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## The Stigma of Homelessness as an Identity: Homelessness as a Gendered Condition

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# **The Stigma of Homelessness as an Identity: Homelessness as a Gendered Condition**



Honors Thesis

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Department: Philosophy

Advisor: V. Denise James, Ph.D.

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## **Abstract**

The main goal of my thesis is to articulate the problem of homelessness. In order to do this, I examine philosopher Eva Kittay's work on disability and equality. Throughout her work, Kittay uses the terms human interconnectedness, oppression and citizenship. These three terms serve as the major concepts I explore. Human interconnectedness highlights the links that humans share with one another as interdependent beings. Oppression is the term used to describe how certain individuals or groups in society are treated unequally or are rejected from society. Finally, exploration of citizenship shows the importance of identities in society and how they allow or prevent equality. These considerations use gender as a lens for an inclusive examination of homelessness.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Opening Reflection

My first experience in a homeless shelter was on June 29, 2016. On that Wednesday, I took half of the day from my internship to volunteer. My perspective on the issue of homelessness changed due to the my encounters in the cafeteria. During the few hours I volunteered, I served dinner to families. At first, I was overwhelmed by the amount of families that entered the room hungry. But in my mind, the best way to serve the families was putting on a smile and being open to forming connections. I, like many others, have often driven past homeless people on the streets. I assumed these people were homeless when they were begging for money or if the belongings they carried seemed to be their only possessions. During these encounters, I did not think twice about the experience of these individuals. It was not until I was open to the connections at the homeless shelter that I began to think about the problem of homelessness differently.

I concluded that it is possible to have multiple interactions without feeling interconnection. However, being open to connections calls assumptions into question. I began to question the stereotypes and stigmas surrounding homelessness. I focused my attention on the realities of homeless experience and the language used to describe this experience. My hyper awareness for discourse around homelessness led me to recognize the limiting nature of the articulation of this problem. When we talk about homelessness, we rarely reflect on the human dignity or differences in experience amongst those experiencing homelessness. I argue for the value in being open to these interactions and connections.

## Introduction

Approximately 2.5 to 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness in a given year according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.<sup>1</sup> Life without shelter comes with many other hardships. Lack of shelter leaves a person unprotected from harms and vulnerable to environmental conditions. Shelter is a basic need for human life. The United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed this need in Article 25, Section 1:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.<sup>2</sup>

This universal declaration recognizes the numerous causes of homelessness and claims that securities should exist to not simply to prevent, but also to aid individuals currently experiencing homelessness. The stereotypes and stigmas of homelessness are not resolved by merely declaring shelter a basic need.

Although we do not describe individuals living in houses as ‘homed’, people living on the streets or in shelters are quickly labeled ‘homeless’. Labels, such as these, attempt to define a person’s identity. As I will claim, stereotypes serve to limit the agency of those who are experiencing homelessness. The stereotypes associated with homelessness make it a problematic form of identification. A person can experience homelessness or come out of homelessness at anytime, but our stereotypes make

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<sup>1</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, “Homelessness in America: Overview of Data and Causes,” 2015, [https://www.nlchp.org/documents/Homeless\\_Stats\\_Fact\\_Sheet](https://www.nlchp.org/documents/Homeless_Stats_Fact_Sheet).

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 217 (III) A. Paris, 1948, accessed April 4, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

assumptions that label this person as lazy, incompetent, and incapable of overcoming homelessness. The conditions that qualify a person as homeless may not be permanent, but the stereotypes create lasting stigmas. These stigmas are especially damaging because they most often result in social exclusion.

Homeless persons need to be classified as a social group in order to analyze their unique situation. Oppression is a structural phenomenon that affects groups. Therefore, to describe to describe the subjugation and harrassament of homeless persons properly, they must be established as a social group. Ann E. Cudd, a feminist philosopher, in her book *Analyzing Oppression* states, “Social groups, whether voluntary or nonvoluntary, are collections of persons who share something that is socially significant.”<sup>3</sup> Homeless persons can be defined as a nonvoluntary group because their experience of being without a home and outcasted is socially significant. Although some persons may choose to live in homelessness, the majority of persons in homelessness did not voluntarily give up their shelters. As a nonvoluntary group, society determines what persons belong in the group of homeless.<sup>4</sup> Cudd theorizes about the realities of oppression, the formation of stereotypes, and resistance strategies. She claims, “Stereotypes originate in naturally, socially, and accidentally formed collections of persons, and they become social facts when they become the default assumptions we make when we first meet someone or when we hear someone described to us or see someone on the street.”<sup>5</sup> These social facts influence our thoughts and beliefs. While some truth may have started the formation of a stereotype, these assumptions may not even apply in the most minimal sense. Some argue that stereotypes are positive and help us to conceptualize the world, but as Cudd claims,

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<sup>3</sup> Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

“Default assumptions not only make false beliefs easier to form when they do not hold, but they make it more difficult to form the correct belief that would otherwise be quite plain to see.”<sup>6</sup> While we need methods to conceptualize the world, stereotyping often leads to the formation of stigmas and begins the cycle of oppression against a group.

Stigmas are especially damaging to persons experiencing homelessness because they tend to result in social exclusion and oppression. This results in material and psychological harm.<sup>7</sup> Stigmas confronting this group change through recognizing a moral responsibility to correct our assumptions. Challenging stereotypes and interacting with the homeless is necessary for overcoming these assumptions and false beliefs. In articulating the problem of homelessness, we come to a new understanding of the human condition. In order to redefine the human condition, I will expand upon the work of Eva Kittay in *Love's Labor*. Kittay articulates how dependency is present within the human condition and condition of homelessness. To expand on her work, we consider homelessness one of the many forms of dependency come to understand how those on the streets or in shelters are overlooked. The framework that Kittay provides, explains why those experiencing homelessness should not be overlooked.

This analysis of homelessness uses gender as a lens in order to have an inclusive examination of the problem. The particular disadvantages of homeless women are revealed through use of this lens. As Kittay notes, “Two thirds of poor and homeless persons in the United States are in households headed by women”.<sup>8</sup> Even the terminology that we have to describe families is centered around the notion of a house. This reality does not match the stereotype of men as the only group facing homelessness. Not only do

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>8</sup> Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 3.



women experience homelessness, but mothers experience homelessness. Compounded stigmas impact these mothers because of the duty to care for children. Society makes judgments about women based upon certain criteria. Currently, mothers are expected to earn a sufficient income, provide a stable home, nutritious food, clean clothes, and other supports for her children. A homeless mother is not considered fit to raise and support a child because she cannot meet all of these standards. Paying particular attention to how this condition impacts women allows us to identify cultural norms that privilege particular experiences.<sup>9</sup> Considering norms and experiences informs what assumptions or false beliefs require adjustment.

I will explore the major concepts of human interconnectedness, oppression, and citizenship. While each of these terms appear in Kittay's work, more emphasis must be put on these concepts when articulating the problem of homelessness. Human interconnectedness is a necessary concept because it focuses on the ties that all humans have with one another. Interconnectedness links us together and must be explored when examining societal problems. Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, individuals are impacted by the decisions of other individuals. We can use our efforts to help or hinder others. The second concept I explore is oppression. Iris Marion Young defines oppression as a structural concept.<sup>10</sup> Oppression becomes relevant when we discuss societal problems because it recognizes how individuals and groups are impacted by "unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional

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<sup>9</sup> Deborah R. Connolly, *Homeless Mothers: Face to Face with Women and Poverty* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 40.

rules and the collective consequences of following those rules.”<sup>11</sup> Young identifies five faces of oppression. Marginalization is the form of oppression that will be discussed in depth. Marginals, as Young states, “are people the system of labor cannot or will not use.”<sup>12</sup> Those who are experiencing homelessness are pushed to the margins in a very literal sense. Since these individuals are not “homed” in the normative sense, they are expelled from social life. Finally, citizenship will be explored to show the importance of identities and how they allow or prevent equality.

Within each of these sections, I will look at dependency, vulnerability, connection-based equality, self-perceptions, and moral responsibilities. Each subcategory is applied to human interconnectedness, oppression, and citizenship to create a framework suitable for defining homelessness. Dependency describes the need for relationships based on reciprocity-in-connection. Kittay argues the standard sense of reciprocity calls for equal exchanges from both parties. In life, we all depend on each other at different times and for varying degrees of help. The expectations of reciprocity-in-connection differ because they do not rely on equal exchanges.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when a person goes to help an individual experiencing homelessness, they need not expect the same efforts in return. Similarly, the person receiving care need not feel guilty for their dependency. Those experiencing homeless are left in a particularly vulnerable state. By focusing each of the main concepts in a vulnerability framework, we can look deeper into those experiencing homelessness who are most in need. Kittay argues for connection-based equality. This definition of equality accounts for dependency. Self-perceptions are a significant aspect to consider in relation to homelessness because the homelessness

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>13</sup> Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 67.

need agency in their self-identification. Their vision of themselves in the world is relevant to an articulation of homelessness because the changes that need to be made must be inclusive of these perceptions. Finally, discussion of the moral responsibilities in relation to each of these major concepts will allow me to offer possible solutions to the problem of homelessness. By articulating the problem of homelessness, I am beginning a conversation for future research. While I will highlight possible solutions, more work needs to be done in order to examine the realistic implementation and effects of these proposed solutions.

## Chapter 1: Human Interconnectedness

In her book *Homeless Mothers: face to face with women and poverty*, Deborah R. Connolly provides the stories of a number of different mothers struggling with poverty and homelessness. Connolly creates portraits of these women in order to show how they struggle as outcasts. She witnessed first hand how stigmas and stereotypes affect homeless women. By using one of her examples, I hope to capture the importance of human interconnectedness and the questions it should raise.

Sally is a 33 year old white woman. She is also the mother of three boys between the ages of 8 and 12 years old, each with a different father.<sup>14</sup> In order to protect her children and herself from abuse, Sally relocated with her kids. In recounting her story, Sally alludes to how this move was reflected in her children's school records.<sup>15</sup> Like many parents, Sally struggles with parenting. She is aware of how her actions affect her children, but she does not want them to be taken away from her. Sally states, "I'm so afraid of losing my kids and I don't want to lose my kids. They would have to kill me to take my kids."<sup>16</sup> It is not uncommon for mothers to be defensive about their children. However, as Connolly points out, "Sally's own lived experiences of parenting are at odds with the larger cultural model of what it means to be a good mother."<sup>17</sup> While all parents experience tension with their children, society views Sally's example in a different way because her story does not fit the norm.

Even without a personal connection to Sally, or others with similar experiences, we can question how Sally's life may be connected to our own. We formulate questions

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<sup>14</sup> Connolly, *Homeless Mothers*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

that call us to consider how our own actions impact Sally in direct or indirect ways. Our actions may have beneficial or harmful effects in regards to a person experiencing homelessness, but without asking questions, these impacts will go unnoticed. Posing questions about the experience of another person requires us to recognize their experience and deem it visible. Members of society need to be challenged to recognize and question, rather than ignore, the experiences of homeless persons. Questioning societal norms of motherhood is one way to ensure Sally is treated with dignity and respect. In questioning particular norms of motherhood, all mothers can be situated with the notion of human interconnectedness.

