Why Don’t We Do Something? The Societal Problematization of “Homelessness” and the Relationship between Discursive Framing and Social Change

by

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Abstract

Despite decades of public support for ending homelessness, there is little evidence that homelessness has decreased in Canada. Instead, Canadian communities continue to respond to rising numbers of people without homes through emergency response measures that do little to prevent or end the problem. In sharp contrast, research has documented that homelessness is not inevitable and can be addressed with relatively insignificant government financing. Canada has the ability to end this problem. The question is: why don’t we?

This study explores Canada’s political response to this issue by tracing the social construction of “homelessness” since its emergence in the 1980s. Drawing on social problem theory, this interpretive study uses a grounded theory approach to explore the construction of this problem by homelessness advocates and the Canadian media. Triangulating this data with social policy and key events, this study proposes a stage model to explain the “career” of this social problem. This research constitutes the first comprehensive study of the development of homelessness as a social problem in Canada.

Results of the study suggest that homelessness has progressed through six stages in Canada and currently stands at a crossroads between institutionalization and transformation. Over the history of this problem, understandings of this issue have shifted from an emergency/disaster framework to an economic, bureaucratic, and scientific framework. Shifts in homelessness advocacy have been crucial to this transformation and are reflected in the development of two distinct “waves” of homelessness advocacy over the course of this problem’s history. This study argues that the differences between these
waves are structurally produced through each wave’s divergent class-based experiences of early twenty-first century social and political changes.

This study also offers the largest historical analysis of Canadian newspapers’ coverage of homelessness to date. Analysis revealed that newspaper coverage peaked in 1999 and has since declined. Findings suggest that Canadian reporters have frequently depoliticized and individualized this issue in class-based ways, while often failing to elucidate the connections between homelessness and Canada’s economic and social policies.

This thesis concludes with an analysis of the contributions of this study to social problem studies, homelessness research, and social work.
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It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

- Theodore Roosevelt, 1910

To study the history of homelessness in Canada is, in many ways, to study the extraordinary efforts of many people to define what justice and equality means in the face of extreme poverty. In my efforts to grapple with these questions, I have had many guides, mentors, and comrades to whom I owe this text (in all its imperfections). Perhaps the most important of these has been the advocates and activists who have devoted their blood, sweat, and tears to trying to rectify this injustice we call “homelessness.” In interviews, community meetings, rallies, and marches with these advocates, I have often felt humbled, inspired, and truly shocked by the sacrifices made by these fighters, many of whom have known both great victory and stinging defeat. As I try to find my way in this movement, I am grateful for all of the guides that have spent time with me and pushed me to become more compassionate, more political, and more thoughtful. Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Who is in favour of homelessness? Who lobbies for homelessness? Which economists tell us homelessness is good for the economy? If no one is doing these things, why does homelessness persist? (Hulchanski, Campsie, Chau, Hwang, & Paradis, 2009, p. 8)

More research with homeless people as subjects can inform efforts to ameliorate or manage homelessness. But if the underlying problem is how to end mass homelessness, then social scientists will have to focus less on homeless people and more on the people whose decisions (or acquiescence) result in the policies that produce homelessness. (Blasi, 1994, p. 583)

Despite decades of broad public support for ending homelessness, there is little evidence that homelessness has decreased in Canada. Instead, many Canadian communities are experiencing increases in homelessness, and social services across Canada continue to be overburdened and ill-equipped to meet the level of need they are encountering (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). Many scholars and advocates worry that Canada has primarily focused on managing this problem through the provision of community-based emergency services, rather than focusing efforts on preventing and ending it (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014; Gaetz, 2010). In sharp contrast, research by various scholars has documented that homelessness is not inevitable, that it can be adequately addressed with relatively insignificant federal and provincial financing, and that the solutions to homelessness proposed by many research bodies are both similar and not particularly complex (Canadian Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2009; Conference Board of Canada, 2010; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2008; Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014). As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Canada has the fiscal ability to address homelessness, and the tools and infrastructure to do so. One glaring question remains: why don’t we?

This study has its roots in trying to understand why the Canadian nation has been unable or unwilling to prevent or end homelessness in our country. As many social problems scholars have demonstrated, social problems like “homelessness” are better understood as a society’s collection definition of a condition agreed to be harmful and
undesirable, rather than an objective social condition (Benford & Snow, 2000; Best, 2013; Blumer, 1971; Goffman, 1974; Gusfield, 1984). As such, understanding how and why “homelessness” has been constructed and framed as a social problem can help explain why we have responded it in the ways that we have. Building on social problem theory and social constructionism, this study explores how and why a particular set of conditions and issues became defined and framed as the social problem we call “homelessness,” and how these framings of “homelessness” have shifted since its emergence as a social problem in Canada.

This study particularly focuses on how and why public concern and political action have waxed and waned in relation to these constructions in key public arenas (e.g., media, social policy, the social service sector). Focusing on media and advocates’ struggles to define and frame this problem, this study traces the connections between discourse and political action over the history of this social problem in Canada. Given sociological research that demonstrates there is no necessary or linear relationship between collective societal recognition of a social problem, objective conditions in that society, and socio-political action with respect to that social problem (Best, 2013; Blumer, 1971; Kitsuse & Spector, 1977), my research contributes to an understanding of how various framings of “homelessness” have shaped the history of this problem in Canada and our political responses to it.

1.1 Research Questions

This study focuses on four primary research questions:

1. How did “homelessness” emerge as a social problem in Canada?
   a) When did “homelessness” emerge as a social problem in Canada?
   b) What institutions, organizations, groups, and individuals engaged in claimsmaking efforts to establish “homelessness” as a social problem?
   c) How did diverse actors attempt to frame “homelessness” as a social problem? What was the content of these claims or frames?
   d) What conditions or issues were problematized under the term “homelessness”?
e) How were these conditions or issues understood prior to the use of the term “homelessness”?
f) How significant was this new social problem considered to be when it first emerged?
g) How were people experiencing homelessness framed when this problem emerged in Canada?

2. Why was “homelessness” framed in particular ways when it first emerged as a social problem in Canada?
   a) What explains the ways in which people experiencing homelessness were typified when homelessness first emerged as a social problem?

3. How have framings of “homelessness” changed over time?
   a) What institutions, organizations, groups, or individuals have been prominent in framing homelessness in Canada? How has this framing changed over time?
   b) How have people experiencing homelessness been typified in framing efforts? How has this changed over time?
   c) What strategies have actors employed in order to exert ownership or authority over the problem of “homelessness”? What strategies have been effective to this end?
   d) What claims or frames have dominated understandings of this social problem?

4. Why have framings of “homelessness” changed over time in Canada?
   a) What explains why particular framings of “homelessness” became dominant over time?
   b) What explains why particular typifications of people experiencing homelessness have become dominant over time?
   c) What major social, political, and economic conditions have impacted shifts in framings of “homelessness” in Canada?
1.2 Study Design

Utilizing a contextual constructionist approach to social problem theory, this research explores the development of “homelessness” as a social problem in Canada and its relationship to political action. This study employs an interpretive research design focused on meaning-making in social discourse, social policy, and media (Yanow, 1996, 2000). Methodologically, this study employs a grounded theory approach to collecting and analyzing data iteratively (Charmaz, 2006). The primary object of study is claims-making activities concerning homelessness in Canada between 1980 and the present. Consistent with many social problem studies (e.g., Best & Harris, 2013) and studies on the social problem of homelessness (e.g., Bogard 2003; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012), I utilize diverse claims-making data from numerous sources in several public arenas (e.g., media, social policy, advocacy, etc.).

This study employs multiple data collection strategies and utilizes data triangulation and methodological triangulation in pursuit of this inquiry. Best (1990, 2013) and others have persuasively demonstrated that social problems are primarily established through claims-making in four sectors: the media, activism, government, and experts (what Best refers to as the “Iron Quadrangle”). Given this, my study focuses on exploring the historical construction of homelessness in Canada through three mutually-informing research tasks:

1. An exploration of how the Canadian media have constructed and framed “homelessness” and “the homeless” over time;
2. An analysis of how Canadian advocates (including activists and experts) have engaged in claims-making in relation to this social problem over time; and
3. The development of a stage model to explain how homelessness has developed as a social problem since its emergence in Canada.

This research is iterative, with each task drawing on previous tasks in order to provide a richer account of this history. These three research tasks, collectively and separately, aim to create a nuanced picture of the historical development of homelessness as a social problem in Canada.
1.3 Outline

Chapter 2 provides an exploration of my theoretical approach, the empirical literature within which this study is positioned, and a review of my methods. Chapter 3 qualitatively and quantitatively explores the construction of “homelessness” in Canadian newsprint media, specifically focusing on how these constructions have changed over time between 1980 and 2013. Chapter 4 explores how Canadian homelessness advocates have constructed homelessness as a social problem, focusing on their rationale, their perceptions of the impacts of their constructions and tactics, and differences between advocates’ constructions of this problem over time. Chapter 5 offers an empirically-derived stage model of how homelessness has developed as a social problem in Canada between 1980 and the present. In Chapter 6, I summarize these findings and explore their implications for the future of homelessness as a social problem in Canada. I conclude by explicating how this study can contribute to both social problem studies literature and research on Canadian homelessness.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Approach, Empirical Literature Review, and Methods

2.1 Introduction

Most studies on social problems, including most research on homelessness, approach the problem from an objectivist perspective. In objectivist accounts, social problems are *conditions* or *behaviours* in society that are harmful to individuals, the social world, or the physical world (Best, 2013). Objectivists thus position social problems as having objectively measurable characteristics that are amenable to identification and quantification by scholars. When homelessness is studied from an objectivist approach and understood as a social *condition*, research has demonstrated that it stands at the intersection of a range of structural factors and systemic forms of inequality that disproportionately disadvantage people with particular identities and/or vulnerabilities (Gaetz, 2010; Galabuzi, 2006; Jahiel, 1992; Klein, 2007; Menzies, 2005; Novac, Brown, & Bourbonnais, 1996; Watson & Austerberry, 1986). As explained by Fitzpatrick (2005), the “new orthodoxy” in homelessness research has been to locate and analyze this problem at the intersection of these micro, mezzo, and macro factors, thus overcoming the largely discredited notion of the individual/structural divide which characterized earlier research in the field (see also Kennett & Marsh, 1999; Neale, 1997; Minnery & Greenhalgh, 2007; Pleace 1998, 2000). Much of this research has sought to distance itself from previous scholarship that often attributed homelessness to individual pathology, deviance, or deficiency (see Amster, 2003; Bottrell, 2009; Kawash, 1998; Lyon-Callo, 2004). Despite researchers’ widespread recognition and assertion of the macro-causes of homelessness, however, research has continued to focus on the individual and individual-level interventions in many fields (Canadian Standing Senate, 2009). Most of these accounts have focused on describing, quantifying, and measuring social service use/avoidance, mental and physical health, trauma and adverse life experiences, housing inequalities, employment, criminality, and interventions at the individual and community level (Canadian Standing Senate, 2009; Huth & Wright, 1997; Kline, 2000; Lyon-Callo, 2004).
By contrast, a smaller group of scholars have approached social problems as *social constructions* (e.g., Best, 1990; Bogard, 2003; Gusfield, 1984; Loseke, 2003). From this perspective, social problems do not have their existence in objective social conditions but in the *process of responding to* social conditions. This means that social problems can be defined as efforts to arouse concern about particular conditions (i.e., the collective definitional process) (Best, 2013). However, within this literature, there has been little focus on the construction of homelessness as a social problem (Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012). While there have been some excellent studies on the discursive construction of “the homeless” and how these constructions structure intervention efforts (e.g., Kawash, 1998; Kyle, 2005; Marcus, 2006; Passaro, 1996; Rosenthal, 2000; Schindeler, 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Steinbock, 1994; Wright, 1997), “homelessness” itself is often bracketed or presumed to be a self-evident object of study. This absence is unfortunate for a number of reasons, but perhaps principally because understanding how this problem has been socially constructed can help illuminate why we have made so little progress at reducing homelessness in Canada.

The intent of this study is to explore the *social construction* of homelessness as a social problem and address this gap in the literature. This chapter argues that social problem theory and social constructionism can provide the theoretical basis to help us understand the connections between how we understand homelessness and why we have been unable to adequately address this issue in Canada. Because this study focuses on how “homelessness” is identified, named, framed, and constructed by people in society, this study positions homelessness as a social *construction* rather than a social condition (see also Bogard, 2003).

This chapter is divided into three key sections: (1) theoretical approach, (2) empirical literature review, and (3) methods. First, this chapter outlines the social constructionist approach to social problem theory used in this study, exploring how social problem theory, and to a lesser extent social movement theory, can help make sense of how this problem was identified and developed over time. Second, empirical literature relevant to the study is reviewed and analyzed, and gaps in knowledge are identified. Third, the study design and methods are articulated, and the objectives, data collection methods, and data analysis methods are reviewed for each of the three key research tasks.
2.2 Theoretical Approach

There are three dominant theoretical frameworks relevant to understanding the societal construction of “homelessness” as a social problem: social constructionism, social problem theory, and social movement theory. Social problem theory is the primary orienting approach of this study. While there are varying epistemological positions within all three theoretical approaches, social problem theory has its historical roots in social constructivist insights, and some scholars argue that these two theoretical perspectives are conceptually difficult to separate and almost inseparable in empirical studies (Loseke, 2003). Given the historical and theoretical intertwining of social constructionism and social problem theory, this section begins by explaining the historical roots of social problem theory, its relationship to social constructionism, and key terms and processes articulated by social problem theorists. Following this, I argue that social movement theory can contribute to social problem theory’s understanding of advocacy and activism. Given the relevance of social movement theory’s concept of “collective definitional processes” to understanding homelessness advocacy, I explicate the concept of “framing” in the social movement literature. Assessments and responses to some of the dominant critiques of these theoretical approaches are then offered, followed by an explanation of how and why I take up a contextual constructionist approach to social problem theory.

2.2.1 Social Problem Theory

Social problem theory focuses on how, and to a lesser extent why, people claim that a particular social condition should be viewed as a social problem (i.e., the process by which people construct social problems, often referred to as “claimsmaking”) (Best, 2015). Social problem theory, rooted in a critical analysis of traditional sociological approaches, can be traced back to the works of L. K. Frank (1925), Fuller and Meyers (1941), Blumer (1969, 1971), and Spector and Kitsuse (1977). These scholars sought to reorient the research agenda in their fields by arguing that social problems are not harmful conditions in society but instead are the definitional activities of people who find a particular condition or behaviour problematic, including the definitional activities of others. For these scholars, social problems have their being in the process of collective definition.
An article written by Herbert Blumer (1971) was particularly influential in shaping this new agenda. In it, Blumer identifies three crucial mistakes made in conventional approaches to the study of social problems. First, he argues that sociologists are mistaken if they believe that research can discover social problems. He argues instead that “sociological recognition follows in the wake of societal recognition” (p. 300-301), utilizing examples such as poverty, environmental pollution, women’s rights and racial injustice to demonstrate that sociological research on these issues has waxed and waned in relation to societal interest. Second, Blumer suggests that the traditional sociological approach mistakenly assumes that social problems exist as “identifiable objective conditions in society” (p. 299) that can be revealed through research. He points out that the “objective” analyses offered by sociologists often differ significantly from how society views the problem and thus may be entirely ignored by the society or “may have no influence on what is done with the problem” (p. 3021). He concludes that such analyses “consequently have no realistic relation to the problem” (p. 301). Third, according to Blumer this approach rests on the highly dubitable assumption that “the findings resulting from their study of the objective makeup of a social problem provide society with the solid and effective means for remedial treatment of that problem,” which he argues is “nonsense” (p. 301). Specifically, he suggests that this supposition completely ignores how society actually acts with respect to identified social problems, namely through the intersection of conflicting interests, objectives, and intentions (p. 301). He concludes that sociologists have been gravely mistaken to attribute social problems to structural processes, breakdowns of norms or equilibriums, or deviation from social conformity, rather than collective definitional processes. Based on these criticisms, Blumer calls for a significant reorientation to the study of social problems that was subsequently taken up by social problem theorists beginning in the 1970s (Best, 2015).

The insights of Blumer and others have radically reoriented the study of social problems based on at least three key premises: (1) the inherent merit(s) or plausibility of any particular solution to a social problem does not necessarily result in social action; (2) there is no necessary or linear relationship between collective societal recognition of a social problem and objective conditions in that society; and (3) documenting social conditions is not necessarily politically persuasive (see also Best, 1990; Bogard, 2003;
Gusfield, 1984; Loseke, 2003). These insights were born out of the recognition that scholars were at a loss to explain why some instances of social distress, strain, or disaster were recognized by a society as a social problem, while others were not (Blumer, 1971; Gusfield, 1984). As Hilgartner and Bosk (1998) argue, “If a situation becomes defined as a social problem, it does not necessarily mean that objective conditions have worsened. Similarly, if a problem disappears from public discourse, it does not necessarily imply that the situation has improved” (p. 58). As a result, social problem theorists have argued that in the field of social problems, the object of study should be the discursive construction of social problems.

2.2.2 The Relationship between Social Constructionism and Social Problem Theory

In many ways, social problem theory has become a theoretically robust area of study based on the epistemological suppositions and lines of inquiry proposed by social constructionism. As Raymond Michalowski (1993) argues, “The birth of social constructionism was less the product of a search for a theory about human problems than it was the product of efforts to develop a meta-framework for the sociological study of these problems” (p. 379). Some scholars have suggested that social constructionism is the method of social problem theory, but a review of empirical and theoretical literature would suggest that they can be mutually exclusive and/or utilize or reject assumptions presumed by the other. Such divergence, however, remains more of an exception than a rule, and scholars commonly utilize constructivist frameworks when approaching social problems (Best, 2013).

Most social problem theory is grounded in a social constructionist epistemology that proposes that the social world and our sense of reality is “socially manufactured through human interaction and language,” and thus is not a Durkheimian pre-existing domain, but the product of social interaction (Houston, 2001, p. 846). According to many of these scholars, social worlds are formed through a cyclical process whereby external interactions become objectified, come to be seen by participants as having an objective status, and are then internalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Constructivists suggest that this process is intimately bound up with language, and that through speaking and writing
we produce and organize our social worlds and our sense of reality (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997). This means that for constructivists, “language is neither conceived of as a window through which the world shows itself nor as a mirror directly reflecting our observations” (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997, p. 84). Importantly, this implies that meaning and reality is constructed dialogically between people, and is not individually produced or owned (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997). Thus, when focusing on “social facts” such as rights, entitlements, or sovereignty, both constructivists and social problem theorists would be most interested in how these categories are established through dialogic discussion, conflict, and debate (Noel, 2006). After Garfinkel (1984), constructivists also propose that our constructions are culturally and historically specific, and thus that events and actions are dependent upon this context in order for them to have meaning for human actors (Houston, 2001).

Stan Houston (2001) suggests that constructivist studies can be largely categorized into two broad (but intersecting) perspectives: research and theory that emphasizes human agency and power in constituting the human world (Giddens, 1991; Mead, 1962), and approaches which underscore the role of “discourse” in shaping experience, reality, and the social world (often inspired by the work of Foucault, 1972, 1980). As argued by Ian Hacking (1999), much social constructionist research involves an analysis of how individuals or groups are relegated to particular social categories and then how these individuals negotiate, resist, or reformulate these categories. Of particular focus for many constructivist researchers has been the creation of professional and bureaucratic categories, for people, conditions, and behaviour (Schneider, 1985). Because of this emphasis on both language and categorization, constructivist studies frequently render problematic elites’ claims that they have privileged access to knowledge and reality (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997).

Like social constructionism, social problem theory takes social interaction and its effects as its object of study, rarely engaging in macro-structural analysis or psychological theories. Further, both theories commonly hold an ontologically interactionist position, arguing that not just social life is constructed, but that the natural world as we view it (e.g., trees, lakes, rivers), as well as more abstract concepts (e.g., race, religion, money, democracy), are constructed and agreed upon through interaction
(Bogard, 2003, p. 210). For many sociologists in both schools of thought, Alfred Schutz’s (1962) theory of “sedimentation” explains the effects of this over time (Bogard, 2003, p. 211). Schutz argues that particular social standards, norms, customs, habits, and morals are “sedimentized” over time, and thus that human beings arrive into a social world built through the interpretations of those who existed before them (Schutz summarized in Bogard, 2003, p. 211). Bogard (2003) explains that “the current actor is presented with the results of previous rounds of social interaction as if they were objective. So money, the Catholic Church, or the legal system seem to have the same ontological status, the same level of reality, as mountains, molecules, or the moon to everyday actors” (p. 211). Thus while conventional sociological research on social problems tends to focus on the population experiencing the problem and/or the structural causes of the problem, the constructivist and social problem theorist shifts the focus to how social actors define what constitutes a social problem (Schneider, 1985).

I would argue that there are three important theoretical assumptions that social constructionism and social problem theory hold in common, and which ground my own theoretical approach. First, both approaches commonly start their lines of inquiry with an analysis of the dialogic creation of reality and the social world by human beings, thus positing perceptions of reality as socially constructed. Second, both have a shared focus on claims made by individuals and groups about their social worlds. Third, both contend that power is primarily negotiated, fortified, and contested at the level of discourse and language, and thus that practices of discourse need to be a primary focus in analyzing social problems.

It is this social constructionist version of social problem theory that currently dominates both empirical and theoretical literature, and it this version that forms the theoretical basis of my study. The basic framework of this theoretical approach is outlined below.

2.2.3 Social Problems and the Social Problem Process

As explained above, most social problem theorists argue that social problems are the activities of people who assert claims or grievances with respect to a particular condition in society (Best, 2013; Schneider, 1985; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977, p. 75). As
argued by Deborah A. Stone (1989), “Difficult conditions become problems when people believe them to be caused by human actions and amenable to human intervention” (p. 284). The social problem process, then, is an explanation of “how and why particular conditions come to be constructed as social problems,” and how these constructions may or may not result in societal responses (Best, 2013, p. 14). Multiple constructions of the problem are usually in circulation as groups seek to frame the nature of the problem and re-frame other groups’ constructions of the issue (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998). As Joel Best (2015) articulates, each “social problem is constructed and reconstructed by the media, the general public, policymakers, the social-problems workers who implement policy, and critics” (n.p.).

Any given social problem may have the opportunity to progress through various stages in its development or "career" over time. While all social problem scholars propose that social problems proceed through such a progression, some scholars have attempted to offer natural history models of the sequence of stages through which social problems progress (see, e.g., Best, 2013; Blumer, 1971; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). These natural history models are discussed in detail in Chapter 5, in which I develop an empirically-derived stage model of homelessness in Canada. This section will focus on the key concepts used by theorists to describe the social problem process, highlighting how competition amongst social problems and “problem blocking” manifest themselves in this process.

**Claims, Claimsmakers, and Claimsmaking**

For social problem theorists, the social problem process begins with the articulation of “claims” by “claimsmakers,” a process referred to as “claimsmaking.” Claims are instances in which a person or group argue that a particular condition is troublesome and needs to be addressed through human intervention of some kind. They are the first element in the social problem process, and the trajectory of any given social problem is directly impacted by the nature, content, and context of these claims. The people who engage in making claims are claimsmakers, and the identity and profession of these people are can vary widely (e.g., faith groups, professional associations, government officials, activists, poor people’s organizations, scientists, etc.). The focus for these theorists is not necessarily the content of the claim or the identity of claimsmakers,
but rather the activity and process by which claims are made and responded to (e.g., Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). Theorists’ positions vary with respect to the “formats” and “arenas” within which they imagine clai smaking to occur. Some emphasize formalized and institutionalized settings like professional societies or political campaigns (e.g., Spector & Kitsuse, 1977), others broaden this to include arenas such a pop culture or film (e.g., Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998), and still others argue that claimsmaking occurs in everyday conversations, including among those who lack social and political power (e.g., Loseke, 2009).

All claims are meant to be persuasive to the audiences to which they are targeted (Best, 2013), with many empirical studies confirming that claims almost always involve rhetoric of some kind or another (i.e., they offer a persuasive argument) (see, e.g., Best, 1990, 2013; Gusfield, 1984; Loseke, 2009). Rhetoric is necessarily culturally and historically specific, and varies significantly by audience. While scientific research may be compelling to some audiences during particular periods of time, other audiences may be persuaded by religious texts (Best, 2015). Claimsmakers thus attempt to construct social problems in ways which are as persuasive as possible to the audience(s) to which they are targeted, including through strategic use of narratives (Davis, 2005), notions of victimization (Dunn, 2010), scientific rhetoric (Gusfield, 1984), emotion (Loseke, 2009), and statistics (Best, 2012).

Toulmin (1958) and others have argued that the standard elements of social problem construction are grounds, warrants, and conclusions. Grounds are claimsmakers’ contentions that a social problem exists and the provision of evidence to support this contention. Warrants are the reasons offered for why the condition is problematic, underscoring the need for action to address it. Conclusions specify what action should be taken to address the problem (Best, 2013, p. 31-32).

According to Best (2013), the grounds for many social problems typically follow a rhetorical recipe containing three ingredients: (1) typifying examples, in which claimsmakers argue that a particular (dramatic and terrible) event or occurrence exemplifies the seriousness of the social problem, (2) naming, in which claimsmakers transform an incident into an example of a particular problem (e.g., transforming bad driving into “road rage” (see Gusfield, 1984)), and (3) offering statistics, in which
claims-makers offer an estimate of the size of the problem (p. 32-33). While many additional grounds for claims have been identified (see, e.g., Loseke, 2003; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), Best (2013) argues these three grounds are frequently the basis of most social problem warrants. Warrants, in turn, mobilize these grounds by invoking powerful emotions and values. Best (2013) explains, “warrants argue that the condition identified in the grounds is inconsistent with what we value, and therefore we need to do something about it” (p. 36). For claims-makers, the ultimate goal is often the widespread recognition and establishment of a particular social problem as highly deserving of political and public responses aimed at ameliorating the problematized condition.

The Social Problem Marketplace and “Problem Blocking”

Every serious social idea in the contemporary world leads a double life. This is not because some mysterious symmetry is at work, but because only a very limited number of changes have any significant chance of succeeding. So the Left and the Right necessarily explore a relatively narrow range of possible futures and, when they are serious, respond to the same reality in fundamentally different ways. (Harrington, 1987, p. 15)

As pointed out by many social problem theorists (e.g., Blumer, 1971; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977), claims-makers frequently struggle and fail to establish a particular condition as a social problem. Conversely, some social problems gain recognition and widespread public concern quickly and dramatically, resulting in responses from official institutions and changes in social policy. What can explain this discrepancy?

Many scholars have argued that beyond the persuasive power of well-crafted claims, and the socio-political power of claims-makers, there are a range of factors which impact whether a particular social problem will emerge on the public agenda. Several theorists have argued that the emergence and trajectory of any social problem is directly related to its ability to compete within a social problem marketplace. Scholars such as Spector and Kitsuse (1977, 2000), Hilgartner and Bosk (1998), Joel Best (1990, 2013), and Joseph Gusfield (1984) have argued that social problems compete amongst each other for recognition in a constricted and narrow environment. In addition, there is competition amongst various groups to frame the problem in a particular way, including groups who argue that the condition does not constitute a social problem. For example,
while “homelessness” has been broadly understood to be a social problem for some time, it has not always been presented or framed as a problem requiring societal action (Bogard, 2003; Jencks, 1994). Importantly, many scholars have asserted that “successes or failures in this competition need bear no strong relationships to the number of people affected, the extent of harm . . . or to any other independent variables that purport to measure importance” (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998, p. 56).

Social problem scholars argue that social problems compete within specific “arenas” (e.g., the government, court, media) that have particular “carrying capacities” (Loseke, 2011, p. 53). Within each of these “arenas” there is a particular set of principles of selection that influence which problems are taken up. Hilgartner and Bosk (1998) suggest that there are several “general selection principles – the intense competition for prime space, the need for drama and novelty, the danger of saturation, the rhythm of organizational life, cultural preoccupations, and political biases – [which] get played out differently in different arenas” (p. 59). Some social problems may be particular successes in one arena (e.g., school shootings in the American media in late 1990s (Best, 2013, p. 142)), but may fail to succeed in other arenas. Hilgartner and Bosk (1998) argue that the “importance of each arena, in terms of the size of its audience or its ability to make long-term commitments, will increase the intensity of competition” (p. 59).

Given the plethora of claims competing for attention, and the inability of claimsmakers to control many of the factors associated with these other claims, a very select group of social problems end up emerging into the public realm. In such competitive environments, “problem blocking” becomes a tool used by various actors in order to halt the ascendancy of a social problem (Blumer, 1971; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998, p. 59). Blumer (1971) argues that there are a multitude of ways that social problems can be “blocked,” including through competing claims which may position the problem(s) as insignificant or not worthy of consideration, as part of the natural order of things, or as taboo, distasteful, or is being advanced by “questionable elements” of society (p. 304). Such counter-claims, among others, can prevent a claim or group of claims from developing into a social problem, or a social problem from advancing onto a further step in its “career” (p. 304). Thus, social problem models and most empirical studies of social
problems seek to address the conditions for, and content of, counter-claims made against those advancing a condition as a social problem.

2.2.4 Social Movement Theory and the Concept of “Framing”

Given that one of the main foci of this study is the social construction of homelessness by homelessness advocates in Canada, overlaps between social problem theory and social movement theory are worth noting here for their analytic utility. The focus of most social movement research has been on “when, why, and how ordinary people act collectively to change something about their communities and societies more generally” (O’Neil, 2007, p. 1). Not dissimilar from social problem theory, this involves a focus on the process by which people come to believe in the existence of a social problem and their views and behaviours in relation to this changed perspective (Benford & Snow, 2000). Within this body of literature, a focus on “framing” social problems has emerged as particularly relevant for the success of social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). The concept of framing has grown in influence across the social sciences (Benford & Snow, 2000), and has been utilized in the fields of psychology (Bateson, 1972), linguistics and discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1977), communication and media studies (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), and political science and policy studies (Schon & Rein, 1994; Triandafyllidou & Fotiou, 1998). It is the concept of “framing” which will be of consideration in this section.

My utilization of this concept builds upon the early work of Erving Goffman (1974), who understood frames as a “schemata of interpretation” that create ways for individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” experiences in their lives and the world (p. 21). Following David Snow and colleagues, I use the term “frame” to refer to the social process through which the meaning of a social phenomenon is constructed, thus focusing on the sociological dimensions of the term (Snow et al., 1986). I understand framing as involving “meaning work” and “the struggle over the production and mobilizing and countermobilizing [of] ideas and meanings” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). In the social movement literature, a particular focus has been on “collective action frames,” which are distinguished from “frames” in that they attempt to “mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize
antagonists" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). These types of action-oriented frames mobilize meanings and beliefs that are used to motivate and justify social movements of various kinds (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Benford and Snow (2000) argue that there are three primary framing tasks that social movements must engage in: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. These tasks involve the identification of a problem and its attributes, the articulation of a solution or a plan of attack, and framing of the problem within “vocabularies of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety” in order to inspire action (Snow & Benford, 2000, p. 617). Best (2013) argues that these components mirror the three components identified as part of claims-making: grounds, warrants, and conclusions.

In the context of this study, the concept of “framing” is often used to illuminate the moral or political frameworks advocates have used to construct the social problem of homelessness over time. To some extent, however, I use “framing” and “claims-making” interchangeably insofar as the literature suggests these terms are essentially similar classification systems, one preferred by social movement scholars (framing) and one by social problems scholars (claims-making) (Best, 2013, p. 69).

2.2.5 Adopting a Contextual Constructionist Approach: Integrating Objectivist Concerns into a Constructionist Approach

In conducting this study, I adopt a constructionist approach to social problem studies. My focus is primarily on the ways in which the problem of homelessness has been constructed through claims-making in a range of public arenas, but most specifically the media and advocacy. Like most social problems scholars, I argue that language plays a formative role in creating the objects we conventionally view as objective parts of reality (e.g., weather, the self, gravity, etc.). In effect, I position “reality” or “truth” as a linguistic effect, following Thomas Kuhn’s argument that a “paradigm gains ascendancy not because it is proved true, but because ‘preceding argumentation’ within the community has persuaded most of its members that it is a reasonable choice” (Bizzell paraphrasing Kuhn, 1979, p. 769). As will be seen in the subsequent section, this approach fits well with much empirical research in this field of study, thus building on
some of the incisive work of scholars who have explored the social construction of “homelessness.”

However, many insightful criticisms of social constructionism have been raised (e.g., Fine, 1997; Michalowski, 1993; Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985), including one that is worth highlighting here in order to demonstrate why I integrate objectivist concerns into my constructionist approach by adopting a contextual constructionist position. This concern relates to realism, and the extent to which constructionists believe that a reality external to discourse exists. Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) rightly identify that there exists a tension between accounts that view the natural/empirical world as giving rise to various interpretations of what exists, and accounts which claim that those socially produced accounts, definitions, and claims actually constitute reality. In answer to these criticisms, some scholars have argued that what constitutes reality is irrelevant to definitional analysis (Schneider, 1985), while others have argued that constructivist analysis should “never leave language” and thus should delimit its focus to discourse alone (Ibarra & Kitsuse, 1993). This latter position, which has come under significant scrutiny (e.g., Holstein & Miller, 2003), often constitutes what is referred to as “strong constructionism.” By contrast, “contextual constructionism” grants the existence of an empirical reality and asserts that social problem scholars can reasonably evaluate estimates of the nature and magnitude of social conditions, at least to some extent (Best, 1993).

