

Summer 8-22-2014

Unsheltered & Undeserving: How Chronically Homeless Individuals are Discursively Constructed in Newspapers

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UNSHELTERED & UNDESERVING

Unsheltered & Undeserving:
How Chronically Homeless Individuals are Discursively Constructed in Newspapers

Jacinda Howard

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

University of Washington

2014

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences- Tacoma

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Background

As a person with a background in journalism, human services and government, I have spent a great deal of my time in the past six years concerned with homelessness and the nation's movement to end it. This isn't a topic that has always caught my attention though.

I returned home to the Tacoma area in summer of 2006 after graduating with a journalism degree from Western Washington University. Shortly thereafter I began to reconnect with old friends. I spent a significant amount of time with one particular friend who owned his own construction business and lived in a home that his mother, whom died from cancer when he was 15, indicated in her last days she wished for him to inherit. My friend worked hard and was compassionate toward others. Lighthearted, full of adventure and never afraid to take risks, he had a natural charisma that drew people to him. In early 2007, he was the first person I told when I accepted a career-launching position as a full-time journalist at a local community newspaper in Federal Way, Washington.

During my employment with the newspaper I wrote about city government, politics and business. I learned of the city's pressing issues and public concerns and wrote articles on social problems such as homelessness and poverty. These issues interested me but didn't tend to weigh heavily on my mind. That changed in 2008.

Late in 2008, my friend began exhibiting strange behaviors. Preoccupied with work, I chose to ignore his actions; however, several months later I realized he was lost in a methamphetamine addiction that was wholeheartedly overtaking his life. In the course of roughly a year, my friend lost everything he valued in life. His health rapidly declined and friends distanced themselves from him. He traded his vehicle for drugs. His business and

financial means fell to shambles. He exhibited spouts of violence and paranoia and often argued with his family. After one particular argument, his family called the police to permanently remove him from the house he resided in. He had been living in the home for nearly 10 years, but did not possess a Deed of Trust. His family insisted he seek treatment for his drug addiction and when he refused to do so his family filed a legal suit to keep him out of the home and off the property. He found himself homeless and I found myself struggling to process how I felt about the situation.

My friend's situation prompted me to think about how Americans, including myself, think about homelessness. I thought about how homeless people, particularly those who live on the streets, are characterized, marginalized and criminalized and how they are judged based on their perceived lack of economic contributions to society. These thoughts led to a desire to research and rethink American ideology, how Americans determine worth or value, the origins of the American welfare system and how these concepts pertain to homelessness.

In 2009, I applied to and was accepted into the University of Washington Tacoma's Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies program. I was drawn to the program's philosophy that public problems cannot routinely be categorized into a single discipline. Rather, they span multiple disciplines, which makes them especially challenging to confront. The program's focus on understanding the nature of public action, public policy and public service appeared to align with my future goal of transitioning from a journalism career—a field in which I educated my community on social problems—to a career in local government—a field in which I envisioned myself playing a role in the creation of policies designed to address public problems such as homelessness.

Research in Discourse

My research is focused on the discourse used to communicate about chronically homeless individuals and a permanent supportive housing model known as Housing First, which was endorsed by President George W. Bush in the early 2000s and is positioned to play a prominent role in the movement to end chronic homelessness by the year 2015. Chronic homelessness is defined as homelessness experienced by individuals who have a disability and who have been homeless for a consecutive period of a year or longer or have experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within a three year timeframe (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013). The research, which is based in the intellectual communities of discourse analysis and homelessness studies, uses a combination of rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis to perform a case study of newspaper articles on the topic of Tacoma, Washington's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project. The research is concerned with questions such as: How are chronically homeless individuals characterized in newspapers and how is discourse used to persuade the audience to support Housing First as an approach to ending chronic homelessness?

Discourse Analysis

Discourse can be defined as language in use; it constitutes cultural and ideological ideas and understandings of the world (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). As put in *Discourse as Data*, discourse is "a fluid, shifting medium in which meaning is created and contested" (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001), as such, discourse analysis, or the study of language use, can be thought of as a method for finding patterns in language and distinguishing what the patterns communicate to the discourse's audience. The field of discourse analysis comprises multiple methods for analyzing text.

Among those methods are rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis. Rhetorical analysis is concerned with the argument being made or position being taken in a piece of text; it considers whether and why the argument or position taken is convincing (Leach, 2000; Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 1999; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). This method of analysis provides insight on how value is either attributed or denied. Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, calls for a close reading of a text. This type of analysis was chosen because it commonly focuses on public texts such as newspaper articles and is concerned with social relationships and processes and how they are influenced by the underlying factors of ideology and power (Huckin, 2002; Fairclough, 1992; Locke, 2004). My research utilizes both forms of analysis so as to reveal the arguments found in discourse pertaining to chronic homelessness and examine how the arguments serve the interests of people in positions of power while simultaneously further marginalizing chronically homeless people. By employing a methodology that combines these two types of linguistic analysis, a multidisciplinary approach to critically examining the pressing social issue of chronic homelessness is achieved.

Homelessness Studies

The field of homelessness studies has grown since 1987 when the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the first legislation aimed at addressing homelessness, was passed. Today, experts in the field of homelessness widely accept that there are three primary causes of homelessness: a lack of affordable housing; a lack of living wage jobs; and long-term debilitating physical characteristics such as addiction or mental illness (Burt et al., 2001; Cunningham, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2009). Experts in the field, both locally and nationally, focus much of their attention on evaluating existing policies and identifying best

practices in ending various types of homelessness—family, veteran, first-time, youth, and chronic homelessness. Homelessness, like all public problems, is socially constructed and heavily influenced by value systems (Stern, 1984). Given this, there exists a need to better understand how some commonly-held American values have historically framed opinions on care for the poor. The history of these values originates in England.

Responsibility for the Poor

Local Responsibility

From approximately the sixth to fourteenth centuries in England, responsibility for caring for the poor fell to individuals at a local level. It was a common belief during this time that impoverished people were poor due to misfortune no fault of their own and naturally a degree of poverty would always exist; it was God's will (Gans, 1995; Katz, 1989; Trattner, 1999). Wealthy landowners were able to fulfill their own needs but the majority of the population didn't own land and therefore required some amount of assistance (Critchley, 2004; Day, 2009). It was the community's responsibility to care for these individuals (Gans, 1995; Katz, 1989; Trattner, 1999). Assistance was provided by family, neighbors and the church (Day, 2009; Gans, 1995; Katz, 1989; Trattner, 1999). Still, resources were limited so there was a need to determine who deserved to receive public assistance and who did not. Residency was the answer. In each town, those who were residents were eligible for public assistance while those who were strangers were turned away (Day, 2009; Gans, 1995; Katz, 1989; Trattner, 1999). Public assistance provisions continued this way for approximately three centuries.