The notion of human interconnectedness situates an individual in the world and links them to other human beings. These connections or associations among humans provide a common ground where all are a part of one community. This community focuses on connections amongst humans regardless of different identities, opinions, backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences. The ideal of a community based on humanity is global. It involves all persons simple because they are human. We can theorize human interconnectedness at this global level, but we can also break it down to national or local levels to demonstrate more intimate connections and dependencies. Human interconnectedness takes individuals to the most basic level in order to prove their interdependence. Joan C. Tronto, in her book *Caring Democracy*, explains how connections are important for a feminist ethic of care. She states, “From the standpoint of a feminist ethic of care, individuals are conceived of as being *in relationships*.”<sup>18</sup> Although individuality is promoted, relationships with others is crucial for life.

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<sup>18</sup> Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 30.

Eva Kittay focuses on human interactions within her work, *Love's Labor*, because she seeks to demonstrate and evoke an appreciation of the full range of human interconnection.<sup>19</sup> While some could say that human interconnectedness is merely a mechanism used to put more responsibility on the individual; I will show how even this increased responsibility is beneficial. A person with this individualistic outlook may seek to be removed from the experiences of others, but in digging deeper they will find that it is nearly impossible to function in the world today without the help of others. These others may be invisible to that person, but their experience and efforts make life possible. Humans rely upon others for the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Surely when we move beyond these basic needs, we can see how the complexity of connections continues to increase.

Recognizing the impact of connections among humans and their experiences provides opportunity. Homelessness is part of the human condition for some individuals, therefore it is part of interconnectedness. By seeing this condition as such, I will claim that we have a responsibility to recognize how this condition impacts the wide range of human experiences. I will reach this claim by examining dependency, vulnerability, connection-based equality, self perceptions, and moral responsibility in relation to human interconnectedness.

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<sup>19</sup> Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 30.

### *Human Interconnectedness and Dependency*

The work of Eva Kittay defines dependency as a natural feature of the human condition that “has a crucial bearing on the ordering of social institutions and on the moral institutions that serve to guarantee adherence to just institutions.”<sup>20</sup> Dependency then, as a feature of the human condition, is also a part of human beings’ interconnectedness. A challenge to maintaining a claim for dependency is that dependency is often described as a flaw. Humans are described as primarily autonomous and rational beings. When defined in this way, a dependency is a flaw to human nature because it inhibits autonomy. Restraints on a human’s ability to function in the world, such as a dependency, is looked down upon. Instead, we need to begin with dependency as a primary feature of the human condition. As a primary feature of the human condition, dependency informs how we give and receive care. As Tronto claims, “A feminist democratic ethic of care has to be able to explain how individuals can balance autonomy and dependency in their lives.”<sup>21</sup> Kittay furthers this claim by stating, “My hope is that once we understand the implications of the clearest cases of dependency, we will appreciate the full range of human interconnection, and see how all moral and political concepts need to reflect these connections.”<sup>22</sup> Kittay comes to the conclusion of human interconnection because of the interdependencies that she finds within the human condition.

Dependency is a feature of the human condition that requires care. Although we can question the origin of dependencies, some are inevitable dependencies. This distinction points out that while we can expect some dependencies, there are others that

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>21</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Kittay, *Love’s Labor*, 30.

cannot be anticipated or controlled. Whether it is infants who need the care of their parents or an individual overcome with sickness or a person who is no longer able to function on their own because of age; humans must rely on and care for one another. Kittay asserts, “If we can see each individual nested within relationships of care, we can envision relationships that embrace the needs of each.”<sup>23</sup> I insist that a conception of dependency strengthens relationships and our understanding of care. Regardless of the inevitability of a dependency need, all humans have dependencies. Therefore, all humans need the help and care of other humans.

Although someone may assume that these dependency relationships should be reciprocal, this is problematic. Since all humans age and reach milestones throughout life, the process of reciprocating care can look different for each individual. Expecting a reciprocal relationship modeled by exchange reciprocity with all members of society will lead to unrealistic expectations and further stigmatize those who are most in need of care. Exchange reciprocity would require equal favors from both parties in a relationship. In order to clarify this point, Kittay sets out the need for a new kind of reciprocity, reciprocity-in-connection. This emphasizes the focus on human interconnection and supports Kittay’s claim that equal exchanges are not always necessary, or even possible for individuals. She states, “This chain of obligations linking members of a community creates a sense of reciprocity between those who give and those who receive and raises the expectation that when one is in the position to give care, one will, and when that person is in need another who is suitably situated to give care will respond.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than constantly repaying favors when care is given, coming to realize human

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 68.



interconnectedness and interdependence should allow us to care for those in need regardless of their ability to return the favor.

Those who are experiencing homelessness are interdependent. Their interdependence is not unique. Interdependencies form a continuum since all humans have dependencies at different times and in varying degrees. In articulating the problem of homelessness, we need to be aware of the many inevitable dependencies that lead to a person being without or losing their shelter. If we make assumptions about how people without shelter reached that state, then we may place blame on that person for being homeless. The path to becoming homeless does not necessarily have a clear cause and effect. Inevitable factors may result in loss of shelter. Unlike the stereotypes that form, we cannot assume that these individuals merely were lazy, addicted to drugs, or incapable of achieving the American dream. However, if these stereotypes are the reality for a person experiencing homelessness, we still need to define care for that person based on these dependencies. Human dignity and worth do not become irrelevant if a person develops dependencies that others can control and avoid in different circumstances. In the book *Hard Lives, Mean Streets: Violence in the Lives of Homeless Women*, the authors take an inventory of the numerous causes that led to the homelessness of their subjects.

Among these causes were:

“car wrecks that made it impossible to commute to work, problems with immigration papers, job cutbacks, reduced hours, drug addiction, physical altercations, sexual assault, male abandonment, divorce, domestic violence, eviction for nonpayment of rent, eviction for violation Section 8 (the federal program for housing vouchers that subsidizes housing costs for low income families) and public housing rules, foreclosures and condemnations of property, various family problems, deaths of caregivers”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jana L. Jasinski et al., *Hard Lives, Mean Streets: Violence in the Lives of Homeless Women* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2010), 42.

and the list goes on. While this list is not all encompassing, it gives insight into the complex realities of dependency. These individuals need a range of supports depending on the severity of their condition and their ability to access resources. Food, shelter, and clothing are the most basic needs of all individuals. Without these, survival is a great challenge.

Beyond their basic needs, individuals experiencing homelessness may also need other supports. Persons facing homelessness fall on a spectrum of needs. Temporary homelessness requires different cares compared to long term homelessness. In order to hold a steady job, those experiencing homelessness may need assistance caring for their children. An individual like Sally may also be dependent on another person in order to move and escape abuse. The concept of reciprocity-in-connection allows us to offer supports to these individuals without expecting the return of equal supports.

### ***Human Interconnectedness and Vulnerability***

The relationships that form within the understanding of interdependence and human interconnectedness are not equal in terms of need. A fact of life is that “all humans are vulnerable and fragile.”<sup>26</sup> Relationships formed in human interconnectedness find guidance in Kittay’s explanation of reciprocity-in-connection. However, to fully understand unequal needs, we must understand unequal forms of vulnerability. As Kittay states, “Vulnerability originating in dependency is not a condition in which all are *equally* vulnerable, but one in which some are *especially* vulnerable.”<sup>27</sup> Understanding these vulnerabilities is particularly significant when articulating the problem of homelessness. In the case of Sally, the stigmatization of homelessness created social exclusion and rendered her invisible. She most likely faced stigma not only as a homeless person, but also as a homeless mother. Forms of social exclusion often result in a person becoming invisible. If a person is not able to see another person, they cannot be aware of the needs of that person. It is often the case that although we see homeless persons on the streets, asking for money, or just being present, we actively choose to not see them. We decide they are invisible to avoid thinking about their needs or experience.

There are also cases when persons living on the streets are hypervisible. This occurs when we choose to see and acknowledge the body of a homeless person because we are pointing out their misplacement. Society’s norm dictates that all persons should have a private place to eat, bath, and sleep. When persons partake in these activities in public, they stand out as out of place. Typically, these persons are harder to ignore or render invisible. They become hypervisible when others point them out as out of place or

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<sup>26</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Kittay, *Love’s Labor*, 84.

not belonging. Ascribing visibility in this sense is also ascribing condemnation to a homeless person. For example, all humans must use the bathroom throughout the day. When persons are not at their home or place of work, it is typical for persons to seek out a public restroom. If a homed person witnesses a person they assume is homeless using the public restroom, brushing their teeth, or following any other step of a normal hygiene routine in the public restroom, they may be off put at the sight of this. This example shows how a homeless person can become hyper visible in certain social situations. Although their actions may be standard to everyday life, these actions do not align with the norms in public. In chapter 2, when I evaluate how oppression contributes to the problem of homelessness, I will further discuss why persons without shelter tend to be invisible or hypervisible. Individuals experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable in both of these scenarios.

While individuals experiencing homelessness may have very basic needs that leave them vulnerable, the culmination of stereotypes and stigmas increases the level of vulnerability further. This is especially true for single mothers like Sally. Not only is she in need of basic supports for her family, but her experience of motherhood does not align with the societal norm. Therefore, she experiences stigmas as a person facing homelessness, but also as a mother because society does not qualify her as fit to raise children. Sally is more susceptible to losing her children because of the increased vulnerability.

Individuals experiencing homelessness will have different degrees of vulnerability based on their personal situation. The length of an experience of homelessness greatly affects an individual's experience in human interconnectedness. Differences in homeless

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experiences will allow some persons to feel included, while others will feel excluded. It may be the case that members of society are more likely to recognize and help an individual struggling to get back on their feet after losing a job suddenly. In contrast, members of society may be less likely to aid a person who has been on the streets for years. Vulnerabilities may be caused by our reactions to the individual's dress or demeanor. Another factor that affects an individual's level of vulnerability is whether or not they have a family. The experience of a single man or woman is different than a family. Children or other dependents increase the responsibility of a person. When faced with homelessness, increased responsibility raises the potential of increased vulnerability. This can be broken down further to say a single mother with children will have a different experience than a single father with children or a family with two parents. Race and other components of identity further complicate the vulnerabilities faced. All of these factors influence how other members of society relate to individuals experiencing homelessness. All individuals experience vulnerability at different milestones in life, therefore we can connect with other groups through vulnerability. Witnessing vulnerability can potentially spark an understanding of interconnection. Situating oneself in human interconnectedness allows the vulnerability to be named and recognized. This provides an opening for sharing in the burden of increased vulnerabilities. We can address why certain individuals are especially vulnerable due to their condition or other factors in their life.

### *Human Interconnectedness and Connection-Based Equality*

Through her work, Kittay redefines equality in order to account for dependency and human interconnectedness. Although many theorize equality as individual-based, Kittay claims that we should follow a connection-based equality. A connection-based equality:

assumes a fundamental need for relationship, and it gives rise to a distinctive set of claims. The claims generated by connection-based equality derives not from the rights we hold as independent individuals, but from what is due us by virtue of our connection to those with whom we have had and are likely to have relations of care and dependency.<sup>28</sup>

Connection-based equality aligns with the notion of human interconnectedness because it recognizes the links present between individuals. By assuming that these connections are necessary, this understanding of equality encourages more people to align their perspective to that of human interconnectedness. In order to establish equality, we must first recognize all individuals as worthy of relationship. Connection-based equality holds that these people are still worthy of relationships and therefore they are worthy of care. Rather than a focus on individual rights, these relationships would be centered around care and dependency. Connection-based equality requires able individuals to care for those in need. Kittay states, “If we can see each individual nested within relationships of care, we can envision relationships that embrace the needs of each.”<sup>29</sup> Affirmation of the links and relationships present between all humans, opens up a level plane where equality is possible.

