

HOMELESS ON THE STREETS OF MONTRÉAL: A DIVISION OF CAPITAL AND *HABITUS*

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Abstract

This paper uses Pierre Bourdieu's *theory of practice* to examine the different social and material circumstances of the homeless population and the domiciled population. Particularly, the concept of *habitus* or acquired lifestyle and habits, is used to explore the distinct experiences and accounts of the homeless versus the domiciled population. I will explain the various barriers the homeless face when attempting to reintegrate into society. Lastly, Bourdieu's four types of *capital* – economic, symbolic, cultural, and social – will be employed to relate the experiences of the homeless and domiciled to the different *habitus* they operate in. The homeless population of Montréal, Quebec is the focus of this explanatory study.

Résumé

Cet essai utilise la théorie de la pratique de Pierre Bourdieu pour étudier les diverses circonstances sociales et matérielles des populations itinérantes et domiciliées. Plus particulièrement, le concept d'habitus, ou habitudes de vie acquises, est utilisé pour explorer les expériences distinctes et les récits des sans abris par rapport à la population domiciliée. J'expliquerai les diverses barrières auxquelles les populations itinérantes sont confrontées lorsqu'elles tentent de réintégrer la société. Finalement, j'utiliserai les quatre types de capitaux de Bourdieu (économique, symbolique, culturel et social) pour relier les expériences des populations itinérantes et domiciliées aux habitus au sein desquelles ils agissent. La population itinérante de Montréal au Québec constitue le sujet de cette étude explicative.

Introduction

There is a lack of data about homelessness in Canada in terms of statistics, causes, and experiences. *The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013*, the first comprehensive Canadian report card on homelessness (compiled by the *Canadian Homelessness Research Network [Homeless Hub]* and the *Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness*), estimates that at least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in any given year (Gaetz *et al.* 2013). The most recent reliable estimate of homelessness in Montréal – the focus of this paper – is found in *A policy on homelessness: a Necessity for Montréal* (RAPSIM) submitted to the Parliamentary Committee on homelessness, which suggests that in 2005, there were an estimated 30,000 homeless individuals in Montréal.

To study the phenomenon of homelessness in Montréal, it is first necessary to define the condition. Homelessness is a social problem that describes “an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.” The state of homelessness can be divided into four different circumstances: unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness (Canadian Homelessness Research Network 2012). In addition to the various factors that may cause an individual to fall into one of the four circumstances, there appears to be a set of discourses blaming the homeless individual for their condition rather than focusing on problems with societal structures such as the lack of low-income housing, erosion of rehabilitation programs for addiction and abuse, and the gutting of income security for workers, as well as the political unwillingness to implement policies, procedures and funding from the government and various, private organizations. The phenomenon of blaming the marginalized in society, including the poor and the homeless, coincides with rise of a neoliberal agenda for Canadian social policy which began in the late twentieth/early twenty first century. Neoliberal thought promotes the belief in citizens each being accountable for his/her welfare rather than state responsibility for those in need.

Under these conditions, it is important to study why some people become homeless while others remain part of the domiciled population. The work of social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1977), especially his concepts of *habitus* and capital can be used to measure and understand the division between the homeless and those with shelter.

This paper demonstrates that the capital and general *habitus*¹ of the homeless population in Montréal results in significant barriers

to successful societal reintegration, effectively making the homeless different from the domiciled population. This qualitative research study explicitly focuses on the subject of homelessness in one of Canada's key metropolitan centres. The research consists of a content analysis of secondary sources, namely the works of Pierre Bourdieu and those authors who employ his theoretical framework and concepts in their studies. I then use this content analysis to frame the data on homelessness in Montréal. This data consists of statistics on the homeless population and a profile of the city's homeless organizations and agencies whose mandate it is to help those without shelter.

The principal aim of this work is to articulate a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the experiences and accounts (*habitus* and capital) of the homeless and the material and social conditions which give rise to them. As this study is an explanatory project, no claims to cause and effect will be generated. The paper will now turn to explore how the city is specifically addressing the plight of the homeless, and will then move to explain how homelessness in Montréal may be conceptualized.

Montréal's Commitment to Homelessness: a Profile

The province of Quebec attempts to minimize the divide between the homeless population and the domiciled population through government sponsored direct funding and housing. David Levinson (2004), who examined the commitment of Quebec to match the funding allotted from the federal government in the early 2000s, found that with a total allocation of \$197 million from the province and its various municipalities, in conjunction with the 5,000 housing units reserved for moderate to low income households, Quebec appears to be genuinely committed in its recognition of, and desire to, provide social justice (Levinson 2004: 45). Furthermore, Gaetz *et al.* (2013) in *The State of Homelessness in Canada* acknowledge Quebec as one of five provinces that is committed to responding to homelessness. Levinson notes, within Quebec the role of the provincial government, church based groups, and non-profit organizations in raising the level of awareness for the need of affordable housing in Montréal as well as lower land costs (Levinson 2004: 44).