The development of feudalism around the ninth century shifted responsibility for care of the poor from the community as a whole to the wealthy. By this time many of the

poor were serfs; as such the responsibility for ensuring their needs were met rested with the land owners who employed them (Day, 2009; Trattner, 1999). Numerous poor people who did not participate in serfdom were cared for by monasteries and hospitals; some took up apprenticeships (Trattner, 1999). In this way, most impoverished individuals were tended to. The welfare system continued in this manner until the growth of England's population and rise of a capitalist economy resulted in indefinite economic and social changes.

Government Responsibility

In response to the uncertainty these evolving systems brought to the population, the English Poor Laws of 1601 were adopted (Day, 2009; Piven & Cloward, 1993; Trattner, 1999). It's estimated that prior to the Poor Laws, one-third to one-fourth of the population was unemployed and unable to support themselves and their families (Day, 2009). Citizens faced widespread economic despair, and shortages of food and basic necessities—all which resulted in social disorder (Day, 2009; Piven & Cloward, 1993; Trattner, 1999). The Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 changed the social welfare landscape by placing responsibility for the poor with the government. The shift reflected an effort to build England's economic well-being and self-sufficiency while quelling civil disorder that threatened the country's economy (Day, 2009; Piven & Cloward, 1993; Trattner, 1999). The poor laws imposed public taxation for the purpose of assisting the impoverished. They also established a framework for determining who among the poor was worthy of receiving public assistance and who was not (Day, 2009; Piven & Cloward, 1993; Trattner, 1999). The laws outlined a welfare system in which a person's societal value and deservingness of public assistance was based on his or her ability and desire to pursue employment and

participate in the free market system, therefore ensuring the economic well-being of the state (Day, 2009; Piven & Cloward, 1993; Trattner, 1999). Children, disabled individuals and people who held employment but were still unable to provide for themselves and their family were regarded as worthy of public aid (Day, 2009; Trattner, 1999). People who were physically able to hold employment but did not do so were thought of as exhibiting personal failures, such as immorality, and were considered unworthy of public assistance. Under the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601, the English government had no obligation to serve unworthy poor.

Individualism and the Protestant Work Ethic

Around this same time, new religious teachings, now commonly known as the Protestant work ethic, about the meaning and value of work arose (Day, 2009; Leiby, 1978; Trattner, 1999). Influential Protestant religious leaders and theologians Martin Luther and John Calvin propagated the teachings. Luther believed people could serve God, while improving themselves and society, through the actions they performed daily as they engaged in their respective professions (Day, 2009). Similarly, Calvin viewed work as a religious duty undertaken in an effort to gain the greatest profit possible and to then reinvest that profit, thus proving one's worth to God (Day, 2009). From these theories grew the belief that frugality and hard work, especially applied to a profession, are to be valued (Katsaros, 1995). American colonists held tightly to the Protestant work ethic, which became a defining American value (Katsaros, 1995; Day, 2009).

Closely connected to the Protestant work ethic is individualism, the belief that a person's success and well-being are self-created and take precedence over the success and well-being of others (Weissman, 2000). Individualism inspires each person to seek to fulfill

his or her own interests (Weissman, 2000). Barry Schwartz (2000), author of *The Costs of Living*, argues that in a capitalist society, the free market—defined by Schwartz as a “collection of free, independent individuals, choosing from among a wide array of competing alternatives whatever satisfies their individual interests best” (p. 24)—and the labor system required to maintain the free market are the bases for measuring usefulness. In other words, individual freedom is synonymous with the freedom to make choices based on economic utility. Historically, individualism and the Protestant work ethic have heavily influenced social welfare practices and beliefs in both Europe and America.

America and Responsibility for the Poor

Throughout early American history, the colonists turned to their English roots for guidance in how to provide for the poor. They first adopted a rule of local responsibility in which the impoverished were cared for by their family, neighbors and churches (Day, 2009; Katz, 1989; Trattner, 1999). However, it was not long before there were insufficient resources to provide for all those in need. A system similar to England’s Poor Laws followed and America’s social welfare system was structured around local taxation as a means to provide for the poor (Day, 2009; Katz, 1989; Trattner, 1999). Meanwhile, beliefs about the value of hard work, pursuit of a profession and participation in the market system persisted, as did the categorization of impoverished individuals as either worthy or unworthy of public aid (Day, 2009; Katsaros, 1995; Katz, 1989; Leiby, 1978; Trattner, 1999).

Every self-made man had handicaps, disappointments, and failures. What was wrong was not to try at all or not to try again, to sink instead into a feckless, helpless dependency. Herein lay the force of the distinction between the deserving and the

undeserving poor, which was and still is important in our welfare programs, (Leiby, 1978, p. 32).

Today, individualism and the Protestant work ethic have helped frame the discourse used to communicate about pressing social problems such as homelessness. People who do not hold jobs, such is typical of chronically homeless individuals, are viewed and communicated about as undesirable and unwilling to better themselves. As seen in my research, discourse pertaining to chronically homeless people reflects this view and blames chronically homeless individuals for their perceived misgivings. As homelessness, specifically chronic homelessness, continues to grab the public's attention, it's likely that discourse intended to shift the blame for homelessness from economic faults to personal failures will continue.

The Rise of Modern-Day Homelessness

Homelessness is not a new phenomenon. Widespread signs of unsheltered people with no place to call home could be seen in the United States during the Great Depression era of the 1930s and into the late 1940s (Daly, 1996). As the U.S. economy recovered from the deep recession during the 1940s and 1950s, homeless individuals tended to congregate in parts of the urban landscape known as skid row, pockets of extreme poverty (Goodnight, 1991). Skid row inhabitants were characterized as people experiencing drug or alcohol addictions or individuals with the inability to meet social norms (Goodnight, 1991). Because the homeless population was concentrated in skid rows, homelessness continued largely unnoticed on a national scale until the 1980s.

An economic recession that threatened the security of many Americans occurred in the early 1980s (Burt et al., 2001; Cunningham; 2009; Goodnight, 1991). Around the same

time, President Ronald Reagan's administration proactively decreased social welfare costs by closing mental illness care facilities and slashing the budgets of welfare programs (Bassuk & Lauriat, 1986; Daly, 1996; Goodnight, 1991). Meanwhile, affordable housing, defined as housing that requires no more than 30 percent of a family's income, became scarcer. In 1984, more than 23 million households either lived in substandard housing—housing that poses a risk to occupants' health, safety or physical well-being, or expended more than a third of their income on shelter (Daly, 1996). By the mid 1980s, 11 million Americans found themselves paying more than one-third of their income on housing. The recession, paired with an insufficient amount of affordable housing caused an increase in the demand for emergency shelter and meal services (Burt, 1992; Burt et al., 2001; Goodnight, 1991). Homelessness among families and other populations that had not traditionally experienced street living increased (Burt et al., 2001; Daly, 1996; Cunningham, 2009; Goodnight, 1991). According to Burt et al. (2001), "The sheer volume of the demand coupled with the shifting nature of the population, caused the country to focus, for the first time since the Great Depression, on homelessness as a serious national issue," (p. 241).