The experience of homelessness would benefit from this form of equality. Kittay asserts, “Once we stop ignoring dependency, then we are obliged to think of how

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 66.

dependency needs are met in a manner that is equitable to all.”<sup>30</sup> Although individuals experiencing homelessness may not be able to repay the help they receive, connection-based equality identifies the care claims of all persons. In order to satisfy connection-based equality, we cannot only commit to viewing others as equal, we must commit to ensuring the necessary care for those in need. Fulfilling connection-based equality goes beyond the demands of the standard definition of equality because it identifies the connections of care between humans in interconnection. Connection-based equality requires recognition of human interconnectedness for the purpose of using this links to provide care to those in need.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 90.

### ***Human Interconnectedness and Self-Perceptions***

Self-perceptions are constructed by an individual. The formation of these ideas reveal how the individual sees their position. In a system of human interconnectedness, self-perceptions are important because positionality reveals how a person is related to other links. Human interconnectedness requires us to see the connections between the lives of multiple people. You may chose not to have certain relationships, but when society prohibits the formations of relationships, this is problematic.

In rethinking how we see others as interconnected, we must also keep in mind that some individuals will feel disconnected. This disconnect is the result of a number of forces. Axel Honneth, in the essay “Recognition and Justice,” states, “individual identity formation generally takes place through stages of internalization of socially standardized recognition reactions.”<sup>31</sup> As a person moves through and experiences life, they are perceived by others and also form self-perceptions. An individual should have the greatest influence over their identity, but the impact of other persons and structures complicates self identification. The stereotypes and stigmas of homelessness are dangerous for a person’s self-perceptions.

We need agency to elect to be part of societal connections. Structures directly and indirectly inhibit this agency. The structure of society works directly and explicitly to form stereotypes and stigmas. These generalizations block groups of individuals from participation in human interconnection by convincing others that a group does not belong. The indirect impact of these structures work through the individual group members themselves. Group members may internalize the stereotypes and stigmas

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<sup>31</sup> Axel Honneth, “Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice,” *Acta Sociologica* 47, no. 4 (2004): 354.



attributed to them. Internalizing common assumptions form an individual's self-perceptions. Not only are persons told that they do not belong, but they come to believe that they do not belong. A sense of not belonging disconnects individuals experiencing homelessness from participating in human interconnection. It should be noted, an individual is freely able to attempt to disconnect. The problem rests in connection being prevented by structures, not persons freely choosing to remove themselves from human interconnectedness.

Persons need the capability to form positive self-perceptions. The ability to choose identity freely and the agency to self identify is crucial. In human interconnectedness, it is necessary that all persons feel capable of connecting without prohibition of other forces. Positive self-perceptions allow individuals to identify themselves as equal within a system of human interconnectedness. A sense of equality is necessary for persons to view themselves as deserving of dignity, respect, and care. The stigmas associated with homelessness provide a damaging list of labels that diminish the quality of homeless persons. These labels include unsightly, disorderly, and disreputable.<sup>32</sup> As Honneth states, "Social equality should be about enabling the formation of personal identity for all members of society."<sup>33</sup> By breaking down stereotypes and stigmas, individuals experiencing homelessness can be empowered to create positive self-perceptions on their own terms. Then, these individuals will be more capable of identifying themselves as equals with other members of society. The formation of this equality further promotes human interconnectedness because when

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<sup>32</sup> Katherine Beckett and Steven Kelly Herbert, *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Honneth, "Recognition and Justice," 356.

individuals are able to identify as equals, they will be more capable of recognizing their interconnectedness with others.

### ***Human Interconnectedness and Moral Responsibilities***

Within a conception of human interconnectedness, all individuals have a moral responsibility to help those in need. This responsibility is present within the links that are shared amongst individuals because there is a duty to ensure the wellbeing of others. Human interconnectedness asks that we recognize those who are in need. The wellbeing of society as a whole depends on each person. According to Kittay, “grasping the moral nature of the relation between unequals in a dependency relation will bring us closer to a new assessment of equality itself.”<sup>34</sup> According to Kittay, the moral nature of dependency is valuable because it allows us to come to a better understanding of equality. Connection-based equality allows those in need to receive the sufficient care. This care is given amongst individuals rather than through a hierarchy of ableness according to this variation of equality.

A person’s condition can change at any moment, especially the condition of homelessness. Therefore, relations between individuals that do not seem equal, are in fact still necessary. A person will not know the exact time that they need assistance, but the moral responsibility to help those in need maintains the links of human interconnectedness. Each time we tend to the needs of others, we strengthen our connections as a whole. As Kittay asserts, “Justice is not a virtue to be ignored in asymmetric relations.”<sup>35</sup> The virtue of justice can be attained through caring relationships when individuals are treated equally regardless of their level of dependency or vulnerability.

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<sup>34</sup> Kittay, *Love’s Labor*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

At the very least, in order to maintain proper human interconnectedness, we have a moral responsibility to critique and change our stereotypes and stigmas of those experiencing homelessness. By modifying these assumptions and judgments, persons facing homelessness will be identified as equal and worthy of care. This view of moral responsibility, “that within a just society *all* persons must be treated free and equal is shared by different theories within the liberal tradition.”<sup>36</sup>

We have a moral responsibility to treat each individual with dignity and respect. Dignity and respect should be counted as connections between humans within interconnectedness. As Axel Honneth asserts, “Recognition of human dignity comprises a central principle of social justice.”<sup>37</sup> Dignity is inherent within each human being and cannot under any circumstances be taken away. Dignity is not determined by one’s potential or ability. The recognition of dignity and respect is particularly necessary when we examine the experience of women who are not homed. These women are treated as inferior because not only are they seen as failing to contribute, but also as failing to meet the expectations of motherhood.

Kittay claims, “Once we stop ignoring dependency, then we are obliged to think of how dependency needs are met in a manner that is equitable to all.”<sup>38</sup> The needs of dependency call for a particular concept of care. In her work, Kittay describes how this idea of dependency and care is necessary for those who have disabilities. This same view can be applied to those experiencing homelessness because these individuals also have dependency needs that are not met with equity. The vulnerability of these individuals must be realized in order to fulfill the moral responsibility of human interconnectedness.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>37</sup> Honneth, “Recognition and Justice, 352.

<sup>38</sup> Kittay, *Love’s Labor*, 90.

Kittay asserts, “A justice which does not incorporate the need to respond to vulnerability with care is incomplete, and a social order which ignores care will itself fail to be just.”<sup>39</sup> Human interconnectedness requires a moral responsibility that will call others to see the needs and vulnerability of those experiencing homelessness. These needs should be met with care and the deformation of stereotypes and stigmas.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 102.

## Chapter 2: Oppression

In my experience, regardless of where you drive in the United States, it is common to see at least one person standing on the street with a sign asking for money. Based on observations of myself and others, it is rare for people to offer these persons money. Although I have heard others recount the stories of homeless persons, I have never seen a person pause their agenda to listen to the person begging on the streets, especially since it is common to simply drive past. My own experiences and observations prompt me to question whether or not people on the streets are regularly acknowledged. If the majority of people are uncomfortable being asked for money, I would assume avoiding eye contact would be a best practice for preventing discomfort.

When I am driving, I tend to feel more relaxed or content when I come across a homeless person. I have the option to acknowledge the individual or ignore their presence. The physical barrier of the car distances my emotions from the assumptions I may make about the person's experience. Although I feel I may still feel discomfort, it is more bearable in the security of a car. These feelings change when I see a person experiencing homelessness in a public place with me. Without the comfort of my car in the library, a park, the subway, or another public space, I feel more vulnerable. I do not feel vulnerable in the sense that I fear for my own safety. Rather, I feel vulnerable in the sense that I know I can be easily confronted by the person in need. Confrontations such as these prompt me to reflect about the experience of the individual and consider my own privilege. Although I have these considerations, I am curious to know how many other persons would be capable of holding a conversation and overcoming the potential discomfort.

When I experience discomfort in these scenarios, I tend to question why a person is asking for money. I find myself wanting to know what led them to their present state of being. If we assume that many persons conclude, consciously or subconsciously, that avoidance is the best action, it is interesting to consider what factors led to this preferred action, or inaction. I have many times taken this course of action without understanding its consequences. I felt guilty for not having anything to offer the person and embarrassed in thinking through a response. Ignoring and avoiding the problem in front of me allowed both of these feelings to fade. Although we recognize the hypervisibility of the person on the streets, acting in ignorance ensures the invisibility of the individual experiencing homelessness. Decisions such as these surround homelessness in oppression. Furthermore, these decisions lead to the physical banishment of the homeless.

Reactions we have toward the homeless are influenced by stereotypes. Although categorization is an accepted way of conceptualizing the world, stereotyping has negative impacts because of the false assumptions it attributes to groups. False assumptions are turned into generalizations about groups of people. The broad claims are applied to identifiable groups regardless of potential differences.<sup>40</sup> Ignoring difference devalues an individual's experience within a group.

It is crucial to understand that stereotypes describe the assumptions made about groups not individuals. Cudd asserts, "stereotypes form the very foundation of our beliefs about groups."<sup>41</sup> Stereotypes can be applied to an individual, but they are formed and maintained through groups. The collective impact of stereotypes reveals the broad nature of negative effects. Stereotypes would be less damaging if they only needed corrected for

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<sup>40</sup> Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 69.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

one person. However, stereotypes impact and damage entire groups of persons through generalizations and assumptions.

To remedy stereotypes, we need to define the social groups the stereotypes target. Cudd defines a social group as “a collection of persons who share (or would share under similar circumstances) a set of social constraints on action.”<sup>42</sup> Members of these social groups need not volunteer to be a part of the group. Although some persons decide to be part of a social group, others can be grouped in nonvoluntarily because they experience the same constraints as group members. These individuals may not elect to be part of the group, but the same stereotypes are applied to them. We can address the stereotypes attributed to persons that do not voluntarily become members of a group by classifying them in the group nonvoluntarily. Stereotypes are formed above the individual level. Therefore, individuals do not get to decide which groups society claims they are members of or which stereotypes are attributed to them.

Due to the social constraints surrounding the condition of homelessness, we can group the homeless together as one social group. While this may seem counterproductive, this grouping is necessary. We cannot overcome the stereotypes and stigmas associated with homelessness if we are unwilling to recognize the common constraints that homeless persons face on the streets. Although Cudd states, “much injustice can be done to the individual who is grouped by a stereotype and whose choices or opportunities are limited by that grouping, especially when the stereotype does not hold in the particular case,” without qualifying the homeless as a social group, we cannot claim or maintain that they suffer from oppression.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 44.



We cannot come to a conception of justice without first conveying the forces of oppression. Philosopher Iris Marion Young, in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, argues that “a conception of justice should begin with the concepts of domination and oppression.”<sup>43</sup> Her description of oppression is important because it first frames the idea of a social group. This form of grouping is important because social groups, not individuals, are oppressed within societal structures. It was clear to Young that the individualistic mindset of many persons in the United States would push back against this idea. She claims, “Entering the political discourse in which oppression is a central category involves adopting a general mode of analyzing and evaluating social structures and practices which is incommensurate with the language of liberal individualism that dominated political discourse in the United States.”<sup>44</sup> The structures of oppression need to be articulated because individualism prevents people from understanding the nature of social groups.

