier for me in my advocacy is the statistics. Because no matter what I say, the decision

makers come back with 'Ya ya, cute story, but here's the *real* story.' They bring out the

statistics." Jose referred to statistics as a negative tool of the system, used by policy makers to

keep in poverty. Augustus expanded on how inadequate policies and public perceptions mistreat

the issue of homelessness.

There's this idea that, ya know, the kind of pull yourself up by the

bootstrap mentality that exists in our society. The whole, I'm not gonna

pay for somebody else to be a freeloader, or to not work, or to not do X Y

and Z. But the reality is, with the current structure we have set up in our

society, people actually pay more taxes to support the homeless. It would

cost our society less to have effective health care, effective housing

programs than it does to actually manage the problem.

The theme of "the system" was central in my discussions with each man. Whether they

feel powerless because of a bureaucracy they cannot change, or they believe those with power

don't care about their struggles, words like "the system" and "statistics" reveal an impersonal, de-

humanized view of the powers that be.

Interactions

       The kind of human interaction you experience while homeless was the final theme that nearly every man spoke about. While Harold and Jose discussed the mistreatment they've endured, Charlie expressed the help he has received from others, and Max simply hoped for more compassion. Harold was visibly frustrated and angry during the entirety of our conversation. While explaining the chip on his should he said, "There are some guys that will come along and shove you over or whatever, just knock you down, just see if you can stand it, see how weak you are." Later on, Jose explained why men like Harold come across as so jaded and angry. He explained how the constant negativity and struggle eventually damages a person's sense of self-worth. "The stress level that you have to push down and down, most people don't realize that. You see us standing all stoic and angry all the time. We get made fun of, we don't say anything. It all gets pushed down. Sometimes that's why people explode, cause they have all that pushed down inside," he said. In this way, Harold and Jose eluded to the idea that negative interaction with others is what incites negative behavior within the homeless.

       On a similar note, Max simply yearned for a more compassionate society. "I wish people knew how much they could help," he said, "Even by taking someone in and sharing a dinner with them and saying see ya later, that is something that could sustain someone's love needs for a month. Just stopping and saying hi, or just showing some moral support." Charlie explained how the kindness of others is what helped him get back on his feet. "I always run into good people out there that wanted to help," he said, "It didn't matter what state what town. Somebody was always out there to reach out to help." Augustus later expanded on the emotional toll that homelessness can take on someone.

Ya know people get really defeated. Being homeless is a traumatic

experience; it strips you of your dignity. It's very easy to get beat down

into an attitude or an atmosphere where you feel like the world has

basically given up on you. But there's a story behind every person. What

you might be seeing, ya know, an individual who is homeless today,

there's a story to that. It's somebody daughter, somebody's son,

somebody's brother, somebody's sister, somebody's mother, or

somebody's father. We're human beings. The most important thing is to

recognize, from a humanity perspective, that we all have to show dignity

to others.

Like most human beings, men who live on the streets desire love and respect. Harold,

Jose, Max, and Charlie have experienced support from strangers as well as neglect and

occasional cruelty. Their discussions reveal that they not only crave supportive interaction, but

they also internalize the negative. As Harold and Jose revealed, this internalized oppression can

manifest itself in aggression and anger towards others, making the barriers that exist even deeper.

Discussion

This study researched the intolerance homeless men in Portland may experience. It did so

by first analyzing the many forms intolerance takes, whether evolutionary, at a group-level, or

message-based. Furthermore, with the highest proportion of homeless people in the nation, the

issue of poverty hits hard for Oregon residents. Through an understanding of the Culture of

Poverty and messages spread through the media, we have come to understand the various ways

that prejudice is spread. Most importantly, we heard the voices of men who experience this

prejudice daily. By use of an ethnographic study, the language each man used revealed that they

have felt prejudiced, from the language used to describe them, to the systems involved, to the lack of positive human interaction. In its conclusion, this study presumed that homeless men in Portland experience prejudice from others at rhetorical, systemic, and personal levels. Building from that presumption, this study sought to understand and interpret how those prejudicial experiences are referenced in these men's shared communicative code. While the men I spoke with are a small handful in an ever-growing community, they offered insight into a community whose voice often is suppressed or ignored.

Implications

The topics and opinions the participants discussed reveal a larger connection to intolerance and prejudice in our society. In regards to labeling, using words that insult or demean the homeless can be a way to instill fear and enforce barriers, as evolutionary theorists would propose. It creates an "us" against "them" mentality. As the message-based approach on intolerance states, language is a powerful tool that influences human behavior and thoughts. By calling people "hoboes" or "bums", we start to think of them as such. As Robert mentioned, there are certain factors, such as health, that make poverty extremely difficult to escape. In fact the single strongest predictor of health is our position on the class pyramid (UnnaturalCauses.org). Those at the top have the most power and resources, and on average live longer and healthier lives. Those on the bottom are exposed to many health threats over which they have little or no control – insecure and low-paying jobs, mounting debt, poor child care, poor quality housing, less access to healthy food, unreliable transportation, and noisy and violent living conditions – that increase their risk of chronic disease and early death (UnnaturalCauses.org). Even among smokers, poor smokers face a higher mortality risk than rich smokers (Adler 2007). Understandably something like gout or heart failure would create a negative cycle for someone

with little access to treatment such as Robert. Calling someone a "drunk", "druggie", or any other demeaning term ignores the often complex reality they are in.