In 1986, U.S. policy makers finally acknowledged homelessness as a growing social problem in need of a solution. In response, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was passed in 1987. The act was the first comprehensive legislation directed at addressing homelessness; it called for relief provisions for shelter, food, mobile health care and transitional housing.

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act placed a heavy emphasis on emergency shelter as a means for managing and ending homelessness (Burt et al., 2001;

Goodnight, 1991). The legislation authorized and codified grant programs designed to assist the homeless population by expanding, renovating and building emergency shelters—facilities with few, if any amenities, which permit homeless individuals to stay overnight free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis. At the time the legislation was passed President Ronald Reagan and his administration considered homelessness a temporary problem; as such the administration viewed a significant increase in the number of emergency shelters as an appropriate response (Burt et al., 2001; Cunningham, 2009; Goodnight, 1991). Heavy investment in emergency shelters continued through the 1980s as dedicated funding grew from \$300 million in 1984 to \$1.6 billion in 1988 (Burt et al., 2001). Emergency shelters continues to play an integral role in ending homelessness, however they are no longer considered the only solution, nor are they the best solution for all types of homelessness.

In the late 1990s, research was conducted on how to better serve homeless populations and effectively end homelessness. A 2001 University of Pennsylvania study showed that a small group of homeless single adults frequently cycled through jails, hospitals and emergency shelters (Cunningham, 2009). The research illustrated that for individuals engaged in this cycle, emergency shelter did little to bring them closer to permanent housing (Cunningham, 2009). This realization paved the way for new innovative practices in housing the homeless. Short term housing meant to transition a person or family from a shelter to permanent housing followed, as did permanent supportive housing.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Psychologist Dr. Sam Tsemberis established a project called Pathways to Housing, Inc. in New York City in 1992 as part of an effort to help permanently house people with mental disorders who were experiencing repeated and prolonged bouts of homelessness (Padgett, Henwood & Stanhope, 2008; Ione, 2009). Pathways to Housing was based on Tsemberis' belief that providing immediate access to housing should be the first step in ensuring the homeless individuals he aimed to help were able to maintain permanent long-term housing. In this regard, Pathways to Housing, Inc. introduced an unconventional approach to ending chronic homelessness. The traditional approach to ending homelessness had been to transition unsheltered individuals through a progression of housing models— starting with emergency shelter, moving to transitional housing and ending with permanent housing— each transition contingent on the homeless individual's ability to demonstrate progress toward self-sufficiency (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). This approach required the homeless individual to prove his or her housing readiness by addressing his or her social barriers, such as drug addiction, mental illness, or inadequate access to employment, that were thought to have led to homelessness. Pathways to Housing, Inc. was guided by a philosophy that opposed the traditional housing readiness approach; the Pathways to Housing philosophy held that a homeless individual would work toward rectifying underlying social challenges and barriers once he or she no longer had to worry about immediate housing needs. Pathways to Housing, Inc. is commonly thought to be the first permanent supportive housing model.

This type of housing model gained popularity in the 1990s and in 2000 it gained the support of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development. The National Alliance to End Homelessness embraced the permanent supportive housing model now commonly referred to as Housing First and vowed, in 2000, to put an end to homelessness within 10 years. By 2002, the program rose to the attention of President George W. Bush's administration (Padgett, Henwood & Stanhope, 2008). Eager to try a new, innovative approach to ending chronic homelessness, the Bush administration endorsed Housing First.

Housing First is a housing model grounded on the premise that individuals who have stable housing will take personal responsibility for their lives and take actions that move them toward self-sufficiency (Kertesz & Weiner, 2009; Ione, 2009; Padgett, Henwood & Stanhope, 2008; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). The housing model removes chronically homeless individuals from the streets and places them in housing. A home is accompanied by supportive services offered by a case manager. The model is unique in that it doesn't require homeless individuals to get a job, recover from a drug habit or seek mental health services before being provided long-term shelter. In return for a home, usually an apartment, permanent supportive housing tenants generally contribute 30 percent of whatever income they earn toward rent (Kertesz & Weiner, 2009; Ione, 2009; Padgett, Henwood & Stanhope, 2008; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010).

Conclusion

The issue of how America's poor, including its homeless, will be tended to has a long history derived from British practices and guided by common values such as the Protestant work ethic and individualism. These values influence the American social welfare system and how Americans distinguish who is and who is not worthy of public assistance.

Chronic homelessness is a convoluted social problem that is steeped in questions about American values and for which there is no single solution. As put by Burt et al. (2001), "We cannot talk about either the causes of or the solutions to homelessness without grappling with values, especially about who deserves what from whom, and who owes what to whom," (p. 324). Although experts in the field of homelessness widely accept that structural factors including a lack of affordable housing, a lack of living wage jobs and other social barriers are to blame for chronic homelessness (Burt et al., 2001; Cunningham, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2009), public discourse on the subject communicates otherwise. The discourse is loaded with language that signifies Americans' commitment to individualism and the Protestant work ethic. The discourse leads the audience to believe that chronically homeless individuals are personally responsible for their lack of a home and unworthy of public assistance. As seen in my research, which follows herein, it is likely that discourse intended to shift the blame for chronic homelessness from economic and other structural faults to the personal character flaws of chronically homeless people will continue if an intervention does not occur. This is illustrated in my research via a case study analysis of newspaper discourse pertaining to Tacoma, Washington's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project.

My research, which was conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree in the Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies program, was performed using a unique methodology which combines rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis to closely examine the role of language in public texts on the topic of chronic homelessness and the effort to end this public problem. The focus of my research and the methodology used to study it reflect the mission of the Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies program to

prepare students to scrutinize the nature of public problems and identify actions to potentially confront such problems. Chronic homelessness is a multidisciplinary dilemma with ties to the fields of social welfare, poverty knowledge, human rights and economics, among others. Similarly, my research represents a multifaceted approach to comprehensively understanding the power of language in the movement to end chronic homelessness. Rhetorical analysis draws attention to the arguments presented in newspaper discourse on the topic of chronic homelessness and examines how those arguments reflect American values. Critical discourse analysis, through a detailed look at the language utilized in the discourse, highlights the complex social relationships embedded within the issue of chronic homelessness and examines the ability of those relationships to shape public knowledge and public opinion. By combining the two methods of analysis my research challenges readers to think critically about the language used to communicate about chronic homelessness; it presents a view of this social problem that is largely missing in the public discourse on the movement to end chronic homelessness. The research simultaneously encourages readers to take similarly thorough approaches to reading and interpreting public discourse.

In an effort to encourage further linguistic studies on chronic homelessness and the movement to end this problem, my research takes the form of an academic publication which is being submitted to *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Critical Discourse Studies*. I've chosen to produce an academic publication because it makes my work more accessible; this is especially important given that the 2015 deadline to end chronic homelessness is fast approaching and a goal of critical discourse analysis is to make one's work readily available to the public.