The Old Mission Brewery's 2012–2013 Annual Report (Turning the Tide 2013) outlines and pays tribute to the large amount of supporters and donors who have contributed funds to its foundation. Almost ninety-five percent of the foundation revenue, for the period March 2012–March 2013, was from individual and corporate donations. The revenue of the mission itself from 2012–2013 was generated from the Gouvernement of Quebec (slightly in excess of fifty-five percent

of funding), while some thirty-seven percent of monies came from individual and corporate donations (Turning the Tide 2013: 23). The foundation also donates funds each year to the mission.

With its funding, The Old Brewery Mission provides research on the homeless population in Montréal as well as transition units, housing, and emergency services such as shelters, clothing, showers and meals. The Annual Report outlines that there were 118,153 overnight stays in their emergency shelters and transition units and 269,191 nutritious meals served. Moreover, with their various resources, The Old Brewery Mission was able to transition 636 clients out of homelessness (Turning the Tide 2013: 2). The Mission states that with its various services, it is the largest resource for homeless men in Quebec while providing resources for homeless women as well (Turning the Tide 2013: 3). Café Mission on Saint-Laurent Blvd, which opened in September 2012, is home to the Mission's own coffeehouse where their counselors are able to sit down with the homeless men and women of Montréal to discuss "employment, housing, healthcare, and rebuilding one's network within mainstream society" (Turning the Tide 2013: 6). This café attracts on average 150 homeless individuals each day.

The Old Brewery Mission also has a space called "The Annex" which seeks to provide a semi-private but comfortable living space that can accommodate fourteen men for a maximum of three weeks. The goal of this resource is for each resident to benefit from thorough individual and group counseling to help them transition into stable housing (Turning the Tide 2013: 7). *Les Voisines* is a program that aims to help at risk women "adapt and practice essential life skills... like shopping for food, preparing a meal, searching for an apartment or socializing..." (Turning the Tide 2013: 8). This program opened in October 2012 and is available to ten women at a time. Other programs are aimed at using affiliations to increase affordable housing-unit availability throughout the city of Montréal; to ensure that the physical needs are met so as to safeguard the mental health and behaviors of individuals; and to raise funds and awareness (Turning the Tide 2013: 8).

There are many other programs, shelters, and individuals who help the homeless in Montréal, the most noteworthy of which are: Homeless Nation, founded by Daniel Cross, uses technology to spread awareness of the homeless population's situation. This program works in various shelters to provide better living conditions and resources for those who are homeless (About Homeless Nation); *Le Refuge des Jeunes* focuses on shelter, food, clothing, and the health of youth in Montréal (*Le Refuge des Jeunes de Montréal*); the Native Women's Shelter of Montréal, which seeks to provide a safe environment for Native women and their children and focuses on cultural identity, housing

and outreach programs for Aboriginal, Inuit, and Metis women (Native Women's Shelter of Montréal); and a trilingual association, *Assistance aux Femmes*, helps women who suffer from domestic violence. The aim of this group is to help women from various backgrounds with shelter and outreach programs (Welcome to *Assistance aux Femmes*). There are also other shelters and programs specific to women such as *Auberge Shalom pour femmes*, *Chez Doris*, *Logifem*, and more.

These organizations, along with others, provide an abundant amount of resources for the homeless. As Fleury *et al.* (2014) observe, however, there is not one singular resource that is able to effectively address and simultaneously meet the complete range of needs of the Montréal homeless population. The principal result of this situation is that some homeless individuals “fall through the cracks” and therefore do not receive the proper help that they require (Fleury *et al.*: 2). There are, however, current programs that seek to close this gap such as the programs listed with The Old Brewery Mission. Levinson (2004: 492) also explores how homeless individuals are forced to transport from service to service. Fleury *et al.* (2014) along with Levinson (2004) argue that resources available to help the homeless population must collaborate with one another including the private and public sectors of organizations and resources. Thus, there is a disengagement which results in a lack of provision to help the homeless population reintegrate into society. The disconnections that create barriers for the homeless population to reintegrate into society will be further examined in terms of the general *habitus* and *capital* of the homeless population and domiciled population.

