CLOSER TO HOME: NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF
HOMELESSNESS DURING THE HOUSING CRISIS AND GREAT
RECESSION OF 2007 – 2009

by

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Abstract

This dissertation asks how public discourse in newspaper articles changed during the housing crisis and Great Recession. Using document analysis, text coding, statistical analysis, and tools from Critical Discourse Analysis, this dissertation tracks quantitative and qualitative changes in the appearance of keywords and topics over a 7-year period in four newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, The Buffalo News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and the Newark Star-Ledger. The data show that a shift took place whereby demographic groups likely to elicit sympathy with readers, such as homeless families, veterans, and children, increased in frequency during the research period. Explanations of the causes of homelessness shifted from emphasizing individual problems, such as addiction and mental illness, to structural factors, such as the job market and cost of living. Evidence is presented that editorials written by representatives from the advocacy community contribute to framing the debate in structural terms.

An interpretive reading informed by Critical Discourse Analysis reveals a trend in which articles make reference to a new category of people experiencing homelessness, the Newly Homeless. Articles are shown to discursively construct an idealized image of people who are: homeless for the first time, recently middle class, educated, and unfamiliar with the social service system. This class of people is constructed as the deserving poor, and calls to action to help this group of people are shown to increase during the recession period. The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) is shown to be rhetorically positioned for directing resources to the Newly Homeless as opposed to people who are stereotypically or chronically homeless.
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Chapter 1: Statement of Intent

In 2005, The New York Times published an article detailing the plight of three families who had fallen into homelessness. One family became homeless when a prolonged illness prevented the mother from working, and the subsequent eviction forced the couple and their six children to sleep on buses or in the airport. Another family became homeless after a water main break flooded their house. For a woman named Joyce, a bus strike meant that she had to take cabs to work, creating unsustainable home-to-work costs relative to her salary, which was already barely enough to cover her rent (Lee, 2005).

The article attributed the causes of these examples of homelessness to happenstance life crises that, coupled with high housing costs, were pushing more and more people out of their homes and onto the streets or into shelters. High housing costs, the article argued, created rent burdens that overwhelmed the ability of extremely poor people to keep pace.

That same year, The New York Times published an article highlighting the lives of Ms. Allen, who was addicted to crack, and Ms. Baldwin, who was an alcoholic. Both women became homeless as a result of their addictions (Hauser, 2005).

Four years later, as the housing crisis began to unfold, a 2009 article published in USA Today chronicled the struggles of three victims of the Great Recession (December 2007 to June 2009 [Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011]). One had been an autowerker from Detroit, one a waiter, and one a carpenter. The article identified these working-class individuals as the “economic homeless,” who “differ from the chronic homeless, the longtime street residents who often suffer from mental illness, drug abuse or alcoholism”
(Bazar, 2009). The article went on to explain that the American ideal—that hard work and a good education ensure a comfortable life and economic security—no longer made sense in the economic context of the Great Recession. According to the article, job losses and foreclosures pushed thousands of hard-working families into shelters or tent cities. Record numbers of families were becoming homeless for the first time, and homeless shelters were over capacity across the United States.

On July 11, 2010, The Washington Post published an article, written by a Professor of Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania, entitled “5 Myths About America’s Homeless” (Culhane, 2010). The article argued: 1) homelessness is not typically long-lasting; in fact, chronic homelessness is on the decline; 2) homelessness is not typically a result of mental illness; 3) homeless people work, and they work at employment rates that are not far from employment rates of the housed population; 4) shelters are not the answer to homelessness; housing is the answer to homelessness; and 5) homelessness is a problem that can be solved, especially with evidence-based policies such as President Obama’s Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program.

These four articles span across a period of 5 years, beginning prior to the American subprime mortgage crisis and the ensuing Great Recession. These articles told different stories about homelessness. The articles from 2005 tended to emphasize individual causes of homelessness stemming from poverty and unfortunate accidents due to poor life choices. The articles from 2009 and 2010 provided accounts of homelessness that focused on working, middle-class families who, through no fault of their own, found themselves facing homelessness as a result of a deeply flawed economy in which the narrative of the American Dream no longer held purchase for the majority of Americans.
If these articles were taken to be representative of public discourse before and after the American economic crisis, one might conclude that the way mainstream print media understand and talk about homelessness changes over time in response to the social and economic context. But it cannot be taken for granted that these articles represented the whole of public discourse. Indeed, there were a vast number of voices and perspectives interacting, competing, negating, and reinforcing each other in public discourse at any given time.

**Hypothesis**

In this dissertation I advance the hypothesis that the way the print media, especially articles in newspapers, discussed homelessness changed from 2005 to 2011. I examine a large number of articles from a variety of sources in order to identify recurring themes and changing trends in the articulation of those themes.

I argue that articles published in major American newspapers tended to draw on a set of ideas, vocabulary, and themes when touching on the subject of homelessness. There was never a homogeneous discourse concerning homelessness and homeless people, but rather tendencies that changed over time. The changes in these tendencies are quantifiable, but qualitative analysis is also necessary given the changing nature of news reporting and the economic backdrop and major news events that took place around time of publication.

Public discourse concerning homelessness prior to the housing crisis was characterized by a tendency to individualizing terms, focusing more on the characteristics of homeless people than causes of homelessness, and when causes of homelessness were discussed, they tended to be: 1) life accidents, such as a natural disaster that destroyed a
family’s home; 2) disabling life conditions, such as physical or mental illness; and 3) poor life choices or individual moral failings, such as criminal behaviors and addiction to substances.

I contend that, by the end of 2011, public discourse concerning homelessness tended to be characterized more by structural accounts and increasingly focused on causes of homelessness rather than descriptions of homeless people. Homelessness became discussed more as a consequence of: 1) economic fluctuations, such as a tightening job market; 2) government policies regulating banks, especially those concerning foreclosure; and 3) the inability of American society to ensure the economic security of working, middle-class families. Consequently, representations of homeless people became more sympathetic as the housing crisis worsened, and more and more families found themselves losing their homes, facing eviction, and entering a life in shelters or on the streets. A key facet of an increasingly sympathetic discourse was the subtle implication in newspaper articles that people facing homelessness were not to blame for their situation. More and more articles tended to convey the impression that people experiencing homelessness were homeless through no fault of their own. An increasing number of articles began to discuss families rather than individuals, and articles began to emphasize narratives about formerly working- or middle-class people who had fallen into homelessness rather than poor people who had always been struggling to make ends meet. There was an increasing tendency to tell the stories of employed—“hard-working”—people.

An increasingly sympathetic public discourse about homelessness, especially in reference to formerly middle-class families, went hand in hand with the implication that
homelessness could happen to anybody. For millions of Americans who were afraid that they might lose their jobs as the economy worsened, homelessness suddenly became much closer to home. With the majority of Americans one paycheck away from being unable to pay their rent or mortgage, the swelling ranks of formerly middle-class families among shelter populations was a significant cause for concern (Ransel, 2010).

News sources, politicians, advocates, and policymakers focused on growing numbers of educated, suburban workers teetering on the brink of homelessness. Many coined new terms or adopted a new vocabulary for describing the group. Some used the phrase “middle-class homelessness” to describe the changing demographic makeup of the homeless population, whereas others used phrases like “the new homeless” or, as most frequently cited in the present dissertation, “the newly homeless.”

I argue that the housing crisis caused a shift in the way newspapers reported on homelessness. Data concerning the number of people entering shelters, the numbers of evictions and foreclosures, housing price indexes, and job market reports were perpetually making their way into the news. Data concerning homelessness changed dramatically beginning in 2005, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began requiring local jurisdictions receiving HUD funding to conduct biennial point-in-time counts of their homeless populations (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). Every 2 years since this requirement was imposed on localities, newspapers reported to the public the raw number of homeless people in their city, state, and nation as compared with previous years. Local and national attention to the issue was ensured for a short time after the count data was released.
Homelessness is surprisingly not routinely discussed as a problem of housing. Often, a newspaper article discussing a homeless person is little more than a human-interest piece, chronicling the plight of an addict or victim of domestic violence. There was something about the housing crisis that forced the subject of housing to the forefront of media discourse: the bubble that burst during the crisis had been characterized by soaring rents and overvalued homes. These high housing costs created a severe rent burden for low-income renters. Rather than benefiting from a sudden decline in housing values, poor renters found themselves forced out of their apartments, as landlords were forced to come to grips with the sudden depreciation in the values of their rental properties and especially as rising unemployment put strains on the budgets of renters that offset lower rents (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2013). The ensuing Great Recession also hit the lower class the hardest, as the struggling job market shed demand for unskilled labor (Fisman, 2012).

For homeowners, the housing crisis brought them closer to the brink of homelessness by eviscerating their home equity, which for decades had been one of the primary repositories of wealth for American families (Gould-Ellen & Dastrup, 2012). Data concerning the housing crisis quickly flooded newspapers as experts and policymakers weighed in on the subject with quotations, speeches, and op-eds and authored articles.

The question remains as to how and why print media began to tie homelessness to conversations about the housing crisis and how and why the discourse about homelessness began to change shape. Were newspapers intentionally trying to alarm their middle-class readers by making increasing references to the specter of homelessness in
order to sell more papers, or were articles being published in response to the genuine concern of readers in the changing economic context? Were policymakers introducing legislation and making pronouncements in response to media fanfare and/or public opinion, or were they reacting to economic data being reported by academics?

It is not my intention to discuss how news reporting, empirical data, public opinion, and policy discourse influence each other. Rather, I provide a qualitative and quantitative analysis of changing tendencies in media discourse concerning homelessness over the period 2005–2011: before, during, and after the housing crisis and ensuing Great Recession. Of particular importance will be an examination of the discursive pathways or pivots around which representations of homeless people become increasingly sympathetic, causative, and structural in nature. I will identify changes in the frequencies of the appearance of common words and themes along with changes in how frequently prevalent words and themes are related to each other; for example, the changing rate at which savings are discussed in tandem with foreclosures.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2 I provide a review of the literature concerning the academic study of homelessness. Of particular importance is the evolution, since at least the Civil War, of what DePastino (2005) calls the “public image of homelessness.” This image evolved in response to and in tandem with changing conceptions of the home in an ever-changing American economy that was increasingly geared toward wage labor and industrialization. I examine several dichotomies that have characterized public conceptions of and responses to homelessness, such as deserving/undeserving, free/unfree, individual/structural, and criminalization/liberalization. I then examine studies that
examine newspaper representations of homelessness, the most recent of which stops just shy of the current research period.

In Chapter 3 I introduce the methodology of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of newspaper discourse concerning the subject of homelessness before, during, and after the housing crisis and Great Recession. I selected four cities that have similar population sizes, economic histories, and homeless populations, and I examine the major newspaper from each city for content concerning homelessness. The four newspapers are *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Buffalo News*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and the Newark *Star-Ledger*. Chapter 3 briefly explores the modern economic context of each city prior to the housing crisis, especially the characteristics of the homeless population.

In Chapter 4 I present the data from each newspaper concerning the quantity of articles published pertaining to homelessness and the relative proportion of articles about homelessness to the overall publication rate of each newspaper. Analysis includes the restructuring that all four newspapers (indeed, most newspapers in the U.S.) underwent during the late 2000s. I present data from each newspaper concerning the changing emphasis placed on certain demographics of people experiencing homelessness; namely families, children, and veterans. Finally, I examine changes in the tendency of each newspaper to cast the causes of homelessness in either individual or structural terms. I aggregate the data from the four newspapers to identify common trends.

In Chapter 5 I examine the emergence of the public identity of the Newly Homeless. Using the methodology and tools of Critical Discourse Analysis, I show how the Newly Homeless were discursively constructed as a category of the deserving poor. I present data showing that the way people experiencing homelessness were represented
had implications for whether and how articles advanced calls to action to address homelessness, such as appeals to increase the supply of affordable housing or offer financial assistance to prevent people from losing their homes.

I conclude the dissertation with Chapter 6, in which I discuss the possible implications for policy and advocacy of the contemporary tendencies of print media discourse concerning homelessness. I discuss the relevance of the findings for other academic theories of media discourse, such as the susceptibility of tendencies in newspaper reporting to change. Finally, I suggest opportunities for further research.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Homelessness is an interdisciplinary subject *par excellence*. Academic studies of homelessness draw from fields as diverse as public health, history, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, public policy, philosophy, cultural studies, and psychiatry. Research on homelessness includes, but is not limited to, accounts of the causes, the effects, and proposed solutions.

Researchers have explained the causes of homelessness as stemming from a myriad of social problems. Examples include: mental illness, domestic violence, poor health, lack of sufficient public health policies and practices, low wages, natural disasters (including those stemming from global climate change), racial and gender economic inequality, and on and on (Bringle, 2011; Sparks, 2012). As such, there are innumerable scholarly works addressing the subject, and there are even academic journals primarily concerned with homelessness, such as *The Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* and *The European Journal of Homelessness*.

Many think tanks and advocacy organizations exist dedicated to researching homelessness, such as the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and there is a host of government agencies at the state, local, and national levels that produce data and reports on homelessness, such as the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. All of this is to say that an exhaustive review of literature on the subject of homelessness is impossible. Instead, this chapter will focus on how homelessness has been socially constructed in public discourse, in public policy, and in academic theorizations.
This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will examine the emergence and transformations the public image of homelessness in the United States. The second section will detail various dichotomies that have come to characterize public and academic understandings of homelessness. The third section will examine studies similar to my dissertation, with a focus on the methodological inspiration for much of my research, namely Ange-Marie Hancock’s *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (2004).

**Section 1: The Public Image of Homelessness**

In the United States, there is a variety of competing interests seeking to define and measure the size and makeup of the homeless population. The number of people said to be experiencing homelessness is itself hotly contested (Gould & Williams, 2010), and the definition of what constitutes homelessness has changed dramatically over time (Culhane, Metraux, Byrne, Stino, & Bainbridge, 2013). According to Jacobs, Kemeny, and Manzi (1999), “homelessness is a classic example of how the struggle by different vested interests to impose a particular definition of homelessness on the policy agenda is critical to the way in which homelessness is treated as a social problem” (p. 2).

The fact that the definition of homelessness is so debated and subject to changes over time suggests that homelessness as a social phenomenon is not an empirical given but rather a set of assumptions about what constitutes a home and who counts as homed and homeless. According to Cronley (2010), “societal understanding of homelessness stems from a process of social construction in which, over time, differing groups have framed the definition and debate” (p. 319).
Todd DePastino (2005) traced the origins of the image or idea of homelessness to the period immediately after the American Civil War, when droves of soldiers who had not been repatriated roamed the countryside without a permanent place to settle; they were known collectively as “The Great Army of Tramps.” The word tramp, according to DePastino, emerged in the post–Civil War era:

In what one commentator called “a happy innovation of language,” Americans in 1873 coined the word “tramp” to describe the legion of men traveling the nation “with no visible means of support.” Previously, the noun had denoted “an invigorating walking expedition” or, during the Civil War, “a long, tiring, or toilsome walk or march.” Stressing mobility, the new usage also signified a sense of novelty, as if older terms such as “vagrant” or “vagabond” were somehow inappropriate at the moment. (p. 5)

In many senses, the sheer number of tramps forced tramps to be understood as a category in their own right with distinct qualities, making them into a public figure or image. It was during the 1870s that tramps became identified as a serious social problem (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992). Indeed, the frequency of public discourse concerning the subject of tramps even led some commentators to consider them a national obsession (Katz, 1983).

One of the key features of the image of a roving tramp army was mobility, which became possible due to the development of the nation’s railroad infrastructure and the evolving demand for seasonal labor. With advances in agricultural technology, the rural demand for labor decreased in the late 1800s, and the tramp army was increasingly drawn to urban centers in the search for wage labor. The period immediately prior to the Civil War was, according to DePastino, a unique time in which the home as a locus of
production (i.e., farming, skilled trades, etc.) began to decline, and for the first time “a majority of Americans in the industrializing North worked for others” (p. 9). Indeed, it was during this time that the word “unemployment” first appeared in print (in 1887) (p. 9).

Homelessness during this time was understood by and large as a choice (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992). For married and homed working men, the mass of migrant workers represented a threat to their jobs, and hence the tramp army became understood in the public imaginary as a threat to domesticity itself: “the tramp’s homelessness denoted a broader-based moral crisis of domesticity, a crisis of men, as one religious journal put it, ‘let loose from all the habits of domestic life, wandering about without aim or home’” (DePastino, 2005, p. 25). Of significance is the fact that the notion of homelessness as a choice coincided with the normative denunciation of homelessness and its characterization as a threat.

As the economic demand for labor grew in the late 19th century, the economic necessity of migrant labor became more apparent, and national discourses surrounding tramps began to shift. Public images of homelessness began to shift from the image of the tramp to that of the hobo. The hobo represented a condition of homelessness in which life on the road and the very idea of unbound (e.g., undomesticated) labor became palatable. “As hobo labor grew, so did urban lodging house neighborhoods, which sheltered jobless workers and then shipped them back out to the field. It was these ‘main stem’ and ‘slave market’ districts where hoboes met, mingled, and together forged a group identity that drew upon shared experiences of class, plebeian notions of whiteness, and peculiar expressions of masculinity” (p. 61).
These districts became known as skid row districts. They were characterized by brothels, cheap boarding houses, saloons, and gambling houses. Essentially, they were places where hoboes and unwed men seeking seasonal labor could spend their paychecks, find work, or find a place to stay for the evening (Siegal & Inciardi, 1982). The image of skid row became one of the most enduring images of homelessness in the American psyche (Hopper, 2003). The contributions of hoboes to the industrialization of the United States has often been overlooked, and hoboes played an important role in building the railroads they so often traveled (Hix, 2015).

It was during the early 1900s that academic institutions began to take interest in hobo life and culture. Haskell (1977) argued that the period following the Civil War up until 1909 represented a period in which social sciences gained prominence and credibility as a professional school of thought. One work in particular turned the sociological gaze onto the subject of homelessness: Nels Anderson’s book *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, published in 1923. Anderson’s book ushered in an entire field of sociological inquiry into the subject of homelessness. Sociologists at the University of Chicago published dozens of studies, and this garnered public and political interest in reforming skid rows through housing codes and charitable outreach organizations (DePastino, 2005).

During the Great Depression, the federal government took on a much greater role for assuming the care of the growing ranks of impoverished and homeless Americans (Hopper, 2003). In 1933, the National Committee on Care of Transient and Homeless identified 1.2 million people experiencing homelessness (Burt, 1992). In 1937, as part of the growing federal role in social welfare, Congress passed the first federal housing
program, and a second policy followed in 1949 with the goal that “every American would have a decent home and suitable living environment” (Cronley, 2010; Wright, Rubin, & Devine, 1998). As a result of these policies, hobo culture gradually died out in the 1940s (Hix, 2015).

In the 1960s, President Johnson’s War on Poverty treated homelessness as a structural issue with roots in economic injustice and widespread poverty (Cronley, 2010). During the 1970s, the populations of skid rows across the country declined dramatically as they ceased to be centers of labor recruitment and, at the same time, as entitlements made better housing options available in other parts of the city (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Urban renewal, including the gentrification of low-cost skid-row housing options, also contributed to the decline of skid rows, with several researchers predicting the eventual disappearance of skid rows altogether (Bahr & Caplow, 1974; Lee, 1980).

Starting in the 1980s, a new type of homelessness began to appear, and the ranks of these so-called “new homeless” grew at startling rates. A review of 40 studies from 1983 to 1990 (Rossi, 1990) found that every study during this period concluded that the size, concentration, and demographic makeup of the homeless population in the United States was changing extensively. The homeless population, previously made up of mostly old, White men, was becoming more diverse in terms of gender, age, and race (Rossi, 1990). Whereas rates of mental illness, physical disability, alcoholism, and serious criminal records are similar for 1970s and 1980s homeless populations, the huge upswing in shelterlessness that began in the 1980s and continues to the present day is markedly different in three important respects.
First, the so-called “new” homelessness (Rossi, 1990) or “advanced homelessness” (Marcuse, 1996) is characterized primarily by a condition of shelterlessness; that is, more people are sleeping in parks, alleyways, cars, and such. The magnitude of the transformation from “home-less” to “shelter-less” cannot be overstated. Consider, for example, that Bogue (1963) found only approximately 100 unsheltered individuals in Chicago, whereas 884 were reported in 2010 (Lin, 2011). This represents an almost 900% increase in shelterlessness by raw numbers alone, not taking into account that Chicago’s population in 2010 had fallen by 25% since its 1960s highs. In New York, shelterless numbers swelled to rates not seen since its peak in 1936 during the Depression (Marcuse, 1996).

Second, post-1980 homelessness was characterized by significantly more severe economic destitution. Bogue (1963) estimated a median income of $1,058 in 1958 dollars in the early 1960s, which, adjusted for inflation, would amount to $6,392 in 2001 dollars. By contrast, the median annual income reported by Burt, Aron, and Valente (2001) is $3,600. In sum, the new homeless are forced to live on about half of what the old homeless did.

Third, African Americans are, statistically, vastly overrepresented in every nationwide measure of homelessness (Rossi, 1990). A survey of 27 cities found the sample homeless population to be 49% African American, 35% Caucasian, and 13% Hispanic (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). By comparison, the demographic distribution of the United States is 12.6% African American, 72.4% Caucasian, and 16.4% Hispanic (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2010). Homelessness, as will be discussed below, both stems from and reinforces racialized concentrated poverty.
At roughly the same time that the demographic and social situation of the homeless population began to change, a significant public and academic misunderstanding about homelessness emerged in the 1980s. Some researchers have dubbed this misunderstanding the “myth of psychiatric abandonment,” and the term refers to public and academic notions that the sudden change in the size and makeup of the homeless population in the 1980s was the direct result of the deinstitutionalization of state psychiatric facilities that took place in the 1960s and 1970s (Mossman, 1997). Empirical data has repeatedly shown this perception of the surge in homelessness as caused by mass deinstitutionalization to be false (Hamid, Wykes, & Stansfeld, 1993).

As the public and academic understanding of homelessness began to change in the 1970s and 1980s with the emergence of New Homelessness, policies began to reduce the federal role in social welfare regarding housing, and this resulted in cuts to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding by 80% between 1980 and 1989 (Koschinsky, 1998). At the same time, the early 1980s saw a flurry of media attention to the issue of homelessness, and this media coverage tended to focus on structural factors affecting changes in the homeless population (Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004).

Homelessness in the 1980s “was widely regarded as a national emergency, one that drew heavy media coverage and gave rise to mass demonstrations” (Ratnesar, 1999). In 1986, approximately 5 million people demonstrated in the “Hands Across America” campaign to raise money for programs for the homeless and draw attention to the issue of the growing numbers of people experiencing homelessness (Donohoe, 2004). These
demonstrations and growing public outcry put pressure on the Reagan administration to pass legislation to address the homeless issue (Kaufman, 2004; Ratnesar, 1999).

It was during this fanfare over homelessness that homeless advocates, concerned with the growing and changing demographics of the homeless population, lobbied for and succeeded in passing the first federal homeless policy in 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. In keeping with the trend of cuts in welfare, “the Act interpreted homelessness according to the individual perspective and thus provided short-term emergency relief and social programs to address individual level problems. Since then, homelessness has gained increasing prominence as a social and political issue, although the general perception of its causes remains largely one of individual problems” (Cronley, 2010, p. 323).

A 1980 survey of 1,507 Americans found that people tended to understand poverty as a result of an individual’s lack of effort and/or loose morals. According to the survey authors, “the only schema for explaining lack of success (other than barriers erected by prejudiced or sexist individuals) that many Americans have available is lack of effort, ability, or some other character flaw of individuals” (Kluegel & Smith, 1986, p. 307). The authors further concluded that “the dominant ideology is quite resistant to challenge, even to that presented by the high levels of unemployment and inflation during the 1970s.”

Unless economic conditions reach the point where most Americans believe that they have little or no hope of personal economic advancement — a condition, of course, that no one desires — the belief that individuals in America in general get the economic status they deserve is likely to persist. (Kluegel & Smith, p. 307)
Despite surveys showing a general public belief that poverty was determined by individual factors, surveys concerning public understandings of the concept of homelessness in particular found different results. Four studies, conducted in 1987, 1988, 1989, and 1990, respectively, showed that the general public tended to think that homelessness was caused by structural factors. According to Lee, Link, and Toro (1991):

This structural understanding of homelessness becomes noteworthy when it is juxtaposed with the public’s understanding of poverty in general. Previous inquiries into beliefs about social inequality are unanimous in demonstrating that Americans hold the poor responsible for their lot; most people think poverty is rooted to a greater degree in internal traits (a lack of talent, motivation, etc.) than in external (i.e., structural) conditions. Such a conviction presumably grows out of adherence to what has been termed the dominant ideology, a set of values proposing that in a democratic society with equal opportunity for all, individuals by definition control their own socioeconomic destiny. Why, then, is the public so willing to adopt a structural perspective on homelessness? One answer to this question…is that the media, advocates, government officials, and other “operatives” have treated homelessness as a structural problem often enough to override the dominant ideology, altering public images in the process. (p. 656–657)

Despite the fanfare and policy changes that took place in the 1980s, the 1990s saw a period of relative stability in public opinion and media attention to the issue of homelessness. A notable study administered in 1993–1994 and then repeated in 2001 found no significant change in public attitudes, assumptions, and knowledge about
homelessness, but it did find that public support for services increased, and negative stereotypes about homelessness decreased (Tompsett, Toro, Guzicki, Manrique, & Zatakia, 2006). Another study concluded that homelessness received little attention in television and radio media in 1993–1996 (Lind & Danowski, 1999).

