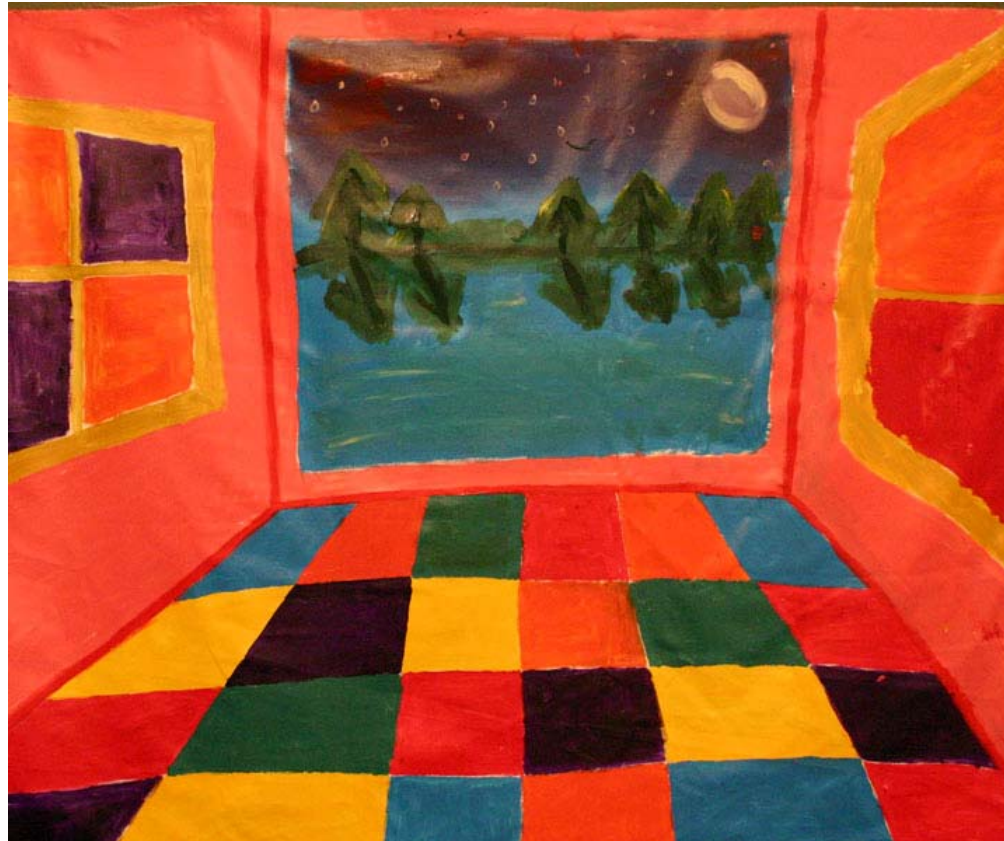


Community-Based Participatory Research using Arts: Homeless Women, Housing and Social Support



**Centre for Urban Health Initiatives (CUHI) Urban Health Seminar
November 8, 2007
Izumi Sakamoto, Ph.D., MSW, MA, MS (University of Toronto)**

Research Team

- ❑ Izumi Sakamoto, Ph.D. (Principal Investigator -- University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work)
- ❑ Josie Ricciardi, MSW (Co-Investigator, Regent Park Community Health Centre)
- ❑ Jen Plyler, MSW (formerly of: Regent Park Community Health Centre)
- ❑ Natalie Wood, MA (Community/Visual Artist)
- ❑ Angela Robertson (Sistering - A Woman's Place)

Students & Researchers:

- ❑ Rose Cameron, Lily Grewal, Aisha Chapra
- ❑ Bixidu Lobo-Molnar, Billie Allan, Matthew Chin, Nadia Bacheu



Thanks to...

- Advisory Board members

- Katherine
- Brandi Nashkewa
- Leahanne Swan
- Sheila A. Samuels
- Marie
- Tiesha Anderson
- Lida

- All of the women/transwomen who have participated in the study



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- Regent Park Community Health Centre
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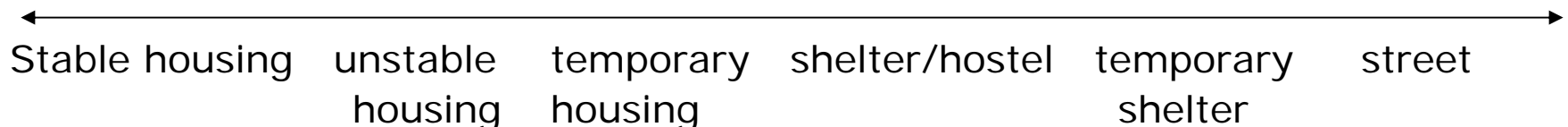
The coming together project is a community-based, arts-based research project using the artistic form of **Staged Photography**.