Abstract

Homelessness arose as a public problem in the 1980s and led to the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the country's first and only legislation to acknowledge homelessness and direct resources toward addressing it. The act has since inspired a national movement to end all types of homelessness by 2020 and chronic homelessness by 2015. A permanent supportive housing model known as Housing First, which provides government subsidized apartments and case management to chronically homeless individuals, is poised to play a crucial role in the movement. Given this, nine newspaper articles published in Tacoma, Washington's *The News Tribune* and written on the topic of Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project are analyzed as part of a case study that combined the methodologies of rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis in an effort to identify how social views about chronically homeless people and the Housing First model are reproduced in Tacoma through publications. The goal of the research is to encourage a change in discursive practices as they relate to chronically homeless people and the effort to end chronic homelessness. The research shows that in Tacoma, discourse pertaining to monetary savings and human rights is used to argue in support of Housing First. However, chronically homeless individuals are simultaneously portrayed in the discourse as responsible for their living conditions and therefore undeserving of housing. The research is significant because it calls attention to the societal values that impact the movement to end chronic homelessness and how those values are communicated in the public texts of newspapers.

Keywords: chronic homelessness, undeserving poor, Housing First, permanent supportive housing, rhetorical analysis, critical discourse analysis, newspaper rhetoric

Introduction

Every night hundreds of thousands of people seeking shelter curl into the shadowed depths of bridge overpasses or the dark alcoves of businesses, onto the cold surfaces of park benches or the crowded floors of emergency shelters. These individuals are part of the United States' homeless population. Roughly 610,042 homeless individuals were tallied during a 2013 nationwide point-in-time count; approximately 213,515 of them were chronically homeless—defined as individuals who have a disability and who have been homeless for a consecutive period of a year or longer or have experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within a three year timeframe, (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013). Homelessness, a socio-economic dilemma, is not a new issue; however, since the 1980s it has engaged the American public to a degree that has resulted in its designation as a public problem. It's subsequently prompted a national movement to end chronic homelessness by 2015 and all types of homelessness by the year 2020.

In order to inspire a change in how Americans communicate about chronically homeless individuals the research presented herein will first offer a history of the emergence of homelessness as a modern public problem. It will then review the history of a permanent supportive housing model known as Housing First, which is utilized nationwide in an effort to transition chronically homeless individuals from the streets to housing. According to Norman Fairclough (1992), a pioneer in critical discourse analysis, changes in social practices are commonly reflected in discourse; historically recounting those changes responds and gives context to existing discourse, while also constructing new discourse that will become part of the historical record. Lastly, this article will provide research findings from a case study on how newspaper discourse published in Tacoma, Washington

on the topic of Housing First characterizes chronically homeless people and the Housing First model. The study was performed using a combination of rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis methods.

Homelessness as a Public Problem

Deserving Versus Undeserving Poor

Taking a historical approach to social welfare and poverty knowledge, sociologists (Day, 2009; Gans, 1995; Katz, 1989; Leiby, 1978; Mink & O'Connor, 2004; Trattner, 1999) contend that an ideology that perpetuates the need to categorize poor citizens as either deserving or undeserving of public assistance has existed as a way of determining how limited resources are allocated since the founding of America. Individuals who are employed, disabled or children have historically been regarded as deserving poor, meaning they are considered worthy of receiving social welfare assistance, also known as public assistance. People who are physically able to hold employment, but do not have a job have historically been regarded as living immoral lifestyles and categorized as undeserving poor, meaning they are not considered worthy of public assistance. This categorical system played a pivotal role in the social welfare reform efforts that took place in the 1980s.

Sociologists (Day, 2009; Katz, 1989; Mink & O'Connor, 2004; Trattner, 1999) argue that 1980s welfare reform efforts put the nation's social welfare safety net in jeopardy. The number of individuals receiving welfare assistance was substantial when Ronald Reagan took presidential office in 1981. Throughout his two-terms, Reagan held tightly to his conviction that recipients of public aid were primarily unworthy poor who fraudulently took advantage of their government by drawing welfare checks instead of working. Reagan fomented an anti-welfare policy agenda that slashed the budgets of federal programs such

as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which helped sustain America's poorest citizens. These actions were devastating to the nation's poor, but this is not to say that anti-welfare policies alone are to blame for modern-day homelessness.

Homelessness Studies

From a historic perspective on homelessness, Ellen L. Bassuk and Alison Lauriat (1986), Martha Burt et al. (2001), Gerald Daly (1996) and Thomas G. Goodnight (1991) insist that America's economic landscape in the 1980s set the stage for modern-day homelessness. The country experienced a catastrophic recession beginning in 1980. By November 1982, the unemployment rate reached a staggering 10.7 percent; the highest rate the nation had seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Bassuk & Lauriat, 1986). Simultaneously, the number of safe and affordable housing units, defined as housing that requires no more than 30 percent of a family's income, dwindled. In 1984, more than 23 million households either lived in substandard housing or expended more than a third of their income on rent or a mortgage, putting them at risk of becoming homeless (Daly, 1996). Meanwhile, the federal government concerned itself with economic growth and looked to private enterprise to revitalize the economy.

Neoliberal Policy Agenda

A neoliberal policy agenda aimed at reducing government involvement and increasing the role of the free market system in many social arenas was persistently advanced throughout President Reagan's terms (Bassuk & Lauriat, 1986; Daly, 1996; Goodnight, 1991). In what is known as supply-side economics, or Reaganomics, business and tax regulations were dramatically scaled back for the country's wealthiest corporations and individuals; the administration argued supply-side economics would trigger economic

advancement and, in turn, prosperity that would trickle down to the impoverished. In reality, the economic recession paired with the Reagan administration's anti-welfare and neoliberal policy agenda resulted in greater poverty.

Public Perceptions

The public began to notice the increased levels of poverty as people who had never before lived unsheltered found themselves without employment, without welfare programs to fall back on and without homes (Burt et. all, 2009; Daly, 1996; Goodnight, 1991). Pre 1980s, homelessness was perceived as a condition experienced by unemployed, substance-abusing men who tended to cluster in low-income urban areas commonly referred to as skid row (Goodnight, 1991). That perception began to change when it became apparent that military veterans, women, children, families and people who desired to work but could not find employment were living on the streets. As put by Goodnight:

In the recession of the early 1980s, it became clear that the homeless were no longer occupants of a limited section of town; people with nowhere to go became visible in the public places of cities. Sleeping on sidewalks, ambling through parks, often carrying their belongings in a bag or pushing all their worldly goods in a shopping cart, the new homeless became the most visible sign that the problems of poverty were increasing (p. 7).

The visibility of homelessness grabbed the attention of advocates as well as the news media.

The media's documentation of people living in unsheltered conditions helped raise public awareness of homelessness. For example, in December 1984, the *New York Times* reported that Jesse Carpenter, a 61 year-old military veteran who had earned a bronze star

for his heroic actions in World War II, froze to death on a park bench across the street from the White House (United Press International, <http://www.nytimes.com>). The night of his death Carpenter was accompanied by a homeless friend who used a wheelchair. The men slept in the park rather than an emergency shelter because nearby shelters were not wheelchair accessible. Carpenter, who had lived on the streets for roughly two decades, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. The public and advocacy groups responded to what they saw on the streets and to stories such as that of Mr. Carpenter by prodding the federal government to intervene.