I utilize a contextual constructionist approach to social problem research for several reasons, three of which are worthy of mention. First, I question the utility of evaluating claims outside of their political and economic contexts. The absence of such considerations, as Michalowski (1993) points out, means that our discussion and investigation cannot actually evaluate whether the harm people suffer as a result of conditions has actually improved or worsened over time, or whether social policies or social movements have actually resulted in positive change in peoples’ lives (p. 379). This seems quite absurd. It appears to me the whole purpose of the endeavour is to discuss the real, experiential impacts of discourse and claimsmaking on peoples’ lives, for certainly this is the reason people choose to participate in claimsmaking in the first
place – to address or rectify harm. Without offering any evaluation of the effects of discourse on objective conditions, the utility of this approach appears questionable.

Secondly, the strong constructionist approach does not appear to grant causality to structural forces such as capitalism and the material conditions they produce. While I do not here offer a theory of causality for such forces, I think it mistaken to suggest that claimsmaking occurs as if claimsmakers were not subject to such forces and their claimsmaking was not shaped by such forces. For example, the globalization of labour has meant that many manufacturing jobs have been lost in Ontario in recent years, resulting in a rise of precarious labour, short-term contracts, and Ontarions increasingly working multiple jobs to make ends meet (Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2013). The very concrete effects of such a labour restructuring impacts the energy and availability of part of the population to engage in public claimsmaking activities. Without an account of such structural changes, it is difficult to make sense of why and how particular people become claimsmakers (see also Archer, 2015).

Third, many strong constructionists do not integrate a micro, mezzo, and macro analyses into their research, and thus miss significant elements of the social problem process. Some critics of constructionism have suggested that the exhibited resistance to scholars like Gramsci or Foucault is largely based on the presumption that hegemonic or totalizing discourses “turn actors into cultural or linguistic dopes” (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998, p. 25). By only focusing on discourse, however, strong constructionists cannot explain why people behave the way they do insofar as many actions or speech acts attempt to obscure their intentions or meanings. Thus, to limit analysis only to the linguistic is to facilitate a largely mechanistic account of human behaviour. As argued by James Scott (1985),

Without determining why people do the things they do it is to treat humans as if they were a dog stealing scraps from the table. This eclipses how strategic choice operates. It is to take behaviour as self-explanatory. It is also specifically to eclipse how claims-making may be more importantly about recognition and identity, rather than just material gains. (p. 324)

It seems that because strict social constructionism often refuses to engage in discussions of the intersection of the psychological, social, cultural, economic, and so forth, it struggles to offer a compelling accounts of why people behave the way they do. By
granting ontological existence to a reality external to discourse, and granting that social problem theorists can evaluate (at least to some extent) the correspondence of claims to ontological conditions, I would argue that contextual constructionists have a better chance of explaining human action.

By integrating concerns that are objectivist in nature (e.g., data on the extent of homelessness in Canada (however methodologically imperfect)), my theoretical approach aims to integrate many of the macro-level factors that influence the social construction of social problems. The methodological implications of this approach are discussed in the third section of this chapter.

### 2.3 Review of the Empirical Literature

Most studies of homelessness do not frame it as a socially constructed problem, even if they do acknowledge the formative power of language. While many studies purport to analyze the “social problem of homelessness,” few problematize the ontological status of “homelessness” in ways that are consistent with social constructionism or social problem studies. Consequently, literature reviews in this area are actually narrower than would be suggested by an initial survey of the literature (see also Stern, 1984). This section will provide a review and assessment of this more narrow area of research, identifying dominant themes and objects of study, methodologies, and gaps in the literature. More specifically, this section will look at three bodies of literature that inform this study: (1) social problem studies, (2) studies on homelessness as a social problem, and (3) studies on the discursive construction of homelessness and “the homeless.” Following this, a brief summary of this empirical research is offered and its implications for the methodologies employed in this study are reviewed.

Two bodies of empirical literature -- research on media representations of homelessness and natural history models of the social problem of homelessness -- are not detailed in this chapter. Instead, these bodies of literature are explored in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 because they have direct bearing on the research tasks and methodologies undertaken in those chapters.
2.3.1 Empirical Research on Social Problems

Empirical research on social problems is extraordinarily broad, constituted by case studies on a range of topics, including the pet grief industry (Berns, 2013), internet addiction (Schweingruber & Horstmeier, 2013), drunk driving (Gusfield, 1984), emotion in presidential speeches (Loseke, 2009), child abuse (Nelson, 1984; Phofl, 1977; Whittier, 2009), surrogate motherhood (Markens, 2009), pornography (Akagawa, 2015), and many more. Hundreds of studies have been conducted using a constructionist approach since the 1970s, when social problem studies significantly shifted its theoretical approach towards a more constructionist stance (Best, 2015). Unsurprisingly, many of these studies have emerged from sociology, though a considerable number can be found in political science, anthropology, and social work (Best, 2015). Although most of these studies have utilized a constructionist framework, some have borrowed from other theoretical approaches (a range that is perhaps most visible among articles published in Social Problems, one of the key publishing venues of the field).

Many social problem scholars have explored the development of relatively “new” social problems (e.g., texting while driving (Parilla, 2013), sexting (Best & Bogle, 2014)), or focused on claimsmaking in relation to specific events (e.g., the media’s construction of 9/11 (Monahan, 2010)), while others have analyzed social problems that go through “cycles” of public concern but have been key issues for centuries (e.g., poverty, violence, death (Best, 2013)). Very broadly, studies might be divided into those that explore claimsmaking concerning single social problem in a variety of public arenas (e.g., the construction of “obesity” in public policy, media, education, etc.), and those focused on social problem construction within a specific public arena. On the whole, studies have tended to focus almost exclusively on claimsmaking in relation to one social problem, rather than offering comparative accounts of different social problems (Best, 2015).

While some studies of social problems analyse decades of data (e.g., Conrad, 2007; Dunn, 2010; Horwitz, 2002; Schweingruber & Horstmeier, 2013;), many analyse shorter periods of time (e.g., weeks, months, or years) (e.g., Akagawa, 2015; Loseke, 2009; Monahan & Maratea, 2013). The data used in social problem research has ranged considerably, but on the whole there is a clear preference for textual and verbal
claims making data (surely related to the availability of this data). Sources of data have included blogs and websites (Berns, 2013; Perez, 2013; Maratea, 2014), legislation and social policy (e.g., Gormeley, 2014), political speeches (e.g., Loseke, 2009), talk shows (e.g., Monahan & Maratea, 2013), magazines (e.g., Jacobsson & Akerstrom, 2015), scientific research (e.g., Armstrong, 2003), advocates’ campaigns (e.g., Moore, 2008), and many others.

Most studies have focused on claims making within four sectors of society, which Joel Best refers to as the “iron quadrangle” in social problems work: media, activists, government, and experts (1999, p. 63). In robust accounts of social problems, scholars usually triangulate numerous sources of data from many of these sectors and seek to capture claims made by diverse claims making groups within and across these sectors. As a result, methods and methodologies have often ranged considerably but have largely been interpretive in nature, often including document analysis, discourse analysis, interviews, ethnography, field observation, participant observation, among others. In addition, some studies have used descriptive statistics in order to analyze claims making in particular arenas. It seems that social problem scholars have particularly utilized descriptive statistics when looking at claims making in the media (e.g., Schweingruber & Horstmeier, 2013; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012).

While the findings in this field of study are numerous, several are worth highlighting here because of their bearing on this study and its methodology. First, relevant to Chapter 3, a vast majority of social problem research has demonstrated that the media is particularly important in shaping public perceptions of social problems and subsequently driving political action (or inaction) (see Beckett, 1994), with many scholars finding that claim makers often strategically construct their claims making with the media in mind (see Bogard, 2003; Best, 2013, p. 127-129; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, p. 28). Second, and particularly relevant to Chapter 6, scholars have increasingly documented the rise of scientific and medical authorities as key claim makers, exploring the ways in which these experts’ claims come to dominate many social problem processes (see, e.g., Armstrong, 2003; Frawley, 2015; Horwitz, 2002; Saguy, 2013). Third, and relevant to Chapters 4 and 5, scholars have demonstrated that activist claims makers often attempt to gain “ownership” of social problems.
Ownership occurs when particular claims or frames become generally recognized as the best way to understand an issue, and the claimsmakers who proffered them “become the recognized, go-to authorities on a troubling condition” (Best, 2013, p. 85 - 86). In Patrick Archer’s (2015) recent article on claimsmakers, he argues that social problem studies would benefit from further extending its analysis to include how claimsmakers’ personal and professional interests are served through claimsmaking. These three findings in the literature are compared to my own findings in the chapters to come.

Gaps and Limitations in Social Problem Studies

There are several limitations and gaps in knowledge in social problem studies that are worthy of mention here. First, it appears that some scholars, particularly in recent years, have analysed particular social problems without exploring how this research can contribute to the broader study of social problems. While these studies commonly share the same theoretical assumptions, what has emerged is a literature that is enormously variable in subject matter and theories of social change. This has created, to some extent, a hodge-podge of studies wherein the relationship of these studies to each other, and subsequently to theory, has been underexamined. I would argue that this missed opportunity hinders theoretical and methodological growth in the field. Nonetheless, in recent years a few manuscripts have sought to condense both the theoretical and empirical literature in this area of study (Best, 2013; Loseke, 2011).

Second, in many studies there is a distinct lack of analysis of the structural conditions which drive the repudiated conditions upon which claimsmakers rest their claims. Most specifically, many scholars have avoided considerations of economic systems and their relationships to social problems. As Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) point out,

Most social constructionist research has focused on noneconomic cultural issues (missing children, child abuse, hate crimes, drug use, crime, mental illness, sexual predators, stalking, etc.). It is not clear why issues related to the economy – unemployment, poverty and homelessness, attitudes toward accumulation of wealth, for example – have not been addressed by social constructionists. (p. 28)
Regardless of the reason for these absences, in effect social problem scholars may participate in obfuscating the economic and political structures that contextualize and motivate claims making. This, I would suggest, is both an analytic and political error.

Third, a review of the literature would indicate that some social problems studies fail to articulate clearly their theoretical or methodological approach, including most specifically their approach to data collection and data analysis. As a result, the reader is left guessing why the author(s) chose to focus on particular texts or data sources rather than others. This leaves these scholars open to the charge that they are constructing unrepresentative narratives about the social problem by “cherry-picking” the data they choose to analyze. Given that the field is relatively new, the number of historic and contemporary social problems sizeable, and the number of claims and claimsmakers enormous, it is extremely challenging to verify to what extent the data used by social problem scholars is representative of other claimsmaking data available. While certainly many scholars would assert that the data they use need not be representative in order to be rich and meaningful, I would suggest that scholars need to offer more cautious knowledge claims if that is indeed their position.

2.3.2 Empirical Research on the History of Homelessness as a Social Problem

Although there has been some important research on homelessness as a social problem in North America (e.g., Blasi, 2000; Rosenthal, 2000; Hambrick & Johnson, 1998; Hulchanski et al., 2009), research that has focused on the historical development of this problem is limited to a handful of studies, all of which have been focused on homelessness in the United States (Bogard, 2003; Stern, 1984; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012). The approach and findings of these studies are briefly explored here.

The earliest study on the development of homelessness as a social problem is a 1984 article by Mark J. Stern in which he explores how “homelessness” became a public problem at the national and state level during the 1980s in the United States. Stern persuasively argues that homelessness gained popularity and legitimation as a serious public problem because it re-established the status-maintaining function of charity that had broken down in the 1960s and 1970s. He argues,

By the end of the welfare revolution of the 1970s, liberals no longer felt appreciated, the poor were no longer deferential, and the gift relationship, with its
affirmation of the virtue of the rich, had broken down. The way in which the issue of the homeless came to public consciousness in the early 1980s broke with this pattern in three decisive ways. First, it reestablished a direct relationship between the giver and receiver. Second, it was based on exacting “proper” behavior from the recipient. And finally, it simplified the web of causal attribution and strategy formulation that had so frustrated liberals during the 1970s. The outstanding feature of the official plan to fight homelessness was its reestablishment of the bond between giver and recipient. (p. 298)

While Stern’s argument is compelling, he tends to make causal connections without much supporting empirical data and without a clear explanation of his method. More specifically, he attributes the “popularity” of the social problem of homelessness in the US to one primary cause. I would argue that this is, to some extent, a rhetorical device rather than an evidence-driven conclusion.

Cynthia Bogard’s (2003) exploration, by contrast, utilizes extraordinary amounts of data in her rigorous analysis of American homelessness in *Seasons Such as These: How Homelessness Took Shape in America*. Focusing on Washington, D.C. and New York City, Bogard painstakingly traces the claimmaking activities of stakeholders in the United States who “talked into being” homelessness during the Reagan years: activists, government officials, academics, experts, advocates, and the media. Bogard offers detailed historical documentation of the variable framing attempts by a range of claimmakers, concluding that the issue was constructed very differently by claimmakers with different interests in each city. By employing extensive amounts of data, Bogard was able to create a very layered and complex explanation of how and why homelessness became an important public problem in the United States in the last few decades of the twentieth century. She argues that, ultimately, none of these framings succeeded in creating major social policy change with respect to the issue. Importantly, her book concludes with an exploration of the ironic and contradictory consequences of these framing efforts.

The most recent text on the development of homelessness as a social problem is David Wagner and Jennifer Barton Gilman’s (2012) *Confronting Homelessness: Poverty, Politics, and the Failure of Social Policy*. Wagner and Barton Gilman employ a stage model to demonstrate how, since the late 1970s, “homelessness” has gone through 4 stages of development as a social problem in the United States (see Chapter 5 for a close
analysis of their model). Analyzing media constructions of homelessness, in addition to publications by the National Coalition for the Homeless (a prominent advocacy organization), Wagner and Barton Gilman argue that in many ways the problem of homelessness has become bureaucratized and institutionalized in the US. Arguing that “social services become a sort of graveyard for social movements” (2012, p. 156) Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) incisively demonstrate how framings of the problem have increasingly moved towards managing homelessness rather than ending it. The findings of this text are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, as I compare the development of homelessness as a social problem in Canada to its development in the United States as described by Wagner and Barton Gilman.

To date there has not yet been a comparable exploration of the development of homelessness as a social problem in Canada, with the exception of a 1991 Master’s thesis (Hemmingson, 1991). However, as will be shown in Chapter 5, “homelessness” was still a relatively new social problem at the time this thesis was published. With the exception of this thesis, research in this area is absent. It is this gap in research that this study addresses.

**Empirical Research on the History of the term “Homelessness”**

While there is very limited literature on the history of homelessness as a social problem, there have been quite a few studies that have traced the history of the term “homelessness” itself, as well as terms associated with it and predating it, such as “the homeless.” Likely the earliest tracing of this linguistic history was C. J. Ribton-Turner’s impressive document, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy, and Beggars and Begging* (1887), which traced the dominant punitive language associated with those who were unhoused or poorly housed between 368 A.D. and 1887. Following this, scholars have traced the numerous terms used to refer to people who are unhoused, including: vagabond, bum, underclass, crack-head, beggar, waif, traveler, transient, working poor, hobo, welfare mother, bag lady, gypsy, tramp, skid, and wino, among others (see, e.g., Amster, 2004, 2008; Broughall, 1832; DePastino, 2003; Kusmer, 2002; Nels, 1998; Wyman, 2010). Many scholars have traced these terms to historical debates over the “deserving poor” and “undeserving poor” (e.g., Stern, 1984), demonstrating how these
moral distinctions required a proliferation of labels in order to maintain clear
typifications, divisions, and realms of responsibility. These studies, almost all American,
demonstrate the sheer plethora of ways in which houselessness has been understood
culturally and politically over time, and how this has impacted social policy (see
specifically DePastino, 2003).

A vast majority of these studies have been conducted in the United States, with
only one article tracing the emergence of the term “homelessness” in Canada (Hulchanski
et al., 2009). Analyzing key governmental reports, legislation, social policy, and socio-
economic changes, Hulchanski and his colleagues argue that the term, as it is currently
used, did not surface until the 1980s in reference de-housing processes occurring in the
Global North, and that prior to that Canada did not have a problem called “homelessness”
(p. 2-3). More specifically, they argue that the term obfuscates the socio-economic causes
of homelessness:

By hiding a broad set of socially undesirable outcomes under the rubric of
homelessness, society can recognize and condemn the undesirable social outcome
we call homelessness. No one I know is in favour of homelessness. But simply
condemning the problem while at the same time not doing anything to change the
social dynamics that produce the undesirable outcomes, means that things will
stay the same – or get worse. (p. 9)

Hulchanski and his colleagues point here is very instructive: the ways in which we have
constructed the term homelessness mystifies the process by which severe forms of
inequality are created and maintained (see also Hulchanski, 2013). More research in this
area is needed if we are to develop a more robust account of how “homelessness”
emerged as a social problem in Canada.

Despite the important work done in this area, research on this topic is fairly
limited and some of it is not particularly systematic or rigorous in its use of historical
sources. Further, few studies address the interconnection of these terms with identity
categories such as race, sexuality, gender, or ethnicity. It remains to be seen, for example,
in what ways a term such as “bum” is gendered and racialized, in what contexts, and
why. The slipperiness of these terms and the difficulty of tracing their origins and usage
historically makes this a difficult task, one made more difficult when one tries to link
them to definitions of “homelessness” (Bogard, 2003, p. 2).
2.3.3 Research on the Discursive Construction of Homelessness

In comparison to the limited research on the history of the term “homelessness” or research on homelessness as a *social problem*, there is much more research on the discursive construction of homelessness and “the homeless.” While often employing similar theoretical approaches and utilizing similar data, these scholars do not often utilize the vocabulary of social problem theory (e.g., claimsmaking) and often offer explicitly political analyses of the economic and political systems they view as producing homelessness (e.g., capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, deindustrialization, etc.). While these studies are often compatible with a constructionist approach, and certainly provide valuable insights into social problem development, the focus of these scholars is often different. While social problem scholars focus on *the processes* by which homelessness has been established as a social problem through claimsmaking, these scholars tend to illuminate *the implications and effects* of particular frameworks and definitions of homelessness and “the homeless” in policy, social service programming, and the lives of people experiencing homelessness. As Pascale (2005) explains, “scholars concerned with the social construction of homelessness have drawn from an epistemological framework that examines the construction of meaning, while simultaneously centering economic explanations of poverty” (p. 251). It is this centering of economic explanations that is absent in many social problems studies.

Studies on the discursive construction of homelessness often focus on the effects of particular constructions at the micro and mezzo level, frequently employing some form of discourse analysis, often inspired by Foucault (1965, 1972, 1980). The intent of many of these studies has been to assess the construction of types of people (typification), public opinion, policy objectives, program objectives and guidelines, laws, media imaging, and political speech (see, e.g., Phelan, Link, & Moore, 1997; Lee, Link, & Toro, 1991; Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2015; Liggett, 1991; Pascale, 2005). This research has focused on language and terminology, though some scholars have analyzed visual imaging as well. Common methodologies have included in-depth interviews, visual and cultural analysis of popular media and subcultural media, participant observation, participatory action research, narrative analysis, oral history, and ethnography.
Early researchers in this field focused on the ways in which “homelessness” was individualized, medicalized, pathologized, and discursively framed as the result of moral failings, disease, laziness, and/or inherent inferiority (e.g., Bunis et al., 1996; Katz, 1990; Kawash, 1998; Rossi, 1989). The implication of these intersecting framings, some scholars have argued, is that merit and morality have been the dominant domains in which policy and programming have developed, rather than in relation to conceptions of justice, need, equality, or the structural causes of poverty and homelessness (Katz, 1989, p. 3). In more recent years, researchers have sought to trace the connections between these framings and their logical extension into policy and programming. Amster (2008), for example, explains:

In political terms, the pervasiveness of the disease image in connection with the homeless serves simultaneously to empower officials and merchants to assume the mantle of speaking for the ‘health and safety of the community’ in devising and implementing schemes to remove the perceived threat, and to disempower the homeless themselves from having effective domains of self-presentation and resistance. (p. 88)

The importance of these types of studies is their ability to make visible the translation of the discursive construction of “homelessness” into concrete practices and laws. Research produced by scholars such as Stern (1984), Marcus (2006), and Bogard (2003) underlines the important role that debates over categorizations and labels, occurring in unequal fields of power, have in shaping the course of social problem “solutions.”

A common premise upon which much of this scholarly work rests is that discursive practices produce the objects which they purport to describe. Within this body of research, scholars have argued that constructing the problem of “homelessness” required creating a category of “the homeless,” which then has to be typified and performed by real people in order to perpetuate the problem and systems built to respond to it. Anthony Steinbock (1994) provides a very interesting example of this in his study of the transformation of “Baloney Joe’s,” a well-known shelter, into the “Recovery Inn.” He explains,

Formerly, Baloney Joe’s was a social service program allowing anyone simply to drop in with no questions asked, and to stay for weeks on end without being required to see counselors, caseworkers, or social therapists, although similar services were available. Now, under the auspices of the Salvation Army, these people who frequented Baloney Joes’ are inducted into “homelessness”; at the
same time they are censured as “homeless” and subjected to efforts which attempt to make them and the streets around the “homeless shelter” homey. Now the “homeless” will not be allowed to stay if they have been drinking, they will have a curfew, and they will have a rent fee imposed after seven consecutive days, after they submit to an evaluation process “to determine why they are homeless and to prescribe remedies.” (p. 205)

Such disciplining practices construct “the homeless” in ways that justify the reorganization of these people’s lives and the creation of agencies, programs, and policies to “deal” with them. Some insightful scholarship has explored how such categories and typifications are internalized by particular members of target populations, sometimes resulting in individuals acting in ways that reinforce these visions (Kyle, 2005, p. 23; Huth & Wright, 1997; Marcus, 2006).

Importantly, much research on the discursive construction of “homelessness” and “the homeless” has sought to trace the impact these constructions have on people experiencing homelessness (see Lyon-Callo, 2004; Marcus, 2006; Passaro, 1996; Snow & Anderson, 1997; Wagner, 1993; Wright, 1997). Research in this area has ranged in focus and methodology but has broadly concerned itself with three topics: (1) research on “homeless identities,” including specifically research on how people who have been assigned this identity attempt to transgress, negotiate, perform, or transform others’ perspectives of them (e.g., Marcus, 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1997); (2) research on homeless social movements and political resistance (e.g., Snow et al., 2005; Wagner, 1993); and (3) the construction of laws, policies, programs, and services based on particular visions of who “the homeless” are (e.g., Amster, 2004, 2008; Passaro, 1996).

2.3.4 Summary of Empirical Research and Gaps in Knowledge

Research that has tackled homelessness as a social problem, or sought to trace its development as a social problem, is quite limited. While no explorations of the development of this social problem in Canada have been conducted, fortunately there are two extremely helpful treatments of this problem based in the United States (Bogard, 2003; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012). Similarly, there have been some rigorous case studies of other social problems upon which this study builds theoretically (e.g., Best, 1990; Cohen, 2002; Conrad, 2007; Davis, 2005; Gusfield, 1984; Gormley, 2012; Loseke, 1992; Miller, 1997; Nelson, 1984). In addition, there are several studies that offer crucial
insights into the discursive construction of homelessness and its effects, providing a strong empirical basis upon which some of this study rests (e.g., Blasi, 2000; Katz, 1989; Lyon-Calio, 2004; Marcus, 2006; Pascale, 2005; Rosenthal, 2000; Snow & Anderson, 1997). This study hopes to build on these works in order to provide insight into both homelessness as a social problem, as well as the social problem process itself.

As articulated above, research in this area has been somewhat weak at connecting social problem construction to economic and political systems, thus sometimes failing to properly contextualize claimsmaking in relation to these systems and their effects. This is a gap I hope to address in some of the chapters that follow, including specifically Chapter 5, in which many sources of data are brought to bear on the development of this problem. Similarly, empirical research in this area of study has been somewhat weak at articulating its theoretical basis and methodological approach, leaving the reader wondering why the author(s) utilized the data they did. In order to avoid this, this study carefully describes the methods and data used in each task, focusing specifically on providing a rationale for these choices. The next section turns to my methodology.

2.4 Design and Methods

2.4.1 Study Design

This mixed-methods study utilizes an interpretive research design focused on meaning-making in media, social discourse, and social policy (Yanow, 1996, 2000). A grounded theory approach is used to collect and analyze data iteratively (Charmaz, 2006). While Holstein and Gubrium (2008) suggest that social constructionism helps illuminate what and how people construct their worlds, it is less able to articulate why people construct it in the way they do (which usually involves a more positivistic inquiry). Following Charmaz (2008), I argue that grounded theory can be utilized in social constructionist studies in order to broaden analysis to include these “why” questions by exploring issues of positionality, context, and polysemy (see also Charmaz, 1995, 2000). Grounded theory, in its emphasis on staying close to the words and descriptions of participants, demands that the researcher “describe the experiences of others in the most
faithful way possible” (Munhall, 2001, p. 540). This approach is particularly useful in for this study given the dearth of research in this area.

Consistent with much research on social problem studies (e.g., Best & Harris, 2013) and studies on the social problem of homelessness (e.g., Bogard, 2003; Wagner with Barton-Gilman, 2012), I utilize diverse claimsmaking data from numerous sources in different public arenas. This study employs several data collection strategies and utilizes data triangulation and methodological triangulation in order to understand the social construction of “homelessness” as a social problem in Canada. Methodologically this involves looking across different genres of text and talk (e.g., interview transcripts, newspaper articles, policy documents, public polls) in order to determine how, when, why, and by whom particular claims were made about the problem of homelessness and how this claimsmaking has affected the development of this social problem over time.

This section briefly outlines each of the three research tasks undertaken in this study, including specifically their objectives, data collection methods, and methods of analysis. These three research tasks, collectively and separately, aim to create a nuanced picture of the historical development of homelessness as a social problem in Canada. The explanations of these methods are fairly brief because detailed explanations are offered in the corresponding chapters.

2.4.2 Research Tasks

My study focuses on exploring the historical construction of homelessness in Canada through three mutually-informing research tasks: (1) an exploration of how the Canadian media has constructed and framed “homelessness” and “the homeless” over time, (2) analysis of how Canadian advocates (including activists and experts) have engaged in claimsmaking in relation to this social problem over time, and (3) the development of a stage model to explain how homelessness has developed as a social problem since its emergence in Canada. This research is iterative, with each task drawing on previous tasks to provide a more robust account of this history.

Task 1: Canadian Media’s Constructions of “Homelessness” and “the Homeless”
**Objective:** The first research task (Chapter 3) explores how the Canadian media constructed “homelessness” and “the homeless” between 1980 and 2013. Focusing on newspaper coverage of this social problem, this research seeks to better understand the prevalence of coverage over time, what topics and themes have dominated media coverage, and how the problem and population have been framed over time. Attention is paid to what claims and claimsmakers received coverage.

**Data Collection:** Six Canadian newspapers’ coverage of homelessness between 1980 and 2013 was systematically collected and analyzed. Data was drawn from two national newspapers and four highly-circulated newspapers based in four major Canadian cities: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Calgary. Newspapers included: *The Globe and Mail, The National Post, The Toronto Star, The Toronto Sun, The Calgary Herald, The Montreal Gazette*, and *The Vancouver Province*. These newspapers represent the 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th most highly circulated newspapers in Canada (Newspapers Canada, 2014).

All articles published between 1980 and 2013 in which the word “homelessness” appeared, either in the title or body of the article, were included in the sample. This resulted in a total of 11,750 articles, all of which were read by the author. Of these, 7,387 were excluded because the primary focus of the article was not homelessness. This resulted in a dataset of 4,363 articles that were analyzed and coded by the author.

**Data Analysis:** Data analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. Two types of data analysis were employed in order to capture different dimensions of the dataset. First, articles were coded based on the primary focus or topic of the article, and each article was assigned to a mutually exclusive category. The categories included in the coding frame were developed inductively as data analysis proceeded. The distribution of the number of articles in each category was measured between 1980 and 2013. Secondly, qualitative analysis was conducted on all articles using a grounded theory approach. Given this study’s focus on the social constructions of social problems, analysis particularly focused on examining the style, rhetoric, and meaning of the content of newspaper articles in order to investigate newspapers’ framing strategies.
Task 2: Homelessness Advocates’ Framings of Homelessness

Objective: The second research task (Chapter 4) investigates the role of homelessness advocates in constructing homelessness as a social problem in Canada. In particular, I investigate how advocates have understood the historical development of this social problem and the role of homelessness advocacy in this history. This research also aims to illuminate how advocates develop claims and social change tactics in competitive contexts.

Data Collection: Between October 2015 and February 2016, 31 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 Canadian homelessness advocates, most of which were Ontario-based. Interviews aimed to elucidate: motivations for, and considerations in, framing choices; how advocates viewed contestation of his/her framing efforts; how advocates viewed the development of homelessness as a social problem over time; how advocates viewed the outcomes of their framing efforts; and what advocates believed the future of homelessness would look like.

Focus was placed on recruiting participants who had extensive experience in homelessness advocacy, as well as those who were frequently identified by media and scholars as “owners” of this social problem. Interview participants were also identified through snowball sampling during which interview participants suggested potential study participants. This sampling method did not seek to be representative, although it did seek to include advocates with diverse interests, approaches, and life experiences. Most specifically, emphasis was placed on recruiting advocates who were employed in different professions, were engaged in advocacy on different sub-issues, held divergent political views, and employed diverse tactics in their approach to advocacy. Advocates with lived experiences of homelessness were also recruited. All interview participants had more than 10 years of experience in homelessness advocacy.

Data Analysis: Data analysis was guided by a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) to analyzing advocates’ perspectives and the meanings they attributed to their advocacy work. Open coding was used to initially identify themes in the data, and a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized to group similar
concepts together. Following this, axial coding was employed to detect connections between initial codes, combine and refine codes, and identify causal connections and associations between codes. Coding was performed line-by-line, and the core codes and relationships between codes were further refined through selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During axial and selective coding, 22 initial codes were collapsed into 8 core codes.


*Objective:* Building on social problem theorists’ natural history models (Blumer, 1971; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977), the third research task (Chapter 5) develops an empirically-derived stage model to explain the development or “career” of homelessness as a social problem in Canada. This section explores when, how, and why homelessness has progressed through different stages as a social problem in Canada, and offers an account of the current status of homelessness as a Canadian social problem. This is the first stage model developed to explain the history of homelessness as a social problem in Canada.

*Data Collection:* To develop this stage model, this research incorporates findings from the previous two research tasks, as well as several additional data sources, including: key documents (e.g., influential governmental reports), key events, key policy changes related to housing and homelessness, reviews of the academic and grey literature, public polls, and advocates’ perspectives on the history of the problem and homelessness advocacy. While my data on newspaper coverage extended only to 2013, other data sources were analysed until early 2016.

Data was selected for inclusion based on the importance it was seen to have within the history as determined by a number of factors, including: identification by experts in the field, widespread media coverage, significant financial investment from the sector or government, attention in academic or grey literatures, and coverage in governmental reports. Assessment for inclusion was often conducted with the benefit of triangulated data on the item’s relative importance.
Data Analysis: Data was compiled and analyzed chronologically using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), allowing key themes to emerge inductively through a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The periodization of each stage was developed inductively by identifying and analyzing important shifts in understandings of, and responses to, this new social problem. Shifts in stages were determined based on triangulating numerous data sources and assessing the extent to which: (1) new claims or frames became dominant, (2) public perceptions shifted, (3) media coverage changed, (4) governmental or institutional responses to the problem occurred or changed, (5) claimsmaking in advocacy shifted, and/or (6) broad narratives about the problem were altered. Data analysis focused on the emergence of broad trends at particular stages in this history (e.g., NIMBYism), while attempting to acknowledge and account for the diverse emergence of this problem in various parts of Canada.

3.1 Introduction

News media play a significant role in the development and trajectory of social problems. Various scholars have documented that the media is often the primary source of information about social problems for the public (e.g., Best, 2013; Hansen, 2000) and an important force in shaping public opinion (e.g., McCombs, 2004; Price, 1989). In the case of homelessness, studies have shown that much of the public’s knowledge about homelessness is typically gained through media exposure (e.g., Krewski, Lemyre, Turner, Lee, Dallaire, Bouchard, Brand, & Mercier, 2006; Reynolds, 2006) and research has demonstrated that North American media powerfully shapes public perceptions of homelessness (see, e.g., Bogard, 2003; Fiske, 1999; Pascale, 2005; Min, 2009; Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, Goin, Mao, & Schnell, 2011; Schneider, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2010). Given evidence that public perceptions are shaped by the media, and that politicians and policymakers pay close attention to both the media and public opinion, media presentations of social problems can powerfully shape what policy choices are considered and pursued (see Best, 2013; Iyengar, 1991; Klodawsky, Farrell, & D’aubry, 2001; Price, 1989). Better understandings of how the Canadian media has framed homelessness can assist in illuminating how this problem has been understood by the public and responded to by politicians and policy makers over time. This chapter offers the largest and most extensive historical exploration of Canadian media coverage of homelessness since it first emerged as a social problem in the 1980s, spanning a period of 33 years.

Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analysis, this chapter argues that Canadian reporters’ constructions of homelessness have typified and homogenized people experiencing homelessness in particular ways, often conflating “homelessness” with “the homeless.” Exploring the erasure of the structural causes of homelessness in Canadian newsprint media, I demonstrate how newspaper reports have positioned “the homeless” as objects for government and private sector interventions in Canada over
time. Disaggregating the claims, grounds, and warrants offered by reporters in their attempts to establish “homelessness” as a social problem, I show how have reporters used narrative and rhetorical devices to construct “homelessness” in ways that threaten the identity and morality of the Canadian nation. Finally, I investigate reporters’ highly emotional constructions of homeless deaths, demonstrating how moral frameworks about what lives are valuable are made visible in such constructions.

The format of this chapter proceeds in the following way. The chapter begins with a brief review of the empirical literature on media representations of homelessness, followed by a detailed explanation of the quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study. Following this, the findings of the quantitative data are reviewed, focusing specifically on the quantity of coverage homelessness received, the core topics that reporters discussed, and how coverage of these core topics has changed in frequency between 1980 and 2013. Data analysis combines both quantitative and qualitative data and is divided into three primary sections: (1) What is “Homelessness” and Who are “The Homeless”: From Social Problem to Problematic Population, (2) Constructing a New Social Problem Called “Homelessness”: Claimsmaking in Early Journalistic Accounts of “Homelessness”, and (3) Homeless Deaths: Who is to Blame?. These sections are then followed by a brief discussion detailing the implications of these findings for media studies on homelessness, as well as social problem studies more generally.

3.2 Literature Review of Media Representations of Homelessness: Findings and Gaps in Knowledge

There have been several studies, largely American and qualitative, that have explored the discursive construction of homelessness in news media. Rather than focusing on the economic or sociological construction of homelessness (see, e.g., Blau, 1992; Jenks, 1994; Rosenthal, 1994; Wright, 1993), these studies have been focused on the cultural production of homelessness (Pascale, 2005). Three common areas of focus in this literature include: (1) whether the media focuses on individual or structural causes of homelessness, (2) what solutions are presented, and (3) whether the coverage is sympathetic or stigmatizing towards people experiencing homelessness (see, e.g., Buck et
al., 2004; Feldman, 2004; Hopper, 1988; Lee et al., 1991; Lind & Danowski, 1999; Schneider, 2013). Perhaps the largest collection of such studies is contained in an edited collection by Min (1999), which includes a range of articles on how the American news media has represented this problem.

While these studies have often been disparate methodologically, many confirm that people experiencing homelessness are typically presented in ways that are both stigmatizing (e.g., Pascale, 2005; Illouz, 1994) and sympathetic (e.g., Schneider, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2010). Research has also shown that homelessness is commonly presented as an individual problem rather than a structural problem (e.g., Buck et al., 2004; Hodgetts, Cullen, & Radley, 2005), and that news reporting often fails to explore the complexities of the issue (Klodawsky et al., 2001). Studies have also found that overwhelmingly, the “homeless person” depicted in news stories is a single adult male (Widdowfield, 2001), and that coverage often focuses on substance use and mental health (e.g., Buck et al., 2004). Within Canada, for example, Klodawsky and colleagues’ (2001) textual analysis of Ottawa media coverage of homelessness found that people without homes were overwhelmingly depicted as male, white, passive, isolated, and substance abusers. Similar conclusions have been drawn by a variety of studies in the U.S. and the UK (see, e.g., Shields, 2001; Platt, 1999). Given such individualization, it is unsurprising that Rachel Best’s (2010) study found that that despite the quantity of media reports on homelessness in the U.S., it was rarely presented as a social problem.

Nonetheless, these accounts have almost exclusively focused on the American media, providing little insight into how Canadian newsprint media has portrayed homelessness. Among the more limited Canadian research in this area, there are a few particularly relevant studies that have conducted quantitative content analyses of media representations of homelessness (Richter et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2010). Methodologically, Richter et al. (2011) is most similar to the current study, sampling 6 Canadian newspapers over 20 years. This method resulted in a corpus of 1,014 articles, the largest sample available to date in the Canadian literature (beyond this study). Richter et al. (2011)’s study is largely descriptive, analyzing the type of articles published, the months in which the most coverage occurred, the demographic characteristics of people depicted, and the major topics. Despite such a laborious and methodologically rigorous
undertaking, some of this study’s findings may be debatable given that the core 8 topics categorized diverse issues under the same topic. For example, the theme “economic factors” includes both “government cuts” and “government spending/aid,” making it difficult to determine to what extent the public was made aware of government cuts to housing, social assistance, and other welfare policies and their connections to homelessness. Similarly, the theme “housing-related issues” includes discussions of both affordable housing and NIMBY protests, issues that often portrayed in drastically different ways and involve the invocation of different values and debates. Given this, Richter et al.’s (2011) finding that “housing-related issues” was the most dominant theme in Canadian newspaper coverage of homelessness may be mistaken.

Similarly, while such scholars have gone to enormous efforts to document the location of such articles within newspapers (e.g., front page), the type or format of article (e.g., editorial), or the number of words or lines dedicated to coverage, it is yet unclear to what extent such data can help us make sense of public perceptions of the problem. More pointedly, some scholars have failed to articulate why such data is valuable. Many studies have demonstrated people exhibit significant agency in interpreting media messaging (e.g., Ostertag, 2010), suggesting that the significance of media coverage has more to do with what topics are covered than how they are covered (i.e., its agenda-setting function) (Best, 2013; McCombs, 2004). As Joel Best concludes, media “may be better able to influence what topics people are thinking about than what exactly people think about those topics” (2013, p. 165).

Given this, the analytic focus of my quantitative findings is on what topics the media has put on the public’s agenda with respect to homelessness over time, in addition to the frequency with which the public has been exposed to coverage of this social problem. This approach sets aside, to some extent, other axes of analysis used in other quantitative studies on social problems in newsprint media (e.g., article format, number of words, location in newspaper, seasonal differences in focus). Quantitatively, this chapter contributes to the literature by offering thematic analysis of the largest sample of Canadian newspaper articles on homelessness to date, analyzed over a longer period of time than is currently available in the literature (4,363 articles over a period of 33 years). Qualitatively, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of how the Canadian
media has constructed “homelessness,” “the homeless,” and the deaths of people experiencing homelessness over the history of this social problem. While some past studies have been limited to cities or regions in Canada (e.g., Klodawsky et al., 2001), this study is national in scope. Analysis throughout this chapter will compare my findings to other research in this area, highlighting similarities and differences.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Study Design

This study is employs both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of Canadian newspapers’ representations of homelessness between 1980 and 2013. Content analysis is substantive in focus (i.e., the focus is more on content than on form) (Schreier, 2012), and this study utilizes a grounded theory approach to collecting and analyzing data iteratively (Charmaz, 2006). Quantitative and qualitative content analysis occurred simultaneously and coding was frequently revisited in order to ensure precision.

Newspapers were focused on because they can provide “accessibility, in-depth analysis, [a] potential diversity of viewpoints, and sustained reflection on important political and economic issues” (Hackett & Gruneau & Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2000, p. 12). While social media and the rise of ICTs in recent years has significantly altered the landscape within which social problems emerge and are defined (Best, 2013), “homelessness” developed during a time in which print media was a main source of news for the Canadian public. Further, research has demonstrated that Canadian newspaper readership has not declined to the same extent as in the United States (Canadian Newspaper Association, 2009), indicating the continued relevance of this medium for analyzing what information the public receives about social problems (see also Dreidger, 2007; Hayes, Ross, Gasher, Dunn, & Hackett, 2007). Exploring newspapers’ representations of homelessness is thus an important component of this study’s effort to understand the emergence and development of the social problem of “homelessness” in the Canadian context.
3.3.2 Data Collection and Sample

Data was collected from 6 major newspapers based in four major Canadian cities: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Calgary. These four cities were selected for inclusion based on both their similarities and differences. All four cities have large populations and high rates of homelessness, but each exhibit unique political landscapes, urban infrastructures, ethno-cultural histories and communities, and social services, laws, and policies especially relevant to people experiencing homelessness. Calgary, in particular, may not appear to be an obvious candidate for inclusion due to its smaller size. However, Calgary was the first Canadian city to adopt a 10-year plan to end homelessness and has reported success employing a Housing First model (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013). Calgary also reports high rates of indigenous homelessness (Auger, 2012), providing an opportunity to analyze how indigeneity and homelessness are linked in newspaper coverage. As a result, Calgary was a vital addition to the sample.

Articles from 33 years of Canadian newsprint coverage of homelessness were analyzed, spanning January 1, 1980 to December 31, 2013. This time period was selected to capture the first instance in which the word “homelessness” was used in a Canadian newspaper in reference to this new and emerging social problem (Swan & Camilleri, 1984), as well as all subsequent instances. Articles were drawn from highly circulated newspapers in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Calgary, as well as two national newspapers. These included: The Globe and Mail, The National Post, The Toronto Star, The Calgary Herald, The Montreal Gazette, and The Vancouver Sun. This collection of newspapers represents the 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th most highly circulated Canadian newspapers during 2013 (Newspapers Canada, 2014). The weekly circulation for each of these papers in 2013 was as follows: The Toronto Star (n=350,222), The Globe and Mail (n=346,485), The National Post (n=163,063), The Vancouver Sun (n=158,118), The Calgary Herald (n=118,726), and The Montreal Gazette (n=101,761) (Newspapers Canada, 2014). While The Montreal Gazette was not the most highly circulated newspaper in Montreal, it was the most highly circulated English paper in Montreal during the years sampled (Newspaper Canada, 2014), and thus was accessible to the author.
The term “homelessness” was searched for in each newspaper in the Canadian Newsstand Database between the years 1980 and 2013. Given the study’s focus on the construction of “homelessness” as a social problem and phenomenon, terms such as “homeless” or “the homeless” were not searched (although considerable overlap was evident). All articles in which the word “homelessness” appeared, either in the title or body of the article, were captured through this method. This totaled 11,750 articles, all of which were read by the author. Only articles in which homelessness was the primary topic were included in the dataset. Articles whose secondary topic was homelessness were excluded, as were articles that discussed homelessness in relation to phenomena outside the scope of the study (e.g., the “cultural homelessness” of a particular ethnicity, homeless pets, etc.). A total of 7,387 articles were excluded from the dataset on this basis, many of which mentioned homelessness in passing, often in reporters’ enumerations of the problems facing Canadians. This method resulted in a dataset of 4,363 Canadian newspaper articles focused on homelessness between 1980 and 2013. All 4,363 articles were read, analyzed, and coded by the author.

All articles whose primary focus was “homelessness” were included, regardless of the type of article (e.g., news item, editorial, letter to the editor, etc.). While articles that were lengthy, written by well-known reporters, accompanied by images, or were printed on the first few pages may have been more influential in shaping public understandings of the issue, considerable studies have shown the immense variability and agency with which readers interpret media texts (e.g., Ostertag, 2010). For this reason, all types of articles were included for analysis, provided they met the above criteria.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

Two types of data analysis were employed in order to capture different dimensions of the dataset. First, articles were coded based on the primary focus or topic of the article, and each article was assigned to a mutually exclusive topic/category (see Table 3.1). The categories included in the coding frame were developed inductively as data analysis proceeded and did not rely on a pre-established framework. As new categories developed, previous articles were sometimes revisited and re-categorized in order to better reflect the content of the article. Categories shifted considerably as analysis proceeded over the
years of coverage, so some articles were revisited following the first round of coding to ensure proper categorization. Some topics originally identified were eliminated because they were found to have such limited coverage, and articles within these topics were subsequently absorbed into other categories. Similarly, several unanticipated categories were identified as analysis proceeded due to the sheer volume of articles focused on that topic.

Within each topic there were many subtopics. The number of articles in each subtopic was not tallied, nor did I limit the number of subtopics. Instead, these subtopics were utilized to deepen and clarify the boundaries of each topic, as well as provide a sense of dominant themes that would be worth pursuing through discourse analysis. While each newspaper article was classified within one mutually exclusive topic, articles often touched on more than one topic, and the content of each topic sometimes blended into the content of another. In order to address articles that could be categorized under more than one topic, I considered the following factors: intention of the article, emphasis and tone in presentation of topic(s), article title, and the focus of the article during the opening and closing of the article. While coding articles for all themes and topics present would have created a more detailed picture, the enormity of the dataset prohibited this. Coding the primary subject of each article provided a trustworthy general indicator of the amount of coverage each of the topics received.

Following categorization of all articles, and analysis of the distribution of these categories over time, newspaper articles were analyzed closely using a grounded theory approach to the analysis of claims-making. Methodologically, this involved examining the style and rhetoric of the content of newspaper articles in order to understand the framing strategies employed by reporters and their sources.

### 3.4 Quantitative Findings

A total of nineteen major topics emerged in Canadian newsprint coverage of homelessness between 1980 and 2013. Each topic is identified in Table 3.1, in descending order, from the most frequent to the least frequent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Content of Topic</th>
<th>Percent of Sample, 1980–2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Public & Private Action to Address Homelessness** | • Action taken by government, NGOs, the private sector, and researchers to address Canadian homelessness at the local, provincial, and/or national level (proposed and implemented)  
• Examples include: announcing funding commitments, conferences on homelessness, city-based initiatives, etc. | 14.6% (n = 637)               |
| **Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness** | • Resistance to governmental or private sector action (or inaction) on the issue of homelessness  
• Political organizing focused on identifying and building solutions to homelessness in Canada (largely community-based organizing)  
• Examples include: occupations, marches, rallies, protests, legal challenges, community meetings, community-based solutions, etc. | 14.4% (n = 627)               |
| **Emergency Shelter & Support Services**   | • All coverage related to emergency shelter and support services for people experiencing homelessness  
• Examples include: debates about services, shelters, drop-ins, education and health services, etc. | 10.5% (n = 458)               |
| **Characteristics of Canadian Homelessness** | • General descriptive overviews and characterizations of homelessness in Canada  
• Examples include: demographics; number of people experiencing homelessness; reviews of existing interventions; explorations of the causes of homelessness; the cost of homelessness, etc. | 10.2% (n = 445)               |
| **Street Survival**                        | • Survival of people who are living unsheltered or emergency sheltered in Canada (often described as “on the street”), usually depicting personal experiences of survival  
• Examples include: underground economies; violence, stigma, and social exclusion experienced while unsheltered; physical and psychological suffering while homeless; makeshift shelters and tent cities, etc. | 6% (n = 262)                  |
| **Charity, Volunteering & Public Education** | • Efforts to alleviate homelessness in Canada through charity, volunteering, and public education  
• Examples include: faith-based fundraising, corporate philanthropy, in-kind donations, debates about giving money to people who are panhandling, public education, volunteering, etc. | 5.9% (n = 258)               |
| **Housing**                                | • Articles on any type of permanent housing or housing policy related to people experiencing homelessness  
• Examples include: social housing; housing by-laws, evictions and tenant rights; housing discrimination; housing policy and city planning; discussions of a national housing program or strategy, etc. | 5.3% (n = 231)               |
| **Criminalization of Homelessness**        | • Coverage on the relationships between homelessness, policing, and the legal system (largely articles focused on the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness based on their housing status)  
• Examples include: arrests of people experiencing homelessness for engaging in survival tasks in public, “street sweeps,” tickets and fines related to being unhoused, etc. | 5.0% (n = 217)               |
| **Politicians Debating Homelessness**      | • Coverage of politicians discussing homelessness without offering concrete solutions, plans, or funds  
• Examples include: photo opportunities, utilizing homelessness as a | 4.2% (n = 184)               |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Stereotyping &amp; NIMBY</td>
<td>• Negative attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness and the organizations/agencies that serve them&lt;br&gt;• Articles range from promoting negative attitudes, providing coverage of negative attitudes, or critiquing negative attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>(n = 182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>• Death of people experiencing homelessness, including death rates, vigils, and coroner’s inquests into the deaths of people experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>(n = 171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Populations</td>
<td>• All articles that focused on homelessness among a particular demographic group (e.g., youth, LGBTQ2SA peoples, women, indigenous peoples, etc.)</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>(n = 155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Homelessness</td>
<td>• Coverage of homelessness in other countries, the state of homelessness globally, and the state of Canadian homelessness compared to other nations’ homelessness</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>(n = 105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>• Coverage of the relationship between homelessness and economic, political, and social inequality&lt;br&gt;• Examples include: gentrification, evictions due to major socio-political events (e.g., Olympics), capitalism, neoliberalism, etc.</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>(n = 97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Representation of People Experiencing Homelessness</td>
<td>• Representations of people experiencing homelessness in movies, art, documentaries, advertisements, and commercials&lt;br&gt;• Debates about the representation of people experiencing homelessness&lt;br&gt;• Art by people experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>(n = 97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>• Physical and mental health of people experiencing homelessness, as well as (dis)Ability&lt;br&gt;• Coverage of access to healthcare, the impact of homelessness on health, and mental health in relation to homelessness</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>(n = 92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Cuts to Housing &amp; Services</td>
<td>• Government cuts to housing and services for people experiencing homelessness&lt;br&gt;• Examples include: non-renewal, deferral, or decreases in funding for housing and services for people experiencing homelessness; the sale or demolition of social housing; shelter or service closures, etc.</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>(n = 83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment &amp; Welfare</td>
<td>• Coverage of the relationship between homelessness, employment, and/or social assistance benefits of various kinds&lt;br&gt;• Examples include: lack of employment or poor wages, eligibility for welfare and welfare reform, the Ontario Disability Support Program, “welfare fraud,” etc.</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>(n = 47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substances &amp; Addiction</td>
<td>• Coverage of the connections between homelessness, substance use, and addictions&lt;br&gt;• This coverage often advanced that substance use and addiction create barriers to accessing housing, and/or reported on the effects substance use on people experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>(n = 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.363%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.1 Distribution of Topics Over Time

The number of articles on homelessness per year ranged considerably between 1980 and 2013 (total for all years = 4,363) (see Graph 1). No articles were published until 1984 (during which only one article was published), and the number of articles per year peaked during 1999, during which 476 articles were published (11% of the sample). Categories ranged considerably in frequency for all years sampled (between 0.3% and 14.6%). The top five categories across all years were: Public & Private Action to Address Homelessness, Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness, Emergency Shelter & Support Services, Characteristics of Canadian Homelessness, and Street Survival (see Table 3.1 and Graph 2). Articles in these five categories accounted for 55.7% of all articles between 1980 and 2013. By contrast, 11 categories contributed less than 5% each to the entire sample between 1980 and 2013, with the bottom five of these contributing 2% or less each. The five categories that were reported on the least were: Art & Representation of People Experiencing Homelessness, Health, Government Cuts to Housing & Services, Employment & Welfare, and Substances & Addictions (see Table 3.1). Together these five categories made up 7.6% of all sampled articles between 1980 and 2013 (n=334).


3.4.2 Peak Periods of Media Coverage

As seen in Graph 1 and 2, there were two 5-year peak periods of time during which reporters were particularly prolific in their coverage of homelessness: between 1997 and 2001 (Graph 3), and between 2005 and 2009 (Graph 4). Articles during these two peak times make up 33% of all articles published between 1980 and 2013 (n=1,424).

During the first peak period of coverage between 1997 and 2001 (see Graph 3), five topics were prominent: Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness (n=243); Public and Private Action to Address Homelessness (n=235), Characteristics of Canadian Homelessness (n=95), Emergency Shelter and Support Services (n=85), and Charity, Volunteering, and Public Education (n=80). This was consistent with the top five topics throughout the sample with the exception of Charity, Volunteering, and Public Education, which was less prevalent than Street Survival in the overall sample. Both Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness and Public and Private Action to Address Homelessness are particularly prominent compared to other categories during this time (see Graph 5), with the former actually gaining more coverage than the latter. As seen in Graph 6, Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness and Public and Private Action to Address Homelessness correlated throughout the years sampled, but particularly so during both periods of peak coverage.

During the second peak period of coverage between 2005 and 2009 (see Graph 4), five topics were prominent: Public & Private Action to Address Homelessness (n=209), Characteristics of Canadian Homelessness (n=166), Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness (n=146), Emergency Shelter & Support Services (n=146), and Street Survival (n=92). This was consistent with the top five topics throughout the sample. The sixth most prevalent topic was the Criminalization of Homelessness (n=90), a close second to Street Survival and a significant increase from the first peak period, during which only 36 articles on this topic were published. As explored in Chapter 5, this is consistent with policy decisions during the late 1990s and early 2000s that increasingly criminalized a range of survival activities that people experiencing homelessness are often forced to conduct in public spaces (i.e., urinating, sleeping, panhandling, etc.) (see, e.g., O’Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011).
Graph 3

The 1997–2001 Peak in Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Homelessness: The Top Five Topics

Year | Total Number of Articles | Topic Categories
--- | --- | ---
1997 | 46, 56% of 1997 total of 82 | Emergency Shelter & Support Services (54)
1998 | 129, 60% of 1998 total of 216 | Street Survival (85)
 | | Characteristics of Canadian Homelessness (95)
1999 | 300, 63% of 1999 total of 476 | Public & Private Action to Address Homelessness (235)
 | | Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness (243)
2000 | 156, 69% of 2000 total of 227 | 81, 57% of 2001 total of 143
2001 | 196, 69% of 2001 total of 283 | 111, 57% of 2001 total of 143


Graph 4

The 2005–2009 Peak in Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Homelessness: The Top Five Topics

Year | Total Number of Articles | Topic Categories
--- | --- | ---
2005 | 87, 53% of 2005 total of 165 | Street Survival (92)
 | | Emergency Shelter & Support Services (146)
 | | | Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness (146)
 | | Characteristics of Canadian Homelessness (164)
2006 | 197, 61% of 2007 total of 283 | 214, 65% of 2008 total of 328
 | | Public & Private Action to Address Homelessness (209)
2007 | 111, 49% of 2009 total of 227 | 150, 53% of 2006 total of 283
2008 | 214, 65% of 2008 total of 328 | 197, 61% of 2007 total of 328
2009 | 214, 65% of 2008 total of 328 | 197, 61% of 2007 total of 328


3.5 Quantitative and Qualitative Findings: What is “Homelessness,” What Caused “Homelessness,” and Who are “The Homeless”?

Journalists and reporters are important claimmakers in the social problem process, and some scholars have argued that the media have been particularly important in establishing “homelessness” as a social problem (Blasi, 1994). Weaving together qualitative and quantitative findings related to Canadian reporters’ coverage of homelessness between 1980 and 2013, this section focuses on three core concerns: (1) how homelessness has been defined, (2) what causes have been attributed to homelessness, and, (3) how “the homeless” have been constructed. Consistent with other research in this area, analysis reveals that Canadian reporters have tended to typify people experiencing homelessness rather than explore the structural causes of the problem, the connections between homelessness and systemic inequalities (e.g., racism), or offer definitions of the problem (see, e.g., Buck et al., 2004; Hodgetts et al., 2005; Klodawsky et al., 2001). I argue that as a consequence, reporters have often positioned “the homeless” as objects for government and private sector interventions in Canada, both punitive and supportive. This perpetuates a broader cultural conflation of “homelessness” with “the homeless,” positioning “homelessness” as a problem more related to a dangerous and deficient population rather than disparities in power, wealth, equality, or justice.

3.5.1 Canadian Newspapers’ Definitions of “Homelessness”

As new social problems emerge, gain legitimacy, and are responded to by official organizations and institutions, it seems intuitive that claimmakers would wrestle with how to define the problem. In the case of a social problem like “homelessness,” it seems likely that such definitions would be a significant focus for claimmakers, particularly given evidence that who is considered “homeless” crucially structures decision making in policy and programming (e.g., Willse, 2010). Further, understanding what definitions of “homelessness” reporters have used may provide valuable insight into what information the Canadian public has had access to and thus some of the frameworks they might use to make sense of this problem.
To investigate whether and how Canadian reporters engaged in defining this problem, every instance in which the word “homelessness” was used in each of the 4,363 articles was reviewed to see whether a definition was offered and, if so, its substance. What constitutes a definition was broadly conceived to include any instance in which the meaning of “homelessness” was articulated, even if that instance was not exhaustive, from a reputable source, or supported by evidence. Any included definition articulated, to some degree, the distinct characteristics of “homelessness.” Definitions were thus differentiated from claims about “the homeless,” causes of homelessness, framing or claimsmaking (e.g., “homelessness is a disaster”), solutions to homelessness, and debates about the extent of the problem. All definitions in the sample were included in analysis, regardless of the source (e.g., political speeches, research reports, city guidelines, etc.).

Surprisingly, analysis revealed only 40 instances in which a definition of “homelessness” was offered over a period of 33 years (see Table 3.2). Definitions primarily appeared in The Toronto Star, followed by The Globe and Mail and then The National Post. In most cases, the definition offered was one sentence or less (72.5%, n = 29). Among definitions that were more than one sentence, a majority offered only two sentence definitions. There were only three articles between 1980 and 2013 in which the definition of homelessness was explored in a paragraph or more (Hopper, 2012; Hulchanski, 2010b; Klassen, 2011). Most printed definitions were based on research studies, city-based definitions, the United Nations’ definition of homelessness, definitions used for “homeless counts,” or social service agencies’ definitions.

Table 3.2. Definitions of “Homelessness” in Canadian Newspapers, 1980-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1 Sentence Definitions</th>
<th>Definitions of more than 1 Sentence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 - 2009</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 - 2013</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No definitions of “homelessness” were offered until 1987, with the earliest definition stating that homelessness is the “absence of security of tenure,” based on one
component of the United Nation’s definition of homelessness (Monsebraaten, 1987). This definition wasn’t expanded upon until 1991, when Michael Valpy defined homelessness as “people without security of tenure, living in substandard housing or having no housing at all” (1991). Starting in the early 1990s, Canadian reporters began to offer somewhat more nuanced definitions. People “at-risk of homelessness” were first mentioned in 1990 (Haynes, 1990), and later defined in 1991 as “people who live in places inappropriate for reasons of health or security, who share cramped quarters or who spend some time each year in hostels” (“The distinct groups among Canada's homeless people,” 1991). Similarly, the first definition of “literal homelessness” was offered in 1994, defined as people “sleeping in homeless shelters, stations, on the street, abandoned buildings or some other temporary residence because they ha[ve] no other place to go” (“13 million have been homeless: Study,” 1994). In 1996, “relative homelessness” was first defined as “those living in places that don't meet basic health and safety standards,” compared to “absolute homelessness,” defined as “living on the streets with no physical shelter” (“The UN's 'homeless' are losing their last Vancouver homes,” 1996). “Chronic homelessness” was not defined until 2008, when it was referred to as “those living without adequate housing continuously for more than a year, or who've experienced at least four episodes of homelessness during the past three years” (“A homeless plan with potential,” 2008).

3.5.2 Discussion: Canadian Newspapers’ Definitions of Homelessness

It is evident that newspaper reporters have rarely focused on defining “homelessness” over the history of this social problem. On average, only one or two definitions of the problem have been published per year since 1987. Further, terms such as “visible homelessness,” “street homelessness,” “absolute homelessness,” and others were frequently used interchangeably, and reporters often differed in their definitions of the same term. To some extent, these contrasting definitions in print media are to be expected – different cities and provinces have variably defined homelessness, as have different agencies, researchers, and communities. Further, definitions have also changed over time in both social policy and social service agency programming, and it would be expected that newsprint coverage would reflect these shifts. However, there is little evidence that reporters’ definitions became more nuanced, complex, or cohesive over
time. Overwhelmingly reporters did not challenge or historize the definitions they utilized, nor did they compare and contrast definitions of the problem. While reporters do face industry-based restrictions on their reporting, the fact that only 11 definitions between 1980 and 2013 were more than one sentence long would seem to indicate that many reporters felt that defining this social problem was superfluous to reporting on the issue. The question is why? And what effect has this had on the Canadian public’s understanding of the issue?

The absence of detailed discussions about how to define homelessness has meant that the media has rarely challenged the Canadian public to think analytically about the features and dimensions of this issue. In most media accounts, what constitutes “homelessness” is assumed, enabling the readership to rely on stereotypes or myths in their attempts to make sense of the issue. While a few articles did explicitly seek to tackle problematic myths about homelessness (e.g., Hopper, 2012; Hulchanski, 2010b; Klassen, 2011), these were vastly in the minority.

While it is difficult to assess how this might have affected public understandings of the issue, it is clear that reporters participated in conflating “homelessness” with “the homeless.” In many cases, articles which purported to “define” homelessness commonly did so by distinguishing between groups of people experiencing homelessness, their personal characteristics, and the (attributed) causes of their homelessness. An illustrative 2005 example “defines” homelessness in the following way:

One share of the homeless are the working poor, those with low-paying jobs who need transitional housing so they can scrape together a damage deposit and first month’s rent. These people genuinely want to improve their circumstances and move on. Another group, however, includes the long-term, chronic homeless, who typically suffer from addiction, alcoholism and mental illness. (“More shelters not solution,” 2005)

Such “definitions” evidence a shift to framing “the homeless” as a problematic population (for whom disciplinary interventions might be justified). Particularly troubling about such articles is their use of the term “definition.” While many articles do utilize the term “definition” to refer to an actual study, government, or organization-based definition, a large number of articles utilize the word “definition” to substantiate typifications of people experiencing homelessness. As Loseke (1992) suggests, typifications are “collective representations of ‘types of people’ constructed within a
symbolic system of moral meanings” (p. 150; see also Holstein & Miller, 1990). In this context, reporters who purport to “define” the problem seek to conceal their productive role in typifying “the homeless” and constructing “homelessness” as the result of personal traits rather than unjust social systems.

More broadly, these findings lend support to the claim that defining social problems is not always in the interests of claimsmakers, in part because definitional flexibility allows claimsmakers to revise claims for different audiences and different contexts (see Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998). As Best (2013) articulates,

Many claimsmakers avoid defining a problem by instead focusing on typifying examples . . . the people who make up the audience for these claims probably assume that they understand the nature of these problems because they are familiar with one or more typifying examples. (p. 32)

In the case of “homelessness,” focusing on typifications of people rather than systems allowed reporters to develop a “common sense” understanding of homelessness grounded in concrete and particular examples (for discussions of common sense, see Cambell & Reeves, 1989; Luckmann, 1987). Building on this, the next section analyzes further quantitative and qualitative evidence that Canadian reporters frequently erased or obfuscated by the structural causes of homelessness.

3.5.3 What Caused “Homelessness”? Canadian Newspapers Coverage of the Structural Causes of Homelessness

Research has shown that the media commonly represent the causes of homelessness as either individual traits, deficits, and pathologies (e.g., alcoholism, poor decision making), or structural and systemic factors (e.g., demolition of affordable housing). Many studies support the former, suggesting that the media predominantly attributes homelessness to deficiency, deviance, or pathology (e.g., Buck et al., 2004; Hodgetts, Cullen, & Radley, 2005; Pascale, 2005). Has this been true in the Canadian context over the career of this social problem?

Looking at the quantitative findings of this study, there is some evidence to suggest that these findings are consistent with Canadian news media as well. Many topics that were structural in focus received limited coverage. Quantitatively, two of the topics that received the least coverage between 1980 and 2013 were Inequality (n=97, 2.2%)
and Government Cuts to Housing and Services (n=83, 1.9%). Even within articles on government cuts, reporters overwhelmingly focused on the closure of services or supports for people experiencing homelessness, and often did not link these closures to government cuts, policy changes, or government funding decisions, or did so briefly. When government cuts were raised, they were often only addressed in a sentence or two, frequently several paragraphs down, and rarely historicized or compared to other government files. Most importantly, government cuts were sometimes not presented as “cuts,” but instead were described in more neutral and passive terms, such as claims that funding had “run out,” “expired,” or “not been renewed” (e.g., Harris, 2004; Bula, 2009). In some cases there was no mention of the government’s role in the cuts to services or housing at all.

Even more insidious, it appears that among articles in Public & Private Action to Address Homelessness, announcements of government funding were frequently re-announced and/or re-framed by both media and politicians multiple times, as though multiple sources of funding had been established. While research in this area is lacking, Michael Shapcott documented that through the Canadian government made 336 announcements about funding for housing following the signing of the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement in 2001, Ontario only built 63 of the 46,332 homes it promised between 2002 and 2004 (Layton, 2008, p. 255). Such incongruity suggests that the appearance of governmental action on this issue was particularly important. While it may not be the case that politicians and reporters were intentionally being deceptive, in effect readers were commonly presented with the message that the Canadian government was taking significant steps to address housing shortages and homelessness when in some cases they were not. The ubiquity of these framings might explain why the public has increasingly blamed the continuation of this problem on people experiencing homelessness, rather than on social policy and funding choices (for evidence of this in public polls, see Norris, 2011).

Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that the issue of “homelessness” was divorced from discussions of poverty in journalistic accounts and advocates’ claimsmaking, consistent with findings regarding American homelessness (e.g., Blasi, 1994; Illouz, 1994). While employment and welfare are often common topics in
journalistic coverage of poverty in North America (Blasi, 1994; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013), the opposite appears to be true in Canadian newspapers’ representation of “homelessness.” Articles in Employment & Welfare made up only 1.1% of the sample, ranking even lower than articles focused on art by or about people experiencing homelessness. Several studies suggest that reporting on poverty decidedly decreased with the emergence of visible homelessness in North America, perhaps because homelessness appeared more urgent, more sympathetic, or easier to solve (see Blasi, 1994; Kendall, 2005). While it unclear why and how this discursive split developed in Canadian newspapers, certainly an effect was that homelessness was isolated as a specific social problem, rather than constructed as part of a continuum of poverty or cluster of social problems caused by structural forces.

Nonetheless, it was evident throughout the sample that reporters did frequently name and list structural causes of homelessness, such as lack of affordable housing and inadequate minimum wage. Such causes were, however, rarely linked to broader political and economic systems (e.g., neoliberalism, democracy), and reporters often struggled to explain who is responsible for these structural changes. As Leckie (1998) articulates,

> [W]hen someone is tortured or when a person’s right to speak freely is restricted, observers almost unconsciously hold the state responsible. However, when people die of hunger or thirst, or when thousands of urban poor and rural dwellers are evicted from their homes, the world still tends to blame nameless economic or “developmental” forces, or the simple inevitability of human deprivation, before placing liability at the doorstep of the state. (p. 82)

Similarly, when Canadian reporters did identify structural causes, they tended to offer explanations that were broad and did not point fingers, particularly in relation to the deaths of people experiencing homelessness. In instances in which claimsmakers did assign specific blame for these deaths, they appeared to face extraordinary resistance. For example, in 2004 there was significant anger and resentment over MP Jack Layton’s public statement that Prime Minister Paul Martin was directly responsible for the deaths of people living on Toronto’s streets (e.g., Diebel, 2004; Gordon & Campion-Smith, 2004). Layton subsequently retracted and nuanced his statement, likely because of this political blowback, revealing how unfavourable such specific attributions of responsibility were. In such contexts, we are reminded of the words of Brazilian Archbishop Hélder Câmara, who stated "When I give food to the poor, they call me a
saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist” (Câmara quoted in Rocha, 2000, p. 53).

**Discussion: Newspapers’ Coverage of Structural Causes**

As many scholars have pointed out, the stakes involved in positioning homelessness as a personal trait rather than the outcome of unjust structural systems are high. Most specifically, this orientation identifies the object of intervention to be people experiencing homelessness themselves, rather than economic or political systems, making it appear obvious that solutions to homelessness should take the form of supportive and/or punitive measures directed at this population. In this context, efforts often become directed at helping “the homeless” change in some way (e.g., “recover,” become “contributing” members of society) rather than addressing structural causes. By contrast, we have not developed programs and services that help wealthy elites disrupt their patterns of wealth accumulation (i.e., we do not pathologize and problematize extreme wealth in the same ways we do extreme poverty). As these discursive patterns build up over years (Silverstone, 1988), particular solutions become unthinkable. For example, Pascale (2005) identifies that “news articles never suggested that socialism would be a solution to pervasive poverty” (p. 257). Given this pattern, the next section turns to how “the homeless” have been constructed as a homogenous group for whom these interventions should be directed.

3.5.4 Who are “The Homeless”?

Canadian reporters have often focused on who “the homeless” are, particularly when “homelessness” began to emerge as a social problem in Canada in the 1980s (Hulchanski et al., 2009). Research has found that reporters tend to homogenize, typify, and/or stereotype people experiencing homelessness (e.g., Campbell & Reeves, 1999; Hopper, 1988; Illouz, 1994; Pascale, 2005). However, limited quantitative evidence has been offered to support this claim, and there has been limited study of this phenomena in Canada. This section will consider quantitative evidence that suggests such homogenization and typification has taken place in the Canadian media.
Given that only 3.6% of the articles in this study focused on particular demographic groups’ experiences of homelessness, there is some quantitative evidence that Canadian reporters have rarely focused on how experiences of homelessness differ along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and other identities. While reporters consistently made statements about the diverse demographic makeup of people experiencing homelessness and “the changing face” of homelessness, the number of articles that actually sought to explore particular demographic groups’ experiences of homelessness was extremely low. As seen in Table 3.3, there were only a total of 2 articles on LGBTQ2SA people experiencing homelessness between 1980 and 2013, despite research that this group is disproportionately at risk for homelessness (particularly LGBTQ2SA youth) (see Abramovich, 2012). Similarly, there were only a total of 9 articles focused on homelessness among newcomers, refugees, or immigrants, another group that is disproportionately represented among homeless populations (See Hiebert, D’Addario, Sherrell, & Chan, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Groups Included in Sub-Population</th>
<th>Total Number of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Sub-Population Topic</th>
<th>Percent of Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child and Youth Homelessness</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>0.015%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Homelessness</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>0.006%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Homelessness</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>0.006%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Homelessness</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>0.004%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomer/Refugee/Immigrant Homelessness</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>0.002%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness Among Older Adults</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.0005%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ2SSA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.0005%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>155</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.035%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A particularly surprising finding was that despite the extraordinary overrepresentation of indigenous peoples among homeless populations in Canada (Patrick, 2014), only 16 articles focused on indigenous homelessness. On average, this would mean that approximately 1 article was published every 2 years. This stands in stark contrast to research demonstrating that indigenous peoples are one of the most materially, socially, and spatially disadvantaged ethno-cultural groups in the country (see Distasio, Sylvestre, & Mulligan, 2005; Patrick, 2014). While indigenous peoples represent only 4
to 5 percent of the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011), indigenous peoples are thought to represent between 20 to 50 percent of the total homeless population in Canadian urban centres (see Patrick, 2014, p. 26). This overrepresentation is clearly not reflected in Canadian newspaper reporting, in which only .0037% of newspaper articles between 1980 and 2013 focused on this population. In this context, the absence of discussions of race is particularly visible.

Other studies have similarly found that race, gender, age, and other identities are rarely visible in North American media’s portrayals of homelessness (e.g., Blasi, 1994; Richter et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2010). In their twenty year sample of Canadian newspapers, Richer et al. (2011) found that 67.9% of articles did not identify age or gender when discussing “the homeless,” and only 4% identified ethnic or racial minorities. Other studies have demonstrated that the gender of people experiencing homelessness is frequently made invisible in media accounts as well. Pascale’s (2005) qualitative study, for example, found that

Although most newspaper articles do not use class to characterize individuals, for people who cannot afford housing, their status as homeless precedes all other information about them . . . Only when people do not have housing, do reporters write about them as if they were neither women nor men. (p. 257-258)

This trend was also evident within my sample and did not appear to decrease over time, with recent coverage continuing to describe people solely based on their housing status. While ostensibly some reporters did seek to represent the diversity of people who experience homelessness, in practice this often took the form of enumerating these groups and then homogenizing diverse subpopulations under the label “the homeless.”

These findings may reflect a broader cultural pattern in which the stigmatized status of being homeless overshadows all other identities. Consider, for example, the controversy that erupted in 2013 over the escalating prevalence of “homeless people” in the videogame SimCity. These individuals were “represented as yellow, two-dimensional, ungendered figures with bags in tow” (Maiberg, 2015, n.p.). Vice Magazine reports that thousands of players have been extremely frustrated by the presence of these individuals who are “driving property values down.” Players advanced solutions such as “bulldozing parks where they congregate” or creating insufficient city infrastructure so that “the homeless would leave on their own” (Maiberg, 2015, n.p.). In such contexts, it becomes
evident that obscuring identities such as gender or race not only serve to homogenize people experiencing homelessness, but also function to dehumanize this population in ways that can be used to justify disciplinary responses.

Such homogenization was also evident in Canadian newspapers’ representation of the mental health status and substance use of people experiencing homelessness. Consistent with other research in this area (e.g., Buck et al., 2004; Shields, 2001), my qualitative analysis found that many (if not most) Canadian newspaper articles referenced or mentioned mental health issues and substance use in their depictions of homelessness and “the homeless.” Given this, it appears surprising that only 0.3% of the sample actually focused specifically on substance use or addictions (an average of 1 article every two years). This disparity may suggest that reporters’ discussions of substance use were primarily used to characterize people experiencing homelessness, rather than offered as a topic of inquiry in pursuit of understanding a social problem. Importantly, qualitative analysis indicated that these characterizations were overwhelmingly assumed by reporters based on their observations of particular individuals, and/or they were assigned by social service workers, researchers, or medical professionals, rather than self-identified by people experiencing homelessness themselves. Such practices function to homogenize and typify “the homeless” based on their self-presentation and appearance, dislocating them as knowers and positioning them as objects of intervention.

**Discussion: Who are “the Homeless”?**

While we can certainly speculate about the causes of these journalistic practices, the effect is undoubtedly one in which “the homeless” were produced as a common sense category for which further identifiers (e.g., race, gender, age) are seen as extraneous. Such typifications are arguably essential to the social problem process more generally, with several scholars arguing that typification fosters the creation of a social problem by abstracting individual conditions or persons into a category or term (in this case “the homeless” and “homelessness”) (see Best, 2013; Loseke, 1992). Loseke argues that “person categories,” such as “the homeless,” are the “collective representations of ‘types of people’ constructed within a symbolic system of moral meanings” (Loseke, 1992, p. 150; see also Holstein & Miller, 1990). In the case of Canadian reporters’ constructions
of “the homeless,” this category has frequently entailed: (1) an obfuscation of demographic differences, (2) the avoidance of discussions regarding systemic inequalities (e.g., racism), and (3) the assumption of particular personal traits among this population (i.e., mental health and substance use issues).

As a consequence of these typifications, it is likely that the Canadian public has rarely been exposed to newspaper reporting which explores the connections between homelessness and racism, patriarchy, colonialism, or other systems of oppression and inequality. More broadly, the absence of media portrayals of the connections between colonialism, racism, patriarchy and other oppressive systems may limit public knowledge about the systemic causes of homelessness.

While these practices of homogenization and typification were evident in the data throughout the years studied, they should not be overstated. The high prevalence of coverage on *Activism & Criticism of Responses to Homelessness*, the second most common topic in newspaper coverage (14.4% of the sample), suggests that the public were commonly exposed to views and events that challenged stereotypical understandings of this population. Further, there is evidence that some reporters resisted these typifications, and that these typifications shifted over time and by city. The next section turns to how early newspaper accounts engaged in claimsmaking efforts to establish “homelessness” as a new and important social problem in Canada.

### 3.6 Constructing a New Social Problem Called “Homelessness”:

**Claimsmaking in Early Journalistic Accounts of “Homelessness”**

Social problems are not natural, they are built over many years through the efforts of many people. In the case of “homelessness” in Canada, reporters have been crucial to identifying and constructing this social problem in particular ways. Since the first use of the term “homelessness” in Canadian print media (Swan & Camilleri, 1984), reporters have endeavored to solidify the characteristics of this problem, who it effects and why, how and when it became a “crisis” in Canada, and what action should be taken to address it. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data, this section will investigate the process by which Canadian reporters endeavored to establish and legitimize “homelessness” as a social problem when it first emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Utilizing Best’s (2013)
conceptualization of “grounds” and “warrants” (see Chapter 2), I argue that one of the ways in which homelessness was established in Canadian print media was through three primary grounds and one powerful warrant. This study reveals that the journalistic construction of this social problem was accomplished through the use of rhetorical devices, conspicuous silences, and narrative forms of particular kinds.

The first ground I explore is reporters’ construction of “homelessness” as affecting a particular kind of person, namely a highly sympathetic and morally superior person. This construction stood in stark contrast to previous cultural understandings of people without homes. Second, reporters emphasized the harm caused by a new condition that they named “homelessness,” utilizing graphic and intimate detail of human suffering to elicit emotion among readers. Third, articles emphasized that this new condition affects a range of people by arguing that “anyone can become homeless” (see Best, 2013, p. 32-35 for comment on types of grounds). Lastly, reporters offered a particularly persuasive warrant for their claims, namely that homelessness is morally inconsistent with Canadian values and signals the erosion of public compassion and Canadian identity. Each ground and warrant will be explored separately below, followed by a discussion of how this “rhetorical formula” operated to legitimize the social problem of homelessness.

3.6.1 Ground 1: New Victims: Disaggregating the “New Homeless” from the “Old Homeless”

Best (2013) argues that social problem claimsmakers often utilize multiple grounds (i.e., descriptions of a troubling condition) in their attempts to move a claim forward in the social problem process. A common ground used in such claims is the identification of particular people who are negatively affected by a particular condition, most often people who are portrayed as victims who bear no responsibility for their plight (Best, 2013, p. 35; see also Loseke, 2011). In Canadian newspapers’ early efforts to construct homelessness, reporters overwhelmingly focused on establishing “the homeless” as victims by emphasizing their differences from previous houseless populations. This new group was called the “new homeless.” This difference was
constructed by emphasizing demographic differences, class differences, moral superiority, and differences in attributed causes for homelessness.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, many reporters, politicians, advocates, and others consistently emphasized the shifting demographics of people experiencing homelessness in Canada. Prior to the 1980s, a “homeless” person was generally typified in the North American media as an “alcoholic man over 50 with no family” (Swan & Camilleri, 1984; see also Blau, 1992; Campbell & Reeves, 1999; Hoch & Slayton, 1989; Wright, Rubin, & Devine, 1998). Beginning in the 1980s, this typification was notably expanded. In 1986, for example, Toronto’s Housing Commissioner George Cook argued that these “traditional drunks and down andouters on Skid Row” are now joined by “the psychiatrically disabled and unemployed” (Monsebraaten, 1986). That same year, the Director of Salvation Army Toronto, Major Lawrence Wilson, similarly claimed that “[t]he stereotype of the old derelict clutching a bottle no longer applies” (Shalom, 1986).

As one journalist argued:

Street life is no longer restricted to the eccentrics or the “winos,” the grizzled male fixtures of urban life who slept on park benches in the summer and connived their way into local jails on the coldest nights of winter. Most who live on skid road do so by necessity, not choice. They are bound by four unifying lacks: no marketable skills; no social networks; no money or savings; no property. (Fulton, 1986)

Given the apparent tenacity of this stereotype, many reporters sought to depict in detail how the “new homeless” differed from the “old homeless,” often in moral terms. One journalist writes,

The homeless today are more than winos sleeping off a bender on the sidewalk or in a Sally Ann shelter. They are single parents with children in tow, troubled teens fleeing abusive homes, working people whose minimum-wage jobs don’t pay enough to keep a roof over their heads. (“Homelessness no longer limited to the down and outs,” 1990)

Similarly, in 1991 The Montreal Gazette’s internal library system chose to retitle it’s “vagrants” clipping file “homeless,” justifying this shift on the following basis: “Vagrants were good-for nothings who got picked up by police. ‘Homeless’ recognizes that many people from all walks of life lose their homes and that losing a home can happen suddenly these days” (Kuitenbrouwer, 1991).

As is demonstrated in the above quote, whole information systems and
journalistic approaches within print media were altered on the basis that the “typical” homeless person had changed significantly since the 1980s, and consequently new language, new problematizations, and new framings were required. Reporters broadly agreed that the “new homeless” were much more demographically heterogeneous than those who lacked housing in previous generations. More specifically, reporters made specific reference to: (1) children and youth (e.g., Flavelle, 1989); (2) women, (e.g., Parton, 1989); (3) families (e.g., Callwood, 1988); (4) people experiencing mental health issues (e.g., Callwood, 1987); (5) people experiencing unemployment (e.g., Moore, 1991); and (6) people from professional or higher class backgrounds (e.g., “How 'Gary Doe' fell from success to homelessness,” 1985).

Most evidently, the “new homeless” were not just demographically distinct, they were commonly presented as morally superior and less blameworthy in these early journalistic comparisons between “old winos” and the “ordinary people who have suffered a reversal in life and suddenly find themselves marginalized” and consequently “try[ing] to get back on their feet again” (Webb-Proctor, 1987). Politicians and advocates engaged in similar comparative accounts as well, including politicians who were deeply sympathetic to the cause. For example, Toronto city councilor Jack Layton is quoted as saying,

> We tend to think of the homeless person as the wandering middle-aged man with an alcohol problem or the bag lady . . . [b]ut homelessness is also a kids' problem. It means many things - for instance, doing poorly at school because you don't have enough sleep and having your future jeopardized. (Webb-Proctor, 1987)

While such comparative accounts became less frequent over the last 10 to 15 years, reporters have continued to emphasize moral distinctions between people who are homeless in ways which are frequently linked to class background, substance use, mental illness, and in particular, physical appearance.

The physical appearance of people experiencing homelessness was a particular common topic in early newspaper accounts. Physical descriptions of people experiencing homelessness were often lengthy and frequently used in the opening lines of articles, sometimes providing intimate, graphic details. In some cases reporters printed individuals’ full names and spoke about their dandruff, fingernails, health conditions, acne, odour, perspiration, blood, and/or urine, seemingly without concern for the
ramifications of publishing such details for these individuals. For example, a 1991 article reads, “[Name redacted] knows his appearance shocks some people. He is a hulking man with a matted black beard encircled by live fleas. His clothes are frayed, his shoulders sprinkled with dandruff and he smells” (Abramovitch, 1991).

Among other things, these physical markers were often used by reporters to distinguish between the “old homeless” and the “new homeless,” and were commonly framed in ways which distinguished the latter as being more deserving of sympathy. In some cases, this was either explicitly or covertly linked to class status, or related to former class status before some type of “fall from grace” that resulted in homelessness for the individuals described. A characteristic example of this “fall from grace” narrative is illustrated in a 1985 article titled, “How Gary Doe fell from success to homelessness,” which describes a former Columbia Law School graduate who became homeless (The Gazette, 1985). In these narratives, luck rather than inherent pathology is represented as the causal agent in the homelessness of the “new homeless.”

A particularly illustrative example of this framing is found in a 1994 article titled, “Hard-luck man and daughter turned down by several agencies” (Jaremko, 1994). The article describes how Percy and his daughter ended up sleeping in their car in a Calgary truck stop because they could not access emergency services because they were not “alcoholics, drug addicts, ex-convicts, wayward youth, disabled or victims of any other social malady that rates official help” (Jaremko, 1994). The article explains that Percy “refuses to take his daughter to the downtown drop-in centre for transients and shudders at the thought,” afraid that “she will be raped.” An unnamed official from the Calgary Distress Centre, who could not find accommodation for the family, agrees that they should stay in the car because the girl is “exceptionally attractive.” This official argued that there are no resources for “middle-class” Canadians who are homeless and “but for fortune go many more” (Jaremko, 1994).

In this article, the physical appearance and class background of this homeless family mark them as different from, and more sympathetic than, other “transients.” Further, their physical appearance and class background is linked to an explanation for their homelessness -- “hard-luck” and bad “fortune” -- rather than “social malady.” Despite significant evidence that substance use or disabilities makes it more difficult to
access emergency services of numerous kinds (Hwang, 2001; Podymow, Turnbull, Coyle, Yetisir, & Wells, 2006; Tsemberis, & Eisenberg, 2000), the absence of these for Percy and his daughter are presented as a structural disadvantage and a further feature of this tragedy. To further highlight and humanize the tragic nature of this disadvantage, the journalist notes it was the daughter’s birthday. In this article, both class and physical appearance operate to mark this family as victims of underserved tragedy brought on by conditions out of their control. People from other backgrounds (e.g., poverty) who’ve had different life experiences (e.g., addiction) are not framed so kindly, and their birthdays are rarely mentioned.

Interestingly, these journalistic connections between class, physical appearance, pathways into homelessness, and moral worth appear to transform over time within the sample. Moving into the 2000s, it appears that reporters use physical appearance to *stand in for* both class background and explanations for why people are homeless, rather than making these connections explicit. Individuals who are homeless but “don’t look homeless” were often asked by reporters to explain how they came to be homeless, while people who “look homeless” were frequently *described* in physical terms but were rarely granted agency or voice. Consider the opening of this article published in 2000:

> The man is in his early 20s, well dressed in casual clothes and a warm jacket, his hair short and slightly spiked, his face clean-shaven. Pretty hip for a downtown church shelter for the homeless. But his eyes are wild with grief and panic. "I was evicted three days ago and I spent two nights at the Sally Ann," he stammers. "Now I'm here. I don't know how this happened. What do I do? Do you have beds here? I don't belong here -- how am I gonna tell my mom?" His face crumples as a volunteer gently steers him to a table for a hot meal. (Cameron, 2000)

Such depictions were overwhelmingly common, and demonstrate how physical appearance was used as a marker by reporters and people experiencing homelessness to distinguish between different “types” of people experiencing homelessness, as well as their pathways into homelessness (see also Snow & Anderson, 1993). However, while it is evident that reporters were more likely to ask people who “don’t look homeless” to comment on their homelessness, in general the voices of people experiencing homelessness were excluded in newspaper coverage. Importantly, these early portrayals of the “new homeless” often excluded the actual voices of these individuals. When quotes
were included in coverage, they were often limited to one or two choice quotes meant to illustrate a story constructed about the individual. In contrast, experts and social service providers were quoted extensively. These professionals were often asked to offer solutions to, and analysis of, this social problem in ways people experiencing homelessness rarely were (see Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, for similar findings). Such framings position the “new homeless” as objects of pity rather than intelligent social actors and agents in their own lives.

By offering accounts of the “new homeless” as demographically distinct, more “middle class” or “normative” in dress and presentation, and victims of bad luck and structural changes, Canadian reporters in the 1980s and 1990s were able to solidify the unique and sympathetic dimensions of the “victims” of this new social problem (thus solidifying the problem itself). This finding contradicts, to some extent, previous research that argued that news media almost invariably individualizes homelessness and neglects structural causes in reporting (Buck et al., 2004; Hodgetts et al., 2005). In the case of Canadian print media, it would seem more accurate to say that while the early explanations of this new social problem were located at the level of the individual through personalized stories, the reasons reporters offered for why this group were homeless were frequently structural in nature. As was seen in the previous section, however, these structural causes were rarely the focus of newspaper coverage over the years sampled.

3.6.2 Ground 2: Extensive Harm Caused by a New Condition Called “Homelessness”

Best (2013) and others have argued that social problem claims often begin with the claim that a particular condition, which can be named, causes extensive and horrific harm. As part of this process, individual instances of suffering, pain, death, or disturbance become an “instance of the condition” (Best, 2013, p. 32). For example, Joseph Gusfield (1984) traced how instances of bad driving became defined as “road rage,” leading to particular kinds of interventions and not others. As social problems are being formed, claimsmakers often utilize typifying examples of the condition which are meant to demonstrate the harm it causes in dramatic ways. While, as Best (2013) points out, these
typifying examples are rarely typical, they serve to rally public concern or panic about a putative condition.

In the case of Canadian reporters’ claims about homelessness, reporters used graphic details and literary conventions to emphasize the suffering of this group, fortifying claims that “homelessness” was a serious social problem. June Callwood’s 1987 series, titled simply “The Homeless,” is perhaps the earliest and most illustrative of this approach. The series, designed to dovetail with the United Nations declaration of 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, documents Callwood’s travels “coast to coast to see first-hand the plight of some of Canada’s ‘resident strangers’” (1987b). Callwood’s articles constitute the first in-depth series on this new social problem in Canadian print media, and thus likely played an important role in establishing early public perceptions of the issue among Canadians.

In this series, Callwood consistently emphasizes the physical, emotional, and psychological suffering of the “new homeless.” For example, the first article of Callwood’s series opens in the following way:

Two nights ago, nine men slept in front of the hot air vents at the rear of Montreal's handsome Place des Arts. One of them, a scrawny, filthy man with one leg, was in the St. Michael's Mission the next day, waiting for the hot meal at noon. He was asked about his friend Max, who died on "la grille" a month ago. "A delivery truck backed up over him, that's what happened," he said. "He was from Jamaica. Squashed his head, blood all over the place. The truck ran over me too, ran over my leg." The good one? He grinned, showing missing teeth. "Naw, the other one. The artificial one." He's 29. Nine years ago he was in a train accident that killed his wife and daughter and took off his leg. His advice for anyone sleeping in front of that air vent is to wrap in plastic. It's better than cardboard. Cardboard gets wet in the snow. (1987a)

In this piece and others, Callwood utilizes graphic stories of physical and emotional suffering, violence, or death in the opening lines. In her November 1987 article, Callwood similarly begins an article by describing an indigenous man’s experience of passing out in the snow in below minus forty-degree weather in Edmonton, Alberta (1987c). Another article opens by describing the trauma and suicidal thoughts of a young woman who is experiencing homelessness following childhood sexual abuse and a recent gang rape (1987d). Given the frequency with which this narrative form was echoed in subsequent newspaper coverage, this approach was likely seen as particularly effective by
other reporters.

What makes the use of these stories so effective in Callwood’s and other reporters’ work is the use of rich, descriptive details and literary conventions to enliven the physiological senses of the readers. As Lauren Berlant (2011) has argued, readers must be compelled to physiologically feel the feelings of the subjects in order to experience an emotionally compassionate response. In order to achieve this, reporters frequently described in precise detail the physical, psychological, and social suffering of individuals experiencing homelessness. In a 1984 article, for example, a man experiencing homelessness is described in the following way: “With blackened fingernails, he continually scratches his second-hand clothes: he has lice” (Swan, & Camilleri, 1984). Another article (1987) claims that people experiencing homelessness “huddle silently, shivering in the rain and the cold, desperately waiting to come inside” (Monsebraaten, 1987). A 1994 article describes the suffering of a homeless man:

He’s tired. He didn’t get much sleep the night before, huddled in a doorway, wrapped in newspapers and cardboard, a rag-filled plastic bag for a pillow. He’s hungry. His only food of the day was the soup and sandwiches just after noon at a drop-in centre. There’s an aching pain in his stomach. Most of all he’s cold. As her turns left into King St. he’s slapped by a bitter wind that draws tears from his eyes. (McAteer, 1994)

In all three articles, vivid language describing sensation, temperature, texture, colour, posture, and emotion is used to draw the reader into the experience. In most cases, the emotions of those depicted are revealed through their physical appearance, body language, and behavior, rather than through dialogue with these individuals. Interestingly, particular words or phrases (e.g., “huddled,” “drained,” “weak,” “vulnerable,” etc.) are consistently repeated in newspaper accounts over the years, creating a kind of hegemonic vocabulary that reporters and readers alike can draw on to describe this social problem and the people it effects. Many of these hegemonic words or phrases are seldom used by people experiencing homelessness themselves to self-identify or self-describe.

While certainly the suffering of this population is not in dispute, it is clear that through journalistic efforts this suffering was made to “come alive” for readers and was attributed to something called “homelessness.” Importantly, however, such vivid details of suffering risk alienating the reader, often verging on the abject and horrific. A 1996 article, for example, describes the death of a man experiencing homelessness during a
Coroner James Cairns said yesterday that it could take three to five days before the man's body thaws enough for an autopsy to be performed. “It's a solid block,” Cairns said, adding that they can't even get an identification from his face, because his hands are frozen over it. (Welsh, 1996)

Such horrifying details, I would argue, can function to highlight the urgency of this social problem. However, they may also result in readers distancing themselves from the subject in various ways, including through “othering,” in order to escape painful emphatic responses (see Halfmann & Young, 2010).

3.6.3 Ground 3: You’re Next: Constructing Homelessness as a Problem that Strikes Randomly

A particularly common ground upon which claims rest is that a range of people can be affected by the problem, or that it can strike “randomly” (Best, 1992, 2013). As Best (2013) explains,

If a problem strikes at random, then it might affect anyone, including anyone listening to the claim. Such randomness suggests that each person who hears the claim has a personal interest in doing something to deal with the problem – before it affects him or her. (p. 35)

Anyone who is even tangentially familiar with the discourse around homelessness in North America can testify to the ubiquity of this ground. Reporters consistently emphasized that “anyone can become homeless” - your friend, your brother, your mother, or you (see also Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012). This ground was used across all years and newspapers analyzed, but was especially prevalent during the emergence of this social problem and subsequently tapered off. Indeed, politicians, advocates, and social service workers were commonly quoted espousing the same ground. In a 1990 Montreal Gazette article, for example, the Manager of Montreal’s Les Oeuvres de la Maison du Pere shelter is quoted as saying,

“We’re 25 years beyond the image of the hobo as a dirty, old drunk. Many of the homeless are well-dressed, they could be your uncle or your father or your son. They pass you on the street each day and you don’t recognize them.” (Locherty & Haynes, 1990)

Similarly, in a 1993 article, Rev. Emmett Johns of Montreal warns, “It might be nice to
drive down Ste. Catherine St. in a limousine, past all those panhandlers. But when your company goes bankrupt or you get laid off, you might be the next one on the street” (Lalonde, 1993).

The ground that “anyone can become homeless” thus functioned as both a warning to the housed population and demand for compassion; soliciting sympathy for people experiencing homelessness while simultaneously nurturing the fear that “you could be next.” A 1995 article, for example, reads “As you sit there complacent . . . contemplate this: Just how many paycheques can you lose before you're out on the street? The homeless are people who need our attention right now. Someday, we may be joining them” (Hurley, 1995). This tension between fear and compassion undoubtedly strengthened the gravity of this new social problem for the Canadian public. And this gravity undoubtedly helped sell newspapers.

The contention that anyone can become homeless, and thus that people experiencing homelessness are not categorically unique or inherently deficient, was often linked to notions of universal humanity and social inclusion in journalistic accounts. For example, a 2001 article argues, “homelessness stains our humanity” (Hill, 2001). While sometimes this took a distinctly religious tone, more often than not reporters used depictions of suffering to underscore our shared humanity and the need for Canadian society to extend compassion and social belonging to this group. In so doing, reporters positioned themselves and their work as important agents of social integration by revealing the humanity of this population to the public, who presumably needed to be educated on the moral worth and deservedness of the “new homeless” in contrast to the “old homeless.” Indeed, reporters’ emphasis on the similarities between the “new homeless” and the housed public is only necessary if this group’s difference is already assumed, and thus requires journalistic efforts in order for this schism to be overcome.

Upon careful analysis, it became evident that the narrative that “anyone can be homeless” was largely used in descriptions of members of the “new homeless” who were identified as: (1) professionals or “hard-working” lower class people, (2) people who physically appeared middle-class or presented as middle class, (3) people who did not appear to have mental health issues and/or substance abuse issues, and/or (4) people who appeared clean, tidy, polite, deferential, and (often) ashamed. There were no examples of
articles that suggested to the reading public that they could become, for example, a woman experiencing homelessness and schizophrenia following incarceration and drug addiction. Thus, while the narrative of “anyone can become homeless” purported to distance itself from previous discourses which stigmatized people experiencing homelessness, it was clear that old divisions between the deserving/undeserving re-emerged in reporters choices to humanize particular subgroups based on class and appearance.

However, when the ground that “anyone could become homeless” was used in articles that negatively stereotyped people experiencing homelessness, it often functioned as a warning that you could become one of these stigmatized “others.” A good example of this is found in a 2008 article which reads:

In Metro Vancouver, we see homeless people every day. We see them so frequently that Val MacDonald of the Seniors Housing Services Society says, "They're like the wart on the end of our nose that we don't want to see." Mostly we've filed them away as mentally ill, drug-addicted or lazy -- society's castaways, part of life's flotsam and jetsam. Of course, it's easier that way because the really frightening thing about homelessness is that some of the people with no roofs over their heads are an awful lot like you and me. (Bramham, 2008)

In this excerpt, the possibility that people “an awful lot like you” are becoming homeless, and thus that you too can become a “wart” on society, hardly humanizes this group. Consequently the claim that “anyone can become homeless” can function as both a statement about our shared humanity, as well as a framing device to stigmatize and dehumanize this population. In such cases, panic over homelessness appeared more related to class-based fears about losing class privilege.

3.6.4 A Persuasive Warrant: “Homelessness” as Inconsistent with Morality and Canadian Values and Identity

Warrants explain why action should be taken to address a particular troubling condition and commonly invoke values and emotions (Best, 2013, p. 36). As Best (2013) explains,

Warrants argue that the condition identified in the grounds is inconsistent with what we value, and therefore we need to do something about it. Thus, claims suggest that the troubling condition violates our sense of justice, fairness, equality, or other values; in turn, we may experience anger, pity, or other
In the case of many early journalistic accounts of “homelessness,” this problem was consistently positioned as a phenomenon which required that Canadian society reflect on its values and identity. In particular, various reporters and their sources contended that homelessness raised foundational questions about what it means to be human and to be part of a caring society. For example, well-known Canadian activist Reverend Dennis Drainville expresses the interpenetration of these themes well: “I learn more and more every day about what it means to be truly human. The bottom line is that hunger and homelessness and poverty is in a sense our society saying ‘We don’t care.’ It’s that that I’ve been fighting” (Turner, 1986).