Conceptualizing Homelessness:

Towards a theory of the homeless in Montréal

To begin, two concepts from Bourdieu (1977) are used to explore the relationship, or lack thereof, between the homeless population and the domiciled population. The first notion is *habitus* which refers to a set of dispositions or tendencies that generate and structure human actions and behaviors. *Habitus* can also be understood as the traits common to a particular social group or class. It shapes all practices but is not experienced as repressive or enforcing. Its effects on the population typically go unnoticed though the population participates in this general *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 72; Deal & Beal 2004). In other words, *habitus* refers to the habits, perceptions, and actions practiced that social beings practice through which an individual comes to know themselves and identify others.

Bourdieu argues that *habitus* is formed naturally and is based on one's conditions of existence. A *habitus* is formed by various external factors

such as one's family as well as social and economic conditions that structure one's perceptions. Bourdieu does recognize that all members will not share the same experiences; rather *habitus* encompasses a general practice or regulation of this group (Bourdieu 1977: 85–87). Bourdieu emphasizes that *habitus* is something that one practices but is not something that is forced upon individuals. Turning to the example of class structure, one can see that the upper class has various actions or perceptions that distinguish them as upper class whereas lower class has different actions or perceptions that distinguish them as lower class. The lower class is not necessarily forced to act a certain way. Furthermore, one may not necessarily recognize *habitus* because it is covert (hidden, covered, concealed) but does become noticeable when compared with another *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977; Swartz 1997).

Bridgette Fowler notes that *habitus* is a flexible concept, which proves beneficial for the purposes of my research when looking at two different groups of people with varying social status (Fowler 1997: 27; Deal & Beal 2004). Bourdieu argues that the differences in social status or "hierarchy" must be analyzed through the notion of *habitus* to understand why there is such a hierarchy within a specific field (Calhoun *et al.* 1993: 16).

To explain the relationship between *habitus* and social position, I use Bourdieu's notion of capital. Capital provides a means of measurement that influences and impacts *habitus*. Fowler (1997) provides an explanation of the four different types of capital:

Bourdieu deploys the concepts of four types of capital which are by now almost synonymous with [Bourdieu's] approach, that is, social capital (power gained by the sheer number of family members, retainers or network of supporters), symbolic capital (reputation or honour-including intellectual honesty), cultural capital (distinction within the autonomous fields of art and science; intellectual or educational qualifications) and economic capital (ownership of stocks and shares, or, more generally, of monetary rewards) (p.31).

Analytically, it is important to separate the four types of capital but in the reality of everyday life, it is often difficult to difficult to distinguish among them.

Economic Capital

As mentioned above, my analysis is guided by the four types of capital derived from Bourdieu. The purpose of analyzing the differences in capital between the homeless population and the domiciled population is to create an understanding of how capital influences an individual's *habitus* and what barriers may arise for those who attempt to reintegrate into society. The first type of capital is economic capital,

which Fowler describes as the ownership of finances (1997: 31). Economic capital arguably has the largest effect on an individual's living conditions due to the fact that, in Canada, economic stability directly affects social class and also influences and impacts the three other types of capital.

It is clear that there is a large divide in the general *habitus* and economic capital between the homeless population and the domiciled population. The largest divide in economic capital is the ability to obtain funds for stable housing. In general, homeless individuals are unable to afford shelter which dictates their *habitus*. Homeless individuals in Montréal are typically seen living in parks such as the Serge-Garant and Émilie-Gamelin parks according to various Montréal based media sources such as CTV News Montréal ("Police fine man \$147 for sitting under tree"). The homeless population generally does not have the financial means for adequate shelter which results in living on the streets as well as lacking the means for attaining other bare necessities such as food and clothing. On the contrary, those who are able to afford adequate shelter typically have the means for attaining the bare necessities of living in Canadian Society which creates a much different *habitus* than the homeless population.

The economic capital of an individual will dictate an individual's *habitus* and an individual's social status will be higher the greater the economic capital. For example, an individual who has a large economic capital may show their capital by eating at higher-end restaurants, driving a Cadillac Escalade, and enrolling their children in private education. On the contrary, a low economic capital may result in a lower social status. For example, an individual who has low economic capital may eat at MacDonald's restaurants, drive a used Kia Magentis, and may not be able to enroll their children in private education or organized sports. In the case of homeless individuals who may have little to no economic capital, the financial means to have routine access to food and clean clothing are inadequate. These examples give a clear indication of the correlation between economic capital and social status as well as the influences that these two have on individual *habitus*.