In 2001, HUD began articulating the goal of ending chronic homelessness. President George W. Bush called attention to the problem in 2003, including the elimination of chronic homelessness in his goals for his fiscal year budget. Bush’s strategy received endorsement by the U.S. Conference of Mayor’s in 2004 (Willse, 2010). This emphasis on chronic homelessness foregrounded the individual needs of homeless individuals, especially those with disabilities, and homelessness was cast as an extreme form of the dysfunction of individuals rather than social structures or systems (Willse, 2010).

At the urging of HUD, more than 300 cities formulated and began implementing 10-year plans to end homelessness. These strategies including creating coordinated access systems that prioritized the needs of the most vulnerable, especially those who were chronically homeless and “literally homeless.” These overall frameworks for ending homelessness did not focus on increasing wages or increasing the supply of available affordable housing; rather, they emphasized targeted interventions for vulnerable individuals (Culhane & Metraux, 2008).

The majority of these plans began between 2003 and 2005. How did public discourse surrounding homelessness from 2005 through the housing crisis and Great Recession change in the context of major economic change and the implementation of country-wide strategies to address homelessness?
A new era of homelessness discourse essentially began around the year 2005. It was during this time that point-in-time (PIT) counts became mandatory every 2 years, 10-year plans began being implemented in cities nationwide, federal agencies began to focus on ending chronic homelessness, and the HUD began prioritizing Housing First approaches and permanent supportive housing. A major analysis of media discourse surrounding homelessness has not been made since this major transformation in federal policies (with local implementation).

All in all, homelessness has proved to be a serious and intractable social problem that is inseparable from the historical racialization and concentration of poverty in U.S. cities. The housing crisis and the ensuing Great Recession brought to the foreground of public conscience that the lack of affordable housing and homelessness were related to neoliberal policies and practices. I suggest that a shift in public rhetoric about homelessness took place from 2005 to 2011, when public discourse became increasingly focused on economic structures rather than individuals and simultaneously became more sympathetic to people experiencing homelessness. It was during this period that media references to housing, economic structures, policies, population numbers, employment statistics, and other structural indicators began to increase in frequency.

Section 2: Dichotomies of Homelessness

As discussed in the previous section, homelessness is itself a social construction whose meaning has been contested and changes over time (Cronley, 2010). According to DePastino (2005):

Because homelessness is always a cultural category, an ascribed condition that does not necessarily define or dominate the experiences of the very poor, the new
scholarship failed to reach definitive conclusions about what exactly homelessness was and what made people susceptible to it. Indeed, the complex host of factors identified by researchers as contributing to homelessness suggests that the very category was itself an ideological attempt to reduce a series of intractable, long-term social and economic developments to a specialized and discreet social problem. (p. 254)

Representations of homelessness have tended to fall across an array of dichotomies or axes (Feldman, 2004). Some research examines public discourse in terms of whether representations of people experiencing homelessness are sympathetic or unsympathetic (Amster, 2003). This sympathetic/unsympathetic dichotomy has been the focus of most of the public opinion research described in Section 1.

The sympathetic/unsympathetic dichotomy has many resonances with the common dichotomy of deserving/undeserving. This dichotomy surrounding poverty has been well documented (Applebaum, 2003; Zatz, 2012). Researchers have specifically observed that the deserving/undeserving dichotomy also plays out in discourse surrounding homelessness (Rosenthal, 2000; Wright, 1988). On these accounts, children, veterans, and domestic violence victims are characterized as deserving of public assistance, whereas criminals, addicts, and people thought to be abusing the welfare system are thought to be undeserving of aid.

Other researchers identify the free/unfree dichotomy as one of the major axes for understanding homelessness (DePastino, 2005; Feldman, 2004). Along this axis, people experiencing homelessness are sometimes romanticized as adventurers traveling the open road or perhaps people living a life of homelessness by choice. On the other side of this
axis, some people experiencing homelessness are cast as excluded from society and homelessness as a result of social forces beyond their control (Averitt, 2003).

Another axis that frequently dominates the literature is that of criminalization versus legalization. Researchers point to a steady rise of anti-homeless legislation that swept the nation beginning in the late 1980s and gained prominence through the 1990s and early 2000s (Baker, 1991; Fasanelli, 2000; Mitchell, 1997). Advocates and academics point to laws that placed restrictions on the movements and behaviors of people experiencing homelessness as part of a broader effort to criminalize the condition of homelessness itself, and many argued that people without homes should have legal protections given their lack of private space (Fasanelli, 2000; Mitchell, 1997).

Feldman (2004) also identified the “sacred/profane” dichotomy (p. 6). For Feldman, the bodies of people without homes are cast as either lives in need of saving (sacred) or in need of elimination (profane). Feldman’s account resonates with other scholarship that understands the bodies of poor people and people experiencing homelessness as subject to discipline and control (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Wacquant, 2009).

By far the most common axis in public discourse, policy analysis, and academic research has been the individual/structural dichotomy. Main (1998) suggested that literature about homelessness since the mid-1980s acknowledged two types of causes: individual, such as mental illness and substance abuse, and structural, such as the lack of affordable housing and increasing rates of poverty.

Parting with the “sterile debate regarding the causes of homelessness that dominated much of the 1980s” (Koegel, 2004), most researchers in roughly the mid-
1990s came to agree with what Koegel called the “structural context” model and what Lee, Tyler, and Wright (2010) referred to as the macro/micro model. In this framework, political, social, and economic processes culminated in a situation in the 1980s and early 1990s in which poor individuals found themselves facing a shortage of affordable housing even as they found it more difficult to make a living. In this context, the most likely individuals to fall into homelessness were those with mental disabilities or substance abuse problems (Koegel, 2004).

Academic research concerning the structural/individual or macro/micro model has evolved to include more nuanced accounts, with the primary structural vulnerabilities being poverty and housing shortages. With regards to the structural problem of housing, many researchers argued that the structural context of the rise and persistence of the new homelessness in the 1980s was the increasingly diminishing supply of affordable housing and an increasing number of impoverished people in demand of such housing (Elliott & Krivo, 1991; Equitable Housing Institute, 2012; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008). Indeed, many commentators argued that the primary cause of homelessness was the lack of affordable housing. For example, a 27-city survey published by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2004) identified the lack of affordable housing as the leading cause of homelessness.

Several researchers argued that homelessness was akin to a game of musical chairs (McChesney, 1990; Shinn & Gillespie, 1994). In this account, the players are low-income individuals and families, and the chairs are affordable housing opportunities. As the number of available low-income houses decreases, some people are inevitably left
homeless. The problem is compounded when the number of low-income individuals and families increases.

Carter (2011) observed that 4 million affordable units were removed from the housing market between 1970 and 1990 and that rent burdens in the 1980s and 1990s increased as well. In the 2000s, the gap in affordable units continued to expand, reaching the highest levels in history between 2007 and 2009 (da Nunez & Bazerjian, 2012). During this same period, the number of impoverished families increased by 13.5%, and the number of affordable units decreased by 11.5%. Some commentators referred to that situation as “the affordable housing crisis” (Salsich, 2011).

The structural shortage of housing was more complex than simply the raw number of units available. Burt (1992) noted that “housing affordability” is a slippery term: housing stock, available income, and discrimination all create nuances as to what is affordable for whom and where (p. 31). “Source of income discrimination,” whereby a landlord denies a tenant application based on elements such as whether he or she receives government benefits such as Social Security Disability Income is one example (Johnson-Spratt, 1999).

Other contributors to the macro/micro model of understanding homelessness point to the significance of poverty as the primary indicator (Bringle, 2011). Structural determinants of poverty are also complicated. Wilson (1987) paid particular attention to the racial aspects. For Wilson, the post-war settlement and concentration of Blacks in urban centers was followed by the out-migration of middle-class Blacks to the suburbs in the 1970s. The population that remained in these Black neighborhoods was largely poor and unskilled. In the 1980s, the growth of computer technology and the
internationalization of economic activity resulted in a steep drop in demand for low-skilled labor. In addition, the suburbanization of production (what is frequently called post-Fordism) placed low-skilled work out of reach or out of convenience for inner-city Blacks (Wilson, 1998).

The high joblessness that came to characterize these areas of concentrated poverty created a situation of welfare dependency, an atmosphere of idleness and irregularity, and the social isolation of neighborhoods. Without a vibrant middle and working class, the social support institutions of Black neighborhoods, such as churches and civic centers, dwindled and deteriorated (Wilson, 1987). The lack of these informal networks of social order, when combined with joblessness and the resulting informal economies, made these neighborhoods vulnerable to drugs and crime, making them “breeding grounds” for homelessness (Wilson, 1993, p. 21).

Massey and Denton (1993) argued that Wilson’s account of concentrated poverty and the underclass placed too much emphasis on the out-migration of middle-class Blacks from the inner city. They argued that racialized concentrated poverty was the result of active efforts by residents of White neighborhoods, real estate developers, and city planners to control what race/class combination could live where.

The neoliberal globalization that brought about transformations such as international offshoring and the shift to suburban post-Fordism of the 1970s also created new situations in which profit could still be had in urban centers. Gentrification led to the renovation, demolition, and redevelopment of many low-income housing areas in city centers across the United States in favor of more profitable high-rises of middle- to upper-class units and office spaces (DePastino, 2005). Rather than allowing the displaced
residents of gentrified low-income neighborhoods to settle in White middle-class neighborhoods, residents were spatially concentrated within racial and economic enclaves (Marcuse, 1996).

Moreover, scholars argued that the structural homelessness that emerged in the 1980s from racialized concentrations of poverty tended to be redirected back into these already impoverished areas. These neoliberal practices for managing the spatial distribution of homelessness operated via a simultaneous “push and pull” strategy—“a push out of spaces where the homeless are not wanted, and a pull into spaces no longer of concern to dominant groups in the city, specifically into the heart of a black ghetto” (Marcuse, 1996, p. 193).

The “push” of the homeless out of commercially significant areas and commercially viable neighborhoods was primarily accomplished through policing. Known collectively as “anti-homeless laws,” legislators and administrators passed regulations that enabled the policing of public space in order to manage the homeless populations of cities. The trend of increasing numbers of anti-homeless laws and their enforcement is considered by many to have begun in earnest in the early to mid-1990s (Foscarinis, Cunningham-Bowers, & Brown, 1999; Mitchell, 1998; Saelinger, 2006). A 2002 survey of 50 major cities across the United States found that, without exception, laws were passed that banned certain activities commonly performed by homeless people in public spaces, such as sleeping or loitering (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2003). What characterized these laws was their ability to be enforced selectively or implemented discretionarily (Saelinger, 2006). Many commentators employed the term “criminalization of homelessness” to describe these new laws because someone
without a home could not help but violate them; for example, laws concerning public
urination or loitering (Baker, 1991; Mitchell, 1997).

The “pull” vector that drew homelessness into commercially nonviable areas was
accomplished through the zoning and siting of homeless shelters, resource centers,
transitional housing, re-entry and rehabilitation programs, and low-income housing in
already low-income (and predominantly Black) neighborhoods. According to Marcuse
(1996), “the spatial concentration of homelessness and poverty resulting from these
policies creates a vicious circle: the more concentrated the poverty, the lower the level of
public services, the greater the deterioration of the physical and social environment, the
greater in turn will be the concentration of poverty and the physical, social and economic
abandonment that accompanies it” (p. 194).

The underclass—that is, spatial and racial concentrations of impoverished
individuals and families—was actively produced as a process of managing the
displacements taking place as city structures adapted to global economic changes while at
the same time preserving some neighborhoods of luxury homes and mansions essentially
untouched in terms of their overall economic and racial compositions.

According to Wacquant (2009), those living in areas with few job opportunities
were compelled to seek welfare or to work in the informal economy. Both of these
options were contrary to the expectations of neoliberal ideals, and so the jobless poor
were cast as lazy welfare recipients or criminal thieves and drug-pushers. These non-
jobseekers represented what was commonly referred to as the “undeserving poor.” The
neoliberal impulse was reinscribed in these practices as signified by both workfare and
prisonfare, mechanisms by which even the jobless poor are assigned tasks of labor.
More recently, theorists in the agency/structure debate argued that neoliberalism was able to draw sustenance by working to fix the problems that were its own creation. For instance, the HOPE VI program privatized public housing initiatives, providing federal funding to private programs to demolish and rebuild sections of cities that have suffered under the weight of racialized concentrated poverty (Spalding, 2008). Similarly, discussions were held about privatizing city shelters in New York (Lazaroff, 1998). In August 2012, Chicago privatized its shelter transportation network (Byrne, 2012).

The literature concerning media coverage and public policy has shown that, since the emergence of New Homelessness during the late 1970s and through the 1980s, there has been movement along each of these axes. Along the sympathetic/unsympathetic axis, 1980s public discourse showed concern that gradually waned to eventually predominantly unsympathetic discourse that highlighted moral deficiencies. Along the deserving/undeserving axis, the moral deficiencies meta-narrative increasingly cast people experiencing homelessness as undeserving as a whole, with exceptions notably for veterans. The individual/structural axis has tended to show both individual and structural accounts of homelessness in public discourse, even as federal policy has become increasing individualizing (especially in the early late 1990s and early 2000s) in how it defines and address homelessness. Finally, along the criminalization/liberalization axis, the trend has been toward increasing criminalization in both public discourse and law.

Section 3: Similar Studies

A study of particular importance for the present dissertation is Hancock’s *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (2004). Hancock sought to explore the prevalence of common attributes that were ascribed to welfare mothers in the
media. The attributes she examined included “overly fertile,” “lazy,” “drug users,” and so on. Hancock’s data set was drawn from the period of the welfare reform debates during 1995–1996, and it examined both newspaper writings and the transcripts of congressional debates.

Hancock developed a concept of a “public identity,” and she sought to prove the existence of this concept through an analysis of public discourse. Hancock’s concept of a public identity drew from Rawls’ account of a public identity that is a public presentation of the self (p. 4). Such an account of identity entailed an emphasis on the agency of the subject in the political sphere. However, Hancock departed from and resisted accounts of public identity that emphasized agency: “one’s public identity is conditioned not simply by one’s own speech and action but also by others’ perception, interpretation, and manipulation—particularly for those citizens who lack political equality” (p. 4).

Hancock wanted to show how the image of the welfare queen was a public identity. In particular, media and political discourse surrounding people on welfare tended to construct the welfare recipients as mostly hyper-fertile and lazy. Recipients of welfare were among the most politically powerless groups, along with immigrants, who had very little control over the political policies that affected them and the public representation of their identities (Kornblum & Julian, 2003, p. 157). Hancock argued that individualistic accounts of identity that emphasized self-presentation or self-representation ignored the power dynamics entailed in representations of group identities, especially where normative values were ascribed to those identities.

Hancock’s aim was not simply to prove that the public identity of the welfare queen existed but also to show that this public identity enabled a “politics of disgust”
wherein marginalized groups “find their voices devalued or disrespected, increasing their isolation and alienation from the public sphere” (p. 4). Hancock argued that the public identity of the welfare queen and the ensuing politics of disgust ultimately preconfigured the debate about welfare reform whereby “alternative policy options considered important by many welfare mothers, such as postsecondary educational opportunities, services for survivors of domestic violence, and sustainable wages, were generally ignored within the marketplace of ideas” (p. 142).

The social impact of a public identity that fosters a politics of disgust is a stifling of the democratic process that shuts out the voices of members of marginalized groups in particular, furthering their disempowerment in the democratic sphere of public deliberation and in the hallways of decision-making institutions (Hancock notes the “absolute silence of welfare mothers within the floor debate” on welfare reform) (p. 139).

The politics of disgust also strips away the legitimacy of the voices of those whose identities are prefigured by a public identity, and this “prevents those who would normally be inclined to stand in solidarity from doing so” (p. 147). Taken as a whole:

Public identity and the politics of disgust condition the process of public judgment through its impact on choice of common conduct, evaluations of the legitimacy of those making claims, and citizens’ subsequent listening power. These artifacts of inequality curtail the democratic potential of legislative policy making by infusing the process with misperceptions, misrepresentations, and emotional miscues that reinforce the marginalization of welfare recipients. (p. 147)

When the discursive construction of identities takes place in the context of mainstream media, such as television and print newspapers, self-representation and contestation of
imposed identities becomes especially difficult. For Hancock, the media functions as a “very large microphone” that privileges the perspectives of a select few: those with power and influence (p. 7).

Because the practical experience of those living in poverty and those without political power is one of a constrained ability to self-define their identities as groups, Hancock sought to elucidate a concept of identity that goes beyond one that reduces identity to individual expressions or individualistic determination. For Hancock, “sociopsychological processes,” such as “linguistic conventions, socialization practices, scripts for daily behavior… are also simultaneously social facts—external realities that can exist relatively independently of the wishes, desires, hopes, or plans of any particular participating individual” (p. 14). Sociopsychology as a political philosophical framework enables the theorization of identity as the intersection of individual self-representation and sociopolitical processes, such as public discourse. This framework enables an exploration of imposed identities that are susceptible “to manipulation and distortion,” that “reflect the asymmetrical availability of power to various members of the population seeking to shape such core cultural ideas” (p. 14).

Indeed, it is the very asymmetry of representational powers that necessitates an account of identity that moves beyond strictly individualistic accounts. However, the concept of a public identity does not abandon or preclude analysis of how individuals create their identities but rather acts as a bridge that brings conceptions of identity as self-representations into dialogue with those that explore the social determinants of identity, especially group identities:

Public identity as a political psychological construct reflects the influence of
political culture upon the dialogical interaction between actor and spectator. In this sense, it represents a fundamental step in bridging the gap between political theory and political psychology. Public identities underlie competing issue frames, reinforcing the structures of suggested relationships among citizens, government, political practices, and political values. Public identity represents a bridge concept first and foremost because it attends to the dynamic relationship between actor and spectator. (pp. 14–15)

This is not to say that public identities are impossible to confront and defy resistance and rearticulation at every turn. Rather, public identities are normative ascriptions that are difficult to contest precisely because of the groups to which they attribute normative assumptions are those that lack of political power. This makes public identities particularly intractable, even if not absolute and immutable.

Hancock fleshed out the distinction between, on the one hand, identities that are both self-determined and imposed yet subject to change and, on the other hand, identities that are both self-determined and imposed yet difficult to change by drawing a distinction between stereotypes and public identities. For Hancock, “Public identities are constituted of stereotypes and moral judgments of multiple group identities (e.g. race, class, gender) ascribed to groups that are the subject of legislative policy. Importantly, they are generally based upon the perceptions of non-group members specifically for the advancement of facially race- or gender-neutral public policy goals” (p. 15). However, “Public identities are socially constructed and include stereotypes but differ from stereotypes for several reasons….Stereotypes function and are susceptible to change given new information about the target of the stereotype” (p. 15).
The distinction for Hancock seemed to hang on the moral judgments that are attached to a public identity. The sociopsychological weight of a persistent moral judgment anchors the public identity in such a way that it is more intractable and resistant to change than a stereotype. In other words, public identities involved stereotypes plus moral judgments: “The cueing of public identity by political elites or the news media involves two distinct cognitive behaviors: the assignment of specific traits and behaviors to an individual (stereotyping), and moral judgments based on the explanations for said traits and behaviors” (p. 16). For Hancock, public identities are more intractable because they are built upon more complicated sociopsychological processes, especially in the context of public and political discourse:

Public identities also differ from traditional stereotypes because of the number of cognitive processes involved….Public identities function more dynamically in the goal-oriented context of politics. Although stereotypes are learned more passively, through exposure and observation, public identities are developed and shared for political goals, as ideological justifications for public policy with little attention to their dissemination as such. (p. 16)

A public identity has the potential to undermine the ability of an individual to participate in the very public discourse that helps to create the public identity. This is the case for two reasons: first, the “negative stereotypes, moral judgments, and frames” ascribed to a particular public identity discourage people from identifying with and struggling to change this public identity; and second, the public identity itself makes it difficult for groups to “accurately interpret and attend to the communicated experiences of marginalized individuals” (pp. 17–18).
Following Hancock’s line of inquiry, I ask whether a public identity of people experiencing homelessness emerged during the period 2005–2011, and to what extent were policy options discussed and debated in public discourse prefigured by prevailing or recurring associations of attributes and assumptions about people experiencing homelessness.

As to Hancock’s methodology, she examined a data set of 149 articles drawn from *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* from 1995–1996 during national welfare reform debates. Hancock coded each article segment for a total of 37 attributes, such as “don’t work” and “system abusers” to track how welfare and welfare recipients were cast in print media. Hancock argued that a recurring set of attributes demonstrated the existence of a public identity, the “welfare queen,” as shown by repeated associations of the attributes “teen mothers,” “overly fertile,” and “don’t work.”

Likewise, I use Hancock’s methodology of tracking attributions and associations to the topic of homelessness. However, there are several notable differences between my dissertation and Hancock’s study. First, my data set is much larger than Hancock’s set. Second, whereas Hancock looked at attributions and associations at a particular point in history, I look at the way attributions and associations changed over time, specifically over the course of the housing crisis. Third, I extend beyond Hancock’s elucidation of the emergence of public identities in media discourse by examining how a major shock in the political economy of the United States played into public identity formation. The economic shock of the housing crisis and recession provided me with opportunities to examine moments of contestation, resistance, counteridentification, solidarity struggles,
and challenges to dominant narratives that Hancock’s work did not reveal during the welfare reform debates.

There are several studies that go beyond examinations of newspaper representations of poverty in general and instead focus on homelessness specifically. Schneider, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts (2010) examined four Canadian newspapers from 2007 to 2008. The total data set consisted of 765 articles. The authors identified common attributes ascribed to people experiencing homelessness who were referenced in the articles. Their study found significant differences in the ways different newspapers from different cities covered and represented homelessness and homeless people. Nonetheless, there are some overarching similarities.

First, most newspaper articles attributed the causes of homelessness to individual factors (65.2%) versus structural factors (34.8%). Second, the majority of homeless individuals represented in the stories were adults (80.5%) and were men (83.8%). Third, the study observed that the overwhelming majority of people quoted in the newspapers were professionals (70.7%) as compared with people experiencing homelessness (18.7%) and ordinary “citizens” (10.6%). The authors found this particular finding alarming, as people experiencing homelessness were largely shut out of media discourse concerning the framing of their situation and solutions to their “problems” (p. 168).

Schneider, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts (2010) noted that the overarching narrative among the newspapers and articles was that readers were urged to view homeless people sympathetically and that homelessness was a problem that needed to be controlled. They found that most articles simultaneously associated homelessness with positive and negative attributes. However, the authors noted that in communities and newspapers
where homelessness was represented more positively, the community was more often referenced as a source for solutions. By contrast, in communities where the newspapers represented homelessness less favorably, the government was often urged to take urgent action.

Remillard and Schneider (2010) extended the analysis of newspaper representations of homelessness to include visual depictions of homeless people. The authors examined 61 photographs that accompanied newspaper articles during the period November 30, 2008, to January 1, 2009. This period was selected in particular because news coverage of homelessness tended to increase in these months; these months are often referred to as the giving season when charities that deal with homelessness push for public attention and funds (p. 78).

The authors found that the majority of photographs championed volunteers. Most pictures of volunteers showed them either giving or acting. Most pictures of homeless people showed them either receiving or in day-to-day activities such as searching through the trash for food. The authors also noted that many of the photographs were accompanied by a dollar amount of services rendered. An example they provide is the headline “Charity given a $76,000 boost” (p. 86).

Based on their analysis of the data set of photographs, Remillard and Schneider reached three conclusions. First, the homeless were depicted as inhabiting another world, far removed from the daily comforts and normal circumstances most readers face. Second, the condition of homelessness was represented as isolating and devoid of community. Third, people who were homeless were portrayed in a condition of decrepitude and lack. The authors concluded that the photographic framing of
homelessness in newspaper articles visually deprived people experiencing homelessness of agency and space in the community.

A study by Huckin (2002) examined 163 newspaper articles from 1999 in order to show how discursive silences played an important role in public discourse. The focus of this work was to show how silences concerning homelessness played an important function in advancing stereotypes and reinforcing traditional understandings of policy and social problems. Unlike this dissertation, Huckin’s study did not chart changes across time and was limited to the period before the Great Recession.

Pascale (2005) examined a set of 413 stories taken from the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and The New York Times during the period 1982–1996. Instead of a quantitative approach, Pascale conducted an “inductive analysis” of patterns in these articles. The author found that the early 1980s saw attempts to distinguish between the “old homeless”; that is, drifters, transients, and vagrants, and bums, and the “new homeless”; that is, those who could not afford housing for economic reasons. By the mid-1980s, Pascale argued, discussions of noneconomic causes of homelessness began to take precedence, and “by the mid-1990s, homelessness was firmly linked to substance abuse, mental illness, and free choice rather than structural problems of wages, layoffs, and housing. Discourse on the homeless focused on unwelcome behavior, including ranting, urinating in public, bathing in fountains, stealing, and panhandling” (p. 256).

The study conducted by Buck, Toro, and Ramos (2004) has the most relevance to my dissertation. The authors sought to chart changes in the quantity and content of newspaper coverage concerning homelessness over a 30-year period. Their study examined 9,032 articles published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los
Angeles Times, and The Chicago Tribune in order to chart changes in the quantity of articles published from 1974 to 2003. Of those 9,032 articles, 574 were randomly sampled for content analysis.

Buck et al. (2004) identified four distinct periods that were quantitatively different in newspaper coverage of homelessness: the pre-interest/early rise period (1974–1981), the peak period (1982–1987), the decline period (1988–1995), and the plateau period (1996–2003). The authors found that there was a steep rise in newspaper coverage of homelessness beginning in the early 1980s that tapered off and eventually plateaued by the late 1990s and early 2000s. The authors found that, during the peak period, representations of homeless people were mostly positive and sympathetic, in part due to public concern about mental illness and deinstitutionalization. They noted that the vocabulary shifted from terms such as “vagrant” to more neutral terms such as “homeless.”