These foundational philosophical questions were frequently linked to expressed concerns that Canadian society was becoming apathetic, immoral, uncivilized, and/or greedy. Doug Dent, for example, argues,

Housing is a right, not a privilege; homelessness a symptom, not a disease. To ignore this is to deny responsibility. To do so with respect to the children of today is to ensure the diminishment of compassion in the adult of tomorrow. (Dent, 1992)

Politicians, advocates, and government officials were particularly likely to use this type of framing when discussing homelessness. In 1988, for example, former Prime Minister of Canada Brian Mulroney told a CBC-TV interviewer,

In a country like ours it strikes me as completely offensive morally to have people sleeping on the bloody sidewalks. We have to collaborate in a great national effort to ensure that this doesn’t happen in a civilized country like Canada. (Diebel, 1998)

Likewise, Governor General of Canada Adrienne Clarkson, following an encounter with an Inuit man experiencing homelessness in Iqaluit, stated:

“There are many wordless things you can say to people. He said to me in quite a low voice, ‘I have you in my heart.’ We cannot have homeless people in our society. It’s just wrong. And that’s what I can do - point that out” (“Hug the homeless: Sometimes that’s all we can do for them, unfortunately,” 2000)

Such examples demonstrate how commonly homelessness was positioned as morally reprehensible in a “developed” or “civilized” country like Canada.

In some claims, concerns about the immorality of “homelessness” appear deeply
linked to fears about Canada’s reputation globally, particularly in comparison to the United States. Indeed, one of the first newspaper articles on homelessness in Canada laments the rise of homelessness in the United States, exclaiming “Thank heavens for the sturdier social conscience of Canada. It’s unthinkable that our citizens, newspapers and elected members would ever let homelessness escalate to this sickening extreme” (Landsberg, 1985). Similarly, in a 1991 article, Major David Stepto argues,

> Look at what’s happened in the States. There are so many homeless and they’ve been talked about so much that people have completely stopped caring about it and just step over their bodies in the subway. Montreal people are much more sensitive, as you can see, with them taking clothing to the Dernier Recours. (Kuitenbrouwer, 1991)

Such framings link Canadian national pride and identity to social consciousness and compassion, which the existence of homelessness in Canada threatens to disrupt. Interestingly, while such comparisons between Canada and the United States were prevalent in reporters’ early depictions of this social problem, gradually this framing faded as homelessness became a more established social problem in Canadian society.

These framings also employed particular language and turns of phrase, variably describing homelessness as a “national disgrace,” an “embarrassment,” “shameful,” “pathetic,” “disgusting,” “a disease,” “a national disaster,” “offensive,” “unconscionable,” “a tragedy,” “a national embarrassment,” and “wrong.” For example, in 2008 the Governor General of Canada Michaelle Jean argued that Canada's record on homelessness is a "shame for us all" (Komarnicki, 2008). Likewise, the following letter to the editor illustrates how these concerns are related to panic about the future of Canada:

> A whole generation of Canadians has now grown up with the concept of homelessness, soup kitchens and food banks, as part of the normal everyday scene. If we are not careful, in a few more years, the days when we were shocked, and shamed by such things, will have passed from our collective memory. What a grand and noble inheritance to leave our children and grandchildren. Our faces should be blushing the deepest red for the dishonor and disgrace we have brought upon ourselves. For shame, Canada, for shame! (Dore, 1996)

In these framings, homelessness is an urgent social problem that threatens the very fabric and future of Canadian society and identity.
3.6.5 Discussion

This section has argued that as claimsmakers, Canadian reporters constructed influential claims and warrants that participated in legitimizing homelessness as a serious social problem in Canada in the 1980s. As Silverstone (1988) and Kitzinger (2000) suggest, media framings of social issues participate in creating narrative arcs upon which future coverage and public understandings are organized. The perpetuity of many of the claims made in these early journalistic accounts certainly testifies to this fact, and claimsmakers today continue to construct homelessness as something that is morally incongruous with Canadian values and could happen to “anyone.”

However, claims, and the contexts in which they appear, change. While claims commonly emerge as exciting, new, and dramatic, over time they often become seen as “old news,” especially when the troubling condition itself has not improved (Downs, 1972; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998). As Joel Best (2013) argues,

Audiences find it easier to forget about or ignore claims that can be dismissed as old news, particularly because other, newer claims are always competing for their attention. Audiences also become frustrated by problems that aren’t easily solved – where efforts to address the problem don’t seem to make much progress. Each time a claim is repeated, it seems more familiar, less interesting – and less persuasive. (p. 48)

As homelessness continued to worsen throughout the 1990s and 2000s in Canada, it is evident that both journalistic and governmental framings of “homelessness” became more focused on disciplinary approaches to the problem, characterizing “homeless people” and “panhandlers” as threatening, dangerous, and perpetrators of violence and crime (see Gaetz, 2013; O’Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011). In announcing the 1999 Safe Streets Act, the Ontario government asserted

Our government believes that all people in Ontario have the right to drive on the roads, walk down the street or go to public places without being or feeling intimidated. They must be able to carry out their daily activities without fear. When they are not able to do so, it is time for the government to act. (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 1999)

Such claims are correlated with punitive approaches taken across the country to “deal with the homeless,” including most specifically the criminalization of acts such as sleeping, laying down, or “loitering” in public (see O’Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011).
To some extent, the sympathetic journalistic accounts of the physical suffering of this population were replaced by typifying narratives about “aggressive panhandlers.” As O’Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri (2011) reveal, these typifications parallel policy choices which represent people who are homeless, including so-called “squeegee kids,” as “dangerous, disorderly and a threat to the ‘safety’ of the general public” (p. 28)

Over the history of this social problem, a further strand of discursive conflict has focused on how best to understand the deaths of people experiencing homelessness. To some extent, homeless deaths stand at the intersection of many claims-making efforts to define, frame, and propose solutions to this social problem. The next section turns to this topic, exploring how the deaths of people experiencing homelessness have been framed in Canadian newspapers.

### 3.7 Homeless Deaths: Who is to Blame?

Articles about the death of people experiencing homelessness, although they did not constitute a substantial subset of the sample (3.9%, n=171), were especially remarkable due to their high emotionality. One of the ways in which this emotionality manifested itself was in reporters’ seemingly panicked need to assign responsibility and blame for these deaths, almost always within the first few lines of the article. With few exceptions, the primary focus of most articles on homeless deaths was who or what was responsible or at fault. Given this focus, this section will explore how panic over the cause, responsibility, and blame for homeless deaths was frequently related to characterizations of the moral character of the person who had died.

Reporters’ representations of the moral character of people who had died while homelessness ranged considerably. While some articles were highly critical of the person, citing his or her “faults” or pathology as it related to his/her death, others were decidedly sympathetic, expressing outrage at the structural and societal forces that caused this inexcusable death. Articles ranged substantially between these two polarities, sometimes exhibiting contradictory accounts that simultaneously venerated and blamed the person who had died. After carefully disaggregating the various frames used by reporters to
describe these deaths, it became evident that frame variability in this theme can be viewed along a continuum best articulated in Rob Rosenthal’s framework of “Slackers, Lackers, and Unwilling Victims” (2000).

This section utilizes Rosenthal’s theoretical conceptualization of “Slackers, Lackers, and Unwilling Victims” to explore how each of these categories is reflected in Canadian reporters’ accounts of people who died while homeless. Although Rosenthal’s framework cannot explain all trends in the data, it provides a helpful roadmap for understanding important subthemes and their relationships to each other. Inconsistencies between the data and Rosenthal’s framework are highlighted throughout. This section ends with a brief discussion of how, over time, Canadian newspapers shifted from framing homeless deaths as related to lack of housing, and began framing homeless deaths as the result of inadequate emergency supports for people experiencing homelessness.

3.7.1 Rosenthal’s “Slackers, Lackers, and Unwilling Victims” Framework

Rob Rosenthal (2000) suggests that the classic debate over the “deserving or undeserving” poor and homeless is better understood as a debate about whether people experiencing homelessness are “Slackers,” “Lackers,” or “Unwilling Victims” (p. 111). Rosenthal defines *Slackers* as, “Those who are ‘incompetent’ because of their own faults – laziness, irresponsibility, and substance abuse in most formulations – and thus . . . undeserving” (p. 113). In contrast, *Lackers* are persons who:

lack competency through no fault of their own and are thought to be deserving: children, those with mental and physical illnesses, and substance abusers in some formulations. These unfortunate souls deserve aid, they deserve charity, but they do deserve autonomy and equal respect. The solutions to their problems are individual because their issues are personal; further, those solutions will be determined by others, because those being helped are incompetent. (p. 113)

*Unwilling Victims*, in comparison, are “[t]hose who are competent but caught in circumstances beyond their immediate control – plant closures, gentrification, and physical abuse in some formulations – and thus are said to be both deserving *and* competent” (p. 114). As Rosenthal points out,

Many of those stressing the structural causes of homelessness have argued that, like the GI, homeless people are paying a price for societal decisions and
processes far beyond their control – the diminishing of the affordable housing stock, deindustrialization, deinstitutionalization, and so forth. Regardless of individual problems, it is these massive dislocations that explain homelessness. (p.114)

Rosenthal argues that those who stress the structural causes of homelessness largely support aid to all people experiencing homelessness, while those who stress the personal causes often suggest that people experiencing homelessness are not deserving of supports or sympathy, or at most are deserving of some form of charity. Mobilizing this framework, the following will analyze how reporters construct the deaths of people experiencing homelessness.

3.7.2 Stubborn, Stupid, and Irresponsible: Blaming “Slackers” for their Death

Among the many characterizations of homeless deaths, some journalistic accounts stand out as particularly cruel and critical of the person who has died. Articles of this kind consistently framed these individuals as “Slackers” – individuals who are responsible for their own homelessness because of their own inherent flaws and faults. Consistent with Rosenthal’s formulation, articles which employed this frame characterized these deaths in relation to one or more of the following personal attributes: substance use, “personality problems,” “hygiene problems,” refusal to accept help, stupidity, laziness, immorality, irresponsibility, mental illness, and stubbornness. In a few rare cases, these characterizations were so disparaging that the writer mocked the person who had died, or expressed anger at others’ care or concern about the death. In many of these accounts, the journalist framed the death of the individual as inevitable, and often argued or suggested that everything possible to prevent the death had already been done. In some cases, the homeless person was constructed as victimizing others, rather than a victim him or herself. This section will describe how the death of “Slackers” was framed in various ways in Canadian newspapers between 1980 and 2013.

3.7.3 Culpability and Mental Illness: How “Slackers” Who Refuse Help Deserve to Die

When discussing the deaths of “Slackers,” reporters often established the individual’s culpability in his/her death by focusing on the person’s (supposed) refusal to
accept help. In many cases, this refusal was framed as a function of personality flaws (e.g., being stubborn or antisocial), even in cases when mental health struggles were explicitly identified. Such articles were more the rule than the exception. In effect, since the mid-1980s, the Canadian public has been reading articles that have attributed homeless deaths to a refusal to accept help. For example, a 1987 article detailing the death of Leigh Scheifele strikes a characteristic tone, stating, “Leigh Scheifele died the way he lived – unable to accept the helping hands that life offered him” (Monsebraaten & Bird, 1987). Similarly, an article published much later in 2013 details the death of 62-year-old Harley Lawrence in an analogous fashion:

Some who knew Mr. Lawrence said he resisted help and showed little interest in taking advantage of programs set up to aid the homeless. He had always rebuffed efforts by volunteers at the Evangeline Club to have coffee or come for a visit, a spokeswoman said . . . Mr. Lawrence said his brother drifted away from the family when he was around 25 years old and developed an unspecified mental-health problem. His brother said he would disappear for years at a time before anyone would hear from him and then push people away who offered help. (Auld, 2013)

Such articles often make reference to the individual’s substance abuse and mental health issues, but do not explore how supports might have failed to address or respect these needs. More generally, these framings position the community as highly generous and caring, and the individual as dismissive, rejecting, and/or rude. These characterizations were essential for establishing the person experiencing homelessness as blameworthy for his/her death, and the community and government as both blameless and victimized by the callousness of these individuals.

Several newspapers accounts focused on the family and service providers who were frustrated and hurt by the person’s refusal to receive help or treatment. In many cases this sentiment, mixed with the contention that everything possible had already been done to help the person, resulted in reporters and their sources concluding that the person’s death was unavoidable or inevitable. Describing the sentiments of a woman whose brother had died while homeless and experiencing mental health and substance abuse issues, a 2009 article reports that,

Shannon Barker is long past feeling guilty or ashamed when a street person like Tracey dies in a fire, huddled under a tarp and shopping cart in downtown Vancouver. It's politically incorrect and anathema on the cocktail circuit. But
Barker believes deaths like Tracey's are "just tragedies, inescapable, unpreventable tragedies." (Bramham, 2009)

Barker herself goes on to say,

“We can't save everyone . . . We tried to save our brother, as did the Salvation Army, the First United Church, the Maple Ridge Treatment Centre, the Downtown Eastside Residents Association and every other organization run by generous souls down on East Hastings, all to no avail . . . Here's the deal, he didn't want to be saved.” (Bramham, 2009)

Without denying or critiquing Ms. Barker’s experience or understanding of her brother’s death, it is worth noting how frequently articles across many decades would repeat and defend the assertion that everything possible had been done to save the person who died, and consequently concluded that the outcome of death was inevitable. This framing was particularly the case in articles that described the death of persons experiencing homelessness and mental health issues. Indeed, these framings may have had a significant impact on Canadian readers’ understandings of the relationships between homelessness and mental health.

In some cases, articles of this kind were more sympathetic towards the family, friends, and communities of the person experiencing homelessness than toward the individual who had died. A 1986 article describes a woman who had died while homeless in the following way: “She had an apartment in a Toronto senior citizens’ building, but walked away from it. Her brother offered her money; she refused it. Community workers tried to give her emotional support, but she turned her back on them” (Taylor, 1986). In such a framing, she is culpable for her homelessness and resultant death because she “turned her back” on available supports. Given that the article serves as a public narration of her life and death, it functions as a public obituary of sorts. Remarkably, in this obituary she is not presented as a victim, but as knowingly victimizing the caring and well-meaning family and support workers who reached out to her. The structural causes and systemic failures that cause homelessness are absent in this explanation.

In many articles on the deaths of “Slackers,” the issue of choosing not to accept help was a dominant theme. With regards to the above example, how the supports available to this woman may have been inadequate, inappropriate, paternalistic, insincere, oppressive, or troubling to her in other ways remains unexplored. Similarly, it is unclear
how, when, where, and the frequency with which supports of various kinds were offered to her. The matrix of choices available to her during her life, presumably narrow, also remains unexplored. Indeed, such articles rely on an oversimplification of the context surrounding peoples’ choices when responding to offers of support, and often assume “choice” is an adequate concept to describe how people experiencing homelessness relate to offers of support.

Importantly, such articles obfuscate how distrust or hesitancy to accept help may be a successful survival strategy, physically and psychologically, for people experiencing homelessness. Perhaps most tragically, this viewpoint does not account for the times that people experiencing homelessness might have asked for help in the past, but been refused, lied to, tricked, or manipulated. Refusing help, in these contexts, may be a highly rational response to histories of trauma and abuse, rather than an indication of stubbornness or irresponsibility. As pointed out by Michael Shapcott about the death of Leigh Scheifele, “When you get people who have been pushed so far out on the margins of society for so long, it’s no wonder they are sceptical when at the point of death the system finally kicks in to help” (Monsebraaten & Bird, 1987). Despite such insights, this characterization of “slackers” remained dominant in reporters’ accounts throughout the years sampled.

The principle underlying reporters’ condemnation of people who refuse help appears to be that “beggars can’t be choosers,” and the related conclusion that if they don’t accept help, they deserve to remain “beggars.” The implication of this framing is a moral imperative that people experiencing homelessness must accept any help that is offered. To do otherwise was represented by reporters as being as irresponsible, disrespectful, and in some cases immoral. Such a principle enormously diminishes the humanity of people experiencing homelessness by rejecting their right to choose how to interact with others, including well-meaning others. It is helpful to consider whether these same demands and expectations are imposed on people with wealth.

Bizarrely, some articles on the death of “Slackers” construct the person’s death as his/her fault even when the actions of others are directly implicated. Consider, for example, the death of Eugenia Balcombe in 1991. Mrs. Balcombe was an older woman experiencing homelessness who was kicked out and banned from a Toronto mall by
security staff, a few days before Christmas. She subsequently died of hypothermia in the mall’s parking lot. The article laments, “shelter workers seem resigned to the stubborn pride and independence of women like Mrs. Balcombe,” and focuses on Mrs. Balcombe’s refusal to sleep in shelters for fear of being robbed (Fine, 1991). Indeed, the article’s title is “Independence kept bag lady on street” (Fine, 1991). Highlighting the stubbornness of Mrs. Balcombe, rather than critically analyzing violence in the shelter system or the behavior of private security guards in corporate spaces, the journal obfuscates the participatory role of oppressive systems (e.g., capitalism), problematic policies (e.g., policies of private security firms), and particular individuals (e.g., security staff) in her death. Indeed, this participation is so obscured that when the journalist interviewed the Systems Supervisor for Canadian Protection Services (the security firm which removed Mrs. Balcombe), he asked, “Do you mind if I ask you a question? . . . Why is this such a big deal?” (Fine, 1991). For the Systems Supervisor, concern over her death is almost indecipherable.

In other articles, both mental illness and substance use are represented as indicators that the person who died was a “Slacker,” and thus responsible for his/her death. In some reporters’ accounts, mental illness was constructed as a blameless form of incompetence that resulted in the homelessness and subsequent death (see the next section on “Lackers”). In others, however, the person with mental illness who refuses to take medication or accept treatment was characteristically represented as responsible for his/her homelessness and death. Further, some articles implied that mental illness itself is a choice. In a few rare cases, articles or letters to the editor even went so far as to mock the death of people experiencing homelessness and mental health issues. A striking example of this is a 1996 article in the Toronto Star that reads,

Once again the government at Queen's Park has come in for undue criticism, this time because somebody made the lifestyle choice of freezing to death in a bus shelter. Does Mike Harris get blamed when somebody turns into a permanent Popsicle en route to the South Pole? . . . But let one person freeze to death in a bus shelter and fingers start pointing. They may even be on to something. Although I have never lived in a bus shelter, it seems to me they have quite a bit to offer . . . And company that doesn't visit for too long, especially when you sing the extremely slobbery national anthem of the planet Kratz-Urgob, which you happen to have learned during your previous lifestyle, which happened to involve residing in another solar system. (Slinger, 1996)
While articles such as this one are uncommon, they exemplify the extreme end of a continuum within which homelessness and mental health issues are highly stigmatized and represented as choices. Frighteningly, these framings appear to echo, and are echoed by, statements by various politicians, government officials, social service providers, and stakeholders. In 1996, Premier of Ontario Mike Harris argued that, “In spite of the fact that the shelters are there, the help is there, for whatever reason, they are making a choice to live on the street” (Harper quoted in Mittelstaedt, 1996).

In summation, depicting homeless deaths as the deaths of “Slackers” was a consistent narrative that spanned all of the years reviewed. Reporters regularly depicted the death of “Slackers” as a consequence of individual characteristics (e.g., stupidity, stubbornness, irresponsibility) and the refusal to accept help, making homeless deaths the responsibility of the individual. As was demonstrated in the above quotes, some articles positioned the “real” victims as the family and friends of the person who died. These framings obfuscate the systemic and structural factors that contribute to the death of people experiencing homelessness, even in cases where the journalist goes on to acknowledge homelessness as a structural problem.

3.7.4 The Death of “Lackers”

As Rosenthal expresses, “Lackers” are people experiencing homelessness who are incompetent through no fault of their own, and thus are deserving of sympathy and charity. A significant number of articles that depicted homeless deaths framed these individuals as “Lackers.” While some articles blamed individuals for their (attributed) incompetence (framed as “Slackers”), this section describes articles that offered more sympathetic portrayals, often describing these “helpless” people whose incompetence means that they are at the mercy of circumstance, bad luck, disadvantage, and in some cases physical and mental health problems. In many cases, articles about the death of “Lackers” discussed these individuals very tenderly, and often described the contributions they had made to their community. Some reporters presented these persons as child-like, even going so far as to idealize or glorify them for their innocence or admirable qualities. While a few articles did criticize passersby or “society” for not
helping the person prior to his/her death, more frequently than not reporters endeavored to demonstrate how caring and thoughtful the community of “Lackers” are.

In this section, I argue that many of the articles which focus on the innocence of “Lackers,” emphasizing their “quirky” contributions to a community that loved them despite their incompetence, often function to sentimentalize the pain and social suffering of these persons and obfuscate their community’s complicity in it. Among the limited articles that did describe the country or city’s neglect of these individuals, critiques were characteristically vague, depersonalized, and depolitisized (e.g., “Canadians have become uncaring”). Generally, these failed to name specific governmental policies, funding decisions, societal structures or particular individuals as contributors to the death of these community members. I suggest that such framings allow the journalist to maintain moral superiority and empathic high ground by lamenting these unfair and tragic deaths, without having to critically investigate and explain the causes of homelessness as they relate to macro forces.

3.7.5 Crocodile Tears: Sentimentalizing the Unavoidable Death of “Lackers”

The key characteristic of “Lackers,” as identified by Rosenthal, is their blameless incompetence. There were many articles in the sample that focused on the hapless incompetence of “Lackers” who died, often ranging in tone between frustration and sympathy. A 1996 article reads,

Shelter officials say it’s important to recognize the value of personal management skills, and how disadvantaged people who lack them really are. “Some of the homeless are former welfare cases who are told that their welfare is ending, and that they should apply for a pension. But they never apply. All of a sudden the money just stops and they don’t know what happened,” says Hunter. (Cheney & Welsh, 1996)

A 2009 article similarly quotes a social service worker as saying, “This group doesn’t have the capacity to seek help, so we [need] to redesign the system to take care of them. Some might need to be certified under the Mental Health Act and forced into treatment” (Bellett, 2009). Various stakeholders, politicians, and community members were quoted as expressing similar sentiments in articles throughout the sample, often framing the “Lacker” as being vulnerable and incompetent because of personality quirks, family dysfunction, mental illness, bad luck, and (sometimes) substance abuse. Incompetence
that resulted in helplessness was frequently framed as the causal determinant of death for many “Lackers.”

Throughout the sample, the incompetence, passivity, and vulnerability with which “Lackers” was characterized were demonstrated in reporters’ repetition of particular language and metaphors. For example, the phrase “fell through the cracks” is a particularly interesting one, and is repeated again and again over many decades. Such phrasing does not blame the person, but positions him/her as passive in relation to unspecified systems and forces. More broadly, this phrasing suggests that “cracks” are an anomaly in an otherwise seamless support system. Deaths like these, it seems, “just happen.” Although insidious, there are numerous other linguistic turns that reporters used to the same effect. For example, reporters recount that Brian Boyd’s life “took a bad turn” before his death (Cotroneo, 2002) and Alvin Elif Constant “ended up a victim of the streets himself” (emphasis added) (Williamson, 2006).

The vulnerability of “Lackers” was bolstered further through the use of metaphorical language typically reserved for descriptions of children. For example, a 1992 article explains that Ingrid Autry “climbed into a dumpster and curled up for a night’s sleep” (Greenaway, 1992) a 1986 article described the “curled-up body” of Eugenia Balcombe (Taylor, 1986); and a 1986 articles describes Kenneth Daniel Curries as “curled up near a heating vent” when he died (“Three deaths as the crisis takes its toll,” 1986). Another article describes Bill Hunta’s body as being found in a “nest of sleeping bags and blankets” (Valpy, 1997). A 2013 article describing the death of Pierre “Picolo” Langevin even notes that he died in a chair with his Elmo doll (Wilton, 2013). The description of these individuals as dying in the fetal position in extreme vulnerability creates a heartbreaking and highly sympathetic picture, one that hauntingly echoes depictions of sleeping children in North American media, literature, and children’s books. These depictions are consistent with Rosenthal’s framework in which helplessness is linked with deservingness.

In some cases, this sympathetic portrait was further strengthened by accounts of the individual’s admirable qualities and the positive contribution he or she made to the community. In a 2013 article about the death of a “Mohawk-sporting character [named] ‘Picolo’,” Picolo was described as “a bon vivant who brought life to the street” (Wilton,
Picolo’s friend states that he “knew everyone and he was appreciated . . . he was homeless, but he wasn’t violent or aggressive” (Wilton, 2013). Similarly, an interesting 2011 article about the death of a Toronto man named Tony opens up in the following way:

Tony sat on the Roncesvalles sidewalk for as long as I can remember: Tony, in his folding chair, with his Elmo doll and his handwritten sign, hoping for spare change. He looked, not like a prince of the city, but like the prince's weary uncle. And then he was off the street for a couple of weeks. He'd had an operation. He came back weak and gaunt. He died in his chair on Tuesday afternoon. He died where he lived, doing what he wanted to do, in the company of people he knew. (Fiorito, 2011)

At the curbside memorial created for Tony, one woman tearfully recalls, “He was really sweet. He would always call me dear” (Fiorito, 2011).

Articles of this nature, while undoubtedly giving voice to genuine care and sadness, also paint an idealistic picture of a caring community that treasured these individuals as quirky but lovable members of the community. For example, one article reads, “Despite his numerous tattoos and a Mohawk haircut,” passersby gave Picolo “change and customers bought him lunch or dinner” (Wilton, 2013). Similar to depictions of the death of “Slackers,” the community is depicted as actively supportive, helpful, and kind. While this may have been the case for some members of these communities, research has overwhelming demonstrated that people experiencing homelessness commonly experience public rejection, stigmatization, criminalization, sexual assault, and violence while living homeless (see, e.g., Gaetz, 2004; Novac, Hermer, Paradis, & Kellen, 2009). These negative experiences are rarely discussed in coverage of the death of “Lackers,” and instead reporters choose to present a brighter picture of community interactions. This framing implies the unavoidability of these deaths because the community was caring and dide.g. all it could do, emphasizing that “Lackers” are merely at the mercy of forces beyond the control of well-meaning community members (e.g., histories of abuse, mental health issues, etc.). In this context, demands for changed responses to homelessness at the community level are often overlooked in preference for sentimentalized accounts of these tragic and unavoidable deaths.

Nonetheless, there are a few articles that do critique the role of the community in relation to these deaths. For example, a small number of articles critique passersby for
just walking past the bodies of people who have died. A 1992 article on the public death of a homeless veteran exemplifies this well, opening with the following description:

When Joseph Bulens lay on the concrete next to city hall, no one checked to see if he was breathing or felt for a pulse - not the commuters who passed or the man who read a newspaper on a nearby bench. After all, Bulens was homeless. No one gave him a second glance. He lay there dead for hours - in busy City Hall Plaza . . . "This shows that as long you have a roof over your head, who gives a damn about the other guy," said David Solomon. Solomon was the one person who gave Bulens a second look. (Rogers, 1992)

While such articles were less common, they are worth noting because they frequently involved fears about public apathy among the Canadian public. Such framings often positioned the journalist as morally superior, in part because they rest on the presumption that he or she knows better and would have acted more compassionately. Unlike articles that focus on the community’s kindness, these framings suggest that the general public does need to change their response to homelessness and become more compassionate citizens. However, these articles frequently fail to explain who or what specifically needs to change, or how this change should occur. Among these articles, demands for specific action are rarely articulated.

In general, the narrative arc employed in these articles was that the individual who died was a kind person, who was liked by the community, plagued by obstacles of various kinds, and died tragically as a result of their incompetence which made them vulnerable to bad luck and bad circumstances. These narratives were so powerful that even in cases where there was significant evidence to the contrary, inconsistencies were often softened. For example, an article which describes the freezing death of Alvin Constant, and the multiple weeks it took for the police to find anyone to identify his body, was titled “‘He Lived an Amazing Life’” (Williamson, 2006). While I don’t doubt this is true, it is also true that he undoubtedly experienced enormous pain and died alone, in public, without shelter. Once again, this is passed over in preference for a sunnier picture of what a great person he was and how mourned he was by the community.

### 3.7.6 The Death of “Unwilling Victims”

While a majority of articles about the deaths of people experiencing homelessness framed these individuals as “Slackers” or “Lackers,” there were a considerable number of
articles that made politically-charged, emotional pleas in defense of “Unwilling Victims” who had died. Rather than focusing on the competency or personal characteristics of the individual, these frames commonly depicted homeless deaths as the most extreme manifestation of deprivation caused by government cutbacks, neoliberal policies, systematic discrimination against people experiencing homelessness, and social policies that deepen poverty for those already marginalized. Articles in this theme focused on systems and structures that cause homelessness, rather than on the individual or the community. Unlike many articles describing the deaths of “Slackers” and “Lackers,” these deaths were not presented as inevitable. Demands for political change were frequent in articles within this group.

Among articles that discussed the deaths of “Unwilling Victims,” the causes of death were commonly described as structural in nature. Reporters frequently named governmental policy and funding decisions as the causal agents of these deaths. More specifically, this framework characteristically identified homelessness itself as the cause of death, rather than mental health issues, personality flaws (e.g., stubbornness), moral inferiority, or incompetence. For example, in 1987 Jack Layton writes, “Last month, the building had a death – from homelessness” (Layton, 1987) which he attributes to government negligence and indifference. Similarly, Michael Shapcott’s 1991 article on the death of John Dean (aka “Custer”) explicitly links his death to Brian Mulroney’s “obscene record on poverty issues.” Shapcott argues, “Housing funding has been decimated, welfare payments capped, unemployment insurance cut back - and the list goes on” (Shapcott, 1991). Likewise, in response to the downloading of social services from the provincial to the municipal governments in 1997, Jack Layton is quoted as saying, “We’ll see more deaths on the street” (Abbate, 1997). Such framings differ drastically from articles that described the deaths of “Slackers” or “Lackers” in the sample.

In contrast to Layton’s and Shapcott’s pieces, reporters rarely named specific policies as the cause of specific deaths. Instead, articles of this kind generally argued that the death of “Unwilling Victims” was the result of a collection of governmental policies, funding choices, economic systems, societal structures, and laws. It was rare, however, for reporters or their sources to explain how this causation occurred, step by step.
Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions. One such example is Michael Valpy’s article on the 1997 death of Bill Hunta, who regularly relied on the overburdened Dixon Hall in Toronto for shelter. Valpy explicitly connects Mr. Hunta’s death to conservative cutbacks in the following way:

> Five years ago, Dixon Hall worked out a redevelopment plan for the site. There would be a shelter, family accommodation and simple single self-contained units for the men and women who could be rehabilitated. The plan had municipal support and was two or three weeks away from final provincial approval (and about $5-million in funding). Then the Harris Conservatives were elected. One of the Conservatives’ first acts was to freeze all assisted housing projects. Who is to say what turn Bill Hunta's life might have taken if the Dixon Hall redevelopment had been approved? Who is to say how many more will die on the streets because it was turned down? (Valpy, 1997)

Such explanations are exceedingly rare across the subset. The absence of such clear explanations are important because it means that the general public has had limited opportunities to understand exactly how policies are translated into local conditions that impact individuals experiencing homelessness. In the absence of such clear accounts, I would suggest that while the Canadian public may have been exposed to framings of homelessness as a structural problem, they were rarely provided examples of *how* structures and policies concretely cause homelessness, poverty, and disadvantage in the lives of Canadians. Articles that endeavor to trace the pathways and connections between the macro and the micro, rather than simply state that there is a connection, are distinctly absent across all years in the entire sample.

Similarly, while many articles in this subset passionately framed homeless deaths as the result of structural causes, these articles rarely framed these deaths in terms of justice – a value that is often mobilized in discursive struggles over social problems of various kinds (Best, 2013). For example, only one article on homeless deaths uses the word “justice” -- an article by Michael Shapcott in 1991. Shapcott’s discussion of Custer’s death is worth quoting at length here:

> The violence of murder wasn't the only violence in his life. The desperation of poverty had cut deep marks in Custer. It's hard to determine which is the worse violence - murder is relatively swift and sharp, but poverty is measured in years of painful suffering, in hunger, cold, ill health, and isolation. I hope that the person or persons who beat Custer to death are brought to trial and receive the proper punishment for their crime. But that won't provide justice for all the violence in the last years of Custer's life. Reflecting on the life and death of Custer, I wonder
what is the greater crime - the violence of murder or the violence of poverty. Consider the entirely different response to each: Murder brings an immediate call for justice, but homelessness usually only prompts a condescending form of charity. In our society, we call Custer’s murder a crime and we demand that the perpetrators be brought to justice. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars on police, courts, and jails - all in the name of justice. Yet homelessness is considered an accident, and we usually blame poor people for their poverty.

The absence of discussions of justice in relation to homeless deaths reveals how rarely Canadians were encouraged to think about this social problem as a miscarriage of justice.

3.7.7 The Role of Housing in Homeless Deaths: Shifts in Media Frames

Looking beyond Rosenthal’s framework, there are several additional themes that emerged in analysis of newspaper coverage. Perhaps most interesting of these is that up until the mid-1990s, many of these deaths were explicitly linked to housing, housing affordability, and/or housing availability. Articles during this period, even if they portrayed the individual as a “Slacker” or a “Lacker,” at the very least mentioned housing affordability or a housing crisis as related to homelessness. More housing and better housing was a solution proposed much more frequently before 2000 than in coverage after 2000 within this theme. By contrast, coverage of homeless deaths from about 2000 onwards tended to focus on depicting the character and life history of the person who died, and/or on the descriptive details of the death. The few articles that did discuss the structural causes and potential solutions to homeless deaths tended to focus on the role of emergency and shelter services. Once again, this focus was largely consistent regardless of whether the homeless person was presented as a “Slacker,” “Lacker,” or “Unwilling Victim.” While a few vocal activists were able to make the connection between deaths and housing post-2000, overwhelmingly the focus was on narrating the life and death of the individual.