Another common label attached to homelessness is that they are "crazy". Yet according to statistics on mental health and homelessness, "Brain injury in the homeless community is a very common thing that we're just starting to learn about," says Dr. Barb Wismer, a practicing physician (Cox 2011). Few formal studies have been done, but those few are sobering (Cox 2011). In one recent study of 904 homeless men and women in Toronto, Ontario, 53 percent reported some type of traumatic brain injury. Studies in Milwaukie, Wisconsin and Boston, Massachusetts offer similar statistics of 48 and 67 percent (Cox 2011). Like addiction, without proper care, mental health has the ability to plunge someone even further into poverty. Finding steady work can be difficult, if not impossible, and a lack of treatment can heighten symptoms. When people see someone on the street muttering to themselves or acting erratically, rarely do they stop to think about the underlying illness that may cause this behavior. The study showed that language we use to describe the homeless is powerful. Whether intolerance is a result of evolutionary or message-based perspectives, the phrases we use to describe the homeless play a keep role in the enforcement of social barriers.

As mentioned before, when media reports or politicians focus on statistics, many in the public may become desensitized to the human aspect of homelessness. This kind of intolerance can be best understood by group-level and structural approaches, such as those proposed by Marx or Weber. Baker (1983) argues, "Power is the primary determinant of group relations. Racial and ethnic groups, whether in dominant, subordinate, or equal positions, mobilize their group resources and strive for control over the major political, economic, and social structures of society, for it is within these structures that most policy decisions, including the allocation or

reallocation of power, privilege, and resources, are determined" (Baldwin 1998, p. 25). This kind

of argument can also be applied to groups of differing social class. According to the participants,

"the system" is a function of power that seeks to keep them down. With welfare costing only two

cents of every dollar in the federal budget, one can start to see why homeless men feel a lack of

societal support.

Lastly, the way individuals treat homeless people can be influenced by a variety of

factors. Without being able to get into the minds of every individual, we are left to assume their

motives. Most likely this negativity comes from the prejudice and stereotypes that are

perpetuated through the media. Myths within the Culture of Poverty can become engrained in a

person's subconscious. A traditional explanation for why people believe stereotypes is that they

are simply easier than processing individual information about every person we meet (Baldwin

1998). It is easier to lump the homeless together and assume the worst instead of recognizing the

personal and often complicated stories behind each person. Tajfel and Turner (1987) proposed

that the more we see someone as a member of a group rather than as an individual, the more

likely stereotypes and prejudice will occur (Baldwin 1998). But from my conversations with

Harold Max, and Jose, this treatment does not go unnoticed. As Max mentioned, even the

smallest bit of positive human interaction can last someone on the streets' "love needs" long

after.

Limitations

This study looked at a small portion of a large and growing population, and the opinions

expressed are not to be considered characteristic of all homeless men, even in Portland. This is

especially so because the sample of participants came from a group whose members all were

working to earn an income in the same way. While this has not always been the case, they are

currently unique among their population. Future researchers should continue accessing the homeless community for participant observation, but they should reach out to shelters, women, and younger generations in order to attain a more holistic and comprehensive analysis.

Conclusion

Poverty is a cycle. From it stems poor health, poor access to resources, and most damaging, a poor sense of self worth. This study focused on a specific group of people, homeless men in Portland, who feel marginalized and stigmatized because of their socioeconomic status. It discovered that they have created new terms to describe their situation; terms that feel less like a representation of their character. They revealed that they feel angered and mistreated by the government and social policies, and their personal stories elicited that supportive community interaction is often lacking for men who live on the streets. When considering the broader message of what these men's language revealed, people and media should start to explain the homeless population not just as a representation of poor traits or behaviors, but as the result of an inadequate and often complicated system. Like other negative slurs, words should be discouraged from our social discourse that enforce stereotypes, such as "bum" or "hobo". The issue of homelessness transcends racial and social boundaries and affects every class, so researchers should continue to look into this population and the intolerance they experience. While prejudice exists in our thoughts and behaviors, we have the ability to challenge the systems and the messages that promote them.

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Appendix I

Interview Protocol

Began each interview by briefly explaining goals of project.

"Have you ever or are you currently homeless?"

"How long, when, and where were you living on the streets?"

"What kind of stereotypes have you experienced from others?"

"Why do you think those stereotypes exist?"

"Why do you think these stereotypes exist?"

"What kind of positive interactions have you experienced with others?"

"What kind of negative interactions have you experienced with others?"

"What do you wish people knew about homelessness?"

"Is there anything else you'd like me to know?"