During the 1988–2003 period, the authors noted a marked increase in emphasis on programs and services for the homeless. Overall, during the whole 30-year period, newspaper representations of homelessness placed a greater emphasis on the deficits of homeless people and deviant behaviors and placed less emphasis on structural causes of homelessness. The authors suggested that “another interesting direction for future research might be to examine the media, public opinion, prevalence, and social policies in specific metropolitan areas (perhaps even before and after major policy changes). Qualitative as well as quantitative methods might be used in this type of research” (p. 169).
This dissertation picks up precisely where Buck et al. (2004) suggest; that is, by looking specifically at media discourses in particular metropolitan areas during the time following the end of their study period. However, my dissertation deepens the analysis of Buck et al. by examining how attributions related to people experiencing homelessness did or did not contribute to the formation of a public identity of homelessness during 2005–2011. It further examines how characterizations of people experiencing homelessness related to and were perhaps influenced policy discussions and the range of policy options being considered. By supplementing the methodology of Buck et al. with Hancock’s (2004) analysis of public identity and the way the politics of disgust impacts democratic outcomes, my dissertation both updates the groundbreaking work of Buck et al. and shows the political significance and policy impacts of public discourse surrounding homelessness against the backdrop of major economic change.
Chapter 3: Methodologies

My methodologies combine document analysis, empirical data, and Critical Discourse Analysis. As Hancock (2004) argued, “language plays an essential part in constructing inequality in American political culture. Document analysis is a specialized type of content analysis that consists of a systematic examination of forms of communication to reveal patterns objectively” (p. 19). I will also discuss transformations of public identities during the economic shock of the Great Recession.

Section 1 will detail the methods used for identifying and accumulating the data set, including the search terms used and the decision to base a newspaper article as the unit of analysis. Section 2 will detail the ways in which empirical data concerning homelessness is reported in the United States, especially pertaining to the point-in-time (PIT) counts and data from the U.S. Department of Education. Section 3 will explain the significance of an analysis of metropolitan newspapers rather than national newspapers. This methodological approach significantly sets this dissertation apart from the works of both Hancock (2004) and Buck et al. (2004). The political economy of each of the four cities selected for investigation will be briefly presented, along with the empirical data available concerning the homeless population in these cities. Section 4 will introduce and explain the coding grid that was used to examine every article in the data set. This section will conclude with an introduction as to how the coding grid will be analyzed to determine if and how a public identity of homelessness emerged during the 2005–2011 period and what the implications may have been for public policy discourse.

Section 1: Document Analysis

I drew the data set from The Newsbank Access World News Research Collection.
I identified articles by searching text for the term “homelessness.” That term rather than “homeless” was used for several reasons.

First, the sample set that emerged from searching for “homelessness” was more appropriate to the current study. The goal was to produce a sample set size of approximately 1,000 articles, spanning the years 2005–2011 across all four cities. The term produced a data set of 1,473 articles total for all years and cities combined. The size of the data set that would have resulted from searching for “homeless” was much too large: 10,063 total for all years and cities combined.

Second, due to the restructuring of most major newspapers during the study period, including my four, random sampling was not an option. This is also especially true given the seasonal nature of coverage concerning homelessness, which tends to peak during the winter seasons, as demand for shelters increases and deaths due to exposure increase, in combination with the holiday season, during which charitable giving increases and events for the homeless increase in number (Bunis, Yancik, & Snow, 1996). Instead of statistical sampling, the search term “homelessness” produced a data set in which every single article could be read and coded.

Third, the search term “homeless” produced a large number of articles that were irrelevant, not about homeless persons: articles about homeless animals and the SPCA (Gunts, Kaltenbach, & McCauley, 2009) and a sponsorless junior football league (David, 2008).

My data set includes articles from editorials, newswires, and letters to the editor. This was particularly important because editorials were forums in which members of the public as well as engaged critics could counter the dominant narratives being produced
regarding the housing crisis (Squires, 2011).

I coded each article across all of the attributes. The alternative to this approach would have been to follow a model similar to that used by Hancock (2004), in which the unit of analysis was segments of text. This approach would have enabled the analysis to take into account the tendency of the media to “show both sides” of an issue (Kuypers, 2002, p. 210). For example, one paragraph may contain a quotation from a city official, which would code as a unit under Hancock’s approach. The article could then quote a policy expert, which would be another, different unit within the same article. The article may include several units, and each would express a particular association of homelessness with some other attribute.

Here, I chose the article as the unit of analysis as opposed to a cluster of sentences for several reasons. First, many articles would begin with a framing reference to homelessness, such as the introduction to a narrative about a particular individual. For example, an article in *The Star-Ledger* written in 2008 begins with a summary description of a formerly homeless man: “Howard Tate's journey as a former homeless man who revived his singing career with a Grammy-nominated album in 2003 came full circle last night, as he used his music to bring attention to an organization that fights homelessness” (Williams, 2008). However, it is not until several paragraphs later that his struggle with addiction is described. Using the cluster of sentences approach, the association of homelessness to drug addiction would have been overlooked in the coding process.

This same risk of not capturing articles that should be coded applies to more generalized statements about homelessness, and these articles are especially important to
this dissertation’s examination about public discourse about the housing crisis. One article, entitled “Everyone deserves affordable housing,” discusses how the housing crisis is not just about foreclosures but also about the lack of affordable housing. The author went on to discuss state and federal budgets, unemployment, and political parties, concluding that the end result of the current economic situation will be increased homelessness (Singletary, 2011). Because there was only one mention of homelessness in the article, a sentence-cluster approach would have coded this segment only for affordable housing and missed the association of the housing crisis, political gridlock, budget cuts, and so on.

The second reason for an article-based analysis is that, unlike the term “welfare” in Hancock’s study, there are dozens of terms and expressions to refer to homelessness. Some terms, such as “vagrant” and “squatter” are used as literal stand-ins for “homeless persons.” More common, however, are expressions such as “unsheltered,” “living on the streets,” “living in a shelter,” and so on. The vast number of living situations that can be considered an experience of homelessness includes “sleeps under a bridge,” “without a stable place to live,” “lives in an abandoned building,” “sleeps on the corner of 21st and Broadway,” and so on. Some expressions of homelessness take the form of verb phrases, such as “lost their home due to foreclosure,” “was evicted when he couldn’t pay his electricity bill,” “found himself with only his car.” A sentence-cluster approach would be uniquely difficult given the subject matter of homelessness.

**Section 2: Measurements of the Homeless Population**

Beginning in 2005, all jurisdictions receiving U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding were required to conduct a biennial (every 2 years)
count of their homeless population. Some cities and jurisdictions now conduct the count every year. The first HUD-mandated point-in-time (PIT) count occurred in January 2005. The data collected from each jurisdiction are aggregated into an annual report to Congress, entitled “The State of Homelessness in America.” The PIT count is always conducted in January, and it includes a count of those staying in shelters on the night of the count as well as data collected by a team that surveys the streets on the night of the count to determine the number of people who are unsheltered (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010).

However, the first PIT count was conducted before 2005 in a number of jurisdictions, and in general it is notoriously unreliable. First, the counts take place in the dead of winter, and this means that a high number of people seek shelter in places such as abandoned buildings where they cannot be counted. This is especially true in places like Buffalo, where winters can be brutal (Homeless Alliance of Western New York, 2012). Second, homeless individuals, especially children, tend to hide from public view to avoid harassment by police and for their own safety. A population that tends to hide is difficult to count. Third, homelessness is not a permanent state, and it varies considerably given people’s ability to find alternatives, navigate among various living options, and so on. As such, a significant portion of people who may be homeless throughout the year may simply not be homeless on the night of the PIT count. Fourth, people experiencing homelessness are extremely mobile, moving from one jurisdiction to another in search of stable housing and/or resources (Agans et al., 2014). Fifth, the PIT count changes shape and implementation every year. The number of volunteers canvassing the streets changes from year to year, and the weather conditions on the particular night of the count
significantly influence the outcomes of the count (Simonsen-Meehan & Scholl, 2012).

Sixth, the PIT count has tended to exclude youth populations (Mitchell & Cavallaro, 2014). Finally, the methodology of the counts has changed from year to year. For example, the 2015 PIT count required that all individuals being counted complete or at least participate in a survey to the extent that the survey results could be reduplicated (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014).

Nonetheless, the PIT count has become the gold standard of measuring homelessness in local jurisdictions. At a minimum, the PIT count creates a baseline that is seasonally consistent, locally specific, relatively unbiased, and temporally coordinated because it occurs in every HUD-funded jurisdiction every 2 years (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014).

The PIT count is especially useful for this dissertation because it occurs biennially over the course of the period under investigation. Counts were conducted in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011. Additionally, the PIT count is conducted locally, and the data are aggregated nationally. The newspapers I examine discussed PIT counts in three ways: 1) they announced that the PIT counts were being conducted and reported on the process and the experience of volunteers; 2) they reported the findings of the PIT counts several months after the data had been compiled and formalized into a report; and 3) they referenced the numbers from the PIT counts, both local and national, as snapshots of the homeless population. Chapter 4, Analysis and Discussion, uses PIT count data in discussing newspaper discourse.

**Section 3: Metropolitan and Regional Focus**

Hancock sought to explore the prevalence of common attributes that were
ascribed to welfare mothers in the media. The attributes she examined included “overly fertile,” “lazy,” “drug users,” and so on. Hancock’s data set is drawn from the time of the welfare reform debates during 1995–1996.

In contrast to Hancock, I do not look at national situations but rather at four medium-sized cities. I selected them based on their similar economic histories and comparable population sizes: Buffalo, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Newark, New Jersey. Each of these cities has a major newspaper that also covers regional and national news. Selecting cities whose newspapers do not have national circulation enables this dissertation to examine how local voices can be drivers in shaping debates about such political claims as identity, inclusion/exclusion, and entitlements.

Four cities were chosen to account for the way local discourses are often responsive to events that capture media attention. The metropolitan newspaper focus enables a view of local events, organizations, places, and people. The aggregated data should also show broader trends that reveal whether a larger overarching change in the discursive context is taking place in the Rust Belt. However, each locality has nuances that cause it to stand out from national trends. For example, in late 2009, Baltimore City closed down an encampment under the Jones Falls Expressway (Jones, 2009b). These actions triggered a round of letters to the editor and increased public attention to the issue of homelessness. Statistically, this moment in time and the articles published around the subject might lead one to believe that the trend in media discourse was becoming more sympathetic to the plight on individuals experiencing homelessness rather than simply being an expression of a particular object of media fascination. Examining four cities,
therefore, achieves a balance between capturing local nuances and also grasping larger trends in changing public discourse.

Another reason that these four cities were chosen in relation to each other is that they share a particular political economic history: they are all Rust Belt cities. A more detailed discussion of Rust Belt cities as well as a discussion of each city’s unique history occurs in this chapter. All four cities are former industrial cities that experienced significant declines in their manufacturing sectors during the 1970s and 1980s, coupled with population loss and increasing joblessness and poverty. Because these cities have similar histories, the analysis is more able to capture trends in changing media discourse.

Most Americans tend to think of homelessness as only an urban problem (Dugan, 2007; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009). However, homelessness affects suburban and rural communities as well. The HUD report to Congress regarding the state of homelessness in America in 2008 found a sharp jump in the proportion of rural and suburban people in shelters, from 23% in 2007 to 32% in 2008 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009). HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan contended at the time that the “report dispels the myth that homelessness is exclusively an urban problem. Today's housing crisis is putting particular pressure on families with children who are living in suburbs and rural areas” (Koch, 2009). The increase in the number of people living in shelters in suburban and rural communities is somewhat surprising, given that urban centers were harder hit by the recession (Henderson & Akers, 2009). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2009), the geographic distribution of people experiencing homelessness falls into five categories: urban (77%), mostly urban (5%), mixed (11%), mostly rural (3%), and rural (4%).
Evidence suggests that homelessness should be understood as a regional phenomenon, affecting rural, suburban, and urban areas all within the same region (Epps, 2014). This is partly the case because homeless adults and families often migrate from rural or suburban communities to larger cities. The Urban Institute (1999) found that 29% of homeless families and 46% of single homeless clients did not live in the same city or town where they became homeless. The major reasons for coming to the city or town where they were interviewed were the presence of relatives or friends, opportunities for employment, availability of housing and shelter, and the presence of other services (p. 9).

The newspapers of a given region have a tendency to cover all types of communities in the vicinity of their local headquarters. According to the Readership Institute (2001), “Most newspapers devote 34 percent of space to local news, 16 percent to state and regional news, 40 percent to national news, and 10 percent to international. Larger papers devote slightly more space to international events, but the difference is minimal.”

An examination of the newspapers of major city centers should be expected to capture trends and tendencies in public discourse in particular regions that have a bearing on the public image of homelessness in that region. Rust Belt cities were the hardest hit by the Great Recession, largely due to the fact that the industries that have traditionally been the backbone of their economies were unlikely to recover or reemerge as leading sources of growth and employment (Stockdale, 2011). It is for this reason that the major newspapers of Rust Belt cities should reveal the most about how the recession impacted public discourse on the subject of homelessness. If it is the case that the recession had an
impact on public discourses surrounding homelessness, the most sensitized barometer would be the newspapers of Rust Belt cities.

I chose the four cities based on important similar characteristics, in order to control for local and regional anomalies, such as extreme weather, e.g., severe cold in Buffalo, and localized homelessness crises, e.g., Hurricane Irene affecting Newark in 2011. Baltimore, Buffalo, Newark, and Pittsburgh are all former manufacturing cities and that have lost a significant number of manufacturing jobs and a significant portion of their populations (Mahaney, 2015; Segedy, 2014). Because of the population loss associated with the decline of the manufacturing sector, these cities are also referred to as “shrinking cities” (Schilling & Logan, 2008). A brief economic history of each of the four cities under investigation in the present dissertation will follow, including a synopsis of the state of homelessness in each city during the period 2005–2011.

**Baltimore.**

Baltimore’s political economic history set the stage for the contemporary situation of urban homelessness as well as the backdrop against which public sentiment and media understanding of homelessness emerged. Baltimore had been a steel city for much of its modern economic history, with roots stretching back even to 1916, when the fledgling Maryland Steel Co. was purchased by Bethlehem Steel (Rasmussen, 2013). By World War II, the steel yard was producing 10,000 tons of steel per day, and shipyards in Baltimore’s harbor employed 47,000 workers (McCausland, 2007).

However, the steel mills began to struggle in the 1950s. Scholars began to observe that the movement of manufacturing away from major cities and urban areas uniquely
hurt the unskilled labor force, especially African Americans, who lacked social and geographic mobility (Harrington, 1963).

During the period of the Great Migration, the African American population of Baltimore more than doubled, rising from 17% in 1935 to 40% by 1965 (Weiner, 2002). Flight from the city took pace at an alarming rate beginning in the 1950s, and over the course of 5 decades the city’s population declined by nearly a third, while the White population declined by more than 70% (Siegel, 2003).

The combined pressures of African American immigration and White outmigration were seen as an opportunity for predatory real estate speculators who, during the 1960s, began increasingly to employ a tactic known as blockbusting. Speculators used scare tactics to convince White property owners that their mostly White neighborhoods were about to see an influx of African Americans and that this would decimate property values. For example, the speculator was doing the homeowner a “favor” by buying a $40,000 house at a price of $35,000 before the racial changes in the neighborhood reduced the home’s value to $30,000. Once purchased below the market price of the home, the speculator would sell the property to African Americans for above market rent, say $45,000, under the pretense that other real estate brokers would not sell to them at market rate. These practices accelerated White outmigration and siphoned wealth from increasingly concentrated African American communities (Pietila, 2010).

Beginning in the 1960s, major industries began to shed jobs or leave the city altogether. Combined with the loss of tax revenues from fleeing Whites, Baltimore’s tax base began to erode. The riots of 1968 that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., also accelerated outmigration (Simon & Burns, 1998). During this period, the
Black middle class also began to leave the city. Formerly the backbone of African American communities, the gradual erosion of the Black middle class left behind a void of civic institutions and undermined the economic diversity and vitality of African American neighborhoods. What was left was an increasingly impoverished African American “underclass” faced with few employment opportunities, poor educational attainment rates, and limited chances at upward class mobility (Wilson, 1987).

In 1971, Sparrow’s Point was the largest steel mill in the country, but due to an influx of imported steel, the factory began to shed jobs, as did other industries, such as American Standard, which closed its Baltimore plant in the mid-1970s. Between 1950 and 1995, Baltimore lost 100,000 manufacturing jobs. In tandem with job loss, the city’s population began to shrink. Baltimore’s population declined from 950,000 in 1950 to 657,000 in 1997, while the population of the suburbs skyrocketed from 387,00 in 1950 to 1.8 million in 1997 (Service Employees International Union, 2004; Simon & Burns, 1998).

The Great Recession hit Baltimore hard. In 2008, the economy shed 14,000 jobs, and new construction projects shrank from $1.4 billion in 2008 to $536 million in 2009 (Hopkins, 2010). Between 2000 and 2010, Baltimore’s economy shed 50,000 jobs, and the unemployment rate went from 6% to 10% (Hopkins, 2010). In 2008, U.S. Census Bureau data showed that 1 in 5 Baltimore residents were living below the poverty line, and 1 in 4 children were living below the poverty line (Jones, 2009a).

**Homelessness in Baltimore.**

Using HUD measures, Baltimore’s homeless population showed a steady decrease during the period under investigation. According to the PIT count, the homeless counts
by year were: 2,904 homeless individuals in 2005; 2,607 in 2007; 2,577 in 2009; and 2,439 in 2011 (Baltimore City Mayor’s Office of Human Services, 2013; Baltimore City Mayor’s Office of Human Services, 2015).

**Pittsburgh.**

The combination of developing rail networks, an abundance of natural resources such as coal, the newly developed Bessemer process of steel production, and the entrepreneurialism of Andrew Carnegie turned Pittsburgh into the steel capital of the United States by the 1970s.

However, the population of Pittsburgh declined rapidly during the latter half of the 20th century: the city lost 18.5% of its population in the 1970s, 12.7% in the 1980s, and 9.5% in the 1990s. But population loss was clearly slowing down by the 1990s, and the city began to see signs of progress. Between 1990 and 2000, the poverty rate fell modestly, the number of people living in high-poverty areas decreased dramatically, and median real family income increased (McDonald, 2014).

A series of important economic changes were responsible for slowing Pittsburgh’s economic decline. Pittsburgh during the 1980s and 1990s underwent a painful period of deindustrialization and economic restructuring as the region weaned itself off its addiction to steel and diversified its economy to include significant investments in technological research, notably biotechnology (Streitfeld, 2009). This restructuring was very intentional, as more than 400 strategic economic planning documents were drafted from 1984 to 1994 (Piiparinen, Russell, & Post, 2015). Led by investments in the city’s historic universities, such as Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh, the city expanded its post–secondary education sector and simultaneously its research and
development sector. The University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University generated $1.14 billion research dollars in 2013, with the majority of Carnegie Mellon’s research funding devoted to mathematics, computer sciences, and engineering; the majority of the University’s research funding was devoted to life sciences. Pittsburgh emerged as a role model for other Rust Belt cities and became the hallmark of the “eds and meds” (universities and health care) paradigm for deindustrialization (Piiparinen et al., 2015).

Because of the significant economic restructuring that took place in the 1980s and 1990s, Pittsburgh was not hit as hard by the recession as cities of comparable size, largely because the city’s two largest sectors, education and health care, were very resistant to economic downturns (Streitfeld, 2009). Another important reason is that Pittsburgh did not experience much of a housing boom leading up to the housing crisis; consequently, the housing bust was not nearly as severe (Boselovic, 2018; Streitfeld, 2009). Pittsburgh saw nothing like the double-digit declines in housing prices seen in other parts of the country: property values fell somewhat, but several desirable parts of the city actually saw home values increase during the housing crisis (Metroguide, 2016). In fact, the entire five-county Pittsburgh metropolitan region of 2.1 million people saw fewer than 4,000 foreclosures in 2008 ("Local foreclosures declined in 2008," 2009).

Pittsburgh weathered the Great Recession so well that, in 2012, the Brookings Institute identified Pittsburgh as one of only three major metropolitan regions experiencing economic recovery, the other two being Dallas and Knoxville (Lambert, 2012). By 2012, Pittsburgh had recovered all of the jobs lost since the onset of the recession in 2007 (Venkatu, 2014).
Although Pittsburgh’s economy as a whole had done well, this does not negate the fact that economic hardship did increase for many (the unemployment rate rose 89% from 4.1% in 2000 to 7.7% in 2010) (De Vita, Pettijohn, & Roeger, 2012). Poverty rates in the Pittsburgh metropolitan region rose steadily from 10.6% in 2000 to 11.5% in 2007 and 12.3% in 2012 (De Vita & Farrell, 2014). By 2010, at the height of the Great Recession, 1 in 8 people in the Pittsburgh area lived below the poverty line, and minorities, female-headed households, children, and people with disabilities were uniquely vulnerable to falling into poverty. Two thirds of health and human service providers saw an increase in clients seeking assistance between 2009 and 2011 (De Vita et al., 2012).

**Homelessness in Pittsburgh.**

Homelessness increased steadily but modestly in Pittsburgh during and following the Great Recession. The number of people experiencing homelessness as determined by the PIT count for Pittsburgh/Allegheny County was 1,241 in 2005, but it rose slightly to 1,380 in 2007 at the onset of the recession. That number rose slightly during the recession period to 1,418 in 2009 (People’s Emergency Center, 2011). It is interesting to note that after the conclusion of the research period, the size of the homeless population continued to climb to 1,423 in 2011 and 1,492 in 2013 (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2016). From 2007 to 2013, Pittsburgh/Allegheny saw an increase in homelessness of 112 people, or 8.1%, according to this PIT count.

**Newark.**

Newark had become a city in decline since the Great Depression, and some say it never recovered. In 1920, 50% of Newark’s workforce was employed in manufacturing,
but that number declined to 34% by 1940 (Tuttle, 2009). The Great Depression marked the reversal of Newark’s population growth, and the city’s population has been declining ever since (PBS, 2005). In the 2 decades following World War II, White flight, coupled with a massive influx of African Americans, dramatically transformed the demographics of the Newark, and by the mid-1960s Newark was predominantly African American (Tuttle, 2009).

Racialized economic inequality became so extreme that the city exploded into 5 days of riots in the summer of 1967, and Newark became a focus of civil rights activism (Tuttle, 2009). The riots resulted in 26 deaths, 1,200 injuries, 1,500 arrests, and $47 million in property damages (Keesing’s Research Report, 1970). In addition to the short-term shocks to the city, the riots created serious and long-lasting problems for Newark, such as outmigration and decreased investment (Curvin, 2014).

High taxes had reduced home ownership in the city so much that, by 1967, 75% of Whites and 87% of Blacks were renters. Combined with corruption and poor governance, Newark collapsed economically in the 1970s.

Newark’s story is that of urban America in extremis. No community hopped aboard the runaway train that was the Industrial Revolution as wholeheartedly as Newark. In its embrace of manufacturing, Newark grew as quickly as any city. When the United States rode to prominence as a world power, it did so on the backs of cities like Newark. Then, Newark experienced the perfect storm of 20th-century urban troubles: deeply entrenched corruption, industrial abandonment, white flight, racial conflict, soaring crime rates, fiscal insolvency, and dire
poverty. Newark’s saga reflects the roller coaster ride of “Everycity,” only with a steeper rise, sharper turns, and a much more dramatic plunge. (Tuttle, 2009, p. 11)

Many city leaders and investors had high hopes for Newark in the 1980s, predicting an economic renaissance. Indeed, there were many indicators of economic revival. The port and airport were doing well, and hundreds of new construction projects were being planned (Lueck, 1986). But poverty had become entrenched in the city, including a poorly educated working class (only two thirds of public school students graduated high school) and blighted neighborhoods. By 1986, the unemployment rate had risen to 11.2% and was twice the state average. From 1970 to 1986, Newark saw a 20% decline in its population (Lueck, 1986). The 1980s also saw a significant influx of drugs and related gang and organized crime activity (Curvin, 2014).

The 1990s were somewhat of a boom for Newark. The decade 1990–1999 was the first in which Newark did not experience significant population decline. By the late 1990s, the unemployment rate was at about 9%, compared with 17% during the recession of 1992. Also during the 1990s, telecommunications became a major industry in Newark, and new businesses moved into the city to occupy vacant office spaces. The city government prioritized economic development, crime reduction, and housing construction (Sidney, 2003).

However, like other major cities struggling to revive their economies, especially those of the Rust Belt, economic gains were not distributed equally, and poverty became increasingly severe and concentrated in Newark’s slums. HUD (2000) found that, in 1995, 170,000 households had “worst-case” housing needs, meaning that the renters made less than 50% of the area median income, paid over half of their income on
housing, and did not receive any government assistance. HUD also found that 59% of these worst-case housing needs households were minorities, and 34% were families with children; 20% of all renters fell into this category. HUD also observed that there was a significant lack of affordable housing opportunities: for every 100 households in need of affordable housing, only 60 units were available. By 2000, nearly 30% of Newark’s population lived below the poverty line (Sidney, 2003).

Nonetheless, Newark’s economy continued to improve in the early 2000s. A new baseball stadium opened downtown, and a major revitalization of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center became a major catalyst for what some were calling the “Newark Renaissance.” What was especially promising about the influx of investment during this period was the construction of affordable market-rate housing to attract new middle-class residents (Newman, 2004).

Also promising was a notable increase of attention to and investment in poor communities. Developers began to attend to the vacant land left behind by the demolition of the high rises. One notable example was the West Side Park neighborhood. Blighted properties were finally demolished, construction of new housing began on a large scale, and the commercial corridor showed signs of rapid improvements (Newman, 2004).