Background

- Previous study on transnational networks of homeless encampments
- The need to focus on the women's experiences in networking among people who are homeless/marginally housed

“Home” as a safe haven?

- Begin to unravel commonly held notions of the ‘home’ as a coveted safe space.
- Wardhuagh (1999) problematizes the notions of safety and comfort that are idealized in the home by examining the realities of violence and fear that many women face within these private spaces.
- Tomas & Dittmar (1995) suggest that notions of safety and security, which delineated a home from a house for those women who were securely housed, are not readily apparent for the homeless women.
- Continuum of Homelessness



Why Research Homeless Women?

- ❑ Women who are homeless/marginally housed are often invisible.
- ❑ Homeless women are often portrayed as “victims” and managed in the charity model of social services; their strengths not often recognized.
- ❑ 50% of women that had lived in supportive housing return to shelters because they felt unsafe in a co-ed environment (Novac et al., 1996).
- ❑ The need to focus on women experiencing homelessness and how they network among people.

The Research Questions

- How do women who are homeless build networks for survival and support?
- In what ways do women support each other through these networks?
- How can social service agencies support women's networks?

Methods

- Community-Based Research
 - Research team partnership of U of Toronto, Regent Park Community Health Centre, and Sistering – A Woman's Place
- Grounded theory

Phase I

- Literature review (over 100 articles/reports reviewed)
- Key Informant Interviews
 - 12 Social service providers + 1 researcher
- In-depth Interviews
 - 20 women/transwomen who are homeless or marginally housed

Phase II

- Arts-based research- *Staged Photography*
- Participatory action research (advisory board)
- Evaluation
- Dissemination efforts (on-going)
- Theorization (on-going)

Phase I:
Interviews &
Literature Review



Phase I: Qualitative Research – Participant Demographics

□ Gender

- Biological women: 14 (70%)
- Transwomen: 6 (30%)

□ Age

- 25-39: 11 (55%)
- 40-59: 9 (45%)

□ Places staying/living

- Shelter/hostel 7 (35%)
- On the street: 5 (25%)
- Private housing: 4 (20%)
- Subsidized housing: 2 (10%)
- Relatives/friends: 2 (10%)

□ Ethnicity/Race

- Aboriginal/Métis: 9 (45%)
- Women of colour 4 (20%)
- White/European-heritage 7 (35%)

□ Duration of homelessness/marginal housing

- Up to 1 year: 7 (35%)
- 1-5 years: 6 (30%)
- 5-10 years: 2 (10%)
- 10+ years: 5 (25%)

Themes From Phase I Interview Data

- Structures of Women's Networks
- Functions of Networks for Women
- Violence and Trauma in Women's Lives
- Safe Space, Homes and Housing
- Needed Changes to Social Services and Policies

STRUCTURES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKS

- ❑ Networks and informal groups amongst people on the streets help to challenge social exclusion and isolation.
- ❑ Poverty brings women together out of necessity, but also limits what they have to share with each other.
- ❑ These networks are sometimes referred to as 'street families' and members can have roles such as mother, father, brother, sister etc.
- ❑ Networks, informal groups and/or 'street families' can embody the same power imbalances and hierarchies as other families.
- ❑ Reciprocity and loyalty are very important and interconnected.

Phase II: Arts-Based Research



What is Arts-Based Research?

- ❑ “Answering the question, ‘What is arts-based research?’ has turned out to be as difficult as responding to, ‘What is art?’” (Mullen, Piantanida, & McMahan, 2003).
- ❑ “Creative forms of research representation—narrative, life history, poetry, drama, visual art, and more—have come to the fore, eliciting response, luring participation, and demanding attention. Arts-based researchers have been exploring ways that the arts and humanities can contribute to the political aim of, as Barone said, (2001a) ‘interrogat[ing] personal and cultural assumptions that have come to be taken for granted’”. (Mullen et al, 2003, p. 26)
- ❑ “Qualitative researchers involve others in having their socially critical works performed. This shift toward arts-based research has raised complex questions, such as how to evaluate its quality and even whether distinctions exist between what is art and what is research” (Mullen et al, 2003).