Groundbreaking Legislation

In 1987, the Reagan administration, which believed homelessness was a problem best confronted by local rather than national government, reluctantly responded to the public outcry by adopting the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. The legislation, named after the congressional representative who sponsored the bill (Ione, 2009; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006), was the first and continues to be the only U.S. legislation directed at addressing homelessness. The Act provided a definition of homelessness; authorized programs designed to create, expand or upgrade emergency shelters; codified homeless assistance grants; established programs to provide job training, and created the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)—a coalition comprised of 19 federal Cabinet secretaries and agency heads—to coordinate a national response to homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006; Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, 1987). Since the passing of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act much has been done to find a solution to ending all types of homelessness.

Movement to End Homelessness

For nearly three decades scholars have studied the causes of homelessness and ways to end the phenomena. Experts on the subject believe an increase in affordable housing, living wage jobs and supportive services to assist homeless individuals in overcoming social barriers such as substance abuse or financial illiteracy are the most pressing commitments required to end homelessness (Cunningham, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2009; Elias & Inui, 1993; Ione, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Kertesz & Weiner, 2009). In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, an advocacy and research organization, issued a lofty 10-year plan to end homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). In 2010, USICH issued “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.” Both the National Alliance to End Homelessness and USICH have strongly encouraged communities to create and adopt their own 10-year plan and today approximately 243 jurisdictions nationwide have met the calling (National Alliance to End Homelessness, Community Plans). The majority of 10-year plans, including the federal strategic plan, include implementation of Housing First.

Housing First Approach

Housing First, a permanent supportive housing model, is considered a cornerstone in overcoming chronic homelessness. The model was developed in the 1990s and represents a paradigm shift in housing the chronically homeless population. Whereas people living on the street have historically been expected to demonstrate housing readiness by overcoming social barriers such as substance abuse or mental illness, Housing First is built on the core belief that housing is the most imminent need and, if offered first, will assist chronically homeless people in reaching self-sufficiency and staying permanently

housed (Ione, 2009; Kertesz & Weiner, 2009; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010; Padgett, Henwood & Stanhope, 2008). While the structure of Housing First varies, the housing model typically targets chronically homeless individuals and is designed to provide permanent, long-term housing and free supportive services such as counseling, financial management and job seeking assistance to Housing First tenants. The housing model requires tenants to contribute 30 percent of whatever income they earn, whether from employment, public assistance or otherwise, toward rent; the remaining rent costs are publicly subsidized, usually by local bodies of government. Housing First is the only housing model identified by USICH as a practice proven to end chronic homelessness (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2010). As such, the model has been implemented nationwide, including in Tacoma, Washington.

Tacoma, WA Case Study

Policy makers in Tacoma, consider the city to have a problem with chronic homelessness. Tacoma, located in Pierce County, is Washington's third largest city and boasts a population of approximately 200,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010), of which roughly 200 people are estimated to be chronically homeless (City of Tacoma, http://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/neighborhood_and_community_services/human_services_division/housing_first/). Around 2004, a group of Tacoma stakeholders consisting of individuals representing government entities, service providers, religious organizations, the medical field, law enforcement and the homeless population set out to establish a 10-year plan for Tacoma and Pierce County. The Road Home: Ending Chronic Homelessness, a Ten Year Plan for Pierce County was adopted the following year. The Road Home proposed implementation of a permanent supportive

housing pilot project and in 2006 Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination project was launched (Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition for the Homeless, 2005). According to the City of Tacoma, the project aims to eliminate encampments— outdoor communities where chronically homeless individuals reside— by removing chronically homeless campers, placing them in Housing First then returning encampments to their pre-encampment state (Anderson-Connolly & Beller, 2007; City of Tacoma, <http://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=5917>; Ione, 2009). The project continues today in much the same form that it was initiated. Local non profits work with landlords to secure apartments for Housing First participants and provide supportive services and case management to tenants while the City of Tacoma manages the project and subsidizes the market rate apartments. The City attests the project is in the best interest of chronically homeless people because it provides them safe, healthy and affordable housing with the accompanying help they need to achieve employment and self-sufficiency.

Like stakeholders in Tacoma, many jurisdictions currently working to eradicate homelessness believe Housing First plays a key role in the effort. They are following the lead of experts in the field of homelessness, which firmly insist that an increase in affordable housing, living wage jobs and access to supportive services will result in an end in homelessness. While this may be true, still more research is needed, specifically as it applies to chronic homelessness. Affordable housing and living wage job provisions will provide the basic resources necessary to physically house people who are living on the streets, but these measures will do little to change how Americans conceptualize chronically homelessness people and thereby determine their worthiness for public

assistance such as subsidized housing. Through a case study analysis of discourse found in newspapers on the topic of Tacoma, Washington's chronically homeless population and the city's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project, my research will illustrate how American values are reflected in the discourse and used to frame the issue of chronic homelessness by characterizing chronically homeless people as at fault for their lack of a home and therefore undeserving of public assistance.

Methodology

I analyzed discourse that was printed between 2004 and 2012 in Tacoma, Washington's most prominent newspaper, *The News Tribune*; this newspaper was chosen based on its status as a trusted source of news in Tacoma—the site of my case study and the only city, to my knowledge, that has paired an attempt to end chronic homelessness via a Housing First model with an effort to clear homeless encampments. In total, 64 newspaper articles that referenced Housing First and Tacoma were identified by using the Access World News database to search Washington state newspapers for the words "Housing First" and "Tacoma." The keyword "Housing First" was used as search criteria because the housing model has generated significant attention nationally and locally regarding its ability to end chronic homelessness. The data set was then narrowed to only the 33 newspaper articles published in *The News Tribune*. It was further constricted by eliminating from my analysis any articles that did not prominently feature Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project. All articles that were explicitly labeled as opinion pieces were removed from the data set in an effort to eliminate texts containing intentional bias. The focus of the case study was further condensed by disregarding articles that were written as an update to another recently printed article; these pieces of text,

upon review, presented little new information. Nine newspaper articles remained after this refining process.

A methodology that combines rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis was used to examine the newspaper articles. These approaches were chosen in an effort to identify discursive techniques used to characterize chronically homeless individuals and Housing First and to determine how the techniques frame the issue of chronic homelessness in Tacoma.

Rhetorical analysis consists of an examination of how rhetorical techniques are employed to persuade an audience. This analysis type was chosen because the articles analyzed all seemed to favor a Housing First model in Tacoma. The goal of using this type analysis in my research was to evaluate whether the argument presented in the discourse is convincing or not and why. To do this, required consideration of who produced the text, when it was produced and the probable cause for its production (Huckin, 2002; Lunsford & Ruskiewicz, 1999). Rhetorical analysis requires a critical and careful review of the rhetorical techniques used to construct the discourse.