But it remained to be seen whether Newark’s economic restructuring was a revitalization of poor neighborhoods or an instance of gentrification. The demolition of high rises along with an emphasis on increasing Newark’s population in turn increased demand for housing, and studies have shown that the combination of a decrease in affordable housing units and the construction of middle-class condominiums resulted in overvalued rents (Crane & Takahashi, 1998; O’Flaherty, 1996). In short, Newark was
experiencing a real estate–led economic recovery that had tightened the rental market and overvalued home and rental prices. This was, in effect, the setting for the “perfect storm” for Newark’s economy.

The housing crisis hit Newark hard. New Jersey had one of the highest foreclosure rates in the country in 2009, and commercial foreclosures reached a record high (Sposito, 2010). In Newark, 1,400 homes were foreclosed in 2009, and default rates rose to 30% (Curvin, 2014). Many of the new development plans of Mayor Booker were stunted by tightening credit, and several highly touted redevelopment plans failed, including the bankruptcy of a major communications company, IDT; the downtown area saw the collapse of major residential and commercial redevelopment projects (Curvin, 2014).

By June 2009, Newark’s unemployment rate had reached 14.3%, a 15-year high. For New Jersey, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for June 2009 reached a 32-year high (Epstein, 2009b). Between 2009 and 2010, the poverty rate of children in Newark increased by 32%, with almost 40% of children living in poverty, the highest rate in 8 years (Calefati, 2011).

**Homelessness in Newark.**

HUD’s biennial PIT count showed a trend of decreasing numbers of homeless individuals over the period under investigation: there were 1,682 people experiencing homelessness in 2005; 2,326 in 2007; 1,730 in 2009; and 1,505 in 2011 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). The spike in 2007 was the result of a reporting error (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2008). Overall, rates of homelessness in Newark remained stable and indeed showed signs of decreasing by the
end of the research period. From 2005 to 2011, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Newark fell by 177 people, or 11%.

**Buffalo.**

Buffalo had reached its peak population in 1950, and the city began to lose jobs and residents during the 1950s. Buffalo, like many other cities that began to see shrinking populations and declining jobs, sought to revitalize itself with redevelopment projects that did little to tackle the growing problem of urban poverty. In 1957, Buffalo spent millions of dollars to rebuild the city’s downtown district by replacing slums with middle-class housing, commercial buildings, and open space. However, this project displaced 2,000 residents, mostly African American, and did little to mitigate the city’s economic woes (Glaeser, 2007).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Buffalo’s economy continued its prolonged downward slide. Factory jobs declined by 20%, and major companies such as Bell Aircraft left the city. Major employment sectors were lost; 20,000 jobs were shed from the grain elevators along Lake Erie, and nearly 10,000 jobs were lost in the steel industry. Major electrochemical companies left the city, and General Motors and Ford reduced production. Even Buffalo’s retail sector saw 25% of its stores close during this time (Schwartz, 2001).

These economic facts accelerated changes in the city’s racial demographics. White outmigration to the suburbs resulted in an increasingly African American demographic makeup of the city: even though the city’s African American population remained static throughout the 1960s, its proportion of the city’s population rose from 20% to 26%. The loss of blue-collar jobs left many African Americans out of work. In
1980, 14 census tracts had African American unemployment rates over 50% (Schwartz, 2001).

Poor local political decision-making contributed to Buffalo’s decline during the 1960s and 1970s. Race riots crippled the city. Poor wages for police officers undermined hiring, and crime rates increased. Fiscal crises recurred, and the city was unable to produce strong public schools. The White middle-class outmigration further eroded the city’s tax base (Glaeser, 2007). State policy did not help Buffalo’s chances of revival. High taxes and complicated regulations drove away industries. In 1975, Fantus Legislative Business Climate rankings put New York as the 48th least favorable state for businesses (Glaeser, 2007).

A key factor in the economic instability of Buffalo was its lack of a diversified manufacturing base. Buffalo was essentially a “two-industry town,” relying almost exclusively on the auto industry and chemicals, both of which came under significant stress in the 1980s (Stanback & Noyelle, 1982). Buffalo showed “little capacity to move away from a long-standing dependency on manufacturing and seems unable to find new directions for rejuvenation of its economic base” (Stanback & Noyelle, 1982, pp. 110–111). Buffalo’s economic diversity further shrank when, in 1987, the Bethlehem Steel plant closed (Schwartz, 2001).

By 1990, Buffalo had the eighth highest family poverty rate among America’s 100 largest cities: 21.7% of families in Buffalo lived below the poverty line, and this poverty became increasingly concentrated in African American neighborhoods (Kraus, 2000).
The end of the 20th century saw little growth for Buffalo. Between 1970 and 2010, the number of jobs in the metropolitan region grew by a meager 5%, whereas jobs grew by an impressive 70% for the nation as a whole. Buffalo’s economy suffered due to competition in the manufacturing sector, the relocation of factories away from the Northeast, and the city’s inability or unpreparedness to participate in the region’s emerging high-level service industry. By the onset of the Great Recession, Buffalo’s manufacturing sector was the same size as the national average (Garcia, 2013).

However, Buffalo’s economy weathered the recession better than those of other cities. Given Buffalo’s steady loss in manufacturing jobs, the economy had already been forced to diversify. On the one hand, Buffalo lost fewer jobs during the recession than the national average; on the other hand, Buffalo gained fewer jobs during the period of recovery after the peak of the Great Recession (Garcia, 2013). In other words, Buffalo did not experience the extreme ups and downs of other cities and the nation overall. The recession accelerated Buffalo’s movement away from manufacturing: the manufacturing sector’s share of the job market went from 20% to 16% over the 2003–2011 period (Garcia, 2013). During this business cycle, the general trend was for the region to gain lower-wage jobs and lose higher-wage jobs, and wage rates in the metropolitan area remained stagnant even as the nation’s average wages grew (Garcia, 2013, p. 6).

The combined effects of the Great Recession and the long period of economic restructuring and declining wages resulted in an increase in poverty in the metropolitan region. By 2014, Buffalo was officially declared to be “America’s third-poorest city,” with a poverty rate higher than 30%. The only cities with higher poverty rates were Cleveland (34.2%) and Detroit (38.1%) (Thomas, 2014).
**Homelessness in Buffalo.**

The biennial Erie County PIT count detected that the size of the homeless population fluctuated from year to year during the period in this dissertation: in 2005, the PIT count revealed 1,361 people experiencing homelessness; in 2007, 1,169 homeless individuals were counted (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009); 862 were counted in 2009 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009); 938 in 2011 (Homeless Alliance of Western New York, 2012); and 848 in 2013 (Homeless Alliance of Western New York, 2013). As was the case with both Baltimore and Newark, Buffalo showed declining rates of homelessness during the research period. From 2005 to 2011, homelessness in Buffalo fell by an astonishing 31%, more than any other city under investigation.

**Section 4: The Coding Grid**

An analysis of trends across a large set of newspaper articles requires a set of common themes to examine to chart their appearance across articles and across time. Within the literature of homelessness, there are stereotypes, attributions, causal explanations, policy solutions, and so forth, that recur quite frequently and are identifiable.

In order to compare articles, I followed the model of both Hancock and Buck et al. (2004) to create a “coding grid.” The coding grid is a set of attributes that might possibly be expected to be found in a newspaper article that mentions homelessness. A few easy examples are “high housing costs” and “drug addiction.” By identifying a set of attributes that one might expect to find in an article, every article in the data set can be coded if it contains one or more of them. If all attributes are put into a spreadsheet as
rows, and every article is a column that is coded for the presence of every attribute in every row, the resulting final data set will be a single spreadsheet containing the coding of every article for every attribute, and this complete data set will be the source material for quantitative document analysis of newspapers during 2005–2011.

A first-draft coding grid of 15 attributes was initially applied to a small set of articles. The attributes, such as “causal explanation,” “substance abuse,” “housing crisis,” were chosen based on a review of the literature. The goal of applying this first draft to a small set of articles was to allow the grid to grow organically, as new associations and attributions became apparent. For example, it became apparent that the coding grid needed to distinguish between individual stories of homeless people and generalized comments about homelessness. The list of causes of homelessness expanded quickly as well (e.g., eviction, job loss, high housing costs). After approximately 100 articles were coded and the grid was expanded, the coding grid was reformulated into a formalized grid with categories and subsections. This formalized grid included approximately 150 attributes. Because the grid evolved during the coding of the first 100 articles, every article was eventually recoded.

The second iteration of the grid included nine major thematic groupings of attributes, and the third iteration added attributes without changing the structure of these sections:  

**Meta.**

This section was used to identify articles that were either (a) irrelevant or (b) duplicate appearances of the same article. There were several reasons that an article may have been coded as irrelevant. First, if the article was referring to homelessness outside of the United States, it was coded as irrelevant. For example, an article in the *Pittsburgh*
Post-Gazette on January 9, 2011, entitled “Haiti Struggles to Survive — Earthquake, Cholera, Homelessness and Corruption — Will Relief Ever Come?” discussed the 2010 earthquake that left thousands of Haitians without homes and living in tent cities (Roddy, 2011). Articles were coded as irrelevant if homelessness was mentioned as part of a laundry list of social ills. For example, a 2007 article in The Baltimore Sun described the vision of a new interfaith advocacy group: “In their model, the United States, followed by other major industrialized nations, would dedicate at least 1 percent of gross domestic product each year for the next 20 years to substantially reduce or eliminate global and domestic poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education and inadequate health care, and to ameliorate the physical damage we've done to our planet” (Klempner, 2007). An article would be coded as irrelevant if it used homelessness in a metaphorical sense or to describe nonhuman entities, such as a homeless animal. Finally, an irrelevant article may mention homelessness only in passing, for instance as part of an obituary mentioning that the deceased had volunteered to help the homeless during college. Duplicate entries were those that appeared in different editions of the same newspaper. For example, The Star-Ledger had no fewer than 17 editions during the period of study. Several articles from The Star-Ledger were printed in six or more editions, and the Access World News database indexed each iteration of the article as a different entry. In order to prevent an article that was printed in numerous editions from being overweighted and thus distorting the data set, only one of the iterations was coded. It was incidentally frustrating that each edition often printed different edits of the same article, presumably making cuts due to spacing restrictions in the particular edition. The problem then arose as to which of the versions to code for content and which versions to code as duplicate. The longest version
of an article printed in multiple editions was coded for content. Edition editors are not permitted to add content to an article; they can only make deletions for the purpose of fitting the article to the section and edition. The longest version of each article was chosen because it was most in keeping with the full statement being made by the article author.

**Voice.**

This section was used to capture whether the article was giving a particular style of voice to the homeless. The possible attributes were “client/homeless,” “service provider/advocate,” and “elected official/representative.” This variable tracked how often articles would quote people belonging to these categories. This section of variables also tracked whether the article was an editorial.

**Individual.**

This section was used to capture attributions that were made in an article to a particular person or specific group of people, such as a family, who experienced or was experiencing homelessness or who was identified specifically as at risk of homelessness. This section had six different subsections (represented by the following six boxes), each of which encapsulated attributes that might be ascribed to someone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman (adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man (adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has children/is pregnant/is/are parent(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a youth/child (boy or girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old/senior citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Demographic.**

This subsection included basic demographic information that is typically provided in an article to paint a picture of the individual(s) being described. The most common attributes, predictably, were “man (adult),” “woman (adult),” “family,” “has children/is pregnant, is/are parent(s),” and “is a youth/child (boy or girl).” A separate category was created in the third iteration of the coding grid for “students (children)” because it was noticed that conversations about students struggling in school or doing well in school were much more specific than simply a description of a child. The category “old/senior citizen” was used only if the article specifically referred to the person in a way that emphasized that the person’s age was important to his or her situation. An article that simply mentioned that an individual was 67, for example, was not coded for reflecting this attribute.

The attributes “immigrant” and “African American” were a part of the coding grid from the beginning of the first iteration, and as will be discussed in the Findings section of this dissertation, these attributes were seldom found in the data set. Other demographic attributes include “ex-offender,” “veteran,” “GLBT,” “foster care (former and present),” “disabled/ill (e.g., AIDS),” and “mentally ill.” “Substance abuse” in the second iteration
was broken down in the third iteration to “addict (currently)” and “former or recovering addict” because it became clear that stories of addiction took on markedly different tones when the story was one of redemption and recovery rather than one of “rock bottom.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predatory lending (e.g., robo-signing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment/job market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low wages/bad minimum wage/no living wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High housing costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of affordable housing/low-income housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing marker/housing crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills (taxes, medical, utilities, high cost of living)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health/mental illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical disability/lack of health care/illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/relationship breakdown (divorce, death in the family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural disaster/house destroyed (e.g., fire, house condemned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blameless/&quot;through no fault of their own&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Causes.**

This subsection captured attributes that sought to provide an explanation of the reasons that a person had experienced homelessness in the first place. Often, multiple causal attributes were ascribed to a case. For example, a story may have described Jane and her son. Jane may have had a bout of depression, lost her job, had no savings, and
was ultimately evicted. All four attributes in the causal chain would be coded in this case. “Recession,” “foreclosure,” “eviction,” and “predatory lending (e.g., robo-signing)” were part of the first iteration of the coding grid based on the review of the literature. The second iteration of the grid included “employment,” but it was further distinguished into “job loss” and “unemployment/job market” in the final iteration of the grid because it was clear that there were different tones between, for example, the story of a woman who lost her husband and could not find a job and the story of a woman who lost her job due to a prolonged illness.

Many of the remaining causes in this category are for the most part self-explanatory, having been gleaned from the review of literature. These include “low wages/bad minimum wage/no living wage,” “no savings,” “poverty,” “high housing costs,” and “lack of affordable housing/low-income housing.” The attribute “housing market/housing crisis” was used to capture stories of individuals that made broad references to the troubles of the housing market without specifying further the details of the cause. For example, an article may have said something to the effect that someone lost his or her home as a result of the housing crisis, but the article may not have specified eviction, foreclosure, housing costs, and so on. “Bills (taxes, medical, utilities, high cost of living)” captured any attribution about expenses other than rent, which was already captured by “high housing costs.”

Several of the attributes in this subsection may seem redundant with the Demographic subsection. “Mental health/mental illness,” “physical disability/lack of health care/illness,” “addiction,” and “criminal history” all have analogues in the demographics subsection. However, these attributes appeared in the “Causes” subsection
because they captured articles that highlighted that the attribute was a causal factor in the person or persons becoming homeless. A prolonged bout of pneumonia, for example, may have caused someone to become homeless, but this does not mean that the person is permanently ill or disabled, as might be indicated by the demographic attribute. Conversely, a person may be living with depression, but he or she may have become homeless as a result of some other reason, such as domestic violence.

Other causal attributes that were not overlapping included “victim of domestic violence,” “family/relationship breakdown (divorce, death in the family),” and “natural disaster/house destroyed (e.g., fire, house condemned).” Finally, an attribute was added under the label of “blameless/‘through no fault of their own’” as a predictive category stemming from the hypotheses of this dissertation to capture pronouncements by the author that the individual(s) being described were not to blame for their situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIVING SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streets/car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubled up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vouchers/Section 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional/halfway house/housing program (residency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detox program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent city (not just living in a tent); homeless encampment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-homeless/at risk/pending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned house/squatting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving frequently/displaced/displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motel/Hotel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Living situation._
As discussed above, definitions of homelessness rely on clarifying which living situations constitute a situation of homelessness. More than one living situation may be described in a given article: for example, the story of Joe, who used to sleep in his car and now lives in a tent city when the shelter is full, would code for all three living situation attributes. Self-explanatory living situations include: “streets/car,” “shelter,” “detox program,” “tent city (not just living in a tent); homeless encampment,” “abandoned house/squatting,” and “motel/hotel.” “Streets/car” was used in all cases in which a person was sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation, including bus and train stations, subways, and the like. The term “double up” referred to situations in which a person was living with friends or relatives due to economic hardship and typically in a situation of overcrowding.

“Vouchers/Section 8” referred to someone who lived in a privately owned unit that was paid for, in whole or in part, through a government or nongovernment voucher program. “Transitional/halfway house/housing program (residency)” referred to programs that were not self-supported housing and not privately owned units. This can be permanent supportive housing, group homes, and so forth. “Pre-homeless/at risk/pending” captured articles that directly stated that persons were about to become homelessness. For coding purposes, an article that used a phrase such as “having trouble making ends meet” did not code for this attribute. Only articles that specifically referenced the pending loss of housing coded for this attribute, such as a story about a woman who has received an eviction notice and could not afford the back rent. “Chronic” referred to stories that emphasized that a person had been homeless for a long time, usually a period of several years. Finally, “moving frequently/displaced/displacement”
refers to individuals with an unstable living situation.

**Generalized.**

This subsection referred to articles that discussed the problem of homelessness in general rather than told the story of a particular individual or individuals. For example, a 2011 *Baltimore Sun* article (Hare, 2011b) noted that “nearly 2,000 homeless children attended county schools last year.” This observation concerned homeless children generally and was not the story of an individual homeless child. The logic behind dividing the attributes between general and individual was that individual stories had a different moral tone, and they were often more sympathetic and descriptive. Generalized discussions of homelessness tended to be more analytic and tend to explain causes. I review this aspect in a later section.

The attributes here are exactly the same as they are for Individual, with the one exception of the first demographic category that was added “Men, women, and children.” This attribute was added during the revision of the second iteration of the coding grid because I noticed that this phrase appeared in articles that were largely sympathetic to the plight of the homeless and were seeking to humanize the homeless population. An article only coded for this attribute only if it used the exact phrase “men, women, and children,” as was done in the 2011 *Baltimore Sun* article mentioned above: “On any given day in Baltimore County, more than 550 men, women and children are living in shelters and hundreds more are on the streets, according to a recent homeless survey” (Hare, 2011b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESCRIPTIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need more housing (or not enough housing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more funding (or not enough funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need new legislation (or a lack of legislation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need new program/strategy/efforts (or no program)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Need more jobs/job training

Need better education

**Prescriptive.**

This subsection contained attributes related to advocacy and argument statements. These statements were normative or consequentialist. Each attribute implied its opposite as well; that is, a statement that there was a lack of a particular service implied that the service was needed. “Need more housing (or not enough housing)” referred to any type of housing, such as affordable housing, public housing, permanent supportive housing, and shelter beds. “Need more funding (or not enough funding)” referred to both government funding and nonprofit grant makers. “Need new legislation (or a lack of legislation)” referred to government policy, whether from the legislative, executive, or judicial branch. “Need more jobs/job training” referred to job creation initiatives from the government; statements about the economy, especially during the recession; and government, nonprofit, or private sector job training programs. Finally, “Need better education” referred to both primary and secondary education, but this attribute excluded job-training programs. In the rare case that a statement was made to the effect that better education was necessary for people to get jobs, this was coded as “Need better education,” not “Need more jobs/job training.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFORTS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising/charitable giving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations (e.g., food, clothing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion organization doing something (e.g., church or religious nonprofit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers doing something (including students engaging in some way)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efforts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This subsection included attributes related to activities being undertaken to reduce or eliminate homelessness. News reporting often focuses on events, and so the attributes from this subsection were very important, especially to capture seasonal trends in reporting on homelessness. “Fundraising/charitable giving” was monetary giving only, and “Donations (e.g., food, clothing)” referred to tangible goods, excluding services. These attributes often coded along with “An event is being held for or about the homeless.” These attributes complement each other. For example, “Fundraising/charitable giving” might further specify what an event might be about. “Religious organization doing something (e.g., church or religious nonprofit)” referred to events or initiatives that involved faith-based volunteers or the religious entity itself. An event held at a church or a group of volunteers from a church would code for this attribute. A quote or statement from someone with a religious affiliation did not code for this attribute unless the religious entity itself was involved. “Service provider/nonprofit doing something” referred to nongovernment actors. Because many</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nonprofit organizations serving the homeless community receive government funding, nongovernment actors receiving government funding still coded for this attribute, especially insofar as the complexities of funding streams were seldom reported in newspapers. “Government program doing something” included all government agencies that provided a service to the homeless community or assistance to nongovernment actors, such as faith-based organizations.

“Job training being offered” referred to both government and nonprofit programs and program announcements. “Housing being built/provided” referred to any type of housing, such as affordable housing, public housing, permanent supportive housing, and private sector housing, provided that such housing was explicitly related in the article to homelessness. “Communities opposed to homeless & programs” referred to “NIMBYism” (“not in my backyard”), such as resistance to the building of a new shelter in a neighborhood or community complaints about vagrancy or panhandling. “Community in favor of homeless & programs” reflected community statements supporting initiatives, and this attribute included statements to the effect that a community “does not mind” a service or homeless person’s presence there.

“An event is being held for or about the homeless” could include fundraising events, sleep-outs in solidarity with the homeless, marches, protests, and public speeches. This was a broad category, and the other attributes in the Efforts section served to narrow the nature of the event(s). Finally, “Homeless self-advocating/self-organizing” referred to events or efforts in which a group of homeless or formerly homeless people were involved. This attribute included efforts that were not necessarily led by a group of homeless people but efforts in which they played a part, such as a march or protest. This
attribute referred only to groups because an individual effort would be coded in the
Individual section under “Giving back.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTS</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing First</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-year plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned/vacant houses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Concepts.**

This subsection was a testing ground for concepts that were prevalent in the
review of literature but that did not fall neatly into any of the other sections. “Housing
First” is a philosophy or framework for ending homelessness that insists that housing
above all is the answer to homelessness. Many programs seek to get individuals
“housing-ready” through mechanisms such as recovery programs or job training
programs. For these programs, housing is the reward for attaining self-sufficiency.
Housing First insists that problems such as substance abuse or lack of employment can be
better addressed once a person’s housing situation is resolved. For advocates of the
Housing First paradigm, anything other than Housing First inevitably becomes “housing
never” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009). Articles would code for this
attribute only if they referred to the concept of Housing First explicitly and used the exact
phrase “Housing First.”

The attribute “10-Year Plans” referred to city, county, state, and federal plans to end
homelessness. Beginning in 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness began
urging governments to develop 10-year plans to do so. The U.S. Interagency Council on
Homelessness took up the call, and it began working with local, county, and state
governments to develop such plans (Del Casino & Jocoy, 2008). An article would code
for this attribute if it explicitly mentioned a plan to end homelessness with a 10-year time frame. Articles that referenced a plan to end homelessness in general or a plan to address homelessness did not code for this attribute.

“Abandoned/Vacant Houses” coded as an attribute for articles that mentioned abandoned, vacant, or blighted houses only if those houses were posed as opportunities for addressing homelessness or were set as a juxtaposition to the problem of homelessness. Vacant houses had to be conceptually related to the problem of homelessness in the article.

Section 5: Method of Analysis

In Chapter 4 I will examine trends in the data from each city concerning rates of homelessness and the number of articles published about homelessness. I discuss each newspaper in the context of the restructuring that took place during the Great Recession in the face of competition from Internet news sources. This chapter shows how restructuring affected publication rates and whether coverage of homelessness was affected. I will examine trends in demographic variables, notably frequencies of mentions of families, children, and veterans. I will also examine changes in frequencies of mentions of variables related to the causes of homelessness to determine if there was a change in preference for either individual or structural explanations. I conclude the chapter by aggregating the data to examine trends across all four cities.

In Chapter 5 I use Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the public identity of the Newly Homeless was discursively constructed. I present evidence showing how the figure of the Newly Homeless was routinely tied to calls to action. I conclude by
showing how the relationship of certain variables (e.g., addiction) to calls to action (e.g., affordable housing) changed over the course of the research period.

In addition to content analysis, Richardson (2007) argued in favor of critical discourse analyses, which “offer interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meanings from this; situate what is written or said in the context in which it occurs, rather than just summarizing patterns or regularities in texts; and argue that textual meaning is constructed through an interaction between producer, text, and consumer rather than simply being ‘read off’ the page by all readers in exactly the same way” (p. 15). In keeping with these insights, I provide qualitative examinations of discursive maneuvers in journalism about homelessness against the backdrop of the housing crisis, with an eye toward how notions of the home and those without homes were rearticulated during a time of economic crisis.

I expect to see a shift in references to structural causes of homelessness (such as an increasing emphasis on predatory banks and lending, a worsening job market, a suffering housing market, etc.). I similarly expect to see an increase in sympathetic accounts of people who are experiencing homelessness (i.e., references to people who are hard-working or who are homeless through no fault of their own). I expect to see an increase in attributes signifying deservingness, such as references to veterans, children, and domestic violence victims.

Generally speaking, I expect to see attributes appear frequently and in clusters, suggesting that there is a public identity of the homeless individual that is being articulated during the 2005 to 2011 period. I also expect to see that the public identity of homeless individuals will influence the range of policy options that are discussed. For
instance, representations of homeless families with children will likely be associated with calls for more affordable housing opportunities.

I quite strongly suspect, however, that despite what I predict will be a shift in public discourse surrounding homelessness to a tone of sympathy, an emphasis on structural causes, an increase in rhetoric of deservingness, and support for decriminalization of homelessness, federal policy will have been moving in the opposite direction. This may have major implications for Hancock’s findings, suggesting that the news media’s framing of an issue through the formation of public identities may not influence policymaking as directly as she suggests.
Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter demonstrates that the rapid increase in news media attention to the issue of homelessness during the Great Recession was not commensurate with national and local data showing that homelessness was actually decreasing during this period. The data suggest that newspapers were advancing the narrative that homelessness could happen to anyone and invoking the specter of rising homelessness despite much evidence to the contrary.

This chapter also shows how the focus of articles shifted to prioritize stories about groups that authors might expect would elicit sympathy, namely families, children, and veterans, who could lose their homes through no fault of their own and deserved to be helped. These stereotypically sympathetic groups are what are commonly referred to as the “deserving poor.” The information presented in this chapter shows that hand in hand with the deserving poor narrative was a reformulation of causal accounts of homelessness to emphasize structural contributors of homelessness, such as unemployment, rather than individualizing or personal determinants, such as addiction. The effect of such representations was to add gravity and consequence to stories about the recession and hence play to fears of middle class readers; in other words, to make a good story.