Modalities of Art Used

- Photography -
Photovoice
- Video/Film
- Dance
- Music
- Poetry
- Painting
- Script
- Story
- Drama
- Action
- Visual art
- Multimedia
- Staged Photography *

Phase II: Arts-Based Research

- Arts-based research – inclusiveness in knowledge production and sharing; greater potentials for empowerment through use of groups
- Explored and elaborated the themes from Phase I. Advisory Board discussed issues raised by research.
- Used *staged photography*, which is an art form that combines photography, theatre, dance, sculpture, painting and literature.
- Art-making sessions in four drop-in centres across Toronto.





First Drop-In Centre

Focused on expressing how they supported each other on an individual and community level with respect to issues of poverty, isolation and accessing social services.

Coming Together Strength and Healing through Helping

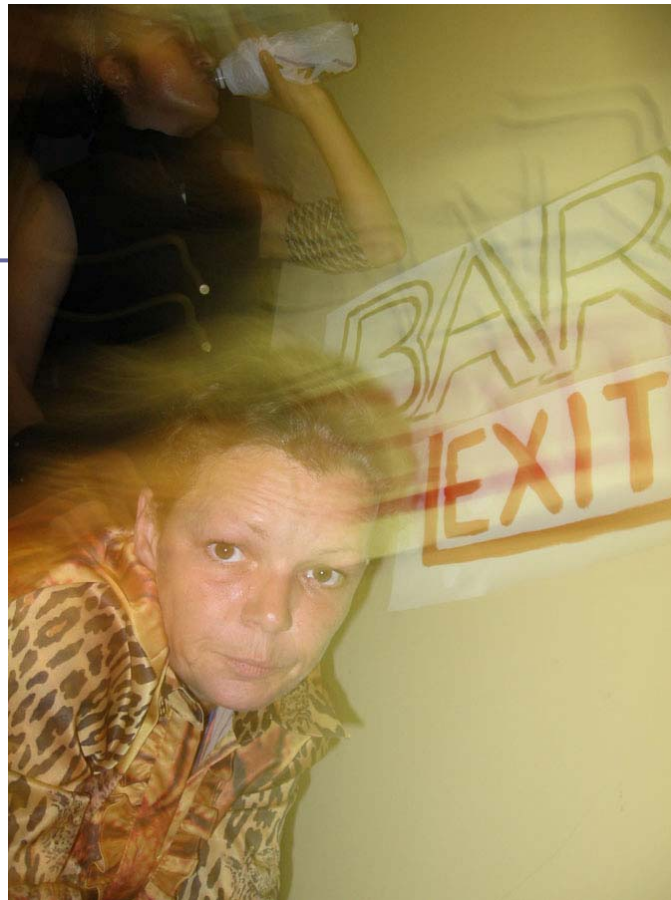
"I have a good set of ears.
I can sit and listen to someone
cry cause I know it's helping them
and sometimes it helps me..."



"I feel better 'cause
I'm helping..."

Quote about skill sharing:

- *“How many social workers know how to put in a wood stove?! I learned from my dad... Truthfully, what [social services] are giving people in terms of skills is exactly zero because they already have the knowledge, or if they don’t have it they can get it amongst themselves, they don’t need [social services].”*



Second Drop-In Centre

Expressed the pain and trauma of violence against women, the tragedy of addictions, and problems of language in accessing support and preventing social isolation.

Coming Together Surviving Addictions



"To be able to live free,
not be harmed, to be
around love and
respect and
understanding and
lots of happiness..."



"That's what I need.
A Safe Place."



Quote about trauma:

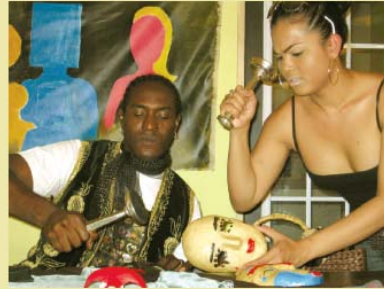
- *“I’m a Grandview survivor. Grandview was a training school for girls where they were sexually molested, physically abused, and it was a nice little package where the government gave them a couple bucks and sent them on their way. It was a training school funded by the government. Girls ended up there if they kept getting into trouble or if they ran away from home. The biggest scars to heal are mental abuses. They [the scars] show when we’re out here in our day to day life on the streets.”*
 - a woman who has experienced homelessness



Third Drop-In Centre

Expressed problems of support and inclusion based on transphobia, homophobia, gender discrimination, poverty and isolation. Issues of employment and housing discrimination.