Even among the very first newspaper reports on homeless deaths, the housing crisis and housing affordability were depicted as the cause of death and/or the solution to preventing future deaths. Interestingly, coverage indicated that this was a position taken up by a range of actors spanning the political spectrum, including politicians, activists, reporters, social service workers, and everyday citizens. One of the earliest articles on homeless deaths opens with,
The housing crisis is reaching deadly proportions. “Do we have people dying in the road, because the hostels we have are not places they want to live in?” asks Ontario Housing Minister Alvin Curling. The frightening answer, he says, is, “Yes.” (“3 Deaths,” 1986)

Similarly, with respect to a homeless death on government property, Jack Layton asks, “Why are there mothballed homes downtown when there is a housing crisis?” (Layton, 1987). Likewise, in response to Leigh Scheifele’s death in 1987, Toronto city councilor Roger Hollander stated that governments should, “‘start dealing with the real issue of homelessness’ by pulling out all stops to create more housing” (Monsebraaten, 1987). This focus on housing as a response to homeless deaths continued into the 1990s. In 1996, during a coroner’s inquest into three homeless deaths, the Toronto jury named housing as a key cause of death. This decision was reached in defiance of coroner Murray Naiberg, who insisted that “their altered mental states or mental illness were the reasons they died” (Gadd, 1996).

By contrast, many articles on homeless deaths post 2000 do not mention housing, the structural causes of homelessness, or solutions to homelessness at all. Among those that do, the focus tends to be on the inadequacy of emergency services, such as the need to increase the number of shelter beds available. More commonly the immediate circumstances surrounding the death are discussed (e.g., where, what time, who found the person, what the police did, etc.) and, in longer articles, portraits of the individual are offered (e.g., blue eyes, kind heart, etc.), in particular his/her mental health. Broadly, this pre/post-2000 split may indicate a cultural shift towards viewing homelessness as a normal or accepted feature of Canadian society (see also Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012). Unfortunately, this shift in framing may both reflect and contribute to the dominant approach of managing homelessness, rather than ending it (Gaetz, 2010).

While Rosenthal argued that frames which emphasize the structural causes of homelessness are frequently aligned with demands for sympathy and aid for all people experiencing homelessness, this was not entirely the case in Canadian newspapers’ representation of homeless deaths. As seen above, there were several instances in which reporters claimed that homelessness is a structural issue, but then blamed individuals for their homelessness or death, thus ameliorating the community or country’s responsibility or role in the death. Indeed, a significant portion of the articles in this theme portrayed the
person’s community or city as caring or kind, and the person who died was sometimes represented as victimizing members of his/her community in various ways (e.g., refusing help). If nothing else, these framings may help assuage guilt about these deaths. In so doing, they may reduce pressure and responsibility on the public and the government to make the societal changes necessary to ensure all people are properly housed. In effect, these articles may perversely function as a source of relief for a public that has been panicked about this new social issue, insofar as many articles function to relieve the community, city, or country of responsibility.

3.7.8 Discussion

This section has argued that Rosenthal’s (2000) framework of “Slackers, Lackers, and Unwilling Victims” can provide insight into how Canadian reporters have framed the deaths of people experiencing homelessness. My findings suggest that a majority of Canadian reporters have framed these individuals as “Slackers” or “Lackers.” Interestingly, while reporters were deeply critical of “Slackers” and particularly sympathetic towards “Lackers,” the deaths of both groups were often represented as inevitable. In particular, reporters often framed the communities, friends, and families of these individuals as caring people who had gone to great efforts to prevent their deaths. In the case of “Slackers,” these communities were even represented as the victims of these individuals, often caused by their “stubborn” refusal to accept help. While reporters who discussed the deaths of “Unwilling Victims” established links between these deaths and the structural causes, these articles were woefully underrepresented in the sample. Further, it was also evident that while early coverage of homeless deaths often referenced housing issues, beginning in the 2000s reporters primarily framed these deaths in relation to emergency services and supports. Unfortunately, these findings suggest that the Canadian public has had limited exposure to newsprint media that makes connections between homeless deaths and structural causes and solutions to homelessness.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored many of the key topics, claims, and narratives used by Canadian reporters to construct the social problem of “homelessness” between 1980 and
2013 in six Canadian newspapers. As the first national study to date that has traced the use of the term “homelessness” back to its first usage in Canadian newsprint media, this research identified some of the ways in which the framing of homelessness has shifted over time. It is evident that early journalistic coverage of this issue often employed various claims and warrants that constructed the “new homeless” as a distinct, sympathetic group who suffered from a new social problem (see Hock & Slayton, 1989; Wright et al., 1998, for similar findings). This was often accomplished through disaggregating the “new homeless” from the “old homeless,” often assigning moral superiority to the former group. While early newspaper reporting on this issue positioned the “new homeless” as sympathetic and deserving of aid, it was observed that as time went on, reporters increasingly began to re-inscribe the deserving/underserving framework in their depictions of the “new homeless,” most evidently based on appearance (e.g., cleanliness), self-presentation (e.g., ashamed, deferential), and class background. Particularly unique to this study was the finding that (attributed) class background, often assumed based on appearance, significantly structured how reporters presented the causes of individuals’ homelessness and deservingness of sympathy. These findings suggest that class analysis, which has been surprisingly absent in media analyses of homelessness (Illouz, 1994), may be important for understanding reporters’ framing choices concerning this social problem.

In addition, this chapter has traced the quantity of newspaper coverage “homelessness” has received during these years, revealing that journalistic concern over this issue occurred in two peaks: between 1997 and 2001, and between 2005 and 2009. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, these two peaks correspond with substantial advocacy campaigns and policy changes in Canada. The first peak parallels a range of events, including the declaration of homelessness as a “national disaster” in 1998 and the federal government’s establishment of the National Homelessness Initiative in 1999. The second peak corresponds with a new wave of advocacy (much of it originating in Alberta) and federal interest in “ending homelessness” through Housing First and 10-year plans, related in part to the perceived successes of the national At Home/Chez Soi study (see Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013). Most pointedly, these observed peaks in media coverage of homelessness were the result of increased coverage of homelessness advocacy.
specifically, which, in the case of the first peak, was followed by federal and municipal government action. While these correlations are explored in more detail in Chapter 5, the quantitative findings of this part of the study suggest that intense media coverage of advocacy may be linked to governmental action on social problems. While causation cannot be attributed to this relationship, these findings provide some quantitative support for Gary Blasi’s (1994) contention that media coverage may be particularly important for the efficacy of social movements focused on homelessness.

More broadly, these findings suggest that the public was often exposed to the claims of advocates over the course of the history of this social problem. Given advocates’ focus on establishing homelessness as a structural problem, rather than a function of individual pathology, such coverage may have disrupted and/or challenged the individualizing and moralizing narratives of reporters. As such, the public was undoubtedly exposed to a range of claims, some of which positioned the Canadian government as primarily responsible for causing and addressing homelessness. If McCombs (2013) and others are right in suggesting that agenda-setting is the primary function of the media, the extent of this coverage of homelessness advocacy is significant because it likely participated in shaping public understandings of this issue, and thus indirectly the agendas of political representatives.

Unfortunately, however, this research found limited coverage on how the public might engage politically with the issue of homelessness (see Shields, 2001, for similar findings). This parallels several interview participants’ contention that advocates and civil society have done a poor job of providing the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary to facilitate greater advocacy engagement for Canadians on this issue (see Chapter 4). Given that most efforts to address homelessness in Canada have been directed at charitable and emergency responses (Gaetz, 2010), the public (including people experiencing homelessness) would likely have benefited from media coverage on strategies they could use to address the structural causes of homelessness.

Perhaps most importantly, this study demonstrated that newspapers extensively covered the Canadian governments’ efforts to address homelessness, particularly during the first peak of media coverage (1997 – 2001). Indeed, analysis suggests that newspapers frequently published articles on government press releases that re-announced
the same funding and projects *multiple times*. While it later became evident that many of the housing commitments made by the federal government in the early 2000s had failed to materialize (Layton, 2008), by that time media interest in the issue had steeply declined. Even when reporters did cover government cuts, they often described them in more passive terms (e.g., funding had “run out” or “expired”). While it was outside of the scope of this research to assess the cumulative impact of this on Canadians’ understandings of the issue, these findings suggest that the average Canadian reader might have the impression that the Canadian government has gone to extensive efforts to address homelessness. It is perhaps for this reason that public polls in recent years have increasingly revealed that many Canadians blame people for their homelessness (Norris, 2008).

Nonetheless, it is evident that, through a variety of claimsmaking effort, reporters importantly participated in establishing “homelessness” as a *social* problem in the 1980s, distinct from the *personal* problems of “hobos,” “winos,” and “tramps.” The drama and urgency early reporters were able to associate with the problem undoubtedly helped this issue compete in the social problem marketplace (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998). However, these constructions have had detrimental effects as well. For example, while the warrant “anyone can become homeless” was rhetorically persuasive, it “undermined the more relevant argument that deindustrialization, gentrification, and other social changes primarily impacted working-class and poor people” (Wagner & Barton Gilman, 2012, p. 74). This failure of reporters to connect homelessness to poverty and class was also evident quantitatively, with only 1.1% of the sample focusing on issues of employment and welfare (the second least discussed topic within the years sampled) (see Richter et al., 2011, for similar findings). By failing to making these connections, Canadian reporters missed the opportunity to connect homelessness to broader issues of systemic racism, patriarchy, and other inequalities. While it may have been rhetorically useful to separate out this issue, it prevented reporters from offering intersectional understandings of homelessness to Canadian readers. Perhaps most specifically, the absence of media discussions of indigenous homelessness was a missed opportunity to assist the public in understanding the connections between colonialism and homelessness.
While media analysis of social problem claimsmaking can undoubtedly assist in understanding how a social problem has been framed, it necessarily cannot explain why claimsmakers employ the frames they do. Given that the media often alters the claims it presents (Best, 2013), media may also be a limited source of information about the original claims made by key actors such as experts, government officials, and activists. Given the importance of advocacy to the development of this social problem in Canada, the next chapter turns to Canadian advocates understandings of their participation in the trajectory of this problem we call “homelessness.”

3.8.1 Limitations

This chapter has several limitations, most of which relate to quantifying and categorizing data that is inherently polysemic and has many intersecting (and sometimes contradictory) themes and topics. While each newspaper article was assigned to one mutually exclusive topic, articles often touched on more than one topic, and the content of these topics sometimes blended together. While I have attempted to qualitatively tease out some of the ways in which these topics have intersected, this chapter’s allocation of articles to single topics necessarily involved a simplification of the data under study here. In particular, the binary nature of the topics prevented quantitatively capturing interpenetrating themes or the co-occurrence of those themes in newspaper articles, thus flattening the richness of articles to some extent.

Binary quantification also did not capture the clustering of themes in ways that discourse analysis or interpretive textual analysis can. For example, during the 2000s in Vancouver, BC, there were many articles that blended discussions of addiction, sex work, crime, poverty, and homelessness. Because these articles were not focused on homelessness, they were not included in the dataset. However, if these articles had been included, the connection between crime, homelessness, and substance use, for example, might have been more evident than the current dataset suggests. Future studies may want to broaden analysis to include articles not directly focused on homelessness, assign articles to more than one topic, and/or develop topics that capture two or more themes simultaneously. The enormity of the dataset in this study precluded such strategies.

Similarly, this study did not analyze newspaper articles in relation to which city the
newspaper was based in. It is unclear whether this would have been a useful source of data, particularly given that two of the sampled newspapers were national and all newspapers reprinted articles from each other and from American newspapers. Secondly, analysis of this kind would not necessarily indicate that a particular province or city was more likely to frame homelessness in a particular way, or provide more coverage on specific topics. Analysis indicated that coverage of a particular topic (e.g., NIMBY attitudes) was often related to a number of contextual or local factors (e.g., a new shelter being built, preparing to host the Olympics) rather than an inherent regional interest in the topic. Nonetheless, future studies that analyze shorter periods of time might consider regional differences in newspapers’ representations of homelessness in relation to key events and concerns occurring in each locale.

Images and artwork that accompanied newspaper articles were also not analyzed, but have been found to play an important role in the construction of homelessness (e.g., Remillard & Schneider, 2010). A majority of the newspapers analyzed did not keep a database of their images publicly available, particularly in the early years during which homelessness emerged. The importance of visual imagery in establishing homelessness as an urgent social problem suggests these texts would have made a valuable addition to the dataset and should be included in future studies, if possible. Similarly, future studies may want to use additional search terms beyond “homelessness” in order to capture articles that might have been excluded in this study. While this study’s focus was the development of “homelessness” as a unique phenomenon and social problem, utilizing search terms such as “vagrant” or “the homeless” may have acquired articles whose content have implications for understanding the development of this social problem.
Chapter 4: Advocates’ Perspectives on the History of Homelessness and Homelessness Advocacy in Canada, 1980-2013

4.1 Introduction

Advocates carry unique knowledge and understandings of the processes and mechanisms by which social change occurs. With respect to the rise and fall of social problems, advocates often have particular access to the processes by which various actors attempt to grapple with and alter the “career” or historical trajectory of a social problem. Canadian homelessness advocates have unique knowledge of how “homelessness,” as a social problem in Canada, has been impacted by the efforts of many actors attempting to name, define, frame, and address this national problem. In order to develop a more robust assessment of this historical process, this chapter will explore advocates’ perspectives on the history of homelessness and the history of homelessness advocacy in Canada.

Analyzing 31 in-depth interviews with 21 different homelessness advocates, this chapter explores advocates’ perspectives on a range of key issues relevant to understanding the past, present, and future of homelessness in Canada.

The chapter begins with a brief review of the methods, followed by analysis of 8 key themes that emerged in interviews with homelessness advocates (see Table 4.1). Although this chapter is quite lengthy, each theme is presented in such a way that it can be read separately or in conjunction with the others. Following discussion of these key themes, I offer an analysis of how to make sense of advocates’ divergent views of this social problem.
Table 4.1. Key Themes in Interviews with Homelessness Advocates

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Assessing the findings of this chapter, I argue that two “waves” of advocacy have developed over the history of homelessness advocacy in Ontario specifically, and possibly in other parts of Canada. My findings suggest that homelessness advocates can be roughly clustered into “first wave” and “second wave” advocates based on their distinct (1) professions and socio-economic status, (2) theories of social change, and (3) tactical preferences. I argue that because of these differences, each wave has had contrasting experiences of: (1) the barriers and disincentives to advocacy, and (2) local and structural changes to policy, programming, and funding that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s in Canada. While participants often attributed divisions over tactics to contrasting political ideologies, this research suggests that these divisions have also been structurally produced through advocates’ divergent class-based experiences of the constraints on advocacy in a shifting political landscape. More specifically, this research suggests that many of the barriers and disincentives to advocacy have increasingly and disproportionately affected first wave advocates.

While findings within this chapter often refer to “Canadian homelessness advocacy” or “homelessness advocacy” broadly, it is essential to note that a majority of interview participants were Ontario and Toronto-based. While many of these advocates have been engaged in national advocacy efforts for decades, there are notable city-based and region-based particularities that are unlikely to correspond with the vibrant advocacy efforts taking place in other parts of Canada. As such, caution should be used when
extrapolating these findings to apply to all of Canada. Further research is needed to develop a more robust national picture of homelessness advocacy across Canada.

4.2 Methods

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 homelessness advocates between October 2015 and February 2016 in order to better understand: (1) advocates’ perspectives on the history of homelessness as a social problem in Canada, (2) advocates’ assessment of the role of advocacy in the history of homelessness as a social problem in Canada, (3) advocates’ perspectives on effective advocacy tactics and approaches, and (4) the future of “homelessness” in Canada and the future of homelessness advocacy.

4.2.1 Sample and Recruitment

Potential participants were identified through a review of media coverage of homelessness, key events and documents in the history of homelessness, and various governmental and non-governmental sources and documents related to homelessness (e.g., reports, newsletters, debates, etc.). Potential participants were also identified through consultation with several experts in the field, as well as through snowball sampling during which participants identified advocates they felt had extensive experience in advocacy. Once identified, all potential participants were invited to take part in an interview, in person or by phone, at a time and location of their choosing. All invited advocates agreed to participate in an interview, with the exception of one advocate who did not respond to the request and one advocate who agreed to be interviewed but was subsequently inaccessible.

The study’s sampling method was guided by two goals: (1) to interview advocates who were crucial to the development of homelessness advocacy since the 1980s, and (2) to capture the diversity of advocates engaged in homelessness advocacy since the 1980s. With regards to the latter goal, particular emphasis was placed on including advocates from different professions, who were engaged in advocacy on different sub-issues (e.g., women and homelessness, rural homelessness), who played different roles in advocacy, and who held diverse political positions and/or views on homelessness. In addition,
specific attention was paid to recruiting advocates who had lived experiences of homelessness. Given the historical nature of the study, preference was given to advocates who had been engaged in homelessness advocacy for 10 or more years.

Upon being invited to participate in the study, all participants were provided with an Interview Guide (Appendix A), along with three supplementary materials: an abbreviated timeline of key events in the history of homelessness (Appendix B), a graph depicting media coverage of homelessness between 1980 and 2013 (Appendix C), and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness’ Definition of Homelessness (2014) (Appendix D). These materials were provided in order to present my preliminary findings to participants in order to foster dialogue and critique, as well as remind participants of some important events, policies, and documents in the history of this social problem.

4.2.2 Participants

A total of 31 interviews were conducted with 21 participants, most ranging in length between one and three hours. Participants ranged considerably in their professions and relationships with the homelessness movement. Professions included: staff and executives at NGOs, professors, researchers, community organizers, front-line workers, religious leaders, social service agency staff and executives, health care providers, staff and leaders at advocacy organizations, and government officials.¹ Participants often occupied more than two of these professions throughout their career, often simultaneously. Table 4.2 lists each of these participants and a brief description of their profession and advocacy work. A majority of participants were active in advocacy at the time of data collection (90%, n=19).

¹ It should be noted that two members of my PhD dissertation committee were included in the sample: David Hulchanski and Steve Gaetz. While it is perhaps unusual to have committee members within one’s doctoral study, in this case to do otherwise would be to miss valuable data from two of Canada’s top scholars and advocates in the field of homelessness. Both Gaetz and Hulchanski are international leaders in their fields of expertise and have been active on issues of homelessness for decades. Were they not on my dissertation committee, I would have made every effort to include them in this study. It is for this reason that I chose to include them, though it may be somewhat unconventional. Every effort was made by all parties to set aside any potential bias their inclusion in the study might have created.
### Table 4.2. Interview Participants’ Professions & Areas of Expertise

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Profession &amp; Area of Expertise</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Abramovich</td>
<td>Alex Abramovich, PhD, has been addressing the issue of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and 2-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) youth homelessness for 10 years. Alex is an internationally recognized leader in the area of LGBTQ2S youth homelessness and is one of few Canadian researchers studying the phenomenon of queer and trans youth homelessness. Alex is a researcher at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), where he is currently investigating LGBTQ2S youth homelessness and access to mental health services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Andras</td>
<td>John Andras is Executive Vice-President of the Andras Group and Director of Mackie Research Capital Corporation, an independent Canadian investment bank. John has been active on issues of poverty and homelessness for over 20 years. He co-founded the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee and serves as Chair for SKETCH, an art studio for youth experiencing homelessness. In 1993 he co-founded Project Warmth, which for over seven years collected 150,000 sleeping bags for people experiencing homelessness.</td>
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<td>Matthew Behrens</td>
<td>Matthew Behrens is a writer and community organizer with a lengthy history working with a diverse range of communities. He focuses on the use of nonviolent direct action as a means of transforming individual and institutional violence. He has been a long-time organizer in numerous advocacy organizations addressing homelessness and poverty, including the Toronto Action for Social Change, the Multifaith Alliance to End Homelessness, and many others.</td>
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<td>Bonnie Briggs</td>
<td>Bonnie Briggs has been a Toronto-based homelessness advocate for over three decades with lived experiences of homelessness herself. In 1996 she created The Homeless Memorial, a public memorial and website which lists the names of people who have died while experiencing homelessness since 1985 in Toronto. She was a steering board member of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, and is currently an Ambassador for Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, as well as a poet and writer. She is active on issues of poverty and homelessness with numerous Toronto-based organizations.</td>
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<td>Brian Burch</td>
<td>Brian Burch has been active in peace, co-operative housing, and social justice struggles since the time of the Vietnam War. Much of his focus in recent years has been in co-operative and non-profit housing, seeing housing as one way of addressing the violence of poverty and marginalization – essential in the long-term work of building a peaceful world. He is currently the Executive Director of CoAction Staff Association and a past Ontario Regional Director on the Co-op Housing Federation of Canada. He has served as President of St. Clare’s Multifaith Housing Society since 1999.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Clarke</td>
<td>John Clarke has been an anti-poverty activist and organizer in Ontario for almost four decades. He became involved in the anti-poverty movement in the 1980s in London, ON, when he helped form London’s Union of Unemployed Workers. Since 1990, he has been a key organizer in the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. He has published extensively on the issues of poverty, homelessness, austerity, and capitalism.</td>
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<td>Cathy Crowe</td>
<td>Cathy Crowe is a street nurse and longtime social justice activist. Cathy has founded numerous coalition and advocacy groups including the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, which declared homelessness a national disaster in Canada. She is the author of “Dying for a Home: Homeless Activists Speak Out” and Executive Producer of the Home Safe film series. She has received numerous grants, awards, and honorary doctorates for her advocacy work, and is currently a Distinguished Visiting Practitioner at Ryerson University.</td>
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<td>Nick Falvo</td>
<td>Nick Falvo, PhD, is Director of Research and Data at the Calgary Homeless Foundation. His area of research is social policy, with a focus on poverty, housing, homelessness, and social assistance. Nick has a PhD in public policy from Carleton University, where he developed and taught one of Canada’s only university-level courses on affordable housing and homelessness. Nick also spent 10 years as a front-line worker with people experiencing homelessness.</td>
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<td>Stephen Gaetz</td>
<td>Stephen Gaetz, PhD, is a professor in the Faculty of Education at York University and the Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Homeless Hub. He is also the President of Raising the Roof, a leading Canadian charity that focuses on long term solutions to homelessness. He is an internationally recognized leader on mobilizing homelessness research and is committed to a research agenda that foregrounds social justice. Previous to his work in advocacy, Stephen spent many years working in frontline social service agencies serving people experiencing homelessness across Toronto. In 2016 he received the Order of Canada for his research and advocacy work.</td>
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<td>Beric German</td>
<td>Beric German has been anti-poverty activist in Downtown East Toronto for almost four decades, working at Street Health for 22 years as an advocate and health promoter. Beric has collaborated to bring many innovative and progressive services to the community including: the expansion of needle exchange programs, the opening of drop-in centers and Out of the Cold programs, improvements to programs for clients with tuberculosis, and the establishment of affordable housing and rent subsidies for single adults. Beric founded several committees and coalitions, including the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, which worked to secure housing for residents of Toronto’s Tent City and successfully lobbied to have homelessness declared a national disaster.</td>
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<td>Anne Golden</td>
<td>Anne Golden, PhD, has gained national recognition for her role in the public policy arena, including for her 1999 report, Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto. She was the President and Chief Executive Officer of The Conference Board of Canada from 2001 to 2012. Previous to that, Dr. Golden served as President of the United Way of Greater Toronto for 14 years. Dr. Golden was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 2003.</td>
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<td>Penny Goldsmith</td>
<td>Penny Goldsmith recently retired as Executive Coordinator of PovNet in Vancouver, BC. PovNet provides online tools that facilitate communication, community, and access to information about poverty-related issues in Canada. Penny has worked in the anti-poverty community for over thirty years and has been with PovNet since its founding in 1997. Penny also owns a small publishing house, Lazara Press, and has recently published a graphic novel on Povnet.</td>
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<td>Josephine Grey</td>
<td>Josephine Grey is a Toronto-based human rights activist and has been involved in the struggle for social and economic justice for more than 30 years. She co-founded Low-Income Families Together (LIFT) in 1986, a resource centre run by and for low-income people. She authored the Ontario People’s Report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1998, and has served as International Secretariat for Canada Without Poverty. She is active within numerous organizations on issues of poverty, homelessness, and violence against women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tanya Gulliver-Garcia</td>
<td>Tanya Gulliver-Garcia is a Canadian ex-pat living in New Orleans, Louisiana. She has been actively involved in the anti-poverty arena for about 35 years, internationally, nationally, provincially, and locally. She began focusing on homelessness in 1996 and her work has included front-line and management positions, as well as advocacy work to improve conditions in shelters, build affordable housing, and address the intersections of climate impacts and homelessness. She has held leading positions in research at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Raising the Roof, and multiple other organizations, and is currently completing a PhD at York University.</td>
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<td>Kathy Hardill</td>
<td>Kathy Hardill has been a Registered Nurse since 1987 and a Primary Care Nurse Practitioner since 1996. Over the past 25 years, she has worked almost exclusively with people whose health is made vulnerable by poverty and poor access to the other social determinants of health, much of that time as a street nurse. She is currently the Clinical Director of the VON 360 Degree Nurse Practitioner Led Clinic in Peterborough, Ontario, which serves people living on low incomes. She has worked with numerous advocacy organizations addressing the intersection of health and homelessness over the past three decades.</td>
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<td>Gaetan Heroux</td>
<td>Gaetan Heroux is a long time anti-poverty activist with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and has worked in Downtown East Toronto for more than twenty-five years. He is also a co-author, with Bryan D. Palmer, of <em>Toronto’s Poor: A Rebellious History</em>, which will be coming out in the fall of 2016.</td>
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<td>Maggie Helwig</td>
<td>Reverend Maggie Helwig, priest-in-charge and rector of Saint Stephen-in-the-Fields in downtown Toronto, has been a human rights activist for over four decades. Deeply involved in activist groups that campaigned against the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, as well as Toronto’s Occupy movement, Maggie has been active on issues of homelessness for many years within Toronto and beyond. She currently chairs the diocesan Social Justice and Advocacy Committee and has published twelve books of poetry, essays, and fiction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Hulchanski</td>
<td>David Hulchanski, PhD, is a professor of housing and community development at the University of Toronto’s Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, and since 1997 has held the Dr. Chow Yei Ching Chair in Housing. He served as the Director of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies at the University of Toronto from 2000 to 2008. Professor Hulchanski’s research and teaching is focused on housing need, homelessness, neighbourhoods, community development, and social and economic rights. He was a co-founder of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee in 1998, and has been an active homelessness advocate for over three decades.</td>
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<td>Tim Richter</td>
<td>Tim Richter is the President and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) and Vice Chair of the CAEH Board of Directors. Prior to joining the CAEH, Tim was President and CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF), charged with leading the implementation of Calgary’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness – the first plan of its kind in Canada. Prior to joining the CHF, Tim was Director of Government Relations at TransAlta Corporation. He has also worked as a political staffer in Ottawa and served seven years in the Canadian Forces Army Reserve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob Rose</td>
<td>Bob Rose is a senior manager at PARC (Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre), a community-based organization that works with members on issues of poverty and mental health. Trained in psychosocial rehabilitation at Boston University, Bob became a member of the first case management program in Ontario. A long-time advocate in numerous organizations, including the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, his work has involved supporting and advocating with psychiatric survivors.</td>
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<td>Michael Shapcott</td>
<td>Michael Shapcott has been active on issues of housing and homelessness for almost forty years, and has worked on housing and homelessness initiatives at all levels of government, including internationally. He is Director of the Affordable Housing and Social Innovation at the Wellesley Institute, where his work focuses on the relationships between health, poverty, and housing. He was previously Executive Director of the Community/University Research Partnerships (CURP) program at University of Toronto’s Centre for Urban and Community Studies. Michael is a founding member of the National Housing and Homelessness Network, the Toronto Disaster</td>
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A total of 21 advocates were interviewed, including 12 men, 7 women, and 1 trans-identified advocate. In general, participants had been involved in homelessness advocacy for more than 20 years, several of whom had been active for almost 40 years. All participants had more than 10 years of experience in advocacy. While data on the socio-economic status of participants was not quantitatively collected, most participants self-identified their class status and analysis indicated that the sample ranged considerably with respect to socio-economic status. Most participants’ advocacy has been Ontario-based (86%, n=17), with the majority of these engaged primarily in Toronto-based advocacy. The remaining advocates were based in Calgary, AB, or Vancouver, BC. Though the sample is Toronto-centric, it should be noted that many participants were (and are) engaged in national advocacy efforts, many of them working with national organizations and/or traveling extensively to engage in advocacy. Nonetheless, caution should be employed when generalizing these findings to advocacy in the rest of Canada.

4.2.3 Ethics and Consent Process

Prior to being interviewed, advocates were asked to complete a Consent Form (Appendix E) to ensure free and informed consent. Consistent with the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board’s standards, the consent form specified the focus of the study, the nature of free and voluntary consent, expectations of confidentiality, risks and benefits of the study, and contact information for the author and the author’s supervisor should the participant have further questions or concerns. All participants were asked for consent to have their full names used in the final dissertation and all agreed, with the exception of one participant whose confidentiality is protected with a pseudonym throughout the study. All participants were provided with a physical and/or electronic copy of the consent form. Given that participants were professional experts in their field, an application for an ethics protocol review was not submitted to the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board.
4.2.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with homelessness advocates in Canada. Interviews were conducted in a range of locations based on the participants’ preference, including professional offices, neighbourhood parks, coffee shops, and social service locations. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. In some cases, a second, third, or fourth interview was conducted in order to elicit further information or seek clarification. Points of clarification were also addressed through email communication with participants, and the author stayed in regular contact with many of the participants.

The use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews was chosen because it provides opportunity for substantial probing and elicits rich data on social processes and the meanings actors attribute to them. An interview guide (Appendix A) was developed based on a review of the literature, consultation with experts in the field, and findings discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. Areas explored included: key events in the history of homelessness; framing homelessness; advocacy tactics; definitions of homelessness; movement “successes” and “failures”; the future of homelessness; causes of, and solutions to, homelessness; the state of homelessness advocacy presently; challenges advocates face; public perceptions of homelessness; media coverage of homelessness; and guidance for future advocates. The interview guide was reviewed, expanded, and refined numerous times in consultation with Dr. David Hulchanski. As interviews proceeded, the interview guide was altered further in order to capture emergent themes and issues that were unanticipated, consistent with a grounded theory approach. Further, the interview guide was somewhat personalized for each participant in order to capture data on individual participants’ areas of expertise (e.g., government lobbying, healthcare, housing, etc.).

4.2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by a grounded theory approach to analyzing advocates’ perspectives and the meanings they attributed to their advocacy work. Grounded theory was used given the relative paucity of research in this area and because of its inductive quality. Given this study’s focus on claimsmaking, methodologically this involved
examining the style, rhetoric, form, and context in participants’ narratives. Open coding was used to initially identify themes in the data, and a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized to group similar concepts together. Axial coding was then employed to detect connections between initial codes, combine and refine codes, and identify causal connections and associations between codes. Coding was performed line-by-line, and the core codes and relationships between codes were further refined through selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During axial and selective coding, 22 initial codes were collapsed into 8 core codes, each of which is analyzed in its own section (Sections 4.4 – 4.11).

4.3 The System Isn’t Broken, It was Built This Way: Advocates’ Perspectives on the Causes of Homelessness

The political and economic causes of modern mass homelessness were a frequent theme in many advocates’ interviews. Although this topic was not included in the interview guide, it was evident that many participants viewed their advocacy tactics as deeply entwined with their analysis of the causes of homelessness. Advocates often extrapolated on this theme in order to explain the reasons for their approach to advocacy, their proposed solutions to homelessness, and their perspectives on what was needed to achieve social change. This section will explore similarities and differences between advocates’ perspectives on the causes of mass homelessness in Canada, revealing that advocates generally agreed that mass homelessness in Canada was caused by a series of policy and funding choices, particularly during the 1990s, which negatively impacted people in poverty. Importantly, however, advocates disagreed as to the whether Canadian homelessness is the unintentional consequence of unjust systems operating normally, or whether homelessness is the consequence of intentional policy choices meant to perpetuate income inequality and poverty.

4.3.1 No Accident

Most advocates in the sample argued that the emergence of mass homelessness in Canada was the result of conscious and intentional policy and budgetary choices made by
all levels of Canadian government, most particularly the federal and provincial
governments during the 1990s. Most specifically, advocates frequently named the
following as key drivers of homelessness is Canada:

1. The termination of Canada’s National Affordable Housing Program and all
   federal spending on the construction of social housing in 1993;
2. The federal transfer of responsibility for existing social housing to the
   provinces in 1996;
3. The decline of affordable housing due to a dwindling supply of rental housing
   and rooming houses, reductions in rent subsidies to low-income Canadians, for-
   profit developers choosing not to build rental housing, the government’s retreat
   from building new social housing, and shifts in landlord and tenant law which
   expedited evictions;
4. Shifts in qualification criteria for unemployment insurance;
5. Major decreases in social assistance rates; and
6. Shifts in the structure of the labour market which increased both the incidence
   and depth of poverty among Canadians.