Section 1 begins the chapter with data concerning homelessness nationally and in the four cities under investigation during the research period. Section 2 presents the data from each of the four newspapers under investigation: The Baltimore Sun, The Buffalo News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and Newark’s The Star-Ledger. Section 3 draws together the data from all four newspapers to examine factors driving the differences in quantity
and quality of coverage as well as the important similarities in the transformations that took place during the Great Recession.

Section 1: Data Concerning Homelessness During the Research Period

Rates of homelessness in the late 1990s and early 2000s were relatively stable. The first *Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* (AHAR), which was published in 2007 and contained data collected in 2005, concluded that “there is no evidence that the size of the homeless population has changed dramatically over the past ten years” (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2007, p. iii). In 2005, it was estimated that 763,010 people were homeless on a single night in January (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008a). The AHAR provides the total number of people experiencing homelessness in the United States each year during the research period, as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. National homelessness trend. Source: HUDexchange.info](image)

The data show that homelessness during the 2005–2009 period decreased, with a slight increase in 2010 and a decrease again in 2011. Homelessness decreased from
671,888 in 2007 to 664,414 in 2008 and 643,067 in 2009, showing declines year after year during the Great Recession (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009, 2010). From 2005 to 2011, homelessness decreased from 763,010 to 636,017, a decrease of 126,993, or 17%.

The fact that official federal data show that homelessness was on the decline during the years of the Great Recession is quite surprising. Numerous studies suggest that homelessness tends to increase during economic downturns (Loopstra et al., 2016). This notion resonates with the prevailing conception of homelessness as caused by a confluence of structural factors and individual factors. As Lee, Tyler, and Wright (2010) contend, “rough agreement now exists on a conceptual model that integrates macro- and micro-level antecedents.” This model predicts that during an economic decline, macro-level changes, such as increases in unemployment and decreases in savings rates, increasingly couple with micro-level incidents (or “life shocks”), such as prolonged illness or family breakdowns, and this creates rising numbers of homelessness (Curtis, Corman, Noonan, & Reichman, 2013).

Some analysts have argued that the massive federal interventions that followed the collapse of the housing market, known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and which included substantial funding for homeless prevention, staved off and helped reduce homelessness nationally (Perlman, 2016). Homelessness prior to the onset of the Great Recession had already been on the decline (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008a), and federal policy during and immediately following the recession period may have prevented this trend from reversing when the economic downturn began.
The effects of the Great Recession were not experienced equally across the economy, and different states and localities faced economic difficulties better or worse depending on a range of factors, including the health of their housing market prior to the economic downturn, the diversity of their economies, their rates of home ownership, and so on (Semuels, 2017). Different states and jurisdictions also saw differing changes in rates of homelessness during this period. Figure 2 shows the number of people experiencing homelessness as measured by the biennial point-in-time (PIT) counts in each jurisdiction under investigation.

Figure 2. Homeless trend by city. Source: HUDexchange.info

It should be noted that the PIT counts are always conducted in January. Therefore, the 2007 data represented in Figure 2 do not yet represent any effects from the Great Recession, which began officially in December 2007. There is a notable spike in homelessness in Newark in 2007, and this spike skews the aggregate data for the four cities combined. The Corporation for Supportive Housing (2008), who compiled the Newark PIT count report, notes that the significantly high number represented in 2007 is
primarily the result of a methodological mishap: for the question “Where will you sleep tonight?” respondents who answered “Don’t know/Refused to answer” were counted as homeless. This error also effectively meant that anyone skipping the question was considered homeless, and this led to higher numbers of people experiencing homelessness being reported. This mistake was corrected in subsequent years, and only people who provided an answer that was within the definition of homelessness were counted as homeless.

For three of the four cities (Baltimore, Newark, and Buffalo), rates of homelessness decreased from 2007 to 2009. Pittsburgh is the only city that saw an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. That number was 1,380 in 2007 and 1,418 in 2009, an increase of just 3% for a 2-year period.

The aggregated data for all four cities are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Combined homelessness trend.

When data from all four cities are taken into account, the combined totals demonstrate a trend of decreasing homelessness for the period of the Great Recession. For the four
cities combined, there were a total of 7,188 people experiencing homelessness in 2005; 7,482 in 2007; 6,587 in 2009; and 6,305 in 2011. From 2005 to 2011, homelessness decreased by 883 people, or 12%. The spike in homelessness in 2007 is mostly attributable to the methodological error in the Newark PIT count explained above. This trend is somewhat similar to the national trend of decreasing homelessness shown in Figure 1.

From these data, one might expect newspaper interest in homelessness to have decreased during the research period. Similarly, one might expect newspaper coverage to have reflected a growing number of people successfully exiting or avoiding homelessness. The next section examines the transformation in coverage of homelessness for each newspaper, including changes in frequency and sub-topics, during the research period.

Section 2: Changes in Coverage of Homelessness in Each Newspaper

The Baltimore Sun

The Baltimore Sun published 438 articles mentioning homelessness during the research period. After controlling for duplicate articles and articles that did not meet the selection criteria (i.e., articles mentioning non-human homelessness or homelessness in other countries), The Baltimore Sun published 378 articles relevant to this dissertation, the most of any of the four newspapers. There was a peak of interest in homelessness in 2007 and 2008; 63 articles mentioning homelessness were published in each of those years.
The Baltimore Sun saw declining circulation during the research period. Between October 2004 and March 2005, the Sun saw an 11.3% decline in its daily circulation, one of the highest circulation losses in the country (Walker, 2005). Its loss of readers continued but slowed in 2006, reflecting a 3% loss for its daily circulation and 6.6% for the Sunday edition (“Sun Readership Up,” 2006). In 2005, the average daily circulation was 253,137, but by 2011 that number was down to 195,561, a decrease of 23% during a 6-year period. Sunday circulation fell 20% during this same period (Mirabella, 2011; Walker, 2005).

The decline in circulation forced The Baltimore Sun to cut costs. In April 2007, the newspaper announced plans to cut 50 jobs through voluntary buyouts, just a day after sister Tribune Co. newspapers the Los Angeles Times and the Chicago Tribune announced plans to cut 250 jobs (MacMillan, 2007). The Sun number increased to 60 newsroom jobs as the plan continued to develop in 2008 along with additional staff reductions in other departments, leaving the Sun with a total of 1,300 employees, with
240 in the newsroom (Farmer, 2008). Lynn Anderson, author of 21 articles in the data set for this dissertation (2005–2008), was part of the wave of staff reductions that began in 2007 (Anderson, n.d.). In December 2008, the Tribune Co. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, forcing The Baltimore Sun to enact another round of staff reductions, this time in the form of layoffs instead of buyouts (Mirabella, 2009).

The restructuring mentioned above had consequences for the content being produced by the newspaper. During the research period, the total number of articles published by The Baltimore Sun decreased steadily each year from 2005 to 2009, with a high of 49,165 in 2005 to a low of 24,387 in 2009. This decline in articles published represents a decrease of 50% in just 4 years. The number of articles published recovered somewhat in the years following the official end of the recession (2010 and 2011), rebounding to 26,898 in 2011. Despite the rebound, there was a decrease in annual publication totals of 45% from 2005 to 2011.

Figure 5. Total articles published per year in The Baltimore Sun, 2005–2011.
By taking into account that the peak in the number of articles mentioning homelessness in 2007 and 2008 (shown in Figure 4) took place against a backdrop of declining numbers of articles published, a different picture of attention to homelessness emerges, as shown in Figure 6.

![Graph showing the proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to total articles published in The Baltimore Sun, 2005–2011.](image)

Interest in attention to homelessness peaked in 2009, at the height of the Great Recession. The proportion test shows the change from 2005 to 2009 to be statistically significant ($p < .05$), meaning that there was a notable increase in attention to homelessness during the recession period. This increase in attention occurs at the same time that homelessness in Baltimore was decreasing, as shown in Figure 3. One of the drivers of coverage of homelessness in *The Baltimore Sun* is the lively debate of the advocacy community in the editorial sections of the paper and its contributions to quotations in stories that are primarily about homelessness. In 2005, for example, 18 of the 49 articles in the data set, or 37%, were editorials. The majority of these articles were written by prominent
members of the homeless advocacy community, such as Jeff Singer, the President and CEO of Health Care for the Homeless. Contributions by these advocates almost always point to the lack of affordable housing as a major cause of homelessness, and they often explicitly state that the public should do away with common stereotypes and myths about homelessness.

The advocacy community drew a great deal of attention to Baltimore City’s first experiments with Housing First in 2005 and the repeated calls by academics and policymakers for Baltimore to develop its own 10-year plan. Baltimore had conducted its first homeless census in 2003, but data from 2005 showed that homelessness was increasing, and commentators pointed to the rising costs of housing and stagnant wages as major causes. In 2005 and 2006, the Maryland General Assembly debated legislation designating certain acts of violence against homeless people as hate crimes. Articles describing this legislation tended to cast people who were homeless in a sympathetic light, describing them as victims of violence deserving special protections.

In January 2007, Mayor of Baltimore Martin O’Malley became Maryland’s governor, and Sheila Dixon took his place as mayor, promising to end homelessness as one of her major platform issues. Mayor Dixon devoted significant time and energy to the creation of Baltimore’s 10-year plan to End Homelessness, which was launched in January 2008. Because debates about the 10-year plan tended to talk about system-level causes of and solutions to homelessness, coverage of homelessness in 2008 and beyond tended to emphasize structural accounts.

The first article in *The Baltimore Sun* data set to mention the recession is an April 3, 2008, editorial in which the two authors (one the Vice President and the other the
President/CEO of Health Care for the Homeless) argued in defense of the Mayor’s 10-year plan over and against criminalization of homelessness and Not In My Back Yard sentiments, or NIMBYism. The authors contended that “the Housing First model is the best documented approach to getting people off the streets” and that resistance to efforts to address homelessness were based on “shameful mischaracterizations of the homeless as criminals, addicts and even sex offenders” (Lindamood & Singer, 2008).

As the recession deepened, articles in *The Baltimore Sun* data set increasingly cast the problem of homelessness in economic terms, and representations of homeless people became increasingly sympathetic. An article from August 3, 2008, focused on a new drop-in center, which provided a haven away from “harassment or a beating” for the increasing numbers of people who were homeless due to “the faltering economy.” One homeless interviewee was quoted as saying “People who don't understand homelessness think they're all bums who don't want to work. That couldn't be farther from the truth” (Jernberg, 2008). Here, the newspaper highlighted a quote that explicitly countered stereotypes about homeless people as being inherently lazy.

Articles in *The Baltimore Sun* data set also increasingly referred to sympathetic categories of people, such as children, families, and veterans. An October 24, 2008, editorial argued that the housing crisis was especially devastating for children and noted that “Rates of homelessness and housing instability are expected to increase as more families lose housing in today's market and deepening recession” (Candelaria, Oberlander, & Black, 2008). Concern about the recession reached its apex in December 2008, when every *Baltimore Sun* article that mentioned homelessness also mentioned the
recession. By January 2009, three out of five articles mentioned the recession, and that number dwindled to three out of eight in February.

One of the features of the coverage of The Baltimore Sun is that normal reporting on events related to homelessness, such as the PIT count, Homeless Persons Memorial Day, seasonal shelter openings, new initiatives and legislation, and so on, was tied in some way, however loosely, to the recession. In other words, a comment on the recession was tacked onto an article about homelessness that would most likely have been published even if there were no recession. For example, an article about Homeless Persons Memorial Day, which occurs every year and is regularly covered in the news, quoted an interviewee as saying, “It's only going to get worse now with the economy the way it is” (Jones, 2008). This tendency suggests that the recession was being added into stories about homelessness to deepen their emotive effect or add a sense of urgency and importance to the reporting.

As concern about the recession faded, homelessness was less frequently mentioned in the context of the economic downturn. A November 27, 2009, article observed that “Some economists say the worst recession since the Great Depression has ended. But with the national unemployment rate in double digits and the economy still hemorrhaging jobs, charity officials reported seeing thousands of new faces” (Brown, 2009). Even though the recession had been officially pronounced to be over, the effects of economic stabilization had not yet trickled down to Main Street. Homelessness is often considered a “lagging indicator,” meaning that it takes time for economic shocks to translate into homelessness and for recoveries to translate into stability in household budgets (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). This sentiment was echoed in a
March 14, 2011, article, in which one homeless advocate said, "We keep hearing that the economic picture is getting better…But there is a lag time and many are still struggling to pick up the pieces" (Hare, 2011b).

In 2010 and 2011, the lingering effects of the recession continued to be mentioned, but overall, conversations about homelessness took on a more order-of-the-day tack, as news came out about encampment closures, annual PIT counts, progress on the 10-year plan, and the opening of a new permanent shelter in Baltimore City.

The trends of increasing emphasis on demographics that elicit sympathy, such as emotional portrayals of struggling families and children or veterans suffering after serving their country, and structural causes of homelessness, such as housing prices, the shrinking pool of affordable housing, and the tight labor market, are quantitatively represented in Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7. Mentions of sympathetic demographic variables in The Baltimore Sun, 2005–2011.
In Figure 7, mentions of demographics of groups likely to elicit sympathy appear to spike during 2008. The proportion test shows that the difference in the proportion of references to families to articles mentioning homelessness from 2007 to 2008 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 8. Mentions of structural and individual causes of homelessness in *The Baltimore Sun*, 2005–2011.

As shown in Figure 8, structural accounts of the causes of homelessness become the predominant frame starting in 2007, and structural variables remain the predominant explanation for homelessness from 2008 to 2011. The emphasis on structural accounts of homelessness reaches its zenith in 2010, when 81% of all mentions of causes of homelessness are structural in nature. Structural variables include: the recession, foreclosures, eviction, predatory lending, job loss, unemployment, the job market, low wages, low rates of savings, poverty, high housing costs, lack of affordable housing, the housing market, and cost of living. Individual variables include: mental health, physical
disability, domestic violence, family problems, natural disasters (such as fire), addiction, and criminal history.

Evidence from The Baltimore Sun shows that there was a qualitative and quantitative shift in the way homelessness was discussed during the Great Recession. Not only was homelessness mentioned more in print, but it was also discussed in increasingly structural terms and with a greater emphasis on families. These shifts in the discursive arena took place despite the fact that homelessness in Baltimore was decreasing during the 2005–2011 research period.

The Buffalo News

The Buffalo News published 182 articles mentioning homelessness during the research period. After controlling for duplicate articles and articles that did not meet the selection criteria, The Buffalo News published 147 articles relevant to this dissertation, the fewest of any of the four newspapers and slightly more than half of what was published by The Baltimore Sun during the same period.

One of the characteristics of The Buffalo News that affects its coverage and content is that Buffalo is in the same state as New York City, the most populous city in the United States and a major hub for cultural, political, and economic power. Consequently, policies and events from New York City occasionally make their way into the data set for this newspaper.

Unlike The Baltimore Sun, there is not a significant uptick in attention to homelessness in The Buffalo News during the recession period. Instead, there is a sharp increase in the frequency of articles mentioning homelessness only in 2011, and this increase is driven largely by reporting on studies, workshops, panels, and charity events
regarding those affected by the continuing fallout of the Great Recession. The frequency of articles mentioning homelessness in *The Buffalo News* is represented in Figure 9.

![Graph showing the number of articles mentioning homelessness published in *The Buffalo News*, 2005–2011.](image)

*Figure 9. Articles mentioning homelessness published in *The Buffalo News*, 2005–2011.*

*The Buffalo News* began to show signs of financial struggle in 2004. An April 2005 piece in the *Frontier Reporter*, the official newsletter of the Buffalo Newspaper Guild, stated:

*The Buffalo News* isn’t nearly as profitable as it used to be…With new presses failing to stem a long-term decline in circulation and advertising revenues sliding, the News’ profits tumbled 24 percent last year to their lowest levels since the late 1980s. Still, the News remains solidly in the black and continues to earn profits that are higher than the industry average, though the once-wide lead the News enjoyed over the vast majority of the newspaper industry has narrowed considerably. (Robinson, 2005)

In 2005, *The Buffalo News* had 892 employees and an average daily circulation of 194,225 (Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., 2006; BurrellesLuce, 2005). In order to cut costs, the newspaper began to offer a series of buyouts in 2008, ultimately offering voluntary
resignation incentives to 10% of its workforce, or about 110 employees ("Adverse Events at Top 100 Newspapers," 2009; "Buffalo News Offers Buyout Incentives," 2008). The result was a decline in the workforce by 116 employees to 730 in 2009, down from 846 in 2008 (Berkshire Hathaway, Inc. 2009, 2010).

Circulation declined steadily from 2009 to 2010, and another round of buyouts took place in 2010 (Tan, 2010). By 2011, circulation had fallen to 154,748, a decline of 20%, and the total number of employees had shrunk to 672, or 25%, in a 6-year period (Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., 2012; BurrellesLuce, 2011).

Compared with The Baltimore Sun, the number of articles being published by The Buffalo News experienced a somewhat similar decline during the Great Recession period, with a slightly more significant rebound in 2010 and 2011, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Total articles published by The Buffalo News, 2005–2011.
Figure 11. Proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to total articles published in *The Buffalo News*, 2005–2011.

The peak in interest in the subject of homelessness in 2009 and again in 2011, as shown in Figure 11, is similar to the trends in the coverage by *The Baltimore Sun*. The proportion test shows the change from 2005 to 2009 to be statistically significant ($p < .05$), meaning that there was a notable increase in attention to homelessness during the recession period. Unlike the data from *The Baltimore Sun*, the data from *The Buffalo News* show a more pronounced decrease in attention to homelessness in 2010 and a subsequent spike in interest in 2011. The increase in interest in homelessness from 2010 to 2011 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Unlike *The Baltimore Sun*, editorials in *The Buffalo News* made up a very small percentage of the articles mentioning homelessness during the research period. Whereas 26% of the articles in the data set from *The Baltimore Sun* were editorials, a mere 6% of those from *The Buffalo News* were editorials. There were only nine editorials in the entire
combined 7-year data set from *The Buffalo News*, less than the number in any single year of the data set from *The Baltimore Sun*.

There were few major service providers in the news in Buffalo during the research period. These service providers also held fewer media events, such as charity galas and other fundraisers, than their counterparts in Baltimore. The leadership of the service provider community in Buffalo was also not very vocal compared with that in Baltimore.

Some of the major drivers of coverage of homelessness in Buffalo were speaking events, such as panel discussions or conferences, but these were usually one-off events that did not inspire sustained dialogue in the press. Buffalo announced its 10-year plan to End Homelessness in 2006, but Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown did not make ending homelessness a priority of his administration as did Mayor Sheila Dixon in Baltimore, despite the fact that the two cities had relatively similar numbers of people experiencing homelessness. Because of the lack of attention at the top levels of government in Buffalo, the 10-year plan was seldom mentioned in the news.

Regular annual events for the homeless did ensure a modicum of coverage in the press, the three primary examples being Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, Homeless Persons Memorial Day, and the HUD-mandated PIT count.

Two moments in particular brought an increase in attention to homelessness in Buffalo in the 2007–2008 period. First, new census data were released, showing that Buffalo was the second poorest big city; this drew some media attention to the subject of poverty and, by association, homelessness (Gee, 2007). Second, Buffalo launched the nation’s first veterans’ treatment court in 2008. This legal model served veterans, many
of them homeless, who had run-ins with the law, and it directed them toward services, such as addiction treatment, as opposed to jail time (Michel, 2008).

Among the articles in *The Buffalo News*, concern about the worsening condition of the economy became apparent in November 2007, when one article noted that service providers in the area reported “seeing an increase in the number of people losing their homes when the struggle becomes too much.” According to one interviewee, “we’re just getting overwhelmed in terms of more people than we’ve ever had that have come to our homeless shelter.” The same commentator stated, “I think everybody is having a hard time. It’s not just the poor. It’s also the middle class” (Gee, 2007).

The first mention of the recession in the data set from *The Buffalo News* was an article from November 2008, much later than in the case of *The Baltimore Sun*. The article details changes in the quantity and quality of calls coming into the crisis call center:

> Of late, more adult callers mention their fears about the sinking economy. “Even our chronic callers, have shifted their focus to talk about the economy,” said Lisa McNeil, coordinator of the Crisis Counseling Program. “We've seen a rise in calls in the early evening, after the local news or world news. People call to express anxiety, a fear of losing their house, their retirement money. Normally people don't hear about us,” said McNeil, “but with the current economy we are seeing people who normally wouldn't call us.” Also, there is an increase in referrals to food pantries and a greater number of people unemployed for longer periods of time, more arrears in rent payments and more concern about utility shut-off notices. “It's not the normal population of homeless people,” said Morrison,
supervisor of the Homeless Outreach. “I'm meeting people who say they've never been unemployed before.” (Voell, 2008)

This article and similar articles in *The Buffalo News* draw a distinction between the usual type of homelessness the Newly Homeless. A 2009 article chronicles the daily activities of a formerly homeless man who “talks to homeless people he knew from his years on the streets and encourages them to help the new homeless—those impoverished by the economic slump—find their next meal or a safe place to sleep” (Chiappone, 2009). One might infer from this example that even the homeless community recognizes the Newly Homeless as categorically different than those who were homeless and destitute before the recession. This distinction of the Newly Homeless is explored in depth in the next chapter.

As the Great Recession ensued, causal explanations of homelessness in *The Buffalo News* shifted from emphasizing personal problems to emphasizing economic and social structures. One 2009 article noted that 2008 “was the first time that foreclosure was cited ahead of mental illness as a cause of homelessness” (Epstein, 2009a). The faces of homelessness in the news also shifted to those who were more likely to elicit sympathy, namely families, children, and veterans. A 2010 article, for example, notes with concern that even though the economy is recovering, “nearly two-thirds of all homeless families in the region are grappling with homelessness for the first time” (Meyer, 2010).

The trends of increasing emphasis on demographics that elicit sympathy and emphasis on structural causes of homelessness are quantitatively represented in Figures 12 and 13.
In Figure 12, trends among mentions of demographics likely to elicit sympathy vary. The proportion test shows that difference in the proportion of references to families to articles mentioning homelessness from 2006 to 2007 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).
Throughout the Great Recession, explanations of the causes of homelessness are dominated by factors affecting individuals rather than social structures. The narrative trend reverses in 2010 and 2011, when fallout from the recession draws attention to increasing numbers of people displaced by the economy.

Evidence from The Buffalo News suggests that there was a minor increase in representations of sympathetic categories of people experiencing homelessness, namely families, in 2007 only. There is also an increase in individualizing (e.g., personal) accounts of the causes of homelessness, such as addiction, mental illness, and criminal backgrounds.

These findings stand in stark contrast to the finds from The Baltimore Sun. The Buffalo News published far fewer articles about homelessness, and it had far fewer editorials. Even though the homeless populations were similar in size, there was less attention to homelessness by political leaders. Consequently, many of the factors that
drove an increase in attempts to explain homelessness in structural terms, such as the faltering economy, the housing crisis, unemployment, and poverty, were not presented in Buffalo. Instead, the data show that homelessness in Buffalo was increasingly seen as a personal problem during the recession period.

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

One of the features that sets the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* apart from the other newspapers in this study is that the paper intends itself to be a national newspaper, distributed in other major cities and countries and in hubs of commerce or travel, such as airports or train stations. Consequently, many articles contain bylines from other major newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, and concern events from other major cities, such as Dallas or Chicago.

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published 324 articles mentioning homelessness during the research period, the second least of the four newspapers. After controlling for duplicate articles and articles that did not meet the selection criteria, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published 242 articles relevant to this dissertation. There was dip in interest in homelessness in 2008, and then a sharp spike in interest in homeless in 2009, as shown in Figure 14.
Figure 14. Articles mentioning homelessness published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2005–2011.

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* had been struggling ever since 1992, when a massive strike over layoffs and other cost-saving measures shut down the paper, resulting in its sale to Block Communications. Block reported net losses every year since the 1992 acquisition. In 2007, the paper reported $23 million in losses over 3 years and another $20 million loss in 2007 alone (“Unions Ratify 39-Month Deal,” 2007). Further financial stresses caused the paper to hike prices in 2008 and cut key positions, including all of its Washington, D.C., bureau (Kurtz, 2008; Olson, 2008). Between 2008 and 2009, the *Post-Gazette* offered three rounds of buyouts, and in 2010 the company announced plans to further eliminate 100 jobs (Belser, 2010; Napsha, 2009).

In 2005, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* had an average daily circulation of 237,867 (BurrellesLuce, 2005). That number had fallen to 203,588 in 2009 and 187,237 in 2011 (BurrellesLuce, 2009, 2011). These figures represent a decline in circulation of 21%.
During the research period, the total number of articles published by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* decreased from a high of 59,563 in 2005 to a low of 43,129 in 2010, rebounding slightly in 2011 with 45,104 articles published. The slump in publication totals from 2005 to 2011 represents a 24% decline. See Figure 15.

Figure 15. Total articles published per year in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2005–2011. The steady decline in the total number of articles published sheds light on the relative amount of attention paid to homelessness during the research period. The proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to articles published is represented quantitatively in Figure 16.
There is a peak of interest in homelessness in 2009 at the height of the Great Recession. The proportion test shows that the change in the proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to total articles published from 2005 to 2009 and from 2008 to 2009 is statistically significant (p < .05).

The homeless advocacy community was not nearly as vocal in Pittsburgh as compared with Baltimore: 43 articles, or 18% of the data set for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, were editorials, compared with 26% in The Baltimore Sun and just 6% in The Buffalo News. Pittsburgh’s homeless population hovered between 1,200 and 1,400 during the research period, and it was the only city to see yearly increases in its homeless population during the research period.