While every homeless individual has different needs, it is important to recognize that lacking economic capital deprives individuals from attaining the bare necessities. Furthermore, it must be recognized that there are individuals who are domiciled but are unable to afford the bare necessities as well as those who may be temporarily homeless. The term "general" and "typically" are key terms in examining the differences between the homeless population and the domiciled population. For the purposes of this research I am not analyzing

why the homeless population is living in their current conditions, but rather looking at the differences in capital and *habitus* to explain the various barriers that may prevent homeless individuals from reintegrating into society.

The barriers that may arise in regards to economic capital when attempting to reintegrate into society are influenced by shelter, which is the largest divide in economic capital. Without shelter there are numerous smaller details that have large impacts on reintegration. For example, without stable shelter, an individual cannot guarantee clean clothing and facilities to bathe. It is also necessary to have a home address on many job applications or when enrolling in educational institutions. The barriers may also change according to the length of time that an individual has been homeless. Beyond the lack of stable shelter, the differences in economic capital present other barriers for reintegration.

These barriers may arise when looking at the *habitus* of an individual attempting to reintegrate into society. For example, when an individual is seeking employment they may not have the means to buy, rent, or lease a car. Having access to a vehicle is a requirement for some careers. Public transportation is an option but does require funds. Finally, many careers and employment opportunities require a specific physical image that may not be attainable for homeless individuals based on their lack of economic capital.

Symbolic Capital

Fowler outlines that in societies where class domination is the root of social status, like Canada, symbolic capital is “filtered through the prisms of class domination.” This means that an individual’s financial means have great influence on social status within society (Fowler 1997: 20). Symbolic capital refers to a reputation within society (Fowler 1997: 31). Bourdieu, at times, uses the term symbolic capital as an “analogy to economic capital” due to the influence that economic capital has on one’s social status (Fowler 1997: 20). Thus, it is very important to understand the intersections between economic capital and the other types of capital.

Distinguishing between symbolic and economic capital can be done through providing examples of how symbolic capital influences *habitus*. Being domiciled and possessing large economic capital typically demonstrates honor or prestige because it may entail social obligations and interests such as country clubs or political stances and involvement. These obligations and interests may include networking, learning new skills, and having various experiences. *Habitus* may entail dinner parties as well as frequent gifts and travelling.

Those with low economic capital do not have the financial means to participate in valued events and social obligations such as country clubs or the financial connections to undertake civic duties so therefore do not have honor and prestige. The lack of highly valued events and obligations does not allow an individual to network at an upper class level, learn new skills, or have new experiences. For some, *habitus* may entail occasional dinners with family or friends at a local restaurant and budgeting to ensure the bills get paid.

The type of *habitus* described above with its attendant events, social obligations, networking, skills, and experiences may become a barrier for homeless individuals when attempting to reintegrate into society depending on the length of their condition. A homeless individual may not be recognized as previously homeless during daily interaction though a lack of reputation and experience may be an issue when searching for employment or resources to reintegrate into society.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is best articulated through a focus on education. As previously noted, economic capital influences the other types. Economic capital means direct and immediate access to finances which may allow an individual greater access to education. Cultural capital on the other hand may include having educational credentials which allows an individual to attain stable employment but no direct and immediate access to finances. In this sense, economic capital influences but is different from cultural capital. The education of the French language, as well as its role and importance in Montréal will be discussed later in regards to social capital.

Focusing on cultural capital, education is a large boundary to overcome when attempting to reintegrate into society. Fowler argues that the absence of education is a large “immoveable barrier to social mobility” in regards to cultural capital (Fowler 1997: 23). An individual’s way of life or *habitus* is greatly shaped by the level or quality of education. For example, having access to education or obtaining a high educational level increases the probability of elevated economic and symbolic capital. This includes stable employment and the means to attain bare necessities which, as discussed above, influences *habitus*. On the contrary, not having access to education or having a low education level increase the probability of low economic and symbolic capital. This may include the uncertainty of stable employment and may not result in the means to attain the bare necessities, which influences *habitus*.

The main barrier that may arise upon reintegrating into society is attaining stable employment. As discussed above, education is a

large part of cultural capital and an individual's level of education influences the type of employment that an individual may attain. As noted above, Fowler (1997) argues that lacking education limits an individual's social mobility. Thus, those who are homeless and have low education face extra barriers in finding employment. With that stated, it must be recognized that not all homeless individuals have low education, rather those who are homeless have barriers in receiving employment and those with low education are faced with even more barriers of finding employment.