These views are consistent with the research literature in this area (Canadian Standing
Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2009; Hulchanski, 2004;
Laird, 2007; Gaetz et al., 2014) and are also reflected in the mandates and efforts of many
advocacy organizations who deal with poverty and homelessness across the country.

When discussing these causes, many participants emphasized that homelessness
was “not an accident.” Advocates frequently argued that it is important to remind the
public and the media that homelessness is not an inevitable, natural, or normal part of the
society. For example, Michael Shapcott explains:

We have had times in Canada where homelessness has been relatively low and we
have had time when it has been quite high, and neither of those [changes] happen
because of God’s will, or because of forces of nature, or whatever. They happen
because at certain points we had a package of legislation, policies, funding, and
the active engagement of the private and community sectors, to the point that it
actually made a difference in terms of reducing homelessness and preventing
homelessness.

Like Michael, many advocates argued that if changes to legislation, policy, and funding
can increase homelessness, changes in these areas could also decrease homelessness.
Similarly, Cathy Crowe explained that the TDRC “tried to counter the notion that politicians were stupid or that they just, they didn’t know better. We tried to show that it [the withdrawal of funds and the national housing program] was a conscious decision.”

While many participants emphasized that homelessness is not a “normal” part of society, they also emphasized that homelessness is the product of our social, political, and economic systems running normally (i.e., as they were designed to). The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee’s (1998) State of Emergency Disaster Declaration expresses this well: “our public and private institutions are organized in such a manner that one of the now ‘normal’ outcomes is that a growing number of people are excluded from having an adequate and secure place to live” (p. 1). Participants argued that these systems both produce and enhance socio-economic marginality and vulnerability for many people, especially those who are already marginalized, and subsequently fail to protect individuals once they are marginalized. Indeed, this shared analysis was seen by several participants to be the common ground uniting advocates. Reverend Maggie Helwig, for example, expressed that:

I think the common ground [among advocates] is that there are all sorts of people out there who are marginalized and suffering through no fault of their own, by a system which doesn’t care about people who are vulnerable, and that that system needs to change. That we need to take better care of people who are vulnerable and easy to push around. I think that’s the kind of core where everybody around the spectrum can hang on to that and we can all push our slightly different variants of that message.

These shared understandings were frequently cited as the ground upon which advocates from different political persuasions are able to work together and build broader campaigns despite political and tactical differences. This was particularly the case in the late 1990s, especially in Toronto.

4.3.2 Intentional or Collateral? Advocates’ Perspectives on Attributing Intention to Policies and Systems which Create Homelessness

While advocates agreed that the current social, political, and economic structures function to create modern homelessness, advocates differed as to why they think these structures were put in place and how specifically they collectively function to create homelessness. According to several advocates, mass homelessness in Canada is the result
of intentional policy choices, made within these unjust systems, which have had the unintentional consequence of creating homelessness. Participants who advanced this position suggested that political leaders fail to address the ways in which these systems and policies create homelessness because they lack interest in the issue, lack understanding of the issue, are intentionally or unintentionally inattentive, and/or prioritize other political goals (e.g., reducing deficits) at the expense of the creation of poverty and homelessness for some members of society. These participants did not argue that homelessness and poverty are goals unto themselves for people in political power, but instead view them as the consequence of systems and policies put in place to achieve other goals (e.g., profits, sovereignty, etc.). David Hulchanski comments, “No one is pro-homelessness,” and yet it has remained a significant social problem for decades because the systemic causes have not been addressed. Michael Shapcott explains:

The reason why we have mass homelessness and other social issues is not because nobody has come up with a perfect political agenda, but it’s because the structures of power create these forces which in turn openly or inadvertently end up creating these injustices. For the most part I don’t think anybody sits around and says, “Wouldn’t it be great if we could have thousands or tens of thousands of homeless people?” I think that they emerge because we put our priorities elsewhere and they become the collateral damage. But because we focus on the program [rather than power], and we think that the reason why there are so many homeless people is because somebody has deliberately got a program to generate homelessness, and if only we can substitute that with a program to reduce homelessness, then we’ve got the problem solved. It misses entirely the point, which is that we have a system, a social, economic, and political system, or set of systems, that are actually generating these things. And as Dr. King says, we have to learn how to confront the system.

Shapcott argues here that when we conceptualize homelessness as a programmatic issue rather than an issue related to how power flows through our social, economic, and political systems, we miss the opportunity to actually disrupt the structural drivers of homelessness.

By contrast, for anti-capitalist participants, the rise of mass homelessness in Canada is crucially related to capitalism and the alignment of government with wealthy elites. Many advocates who hold this position differ from the above group insofar as they explicitly emphasized that governments “are not honest brokers of the common good” and instead “represent the interests of the richest people in society” (J. Clarke).
Advocates who come from this perspective may not believe that political leaders get together and actively decide to create homelessness, but they do believe that, in the interest of profits, such leaders (1) advance policies which intentionally create and maintain poverty, and/or (2) actively block efforts to end poverty or homelessness.

Several advocates pointed out that the recent popularity of “poverty reduction strategies” were aptly named because people in power do not actually want to end poverty because to do so would reduce the number of people willing to work for low wages. Advocates of this persuasion would not agree that poverty and homelessness are (in part or whole) unintentional consequences of social, economic, or political systems, but instead believe they are a necessary component of these systems under capitalism. Insofar as advocates who advanced this position believe that political leaders largely seek to serve wealthy interests at the expense of others, these advocates attributed significant intentionality to the choices political leaders make. Thus these advocates tended to be sceptical of the argument that many politicians are unwitting or unwilling participants in policies that perpetuate homelessness and poverty. As expressed by Brian Burch,

> We are consciously choosing to make decisions in our society that cut people out and create homelessness. It’s always better economically to have somebody who’s at the bottom – you have a reserve army of labour . . . It’s a conscious political decision to have homelessness in Canada.

For these advocates, homelessness is centrally related to capitalism’s effort to foster intense competition for jobs in order to drive down wages, job benefits, and social benefits in the interests of profit. Some participants believed that income support programs, such as Employment Insurance, are intentionally kept too low to survive on in order to “squeeze people onto the job market,” creating a pool of desperate workers. John Clarke explains,

> You want a level of unemployment and you want to be able to use the poor. And what they’ve [the government] realized is that it wasn’t just a question of how much unemployment there was, but it was a question of the level of desperation. The cutting of the income support programs becomes, to them, a really important question. Well-meaning people often say things like, “It’s going to cost more in the long run to keep people poor because you are going to pay for healthcare.” And that’s all true, but largely irrelevant. The importance of driving down income support is that it creates a scramble out of it -- a climate of desperation forces people to compete for the lowest paying jobs on offer.
As this economic approach has progressed, combined with the rising unaffordability of housing and a retreat from social programs, more and more poor people in Canada have found themselves homeless. Clarke goes on to argue, “It’s a strategic imperative to drive down social assistance rates and unemployment insurance, but then what happens is that the agenda of impoverishing people goes over to an agenda of outright social abandonment.”

Several participants elaborated on this theme, arguing that Canadian poverty and homelessness are deeply exacerbated by free trade agreements, the deindustrialization of the economy, and the globalization of labour through which poor Canadians are forced to compete for jobs with foreign labour in the Global South. As Gaetan Heroux explains, the rise of deindustrialization and globalizing labour markets has meant that Canadians who were previously employed now find themselves out of a job:

When you have a huge, huge amount of surplus labour, then you have a large sector of people who wind up being thrown out. So if you go into some of these shelters, some of these men are in their mid-40s, some in their 50s, and the system has no use for them. They might have been working at a factory for twenty years and next thing you know, the factory shuts down and there’s no purpose for them.

In addition to these labour issues, several advocates argued that mass homelessness is connected to gentrification, the power and wealth of developers, the unregulated housing market, and the increasing price of land in Ontario and Toronto, specifically.

4.3.3 Discussion

Overall, advocates generally agreed that the interaction of unjust social, political, and economic systems, combined with a number of policy and budgetary changes beginning in the 1990s, has created mass homelessness in Canada. Many advocates commented that part of their advocacy work has been to speak out about these structural causes of homelessness in order to counter a range of harmful discourses that individualize, stigmatize, and blame people for their homelessness. Interestingly, advocates rarely discussed the role of racism, sexism, or colonialism in these systems that produce homelessness, though some advocates did briefly mention the connection between high rates of indigenous homelessness and racism.
As seen above, some participants emphasized the role of capitalism in causing Canadian homelessness, while others did not mention capitalism at all. Perhaps unsurprisingly, advocates who did focus on capitalism tended to be connected with grassroots advocacy efforts and were less likely to be employed by government, research institutions, or NGOs. It was unclear whether the advocates who did not discuss capitalism see it as a key structural driver of homelessness or not – further interviews would be necessary to determine this.

Advocates’ perspectives on the causes of homelessness were directly linked to what they believed it would take to end homelessness and the tactics needed to achieve that goal. For example, John Clarke argues,

In general, I think [the reason] governments provide anything to the poor is because they are scared of social unrest . . . So we place a premium on disruptive action. But the kinds of things we would say are also tailored on trying to maximize the pressure on those in power, rather than have them like us.

In contrast, other participants believed that advocates can create social change through partnering with government and the private sector. This latter approach rests upon the (often implicit) belief that people in power are not intentionally creating homelessness and that these leaders can be persuaded to prevent and end homelessness. Thus while participants generally agreed upon the core causes of mass Canadian homelessness, the political, analytic, and tactical differences between advocates became clear when comparing advocates’ beliefs about the motivators of government and motivations of people in power.

4.4 Advocates’ Perspectives on Public Perceptions of Homelessness

Determining what advocates think the public believes about a particular social issue is essential for understanding advocates’ approach to advocacy and how they evaluate its efficacy. Identifying who and what drives public perceptions, what impact they have on the trajectory of a social problem, and how advocates can best intervene or participate in that process, are crucial (if implicit) foundations of advocacy work. Given this, participants were asked to reflect on how public perceptions of homelessness have
changed since homelessness emerged as a public problem in Canada. Interestingly, advocates’ views ranged considerably on the issue of public perceptions. While many advocates contended that harmful stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness were less prevalent now than they were when the problem first emerged, advocates were divided as to whether the public actually had a better grasp of the social problem itself and its structural causes. Among advocates who argued that public perceptions had shifted positively, they attributed this change to a range of factors including effective advocacy work, positive shifts in media coverage, positive shifts in political discourse, as well as increased contact with people experiencing homelessness among the general public.

Irrespective of whether advocates believed that public perceptions had improved or not, all advocates argued that the public discourse which accompanied the rise of homelessness in Canada was one which stigmatized and demonized people experiencing homelessness, individualizing a problem that was structural in nature. For the most part, advocates attributed this discourse to claimsmaking by political leaders, wealthy elites, and the media. It is in this context that early advocates struggled to re-articulate the problem and change the public conversation about people experiencing homelessness.

This section will compare and contrast advocates’ perspectives on how the public has perceived homelessness as a social problem since its emergence in the 1980s. While most advocates agree that the public is more educated about homelessness as a social issue, advocates remain divided in their assessments of whether the public has developed more sophisticated understandings of the causes of, pathways to, or solutions to homelessness.

4.4.1 Public Perceptions of Homelessness Have Improved

A majority of the participants felt that public perceptions of homelessness have improved among the Canadian public, either on the whole or in part. Some advocates argued that the public sphere has witnessed a decline in prejudicial or stigmatizing discourses about people experiencing homelessness, including among the more conservative voices in politics or the public. David Hulchanski, for example, argues,

I think it has vastly improved. I think that's where we have made progress - that it's really hard for somebody to say, "Well, homeless people are mentally ill, or
homeless people are all lazy." That's still around but really small, and I don't hear too many politicians saying that, even the Tories. I think if we look at the last few years of what the Harper government people said, if they said anything, about homelessness, it would not be blaming the victim blatantly . . . It would be back to the thing about the strong economy and good jobs . . . So they would have a polite answer as opposed to saying it's not a real problem, or it's a bunch of lazy people or drug addicted people, right?

In particular, several advocates felt that the belief that people are lazy or choose to live homeless has become a less pervasive belief among the Canadian public. Reverend Maggie Helwig expresses,

Something I used to hear a lot more and don't hear nearly as much now is that people choose to live on the street. A lot more people realize that homelessness, even when it is a choice, is because it's the least bad choice in a set of bad options.

Nonetheless Helwig and others argued that the stereotype that people experiencing homelessness have mental health issues and/or substance abuse issues, and are at fault for those experiences, continues to be stubbornly held belief among the public.

According to several advocates, this positive shift in public attitudes can be attributed to the increased economic precarity that more people in Canada are experiencing themselves, or are witnessing among friends and family. Advocates also emphasized that following the rise of mass homelessness, Canadians are now more likely to know or have contact with people experiencing homelessness, or have experiences of homelessness themselves. Many advocates believed that this personal proximity powerfully shapes understandings of homelessness among the public, notwithstanding stigmatizing media coverage and political rhetoric. Reflecting on recent public surveys about homelessness, Tanya Gulliver-Garcia argued that most Canadians now “almost always know somebody who is homeless . . . it’s either happened to them directly, or they know somebody. So I think that makes a really significant impact on how people feel about homelessness, because it is getting closer.” John Clarke makes a similar point, arguing,

Homelessness is ceasing to be a sort of peripheral phenomenon and it’s something that is affecting much wider sections of the population . . . the situation of being precariously housed is becoming a much more mainstream experience. So there’s huge numbers of people who are not homeless, but know only too well they could become very easily . . . So the consciousness within the general working class population of the threat of homelessness is really becoming, I think, widespread.
According to several advocates, this proximity to homelessness often functions to counter the “othering” of people experiencing homelessness that many advocates viewed as quite common when homelessness first emerged as a social problem in Canada.

A key advancement among the public is a better understanding of the diversity of people experiencing homelessness, according to a number of advocates. Cathy Crowe suggests that, “Public perceptions have changed a lot, and I think there is more awareness that it’s not just men, there are very different groups.” In general, most advocates identified that the public now has a better understanding that homelessness affects not just single men, but that youth, children, single mothers, families, newcomers, and ethnic and sexual minorities, among others, struggle with homelessness in Canada. Alex Abramovich, who researches LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada, has found that “people understand this issue [of LGBTQ youth homelessness] in a very different way today,” and that previously there had been significant denial and/or a lack of understanding of this issue, including within the homelessness sector itself. Several advocates felt that these positive shifts in public perceptions were partially attributable to the work of advocates.

4.4.2 Public Perceptions of Homelessness Have Gotten Worse or Stayed the Same

There were some advocates who were sceptical that public perceptions of homelessness have significantly improved over time, and several felt that the public was confused and/or conflicted in terms of how to understand the issue. A number of participants felt there has been considerable flip flop and fractures among the public with respect to the issue, often correlated with media portrayals, the public visibility of homelessness, and shifting political and economic discourses. Several participants argued that the media’s demonization of people experiencing homelessness, including “urban myths about violent, mentally deranged homeless people” who “push people in front of subway trains” or are “drunk and lazy,” has contributed to the stubbornness of prejudicial attitudes towards this population (M. Shapcott). Steve Gaetz suggests, “There are these kinds of prejudices and stigmas that are deeply and historically rooted, going back to 19th century images of ‘the vagabond’ . . . and I’m not sure how much they’ve changed.”
Because many of the participants have been involved in advocacy for over two decades, they have lived through and grappled with these shifts in public consciousness. Beric German, for example, recounts that when his father visited Toronto in the late 70s and encountered a man on the street with his hand outstretched, he did not understand that he was begging. Such experiences reveal that, at one time, visible homelessness and panhandling was so infrequent in Canada that members of the public wouldn’t even recognize it. Brian Burch argued that in the 1970s and early 1980s, an unhoused person was seen as the responsibility of the person’s family or community, not a victim of a public problem. He explains,

During the period before the recession of the 1980s, if there was homelessness it was seen as a personal moral crisis, but it meant that then something could be done about it. So if you lost your home because you’re an alcoholic then you have a moral failing, [but] you work with people to help with the drinking and there’s housing for you . . . [There was] a sense of shared responsibility . . . Then at some point along the way homelessness became not just a moral failure, which can be cured, but there’s [a split] between deserving and undeserving—there were some people that were homeless that you should help and that there were other people who were homeless who, because they had a moral failure, you shouldn’t help . . . The [belief was that] society’s resources were shrinking and we’re going to triage … we don’t even have enough resources to help these deserving poor, and so we’ll cut out the undeserving.

According to Burch, this pathologizing narrative began well before the rise of mass homelessness in Canada but has since continued in new forms under the agenda of austerity.

A number of advocates worried that homelessness has come to be seen as a “fact of life” in Canada, and that the urgency that was felt when mass homelessness first emerged has since dissipated. Even for advocates who felt that public understandings of the issue had improved, several worried that public concern had decreased and that “there’s a level of acceptance” among the Canadian public (A. Golden). Michael Shapcott poignantly recounted a personal experience he had during which he realized there had been a shift in what Canadian society would accept:

I remember in the mid-1990s, I think it was ’96 . . . a friend of mine who was doing some street outreach came to me and said, “I just met this woman who’s eight months pregnant and she’s living in Maple Leaf Square.” I said, “No. You’re wrong! She can’t -- this is Canada! Things are bad, but we don’t have pregnant women on the street - that’s just not happening.” . . . We went, we met
her, and yep, she was there. She actually gave birth in Maple Leaf Square - taken by ambulance over to Saint Mike’s . . . I’m sorry, I still get just a little bit emotional about this because . . . I am very old fashioned and what little memory I have does remember a time when there was a notion that it was indecent. That elderly people, that pregnant women, and that infant children would be homeless. Now it seems that that kind of decency is gone.

Several advocates related similar personal stories which they felt reflected a decline in values of compassion, justice, or morality in Canadian society. For some of these advocates, these experiences reflected an escalating acceptance of inequality, while for others they reflected a sense of powerlessness or helplessness among the public that this social problem could be solved.

For advocates who felt that public perceptions have worsened or at least have not improved, this was often partially attributed to the influence of media and politicians on public understandings of the issue. Several advocates argued that the pathologizing and demonizing discourse employed by politicians (particularly in the 1990s) enabled governments to explain the rise of homelessness while downplaying the role of the state in creating or solving it. Michael Shapcott argues that in response to the sharp rise of mass homelessness in the 1990s,

The government’s response was to pathologize people and say that they were either lazy, crazy, or stupid. So, nice politicians would say that they are crazy people, they’re all ex-psychiatric inmates and blah, blah, blah, and we should feel sorry for them . . . Those were the nice politicians. The nasty ones would say they are lazy or stupid – they’ve made bad life choices, they would rather have the carefree life of sleeping on a bench and dying at the age of 35 than putting in an honest day’s work and so on. So, there has been a barrage of that, and Harris’ line and the federal government’s line, first under Chretien and the Liberals and then under Harper, has been that people are the authors of their own misfortune and that there’s no role for government. That people have to lift themselves up by their bootstraps. Handouts don’t work, and maybe if the churches want to do a few nice things . . . that’s okay, but there’s really not a role for the state.

As Shapcott argues, such discourses enable the state to powerfully counter structural explanations of homelessness and capitalize on the public’s confusion about how to best address the issue.

Some advocates felt that if there had been genuine changes in how the public views homelessness, these would have been reflected in public policy. Anne Golden, for example, argues,
I don't think we've advanced, I think, since the 1990s . . . To give you an example, we haven’t even made any good headway on affordable housing. That would be a good litmus test . . . I don't think the dial has moved much since 1998 or 1999.

In contrast, other advocates felt that public perceptions are not correlated with public policy. John Clarke argued,

I don’t think that public opinion is what necessarily drives government policy, for example I think big segments of the public would like to see the banks taxed, but that doesn’t happen regardless. But at the same time there’s a strong level of public support for the notion that homelessness is terrible and more needs to be done about it.

Such contrasting views reflect how political and ideological differences between advocates are mirrored in how they assess what counts as evidence of public opinion, as well as the extent to which they think policy reflects public opinion.

Despite these differences, a key point on which almost all advocates agreed was that the public does not have a good understanding of how the economic system and economic policy is related to the causes of homelessness and barriers to ending homelessness in Canada. According to several participants, this lack of understanding was a reflection of the persuasive power of neoliberal discourses that promote austerity, small government, and low taxes. While some participants felt that there was a better understanding of the structural causes of homelessness among the public, several advocates felt that the dominance of neoliberal ideologies has created a situation wherein the Canadian public suffer from the decline of the welfare state but are unable to identify it as the culprit of their suffering.

4.4.3 Discussion

With respect to homelessness, advocates expressed a range of opinions about how public perceptions have shifted. Overall, most advocates believed that the public was generally more educated about homelessness as a social issue. Most advocates attributed this improved understanding to a combination of advocacy efforts, helpful media coverage, shifts in political discourses, and increased contact with people experiencing homelessness. Advocates differed, however, with respect to whether they felt that this improved understanding had actually translated into more positive and less prejudicial views of people experiencing homelessness, or into increased public concern about the
issue. While some participants argued that the stereotype that people choose to live homeless and/or are lazy has subsided, others disagreed. Bonnie Briggs, for example, an advocate with lived experience of homelessness, expressed that it is not well understood that people do not choose to be homeless. Similarly, some advocates expressed views that appeared contradictory. For example, several advocates argued that public polls indicate homelessness is an issue the public thinks is important and requires government attention, but some of these same advocates raised evidence that suggests homelessness is normalized and public outrage over the issue has declined. This range of perspectives suggests that there isn’t substantial consensus among advocates as to whether public perceptions have improved, eroded, or stayed the same.

One area in which there was significant consensus among participants was with respect to the public’s perceptions of how to solve homelessness, who is responsible, and how homelessness relates to economic policies, including taxation. Many advocates argued that the public has a poorer understanding of these dimensions of the problem, and that significant confusion exists among most of the public with respect to these issues. Almost all advocates noted people in positions of power have confused the public about what can be done and who should do it. Several advocates pointed out that this confusion is created and sustained by politicians at different levels of government pointing fingers at each other for failing to solve the problem, as well as obfuscating the role of the state in creating and maintaining homelessness. For many advocates, the rise of the charitable sector and the governments’ downloading of responsibility for social problems to citizens also function to confuse the public with respect to the role of the state in ending homelessness. As will be discussed in much greater length in section 4.6.3, several participants felt that advocates need to develop more strategic, solution-focused messaging in order to foster the public pressure needed to force the government to take action.

Distinctions between advocates’ beliefs about the state of public opinion can be partially attributed to diverse ideological and epistemological perspectives. Many advocates identified that determining how the public feels about any social issue is difficult at best, and one participant noted that “the public,” as an aggregate, was a problematic notion. Several advocates expressed that their own perspectives of what the
public thinks is likely related to the social circles they frequent, and may not be
generalizable. Distinctions in perspectives were thus crucially related to what advocates
viewed as “evidence” of public opinion and what access they had to such “evidence.” For
example, some advocates felt that improved media coverage of the structural causes of
homelessness had assisted in positively shifting public perceptions, while other advocates
were skeptical that media coverage adequately reflected or caused such changes. John
Clarke, for example, noted that coverage of the March on Queen’s Park was “intensely
hostile,” yet he recalls that

A lot of people would recognize me at that time . . . [and] I was astounded by how
much support there was. You know, people coming up to me on the street and
shaking my hand. I remember walking along the Danforth and there were a bunch
of old men in an Italian coffee shop and they brought me in and gave me wine.

Several advocates drew on such personal experiences in order to deduce public
understandings of homelessness, often in combination with reflections on political
speeches, media coverage, advertising, public polls, public policy, and/or the
entertainment industry. Bringing their own analytic perspectives, advocates would
sometimes utilize the same “data” to reach different conclusions. For example, while a
number of advocates argued that increased contact with people experiencing
homelessness has positively impacted public perceptions, others argued that this
increased contact can also serve to fortify negative and individualizing perspectives of
people experiencing homelessness rather than undermine them. Such contrasting views
should not be overstated though – advocates on both sides were quick to point out the
shortcomings of deducing public opinion from the evidence they raised.

4.5 Barriers and Disincentives to Advocacy

One of the most prominent themes in interviews was how powerful and numerous
the disincentives and barriers to advocacy are. Three common areas of discussion were:
(1) what prevents people from becoming advocates, (2) what makes advocacy difficult,
and (3) why it is difficult to continue with advocacy over many years. With regards to
each of these, advocates highlighted a complex picture of the intersecting micro, mezzo,
and macro barriers to participating in advocacy. Compared with other themes, this theme tended to be expressed with more emotion, ranging from anger and frustration, to sadness or anxiety (as indicated by swearing, crying, increased volume and speed of speech, etc.). Advocates frequently expressed frustration with how these barriers have caused damage to the movement, and for many advocates their assessment of the magnitude of these barriers was correlated with what they imagine the future of homelessness will look like. While there were many barriers mentioned by advocates, five key challenges were consistently discussed: (1) advocacy is time consuming and energy intensive; (2) advocacy is poorly paid and can be professionally damaging; (3) there is an increasingly hostile climate in Canada for agency-based advocacy; (4) there are high emotional and psychological costs to advocacy engagement; and (5) there is limited knowledge of the history of advocacy and a sense of powerlessness among many advocates. These challenges create a complex set of disincentives to advocacy participation for passionate people who want to see social change on this issue. This section will explore advocates’ perspectives on each of these key challenges.

4.5.1 Advocacy is Time Consuming and Energy Intensive

At a practical level, advocacy work can often demand significant amounts of time and energy (e.g., Gorski & Chen, 2015). Advocates have to be both proactive and reactive, mobilizing organizational energy and strength immediately following crises or changes in funding, policy, and programming, while simultaneously developing and executing their own agenda for social change. Several advocates explained that the many competing demands of modern life make it difficult to find time and energy for addressing social issues. Other advocates noted that it can be very hard for advocates who have both full time jobs and young children to find time and energy to be involved in advocacy efforts. For some advocates, shiftwork or unpredictable work schedules (especially for those working multiple, low-paying jobs) is a barrier to attending advocacy meetings or events. The scarcity of financial resources within advocacy organizations also means there are limited funds to provide childcare or transportation for group members.
Several participants expressed that certain tactics or types of advocacy can be particularly draining for advocates. Coroner’s inquests, for example, was a tactic used in Toronto to investigate and document the lethal consequences of homelessness. Kathy Hardill explains,

[It’s a] very good tactic, but very time consuming . . . You had to go day after day after day and, you know, most people had jobs and it's hard not to be at your job in order to be at the inquest. But you have to keep the pressure up and visibility up in order for an inquest to have its effect.

Other tactics, such as court-based challenges, can also be difficult to mobilize around because they are labor-intensive and take place over significant lengths of time (G. Heroux). The limited financial resources of most advocacy groups exacerbate such challenges. Thus many participants argued that the amount of time and energy required was a key barrier to advocacy participation.

4.5.2 Advocacy is poorly paid and can be professionally damaging

A significant barrier to advocacy participation is financial. Many advocates expressed that most homelessness advocacy is poorly paid or not paid at all, and that this has been increasingly true in recent years. Participants expressed that most advocates could rarely do advocacy full-time because these jobs were so scarce, thus requiring that advocates hold other jobs in order to make ends meet. Some of the advocates interviewed did have stable, well-paying jobs, but this was often limited to advocates who were employed in research, government, the private sector, and/or non-profits. A majority of the grassroots advocates interviewed were either employed doing frontline social service work, were receiving income supports of some kind, or held “survival jobs” (e.g., factory work) in order to support themselves and their advocacy.

Many grassroots participants had commonly experienced job loss and job insecurity, poor pay, difficult working conditions, and/or limited benefits (regardless of whether they were working within or outside the homeless sector). In the words of Beric German, when you are engaging in advocacy,

There may be times of reward, because you'll see things happen. You will also get beaten up many times and you won't be paid for what you do and you will be in danger . . . You’ll be punished many times as opposed to being rewarded.
For some participants, particularly those who identified as working on the “frontlines,” this “punishment” included difficulty making ends meet and chronic anxiety about how to survive as they get older. One participant, who was fired from social service agencies multiple times for his advocacy work, explained “I’m 60 years old – it’s a lot harder for me to lose my job now.” Some advocates nearing retirement age had concerns about how they would survive on their meager pensions, or if their comrades would ever be able to retire. Several advocates viewed these financial concerns as a key challenge and a significant barrier to advocacy participation.

Given that many advocates work within the homelessness sector, or have experienced homelessness themselves, a majority of advocates have firsthand knowledge and experience of the suffering and desperation caused by homelessness. For many of the participants employed as frontline social service workers, their work is typically poorly paid and they are keenly aware of the short distance between themselves and homelessness. One participant who had been doing frontline work for over two decades, explained:

For instance, I was fired from my job in 2010. I was off for 16 months. I was able to get unemployment insurance. Juliette, my wife, got sick during that time and had to take time off. And she was able to get health insurance. Had those programs not been there, Juliette and I were destroyed. We were on the streets. We could not have survived . . . we couldn’t survive that. As it was you lose 45% of your income when you go on EI. And Juliette, when she got sick . . . was getting 55% of her pay.

In interviews, this precarity was often coupled with participants’ anxiety about becoming homeless. Many participants had regularly heard stories, for decades, which demonstrated how quickly and easily people in poverty can become homeless. Beric German, for example, expressed, “I would be frightened of being made homeless, certainly, because I knew it like the back of my hand.”

Several advocates expressed that while frontline work positions advocates to be uniquely knowledgeable, this intimacy with homelessness often functions to frighten workers into focusing on their own survival, ensuring their job security, and/or protecting the funding and reputation of the agency or sector they work in. As Brian Burch explains,  

2 Pseudonym used to protect privacy.
If you think that one bad decision means that you’re going to be out that door and one of them, it’s very hard for you to advocate for them when you’re fighting to not become one of them . . . probably the most common one [barrier to frontline workers becoming involved in advocacy] is the sense of “It’s going to be me and I’m so afraid that it’s going to be me that I’m going to keep my mouth shut.”

Given that many participants had experiences of intense financial precarity or actual homelessness, their perseverance in advocacy speaks to their courage and tenacity.

Within the sample, there were several advocates who had significant job security and/or were able to engage in advocacy with limited fear that they would lose their job or their income. Naturally, these participants experienced less anxiety related to the financial ramifications of advocacy engagement. David Hulchanski, for example, expressed that one of the advantages of being a tenured professor is academic freedom and the ability to speak with authority about your area of expertise without the expectation that you speak on behalf of the university. Coming from a very different background as an advocate who has experienced homelessness, another advocate explains,

I’m painfully aware that one of the reasons I’ve had the freedom to say what I want, learn what I want, take the time to study what I want, is that the flipside of the suffering I went through is that I have subsidized housing and I’m under Disability [Ontario Disability Support Program]. So my basic needs are met, and that allows me to be very flexible. And if I don’t get a project that pays me, I can still do the project. It’s hard, but I’ll do it, and that’s what I do. I haven’t stopped working this entire time. I haven’t been paid for, I don’t know, a decade.

This advocate, however, was an exception in the sample. For most advocates with lived experiences of homelessness and/or frontline social service jobs, financial and employment precarity was a feature of their lives for most of their years in advocacy.

Importantly, some advocates reported that they felt they had been passed over for jobs because of their advocacy involvement. For example, Cathy Crowe, perhaps one of the most well-known homelessness advocates in Canada, expressed:

Somebody like me, I would say 80% of my work that I do now is for free, it’s unfunded, right? So I still have the potential in my career to do work and I’m unfunded. You know I have this little gig at Ryerson that allows me a little bit of flexibility to do some stuff that I like to do. You know, and three years of trying to get universities and colleges to hire me, and before that, frontline organizations, and I would say I’m blacklisted. And I’m blacklisted because of the advocacy history I’ve had.
Such experiences serve as a warning to potential advocates that advocacy participation can cost you your livelihood.

At an organizational level, the lack of financial resources within advocacy organizations themselves makes it difficult to create the conditions for advocates to meet and organize together. Several advocates discussed struggles they have had trying to find meeting places, pay for phone lines, compensate volunteers and advocates for their labour, or provide space in which to cook, socialize, support each other, and share resources. Several participants believed that having the financial resources to meet the practical needs of advocacy organizations is essential for movement building, and yet these resources are very scarce.

4.5.3 Canada’s Hostile Climate for Agency-Based Advocacy

Easily one of the most discussed interview topics was the decline in advocacy among frontline agencies serving people experiencing homelessness. Many advocates argued that frontline agencies are now much less likely to engage in advocacy, and rarely set aside staff time for advocacy work. Cathy Crowe, for example, explains,

> It [activism] is not allowed. It used to be on the agenda of staff meetings - who is going with clients to the national housing day rally, or to such and such rally about the shelters, and there would be carefully constructed ways that certain types of outreach workers could go and take people, or speak at it. And that’s really rare now.