Oppression is perpetuated by individuals, but the roots of oppression lie deep within societal structures. As a condition of groups, Young maintains,

oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms - in short, the normal processes of everyday life.<sup>45</sup>

Understanding oppression in this way is necessary because it reveals unequal structures that target groups of people. The groups are targeted for the characteristics, experiences, or beliefs they share or that others perceive them to share. Characteristics, experiences, or beliefs form group memberships, which are voluntary and nonvoluntary. Group

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<sup>43</sup> Young, *Justice*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

membership can be formed through perceived traits, rather than confirmed traits. Social group identity is necessary even if group membership is determined based on perceived traits because without a structured social group identity, a person cannot claim oppression.

Social identities not only form groups, they also impact the individual identity of persons. According to Young, “social groups of this sort are not simply collections of people, for they are more fundamentally intertwined with the identities of the people described as belonging to them.”<sup>46</sup> Although we can argue the necessity for person-first language when referring to the people suffering from the condition of homelessness, their grouping as “homeless” is beneficial. The homeless is a collective of people that constitute a social group. As a social group, the homeless share in the experience of living without one of life’s most basic needs, shelter. Visible factors such as standing on the street, appearing disheveled, or wearing old clothes can cause someone to be labeled homeless. They face hardships of survival due to environmental factors, as well as structural challenges. Societal structures restrict the mobility of homeless persons away from public places. Community officials fear that the image of the community will be in jeopardy due to the appearance of homelessness. Beckett and Herbert, in *Banished*, use Seattle as a primary example. In Seattle, “imposing exile to encourage conformity” is how they deal with the issue of homelessness.<sup>47</sup> Rather than addressing the problems that lead to homelessness, community members are active, whether conscious or unconscious, in the banishment of the homeless.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>47</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 10.

Oppression, depending on the situation, can take a number of forms. Young defines the 5 faces of oppression in “Five Faces of Oppression.” Oppression, as a structural injustice that dominates in-need or underrepresented groups, can take the form of exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, powerlessness, and/or violence.<sup>48</sup> In articulating the problem of homelessness, I will focus my attention on oppression manifested through marginalization. The homeless may also be impacted by violence, exploitation, powerlessness, or cultural imperialism, but I am most interested in marginalization. The other faces of oppression should be explored in relation to homelessness, but for my purpose, I focus on marginalization because it clearly articulates the banishment that homeless persons experience. The structures in our society have created norms and other structures that marginalize homeless persons. It is not that case that the particular traits of homeless persons lead to their oppression. The homeless are oppressed because structures influence our perceptions of homeless persons based on the way they look, dress, or act in public.

The oppression of those experiencing homelessness can most closely be defined as marginalization. Young states that marginalization may be the most dangerous form of oppression. When “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life,” Young warns how they may be “potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination.”<sup>49</sup> We can understand from the example that individuals experiencing homelessness are often pushed to the margins or excluded altogether. They are not treated with dignity nor respect. Instead, a physical distance is

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<sup>48</sup> Young, *Justice*, 48-63.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

created between the homed and the homeless. The social exclusion or banishment of these individuals is a factor preventing them from escaping homelessness.

### *Oppression and Dependency*

Identifying the interdependencies between individuals can combat the marginalization of those experiencing homelessness. The homeless appear to have many obvious dependencies. If we see a person sitting or sleeping on the streets, we assume that they are in need of food, shelter, and other basic needs for personal hygiene and health. Resistance to giving these supports creates more barriers for a person struggling with homelessness. Lack of this aid increases a person's level of dependency. Without these basic needs, those who experience homelessness continue to be marginalized due to their dependencies. As a group of people affected by this condition, the homeless have needs that society is not willing to address. Members of society refrain from devoting resources to the problem of homelessness. The condition of homelessness is inadequately addressed because the ideal of the American dream assumes that we can all help ourselves, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, and achieve success. In reality, this is not possible because barriers prevent access to basic resources. The neglect of persons experiencing homelessness contributes to their oppression because they are cast out of society. This marginalization can be mental and physical. Those experiencing homelessness may feel unwelcome in public places, but they may also be physically banned from some public spaces.

Dependency relationships place obligations. Although these obligations may not be equally distributed among both parties, since all humans are dependent, we share in these obligations. When we recognize that these relationships exist amongst all people, individuals will not be shoved to or left in the margins. The stereotypes and stigmas of homelessness are attacked in the affirmation of dependency relations. Recognizing that

individuals must rely on each other in a number of scenarios calls us to reexamine the needs of the person facing homelessness. It may be the case that this person has only been without a home for one week. In this case, we might assume this individual just needs a hand to get back on their feet. As the dependent, the person experiencing homelessness may only need short term assistance. In contrast, it may also be the case that people spend years dealing with the condition of homelessness. A long term dependency relationship needs to form in order to reverse this condition. As we discussed in *Human Interconnectedness and Dependency*, addressing and forming dependency relationships requires us to reevaluate the reciprocal nature of the relationship. As Kittay suggests, reciprocity-in-connection provides an alternative understanding. Reciprocity-in-connection allows the links between people to be maintained even when the aid or assistance being given is not reflected equally in both parties. This alternate reciprocity admits that needs vary amongst people due to a variety of factors. Rather than focusing on identical aid between those in connection, reciprocity-in-connection focuses on guaranteeing that an individuals needs are met.

One challenge is that dependency is looked down upon in our society. Young argues, “Dependency in our society thus implies, as in all liberal societies, a sufficient warrant to suspend basic rights to privacy, respect, and individual choice.”<sup>50</sup> Young does not believe that this should be the reality, and recognizes that dependents “are subject to patronizing, punitive, demeaning, and arbitrary treatment.”<sup>51</sup> Understanding oppression can help us better understand why people who are dependent are treated poorly.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 54.

An individualist may support oppression because they don't want to admit to dependency. Individuals in this framework have to look out for themselves. Dependency is considered weak. An individualist may claim that the ideal life includes flourishing without being dependent. Therefore, individual achievements and successes would define this flourishing. This lifestyle would praise persons for not needing help and devalue those persons in need of care. If we step away from this framework, we can construct a vision that defines human flourishing alongside an ethic of care. Human flourishing in an ethic of care values persons who attend to the dependency of others.

We must determine who is responsible for providing care when it comes to the lives of the homeless. The authors of *Hard Lives, Mean Streets* state, "That the homeless are from somewhere else, and thus are somebody else's problem, has become an article of faith in discussions of public policy."<sup>52</sup> Not only do we see a lack of support for the homeless in individual relationships, but also within our public policy. This lack of support is necessary to articulate the problem of homelessness and homeless experience. If the majority of persons deny responsibility to care for homeless persons, then those experiencing homelessness will struggle to overcome homelessness. Human interconnectedness affirms the assistances present in dependency relationships.

Dependency is a necessary feature of the human condition As Kittay proves, all humans are interdependent with one another. In this view, dependency is not only a reality, but also takes on a positive connotation. Individuals should not merely look out for themselves according to Kittay. Individuals must rely on other people in order to survive. Our ability to care for others increases when our own basic needs are met. As mentioned, each person will not make all of their own clothes, grow all their own food, or

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<sup>52</sup> Jasinski et al., *Hard Lives*, 27.

build their own homes alone. We rely on interdependent relationships. Although these relationships may not be reciprocal, reciprocity-in-connection allows these relationships to aid one another. When a person looks closely at the functioning of their life, the different ways that we are dependent on others becomes very apparent.

At the very least, understanding dependency relationships, as they pertain to marginalization, challenges the stigmas that society holds against those experiencing homelessness. Assumptions about homelessness pushes people to the margins. Furthermore, assumptions are the cause of the uneasiness and discomfort that we discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Our perceptions and negative sentiments are based off of these assumptions.

Often, we assume that the person experiencing homelessness made poor choices that led to their failure. However, this failure is defined by the established norms. Stereotypes of homelessness prevent us from seeing the entire scope of the problem. These stereotypes claim that the majority of those experiencing homelessness are men struggling with drug addictions or men who are too lazy to find work. The claims of this paper do not change even if these stereotypes are true. Dependency relationships are necessary even when poor choices can be named as the cause of dependency. We cannot assume that these generalizations apply to all persons, but when these assumptions are true, dependencies on alcohol, drugs, and lack of shelter need to be addressed.

All humans have inherent human dignity and deserve to have their basic needs met. Although men account for about half of those experiencing homelessness in the United States, we still need to articulate the other half of the problem. In order to articulate the problem of homelessness, we need to look beyond stereotypes and



assumptions. Only then will we be able to see the full scope of the problem and be inclusive of all persons affected by homelessness. Furthermore, if we understand that dependency is a necessary part of life, we will refrain from casting people into the margins of society. Instead of being repulsed by the needs of dependency relationships, recognizing dependency as Kittay does keep people out of the margins. Viewing the world as made up of interdependent relationships asserts that all people are a necessary part of the community.

### ***Oppression and Vulnerability***

Marginalization leaves individuals experiencing homelessness vulnerable. It can be argued that marginalization and oppression of the homeless actually increase the vulnerabilities that they encounter. These people can be described as vulnerable because they lack shelter and other basic needs. Even just lacking shelter is a serious vulnerability because this lack leaves the homeless susceptible to harsh environmental and weather conditions. Without a shelter, people experiencing homelessness also lose security. Marginalization increases vulnerability because society actively excludes the homeless and devalues their story.

If we group all people affected by homelessness into one category, we can see how particular individuals are especially vulnerable. As was mentioned in *Human Interconnectedness and Vulnerability* (15), the length of an experience of homelessness renders some individuals more vulnerable.<sup>53</sup> When articulating the problem of homelessness, being mindful of the variety of experiences and vulnerabilities is important. It pushes us to look past common stereotypes that attempt to minimize and reduce the variety of effects. Reductionism may make it easier for someone to quickly grasp the problem of homelessness, but it does not do justice to the range of vulnerabilities that people experience. Forms and levels of oppression further vary the degrees of vulnerability. Those who are only experiencing short term homelessness may not be completely pushed to the margins. A individual may have a more forgiving and open mind when it comes to helping this person because they are not perceived as especially vulnerable. Therefore, the responsibility placed on the individual helping the person experiencing homelessness is less.

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<sup>53</sup> Refer to page 15 of thesis.

As Desiree Hellegers claims in *No Room of Her Own*, homeless voices are rarely heard, let alone heard on their own terms. She states, “They are represented, implicitly or explicitly, as incapable of analyzing their own situation, as devoid of historical understanding and political agency.”<sup>54</sup> Vulnerability arises from this inability to speak and be heard. Since those caught in homelessness are pushed out of society they do not receive care, even if they cause others to feel sympathy. As the duration of a homeless experience continues, the individuals’ lack of shelter becomes more apparent to others.<sup>55</sup> However, just because their homelessness becomes more visible, they are not given any rights to speak on their own behalf. Their voices and experiences are still silenced. The inability to share their story devalues a person’s vulnerability.

It is important to use a gendered lens when examining and articulating the problem of homelessness. While it may seem acceptable to simply group all people experiencing homelessness into one category, this tactic masks the experience of women and children. The women and children experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable. As we have stated, these individuals are not given a space to share their story and experience. Women and children do not match the stereotype that society holds of homelessness. Women and children lack visibility as homeless persons. They are not described in the common narrative. They are left as more vulnerable because since their story is not complete.