The most commonly analyzed rhetorical techniques are appeals to pathos, ethos and logos. Pathos, an appeal to the audience's emotions, invites the audience to view the subject matter from a different perspective; this type of appeal has the ability to change the audience's attitude or mood toward the subject (Leach, 2000; Lunsford & Ruskiewicz, 1999). Ethos, an appeal crafted to establish the credibility of the author, is based on the assumption that a credible author can be trusted to give honest, well-intentioned and well-informed advice and opinions on the subject matter. Logos, an appeal that relies on evidence and reason, presents the argument as factual and quantifiable. While rhetorical

analysis is a valuable tool for identifying the arguments presented in discourse, it is not suitable for evaluating the social relationships conveyed in public texts. For this reason, critical discourse analysis was used to supplement rhetorical analysis.

A careful examination of the impact of power and ideology on public texts can be achieved through the use of critical discourse analysis (Huckin, 2002; Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 1992; Locke, 2004). This method provides a way to better understand the social relationships between individuals or groups featured in public texts; it offers a way to show how public discourse often serves the interests of people in power. As put by Fairclough (1992):

Today, individuals working in a variety of disciplines are coming to recognize the ways in which changes in language use are linked to wider social and cultural processes, and hence are coming to appreciate the importance of using language analysis as a method of studying social change (pg. 1).

Critical discourse analysis is appropriate for analyzing newspaper articles because these publications are public texts that have widespread readership and therefore hold the ability to influence public opinion and social change on issues such as homelessness.

Research Results

My research found that three types of discourses: personal responsibility, economic, and human rights, were utilized in the newspaper articles to characterize chronically homeless individuals and communicate about Housing First. Each of the discourse types, which can be thought of as sub-discourses of the larger discourse comprised of the newspaper articles as a whole, targets a different audience and communicates a distinct American value. Personal responsibility discourse, for the purposes of this article, is

defined as discourse that is concerned with and blames chronically homeless people for the choices they have made in their lives. This type of discourse describes chronically homeless people in relation to what they lack and implies that they are without a home for reasons that are their fault; therefore, they are not deserving of housing. Personal responsibility discourse embodies the value of a strong work ethic. Economic discourse, for the purposes of this article, is defined as discourse that focuses on the monetary economic impact of a public problem. This type of discourse targeted policy makers and public figures tasked with ending chronic homelessness; it represents the value Americans place on a free market system. Human rights discourse, for the purposes of this article, is defined as discourse that is concerned with privileges that are considered basic human rights of all members of society. Human rights discourse was aimed at taxpayers who are susceptible to social justice issues. This type of discourse represents the value Americans place on individualism. Each of the newspaper articles congruently employed the three discourse types. Findings from the rhetorical analysis will be presented first, followed by results from the critical discourse analysis.

Rhetorical Analysis

Personal Responsibility Discourse

The discourse frequently featured personal responsibility language that depicted chronically homeless people as possessing character flaws and making unwise decisions that put them at blame for their lack of housing. Nearly all the articles analyzed employed rhetorical techniques that characterize the habitually unsheltered population as drug addicts and alcoholics (Hagey, 2006a; Hagey, 2006b; Hagey, 2007; Merryman, 2009; Housing First works, 2008; Sullivan, 2008; Leventis, 2004). Some articles made mention of

criminal records (Hagey, 2006b; Hagey, 2007; Merryman, 2008). The chronically homeless were said to be unable to “manage their rent, rules, social services and transportation well” (Merryman, 2009, p. A03)¹ and were described as lacking the self-initiative to seek counseling and treatment for their vices (Hagey, 2006a). Furthermore, they were depicted as in need of “rigorous guidance, benchmarks and goals” (Sullivan, 2008, p. A16). One article specifically communicated that some members of the public do not support Tacoma’s Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project because it assists people who are the “least willing to help themselves,” (Leventis, 2004, p. A01). The same article features a resident who is questioned about his feelings toward Housing First in Tacoma and responds by saying, “I think if you're providing something to people, they should be trying to improve, not be a negative influence” (Leventis, 2004, p. A01). The personal responsibility discourse found in the texts analyzed hinders the movement to end chronic homelessness by sending an underlying and counterproductive message that chronically homeless people are undeserving of a home because they lack a strong work ethic and ability to become self-sufficient.

Economic Discourse

Logical appeals, primarily in the form of statistics and examples, were used to characterize chronically homeless individuals as costly to taxpayers due to their heavy dependency on expensive public services. Economic discourse alleged that the chronically homeless population consumed a disproportionate amount of public resources such as jail and hospital beds. For example, Leventis (2004) tells the audience that chronically homeless people comprise 20% of the area’s total homeless population but consume 50% of the available public resources. The disproportionate depletion of resources is

emphasized in several of the articles through the use of statistics showing chronically homeless individuals cycle through jails, emergency care, hospitals, homeless shelters and treatment programs racking up costs that range from \$35,000 to \$150,000 per person per year (Merryman, 2009; Sullivan, 2008; Hagey, 2006b; Sherman, 2006). The discourse communicates that because the chronically homeless generally have no means to pay for the services they utilize, the costs must be covered by taxpayer dollars, which equal roughly \$2.8 million per year (Leventis, 2004). Economic discourse such as that illustrated here is significant, especially in finance-strapped communities such as Tacoma, because it quantifies the cost and economic impact chronically homeless people have on a community and motivates policy makers to consider ways to free up some of the tax dollars dedicated to the care of the chronically homeless population. The discourse sets the stage for a logical argument for why Housing First should be supported as a way to intervene with the social practices exhibited by the city's chronic homeless population.

Similar to the economic discourse on chronically homeless people, economic discourse on the subject of Housing First relied on logical appeals such as statistics, examples and a study to present Housing First as a viable solution to reducing the costs associated with chronic homelessness in Tacoma. Statistics detailing Housing First's proven track record of success in cities across the nation were used to suggest the housing model could work in Tacoma to decrease the number of chronically homeless people living on the streets, and therefore circumvent their frequent use of costly public services. For example, Leventis (2004) cited a New York and a San Francisco program, both which sheltered more than 80% of their chronically homeless population through Housing First. Hagey (2006b) called attention to Philadelphia's and San Francisco's Housing First efforts. Merryman

(2009) pointed out Seattle and Portland's triumphs. Specific claims about the housing model's ability to cut costs were featured often in the discourse (Hagey, 2006a; Merryman, 2009; Sullivan, 2008). Merryman (2009) conveyed that Housing First saves taxpayers \$13,000 to \$25,000 per chronically homeless person per year. The discourse included findings from a local study conducted by University of Puget Sound researchers which concluded Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project was successful because it "saves money, contributes to decreases in social service use and, perhaps most importantly, keeps clients housed" (Sullivan, 2008, p. A16). The study is significant because of its local subject matter and local production; the study makes the argument for Housing First in Tacoma appear logical and reasonable.

