



Crossing the Border: Encounters between Homeless People and Outreach Workers

Michael Rowe

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The relationship between the homeless and the social service community marks a border where the disenfranchised meet the mainstream of society. *Crossing the Border*, the first book-length study of outreach work to the mentally ill homeless, uses ethnographic tools to examine encounters at this border. Michael Rowe provides a rich picture not only of a particular group of homeless people, but also of the complicated interactions between the marginalized and those who try to help them. As it examines both the dilemmas and opportunities of outreach work to the mentally ill homeless, this compelling study asks us to consider the broader questions about how we relate to the poor and other marginal persons at the border of society.

The author's personal encounters with the homeless as Director of the New Haven ACCESS outreach project, his interviews with fifty homeless persons for this study, and his numerous interviews with outreach staff, provide an invaluable personal perspective. In this study, Rowe draws a collective portrait of the homeless whom he interviewed and observed, discusses the outreach workers in depth, examines transactions from the perspective of each party, and finally, places these encounters within the social and institutional contexts that shape them.

Rowe's writing is accessible and punctuated with many vivid anecdotes. As *Crossing the Border* shows, encounters between the homeless and outreach workers represent a measure of where we will set our social boundaries and what standard of living we will accept for those who live at that boundary.

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