Women experiencing homelessness lack protection due to their marginalization. Due to societal realities, women who are homeless face greater vulnerabilities. Jana L. Jasinski, Jennifer K. Wesely, James D. Wright, and Elizabeth E. Mustaine examine the

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<sup>54</sup> Desiree Hellegers, *No Room of Her Own: Women's Stories of Homelessness, Life, Death, and Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

voices of homeless women in particular in their book, *Hard Lives, Mean Streets*. This book includes the narratives of a variety of homeless women and provides a unique insight into their specific vulnerabilities due to oppression. They state, “The marginality of homeless individuals and their consequent lifestyle exposes them to victimization.”<sup>56</sup> It is important to keep the voices of homeless women in tact in order to recount their vulnerabilities.

The vulnerabilities of women experiencing homelessness may have started before the condition of homelessness was present. The authors of *Hard Lives, Mean Streets* asserts, “Clearly a substantial portion of homeless women have been victimized by childhood sexual abuse, and some researchers argue that childhood victimization is directly related to homelessness among adult women.”<sup>57</sup> The victimization of women prior to or during homelessness contributes to their vulnerability. This victimization may make it more difficult for women to overcome homelessness. Women experiencing homelessness who have also been victims of sexual assault or abuse have more barriers to overcome. While they may seek the basic need of a shelter, they may also have other protection needs.

While prior vulnerabilities contribute to the oppression of homeless women, their identity as woman also affects their experience. As Hellegers states, “Women who are visibly homeless are subject to continual sexual harassment and sexual assault on the street.”<sup>58</sup> Violence in the form of sexual harassment and sexual assault against women is not a new phenomenon. Violence is the fifth face of oppression according to Iris Marion

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>57</sup> Jasinski, *Hard Lives*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Hellegers, *No Room*, 20.

Young.<sup>59</sup> Women experiencing homelessness can be classified as a social group that experiences violence as a form of oppression. This violence may be manifest in harassment, sexual assault, rape, or other abuse. If women, especially homeless women are the targets of this violence, then the “violence is a social practice.”<sup>60</sup> The motive of this social practice may be to merely assert power over the victim. This injustice needs to be seen as a face of oppression because it is motivated at a structural, not a personal, level.

In *Analyzing Oppression*, Ann Cudd dedicates a chapter, “Violence as a Force of Oppression,” to show how violence is used against particular groups. In this chapter, an entire section is dedicated to discussing violence against women, and even more specifically the systematic violence of sexual assault and domestic violence.<sup>61</sup> Cudd is clear that this violence is pervasive, but she does not discuss how lacking proper shelter can leave women with greater vulnerabilities to this violence. She states, “The threat of these kinds of violence limits women’s mobility.”<sup>62</sup> But when women are homeless, where would increased mobility allow them to run?

Although data that attempts to quantify violence against women and violence against homeless women in particular, attaining this data is difficult. For one, not all women will come forward once they have been the victim on some sort of violence. In addition to that barrier, we must be aware of the different definitions of violence that each study uses. Although homeless women may face limited channels for justice, violence against them needs to be studied. In their research, the authors of *Hard Lives, Mean*

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<sup>59</sup> Young, *Justice*, 61.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>61</sup> Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 93.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

*Streets* found that violence against homeless women is very common. They focus on the gender differences between males and females, while comparing their data to national rates of violence against women.<sup>63</sup> These studies were completed because the authors were concerned about “the widespread use of ad hoc, unstandardized, unvalidated measurement instruments” being used in other studies.<sup>64</sup> Their survey was compiled using the experiences of 737 homeless women in four cities in Florida.<sup>65</sup> Of these women, 55.9% experienced rape and 72.2% experienced other forms of assault.<sup>66</sup> The sexual victimization that homeless women experience put them in a more vulnerable position than men. Overall, individuals experiencing homelessness are not being protected from violence and women are especially vulnerable to forms of oppressive violence.

The insights of one interviewee in *Hard Lives, Mean Streets*, Tamara, depicts how marginalization impacts her life and adds to her vulnerability. She states, “The feeling of being homeless is feeling unwanted, feeling not belonging, feeling different. Feeling that people - you’re not part of society. That you’re separate. You live on a totally different planet.”<sup>67</sup> By showcasing the voices of homeless women in their work, the authors of *Hard Lives, Mean Streets* are able to ascribe value to the vulnerabilities that these women face. Acknowledging vulnerability affirms that the vulnerability exists and that it is valid. Although naming these stories and vulnerabilities does not make them disappear, it raises a level of consciousness for those people who choose to listen to these accounts.

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<sup>63</sup> Jasinski et al., *Hard Lives*, 55.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

### ***Oppression and Connection-Based Equality***

Connection-based equality as a worldview can begin to combat oppression on a number of fronts. This combats marginalization because the focus of the form of equality is on relationships and links amongst people. These connections will not allow members of society to be cast out into the margins and excluded. Rather, connection-based equality places a responsibility on society to care for and recognize all people. The recognition of all people is arguably the most important aspect of this type of equality. Recognition is crucial against marginalization because it eliminates the psychological banishment that the homeless face. The homeless must be identified as persons before they are eligible for respect. It will take more work to ensure resources to help people experiencing homelessness to overcome the condition, but first acknowledging the homeless will make this process more attainable.

The homeless are not only ignored, but they are also banished. Banishment, according to Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert, is used as a social control practice.<sup>68</sup> In our current world, people do not like to be reminded of the suffering of others.<sup>69</sup> Appearance of individuals plays a large role in suffering. In their introduction to *Banished*, Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert offer a different way of thinking about oppression. They discuss how members of society can be included or excluded, but they offer a caveat. One reason that marginalization may occur is because certain people our sensibilities. They assert, “those who are unwanted - which includes those who merely offend our aesthetic sensibilities - feel continually harrassed and unwelcome. The moral division between the respectable and not-so-respectable is reinforced daily by a spatial

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<sup>68</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

division between the included and excluded.”<sup>70</sup> Beckett and Herbert make this claim as they introduce how banishment is present again.

Beckett and Herbert claim that one reason for banishment is aesthetic sensibility. This means that people are offended merely because of how someone looks. These looks may make them feel uncomfortable or uneasy. Hellegers describes this problem of “collective anxieties” as a structural root of homelessness.<sup>71</sup> A sensitivity to such appearances of situations creates and enforces banishment because those who are offended do not want to keep encountering these feelings. Herbert and Beckett recognize that it is not “pleasant to be reminded of the deprivations associated with homelessness, severe poverty, addiction, or mental illness.”<sup>72</sup> While this unpleasantness may be true, stating that one’s aesthetic sensibilities are offended takes this discomfort a step further. Discomfort and a lack of safety are two possible feelings that arise when a homed person imagines losing that shelter. Being homed provides a sense of security many do not want to lose. While sentiments of unease can be overcome because, developing a visceral reaction to our perception of another’s dress or appearance is more difficult to reverse or eliminate.

Connection-based equality can be used to combat this phenomenon of excluding individuals based on appearance because recognition of all is guaranteed. Appearance and aesthetic sensibilities need to be challenged in order to combat marginalization of the homeless. Our representation of homeless bodies is crucial to how society responds to this condition. As Hellegers states in *No Room of Her Own*, “The disorderly bodies of the poor and homeless were represented by developers, city administrators, and the media as

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>71</sup> Hellegers, *No Room*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 22.



undermining the comfort and safety of high-end shoppers, theater goers and condo dwellers in the city's increasingly upscale downtown core."<sup>73</sup> The representation of homeless bodies in this way further oppresses them. By depicting them as dangerous, society is given a reason to banish the homeless. This banishment is validated because we value safety and security within our communities. Representation of bodies within connection-based equality will combat stereotypes that we hold and provide a means of acknowledging the unique experiences of different people without marginalizing them.

Public policies addressing homelessness are caught in a bind. On one hand, these policies seek to put an end to homelessness. But, on the other hand, public policies attempt to banish homeless persons for security reasons. While polices want to dissuade persons from becoming homeless, they also are punitive toward the homeless. Public policies do not acknowledge the range of factors that contribute to homelessness and do not not prescribe aid to help homeless individuals recover. As Beckett and Herbert express in *Banished*:

Punitive policies employ the false premise that if you hit a homeless person hard enough, or issue a big enough fine and then jail them when they dont have the money to pay, then that person will stop wanting to be poor and will stop having nowhere to sleep. The fallacy of this premise is that while the person may leave that park, doorway, neighborhood, or town, they will still be poor and homeless.<sup>74</sup>

The framework of connection-based equality addresses homelessness differently. Rather than taking a punitive approach to ending homelessness, connection-based equality focuses on the connections and links between members of society, gives recognition to the struggles and vulnerabilities that people experience, and seeks to find the root cause of the problem.

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<sup>73</sup> Hellegers, *No Room*, 8.

<sup>74</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 25.

In the specific case of homelessness, connection-based equality would recognize the different types of homelessness. Jasinski, Wesely, Wright, and Mustaine outline three different kinds of homelessness. Transitionally, episodically, and chronically are different variations of homelessness.<sup>75</sup> These variations are significant because each will have unique needs that are recognized by connection-based equality. This equality is also useful when employing a gendered lens. As we have discussed, women face different and increased vulnerabilities in the condition of homelessness. Connection-based equality is concerned with the gendered nature of problems. Since it places focus on the links between people, it will recognize the difference in need between men and women facing homelessness.

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<sup>75</sup> Jasinski, *Hard Lives*, 43.

### *Oppression and Self-Perceptions*

Oppressive structures reveal that “humans desire recognition by others.”<sup>76</sup> The desire for recognition and our use of stereotypes are linked together. Stereotypes are not only used to harm others. These assumptions are the primary way that humans order the world. Since vast amounts of difference exist among humans, stereotypes allow generalizations to be made about groups of people. Stereotypes can be false and discriminatory, but they serve to distinguish differences in groups as a form of recognition. They provide ready assumptions about groups based on appearance and other factors to aid humans in thinking about society and how individuals fit into specific roles. This form of categorization helps us to think about others, and ourselves. Cudd alleges, “Stereotypes thus serve not only to group the social world, and then to place oneself in the social order, but also to do so in a way that bolsters the valuation of one’s self-identity, insofar as that is possible within the given social realities.”<sup>77</sup>

We need to be critical of stereotypes because while they can help us conceptualize a social order, they can also create and maintain structures of oppression. The stereotypes that lead to oppression “require minimal evidence for the wide range of inferences that they set in motion in our minds.”<sup>78</sup> An individual cast out to the margins may base their self-perception on these stereotypes. In this way, oppression becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Cudd would agree with this because she recognizes the effects of psychological harm on the oppressed.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 62.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Psychological harms result from humiliation and degradation. These mechanisms are used against oppressed groups as a way of affirming negative stereotypes. Cudd states, “These practices reinforce negative stereotypes about these groups, degrading the social perception of their groups into a downward spiral.”<sup>80</sup> Unequal treatment and shame lead oppressed groups to internalize stereotypes and stigmas. Self-perceptions influenced by stereotypes and stigmas reflect the psychological harm. Persons experiencing homelessness may feel shameful or humiliated by the gaze of other onlookers. These impressions manifest in the groups perception of themselves and others in the group when they are affected by psychological harm.