Ethical appeals, most commonly in the form of expert opinions regarding the monetary benefits of the Housing First model, can be found in the economic discourse. Opinions from a former Tacoma city manager (Hagey, 2006a; Hagey, 2006b), a case manager (Sullivan, 2008), a mayor (Merryman, 2009), President George W. Bush (Sullivan, 2008) and university professors who published a study on Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination project (Sullivan, 2008) are found in the discourse. For example, Merryman (2009) includes a direct quotation from the executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH): "[Housing First is] better for the community. It's better for the homeless person. It's better for the taxpayer" (p. A03). In journalistic writing, direct quotations are used to signal that the information quoted is of utmost importance and the reader should not ignore it. Direct quotations are also used to give the journalist credibility; they show the journalist has done his or her research and found sources of information that readers can rest assured are experts on the subject

matter. Due to their political or professional status and their direct relationship with Housing First in Tacoma, the experts' opinions are considered credible and reasonable and therefore can be said to strengthen the argument for Housing First because they were given by people who are influential in the community and who are trusted to act in the best interest of the community. In opposition to economic discourse, human rights discourse was used to appeal to individuals with the interests of marginalized groups in mind.

Human Rights Discourse

Emotional language—a pathos appeal— aimed at individuals who are susceptible to social justice issues was used in human rights discourse to convey the message that housing, safety and security are basic human necessities that ought to be met, in part because it's the moral thing to do. A handful of the news articles suggested that chronically homeless people's primary need, above all else, is shelter (Sullivan, 2008; Hagey, 2006b; Sherman, 2006). The discourse further communicates that “there really is no place like a home” (Housing First works, 2008, p. B04). This slight twist on a well-known line in the classic American film *The Wizard of Oz* reminds readers of the character of Dorothy, a young woman who faces dangerous perils as she desperately tries to find her way back to her Kansas home. This connection is important because it encourages readers to contemplate how frightening it must be to not have the safety and security of one's own home. In considering this, the reader may be inclined to feel empathy for chronically homeless individuals. Not just any housing will do for the chronically homeless population though; Human rights discourse, through the use of emotional language, positions Housing First apartments as superior to encampments due to the sub-standard, unsafe and unhealthy conditions found in encampments (Hagey, 2006a; Hagey, 2006b; Sherman,

2006). Hagey (2006b) illustrates this point by featuring a homeless woman's vivid recollection of rats running over her head as she slept underneath an overpass. Using a first-person point of view to communicate this experience increases the likelihood that readers will react by registering it as highly terrifying and unhealthy. The message that Housing First increases a chronically homeless person's general level of safety is seen elsewhere in the discourse as well. Sullivan (2008) notes that Housing First tenants credit Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project with saving them from the certain death they believe they would have suffered had they continued to live on Tacoma's streets. According to human rights discourse, the housing model also represents the morally correct approach to ending chronic homelessness. Implementing Housing First is described as "an act of compassion" (Sherman, 2006, p. A01). The discourse further sends the message that "it's helping the poor, and that's the right thing to do" (Hagey, 2006b, p. A01). This type of emotional language is powerful because it has the potential to remind the audience of influential documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which outlines a person's right to an adequate standard of living that includes housing, safety and necessary social services (United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a23>).

Human interest anecdotes, another pathos appeal, were employed in human rights discourse as a way to portray Housing First tenants as upholding the American values of individualism and a diligent work ethic. This technique can be seen in Sullivan's (2008) piece, which includes the story of a chronically homeless man who regained his health, family, employment and ultimately economic self-sufficiency after participating in Housing First. Another example is that of the lives of a chronically homeless couple who desperately

hope to turn their lives around and secure a job with help from Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project (Hagey, 2006b). In both cases, the anecdotes provide glimpses into the lives of Housing First tenants. They also help to convince the audience that Housing First tenants want to be productive and contributing members of society. While a rhetorical analysis of the discourse presents an argument in favor of Housing First, a vastly different perspective of chronic homelessness and Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project can be seen by taking a critical approach to the texts.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The complexities of the relationships between those involved in social issues can be better understood through the use of critical discourse analysis. This type of analysis provides insight into how a text's audience and its subject can be manipulated by discourse that tends to serve the interests of people in positions of power while proliferating social inequalities experienced by less privileged individuals. Critical examination of the newspaper articles pertaining to Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project starting at a macro level and moving toward a micro level focus exposes how readers can be manipulated and chronically homeless individuals disempowered by the public discourse circulated in the texts.

From a macro perspective, the concept of *agency*, also known in the critical discourse analysis field as *transitivity* (Huckin, 2002), helps frame the discourse. *Framing* can be thought of as the perspective displayed in a text while agency can be described as the social relationship between the person performing an action, known as the agent, and the subject of the action found within a text. The agent is typically understood as exerting power over the subject. My research finds that within the data analyzed chronically

homeless people are typically the subject of power exerted by two groups of agents, people associated with the creation and implementation of Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project and journalists.

An understanding of how agency operates can be gained by exploring the role of power in the relationship between individuals directly associated with carrying out the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project and chronically homeless people. The discourse reveals that people in positions to influence policy directives disempower chronically homeless individuals by upholding policies and procedures that limit how and where chronically homeless people reside. The following examples from the analyzed texts illustrate this point. The city council, the agents, adopted the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project with the intent of physically removing chronically homeless people from their place of residence— encampments— and relocating them to Housing First apartments; the policy was adopted, in part, because the agents view chronically homeless street dwellers as threatening to local business and economic vitality (Leventis, 2004; Sherman, 2006). Local police, by insisting encampment occupants vacate a camp and either relocate to a Housing First apartment, move to a temporary emergency shelter, leave town or be arrested for trespassing (Hagey, 2006a), marginalize chronically homeless individuals. Encampment occupants who accept a Housing First apartment are subjected to social controls that are inherent to the housing model. These social controls include an expectation that Housing First tenants participate in case management, an example of institutional power exercised in an effort to motivate tenants to behave in socially acceptable ways (Sullivan, 2008; Merryman, 2009; Leventis, 2004). According to Hagey's article (2006a), "People who choose to move into an apartment will receive regular

counseling, and those with mental health or substance abuse problems will be prodded to receive treatment” (p. A01). The analyzed texts reveal that encampment occupants who decline participation in the city’s Housing First & Encampment Elimination project are also subjected to policies and procedures designed to manage their living conditions. For example, policy makers approved the construction of fences and barriers erected in an effort to deter inhabitation of the camps and former encampments are patrolled by police who arrest chronically homeless individuals who attempt to make their home at former encampment sites (Hagey, 2006a, Hagey, 2006b). These examples show how those in power use Tacoma’s Housing First & Elimination Project to essentially force chronically homeless people to live in a way that is seen as socially acceptable and non conflicting with the desires of local business owners. Policy makers are not the only group of agents that hold power over chronically homeless individuals. This population is also subjected to another form of disempowerment that manifests itself in the production of the public texts.

