



“Everyone is Laughing at Me” Media Saturation and Homelessness



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We have all seen it, a news article with a photo of someone experiencing homelessness to catch your attention. Maybe a friend posted a “funny” clip on a social media of a person who is struggling with mental health doing something we might find bizarre or unexplainable. Maybe your favourite content creator is publishing their opinions on homelessness and has been taking footage of people living on public streets as their background.

It is no secret to any community in Canada right now, rates of people experiencing homelessness is at an all time high for a variety of reasons. What has also increased is the media saturation on the topic.

From news coverage to people’s private social media feeds, we are seeing more and more of the day-to-day struggles of unhoused individuals, along with the entire community’s opinions of them. Sometimes this is done with best intentions, to

raise awareness and bring change, other times for exploitative or negative purposes. What is consistent, however, is the impact it has on people experiencing homelessness.

I had someone I worked with give me permission to share a story that impacted their life significantly. During one very cold winter, he had found a warm vent by a building to sleep next to consistently. One night, a group of younger revellers exited a local bar and passed by his spot. Someone saw him, and they began to laugh. Phones came out, and they were snapping pictures and videos of him. He became upset and shouted at them to leave, which they did after more camera flashes. He explained to me that every night new people came to find him at his spot and began calling him “the crazy bad air freshener”. He shouted many times; “why wont you people leave me alone!” He was told he was going viral across Snap Chat feeds, making him a public spectacle. He said to me, with tears in his eyes, “Everyone is laughing at me, nobody understands how hard I have been trying”.

And of course they did not, his story was being told by people that didn’t know him or understand him. He, a struggling individual, was receiving the brunt of our collective judgement, at no fault of his own.

The Right to privacy is something we in Canada have come to expect and enjoy. We can close our door and selectively share the contents of our lives through

filters and edits. Someone who is experiencing homelessness rarely enjoys this Right. Everything someone does when they don't have a home to call their own, is done in public, or in a group setting. This lack of privacy increases peoples stress levels and deteriorates their mental health.

Giving someone the privacy and dignity all people deserve is something we as a community can easily grant. Seeking permission and consent for content creation is an essential component to doing so.