If this is the case, they may assume that they lack dignity, are unworthy of care, and do not belong. This will influence the daily life and choices of the homeless. Individuals experiencing homelessness are conscious of the way others view and treat them. They are aware that many, as Hellegers points out, think that the homeless are “garbage, human litter, a public sanitation problem.”<sup>81</sup> While they may be instructed to stay out of an area and thereby be informed of their banishment, the homeless may also feel banished from areas just because of the reaction they receive from others. This consciousness traps the homeless in the margins.

Internalizing slurs and bearing commands of banishment render homelessness inescapable. Feeling unwelcome in a place, or determining that you will not be able to integrate, creates a barrier between society and individuals experiencing homelessness. These barriers add to the cycle of oppression in the homeless condition. Hellegers describes this problem by stating, “To be homeless in the United States is to be branded

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>81</sup> Hellegers, *No Room*, 14.

both psychologically and physically. To be homeless is to confront daily reminders that you don't count for as much in the world, that your life is disposable."<sup>82</sup> Hellegers description affirms the reality of the psychological mechanisms of oppression.

Ann Cudd describes these mechanisms within her *Analyzing Oppression*. She maintains:

Social identity theory postulates that individuals are motivated to develop a positive social identity, and that this is done by establishing the "positive distinctiveness" of one's own in-group. People want to believe that they have positive attributes, and because they identify themselves part by the social group that they consider their in-group, people want to see their own groups in a positive light.<sup>83</sup>

This theory leads us to understand the damaging nature of stereotypes and oppression surrounding particular social groups, like the homeless. While categorization is necessary and important for living in the social world, the stereotypes that form are biased.<sup>84</sup> Some have the power to assert dominance in their social role, while cannot, in a positive fashion, manipulate their position. Due to this, nondominant groups tend to subconsciously accept the stereotypes ascribed to them. Cudd describes the indirect forces that lead to this acceptance. These include, shame and low self-esteem, and false consciousness.<sup>85</sup>

Shame is related to, but significantly different from guilt. As Cudd describes, "Shame accompanies the belief that one is not good enough in some respect, either in one's own eyes or the eyes of others."<sup>86</sup> The condition of homelessness may cause shame because stereotypes affirm that people who do not have adequate shelter suffer because

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>83</sup> Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 71.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 176.

of personal failure. Rather than addressing the structures that allow homelessness to be a reality for so many people, society assumes that a lack in action or motivation keeps these people from accessing the basic need of shelter.

False consciousness describes a set of beliefs that can hold group members in subordination. Rather than being able to self-identify in a positive light, members of oppressed groups internalize and accept the stereotypes associated with them. Not only do they accept these assumptions as fact, but these assumptions develop into the consciousness of the individual, even if the stereotypes are not true.<sup>87</sup> This creates a lack in self-worth. Those experiencing homelessness are often viewed as less than human. The descriptions of homeless persons affirm that they do not have a place.

The self-perceptions of a homeless person can reinforce stereotypes. Self-perceptions also contribute to marginalization because they preserve the cycle of oppression. If an individual experiencing homelessness is constantly banished and told that they do not belong, they may internalize the oppression. As Cudd states, the cyclical nature of oppression is possible because “oppression is self-maintaining.”<sup>88</sup> This double form of oppression ensures that the journey to overcome homelessness will be more challenging. Homelessness is a vicious cycle and all of these factors contribute to it.<sup>89</sup>

The life of a person experiencing homelessness is challenged by physical and mental barriers. As we have discussed, lack of shelter means that a person does not have physical protection from the environment. Typically an individual is able to overcome problems affecting their physical and mental well-being. However, these struggles are more complicated when oppression and internalized oppression consume the self-

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>89</sup> Jasinski, *Hard Lives*, 47.

perceptions of a person. How one views oneself is extremely detrimental to how they overcome the obstacles in their life. As Hellegers states, “Homelessness can, and does, cause mental illness and drive people to drink.”<sup>90</sup> As we discussed in *Oppression and Connection-Based Equality*, the visual image of a person experiencing homelessness may not be flattering. Beckett and Herbert go further to state, “The visible manifestations of extreme poverty are often unappealing and, for some, frightening.”<sup>91</sup> When discussing oppression and articulating the problem of homelessness, one must not only be aware of their own sensibilities, but also of the sensibilities of the person experiencing homelessness. Life without shelter and access to other needs is the reality of their life. If our sensibilities reinforce stereotypes and stigmas of homelessness, we will only further oppress the homeless.

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<sup>90</sup> Hellegers, *No Room*, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 103.

### ***Oppression and Moral Responsibilities***

Due to the harms of oppression, the moral responsibility is placed on society to remove these barriers. Conceptions of care and the way we talk about individuals experiencing homelessness are two areas that this responsibility is needed. Since oppression is a structural phenomenon, society as a whole needs to be concerned with reimagining these structures. However, an obligation also needs to be placed on individuals. Ann Cudd states, “Resisting oppression is prima facie morally praiseworthy.”<sup>92</sup> Individuals and groups can resist oppression whether they are the oppressed, the oppressors, or bystanders. My main task through this work is to articulate the problem of homelessness and the issues associated with it. Methods of resisting oppression need to be evaluated more closely. By discussing potential options here, my hope is to further this discussion.

In addressing the current discourse around homelessness people are labeled differently. Throughout this paper, I have made an effort to refer to those without a home as “individuals experiencing homelessness,” rather than “homeless individuals.” As we have discussed, a group of homeless individuals is necessary in order to claim the existence of this oppression. Without defining this group in society, claiming that structures of oppression disadvantage the homeless are not possible. In my own language, I make a conscious effort to draw attention to the power of words and labeling. Naming a person “homeless” assumes that they primarily identify as a person without a home. It may well be the case that an individual experiencing homelessness wants this condition to be part of their identity. However, it may also be the case that this form of labeling further oppresses individuals experiencing homelessness. As mentioned in *Oppression*

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<sup>92</sup> Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 187.



*and Self-Perceptions*, individuals internalize stereotypes and are affected by the psychological mechanisms of oppression. Efforts to label persons in more positive manners will contribute to positive self-perceptions. Furthermore, labeling will also affect how society as a whole responds to the problem of homelessness. Changing discourse around homelessness reminds us to look at these people with dignity and respect, and as people worthy of our care.

Different experiences and conditions contribute to an individual's identity. A person should have agency to determine how society identifies and refers to them. This agency is necessary in order to avoid overgeneralizations or negative assumptions. The task of paying attention to our discourse and habits of labeling persons is feasible and in line with moral responsibility. An individual may not be able to financially aid or care for a person experiencing homelessness, but we are all capable of altering our language.

The existence of oppression necessitates action. As Cudd asserts, "Oppression, by definition, implies injustice, and so someone or some entity has at least a prima facie obligation to end the oppression."<sup>93</sup> Those experiencing homelessness cannot be the only people charged with ending homelessness or correcting the stereotypes enabling oppression. The greater community has a moral responsibility to end the oppression. Cycles of oppression exist in part because oppressed groups internalized oppression. But, other forces are responsible for sustaining oppression.

An inventory of privilege may be necessary for certain groups to resist oppression.<sup>94</sup> In detailing resistance strategies, Ann Cudd assigns responsibilities to oppressors and non-oppressors. While oppressors have an obligation to stop harm and

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 195.

rectify the harms of oppression, “privileged non-oppressors are morally obligated to resist and attempt to change those institutions and renounce privilege when they are capable of doing so.”<sup>95</sup> Through an analysis of Cudd’s work, it is clear that all persons have a moral responsibility to end oppression.

Changes will not be easy and problems will not be solved overnight, however the struggle to end oppression is a worthwhile effort. The affirmation of human interconnection and care of each person will promote a better vision of society for all. This vision does not require all needs to be equal or all persons to be assimilated, rather, this vision promotes an understanding of human difference and human responsibility to aid others. The understanding of human difference also tasks humans with a responsibility to learn about different experiences.

Through actively listening to the stories of others can we come to greater understanding of their challenges and move beyond the assumptions that reside in stereotypes. Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert affirm the possibilities that listening offers in their book *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*. After completing interviews with individuals banished from society, they claim “listening to the voices of the banished highlights the need to go beyond simplistic identification of complex and multifaceted people as the embodiment of disorder and move beyond the urge to exclude those whose presence disturbs us.”<sup>96</sup> If oppression is occurring merely because the presence of group members or individuals disturbs the public, then the importance of “generating general social knowledge of oppression” as Cudd states, has

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>96</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 139.

even more weight<sup>97</sup> This knowledge will not only inform society at large, but it will encourage individuals to be open to the opportunity to engage in human interconnection regardless of a person's outward appearance. Greater social knowledge provides an alternative to individualistic thinking.

When determining how to effectively spread social knowledge, the group of privileged non-oppressors should be examined as key players. Cudd argues, "The privileged non-oppressors are most well placed and easily motivated to resist oppression but also the most motivated consciously or unconsciously to ignore it."<sup>98</sup> I agree with Cudd on this point because non-oppressors do not have a clear stake in ending oppression. The impact of this oppression may not affect them in a visible way. However, if we choose to see the interconnected reality of the world, this stake becomes more clear. Enabling privileged non-oppressors to combat and resist oppression will be an effective strategy. Of the strategies Cudd provides for resisting oppression, the rhetorical and economic strategies are most relevant for oppression the homeless face. As Cudd states, "Rhetoric is both a cognitive and affective strategy that challenges stereotypes of oppressed groups and the false consciousness that accompanies oppression, and persuades and motivates change."<sup>99</sup>

Critiquing rhetoric will challenge stereotypes for the public, and it may also challenge the false consciousness formed in those experiencing homelessness. Rhetoric can redefine our understanding of the group experience of homelessness. Along with rhetoric, economic strategies are useful because those experiencing homelessness are in a vulnerable state because they lack adequate shelter. Resisting oppression of the homeless

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<sup>97</sup> Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 197.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

with economics may include providing opportunities for more public housing options.

Increasing the economic power of the oppressed will benefit their standard of living.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 205.

## Chapter 3: Citizenship

In *Love's Labor*, Eva Kittay questions what it means to be a citizen in the world. Citizenship can be contemplated on different levels. At the global level, citizenship includes all persons. Citizens of the world communicate and trade with other persons across borders. This understanding of citizenship is the most complex, but also the most interconnected. The more traditional understanding of citizen is understood in a legal framework. Certain persons in a physical space are granted, by birth or other permissions, legal citizenship in that place. Although future discussions will benefit from exploring these modes of citizenship, this discussion will incorporate a more basic definition of citizenship. A person can be classified as a citizen on the basis that they reside in a particular place. Stepping outside of the legal framework is useful for two main reasons. First, those experiencing homelessness may have citizenship as defined by the law, but their experience may not reflect the ideals attributed to citizenship. Second, if a homeless individual does not have the status of citizen, their presence in a particular place is still important to consider. Regardless of legal status, citizenship grants a person recognition. At the most basic level, citizenship is a mechanism by which all persons can be considered equal.