The journalists who produced the newspaper articles comprise an agent group which discursively exerts power over readers of the texts and chronically homeless individuals by choosing to present a biased account of Tacoma’s Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project. Critical discourse analysis reveals that *The News Tribune* journalists limited who was permitted to contribute to the public discourse on chronic homelessness and Tacoma’s Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project by predominantly choosing to feature in their work the voices of individuals with the power to make operating decisions regarding the project. In fact, of the news pieces analyzed only Hagey’s (2006b) and Sullivan’s (2008) articles included the voices of people who were chronically homeless. While chronically homeless people are prominently featured in

Hagey's (2006b) piece, comments from this population are limited to one sentence in Sullivan's (2008) article. This is to say that chronically homeless people, those subjected to the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project, are marginalized in the sense that they were hardly given the opportunity to contribute to the discourse and thus help frame the discussion around ending chronic homelessness in Tacoma. Perhaps as a result of the journalists' choice to interview primarily policy makers, a pro-Housing First argument seems to be apparent in the texts while counterarguments and alternative resources or approaches to ending chronic homelessness are largely missing from the texts. The single exception is Hagey's 2007 article, which highlights the opinion of a councilman who considers the project less about housing chronically homeless people and more about positioning Tacoma for economic growth by beautifying areas of the city where extreme poverty is visible. In the field of professional journalism, this one-sided framing of an issue is atypical and contradicts practices commonly adhered to within the journalism field. Critically speaking, the framing can serve to manipulate the texts' readers by restricting the information they have access to, thereby increasing the chance that readers will support the discourse presented in the newspaper articles without fully considering the implications Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project may have on them or homeless encampment occupants. Readers can be further influenced through the structuring of the texts.

From a micro level perspective on the discourse, *topicalization* has the ability to manipulate readers. Topicalization refers to the placement of information within and relative to other information in a text. This concept is important because it signals to the reader which information should be considered important and which information can be

dismissed. In the journalism field, topicalization is commonly seen in a writing style known as the inverted pyramid. This is a way of organizing a piece of writing so that the information the journalist considers most important to the audience appears near the start of the text while information considered less important is placed toward the end of the text (Morris, 2004). The inverted pyramid is based on the notion that most readers are inundated with information throughout their day and therefore will take a quick and uncritical approach to reading texts instead of investing the time to read the article in full and question what it communicates (Huckin, 2002; Leach, 2000; Morris, 2004).

By taking notice to the organization of the texts, it can be seen how language that hints at contentious motives for pairing the cleaning of encampments with a Housing First model is background to discourse that communicates the cost savings the City of Tacoma could realize by adopting the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project. The discourse communicates that encampment clean up is a high priority for the City of Tacoma; however, pertinent details on why it is a priority and how it impacts chronically homeless people does not appear in the opening paragraphs of any of the texts analyzed. In fact, in most cases this information is either not provided or is buried halfway through the article and given no more than a mention. For example, it is not until the 35th paragraph of Hagey's (2006b) 37 paragraph news article that the reader learns fences will be built around former encampments in hopes of preventing future inhabitation of the sites. While two news pieces acknowledge the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project may be partially driven by the interests of business owners (Leventis, 2004; Sherman, 2006), this information is not divulged until the 10th of 12 paragraphs in Sherman's (2006) article and the 17th of 28 paragraphs in Leventis' work. Furthermore, only one of the texts calls

attention to fact that the City plans to continue shutting down encampments even if it runs out of money to transition encampment residents into housing (Hagey, 2006a). This critical piece of information is disclosed in the 21st of 24 paragraphs.

In summary, from a broad perspective of the discourse, the concept of agency, also known as transitivity, reveals that Tacoma's chronically homeless population is subjected to power exerted by both policy makers and journalists. Tacoma's political figures and policy makers impose their power via regulations guiding Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project. The regulations can serve to marginalize the city's chronically homeless population by imposing social controls intended to restrict where and how chronically homeless people are permitted to live. Journalists exhibit power over Tacoma's chronically homeless population in a discursive sense by presenting a biased account of Tacoma's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project. The bias manifests itself in the framing of the discourse, which repeatedly features the voices of public figures in support of the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project while scantily including the voices of chronically homeless people. This framing limits the knowledge made available to readers about the affect of the project on chronically homeless individuals and has the potential to influence readers to hold an opinion similar to what is predominantly seen in the discourse.

From a detailed perspective of the discourse, the placement of information within and relative to other information in the texts is intended to cue readers as to the level of importance of the material. Information that is considered important is prominently featured in the discourse and generally mentioned toward the beginning of a text.

Information that is considered less important is less conspicuous and usually found near

the end of a text. Consistently, motives for pairing the cleaning of encampments with a Housing First model are represented in the discourse as less significant than the potential cost savings the Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project presents for the City of Tacoma. In other words, the discourse communicates that the city of Tacoma's effort to end chronic homelessness is less concerned with the care of chronic homelessness people and more concerned with the city's ability to realize cost savings.

Conclusion

Homelessness has been considered a public problem since the 1980s. Today, nearly three decades after homelessness was recognized as a public problem and more than a decade after communities were prompted to create their own 10-year plan for ending local homelessness, the problem persists. At a national level, *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness 2010* directs the national movement to end homelessness by 2020 and specifically chronic homelessness by 2015. Locally, *The Road Home: Ending Chronic Homelessness, a 10-Year Plan for Pierce County* guides Tacoma's effort. Both plans align with the opinions of homelessness experts, who insist increased access to affordable housing, living wage jobs and supportive services designed to help homeless individuals overcome social barriers. At both a national and a local level, investment in permanent supportive housing such as a Housing First model is considered essential.

To end homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness, will require more than an investment in affordable housing, living wage jobs and supportive services; it will require an in-depth look at the social structure of homelessness, the role values play in discourse

pertaining to this social problem, and the power of language in the movement to end chronic homelessness.

Through a case study analysis of public discourse on Tacoma, Washington's Housing First & Encampment Elimination Project, research presented herein reveals that three types of discourse are used to communicate about chronically homeless individuals. These discourses are labeled for the purpose of my research as personal responsibility, economic and human rights. Used congruently, as the research indicates is typical in newspaper texts, these three discourse types contradict one another. Economic and human rights discourses send the message that a Housing First model should be adopted because it is an efficient and successful method for providing permanent housing for chronically homeless people, thus furthering the movement to end chronic homelessness. However, personal responsibility discourse conveys the message that chronically homeless people don't deserve housing, which hinders the movement to end homelessness. In other words, while a paradigm shift— from housing readiness to Housing First— in sheltering chronically homeless individuals has occurred, the deep-rooted beliefs displayed in public texts about chronically homeless people's deservingness of housing has changed little in the years since widespread homelessness first grabbed the public's attention.

An understanding of why the characterization of chronically homeless people has scantily changed since the 1980s can be gained by taking a critical approach to the texts. A critical discourse analysis uncovers how the exertion of power manifests itself in social relationships that guide the movement to end chronic homelessness. This methodology also offers a lens by which to question what is presented in discourse pertaining to chronic homelessness and the movement to eliminate it. By permitting oneself to be aware of the

ways in which texts can manipulate both a reader and the subjects of the discourse a person can more adequately prepare to engage in meaningful public action that takes into consideration the immense capacity and strength of language and its use in public texts.

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¹ All direct quotations originating from newspaper articles are cited using the page number on which the article begins.