



Ignorance is Bliss...For Some

By Nicole Arcieri

Being ignored is arguably one of the worst feelings anyone can experience. Not being heard, understood or recognized can contribute to how we perceive and experience the world around us. Being ignored can have a negative affect on one's mental health. People that are homeless know what it's like to not be seen on a daily basis. Everyday civilians may find it easier to just avoid eye contact and keep walking when a person who is homeless approaches them. I can say that because that thought has run into my head when I'm on the subway, walking the city streets or getting a cup of coffee. However, I think it is time to challenge these thoughts and behaviors.

It is easy to say that you are going to do everything in your power to help a person who is homeless when you see them, but when you're actually in that situation, it's hard to put those thoughts into action. Perhaps it will be easier to reevaluate how we behave around people that are homeless when we acknowledge what makes us uncomfortable about the situation. Why am I avoiding eye contact? Why am I briskly walking

away from this person? Why is it that, when I see a person who is homeless on a train car, I switch to the next car over?

There are these preconceived notions that our society holds about people that are homeless. We are taught to be distrustful of the homeless community, to keep in mind that they are in the position that they are in because they did not work hard enough. We are taught to criminalize homelessness, with cities' anti-homeless infrastructure and the illegality of loitering and subway fare evasion. We are taught that not having a home or an income makes you unworthy of respect and recognition. When we make these assumptions about people, we erase their stories, their dignity and their humanity. We inadvertently write their chapters for them and dictate their endings.

There are many reasons that people that are homeless find themselves in the positions they are in. However, the reason does not matter, and I think society places too much emphasis on wondering what someone went through to get to where they are rather than what our local communities can do to help them now. There is no "right" or "wrong" way of being homeless. Individuals of homeless communities across the United States and worldwide deserve to be seen and heard, not secretly ogled at from the corners of our eyes. People may feel that they would rather ignore someone who is homeless than acknowledge them perhaps because they don't have anything to give them. Maybe it comes from a place of guilt, or even from a place of just not wanting to face the reality of the homelessness crisis. Whatever the reason may be, I think it is important to at least be able to look these individuals in their eyes, greet them on your morning commute and flash a quick smile. This by no means will solve the homelessness crisis, but it has the potential of making someone feel seen again.