Due to varying dependencies, society excludes some from citizenship rights. Kittay asserts, "Dependency strongly affects our status as equal citizens (that is, as persons who, as equals, share the benefits and burdens of social cooperation), and because it affects us all at one time or another, it is not an issue that can be set aside, much less avoided."<sup>101</sup> Although we need to discuss the importance of equal citizenship,

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<sup>101</sup> Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 77.

we also need to recognize that difference is still present within citizenship. Not only is difference present, but it is key component of citizenship that needs to be maintained.<sup>102</sup> Neglecting to include difference in a definition of citizenship will cause us to overlook or exclude certain individuals whose cases do not fit into the traditional definition of citizen. Meaning that members of society may be seen as forfeiting their citizenship if they do not appear to be contributing to society.

As mentioned in Chapter 2: Oppression, the homeless are marginalized and cast out of society.<sup>103</sup> They are not granted the same benefits and protections as those who reside in houses. The benefits and protections of citizens include a sense of belonging, being free from unreasonable search and seizures, access to public spaces such as restrooms, dignity and respect, and the recognition of their bodies. If basic rights and protections are not met or kept secure, then those experiencing homelessness are not treated as citizens.

The banishment of individuals, including those without a home, prevents these persons from enjoying rights provided through citizenship. Beckett defines the rights retracted from the homeless as “the rights to enjoy spatial mobility, access necessary goods and services, and to be free from searches and seizures based on a status rather than specific illegal behaviors.”<sup>104</sup> Beckett also reminds us that the homeless lose a sense of security. The security of knowing that law enforcement, the government, and others will care for you if you are wronged is not often felt by the homeless.<sup>105</sup> Instead, the bodies of the homeless are not recognized, therefore, when the homeless are wronged,

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<sup>102</sup> Young, *Justice*, 168.

<sup>103</sup> Refer to page 31 of thesis.

<sup>104</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 103.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

society does not recognize its responsibility to tend to these bodies. A loss of citizenship further complicates the issue of homelessness. As Kittay states, we idealize the notion that “all citizens are fully cooperating members of society.”<sup>106</sup> This is problematic because our stigma of homelessness is that people on the streets are not fully cooperating members of society. We cannot expect these persons to contribute to society if we are unwilling to recognize them as citizens who do not belong in our space.

Holding an ideal that cooperating members of equal citizenship is not inherently wrong. If we strive toward this ideal, then theoretically speaking, we will help those along the way who are struggling to reach this potential. This ideal becomes problematic when we do not maintain a definition of citizenship that encompasses all persons, including those who do not appear to be contributing. Citizenship will not neglect groups of individuals if we consciously give recognition to all persons in a place. A definition of citizenship cannot allow individuals to give up or forfeit their rights as citizens simply because they are unable to provide for themselves. Rather, all persons should be granted citizenship regardless of their ability, whether that ability refers to physical, mental, financial, or other abilities. To achieve this ideal of citizenship we need to be mindful of and appreciate dependency.

In the articulation of the problem of homelessness, a discussion of citizenship is crucial. A person can experience homelessness at anytime in time in life. Homelessness may not affect every person, but it is a problem that many cannot avoid. For this reason, the citizenship of persons experiencing homelessness needs to be considered. Although it may not be in a house or other shelter, these persons reside in a place. The varying dependencies of homeless may cause their citizenship appears to be different on the

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<sup>106</sup> Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 88.

surface. This difference accounts for exclusion of individuals experiencing homelessness from citizenship. Defining dependency as an inherent part of the human condition and therefore citizenship, allows us to define homelessness as a condition that is compatible with citizenship.

Providing equal and inclusive citizenship requires a reconception of care. As Tronto defines, care is “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live as well as possible.”<sup>107</sup> Once we complete the articulation of the problem of homelessness, we will need to return to this idea of care. Although I do not provide one, we need to reconceptualize an ethic of care. This new ethic of care needs to be mindful of human interconnectedness, dependency, oppression, and citizenship.

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<sup>107</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 19.



### *Citizenship and Dependency*

As we mentioned in *Human Interconnectedness and Dependency*, dependency is a feature of human life.<sup>108</sup> In claiming this as a fact and facet of human nature, dependency must be worked into our conception of citizenship. Without a notion and understanding of dependency, citizenship will view these needs as flaws. This is damaging because neglecting dependency will result in the neglect of many vulnerable citizens. We will further discuss vulnerable citizens in the next section.

In order for dependency to be worked into our conception of citizenship, we need the duty of responsibility.<sup>109</sup> As citizens, we have a responsibility to care for those who are dependent. Luckily, as we have already discussed, all humans are dependent at one time or another during their life. Humans are equal in their having dependency, however the needs within dependency will not look the same for each person. We need to cultivate a respect for difference.

The duty of responsibility recognizes the needs, and often unequal needs, of individuals and groups. Dominant groups regularly have their needs met and reside in a position of power. This power is derived from their lack of vulnerability. The duty of responsibility requires that dominant groups use their power to aid those who are vulnerable and especially vulnerable. A responsibility to help vulnerable groups will require those with power to interrogate the structures that trap people in dependency. As Tronto states, “Usually the more powerful are able to exclude the less powerful; this is

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<sup>108</sup> Refer to page 11 of thesis.

<sup>109</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 55.

one of the things that it means to be more powerful.”<sup>110</sup> A duty of responsibility within citizenship makes these exclusionary practices more difficult for the powerful.

Currently, as Young states, “Today the exclusion of dependent persons from equal citizenship rights is only barely hidden beneath the surface.”<sup>111</sup> As we discussed in the Chapter 2: Oppression, banishment is one of the exclusionary practices.<sup>112</sup> If citizenship requires us to be responsible for dependents, banishment will be less common. Tronto argues, “While it may seem that what one gains from avoiding dependency is freedom, in fact it just substitutes other forms of dependency.”<sup>113</sup> We cannot be free from dependency. Dependency and citizenship are linked together as part of the human condition. We cannot remove ourselves from dependency and when we attempt this, we end up facing other dependencies.

We need to accept dependency as a necessary part of citizenship. As Tronto claims, “What makes us free, actually, is our capacity to care and to make commitments to what we care about.”<sup>114</sup> Citizenship does not amount to freedom from dependency. This imagined negative right is unattainable. Rather, citizenship gives us a duty to be responsible for dependents in the world. An ethics of care must reside in citizenship. This responsibility will help humanity to flourish as a whole. Only in caring for dependents can we expect to have a society of capable citizens participating in care. A cycle of care forms that will help society to flourish.

Our understanding of dependency and citizenship adds to the articulation of the problem of homelessness. Currently, as Beckett states:

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>111</sup> Young, *Justice*, 54.

<sup>112</sup> Refer to page 30 of thesis.

<sup>113</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 94.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

The visible manifestations of extreme poverty are often unappealing and, for some, frightening. As we demonstrate, the banished find many of these right severely limited. These include the rights to enjoy spatial mobility, access necessary goods and services, and be free from searches and seizures based on a status rather than specific illegal behaviors.<sup>115</sup>

Due to the status of homeless persons, they are denied the rights that come with citizenship. Simply because of their dependency, they are denied access to basic rights.

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<sup>115</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 103.

### *Citizenship and Vulnerability*

In society, efforts are made to look out for citizens primarily. Outsiders may be granted protections, but in the United States, the needs of the citizens are put first and prioritized. However, it is clear that the needs of the homeless are not ranked among the top priorities for most people. More often than not, the homeless are looked down upon and seen as burdens. Facing homelessness without citizenship rights creates vulnerabilities. As we have described, certain conditions render individuals or groups especially vulnerable.

Vulnerability must be acknowledged. Tronto maintains, “The first step that citizens need to take, and the one that requires considerable bravery, is for each person to admit human vulnerability.”<sup>116</sup> This is a particular difficult task within the context of the United States because we uphold the values of individualism. We assume that we are capable of reaching our goals simply by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. A number of individuals hold themselves to this standards, but they also expect this mindset from other citizens. This leads to the American dream within the United States. We need to understand that not everyone has boots to pull themselves up. According to Tronto, “If citizens are willing to recognize their own needs, then they can also recognize that others have needs as well.”<sup>117</sup> This will require us to look beyond assumptions of individuals or groups. Mutual recognition contributes in a positive way to an ethic of care because persons are understanding of the needs of others.

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<sup>116</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 146.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

Due to lack of shelter, persons experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of experiencing violence.<sup>118</sup> Physical or sexual violence against these individuals are not taken seriously if the victims are not recognized as citizens. This recognition is important because it establishes relevance and urgency.

As we discussed in *Human Interconnectedness and Dependency*, a new form of relationship must form.<sup>119</sup> Although conceptions of reciprocal relationships are common, reciprocity-in-connection allows for a theory of care open to all. “Not expecting any reciprocal relationship to develop.”<sup>120</sup> Different factors may prevent individuals from being able to give care at particular times. Reciprocity-in-connection allows care relationships to flourish without the condition of equal service from both parties. Care relationships express varying degrees of vulnerability. Those receiving care are more vulnerable within these relationships. Vulnerability is handled more smoothly as we move through the phases of caring as defined by Joan C. Tronto in her book *Caring Democracy*. According to Tronto, we move from *caring about*, to *caring for*, to *care-giving*, to *care-receiving*, before finally reaching *caring with*.<sup>121</sup> These steps are necessary for both parties in a care relationship. Not only do those being cared for need to be viewed as humans with inherent human dignity, but also those giving the care need to recognize their own vulnerabilities. Without being open to receiving care, caregivers may be incapable of seeing another human as equal.

As Tronto states, there are many different forms of care that we must be aware of in the context of an ethic of care. She lists, “Spontaneous care, necessary care, and

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<sup>118</sup> Jasinski, *Hard Lives*, 2.

<sup>119</sup> Refer to page 11 of thesis.

<sup>120</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 22.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

personal service.”<sup>122</sup> Differentiating between care needs and levels of care allow us to address problems facing our citizens. In some instances, these needs may be long term. In other cases, as Tronto states, only a spontaneous example of care is required to assist a person. Above all, the we need to reinforce that once we admit that we need care, we can come to understand why others may need care as well. This is crucial for citizenship because sometimes thinking that we lack vulnerabilities causes us to look down upon those who have obvious vulnerabilities. Instead we need to admit our own vulnerabilities and respect the vulnerabilities of others.

Tronto further states “Democratic life rests upon the presumption that citizens are equal.”<sup>123</sup> In relationships where some individuals face greater vulnerability, this fact needs to be remembered. This assumption is necessary to argue that all citizens are deserving of care. Following Tronto’s model is useful because she suggests “each of us is thus engaged in caring from the standpoint of the recipient of care.”<sup>124</sup> Caring from this standpoint provides a unique perspective to the caregiver. From this perspective, there is potential for the caregiver to be open to a relationship grounded in reciprocity-in-connection, rather than the traditional understanding of a reciprocal relationship.

Along with the different phases of caring relationships, Tronto explains the different moral and ethical qualities that accompany each phase. Attentiveness is needed when we are *caring about* other individuals. This means that we need to be aware of the needs of another person, see their vulnerabilities, and understand what needs they have that are not being met. When *caring for* another individual, responsibility is the ethical quality. In deciding to care for another person, a relationship of responsibility is formed.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 29.

