<H3 ALIGN=‘‘CENTER’‘>Cultural Models in Everyday Discourse</H3>

<P>The streets connect society; they allow for paths of travel and provide a structure that connects businesses and residences. For most people, this structure is merely a means to an end—a trajectory lined with street names and signs to guide our direction. But for some, the streets themselves are called ‘‘home’‘. The homeless culture is often looked down upon as members within society that have given up hope, yet rarely viewed as a culture that has emerged out of adapting to situational changes. </P>

<P>There are many cultural models embedded within model of what it means to be homeless. Thoughtful analysis of these structures guides our ways of thinking and speaking about ‘‘homelessness’‘. Talking with an individual who is part of the culture provides an insider perspective. Throughout the dialogue, the informant uses several cultural models that infer cultural understanding. D’Andrade’s paper, ‘‘The Folk Model of the Mind’‘, serves as a guide on how to analyze text to see the correspondence between the state of affairs in the world and the internal state of mind. We will look at models of work, reciprocation, and homelessness. </P>

<P>The informant is presented with black and white photos of other homeless individuals and is asked to describe what is going on in the photos. He flips the page and says, ‘‘Uhh… plead the 5th.’‘ He is encouraged to explain his reaction. ‘‘Well, looks like another working girl because of the, uh of the open shirt with the, of the cleavage showing.’‘ He is inferring that this woman makes a living as a prostitute on the street. The words ‘‘working girl’‘ and ‘‘open shirt with cleavage showing’‘ are connected by the word ‘‘because’‘, indicating her work is related to her open shirt. Implicit knowledge of working and what the hooker’s job description entails is required to understand this inference. Moreover, the hesitant ‘‘uhh’‘ followed by ‘‘plead the 5th’‘ requires an understanding of American law. The right to remain silent when being questioned by law enforcement, comes from the fifth amendment to the constitution. Thus, in pleading the fifth, the informant has indicated he knows something yet is weary of sharing this information. </P>

<P>Upon turning the next page, he remarks, ‘‘entrepreneur. Sellin’ cigarettes.’‘ There is an image of a woman sitting on the street holding money and displaying cigarettes. He explains that a lot of people on the streets get monthly disability checks, and ‘‘they know that it’s not gonna be able to cover an entire month…of food and all that.. so they go down to the duty-free shop down at the border’‘ to get a cheap carton of cigarettes, and ‘‘sell those packs for… two-three bucks a pack, and that’s pretty much how they survive for the month.’‘ The cultural model of work is an understanding that a job provides a service in exchange for pay. A work model is used here as the informant views this behavior as a reaction to knowledge of insufficient funds and a need to survive. The woman in the photo is described as ‘‘knowing’‘ the check won’t cover food, ‘‘so’‘ she goes to buy and resell an item to make money. </P>

<P>On the streets where resources are scarce, it would make sense for confrontation to be abundant. The informant says ‘‘there is quite a bit of confrontation because people steal from each other’‘ but does not think stealing is justified. His philosophy is ‘‘If I have it, and you need it, I’ll give it to you…and it should be reciprocated. But some people… just don’t care.’‘ This statement implies that on the street, ‘‘you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’‘-- a model of reciprocity. Also, the informant mentions that ‘‘some people think that…ya gotta grab whatcha can and hold on tight. Other people- like myself and friends…we believe in a commune.’‘ The informant attributes stealing and not reciprocating to people who ‘‘don’t care’‘ for others and live as if it is every man out for himself. He also makes an interesting distinction between himself and thieves. In differentiating between these viewpoints he is telling us a lot about himself. Since people who steal are those that ‘‘don’t care’‘, and he refers to himself as ‘‘others’‘, he is inferring that he does care. This intersubjective care enables a camaraderie that creates a community where individuals look out for one another. </P>

<P>The cultural models of work and reciprocity are embedded within the model of homelessness. Mentioning ‘‘work’‘ generally suggests a 9am-5pm job, a boss, an office, etc, but the work model changes when applied to a specific culture. Hustling goods on the black market, whether it be cigarettes or sex, is seen as mere work in the eyes of the street. Out there, work takes precedence over legality, but who is to say whether it is right or wrong? Our beliefs are grounded by cultural models, models that show the means by which we reach an end . </P>