At the beginning of the research period, Pittsburgh released the details of its 10-year plan, but it received little coverage. Instead, the primary driver of news about homelessness was concern about panhandling. Pittsburgh launched a new anti-
panhandling campaign, with billboards and signs on buses discouraging people to give to panhandlers. The city also considered the idea of passing legislation that would ban panhandling during certain hours and in certain proximities to places of business and finance.

Compassion about homelessness was lukewarm at best. A 2006 rally had as its expressed goal to draw about 1,675 people, representing the number of people in the homeless continuum, but only about 70 people attended (Ward, 2006). It was not until 2007 that coverage about homelessness began to talk about affordable housing. In 2007, a major psychiatric hospital, Mayview, was being closed, and advocates and scholars began to call for more housing opportunities for people with mental illness.

By 2008, attention to homeless veterans was increasing, and a few articles mentioned the struggling economy. Unlike Baltimore, news about the recession was slow to make headlines in articles about local affairs, perhaps because, as described in Chapter 2, Pittsburgh weathered the recession rather well with its diversified economy. But concern about rising homelessness eventually made its way into print. One editorial by a concerned citizen warned:

Homelessness is a symptom of our failing economy, a symbol of society's lack of care for the most vulnerable amongst us, and a reminder of how tenuous the American Dream can be. As we walk to work, drive home or stroll to the theater or sports events, we come face to face with those who live on the streets and panhandle for money. Hidden under bridges, in vacant buildings and behind fences are the resting places of those with no permanent homes and no protection against the elements. If the economy continues to collapse, we will see more and
more people without homes, people who live with relatives and friends until those situations fail, finally finding themselves on the street with their belongings in bags and carts. (Hollingshead, 2008)

By 2009, concern about increasing homelessness in the midst of a failing national economy grew significantly as unemployment soared and the housing crisis deepened.

Public attitudes about homelessness were beginning to shift. One article in March 2009 claimed that middle-class families were the “new face of homelessness” (Eckholm, 2009). An April 2009 article noted that neighbors were now voicing support for squatters, and sheriffs were reluctant and slow to act on evictions and foreclosures (Leland, 2009).

One social worker was quoted as saying, “The thing about this recession, we're seeing more and more people who are coming to us because they need our services for the first time. Many of them have never had to ask for help and now they are faced with potential homelessness” (Rujumba, 2009).

In late 2009, a trio of articles focused on the rise of homelessness among families with children, and this concern carried well into 2010, when a series of legal cases made headlines concerning the rights of homeless children to education. Along with increased concern for homeless children was an increase in attention to homeless veterans and even seniors (Rich, 2010).

In 2007, an article entitled “Effort to Reduce Homeless Behind Schedule” detailed how the 10-year plan did not prioritize housing, lacked clear goals, and needed to consider adopting the increasingly popular Housing First paradigm (Lord, 2007). But by late 2010, the infusion of federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program funds, strong political will, public sympathies toward the homeless, and a new
emphasis on housing as part of the 10-year plan all combined to lead one author to conclude that the 10-year plan was now ahead of schedule and making great strides. According to the article, that progress was closely related to the changing attitudes about homelessness:

Pittsburgh City Councilman Bill Peduto said city government has come a long way in its attitudes from the late 1990s. At that time, he said, officials confused panhandling with homelessness, even though many panhandlers are not homeless, and conducted sweeps of areas where homeless people stayed, clearing out their belongings and telling them not to come back. “Imagine going home tonight and finding everything is gone,” he said. Now, he said, the city recognizes that affordable housing is a key part of neighborhood improvement. (Kalson, 2010)

By late 2011, at the end of the research period, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette argued that local governments “have started to realize that combating homelessness with their own funds can save them money, by reducing demands on police, paramedics, schools and other services” and noted that homelessness in Pittsburgh among veterans and likewise overall was starting to decrease (Lord, 2011).

The increasing emphasis on categories of people experiencing homelessness that are likely to be viewed sympathetically is represented in Figure 17.
The proportion test shows that the increase in the proportion of articles mentioning families and children to articles mentioning homelessness in 2005 and 2011 is statistically significant ($p < .05$). The proportion test also shows a significant effect among people experiencing homelessness between 2008 and 2009 who are reported to have children ($p < .05$).

With respect to articles that offered an explanation for the causes of a person’s homelessness or of homelessness in general, Figure 18 quantitatively shows the changes in emphasis from personal variables, such as drug addiction, to structural variables, such as the lack of affordable housing.
Figure 18. Mentions of structural and individual causes of homelessness in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2005–2011.

Individualizing accounts of homelessness predominate from 2005 to 2008, but a significant reversal takes place in 2009. Structural accounts of the causes of homelessness come to dominate from 2009 to 2011.

The data from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* show that media discourse surrounding homelessness underwent quantitative and qualitative shifts similar to what was seen in the data from *The Baltimore Sun*: more articles were published about homelessness as the recession deepened; demographic groups likely to elicit sympathy were increasingly featured; and structural rather than personal accounts of the causes of homelessness predominated during the Great Recession period.

Unlike *The Baltimore Sun*, however, the changes in the discursive climate in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* were driven not by the advocacy community but rather by changes in national data, federal policies, and major event in big cities. The differences in what drove the transformations of public discourse in the two newspapers can be
attributed to the fact that *The Baltimore Sun* had a more local focus, with news covering local events, the views of local politicians, and the voices of local advocates. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, however, sought a more national audience, and its content was therefore shaped less by local advocates and more by national-level conversations. But like *The Baltimore Sun*, evidence from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* shows that representations of homelessness became more sympathetic and more structural in nature during the Great Recession period.

**The Star-Ledger**

Newark’s *The Star-Ledger* published 529 articles mentioning homelessness during the research period. After controlling for articles that did not meet the selection criteria, *The Star-Ledger* published 316 articles relevant to this dissertation, second only to *The Baltimore Sun*. There was a peak in interest in homelessness in 2007, and interest remained strong in 2008 and 2009, with a decline in 2010 and slight rebound in 2011, as shown in Figure 19.

![Figure 19. Articles mentioning homelessness in *The Star-Ledger*, 2005–2011.](image)
Financial troubles for The Star-Ledger prompted a major restructuring of the newspaper in 2008. The company had a long-standing pledge that it would not lay off non-unionized employees due to financial difficulties, so the company pursued a range of different cost-cutting strategies. In March 2008, The Star-Ledger announced that it was closing one of its two printing plants, but the paper’s owner, Advance Publications, promised that there would be no cuts to the newsroom (Kelly, 2008a). Noting that the paper had posted net losses for 3 years in a row, the paper’s publisher George Arwady stated publicly in August 2008 that the newspaper would be sold if it could not cut staff by 26% and reach new agreements with employee unions (“Star-Ledger to Be Sold Unless Staff Shrinks,” 2008).

As negotiations with unions stalled and closure or sale of the paper seemed imminent, a significant number of employees sought to accept the buyout offers, with more than 50% of the non-union workforce applying for voluntary resignation packages by October 2008 (Kelly, 2008b). The paper eventually accepted 151 buyouts from news staff, representing about 50% of the newsroom (Jesdanun, 2008).

Faced with continued declines in advertising revenue, The Star-Ledger announced in May 2009 that it would reduce employee salaries, cut back the amount that the company contributed to employee health care plans, eliminate contributions to the pension plan, and require 10-day, unpaid furloughs in order to recoup an estimated $24 million in losses (Diamant, 2009). Another round of staff reductions, 25 of them from the newsroom, was announced in October 2009, reducing the paper to half its former size in just one year since the restructuring began in 2008 (Koblin, 2009).
The paper continued to lose money and readers through 2010, reporting $9 million in losses in 2009 and another $10 million in 2010, forcing it to offer a company-wide buyout to cut costs further (“The Star-Ledger Announces Staff Buyout Offer, Possible Salary Reductions,” 2010).

The buyouts affected the rates of articles being published about homelessness in the data set. Kevin Dilworth, a veteran reporter for *The Star-Ledger* for 28 years, was one of the reporters who left the paper during the 2008 buyout offerings, according to his Linkedin profile (Dilworth, n.d.). He was a frequent author on social issues; in 2005 alone, he published five articles on homelessness. Ralph Ortega left the paper in 2009; he was the paper’s City Hall reporter, and he often reported on homelessness.

In 2005, *The Star-Ledger* had an average daily circulation of 382,055 (BurrellesLuce, 2005). That number shrank to 316,280 by 2009, and circulation continued to decline to 229,255 by 2011 (BurrellesLuce, 2009, 2011). The decline in circulation during the research period represents a 40% decrease, the most of any paper under investigation.

The total number of articles published per year in *The Star-Ledger* increased from 89,031 in 2005 to a high of 91,741 in 2007. When financial troubles hit the paper in 2008, publication rates dropped sharply, and by 2011, *The Star-Ledger* published just 57,377 articles, a 37% decline in 4 years. See Figure 20. This decline in publication is the steepest decline of any of the newspapers in this dissertation.
Figure 20. Total articles published per year in *The Star-Ledger*, 2005–2011.

When the overall decline in publication totals is factored in, the relative interest in the subject of homelessness appears quite differently than that shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21. Proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to total articles published in *The Star-Ledger*, 2005–2011.
There is a sharp increase in attention to homelessness beginning in 2006. Interest dips somewhat in 2008 and then rises again in 2009. The proportion test shows the difference in the proportion from 2005 to 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 to be statistically significant ($p < .05$), confirming that attention to homelessness increased in the recession period.

Editorials were not a major driver of coverage of homelessness in *The Star-Ledger* data set. Editorials represented just 14% of the data set, the second lowest number of the four newspapers. The authors of editorials in *The Star-Ledger* were often concerned citizens. Only 6 of the 44 editorials in the data set were authored by representatives of the homeless services and advocacy community.

Prior to the Great Recession, the main driver of coverage of homelessness was the changing landscape of federal policy concerning homelessness, notably the HUD requirement to conduct biennial PIT counts and the Continuum of Care funding competition, which directs millions of dollars to jurisdictions annually. The first PIT count in New Jersey was conducted in January 2005, with 20 out of the 21 counties in the state participating (Ortega, 2005).

Discussions of the causes of homelessness prior to the recession tended to focus on addiction or other individualizing factors. For example, an article from January 2005 focused on a longtime volunteer, a nun who witnessed rising homelessness in the late 1970s that was caused by major economic transformations. The nun is quoted as saying, “There's a total different type of homelessness now than when I came,” noting that “underlying causes have changed over the years, and today it may be rooted in unemployment, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, young-adult
parenthood, hospital discharge and acute or chronic physical disability, including HIV infections” (Lockwood, 2005).

Another article noted that the tendency had been a shift away from family homelessness and toward homelessness caused by individual factors. According to one interviewee, “Ten years ago, we saw a lot of families in crisis,” she said. “Now it's shifting to individuals with mental illness, addictions or people who are coming out of prisons and don't have a permanent residence” (Moore, 2007).

Several articles prior to the Great Recession warned of a shortage of affordable housing and high housing prices (Braun, 2006; Hester, 2006; Whitlow, 2005), but concern about homelessness only really began to take off in late 2007 as the recession set in. By November 2007, The Star-Ledger was warning that shelters were full, demand at food pantries and other service providers was increasing, and the amount of money coming in from charitable donations was falling (Rugaber, 2007).

That the conversation about homelessness was beginning to change can be seen in one editorial offered by a local reverend:

It is estimated that the lack of affordable housing in Morris County is as great as 10,000 apartments. Often, the image of the homeless is the very sad picture of a person huddled over the grate of a subway. However, homelessness is increasingly the person working next to you, serving you coffee, delivering your packages. The homeless are children in our schools and colleges. More people are using soup kitchens and food pantries to feed themselves and their families so they can pay their rent. More often, families are now spending well over 50 percent of their income on housing costs. (Hall, 2007)
Sympathy for the homeless began to become a feature of coverage beginning in 2008. One article noted a surge in veteran homelessness (Larini & Woolley, 2008), and another article noted that, with the “perilous economy,” “homelessness could happen to anyone” (Lockwood, 2008). Amid public concern and growing political pressure over new data on the number of homeless families, the community of Middlesex, New Jersey, began pursuing the creation of a 10-year plan in 2008 to try to relieve family and chronic homelessness (Walsh, 2008).

In 2009, an important change in attitudes about homelessness occurred. Coverage about homelessness soared to its peak, and authors were emphasizing that a new category of homelessness had emerged as a result of the Great Recession. According to one author, “For nearly a generation, the face of homelessness in America has been that of someone living on the street, panhandling for loose change. But with the foreclosure crisis, stagnant economy and rising unemployment, advocates for the homeless said they are seeing more two-parent families seeking shelter” (Jenkins, 2009). Authors began to refer to the “new faces” or the “new homeless.” According to one social worker, “We're used to seeing someone in their 40s or 50s who has mental illness or substance abuse problems or both….Now, because of the change in the economy, we get lots and lots of new homeless” (Fadel, 2009).

Along with a growing concern for homeless families came a concern for homeless children. One article noted that, because of the economy, public schools reported a 25% increase in homeless children from 2006 to 2008 (Stetler, 2009).

By 2010, media portrayals of homelessness had begun to emphasize structural causes in order to explain the rise of middle-class homelessness. A front-page article
entitled “The New Faces of Homelessness” told the story of the Natal family, a “typically American” family whose “typical American experience spiraled downward in an atypical recession.” The family became homeless when the father lost his job as an operations manager at a rug-cleaning company, and the family was evicted. Data from the previous year’s PIT count had shown that more than half of those surveyed cited job loss or housing costs as the reason for their homelessness, and 25% said they were evicted from their home in 2009 (Read, 2010a).

Finally, in 2010, mounting pressure from advocacy groups and policy experts prompted Mayor Cory Booker and County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo to devise Essex County’s 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, a plan that focused largely on increasing the supply of affordable housing. In announcing the plan, political leaders mobilized around the mantra “housing ends homelessness” and committed to a Housing First approach (Read, 2010b). The discourse surrounding this 10-year plan was largely structural in nature, emphasizing employment and housing but with few references to addiction or mental illness.

As the recession wound down, coverage of homelessness slowed. Despite all the fanfare of 2009 and 2010, a 2011 article noted that during the 3 years of the Great Recession, homelessness in the area had increased “only slightly” (Lee, 2011a). In fact, official figures confirmed that Essex County itself saw a 14% decrease in homelessness (Lee, 2011b).

As with the other newspapers under investigation, The Star-Ledger increased its coverage of homelessness despite decreasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness, and the conversation around homelessness focused on sympathetic groups
and structural factors that cause homelessness. These shifts in media discourse are represented quantitatively in Figures 22 and 23.

Figure 22. Mentions of sympathetic demographic variables in *The Star-Ledger*, 2005–2011

The proportion test shows that the increase in references to veterans from 2006 to 2008 and 2009 is statistically significant. The proportion test also shows that the increase in references to children from 2006 to 2007 and 2008 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).
In 2008, there was a sharp rise in the percentage of mentions of structural causes of homelessness. The structural framework for explaining homelessness continued to dominate from 2009 to 2011.

Data from The Star-Ledger show that attention to homelessness increased during the recession period. The advocacy community was not very vocal in coverage of homelessness in The Star-Ledger. Unique to The Star-Ledger is the particular fascination with new homelessness that emerges in 2009. It was not until the media fanfare over middle-class homelessness that structural accounts began to predominate. Perhaps this explains why Newark was the last of the cities under investigation to introduce a 10-year plan finally in 2010 (Buffalo introduced its plan in 2006; Pittsburgh in 2005; and Baltimore in 2008). Whatever the case, coverage of homelessness in The Star-Ledger became more sympathetic and structural during the Great Recession, and the structural
understanding of homelessness continued to dominate the news after the recession had officially ended.

**Section 3: Aggregate Data**

The four newspapers differed in several important ways. The first and perhaps most obvious difference was that each newspaper devoted a different amount of coverage to homelessness during the research period, as shown in Figure 24.

![Figure 24](image)

**Figure 24.** Number of articles mentioning homelessness 2005–2011.

*The Baltimore Sun* has the most frequent coverage of homelessness, followed by *The Star-Ledger*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *The Buffalo News*.

Another significant area of difference among the four newspapers was the amount of editorial content on homelessness, shown in Figure 25.
Figure 25. Amount of editorial coverage of homelessness.

*The Baltimore Sun* had the most editorial content, followed by *The Star-Ledger*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *The Buffalo News*.

While all four newspapers saw a shift to structural explanations of homelessness during the research period, they did so at different times, and the year in which the switch took place seems to be related to the amount of coverage overall and the amount of editorial content. *The Baltimore Sun*, with its strong network of homeless advocates authoring a large number of editorials and a mayor committed to the cause of ending homelessness, began to emphasize structural accounts of homelessness in 2007, the first of the newspapers under investigation.

*The Star-Ledger* had a number of editorial contributions (44) similar to that of *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (43), but *The Star Ledger* was more committed to coverage of local events and had extensive coverage of homelessness in the early days of the Great Recession, with 49 articles mentioning homelessness in 2008 and 51 articles mentioning

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, with its greater emphasis on national news, published relatively few articles mentioning homelessness in the beginning of the Great Recession, with just 24 articles published in 2008, less than half of what was published by *The Star-Ledger* that same year. Structural explanations of the causes of homelessness gained prominence in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* in 2009.

*The Buffalo News* had the least amount of coverage of homelessness, despite Buffalo having a homeless population similar in size to those of Pittsburgh and Newark. *The Buffalo News* also had the fewest editorial contributions of the four newspapers. Advocates for the homeless tended to emphasize positive attributes of people experiencing homelessness and structural factors contributing to homelessness (Lee, Farrell, & Link, 2004; Rosenthal, 2000). It is no surprise, therefore, that *The Buffalo News*, with the least amount of editorial content in the data set, was the last newspaper to switch from personal to structural accounts of the causes of homelessness. Structural explanations of homelessness gained prominence in *The Buffalo News* in 2010.

Despite the above differences, the four newspapers exhibited surprising similarities in the changes that took place in quantity and quality of coverage of homelessness during the Great Recession.

As detailed in Section 2, all four newspapers underwent significant restructuring during the research period as a result of growing competition from internet news sources and declining subscriptions due to the faltering economy. One of the effects of this
Restructuring was a decrease in the total number of articles published by each newspaper, shown in Figure 26.

Figure 26. Aggregate trend in total number of articles published for all four newspapers 2005–2011.

The aggregate trend for the four newspapers is a steep decline in the number of articles published from 2005 to 2009, and publication totals stabilize somewhat in 2010 and 2011 (after most restructuring was complete at each of the newspapers). Overall, from 2005 to 2011, the total number of articles published per year fell from a high of 239,453 in 2005 to a low of 165,983 in 2011, a decrease of 31%.

All four newspapers saw a relative increase in the proportion of articles mentioning homelessness during the Great Recession period, shown in Figure 27.
Figure 27. Proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to total articles published by all four newspapers 2005–2011.

Because of the restructuring of each newspaper, it is unhelpful to simply chart the amount of articles mentioning homelessness; a decrease in the number of articles mentioning homelessness may simply be a result of cuts in the newsroom or declining publications rates overall. Instead, Figure 27 controls for the restructuring of the papers by presenting the proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to the total number of articles published. The proportion test shows the pre-recession proportion of articles in 2005 mentioning homelessness to total articles published to be statistically significantly different ($p < .05$) from same proportion during the Great Recession years of 2007, 2008, and 2009.

This increase in attention to homelessness does not correspond to increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness; homelessness nationally and in the four cities under investigation was on the decline during the Great Recession period. The reason for this attention may be the profit motive to capture readers’ attention. The target
audience of American daily newspapers is the Middle Class (McChesney & Nichols, 2010, p. 50), and the stability of the home and the value of home ownership are central to Middle Class identity (DePastino, 2005). The point is made succinctly by Richardson (2007):

Of course, we know that newspapers are businesses. The vast majority of news producers exist to make profit and, under the current conditions of capitalism, the continued existence of a news producer hinges on it selling its product (to its identified audience) and doing so in the most profitable manner possible. News is a product – a product that must be made attractive or appealing to a market of consumers. This will in turn overly emphasize stories that are amusing, pleasurable, and engaging to these identified consumers. (p. 77)

The overemphasis of the subject of homelessness during the Great Recession period can be understood as an attempt to capture the attention of readers, playing to their fears that homelessness could happen to them. As one of the articles in the data set from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette exclaimed, “The average homeless person is no longer a stereotype. It’s my neighbor, it’s your neighbor. It could be me” (Navratil, 2009).

All four newspapers shifted from a predominance of individualizing accounts of the causes of homelessness, such as addiction and mental illness, to structural accounts, such as the job market or the housing crisis. Even though the shift took place during a different year for each newspaper, the overall trajectory of the transformation in public discourse was quite clear: as the Great Recession ensured, media representations of the causes of homelessness became increasingly structural in nature.
At the beginning of the research period, as shown in Figure 28, the predominance of explanations for the causes of homelessness were personal (54%). In 2006, there was a nearly equal distribution of personal and structural causes mentioned (51% and 49%, respectively). The shift in emphasis to structural causes began in earnest in 2007 (56% structural) but became more pronounced in 2008 (65% structural), peaking in 2009 and 2010 (78% structural in both years).

Figure 28. Percentage of causes attributed to structural versus individual factors for all four newspapers 2005–2011.

The four newspapers variously emphasized categories of sympathetic demographic groups. Combined, however, the four newspapers create a larger sample size, and the picture of the shift in emphasis to sympathetic categories of demographic groups becomes more apparent, as shown in Figure 29.
For all three sympathetic variables (families, children, and veterans), the aggregate data show an increase in emphasis during the Great Recession period, with a peak for all three variables in 2008. The proportion test shows that, for these three variables, the difference in the proportion of variables in articles from 2005 to 2008 to be statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Despite the steady decrease in homelessness, newspaper attention to homelessness grew during the Great Recession period. Newsrooms increasingly decided to feature stories about people losing their homes during the economic downturn despite often-published data showing that the number of people living on the streets or in shelters was actually declining. By and large, the stories that ran featured families losing their homes, often due to foreclosure, and these stories were accompanied by anecdotes about the swelling ranks of people in shelters or by interviews with people living on the streets.
There is a crucial jump in logic being implied in the media hype about homelessness. Typically, a family who loses their home due to foreclosure does not end up on the street or in a shelter. Instead, they find a cheaper home with a mortgage they can afford or become renters instead of owners. Often the worst-case scenario is that a family may stay with relatives or friends while they seek alternative housing arrangements (Fessler, 2010).

Instead of providing a realistic snapshot of the pathways into homelessness, newspapers during the recession period used the specter of homelessness as the punch line to give foreclosure stories an added sense of urgency and doom. Middle class families do not fall into poverty and street homelessness just because they can no longer afford to pay their home loan. For someone to be street homeless, the individual would need to have exhausted his or her savings, social networks, and income. Families and veterans are the types of figure who readers do not want to see fall into homelessness. A story about a veteran or family becoming homeless is a more shocking or interesting story to read (“How could homelessness happen to them?”) than a story about a drug addict or ex-offender (“Of course homelessness would happen to them”). Families and veterans are among what are often considered the “deserving poor,” that is, people for whom there is a moral obligation to help and who are not to be blamed for their circumstances.

In order to sustain this narrative, the causal accounts of homelessness needed to shift from individualizing and moralizing accounts that blamed people for losing their homes to systemic and structural accounts that suggested that homelessness could happen to anyone. How else could hard-working families fall on such difficult times? As detailed
in this chapter, there was a dramatic reversal of explanations of homelessness stemming from addiction and mental illness toward an emphasis on the economy and labor market. This shift in explanatory paradigms was part of the overarching grand narrative that homelessness was coming to the middle class, even though all available data showed that it was not. According to this narrative, people could become homeless suddenly and through no fault of their own.

The news media during the Great Recession sounded the alarm bells to alert their middle class readers that their way of life was under siege. The very notion of home ownership as the defining characteristic of middle-class identity was under threat, and the foil that newspapers used to juxtapose against that coherent identity was the looming and ominous figure of homelessness.

Regardless of whether newspapers were selling hype about homelessness to stir up excitement about the Recession and produce good stories that people wanted to read, the fact remains that homelessness was being talked about more, and in more detail, during the recession period. The causes of homelessness were being laid out in increasingly structural terms that eschewed stale moralizing dismissals of addicts and criminals. The question remains as to whether the changing discourse about who was homeless and why affected whether and how solutions to homelessness were posited. As the next chapter will show, calls to action did increase during the recession period, but these calls to action tended to be only for the benefit of certain groups of people, especially the group of people newspapers began to refer to as the Newly Homeless.
Chapter 5: The Public Identity of the Newly Homeless

This chapter argues that the four newspapers under investigation (The Baltimore Sun, The Buffalo News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and Newark Star-Ledger) constructed an idealized image of a type of homelessness that emerged during the Great Recession, and that this image was presented against images of homelessness that predated and persisted during the economic downturn. This new image of homelessness during the Great Recession was often cast as a new class of people, which several authors referred to as the Newly Homeless.

The four newspapers sought to chronicle the plight of the Newly Homeless in such a way as to provoke moral outrage and condemnation at their suffering and to call for social and policy solutions. Articles used a variety of techniques to construct an identity with moral qualities that deserved sympathy and aid; they constructed this identity in part by opposing it to stereotypical images of people experiencing homelessness as panhandlers or cases of mental illness.