Coming Together Courage Through Friendships



"We are constantly being on guard, because as transwomen we are at more risk of violence so we are always looking out for each other as a form of protection."



Quote about protection:

- *“They’re constantly being on guard, because as transwomen you are at more risk of violence so they are always looking out for each other as some form of protection. Transwomen inform each other about which streets are safe, where’s safe to stay and what parks and bridges are safe to access.”*

-Trans service provider

Coming Together Home Should be Safe and Fun



"When (we) get together...it's just to have fun and enjoy each other's company... So the little bit of joy, the ray of sunshine, the pat on the back, the piece of bannock...that enriches (us) a lot."



"Bare-bones housing without support is unsustainable and isolating for women."



**Fourth Drop-In
Centre**
Focused on
expressing issues
related to housing
and homelessness
by creating their
ideal homes and
places where they
received comfort,
feel included and
empowered.

Quote about needing 'home' to be safe

- *“What do I want? To be able to live free, not be harmed, to be around love and respect and understanding and lots of happiness with some sense of security so that if I ever get stuck or anything like that I know I can talk to somebody or go somewhere where I can gang out if I want to sit or sleep or whatever. That’s what I need. A safe place.”*

Needed Changes in Service/Policy

- Services need to be accountable and grounded in women's strengths and networks
- Stop Abusing Power
- Advocate Harder
- More Accessible Counseling Services
- More Trans-Positive Services
- More Funding and Prioritizing of Aboriginal Services

Dissemination Efforts & Evaluation

- Public dissemination
 - Public shows with presentations (e.g., Metro Hall)
 - Distribution of posters and booklet to policy makers and social service agencies
 - Website at University of Toronto
- Academic dissemination
 - Presentations at national/international conferences (e.g., APA, CSWE) & universities; publications
- Evaluation sessions at each site & advisory board members

Implications: Multi-level empowerment

- Creating art as feedback
- Ability/space to dream about their own future
- Empowerment through knowledge that their voices will be heard at higher levels (public recognition)
- A sense of ownership
 - Trusting the process
- Transformation from consumers to helpers

Comments by Advisory Board Members

- *"[Participating in the art-making sessions] meant a lot to people. [There was] not a sad face in the group by the end – people came in kind of serious and were laughing and smiling by the end."*
- *"Lots of laughter [in art-making sessions]... [This project was] not only research but medicine."*
- *"[I] told everybody about the project!"*
- *"Positive and healing thing....[because I] talked about the negative experiences. [I] feel less alone when others say they felt same way."*
- *"At first [I went] for \$25 [honorarium] but then it became more – listening and sharing and realizing that I could relate."*
- *"[I] like to be more on the helpful side than on the doing side."*
- *"I am a street person...just minding money and food. But I was needed [for this project and it] made a difference."*
- *"There were a lot people I've seen around for years but I've never got to know until this project...That was possible because of the sharing of stories. Sometimes it's hard to even get people to listen to your stories."*
- *"Study conducted as not a study. Open forum... [I] liked that."*

Reflections on “University-Community Collaboration”



Izumi Sakamoto (academic)

Josie Ricciardi (community agency)

Natalie Wood (artist)

Academic Researcher's Perspective

Challenges

- ❑ Unpredictable process due to participatory & artistic nature of the research.
- ❑ Tensions between conducting “rigorous” research that meets academic standards vs. being true to participants & agencies.
- ❑ Lack of legitimacy and recognition given to CBR in general by the academic environment (“too much time spent”, “too few academic outcomes”).

Rewards

- ❑ Empowerment of women/transwomen involved
- ❑ Synergy and creativity through collaboration that could reach far beyond any expectations I had – truly amazing!
- ❑ Ability to engage a broader scope of people with research through our art-sessions and with our end products (e.g., posters, booklets)
- ❑ Opportunity to work with amazing women/transwomen (research team, advisory board, participants)
- ❑ Lots of learning in the field.
- ❑ Arts-based research challenges your creativity and is so much fun!