We commit to attending to the needs of another person. The next phase of caring, *care giving*, requires competence. This quality allows us to give care in the most efficient way. Competence is necessary because while a person can see and commit to caring for another individual, they must also know how to carry out this care. The fourth phase of caring is *care receiving*. As we discussed, this phase is important because it allows the caregiver to be continually reminded of the dependent nature of humankind. At different times, we all experience vulnerability and require care. The moral quality of responsiveness is aligned with the *care receiving* phase. Finally, we reach the *caring with* phase. For this phase, the moral and ethical qualities are plurality, communication, trust, respect, and solidarity.<sup>125</sup> These qualities are important because they provide a means to viewing another person as an equal, even if that person is more vulnerable. Plurality reminds us that there are varying degrees of vulnerability. We need to keep in mind that care and vulnerabilities will never look the same for each citizen. Communication is necessary because it gives value to the story of each individual. I claim that we cannot always assume the needs of another person. Some visible needs may be apparent, but communication is vital in order to deliver proper care. Trust is necessary in all reciprocity-in-connection relationships. Both parties have to trust that their needs will not be discounted and that they are deserving of care even if they are unable to provide care at the present. Respect factors into this phase as well because we live in a world where some are especially vulnerable. If we do not respect the experiences of these individuals, equality is impossible. Respect is vital because it allows a caregiver to see their impact on the life of a person in need, but also treat that person with dignity and high regard. The last moral quality, solidarity is arguably the most impactful. The mutual support of

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

solidarity affirms dependency and the varying degrees of vulnerability. Solidarity allows individuals to be in relationship with one another regardless of the vulnerabilities at stake.



### *Citizenship and Connection-Based Equality*

In articulating the problem of homelessness, we have concluded that our understanding of citizenship needs to shift. One factor that will contribute to a shift in our understanding of citizenship is connection-based equality. This form of equality calls us to recognize the connections that we have not only with other citizens, but also with all members of the global community. Ensuring that we have an inclusive definition of citizenship and applying connection-based equality will allow us to come to respect the difference that is present within citizenship. Respecting this difference is necessary for us to give care and remain inclusive in our understanding of citizenship. As Tronto states, “It would be absurd to say that everyone has to share the care burdens of society equally.”<sup>126</sup> Rather, we need to pay attention to the connections that are present, and give care where and when we are able. In this way, we can come to share the burdens of society as equals, instead of expecting each individual to have an equal share in caring for the burdens. As Tronto explains, “What should be shared is the duty to reflect upon the nature of care responsibilities, and the need for a generally acceptable way to allocate caring responsibilities - all of them - in a way that democratic citizens think best achieves the goals of freedom, equality, and justice.”<sup>127</sup> My aim here is not to detail a full plan for allocating responsibilities, rather I am advocating for continuing to explore connection-based equality and how this framework can lead us to a concrete plan for assigning responsibilities.

As Kittay claims, “Connection-based equality, grounded in our understanding of ourselves as inherently related to others, can serve as a guide to thinking and even to

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 141.

policy.”<sup>128</sup> This is important for citizenship because policy informs the lifestyle of citizens. Currently, as Beckett discusses in *Banished*, there are currently public policies that prohibit homeless individuals from entering certain public places. Although some who are restricted by these policies have committed a crime, it is not the case that all homeless persons have violated a law when they are restricted from entering certain public places. Rather, it may be the case that their appearance in a public place made others feel uneasy or uncomfortable. Currently, homeless persons are not recognized as part of the collective citizens.

As Honneth demonstrates, social recognition is necessary to be considered a full citizen.<sup>129</sup> The bodies of homeless persons may be invisible, visible, or hypervisible on the streets. In calling for the social recognition of these bodies, I mean that we need to work to see these bodies with respect and dignity. Our framework for connection-based equality puts emphasis on the care relationships that need to be built. Fostering these caring relationships will allow us to recognize individuals who are experiencing homelessness and to see them as such. Meaning, we can begin to move away from the stereotypes and stigmas of homelessness. Instead of assuming that these people will not be able to sustain life with shelter and other supports, we can appreciate the connections between us that will lead to an ethic of care and equality. Those experiencing homelessness can come into or out of homelessness at any time. Recognizing this fact and giving the bodies of those experiencing homelessness recognition supports connection-based equality.

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<sup>128</sup> Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 70.

<sup>129</sup> Honneth, “Recognition and Justice,” 352.

### *Citizenship and Self-Perceptions*

Self-perceptions inform us of our positionality in human interconnectedness and if negatively impacted, contribute to oppression. Concepts of self and identification help establish social groups. The formation of positive and accurate self-perceptions combats generalizations and assumptions about groups because persons will be able to assert their own position. Validation in asserting this position can be grounded in a sense of belonging. Persons who feel that they belong in a space, are more likely to be recognized as welcome in that space. Granting citizenship to all persons in a space promotes this recognition, and therefore a sense of belonging amongst all people.

Self-perceptions need to be accounted for in our conception of citizenship. One can state that all persons residing in the United States legally are citizens, but as we have proved, this is not the case for most homeless persons. Those experiencing homelessness are not given the same rights and respects as other citizens. They are oppressed and often banned from certain public places because their presence has been devalued and taken for less than human. This relates to self-perceptions because although we may say that the homeless are still citizens, they are not treated as such and may not feel that they are citizens and belong here. Rather than being given an identity under citizenship, Beckett points out that those experiencing homelessness are merely given the status of homeless.<sup>130</sup>

Granting an individual experiencing homelessness only the status of homeless strips them of more than citizenship. It devalues their entire experience and identity to the condition of homelessness. Although they may not describe their primary identity as homeless, society labels them in this way. Labeling such as this influences the self-

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<sup>130</sup> Beckett, *Banished*, 56.

perceptions of a person. If we define citizenship as a marker of equality, and homeless persons cannot reach this minimum in their self-perceptions, the cycles of homelessness will continue. This issue requires conceptual change. Material supports and other forms of care are necessary to pull a person out of homelessness, but these efforts must be linked to conceptual changes. The stereotypes and stigmas around homelessness prevent persons from understanding themselves as belonging in a place. Citizenship needs to be granted and recognized in homeless persons by society and individuals experiencing the homelessness.

This conceptual change needs to reach beyond the minds of citizens. In order for this change to be effective, it needs to permeate into actions, public policy, sentiments, and discourse. Infusing all of these facets of humanity with an inclusive definition of citizenship will positively impact the self-perception of all people, not just those experiencing homelessness. All humans experience dependency and need the care of other persons to survive. Acceptance of dependency, dependency relationships, and an ethic of care will be impacted by self-perceptions of all people. As we stated, self-perceptions not only inform us of ourselves, but this positionality also informs us of our relation to other persons. Contributing to self-perceptions, inclusive citizenship will persuade us to broaden the reach and benefits of citizenship.

### *Citizenship and Moral Responsibilities*

Granting and recognizing homeless persons as citizens creates a responsibility for other citizens. Not only do we need to treat these persons with respect and dignity, but we also need to ensure that they are protected and receive proper care. This responsibility in citizenship requires an ethic of care. As Tronto claims, “Care really is a problem for democracy.”<sup>131</sup> Not only do we have a moral responsibility to be concerned about care as citizens, but also we have a responsibility to question how gender will affect this care. Gender will contribute to an ethic of care on a number of levels. First, we need to be concerned with who the caregivers are and what societal supports they are receiving for giving care. Second, we need to be aware of whether or not certain genders are given preference in receiving care.

As we have discussed, the current stereotypes and stigmas about homelessness result in assumptions that only men experience homelessness. While men do account just over half of the people affected by homelessness, we cannot forget that women and children make up the remaining portion of the statistic.<sup>132</sup> We need to critically think about how we can care for the homeless while also being mindful of these other considerations. If we are not mindful of these other considerations, an ethic of care will sustain and perpetuate other stereotypes and forms of oppression.

A question that is raised in deriving an ethics of care is how to determine what individuals are most deserving of our care. Iris Marion Young provides important contributions in thinking through this question because while we want to say that all persons are deserving of care, some will still hold that citizens deserving of care are only

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<sup>131</sup> Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 10.

<sup>132</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, “Homelessness in America: Overview of Data and Causes.”

those who are autonomous, independent, and contributing to society in a positive way. By viewing citizenship in this way, we have assumed that those who experience homelessness have failed and given up their rights as citizens. However, as Young states, “An important contribution of feminist moral theory has been to question the deeply held assumption that moral agency and full citizenship require a person to be autonomous and independent.”<sup>133</sup> Moving away from this idealistic individualism will allow us to see how care is necessary for vulnerable citizens whether their actions resulted in their loss of basic needs or not.

As I have stated, my goal throughout this paper is to articulate the problem of homelessness. More work and research will need to be done in order to come to a clear ethic of care and determine exactly how to tackle the problem of homelessness. Extra considerations and research are necessary to ensure that solutions are sustainable and mindful of difference across all citizens. For this reason, I offer that an important next step is Young’s concept of consciousness raising.<sup>134</sup>

Raising awareness and consciousness around the issue of homelessness will aid in the dispelling of stereotypes and stigmas. Consciousness raising will also enable other members of society to be more qualified in thinking and developing an ethic of care that responds to the unique needs of those who experience homelessness. This awareness will affirm difference and show the value of listening to the voices of those who are faced with different structural problems. Hearing these voices will allow their stories to be valid and not dismissed. Openness to conscious raising is a low responsibility for citizens. The risk is that once we are aware of an issue, we may want to solve it, which requires

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<sup>133</sup> Young, *Justice*, 55.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

more effort. But, being aware of the struggles of other groups of people will allow their stories to not be foreign. Their experiences can be accepted and still included in the broad definition of citizen.

## Conclusion

A complete description of homelessness requires rearticulating the problem. Currently, the stereotypes and stigmas of homelessness leave out about half of the individuals experiencing homelessness. Due to dominating assumptions, the experience of women and children without adequate shelter has been overlooked. We examined the complexities of homelessness through discussion of human interconnectedness, oppression, and citizenship. Each of these components points to the necessity of a new ethics of care to account for the needs of homeless persons.

The topics of human interconnectedness, oppression, and citizenship also reveal that the identities of those experiencing homelessness need integrated back into citizenship. Often, we identify those experiencing homelessness as merely 'homeless.' While this label marks the facet of their experience without adequate shelter, this label does not account for the complete experience of all persons facing homelessness. Homelessness is a condition that has many overlapping identities. It is problematic to assume that homelessness is the prominent identity within a person. When the prominent identity label of a person is a condition with such strong negative connotations and stigmas attached to it, we see that person as less and allow them to internalize these value claims as well.

If we give individuals autonomy to determine their identity, there is the potential for someone choosing to be labeled primarily as homeless. Allowing individuals to form and select their dominant identity labels without negative interference will better suit the variety of people who experience homelessness. The identity of homelessness is therefore only one of many that can represent a person. It is an identity that can adapt to all



identities including single mothers, single fathers, children, traditional families, non-traditional families, single men, single women, long-term instability, short-term instability, those whose choices caused the loss of their home, those who were affected by a structure in society, those who do not want to live in a house. Homelessness can be seen as a structurally problematic condition because it prevents individuals from having basic needs met.

Considering dependency, vulnerability, connection-based equality, self-perceptions, and moral responsibilities show the importance of recognition. Not only do we need to recognize that we all experience dependency, but we need to recognize the difference within the dependencies and vulnerabilities of other persons. This allows us to move toward a connection-based equality where we appreciate difference, provide care when we are capable, and acknowledge equality is not established on ability. Articulating the problem of homelessness charges us to examine our moral responsibility to care for the persons experiencing homelessness and discover sustainable solutions to end the problem. Individual stories of those experiencing homelessness will be more well received when we acknowledge human interconnectedness, combat oppression, and grant citizenship to all people.

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