"Fuck you with your recovery!"

The identity work of becoming ex-homeless

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- Homelessness remains one of the most stigmatized identities in society.
- Public and institutional discourses tend to individualize and pathologize homelessness.
- This research explores how four recurrently homeless men resist these narratives through identity work during their transition to housing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **Goffman (1963)** – *Stigma and the performative self*
- **Ebaugh (1986)** – *Role-exit theory*
- **Bourdieu (1991)** – *Symbolic violence*

Theoretical lens: *Stigma management as resistance* and *identity work as resilience*

METHODOLOGY

Analysis guided by concepts: identity, setting, meaning, performance, stigma

Collaboration with **peer researchers** to help reduce power asymmetries

Name	Years homeless (T0)	Age in years (T0)	Episodes of homelessness	Housing status T0	Housing status T1	Housing status T2	Housing status T3	Housing status T4
Wesley	10+	35	2	24-hours shelter	Partner's place	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling
Tom	3	64	2	24-hours shelter	Night shelter	Night shelter	Own room at social care	Own room at social care
John	13	56	2	Night shelter	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling
Richie	35	58	4	24-hours shelter	24-hours shelter	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling	Independent dwelling

FINDINGS

- **Help-seeking as identity threat**: Often experienced as degrading or infantilizing
- **Refusal of care**: Not simply "care avoidance" but **resistance** to **symbolic violence**
- **Discursive identity work:**
  - Rejection of the "human waste" label, selective alignment with social groups, constructing self-narratives of dignity and strength
- **Performative strategies** to balance:
  - Accepting necessary care and preserving self-worth

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- The **transition out of homelessness** is not just material but deeply **symbolic**
- Institutional settings often **reinforce stigma** through **psychocentric discourses**; **resisting** this **stigma** is a **form of resilience**
- **Identity work** is central to **exiting homelessness** and allows individuals to:
  - **Resist dominant labels**, **reclaim agency** and **strategically re-position themselves** in social and institutional contexts
- Institutions must rethink their practices to avoid reproducing **symbolic violence**; future care should recognize **identity, dignity, and narrative control as integral to recovery**

KEY WORDS: HOMELESSNESS, IDENTITY WORK, STIGMA, SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE, INSTITUTIONS