Community Agency's Perspective

Challenges

- ❑ Balancing the needs of the community vs. academic research guidelines.
- ❑ Time commitment involved- arts-based research component.
- ❑ Supporting advisory members.
- ❑ Challenge of dealing with diverse women at the various sites.

Rewards

- ❑ Empowerment process with the women.
- ❑ Art based activity allowed women to express their stories.
- ❑ Seeing the immediate impact of the involvement on women.
- ❑ Working with advisory committee of women.

Artist's Perspective

Challenges

- ❑ Didactic approach from educational institution.
- ❑ To shift participants & advisors from applying stereotypical imagery & thought processes to go deeper.
- ❑ Controlling the images -- participants not holding the camera.

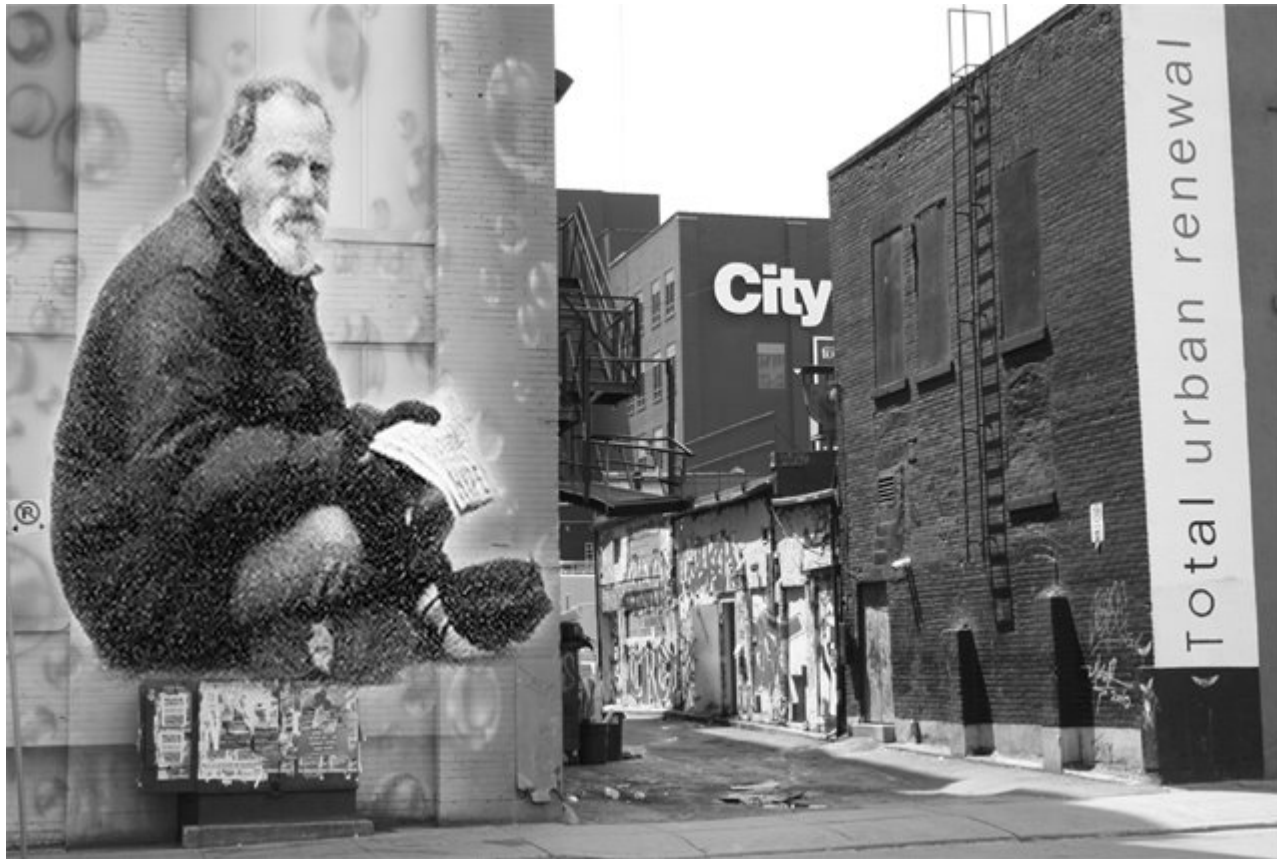
Rewards

- ❑ Transformative learning. Transforms individuals from passive to active subjects.
- ❑ Provides a sense of identity, power through active participation & collaboration in creating.
- ❑ Art & artists' expression seen as credible tool for communication across differences & diversity. Unifying tool.