This chapter uses strategies from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), based on the works of Fairclough and Van Dijk, to explain how the identity of the Newly Homeless was created and imbued with ethical significance. The chapter will detail how the press emphasized characteristics of the Newly Homeless that are particularly relatable to the middle-class reader. The relatability factor encouraged the reader to experience stories sympathetically, and it created an implicit argument in support of the policies and proposals being advanced in the news. This chapter will show how the image of the Newly Homeless reinscribed conceptions of the deserving poor in the context of the Great Recession.
The first section of this chapter will draw from themes ideas in CDA to indicate why and how identities, morality, and social relations are constructed in print media. Particular attention will be paid to the work of John Richardson, who applies CDA to the analysis of newspapers. The second section will undertake a CDA of samples from the data set, those that refer to the Newly Homeless, to show a variety of techniques by which the Newly Homeless are constructed and laden with moral consequence.

The third section will show how the figure of the Newly Homeless mirrors the narrative of the dichotomy of the deserving and undeserving poor and how the normative figure of the Newly Homeless served as a mechanism for couching appeals to end homelessness in terms of deservingness. The fourth and final section of this chapter will show how the variables associated with calls to action changed over the period of the Great Recession, reflecting a shift in the way the allocation of resources was justified.

Section 1: Critical Discourse Analysis in Analyzing Newspapers

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a relatively recent school of thought that emerged in the late 1970s and gained prominence in the 1990s and 2000s. Authors who use CDA techniques most frequently identify Norman Fairclough as the progenitor of the methodology. Fairclough brought sociolinguistics into conversation with theories of social power and relations of dominance (i.e., Marx, Foucault) to show how language functions in reconfiguring the social order. One use of language is to function as discourse, a term that requires special definition.

A definition of “discourse” was supplied by the Functionalists as the study of language in use. For Functionalists, language is active in context. According to Richardson:
In order to properly understand discourse we need to do more than analyze the inter-relations of sentences and how they hang together as a cohesive and coherent text. To properly interpret, for example, a press release, or a newspaper report or an advert, we need to work out what the speaker or writer is doing through discourse and how this ‘doing’ is linked to wider inter-personal, institutional, socio-cultural and material contexts. (2007, p. 24)

CDA adopts this definition of discourse. It argues that the purely quantitative approach, such as the mathematical calculation of trends in the frequencies of words or themes, to the study of texts does little to help explain how a text functions in its particular context. Instead, CDA offers interpretations of texts, and it argues that textual meaning is “constructed through an interaction between the producer, text and consumer rather than simply being ‘read off’ the page by all readers in exactly the same way” (Richardson, 2007, p.15).

According to another essential tenet of CDA, language plays a role in producing and reproducing, or (re)producing, social life; consequently, language plays an important role in (re)producing social inequalities. Therefore, CDA necessitates a moral stance: Critical discourse analysts focus on social problems, and especially the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse and domination. CDA starts by identifying a social problem, chooses the perspective of those who suffer most, and critically analyses those in power, those who are responsible and those who have the means and the opportunity to solve such problems. In response to social inequality and the abuse of power, CDA demands politically involved research and with an emancipatory requirement. Such an approach
inevitably means that CDA takes an overt moral and political position with regard to the social problem analyzed. (Richardson, 2007, pp. 1–2)

CDA is “critical” because it understands itself as necessarily implicated or already existing in the world of social relations of power rather than as existing in the realm of an objective or impartial observer. This critical perspective implies an awareness that the act of critique may have the effect of reinforcing or resisting relations of dominance. As Fairclough argued in his early work, *Language and Power*:

> If the facts of the existing sociolinguistic order are seen as lines of tension, as a temporary configuration representing the current balance of class forces, then the effect of sociolinguistic research might either be to legitimize these facts and so indirectly the power relations which underlie them, or to show the contingency of these facts despite their apparent solidity, and so indirectly point to ways of changing them. (Fairclough, 1989, p. 8)

Thus, if language use is an intervention in the field of power relations, then one of the tasks of CDA is to pull aside the curtain on mechanisms by which language furthers relations of dominance and in so doing undermines or reverses the effect of them.

Media, and newspapers in particular, are texts that are made up of language and serve a social function. The analysis of newspapers is not a straightforward analysis of texts but is rather complicated and varied, involving a mix of sources. A newspaper text, for example, tends to be updating a narrative thread that came before it in reporting on a series of events, and it does so in the context of interwoven genres of storytelling, reporting, political commentary, and so on. If media texts are sites where contestations over meaning and social relations are taking place, these struggles and (re)articulations of
identities and ideologies happen not just in one text but are stretched out over many
articles and across different newspapers and forms of media.

A behind-closed-doors utterance leaked to the New York Times, for example, may
find itself cited in PR Newswire, subsequently picked up by dozens of newspapers,
bantered about on television news programs, and later commented upon by the
President’s press secretary. It is for this reason that Fairclough insists on an intertextual
approach to the analysis of media discourse. Across different articles and media
iterations, moments of creativity in discursive practices can be ascertained. According to
Fairclough, “media texts are sensitive barometers of cultural change which manifest in
their heterogeneity and contradictoriness the often tentative, unfinished and messy nature
of change” (1995, p. 60).

Among the registers in which the creativity of the media can be accomplished is
the (re)construction of identities:

The wider social impact of media is not just to do with how they selectively
represent the world, though that is a vitally important issue; it is also to do with
what sorts of social identities, what versions of the ‘self,’ they project and what
cultural values (be it consumerism, individuals or a cult of personality) these
entail. And it is to do with how social relationships are defined, especially social
relationships between the mass of the population who constitute audiences for the
most popular media output and people like politicians, scientists, church leaders,
and broadcasters themselves. (Fairclough 1995, pp. 17–18)

The identities that newspapers (re)construct include value propositions such as what it
means to be an American or inclusion/exclusion statements such as who counts among
the middle class. In the context of the present dissertation, precisely who counts among the poor in need of and deserving social supports is a widely discussed topic.

A CDA of newspapers must, therefore, pay attention to commonalities among various articles across time and to the way these article diverge from each other, comment on each other, and evolve a narrative thread. A given article accomplishes something through language, but it does so in relation to the larger context of the particular periodical in which it appears at a particular time and place as well as the broader social and economic context of the times. A CDA of articles in the data set will necessarily, therefore, examine not only the rhetorical and grammatical moves being made within a given article but will also consider the processes at work in the production of articles in newsrooms during a period of economic stagnation as well as the reception of these works by their intended audiences.

Section 2: The Discursive Construction of the Newly Homeless

In the data set, 37 articles make direct or indirect reference to a new type of homelessness, one that stems specifically from the Great Recession. The class of people said to be experiencing this new type of homelessness is sometimes referred to as the “Newly Homeless.” Strikingly, every single article that refers to the Newly Homeless also includes some sort of appeal for devoting social resources to assist them. It is important to note that no other variable in the coding grid is so directly related to calls to action. This chapter section argues that the Newly Homeless is not merely a descriptive category used by authors to convey a particular experience of housing insecurity, but rather the discourse of the Newly Homeless serves a moralizing purpose to cast the people it refers to as deserving of attention, sympathy, and social assistance. The
construction of the Newly Homeless as a morally deserving class of people is accomplished by a variety of means that can be made visible through CDA.

Framing Headlines.

Newspapers during the Great Recession often framed the economic downturn in terms of its direct consequences for the middle class and their homes through the use of startling headlines. According to Kendall, “Middle- and upper-class people who once believed they were safe from the worst effects of an economic recession, but have learned otherwise, find stories about home evictions particularly frightening.” “Media framing contributes to this fear with headlines” (Kendall, 2011, pp. 202–203). By creating an attention-grabbing headline, authors and editors direct readers to interpret the stories and information contained in the article in terms of what they mean for the readers’ own homes and economic security.

A notable example is a Newark Star-Ledger article from February 15, 2010, entitled “The New Faces of Homelessness: As Unemployment Rises, Working-Class Families Struggle to Stay Afloat” (Read, 2010a). This headline constructs the identity of the Newly Homeless as a moral subject through the use of the synecdoche of “face” as a stand-in for demographic in order to emphasize the humanity of the group of people it seeks to describe rather than statistical indicators.

I chose this headline to frame two facts upon which the article is built. First, the results of the annual point-in-time count for New Jersey having been released, those results showed family homelessness increasing and chronic homelessness decreasing. Second, the article asserts that, in the previous month, New Jersey’s unemployment rate broke 10% for the first time since 1977. This second fact was extensively covered by the
Star-Ledger, and the article is making use of this fact in the chain of reporting on the fallout from the economic downturn. The framing headline encourages the reader to interpret these facts as having implications for identity, suggesting that the identity of “working-class families” is under threat from the specter of homelessness.

Another article from the Star-Ledger, published on December 6, 2009, makes use of a framing headline to construct the identity of the Newly Homeless by employing a headline “Sometimes the Homeless Wear a White Collar. Shelter Workers Say More Professionals Seeking Help” (Drobness, 2009). The event that was the impetus for this article was Project Homeless Connect, an annual resource fair, in Morris County, New Jersey. The author used extensive quotations and the stories of attendees to create a narrative that the type of people experiencing homelessness differed from that in the past. Instead of reporting on the event in terms of services being delivered, the headline focused on the identity of the people being served. The framing headline used metonymy (“white collar”), meaning upper-working-class, to encourage the reader to interpret the facts and stories presented in the article as having significance for the identity of the homeless. The article’s second sentence reads “Many of these newly homeless professionals are staying at county shelters.”

Five articles from the data set have headlines that do the work of constructing the identity of the Newly Homeless (phrases in headlines like “the new faces,” “first timers,” or “the new homeless”). The headlines set the articles in relation to each other. These five articles headline this new identity in such a way that it cannot be ignored and emphasize that facts about the economic slump must be cast in such terms. The headline does more than just suggest that some people think the identity of the homeless population is
changing; the headline implies, by sheer virtue of publication, that the author and newspaper agreed with this observation and asserted it to be fact.

By these acts of headlining, the vague category of the Newly Homeless was reified as a determined identity, in these acts of headlining, rendering it less subject to skepticism or rebuttal. Leaping over the definitional work necessary to the construction of class identity, these reductive headlines made their assertions seem taken-for-granted. These headlines served as the starting assumptions of articles. The use of headline framing in the construction of the identity of the Newly Homeless gave the construction assertive force and finality, and it relieved the readers of the need to decide whether they agreed with the implied suggestion that there was a new class of people.

**Storytelling.**

A common practice in newspaper reporting is to present long narratives about people whose experience could be generalized to support the point being made by the author. Sometimes several such narratives are presented in a single article; sometimes the narratives span several articles, as was the case of a group of articles in the data set comprising the series “On Their Own,” which chronicled the lives of two homeless teenagers, Iven Bailey and Gary Sells, as they struggled to complete their senior year (Madigan, 2006). Telling the story of these people familiarized the reader with their situation and enabled the reader to relate to and sympathize with them. Storytelling is, of course, selective: the author chooses which elements of the peoples’ history or decisions to emphasize and which to downplay or exclude altogether. A few examples suffice to show how storytelling functions in the construction of the Newly Homeless.
A November 14, 2009, article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* detailed the events that brought Ms. Miller to the brink of homelessness. Ms. Miller, who “has had one job or another since the age of 15,” found herself in need of government assistance due to “a combination of health problems and the poor economy.” Her health problem involved excess brain fluids, a condition she could neither predict nor control. She was married and had a 6-year-old daughter. Her husband worked, but due to her illness, she could not. The family was struggling financially, despite having a rent that was only $550 per month, and needed help (Rujumba, 2009).

The story of Ms. Miller is denuded of context and foregrounds features of her situation that make her and her family deserving candidates for sympathy and support: she has worked all her life as much as she can; she can no longer work due to an illness that is not her fault; she is married to a man who works; their modest rent suggests that they are not living unreasonably beyond their means; they have a blameless young daughter; and their usual coping strategies are compromised by the failing economy.

Gone from this narrative are any life choices that may make this family seem like unfit recipients of government aid. Decisions like not saving money for emergency situations or having a child when they were not on stable financial footing are not discussed, because the point of telling her story is to justify government assistance to the Newly Homeless. Any characteristics that might be considered unbecoming, such as family drama or perhaps an episode of trouble with the law, are concealed from the reader.

A 2009 *Baltimore Sun* article tells the story of Michael Brisco, a 43-year-old truck driver who was laid off from his job at the state Department of Agriculture. “Difficulties
with his unemployment benefits” left him with no income. He was unable to pay rent and eventually became homeless. He had also previously lost a home during Hurricane Katrina. The *Baltimore Sun* picked up his story by interviewing people receiving a Thanksgiving meal at a local drop-in center (Brown, 2009).

In this story, Michael was a victim three times over: first, he lost his home to an extreme weather event; then he lost his job due to an economic downturn; then his benefits were bungled by the government. Nowhere in this story does Michael have any agency. At no point is information provided to suggest that he had any control over his situation or could have acted to prevent or mitigate his suffering. This lack of agency is in fact necessary to the structure of the narrative of the Newly Homeless: this individual had no say in what was happening to him, his situation of homelessness was not his fault, and he was therefore not morally responsible for his plight. Because his homelessness is morally legitimated, he is deserving of help. In this case, that help comes in the form of a Thanksgiving meal, cash assistance from his church, and a new government-funded apartment that he will be moving into next month.

In 2010, the Newark *Star-Ledger* picked up on a problem that fit perfectly into the narrative of the Newly Homeless: in New Jersey, most shelters serve people who are on welfare because the shelters can draw funding from those welfare payments. For Newly Homeless families who are not on welfare, there are few shelter options available if they lose their homes. This conundrum makes for a good story because the protagonists (Newly Homeless families) are disadvantaged precisely because they are *not* on welfare.

While several *Star-Ledger* articles reported on this contradiction in New Jersey’s homeless services system, one article told the story of Contina Wright and her family.
Contina’s husband was a construction worker; he lost his job when the housing market collapsed. The couple and their five children soon found themselves living in one of the only shelters that accepts people who are not on welfare. The problem, according to the article, is that the system was not designed for “the middle class homeless” who are “too ‘wealthy’ for government assistance but too poor to make ends meet” (Juri, 2010).

Contina’s story exemplified many of the features commonly associated with the Newly Homeless: she and her husband were both working before economic forces beyond their control rendered them incomeless and subsequently homeless. However, Contina’s story was uniquely appealing because she and her family were not on welfare. Their situation of “middle class homelessness” set them apart from people on welfare. What is interesting here is that, despite losing their income, their savings, and their home, this family was still considered by the newspaper to be middle class. It is as though class status is determined not by income or net worth but rather by a set of behaviors, expectations, and especially one’s willingness to go on welfare.

Implicit in the *Star-Ledger* coverage of the welfare requirement of New Jersey shelters is an ignorance or dismissal of the plight of other people on welfare. What is newsworthy in these articles is that people who have not accepted welfare are suffering, and what is not newsworthy is that people who are on welfare are suffering too. What is not fair is that there is not shelter space for “middle class” people, but what presumably *is* fair is that people on welfare are living in shelters. In other words, it should probably be expected that people who are poor cannot afford housing. What cannot and should not be accepted is that people who are not poor can find themselves without shelter.
These three examples demonstrate how storytelling is employed to construct the Newly Homeless. The intertextual mixing of the genres of fact-based reporting and prose weaves a narrative that makes the trends suggested by the data more relatable to the reader. In this way, reporting on facts is given a moral gloss that is humanizing and provocative of sympathy and outrage. All of this results in a call to action justified by the plight of the protagonists. In other words, policy recommendations are being supported by moralizing narrative representations of the Newly Homeless.

**Argumentation.**

References to facts and statistics are persuasive moves that do discursive work in managing the processes of understanding of readers (Van Dijk, 1993). For instance, a *Buffalo News* article summarized a report that found 60% of people experiencing homelessness in 2009 and 2010 were homeless for the first time (Tokasz, 2011). While there were many findings in the report, the statistics concerning the Newly Homeless were “the most striking,” according to one commentator. The repeated emphasis of this statistic throughout the article and even in its headline imbued the data with added weight, creating a category of people who the number was describing. Despite the fact that, as described in the article, data from previous years was too imprecise to draw comparisons or conclusions, the author nonetheless implied that there was something new about this group of people.

The 60% figure rang alarm bells in part due to the economic background of the reporting. Although the recession and economy were not mentioned in the article, fears of rising homelessness are were cited, as well as federal stimulus funding. Even though the authors of the report being described in the article were cited as cautioning against
drawing conclusions based on their data, the reader was left with a sense that the 60% statistic of the Newly Homeless was a symptom of the failing economy.

However, the 60% figure was not new. A similar report about homelessness in Buffalo from 2010 also noted that nearly two-thirds of all homeless families in the region were dealing with homelessness for the first time. The 2010 article used the 60% figure in an article that cast the work of City Mission in a favorable light. “At a time when our economy is still recovering, the mission ensures that everyone in our community will have their basic needs met,” said Tanya Perrin-Johnson, interim community services commissioner of City Mission (Meyer, 2010). The combined references to the economy and a statistical category rendered the narrative of support for the work of City Mission into mathematical certainty.

**Dichotomization.**

Several articles set up a dichotomy between the Newly Homeless and other types of people experiencing homelessness. The contrasts typically involved the foil of either chronic homelessness or stereotypes about homelessness. One *Star-Ledger* article from 2009 set up the contrast by quoting a social worker:

They are the new faces Ken Barnum sees in his office every day. The Department of Veterans Affairs social worker used to work mostly with older veterans who suffered from commonplace mental problems and addictions. Now the newly homeless often grace his door. He sees young mothers with two or three children; he sees young, able men and couples who have nowhere else to go. "We're used to seeing someone in their 40s or 50s who has mental illness or substance abuse
problems or both,” he said. “Now, because of the change in the economy, we get lots and lots of new homeless.” (Fadel, 2009)

Here, the article oscillates between the statement of facts and quotation. Whereas the interviewee states that he notices a difference between service-seekers with mental illness or addiction, the article encapsulates his quotation with a summary and restatement of his observation that posits the dichotomy he presents as reality.

A Buffalo News article, entitled “Buffalo’s use of stimulus funds to aid homeless gets high praise,” followed a similar approach. The article cited a number of sources and figures to lend validity and moral support for Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) efforts. The article then quoted Dale Zuchlewski, executive director of the Western New York Homeless Alliance, as saying “All of the data flies in the face of the stereotype of the homeless person being a bearded man pushing a shopping cart” (Besecker, 2011). That the people being served are precisely not the stereotypical homeless person serves as justification for the continuation of the program.

Such dichotomization bundles all of the negative feelings and emotions that readers may have about homeless people or homeless assistance and places them on one side of the dichotomy. On the other side of the dichotomy are people to whom the reader can relate and who, according to the moral structure of the equation, deserve sympathy and support. One Star-Ledger article defended the existence of a tent city in the context of the recession and quoted one resident of the encampment as saying “The community isn't your stereotypical guy laying down on Skid Row anymore…They’re intelligent professionals, craftsmen. They fell on hard times” (Smith, 2009). The dichotomy
simplifies the moral equation for the reader: there are those who are likeable and relatable and those who are not.

**Lexical Style.**

Several words and phrases are often associated with the Newly Homeless that cast them in a positive light. One notable example is the use of the phrase “hard-working,” as in “good ol’ hard-working Americans.” This phrase is a stand-in for people who are behaving in morally correct ways in their daily lives. “Hard-working” encapsulates the Protestant work ethic; hard work implies deservingness in the American context.

In response the above-mentioned article entitled “The New Faces of Homelessness,” an editorial by the executive director of Habitat for Humanity Newark appealed to the hard-working nature of the Newly Homeless to justify policies to increase affordable housing. The author argued that, “Before the recession, the high price of home ownership hovered out of reach for many hard-working families.” The author implied that these hard-working families deserved home ownership. Exactly which families the author meant was unclear and beside the point. The author was merely using the phrase “hard-working” as a synonym for “moral,” “good,” or “deserving.” Just a few sentences later in that same article, the author implored the *Star-Ledger* to “Please keep up your excellent coverage of the need for affordable housing for hard-working, low-income families” (Zurheide, 2010).

Similarly, the term “Newly Homeless” implies an experience of homelessness that is categorically separate from other experiences of homelessness. People who have not experienced homelessness and poverty before are to be contrasted with those who have repeated episodes of homelessness or chronic homelessness. Five articles in the data
set use the specific phrase “newly homeless,” although other terms are used in many articles for the same concept, such as “new poor,” “suburban homeless,” “middle-class homelessness,” and so on. All these terms have in common that they separate a group of people in order to distinguish them from the usual type of homelessness. This move assumes at the outset that the idea of typical homelessness is already determined, understood, and agreed upon. In so doing, the discourse of the Newly Homeless renders unproblematic an identity category (the homeless) which is itself contested, varied, and heterogeneous.

**Discourse Access.**

Van Dijk (1993) argued that who is allowed to speak reflects social relations of dominance. In newspapers, people who tend to be excluded from power often do not have a voice or at best have a marginal voice in the conversation about them. In the data set, the people who tend to be quoted in articles about the Newly Homeless tend to be service providers and homeless advocates. Quotes from people experiencing homelessness, and the Newly Homeless in particular, tend to be testimonials to their suffering. One article from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reports on a summit on homeless children and quotes one of the speakers, a homeless man named Terrance Moses, as saying “I come from a family of 12, a single-parent family, and we moved many times and sometimes had no place to go. We stayed in hotels and shelters. It wasn't easy for mom.”

Although Terrance appears to have a voice in this example, his story is framed and given meaning by quotations from a civil rights attorney, David Hickton, who noted that “The economic downturn that started in 2008 has pulled middle-class families into homelessness…the homeless crisis is a civil rights issue. Homeless children deserve
equal protection and opportunity under the law” (Niederberger, 2011). At the summit as well as in the article, the voice of the homeless is used as a testimonial to the suffering entailed in homelessness, and subsequent speakers or dialogue employs their suffering to make a case for a policy or social action. The sequencing of testimony and explication performs interpretive work for the reader in such a way that the privileged voice is that of the expert service provider rather than the person with lived experience of homelessness, who are presumed to not have

Of the 269 articles in the data set that include a call to action, 247 of them quote an advocate or service provider, but only 66 include a quote from a person with experience of homelessness. Curiously, politicians are only quoted in 38 of the 269 articles. It would seem that those who hold the microphone in framing appeals to address homelessness are the technical experts rather than the homeless themselves or elected officials.

Fear-mongering.

Some articles explicitly state that homelessness could happen to anyone. Interviewees sometimes express surprise that life events led them to lose their housing, and they caution that most people do not suspect that they themselves might someday succumb to homelessness. One interviewee stated as such:

There are these fears in the background, and they are suppressed…I have had nightmares about becoming a bag lady…It could happen to anyone. So many people are so close to it, and they don't even realize it. (Rich, 2010)

The narrative of “it could happen to anyone” stokes readers’ fears of economic uncertainty. According to this reasoning, and in the context of the recession, even people
with stable jobs who are living within their means might unexpectedly find themselves out of a job and facing homelessness.

This fear of the unknown could be found in many of the comments that made their way into the discourse of the Newly Homeless. One interviewee lost his sales job and found himself homeless just 4 months later. “It was a shock to my system, no doubt about it,” he said. This interviewee, like the majority of Americans, had little savings. “We have a lot of people in this country that are about one paycheck away from being in the same boat I am, and don't realize how tenuous things are,” he said (Drobnas, 2009). Another author made the point that the Newly Homeless “could be anyone we all know, all of them subject to the vagaries of the worldwide recession” (D’Allesandro, 2010).

Some articles reported on the threats homeless people faced in their everyday lives. The situation was particularly dangerous for the Newly Homeless, who did not have “street smarts” and were vulnerable to predators or hate groups. One article cited a statistic that from 1999 to 2007, there were 774 violent attacks on homeless people, and 217 of those incidents were fatal. In addition to violent crime, people living on the streets found themselves subject to harsh weather conditions, risking heat stroke or hypothermia. According to the executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, “It's working-class people joining the ranks of the homeless population….They've never been homeless before and that's why they're scared to death” (Schaarsmith, 2009).

Articles that emphasized the dangers of homelessness fed readers’ fears about becoming victims of crime or finding themselves or their families and children suffering. Articles describing the Newly Homeless suggested that the situation was uniquely
terrifying. One interviewee, who lost his job in construction after a surgery left him unable to work, ended up sleeping in a shelter. “It was scary,” he said. “I can’t stay there. I can’t stay with a bunch of people I don’t know” (Marbella, 2009). Quotations such as this one have the effect of bringing readers into the situation of the interviewee, causing them to experience the same fear of violence or harm.

**Relationship to Audience.**

Several articles stated that the Newly Homeless are just like the readers. A *Buffalo News* article entitled “Suburban plight—Poverty isn't a primarily urban problem anymore” made the case that the Newly Homeless, those seeking help at food pantries and soup kitchens during the Great Recession, are people who come from middle America:

The demographic of people seeking food at the Tabernacle—one of the Southtowns' few pantries—has changed dramatically, too, she said. The pantry's main clientele used to be senior citizens, disabled people and people struggling with addictions. Now, they are joined by formerly middle-class people who have lost their jobs. “I have people with master's degrees who have no job, and they're coming in for food,” Cafarella said. “The face of hunger has definitely changed.” She wondered aloud: “This is America?” Even churches on the East Side of Buffalo have had suburban residents at their doors, desperate for help with feeding and clothing their families….“When you think of a homeless person, you think of a person on the sidewalk panhandling,” Hartz said. “But these are people that look like you and I. It was eye-opening.” (Becker & Rey, 2011)
The characteristics of the Newly Homeless are similar to those of the idealized image of the reader of print newspapers: they are middle-class, suburban, and educated; they are disabled or addicted; they “are people that look like you and I [sic].” The speaker is speaking, of course, to the interviewer in the article, but the article is arranged in such a way that the speaker seems to be speaking to the reader as well. It is as though speaker, interviewer, reader, and homeless person are all tied together in this single statement. All four positions are linked in similarities, and the emphasis on similarities is meant to elicit sympathy for their plight. This sympathy is used in turn to justify a demand for additional resources to this population of Newly Homeless individuals and families.