Social Capital

Social capital refers to an individual's networks of supporters, as defined by Fowler (1997). I will explore the networks of individuals through the ability to speak and write the French language.² Language will not be examined in terms of a cultural identity, rather as a social division when there is a discrepancy in communication.

According to Statistics Canada, the population census of 2011 found that the majority (over 65%) of the population in urban Montréal were French speakers. Due to this majority, the ability to speak and write French influences and highly determines the probability of attaining employment, education, healthcare, legal care, etc. In 2006, Statistics Canada noted that 94.3% of individuals in the Quebec work force could speak French and spoke the language 86.7% of the time (Statistics Canada 2006). As a result, language plays a large role in exercising power and control. This directly influences an individual's social identity when creating networks in terms of social capital, as supported by John Joseph Gumperz (1982: 1–5) and Norman Fairclough (1989: 17). A discrepancy in communication created by language can create social divisions. For example, individuals not fluent in French may not be able to attain employment in Montréal. This may leave them isolated from the rest of society. In the case of homeless individuals who are not fluent in the French language, they may become insulated from society and unable to attain employment, education, healthcare, and legal care. Those who are fluent in the French language are advantaged in creating social networks which may result in stable employment.

When creating a solid social network, language symbolizes group membership, a set of values, and a way of accessing the social world. Language also plays a strong role in forming a *habitus*, a way of living because it dictates your ability to network, be gainfully employed, and financially stable (Gumperz 1982: 6, 109; Calhoun *et al* 1993: 139). Floch and Pocock (2008) explore the relation of language and employment income. In 2001, Anglophones in Quebec were “over-represented

in the highest income grouping, but are also over-represented in the lower income spectrum, being 10% more likely” to have no employment (Floch & Pocock 2008: 42). Moreover, Anglophones were also more likely to have low incomes compared to Francophones in 2001 (Floch & Pocock 2008: 42). According to the 2006 Census, Anglophones in Quebec were 38% more likely to be living below the low-income cut off and 33% more likely to be unemployed compared to Francophones. In 2006, 22% of Anglophones were living under low income cutoffs (Quebec Community Groups Network 2012: 15). In Montréal specifically, 26% of Anglophones were living under this cut off (Quebec Community Groups Network 2012: 16).

In terms of social capital, the French language may create barriers for the homeless population to reintegrate into society if they are unable to speak and write French at an advanced level. There are specific jobs such as janitorial services and other types of employment that do not require immediate contact with the public so French language skills are not required. However, wages often do not meet the cost of living standards. There are always educational, healthcare, and legal services that do have English-speaking employees to help homeless individuals hurdle the barriers presented by Quebec’s official language. But, without the ability to communicate, it may be difficult to create a network of supporters which is the core of social capital.

Finally, the problem of trusting authorities may arise in social networks as a barrier to reintegration. Individuals who have been socially isolated for long periods of time may develop distrust towards figures of authority. For reasons beyond language and communication discrepancies, a homeless individual’s social networking is limited when stigmatized and rejected from society. This barrier is supported by Levinson (2004) who examines the mistrust of authorities, particularly in treatment of addictions or abuse.

Conclusion

The differences in capital and general *habitus* between the homeless population and the domiciled population suggest that there are barriers that exist when an individual attempts to reintegrate into society. Homelessness is a social problem that Canadian citizens are not always invested in improving. This lack of investment may be due to the tendency for Canadian citizens to focus on their own well-being and welfare rather than others.

The homeless population – specifically those individuals in Montréal – is disadvantaged due to the differences and divisions created by the various forms of capital. This divide creates significant barriers leading to minimal social mobility. Due to these differences,

the barriers effectively inhibit a smooth transition back into society for those who are attempting to get off the streets. Individuals among the homeless population need a variety of resources to stabilize their lives in order to successfully reintegrate into society. This paper delivers a broad examination of the differences between the homeless population and the domiciled population which is essential in beginning to understand the barriers that arise in various situations

This research can help inform policy on homelessness because it attempts to encompass the hardships of individuals who may find themselves homeless as well as explain the circumstances that keep people on the streets. Further, by bringing together sources and resources for the homeless in this paper, we can start to identify where there is room for improvement. It is imperative that resources are available and operational so the homeless, as demonstrated by this examination of current realities and practices in Montréal, can gain the necessary capital to become fully-functioning citizens.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The term 'general *habitus*' is used rather than '*habitus*' in recognition that not all homeless individuals have the same tendencies. Furthermore, this research does not focus on the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, Aboriginal identity or refugee status.
- 2 French is the official language of Quebec and the language of work and social service delivery.

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