Discussion: Role of Arts in Research?

- Positive images vs. negative images
 - *'Posters are powerful, creative, dynamic, authentic and evoke a response' vs.*
 - *'Posters need to be more "real", showing women's daily struggles'*
- Questions to consider...
 - Do positive images minimize daily struggles of homeless women?
 - Do realistic' photos serve as the "pornographication" of poverty?
 - Do happy images challenge otherization of homeless women? (e.g., 'homeless women can't have hope')
- "Representation" vs. CBPR
- Possible collaboration with other arts-based projects for exhibition and advocacy to show the 'whole' picture

“A Day in the Life” Photovoice Project (Street Health/Nancy Halifax)

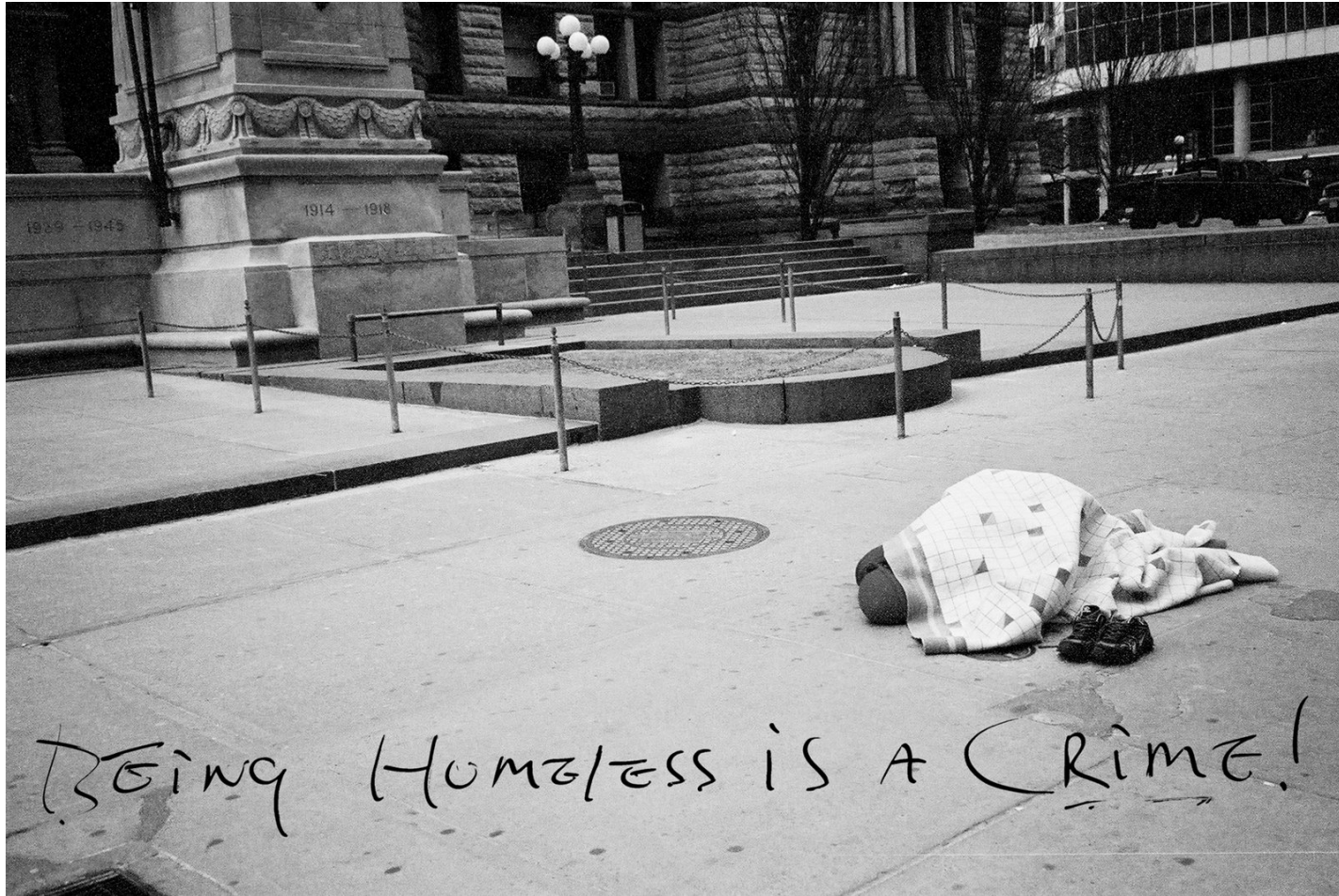


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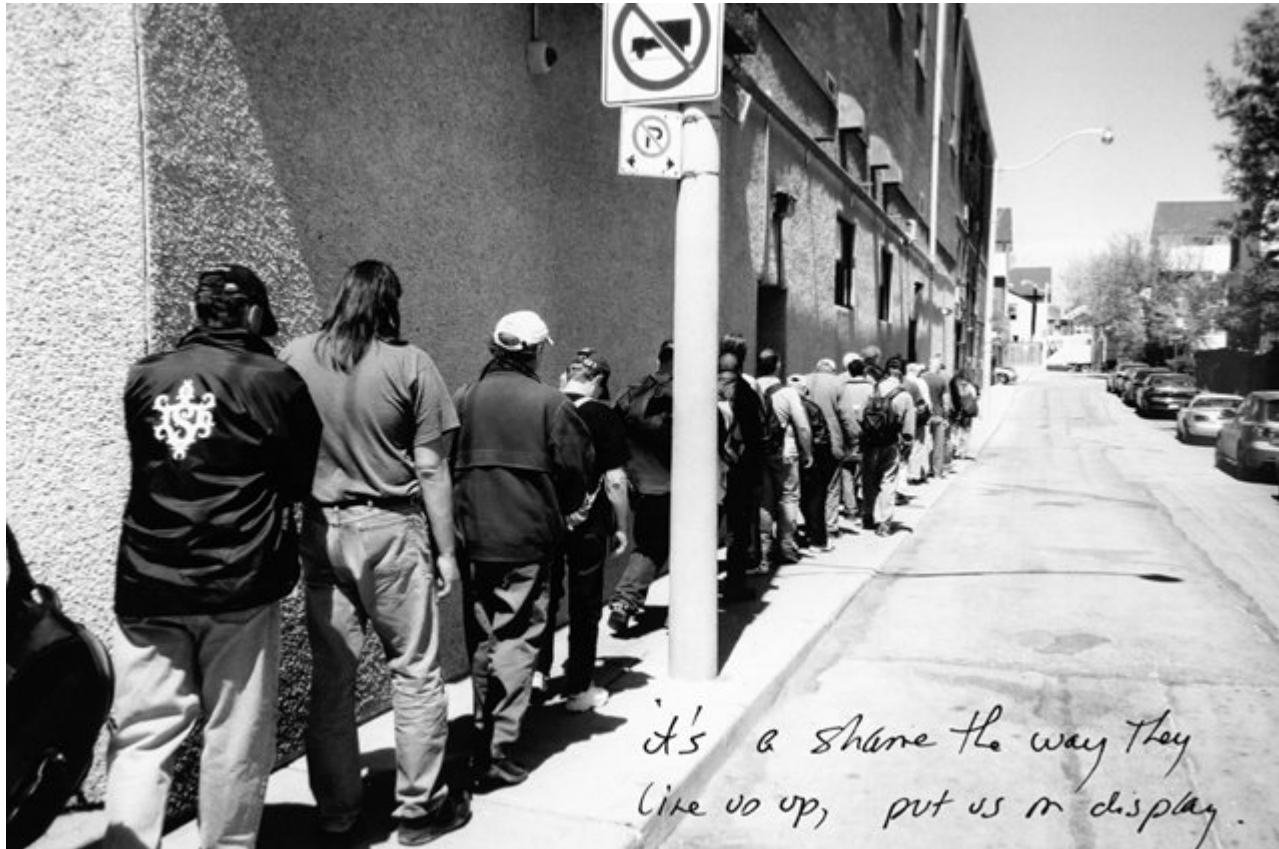
Photovoice Blog: <http://anagraphia.blogspot.com/>

“Being Homeless is a Crime!”



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“It’s a shame the way they line us up, put us in display”



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“A Day in the Life” Photovoice Project



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Language as a Social Barrier & Help Needed



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- Website <http://www.socialwork.utoronto.ca/aswri>
 - Click on 'Research Projects'
 - Includes e-research reports and posters in PDF files