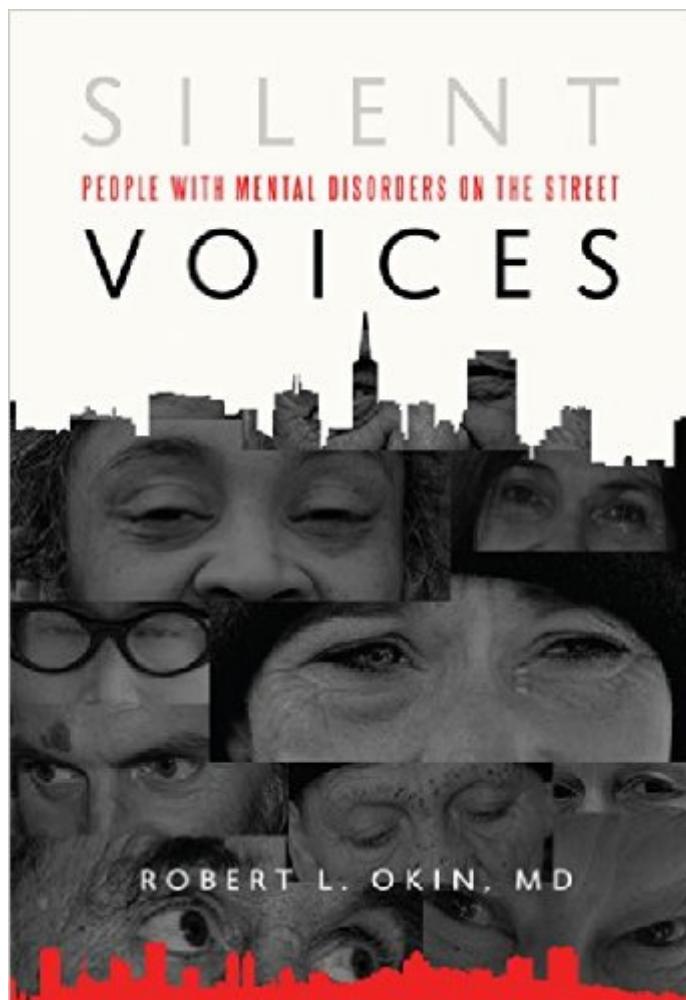


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# Silent Voices: People With Mental Disorders On The Street



## **Synopsis**

We avert our eyes when we meet them on the street: homeless mentally ill people with their hand-scrawled signs, shopping carts, and cardboard boxes. Because of our fear and revulsion, we fail to see any human connection with them. Still, we're curious: How do they end up on the street? How do they survive the stress and privations of such a life? What combination of biological vulnerabilities, childhood traumas, drugs, mental disorders, and financial devastation brought them down? And how do some manage, against all odds, to climb out of this desperate situation? Former commissioner of mental health Robert Okin spent two years on the street meeting and photographing homeless individuals with mental illness to find answers to these questions. He masterfully brings these people to life through stories and images that are intimate and gritty. This is a book about hope, not just grief and despair. It challenges us to face the situation and do something about it rather than simply look away.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Robert Okin touches the heart with unflinching honesty and compassion as he brings us along on his moving journey into a world of isolation, sadness and stigma. With vivid and heartbreaking photographs, and with the words of the many homeless people he befriends along the way, he reveals just how close any one of us could be to living on the street. We have all taken part in isolating those who are different, whether they are labeled mentally ill • or disabled in other ways. This book is a window into the importance of embracing our humanity, healing our

differences, creating inclusive communities, and finding a kinder way to be with our fellow travelers on this earth.

Dr Okin has written a fascinating and compelling book about the homeless people who inhabit our cities, often people with some form of mental illness, people we instinctively turn away from when we encounter them in the street. He masterfully brings them to life by telling their stories in a frank but touching way and also showing us what they look like in a series of stunning photographs. This works in a surprisingly effective way. The photos are not mere snapshots. As a photographer myself, I admire their detail and the outstanding way in which they capture the expressions and feelings of the people he has befriended. We owe Dr. Okin a debt of gratitude because he had the courage to overcome his fears and prejudices and seek people most of us would rather ignore.

Heâ™s given us a gift by making us realize that âœthese peopleâ• are human beings like you and me and to give us a more compassionate outlook. After reading this book you will never look at or think of a homeless person in the same way. This book should be required reading for health professionals who will be involved in interviewing and treating mentally ill homeless people. A young doctor raised in a small town or suburb and transported to a major city for his/her residency may not have a clue about the homeless thereby approaching their patient with quite a few prejudices.

Reading this book would at least give that young doctor some degree of enlightenment and incentive to give the homeless the compassionate care they deserve. Gerard P Closset, Ph. D

If you have ever experienced the simultaneous feelings of deep compassion and embarrassing aversion when in the presence of a homeless person, Silent Voices is the book for you. Dr. Robert L. Okin, a distinguished psychiatrist with a long track record of working for the mentally ill at the local, state, and international level, had the courage to approach and talk at length with many people with mental disorders on the streets of San Francisco, and obtained their permission to share their photographs and their stories. His portraits allow you to experience their emotions, their confusion, and their pain. But they also allow you to linger long enough to pierce through the current intensity of these feelings, which we find so disturbing, to see in their faces traces of the people they once were â“ people with friends and family, who enjoyed the things we do, who shared the dreams and fears we all do. Hopefully, this book will contribute to directing our countryâ™s attention to these extremely neglected members of our communities, and move us to do something beyond averting our eyes. Ricardo F. Muñoz, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Psychology, UCSF Department of Psychiatry at San Francisco General Hospital and Distinguished Professor of Clinical Psychology,

This book pulled me in right away- not only are the photographs stunning and evocative, but each narrative that accompanies it is compelling and illustrative. I felt as if I was getting a glimpse into the tragic but often heroic lives of people who I have walked by my whole life, often judging and making assumptions. This book highlights the devastating effects that childhood trauma, chronic neglect, and substance abuse can have on a person, derailing them and pushing them to the edges of society, where we would rather not look. While reading, I found myself crying, cheering, and ultimately humbled by the courage of the people who Okin interviews and gets to know on his journey. This is a must-read for anybody who works in or is thinking of working in community mental health, but I imagine will also be enjoyed by anyone who is captivated by portrait photography and/or substantive personal narratives.

This book is a potent work of love towards the increasing number of American homeless. Imagine one of the smartest psychiatrists in the U.S. spending time on the streets to better understand the homeless with some form of mental illness in San Francisco. If we want to understand how come they landed on the street, as well as their strategies, concerns, memories, and joys, then this is the book that brings us closer to them. And Okinâ™s pictures bring us even closer to them. What I loved the most is the humility of a well-known psychiatrist towards these persons, it is touching how Okin approaches them and wants to learn from them. Thank you for this wonderful book! It was time, especially considering the widening disparities between the âœhavesâ• and the âœhave-notsâ• in the city.

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