Taken together, these techniques of constructing the Newly Homeless tended to create a figure that was very much like the assumed audience of newspapers: middle-class, educated adults in two-parent families with jobs and children. Print newspapers typically assumed that this demographic was the audience who could afford to purchase subscriptions, and they crafted their content with this target audience in mind (McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Richardson, 2007). Newspapers painted a picture of suffering people meant to elicit sympathy by emphasizing characteristics that made the Newly Homeless seem “like us.” This strategy made for more attention-grabbing headlines and added emotional gravity to the article. All of these techniques constructed the identity of the Newly Homeless as the deserving poor, and this is the focus of the next section.

**Section 3: Changes in the Framing of Calls to Action**

Many articles in the data set included calls to action, but these calls to action were framed in different ways. For example, a call for more affordable housing may be framed
in terms of how housing chronically homeless would save the social system money, or it might be framed in terms of the moral imperative to house suffering families. Authors are making choices about how to frame calls to action based on what they think will appeal to readers. According to Kendall (2011), “a basic premise of framing analysis holds that the process of framing is an active endeavor involving patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusion on the part of journalists and writers who determine what material might be entertaining or newsworthy for readers and viewers” (p. 10).

Only 269 (25%) of the 1,083 articles in the data set made some kind of recommendation for policy or social action to address homelessness. Of those articles, 213 made the case for increased resources for housing for the homeless, such as increasing the supply of affordable housing; 100 articles made the case for some other form of action to address homelessness, such as increased access to mental health services or job training programs; 44 articles suggested both housing and non-housing solutions to homelessness. As this section will show, calls to action tended to be associated with certain variables (e.g., calls for federal funding for homeless prevention frequently make reference to homeless families). As will also be shown, the frequencies of these associations changed over the course of the Great Recession, with certain associations increasing in frequency while others decrease.

The year 2009 was the peak effect year for the Great Recession in the discourse concerning homelessness. Only one article mentioned the recession as a cause of homelessness in 2007, and 15 articles mentioned the recession as a cause in 2008. In 2009, 37 articles mentioned the recession as a cause of homelessness, the greatest frequency of any year in the data set. That number fell to 16 in 2010 and 19 in 2011.
During 2009 the greatest percentage of articles that proposed housing as a solution to homelessness also mentioned the recession. Of the 40 articles that called for housing as a solution to homelessness in 2009, 30 of those articles mentioned the recession. In other words, the recession was used in support of arguments in favor of housing in 75% of articles that made a case for housing during 2009. It would be fair to say that conversations about ending homelessness were dominated by talk of the recession.

There was an increase in the number of articles mentioning homeless families during the Great Recession years: 15 articles mentioned homeless families in 2005, and 16 in 2006; that number more than doubled to 35 in both 2008 and 2009. Articles mentioning homeless families were more likely to include appeals for greater housing opportunities during the Great Recession years. In 2007, for example, only 15% of article mentioning homeless families also contained a call for housing. That number rose to 28% in 2009 and 46% in 2010. Not only were homeless families mentioned more frequently during the recession period, but mentions of homeless families were also much more likely to be accompanied by calls to action to end their homelessness.

A similar trend can be seen with respect to non-housing resources: none of the articles mentioning homeless families in 2005 included appeals for non-housing solutions to homelessness. However, the percentages were 15% in 2008 and 25% in 2009.

In 2005, 14% of articles mentioning homeless children also mentioned calls for housing. In 2010, 29% of articles mentioning homeless children also mentioned calls for housing. In 2008, the percentage was 32%.
It is also interesting to note how frequently articles that proposed solutions to homelessness made use of families in the argument. In 2007, at the start of the Great Recession, just 15% of articles proposing any sort of solution to homelessness also mentioned homeless families. In 2008, that percentage rose to 44%; that percentage rose again in 2009 to 63% and reached a peak in 2010, when 77% of all articles proposing a solution to homelessness made reference to homeless families. In sum, the majority of appeals for greater housing opportunities referenced families during the recession period.

As these findings indicate, a significantly greater share of references to families included calls to action for social resources during the Great Recession period than prior. This holds true for children as well.

The opposite trend was the case for references to mental illness, addiction, and chronic homelessness. In 2005, 44% of articles mentioning people who were homeless with experiences of addiction also mentioned calls for housing. That number fell by approximately half during the Great Recession, with 19% in 2008 and 24% in 2009. In 2005, 41% of articles mentioning people experiencing homelessness with mental health challenges also mentioned calls for housing. In 2009, at the height of the Great Recession, that percentage was just 10%. In 2005, 50% of articles mentioning chronic homelessness also included a call for housing. In 2009, that percentage was 29%, and in 2010, that percentage was just 13%.

Taken together, these observations from the data suggest that a shift took place in how calls to action for ending homelessness were framed during the recession. Characteristics such as families and children that tended to be more often associated with the Newly Homeless came to dominate the debate, while characteristics more often
associated with chronic homelessness faded largely into the background. This was of significant consequence during the recession period, as it was middle-class families on the brink of homelessness, rather than people who were already experiencing homelessness, who received the lion’s share of assistance in government bailouts and social efforts.

Section 4: Deservingness Discourse and Calls to Action

At the same time as newspapers were constructing an image of the Newly Homeless, they were doing so in contrast to a different, albeit unnamed type of homelessness; that is, normal or everyday homelessness. What these articles meant by the “usual type of homelessness” was in reality the stereotypical image of homelessness. The stereotypical image of homelessness that people typically think of is that of the person living on the streets with a disheveled appearance, usually suffering from mental illness or addiction. This stereotype most closely resembles the characteristics of chronically homeless population.

Often, the contrast was set up explicitly: “It’s not the normal population of homeless people,” said one outreach worker (Voell, 2008). Often, however, the contrast was implied. Articles that suggested that the Newly Homeless are hard-working implied that other people who were homeless did not work or were lazy. Similarly, articles that suggested that the Newly Homeless were unfamiliar with the social service system and were embarrassed about seeking help implied that other people experiencing homelessness were regular users of welfare and social services and had no shame in accepting handouts: they were shamelessly needy.
The effect of this discourse that contrasted the Newly Homeless to the chronically homeless was to construct an us/them dichotomy that situated the Newly Homeless on the side of the reader and the chronically homeless on the side of the “other.” To this other was attributed all the negative stereotypes typically associated with homelessness: addicted or mentally ill; dependent on welfare; morally at fault for their own situation; criminal; and so on.

The binary discourse of the Newly Homeless reinscribes the deserving/undeserving poor dichotomy. According to this logic, people are in situations of poverty for different reasons. Some people are morally culpable for their own poverty; for example, people who have led a life of crime and subsequent incarceration and who, on reentering society, are unable to find work. Their poverty is considered to be of their own making, and they are therefore thought to be undeserving of help in addressing their poverty. Those who do deserve help are those who follow the law, abide by the American ethic of hard work, and who contribute to society. Examples include people injured on the job or military veterans suffering from the emotional traumas of combat.

The narrative of the Newly Homeless is in its very essence a “deserving poor” narrative. The Newly Homeless are represented as everyday Americans who, through no fault of their own, have fallen victim to the fluctuations of the economy. One editorial in the data set describes the victims of the Great Recession as the “new poor”:

Many are educated and well-spoken. Chastened but determined, they're people with whom middle-class media audiences can identify. Plus, they fit easily into a tragedy narrative, the fall from exalted status provoking pity and terror.

Underlying their condition is an infuriating story: They played by the rules,
worked hard and consumed hard, kept up their end of the American bargain, and suffered an unreasonable and unjust fate. (Wasserman, 2009)

The “new poor” and the Newly Homeless are idealized images of average Americans who have fallen on hard times. Unlike the chronically homeless or the “welfare queen,” the Newly Homeless are not morally responsible for their plight because it was not their actions or their decisions that led to their situation of homelessness.

Prior discourses of deserving homeless people included primarily veterans, people with physical disabilities, and sometimes victims of domestic violence. The aim of the Newly Homeless discourse is to add victims of the recession who would otherwise be thriving to the list of people who are morally in need of saving. Such an addition comes at a very important time, as billions of federal dollars began to flow as stimulus dollars trickled down to states and localities. Notions of who deserved to get what had very real implications for the allocation of funds for homeless prevention. The majority of HPRP funds ended up being used for homeless prevention rather than for addressing chronic homelessness (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016).

The plight of the Newly Homeless was used as a justification for efforts to reorient the homeless services system completely from a paradigm focused on ending homelessness to one of prevention. According to a 2010 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article, the plight of Newly Homeless families losing their homeless during the recession “has little to do with the complex, intertwined causes of homelessness of decades past, like substance abuse, mental illness and domestic violence. The current surge stems directly from the recession.” This entirely new type of homelessness, the author argued,
demanded a different sort of response than that of a generation ago. The HPRP was
designed specifically with the Newly Homeless in mind:

The program rests on the assumption that intervention is the best course because
once people become homeless, the odds and costs of regaining their lives escalate
sharply. “This allows us to reorient a system that is focused on fixing a problem
after it happens to preventing the problem,” said Shaun Donovan, the secretary of
the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which oversees the program.
“This is the single most important thing the federal government has ever done on
family homelessness. It's a transformative tool.” (Goodman, 2010)

This paradigm shift from addressing already existing homelessness to preventing
homelessness makes the HPRP mostly into a bailout for middle-class families. Of the 37
articles describing the Newly Homeless, 29 make reference to families. The concept
“family” is the symbol for American values of domesticity, the locus of social
reproduction, and the roots of social organization. As one researcher put it, “Dramatic
stories of downward mobility and failed breadwinning arrested the attention of a middle
class gripped by the ‘fear of falling’ and grappling with the breakdown of nuclear family
life” (DePastino, 2005, p. 251).

The deservingness logic suggests that if families worked hard to earn the money
to buy, rent, or otherwise obtain their homes in the first place, then they deserve to keep
them and also deserve assistance in keeping them. For example, one article noted that
homeless services agencies were seeing more and more “victims of the worsening
economy, people who despite working, sometimes full time, can no longer afford their
own homes” (Marbella, 2009). The word “victims” suggests that a moral wrong has been
committed, and the phrase “their own homes” emphasizes the ownership of the homes as though they have a right to them.

This appeal to a right to one’s home was echoed by HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, who said definitively, “With the foreclosure and unemployment crisis looming, millions of families—both homeowners and renters—are in danger of losing their homes so we must focus substantial resources to help those families” (Johnson, 2009). Here, Donovan sets up an equation whereby the mere fact that families already have homes morally necessitates action to help them keep those homes. The implied right to one’s home translates into a call to action to shore up that right of possession.

The essential element that defines families in the discourse of the Newly Homeless is the presence of children in the household. Of the 37 articles about the Newly Homeless, 25 included references to children. The presumed innocence of children creates an implied victim status that makes them deserve saving. Several articles foreground households with children as hallmarks of the Newly Homeless. According to one author,

advocates say the number of new homeless families being noticed by workers in soup kitchens, shelters and free medical clinics has grown since the explosion in layoffs and housing foreclosures. Unlike the long-term homeless, many of the new homeless—the fastest-growing segment of whom are families with children, advocates say—don't have the same survival skills of knowing where to go and whom to trust, making them even more vulnerable. (Schaarsmith, 2009)

In this case, the article’s appeal is for greater police protection and resources. Other articles justify appeals to help children in terms of securing them against hunger,
safeguarding their education, or guaranteeing them a safe place to sleep. The moral
deservingness of children derives from their presumed innocence, and this innocence
implies a helplessness that serves to justify calls to action.

In all of the above cases, the Newly Homeless were constructed as moral subjects
upon whom suffering was inflicted by the socioeconomic forces known collectively as
the Great Recession. The assault on these moral subjects necessitated in every case a
reaction in the form of a social program or policy. The Newly Homeless were
discursively constructed as moral subjects in order to help frame debates and create an
argument using identity in order to justify directing social resources to one group of
people (the middle class) rather than others.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Direct Findings

The 2005–2011 period saw dramatic transformations in the way homelessness was represented in public discourse. George W. Bush was sworn in for his second term beginning in January 2005, enabling his administration to continue to advance the agenda it had launched in 2002 for ending chronic homelessness within 10 years. In support of this goal, President Bush had appointed Phillip Mangano to lead the effort as the head of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness in 2002. Mangano saw evidence-based and data-driven strategies as the key to addressing the problem.

Under Mangano’s direction, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began experimenting with national counts of the homeless population in 2003. In 2005, HUD began requiring local jurisdictions that received federal funding to participate in biennial point-in-time (PIT) counts to collect information on the size, demographic makeup, and service needs of local homeless populations. Technological change was making new data collection techniques possible, and emerging Internet technologies accelerated the pace of change in policies and practices. HUD began encouraging local jurisdictions to integrate information into online Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS).

One of Mangano’s most often-cited claims was that communities could save money by addressing chronic homelessness. A single person with an extensive history of homelessness, coupled with substance abuse problems, mental illness, or other disabilities, could cost a community’s emergency services systems tens of thousands of dollars annually, whereas it would cost a fraction of that amount to house that person and
provide him or her with supportive services. The solution, Mangano argued, was the expansion of Permanent Supportive Housing programs and adherence to the principles of Housing First. Under Mangano’s leadership, HUD began encouraging localities to develop 10-year plans to end chronic homelessness.

The Bush administration’s campaign to end chronic homelessness kept the issue in the national spotlight, and local implementation of Mangano’s policies, such as the creation of 10-year plans, PIT counts, and HMIS systems, propelled the issue into the headlines of local news. The evidence presented in Chapter 4 shows that, as a result of these factors, homelessness began to gain increasing prominence in the news, as was the case in the four newspapers under investigation (The Baltimore Sun, The Buffalo News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and Newark Star-Ledger).

Mangano’s strategies for person-centered solutions meant that the vocabulary coming from Washington was mostly centered around individual deficits, such as addiction and mental illness, rather than social and economic systems, such as wages and the affordable housing stock. This discourse at the federal level was picked up and echoed in local newsrooms and town halls, and this was definitely the case in Baltimore, Buffalo, Newark, and Pittsburgh, where, as this thesis has demonstrated, individual causes of homelessness were more frequently highlighted in newspaper coverage than were structural ones.

At the same time that Internet technologies were transforming how information about people experiencing homelessness was being collected and how policies concerning homelessness were being implemented, newspapers were beginning to feel the sting of competition from online news sources. In 2001, the Internet was America’s
least preferred news source. By 2003, Americans preferred Internet news to radio, but the Internet still lagged behind print newspapers and television. Over the next few years, the Internet continued to gain prominence as a news source, and by 2009 more Americans preferred Internet news to print newspapers, even though broadcast television remained at the top (Pew Research Center, 2013).

This transition profoundly affected newspapers’ bottom line. Among mass media, newspapers had always held the lion’s share of advertising dollars, but that share, which had begun to decline slowly since the 1980s, took a steep dive in the early 2000s due to competition from cable television, direct mail, and the Internet. From 2007 to 2009, advertising revenues for Internet companies soared at the expense of print newspapers, and finally by 2010 the Internet held a greater percentage of advertising dollars than newspapers (Skorup & Rachmat, 2016).

While competition from online news sources drew away newspaper advertising revenues, the onset of the Great Recession sparked drastic reductions in readership and subscriptions. The combination of these two market forces prompted most major newspapers to undergo painful restructurings during the 2007–2011 period; this included reductions in newsroom staff and, consequently, a decline in the amount of content published. As shown in Chapter 4, The Baltimore Sun, The Buffalo News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and the Newark Star-Ledger all saw newsroom buyouts and declining publication rates.

Chapter 4 showed that, within the sagging publication rates for the four newspapers, the proportion of articles mentioning homelessness to the total number of articles published annually grew rapidly from 2005 to 2009, declined somewhat in 2010,

One of the most striking findings of this dissertation is that newspaper attention to homelessness was increasing during a time when the number of people experiencing homelessness, as measured by PIT count, was decreasing. One possible explanation for this discrepancy might be that newspapers were attempting to appeal to their middle-class readership with “doom-and-gloom” headlines in part due to their declining sales and subscription rates. Regardless of the motivations, the available evidence points to a rise in attention to homelessness during the recession period.

In addition to these quantitative changes in the frequency of coverage of homelessness, four qualitative changes were taking place. First, Chapter 4 showed that certain demographic groups began to be mentioned with increasing frequency, namely families, children, and veterans. It should be noted that the Obama administration made addressing family, youth, and veteran homelessness part of its strategy. However, these new foci were intended to supplement, not supplant, the Bush administration’s focus on chronic homelessness (Moon, 2016). Media discourse, and newspaper discourse in particular, both shapes and is shaped by the social context (Fairclough, 1995; Richardson, 2007; Van Dijk, 1993). As such, the Obama administration’s decision to pursue policy
solutions to family and veteran homelessness likely both shaped and was shaped by changing public sentiment and public discourse.

Second, Chapter 4 showed that a switch took place whereby structural explanations of the causes of homelessness, such as unemployment rates and housing costs, gained prominence over individual explanations, such as addiction and mental illness. The switch happened at different times in each of the four newspapers: The Baltimore Sun in 2007; The Buffalo News in 2010; Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2009; and Newark Star-Ledger in 2008. Evidence from the data suggests that the vocalness of the advocacy community played a part in determining how soon a newspaper made the switch. This finding negates that of Kluegel and Smith (1986), who predicted that public discourse would identify only individual factors as the cause of one’s economic fate, even in the face of economic downturns.

Third, Chapter 5 showed that the associations of calls to action with demographic groups changed over the course of the 2005–2011 period. At the start of the period, addiction and mental illness were more often associated with calls to action, but they became less often associated with calls to action as the Great Recession unfolded. Families and children followed an inverse relationship to addiction and mental illness, with families and children being less often associated with calls to action at the start of the research period and becoming more often associated by the end of the research period.

Fourth and finally, Chapter 5 showed that newspaper coverage of homelessness during the Great Recession created a dichotomy between “normal” or “stereotypical” homeless people and what many articles referred to as “newly homeless” people. This
dissertation refers to this public identity that was created during the Great Recession as the Newly Homeless: people who were once middle class but who had fallen on hard times as a result of the recession and were now facing homelessness through no fault of their own.

The foil against which the characteristics of the Newly Homeless were articulated was that of the chronically homeless. To this foil were ascribed all of the pejorative connotations often associated with people experiencing homelessness: addiction, mental illness, and shameless use of the social welfare system.

I expected that newspaper discourse would become more sympathetic to the plight of all people experiencing homelessness, but the data show that in fact newspaper discourse was sympathetic only to certain people. The four newspapers were sympathetic only to people who had the most in common with the intended or assumed audience of print newspapers, namely college-educated, middle-class parents. These findings stand in contrast to the findings of Remillard and Schneider (2010), who suggested that the homeless were often cast as inhabiting another world living under bridges or in forests. Instead, coverage of the Newly Homeless during the recession period took great pains to show how they were “just like you and I [sic].”

The findings of this dissertation concerning the Newly Homeless suggest a reversal of the trend identified by Pascale (2005), who had identified a preference for economic explanations of homelessness in the early 1980s that gave way to noneconomic explanations, such as addiction and mental illness, in the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s. Indeed, newspaper articles of the early 1980s had striking parallels to newspaper articles of the Great Recession period: in the early 1980s, newspapers sought to
distinguish between the old homeless, such as vagrants, and the New Homeless, namely middle-class people who could not afford housing for economic reasons.

**The Public Identity of the Newly Homeless**

I expected to find a relatively cohesive public identity of the average homeless person, similar to Hancock’s (2004) welfare queen. Instead, I found a vast range of characteristics attributed to people experiencing homelessness at any given time. Certain characteristics, such as a history of addiction, were featured more often in the years prior to the Great Recession than during and after. Of notable significance was the way in which the public identity of homelessness was contested and challenged in editorials. Most editorials in the data set were authored by advocates or professionals from the homeless services community, and these authors almost always provided sympathetic portrayals of people experiencing homelessness and emphasized structural causes. A major finding of this dissertation is that the vocalness of the advocacy community in a given metropolitan area had the effect of moving the needle of public discourse away from individualizing accounts of the causes of homelessness and towards more structural understandings.

An interesting feature of this finding is that, once a newspaper made the switch from predominantly individual explanations to predominantly structural ones, the switch stuck: newspapers did not retrench to individualizing accounts of homelessness once the Great Recession was over. It may be the case, however, that individualizing notions of homelessness returned in the years following the research period. That homelessness is a lagging indicator suggests as much: it takes several years for the effects of economic shocks to trickle down to homelessness and then back up to housing stability (National
Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). A future direction for research may be to extend the analysis of this dissertation several years past 2011 to see if the switch to the structural explanatory paradigm continued to prevail.

Similar to Hancock’s elucidation of the public identity of the welfare queen, this dissertation has shown that the pejorative attributes associated with chronically homeless people had implications for policy discourse and calls to action. Calls to action tended to emphasize the worthiness and deservingness of the Newly Homeless over and against that of the chronically homeless. Very surprising was the finding that every article (37 in total) that mentioned some version of the Newly Homeless narrative also included a call to action. It is as though the Newly Homeless were constructed as an argumentative tool used for making the case for action to address homelessness.

Chapter 5 presented a critical discourse analysis of the construction of the Newly Homeless that showed how their mere existence necessitated a call to action. Through techniques of storytelling, argumentation, framing headlines, dichotomization, lexical styles, discourse access, fear-mongering, and relating to the audience, the four newspapers built a public identity that needed saving. This public identity differed from Hancock’s welfare queen in that the Newly Homeless were cast as deserving. But like Hancock’s welfare queen, the Newly Homeless were seldom given a voice to speak for themselves in newspaper articles. One consequence of this silencing may have been to foreclose opportunities for gestures of solidarity between disparate groups of people experiencing homelessness.

One of the most interesting features of the discursive construction of the Newly Homeless was the way in which people in this category were defined by what they were
not. The attributes that were expressly not associated with the Newly Homeless were those that were most commonly associated with the chronically homeless population: lack of work ethic, shameless dependency on welfare, poor life choices, and criminal behavior. While newspaper articles did not go out of their way to outline the characteristics of the chronically homeless population, it is as though a well-defined shadow was cast with every attempt to articulate the public identity of the Newly Homeless.

Consequently, newspaper discourse surrounding the Newly Homeless saw a concomitant retrenchment of old stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness, although the work of this stereotyping was stunningly indirect. When the Newly Homeless were said to be educated, it was implied indirectly that typical homeless people were uneducated. Whereas the Newly Homeless were hard working, the old homeless were implied to be lazy. When the Newly Homeless were said to be unfamiliar with the social service system and ashamed to admit they needed help, it was insinuated that the typical homeless person was shameless and constantly needy or dependent on government assistance.

Because of the dichotomizing nature of discourse surrounding the Newly Homeless, it is as though two public identities were being constructed simultaneously. Neither public identity had access to what Hancock described as the “microphone” of the media, as both the Newly Homeless and their foil were seldom quoted in the data set. Actions were authorized on their behalf, ranging from increasing the supply of affordable housing to creating more job training programs. Finally, calls to action to help the Newly Homeless did not trickle down or equate to calls to action on behalf of all people.
experiencing homelessness; primarily those with whom the newspaper readership would most closely identify.

**Directions for Future Research**

An important direction for future research would be to examine transformations in official political discourse, as was done by Hancock concerning the welfare reform debates in Congress surrounding the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996. Similar to that constructed for this thesis, a set of coding and analysis would be conducted of congressional debates concerning the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program, which was $1.5 billion of the $831 billion 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Hancock’s analysis was almost exclusively focused on the federal level, and another direction for future research might be to examine changes in discourse at the local political level, such as transcripts from city hall hearings and deliberations. Further research could examine the how well the homeless advocacy community was organized in local jurisdictions in order to determine if or how that organization had an effect on switching public discourse from individual to structural explanatory paradigms.

Regarding the switching of explanatory paradigms, and as discussed above, it might be interesting to extend the analysis of this dissertation’s research period further than 2011 to determine whether the shift to structural explanations of the causes of homelessness continued to persist and, if so, for how long after the economic shock of the Great Recession.

It is regrettable that none of the 10-year plans to end homelessness, or chronic homelessness specifically, were successful. This is not to say that progress was not made.
But most communities shifted to strategic plans that did not aspire to end homelessness. It might be interesting to detail the changes in public discourse about homelessness as excitement about ending homelessness dissipated back into the discourse of managing it.

After the research period, the Obama administration focused much attention on ending veteran homelessness, and Michelle Obama challenged mayors across the US United States to end veteran homelessness in their cities. One final avenue for future research might be to show how the discourse of the deservingness of veteran homelessness did or did not cast a shadow of undeservingness onto other segments of the homeless population.

I predict that the structural explanatory frame likely persisted for several years after the research period, at least up to the end of the Obama administration, and that there will continue to be a substantial shortage of investment in affordable (cheap) housing. Until affordable housing for everyone becomes a unifying theme at the national level, homelessness in its current form is likely to persist largely unabated.


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EDUCATION

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

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Homelessness in America: Critical & Interdisciplinary Perspectives 2012 – 2013
The Politics of Sexual Empowerment 2010

Teaching Assistant
The Moses Complex – Professor Ruth Leys Fall, 2009
Avant Garde Cinema – Professor Anne Eaken-Moss Spring, 2009
Animal Spirits – Professor Richard Macksey Spring, 2008

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Johns Hopkins Writing Center Tutor 2007 – 2012
### Honors and Awards

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### Professional Experience

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<td>Co-Founder; Fundraising &amp; Development Chair</td>
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<td>Word on the Street – Homeless Street Paper</td>
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