Advocates also noted that in recent years, agency staff are less likely to engage in advocacy outside of the workplace, despite the unique knowledge they have about the realities of homelessness in their communities. As Gaetan Heroux explains,

> As a welfare worker, you would come across that every day – that people are having a hard time and don’t have enough money. But for whatever reason you’re not getting a strong movement from welfare workers outside of the welfare office saying people are starving. And they would have direct evidence, right?

Several participants also worried that in recent years there has been significantly less collaboration and coordination across agencies with respect to advocacy. Many participants felt that agencies rarely work collaboratively to strategize beyond an emergency response approach. The crucial question is: why?
Participants attributed this decline to a number of structural changes related to how civil society is funded and monitored. Numerous participants argued that these changes have created an increasingly hostile climate for advocacy, both within and amongst civil society organizations in Canada. While advocates attributed this hostile climate to a number of factors, two intersecting causes were frequently discussed: (1) the federal government’s increased regulatory scrutiny concerning the political activities of non-profit organizations (often thought to create a “chilling effect” among agencies), and (2) the scarcity, precarity, and competition for agency funding. For a number of advocates, their appraisal of the future of homelessness was linked to whether they believed the movement would be able to effectively deal with this chill on advocacy and scarcity of funding within the sector.

The “Chill” on Advocacy in Canada

Many advocates emphasized that the decline in advocacy participation among agencies can be traced to the Harper government’s increased regulation of the political activities of civil society organizations. In March 2012, the federal budget made available an additional $8 million in funding for the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to conduct audits on federally registered charities to verify that 10% or less of their resources were devoted to “political activity” as defined by the CRA (see Broadbent Institute, 2014). In the area of homelessness and poverty, there were a number of agencies and organizations that came under scrutiny. Oxfam, for example, was told by CRA officials that “preventing poverty” was not an acceptable goal and that only “relieving poverty” was considered charitable. In this context, participants felt that there had been a significant “chill” on advocacy in many civil society organizations for fear of losing government funding or experiencing various governmental sanctions, such as deregistration. As Michael Shapcott explains,

I think there are a lot of disincentives around advocacy and they’ve gotten more and more powerful over time . . . Governments have been very, very clear that, outside of Quebec, they do not want people to be engaged in advocacy. In fact the “A” word has often disappeared because if people engage in advocacy they get their funding cut. We’ve heard enough stories here in the city of Toronto, organizations funded by the City of Toronto, being told if you are too critical of the City of Toronto’s housing and homelessness programs then we may have to evaluate your grant. We certainly know that’s happened at the provincial level, and programs like the Partners In Housing program, which existed up until 1995
and funded tenant organizations and advocacy organizations, that was shut down. And of course, the last a decade or so, nationally under Prime Minister Harper, was a time when the government very openly used various tools, including the Canada Revenue Agency, to go after organizations that it didn’t like.

For several participants, this meant that organizations or agencies with whom they had previously organized were now more reluctant to work with them and/or their advocacy organization. Josephine Grey, founder of Low-Income Families Together (LIFT) explains that, “I was told by a couple of foundation heads that I got along with, and knew well before, that we [LIFT] were a ‘hot potato’ and they couldn’t risk it.” This suggests that damage to advocacy networks and relationships between advocates and non-profit organizations were also outcomes of this chill on advocacy.

Several participants identified that staff at social service agencies are often frustrated by their inability to provide adequate services or resources to people experiencing homelessness due to funding constraints, bureaucratic rules, agency policies, and the unavailability of affordable housing and other external resources. However, because of the chill on advocacy and the scarcity of funding, staff “try to address this internally, but they can’t. [And] they have no vehicles for taking it outside [the agency]” (G. Heroux). Several advocates felt that this has even created a hush on critical discussions within organizations, and a few advocates noted that when they had offered critical perspectives on some types of programming (particularly related to Housing First), it was “shut down.” A number of participants felt that this chill created a culture in which agencies are punished, and in turn punish staff, for engaging in critical reflection and discussion about whether their services are meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Given that agency staff are uniquely positioned to see how public policy and funding choices are connected to lived experiences of homelessness, many participants were worried that the knowledge these workers have about homelessness will not to mobilized to inform broader social change efforts. Importantly, to the extent that civil society organizations educate and inform the public about important social problems, advocates worried that agency workers’ inability to speak out negatively impacts the public’s knowledge of the issue and the public policy process. As Beric German illustrates, “With that 10% you can only cry murder so many times out the door – and
after that, if you see more murders, you close the door. You say, ‘I saw nothing, it’s all over, just give me my money.’” Presumably this silence from agencies makes it even harder for advocates to gather allies and evidence that will help keep the issue in the public eye and on the government’s agenda.

**The Role of Funding in the Decline of Agency-Based Advocacy**

A number of advocates believed that this “hush” on critical dialogue was also linked to the scarcity of funding for these services, and in particular to social service agencies’ concern that such discussions would reflect poorly on their organization and thus threaten their access to funding. For example, Alex Abramovich expressed that it was extremely difficult to recruit agency staff to participate in discussions about homophobia and transphobia in the Toronto shelter system. He explains,

“Funding is always an issue, right? And so there’s a lot of funding cuts and everyone is sort of fighting for the same pool of funds, and so I think that services have been mainly afraid to speak up for that reason. So it’s like . . . if a shelter in Toronto says “Yes, homophobic and transphobic violence are very big problems in this shelter,” and then that were to get out . . .

The tragedy of this, as several advocates pointed out, is that agencies are best positioned to actually benefit from advocacy because they have the most to gain and lose with respect to policy and funding decisions. For example, over the last few years a number of advocates have been struggling to alter Toronto’s Extreme Cold Weather Alert system, which only declares a Cold Alert when temperatures reach -15 °C or below (thus signaling the opening of “Warming Centres” for homeless Torontonians). Given the number of homeless deaths due to freezing on the streets of Toronto, Crowe and others have been fighting to change this threshold but have not had significant support from social service agencies. Were this threshold to change and more Warming Centres or additional shelters opened, this could significantly reduce the pressure on current agencies and shelters which are severely overburdened and overcrowded. Yet agencies and agency staff have not been able or willing to participate in advocacy efforts towards this end. Crowe argues, “They are going to suffer as a result of not being allowed to do work on that issue.”

Advocates also explained that the scarcity of funds available to frontline agencies creates a competitive environment wherein these agencies are forced to compete with
each other in order to survive. In this context, agencies tend to have their own “turf” and are less likely to challenge policy and programming changes at the municipal level for fear that this will jeopardize their funding. Given that agencies are well aware that City of Toronto officials have historically held negative opinions about certain Toronto-based activist organizations (most pointedly OCAP), several participants felt that many agencies have tried to distance themselves from such advocacy groups and campaigns, even when winning these campaigns would significantly improve the lives of their clients and their staff. One advocate felt that, in this context, agencies can develop rigid internal cultures in which staff are deterred from critically analyzing their experiences or the experiences of their clients. He felt that this rigidity “makes it harder for a worker to begin to say ‘well maybe this should change,’” and thus begin to engage in advocacy within or outside of the agency.

Several advocates also felt that these factors fostered a sense that activism or advocacy is a bad thing or a “dirty word,” both within the homeless sector and in Canadian society at large. As Cathy Crowe explains,

> Activism, for many years, has been labeled as a bad thing to do. It has a bad reputation, and it is really unfortunate and I’m hoping it will change. I don’t like the fact that people with a lot of power or credibility put down activism, and . . . they lump it all into one form of activism, whereas in reality it takes many shapes.

In particular, advocates noted that various stakeholders, including voluntary and faith-based organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness, have increasing sought to distance themselves from anything that could be construed as “too political.” For example, during OCAP’s Special Diet Campaign, OCAP organizers encountered many doctors who refused to sign Special Diet forms for their patients because “they didn’t want to be part of something political” or did not want to be seen as allying with OCAP (K. Hardill). Several advocates felt that some charitable organizations similarly sought to distance themselves from the notion that they were “activists” or “political” organizations. This culture not only makes it difficult for current advocacy organizations to mobilize, but it also dissuades potential advocates from joining the movement.

Many advocates felt that the lack of agency participation in advocacy was also a function of being overburdened with trying to meet the daily needs of their members or
clients, making it very challenging to find the time or resources for staff to get together and strategize about advocacy. As Brian Burch explains, “If the best you can do is fight for the present, you’re not going to dream for yourself [and] you’re not going to dream for others.”

4.5.4 The Emotional and Psychological Costs of Advocacy Work

Participants identified a range of emotional and psychological consequences of advocacy that serve as barriers to continuing to organize, and that deter new people from joining the movement. Several of the participants, particularly those engaged in grassroots advocacy, expressed that these psychological and emotional effects can be powerfully damaging. A number of participants expressed that they had experienced difficulty continuing to organize because of these challenges. While I had the privilege of meeting many advocates who had continued despite these adversities, there are an untold number of advocates who left advocacy because of these challenges and whom I did not interview. When discussing these challenges, advocates discussed two key emotional and psychological dimensions of advocacy that create barriers to participation: (1) advocacy is often emotionally overwhelming and advocates frequently experience “burnout,” and (2) there are limited supports for people engaged in advocacy. This section will discuss advocates’ perspectives on these key emotional and psychological barriers and their impacts.

Advocacy “Burnout” and Emotional Exhaustion

Advocacy and activism can be very hard – emotionally, psychologically, physically, and financially (e.g., Chen & Goski, 2015; Downton & Wehr, 1998; Gorski & Chen, 2015). Several advocates noted that homelessness advocacy is particularly emotionally exhausting given that advocates are working with people who are experiencing the some of the most severe forms of destitution and marginalization in Canada. Most participants had been engaged in advocacy for more than twenty years and had not yet witnessed a decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness. In effect, participants were witnessing the same crises, suffering, and tragedies again and again. Reverend Maggie Helwig explains,

One of the realities of working on homelessness in Toronto is, and anybody who has been doing this for a while can tell you, you will meet people, you will come
to care about people, and you will see them die. I couldn’t begin to list the people I’ve known who’ve died, people whose funerals I’ve done, or funerals I’ve been to. You know, it’s something I think people who aren’t directly involved in homelessness advocacy don’t get – that part of the reason we are doing this is we are seeing our friends dying.

The emotional and psychological consequences of seeing not only chronic suffering but actual death means that advocates have to engage in significant emotional labour in order to continue to work that they do.

For many advocates, “burnout” is a reality or significant threat, particularly for those employed in social service agencies. Brian Burch explains that,

So many frontline workers are being burnt out for years, and they can barely care for themselves, let alone the people they’re working with. And they see no hope for themselves, they see no hope for the people they are working with.

For advocates who rise to some fame in the media or in their community, the threat of burnout can increase due to increased expectations and pleas for support from community members. For example, one participant became well-known for her work on poverty and issues facing single parents, a situation she found herself in because of intimate partner violence. She explains,

Frankly, I found it difficult to be very involved in activism that was related to domestic abuse, you know, because it’s too triggering . . . When I started working at the Income Security Advocacy Centre and there was a toll-free number, and even before that, I would get calls because people would see me on TV and stuff like that, talking about poverty and being a single parent . . . so I would always get calls from women, and they would tell me things like, “I’m living in a barn,” “I’m living in a car with my son” . . . and it was just too much. Too much to take.

Several advocates explained that their own traumatic experiences of poverty or violence, combined with the vicarious trauma they experienced as advocates and/or frontline workers meant that the emotional and psychological costs of continuing in advocacy were very high.

In this context, some advocates experienced significant distress when advocacy events or campaigns were seen to be unsuccessful, or when new changes to policy, programming, or procedures negatively impacted people experiencing homelessness. This was particularly true for advocates who were employed in frontline service provision. Given that these advocates saw their friends and clients become homeless due
to minor changes to bureaucratic procedures in programs like Ontario Works, participants’ emotional investments in such changes were very high. Gaetan Heroux, for example, explains

I realized that as I got older, I can’t keep doing this. I don’t have the energy . . . and the outcome is just – it’s hard . . . Like the last little bit around status was really, really going to be rough. Because if we didn’t change that, then I was living a world now where I had all kinds of people who were going to be cut off welfare. I couldn’t . . . I mean, right now it’s rough, but you feel like you’re able to still give people something.

Given the ever-present threat that the meager supports could be withdrawn further, advocates are left in a constant state of having to respond to the fallout of changed policies, procedures, and funding decisions. Not unsurprisingly, interviews revealed a heightened vigilance among some advocates, which appeared linked to anxiety, fear, and anger for some participants.

More broadly, many participants expressed that advocates often feel overwhelmed by the number of people they see suffering and the depth of that suffering. Advocates working directly with people experiencing homelessness reported seeing the same individuals for many years who were trapped in poverty and homelessness due to issues such as precarious legal status or unmet health needs. Social service workers also report being regularly shocked by what they saw during their workdays. Gaetan Heroux, for example, explains:

I sit there, two, two and a half hours, and I see who’s there . . . What’s a 73-year-old man, an 82-year-old man, doing in a shelter? Why isn’t he housed? Why isn’t he? Like, I don’t understand this. But then I do, because there’s just nothing out there.

Several participants reported feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and frightened at various times during their advocacy work, and believed these feelings were common among their colleagues and allies. A few advocates disclosed that this has led to their own mental health issues, physical health issues, and/or substance abuse issues. Two advocates expressed that their work had almost “killed them.” Participants engaged in frontline social service work were more likely to disclose these personal experiences of distress, although these experiences may also be common among advocates working in other professions.
Participants identified that an additional challenge was the limited support networks available for advocates who are seeing and experiencing distress as a result of their work. As Michael Shapcott explains,

There isn’t a lot of support for people who are engaged in advocacy, and there are a lot of challenges. Many people burn out and they burn out because they’ve put in so much time, and they keep giving and giving and not taking and nourishing . . . Not only are there no support networks, or very limited support networks . . . but we kind of think that’s sort of for sissies. You know, “real” political advocates don’t need to have personal support networks.

Some advocates expressed feeling quite isolated and alone, especially when working outside of an advocacy group or facing resistance to the work they were doing. When Alex Abramovich began his advocacy work on LGBTQ homelessness in Toronto, he experienced this sense of isolation. He explains, “It was just really difficult because I felt very isolated in many ways because I wasn’t part of an organization. I was just myself, as a PhD student. So . . . I don’t really have that much power.” Given that advocacy can be isolating, several participants identified that strong support networks and shared vision were essential for being able to cope with the distressing conditions that advocates witness every day, especially for frontline workers. Without these systems of support, participants felt that homelessness advocacy is hard to become engaged in and continue with.

In contrast, however, emotional distress was also seen as a trigger for becoming involved in advocacy for many participants, and feelings of distress were also linked to their passion for the issue. Distress thus often functioned as both a barrier and a motivator in the lives of many participants. When participants were asked why they became involved in advocacy, they frequently traced it back to distressing experiences in which they witnessed the suffering of people in poverty. For advocates who had disengaged and re-engaged in advocacy, re-engagement was similarly triggered by such distressing experiences. Bob Rose, for example, explains,

The trigger, actually, for that change [re-engaging in advocacy], was the number of members [of PARC] who were dying. And there were some deaths that had quite a dramatic impact on me. And there were people who were dying in a state of homelessness. Patty Dempsey died in a stairwell. You know, I said goodbye to her one night in the drop-in. She went “home” and she was living homeless in a stairwell, and we didn’t know. We didn’t know. And it was kind of like fffttt, take a step back where you kind of realize that ill health is the norm here. You know,
precariousness is the norm. So at a certain point you’re not even looking for that because you are trying to relate to people in a different way, which is not about what is wrong, right? Not just what is wrong, but also where’s the rest of you and what can you do?

In Rose’s case, the deaths of homeless friends and PARC members provided the motivation and impetus for reengaging in advocacy aimed at addressing the root causes of homelessness. For many participants, the emotional distress caused by witnessing suffering was thus a double-edged sword.

4.5.5 Surplus Powerlessness and Historical Amnesia

A number of participants identified a cluster of barriers to advocacy related to historical knowledge and feelings of powerlessness. In particular, several participants offered three intersecting claims: (1) advocates and the Canadian public often have limited knowledge of the Canada’s history of social change and homelessness advocacy, (2) new advocates have limited opportunities to be mentored and learn advocacy skills, and (3) people underestimate the power they have to create social change. For a number of advocates, these factors combine to create barriers to effective advocacy.

Several participants felt that new people entering the movement often don’t know the history of the movement and are unaware of successful advocacy models they can draw from and build on. Without this historical knowledge, participants felt that new advocates fail to benefit from an understanding how and why advocacy has resulted in political changes in Canadian history. A number of participants also argued that this lack of historical consciousness makes it difficult for advocates to persevere in the face of challenges and resistance, in part because they lack insight into the approaches previous advocates have used to deal with such difficulties. A number of advocates felt that this lack of historical consciousness is related to the limited documentation of Canadian homelessness advocacy, and several worried that this history may be lost as older advocates leave the movement or pass away. For some participants, fields such as social work can contribute further to this historical amnesia by guiding students to individualize social issues through casework, rather than training them in advocacy skills and history. In general, participants worried that that the education system in Canada does a poor job at educating students on why their actions matter politically.
For many participants, this lack of historical consciousness was evident among the Canadian public as well, and a number of participants worried that this absence inhibits public understandings of social change. Brian Burch argues,

We don’t know our own history. It’s an ongoing thing that there’s been generations of successful political transformation in this country that people have become so used to that that they don’t see that as being the result of historical struggles of people like them . . . So the world has changed. It might be frustrating, but the world can change, and if you don’t study your history you won’t know that it can. You will think you’re trapped in this moment . . . The fact that we don’t have a national housing program yet doesn’t mean it’s not going to happen.

Like Burch, several participants felt that often the present socio-economic relations appear permanent if they are not understood in relation to previous waves of social change. Burch and others argued that this can contribute to feelings of powerlessness among the populace, and thus deter advocacy participation.

In light of this, a number of participants argued that part of the work of advocacy is convincing people that they do have the power to create social and political change, in effect helping people overcome feelings of fear, hopelessness, and powerlessness. As Michael Shapcott explains,

I think part of the necessary work of advocates is to actually convince people that there are things that can be done and that we can do . . . I think that when people are convinced that their actions can make a difference, then people get involved in things. . . . [For example] people got involved in food banks because, by and large, they became convinced that taking a can of beans or a jar of peanut butter and sticking them in a cardboard donation basket, and then eventually having that go into the hands of a hungry person, that’s a good thing and that’s something they can do. Now the reality, sadly, is that in the case of food banks, they actually aren’t tackling the underlying causes of hunger.

As Shapcott’s example illustrates, many participants felt it is essential for advocates to find ways to direct people’s good will towards change efforts that tackle the underlying drivers of inequality, while simultaneously convincing them that their individual contribution can effect change and that collective battles can be won.

Some participants argued that feelings of powerlessness were structurally produced and politically motivated by people in positions of power. Josephine Grey argues,
Government has been successfully painted as an enemy, or something that is beyond your reach, and something that you’ll just be cynical about and you don’t communicate with. Well that’s handy, isn’t it? You know, the big business lobby sure as hell has spent a lot of time telling them what to do, and they’ve made damn sure that we don’t think there is any point.

Participants also pointed out that frontline work often engenders feelings of hopelessness, making it difficult for staff to imagine that larger structural change is possible. As Brian Burch explains,

You’ve also been working with some of these people for a long period of time and it doesn’t seem like you’ve succeeded, so you have that sense of failure. The reason I left prison chaplaincy [was because] I felt I couldn’t be a voice of hope for anybody in this institution. If you can’t be a presence of hope, you can’t do it. You shouldn’t do it. If it’s the only job you can do, however, you might take it.

Feelings of failure in both advocacy and frontline work can lead to the adoption of advocacy strategies that reaffirm feelings of powerlessness, according to one participant. Citing the work of Michael Lerner (1998), Michael Shapcott suggests:

It is my observation that many people start to believe that the forces that are against us are all-powerful, and there is nothing we can do, and they internalize that. They put themselves into positions of powerlessness. Or they deliberately adopt strategies which are stupid strategies, which are powerless strategies, which emphasize powerlessness. Like standing in front of a locked building and shaking your first and saying, “We hate you” and blah, blah, blah. There is no point in that, it doesn’t affect anything, and it just underlines the fact that they’re inside and they’ve got control.

Shapcott and Burch, among others, highlighted how devastating experiences of perceived failure can be if advocates are unable to contextualize those loses within historical struggles that began before, and will continue long after, the present battle.

4.5.6 Discussion

Participants argued that the barriers and disincentives to homelessness advocacy are numerous, varied, and often mutually re-inforcing. Strikingly, when comparing participants’ perspectives on this theme, there was a clear class division with respect to what extent advocates were buffered from these challenges and their impacts. For advocates with lived experiences of homelessness, who were living in poverty, and/or who were working in frontline organizations, their experiences of emotional and
psychological stress appeared to be higher than their colleagues employed in NGOs, research, or government. It also appeared that advocates in the latter position had more job security and financial security, and on the whole seemed less concerned that the history of grassroots advocacy be recorded or taught. Advocates who identified as single parents or as having disabilities also expressed higher levels stress and anxiety with respect to advocacy participation.

Advocates who are employed in social services are, in a very tangible and meaningful way, living with some of the worst consequences of the decline of the welfare state alongside those whom they are employed to help. Consider, for example, Heroux’s phrasing when he describes the recent battle over welfare allowance in Toronto. He says it was “really, really going to be rough. Because if we didn’t change that, then I was going to be living in a world now where I had all kinds of people who were going to be cut off welfare” (my emphasis). Being employed as the person who has to tell hundreds of people that they will be losing their social assistance, and possibly their housing, due to a minor change in a bureaucratic form, is a vastly different experience from those typically had by advocates holding jobs in research or NGOs. Given this, it is unsurprising that advocates’ experiences of the challenges and disincentives to advocacy vary significantly, and that profession and class plays a significant role, in addition to other forms of identity-based oppression that advocates face.

These findings suggest that the decline in federal and provincial funding for social programs, combined with the chill on advocacy caused by the Harper government’s enforcement of the 10% rule, has functioned to further distance grassroots advocates from those employed in research or NGOs. Several Toronto-based participants mentioned that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, advocates of all stripes were frequently working together, collaborating on campaigns, and meeting to discuss issues. Josephine Grey argues, “we used to be pretty effective at working side by side in different sectors and recognizing the connections . . . it just got completely weakened and undermined with all of these restrictions.” As will be argued in the next section, the capacity of the movement to overcome some of these structurally-produced barriers, and foster communication and collaboration between advocates of different classes and approaches, will significantly impact what the future of homelessness advocacy will look like.
4.6 A Tactical Crisis? Debates about Tactics in Toronto’s Homelessness Movement

Advocacy tactics were among the most discussed, and possibly the most contentious themes in interviews with homelessness advocates. A majority of advocates supported a broad spectrum approach in which multiple tactics were employed to create maximum political pressure. When the responses were probed further, however, there was a significant split in the sample between advocates who believed direct action tactics can be effective and should play a role in the movement, and advocates who believed direct action techniques are ineffective and seriously hinder the movement. In particular, participants had very polarized understandings of how to best engage and influence people in positions of power. Advocates’ beliefs about tactics were deeply linked to their (often implicit) theories of social change, their analysis of the current political climate and public opinion, their sense of identity and history, as well as their analysis of how power circulates. This section will explore the historical emergence of a “crisis of approach” to advocacy in the homelessness movement, as well as investigate how advocates differ in their beliefs about what different tactics can (and cannot) achieve. Toronto’s homelessness movement is the focus in this section given that a majority of participants focused on how tactical conflicts have manifested themselves in Toronto. As such, caution should be used when applying these findings to tactical conflicts in other homelessness movements across the country.

4.6.1 A Crisis of Approach: The Shift in Advocacy Following the “Queen’s Park Riot”

Numerous participants felt that homelessness advocacy in Ontario and Canada is currently at a crossroads, particularly in Toronto. Several expressed that there are “huge tensions within the group about how to do activism and how to do policy influencing” (C. Crowe), and that “the sector isn’t united in terms of what it thinks about what to do” (S. Gaetz). Several participants labeled this a “crisis of approach” and argued that such
conflicts are occurring in other social movements, both across Canada and internationally. As John Clarke expresses, “Not just in Canada, but internationally we face a crisis of how to effectively oppose the agenda of austerity.” Disagreement over tactics within the homelessness movement was seen as one of the ways in which this crisis has manifested itself.

In the context of Toronto, a number of participants felt that these tensions can be traced back to OCAP’s March on Queen’s Park on June 15, 2000 (dubbed the “Queen’s Park Riot” by the media) (Klein, 2000). The march on the Ontario Legislature, attended by approximately 1,5000 people, sought to “confront the provincial government’s attacks on poor and homeless people,” and to specifically pressure the Mike Harris government to allow a delegation of homeless people to address the Legislative Assembly (Clarke, 2010, n.p.). The event escalated to an intense conflict between marchers and riot police, resulting in numerous arrests and significant national and international media attention.

While one participant felt that support for OCAP and/or direct action tactics actually increased as result of the March (Clarke, 2010, n.p.), other participants felt that this event led to a schism between advocates who had previously been collaborating despite tactical differences. Kathy Hardill explains the significance of the event in the following way:

> I think it forced a lot of discussions about tactics and militancy that hadn’t really been happening. I think within the movement we’d been able to avoid having those discussions. A lot of people from agencies attended that demonstration . . . No one planned for it to be a riot . . . It was a demonstration, like many others before it, and there was a lot of healthcare representation there. It was a really terrifying experience to be there that day, and it was kind of traumatizing to people and it scared people . . . So then people started to link OCAP with riots, but really it was the police that escalated the situation that day.

According to a number of participants, one of the consequences of the event was that a number of individuals, groups, and organizations which had previously been working with OCAP subsequently felt the need to distance themselves from that organization. Tanya Gulliver-Garcia and others indicated that one of the consequences of the March was a shift in alliances and networks within the movement.

Some advocates felt that this shift resulted in poorer collaboration, communication, and coordination between groups who had previously worked together despite their differences. As Matthew Behrans explains,
I think the problem is that . . . there was a real schism in terms of even communication when it came to dealing with “hotheads” like us [Toronto Action for Social Change] and OCAP. I mean, OCAP is seen as hotheads, we’re seen as hotheads, but if you look at who has been “getting the goods,” who’s been opening up the shelter spaces and really putting pressure on that, the sleep-ins and the Moss Park vigils and all that kind of stuff, that was all of a piece. So, I think it’s really just, it’s not saying your approach of putting on a suit and tie and making your deputation is wrong, it’s not. That’s an important part of the process, but coordinate it. Be open to coordination with others tactics you might not necessarily agree with, but let’s see if we can work together.

By contrast, many participants reported that when homelessness first emerged as a major public problem in Canada, there was significant discussion and collaboration among many different kinds of actors and stakeholders. Michael Shapcott felt that in the 1980s, “everyone was talking to everybody else and we were all sharing ideas.” While undoubtedly a number of factors contributed to this perceived breakdown in communication between advocates of different tactical persuasions, participants frequently framed the March on Queen’s Park as a galvanizing moment for the emergence of these challenges because it sparked serious tactical divisions.

For some advocates, this perceived breakdown in communication indicated (and exacerbated) the decline of the movement in Toronto and Canada more broadly (with the exception of Quebec). Several advocates reported that advocacy events in Toronto are not attended nearly as well as they once were. According to Bonnie Briggs,

We don’t get anywhere near the numbers now. We mostly get small crowds now. There’s been many times I’ve gone to Queen’s Park expecting a lot of people, and show up and there’s only a half or a quarter of what I expected to see.

Interestingly, however, other participants felt that rather than declining, the movement has actually just transformed and has been increasingly situated in Alberta. Tim Richter, for example, argues, “There’s been a shift here to more of a focus on lobbying. And more of a focus on taking leadership, and taking initiative, and lobbying senior governments, and using research as a way to bring about change.” These shifts, regardless of how they are perceived by advocates, are deeply related to how conflicts and debates over tactics have played out in the movement.
4.6.2 Support for Direct Action

Probably the central tactical debate in interviews was to what extent direct action is an effective tactic. Direct action, broadly defined, refers to tactics that seek to seize power for oneself, or one’s group or class, rather than attempting to persuade those in power to make desired changes (Graeber, 2009, p. 201-211). Here are two useful examples of how direct action has been defined:

Direct action implies one’s acting for one’s self, in a fashion in which one may weigh directly the problem with which you are confronted, and without needing the mediation of politicians or bureaucrats. If you see some bulldozers about to wreck your house, you engage in direct action to directly intervene and to try to stop them. (Sans Titres Bulletin, quoted in Graeber, 2009, p. 201)

Direct Action aims to achieve our goals through our own activity rather than through the actions of others. It is about people taking power for themselves. In this, it is distinguished from most other forms of political action such as voting, lobbying, attempting to exert political pressure through industrial action or through the media. All of these activities . . . concede our power to existing institutions which work to prevent us from acting ourselves to change the status quo . . . Examples of Direct Action include blockades, pickets, sabotage, squatting, tree spiking, lockouts, occupations, rolling strikes, slow downs, the revolutionary strike. In the community it involves, amongst other things, establishing our own organizations such as food co-ops and community access radio and TV. (Sparrow, quoted in Graeber, 2009, p. 202)

While participants were not asked for their definition of direct action, it was clear that they were referring to a cluster of tactics that would fall within the above definitions.

Many different groups have engaged in different forms of direct action in the Toronto-based homelessness movement over the years. Several participants argued for a broad understanding of direct action, suggesting that actions such as the TDRC’s delivery of washroom facilities to Toronto’s Tent City, or St. Clare’s Multifaith Housing Society’s grassroots funding of affordable housing, should be considered direct action. As such, a number of participants argued that while direct action is often associated with occupations, protests, and demonstrations, it should include all actions that provide a solution to the issues faced by the homeless community.

A majority of participants expressed that broad spectrum advocacy campaigns which include the use of direct action tactics are often the most politically effective. By contrast, a smaller number of participants believed that direct action is the most effective
tactic for creating social change, while several believed that direct action is necessary for change to occur. Advocates evincing this perspective tended to believe that the majority of successes achieved by poor people’s movements, currently and historically, “were won by people who fought for them – they weren’t given to us” (G. Heroux). While these participants acknowledged that the political climate does structure the efficacy of advocacy tactics, advocates of this orientation tended to believe that history shows direct action “gets the goods.” John Clarke, for example, attributes a majority of OCAP’s successes to the fact that they have “been prepared to take militant, disruptive action.” He explains,

I think governments provide anything to the poor because they are scared of social unrest. I mean, if you go back to the dispossession of the peasantry, the reason they brought in the Poor Laws was because brutal repression wasn’t enough. They couldn’t control that population. And so I think that what remains true is that some level of social provision is provided because people rebel, and that has always been true, and sometimes that happens incrementally within the population, and sometimes it happens on a more organized basis. But it is the thing that produces results. There’s a parallel approach that the poverty reduction people do personify, and it would be inaccurate to say that that’s never achieved anything. I mean, as hostile as I am to it, I must acknowledge that it’s not always necessarily been a failed approach. I think in a time of austerity, it’s totally the wrong approach, but in earlier periods, sort of a consultative approach sometimes did produce results.

Clarke and most other advocates argued that political context matters when assessing tactical utility. Where participants differed was in their estimate of how and why policy makers are influenced and whether they felt that direct action is effective in the current political climate.

Participants who emphasized the efficacy of direct action offered many examples of historical wins in which direct action was crucial in obtaining services, programs, housing, funding, and supports for people experiencing homelessness. Toronto-based examples that were offered by more than 2 participants included: the opening of 24-hour warming centres and cooling centres; the opening of Moss Park Armoury for emergency shelter space; additional funding for the Toronto shelter system and improvements to shelter conditions; the building of supportive and/or affordable housing (advocates specifically mentioned St. Clare’s Multifaith Housing Society and the housing obtained
by residents of Toronto’s Tent City); the provision of Special Diet funds to thousands of people in poverty; and others.

One example of direct action deserving of closer explication is the Special Diet campaign, led by OCAP and their allies beginning in 2005. Through some careful investigative work, an OCAP member realized that there was a provision in Ontario Works that was not well known or accessed – the Special Diet Supplement, through which an additional $250 per month could be obtained by people accessing Ontario Works if their healthcare provider determined it was necessary to meet their health needs (K. Hardill; “A Short History of OCAP,” 2008). OCAP coordinated “Special Diet Clinics” in which healthcare providers signed forms allowing access to the Special Diet supplements for thousands of people in poverty. The largest clinic, held outside the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in October of 2015, hosted over 40 healthcare providers who signed Special Diet forms for over 1,100 people (“A Short History of OCAP,” 2008).

The campaign faced significant resistance from government, including the illegal shredding of Special Diet forms at welfare offices across Toronto (K. Hardill). However, OCAP consistently pushed back on such tactics, including by occupying welfare offices that were refusing to process Special Diet forms. Kathy Hardill, who was deeply involved with the campaign, felt that these occupations were successful because they forced mid-level bureaucrats in welfare offices to “give answers for what was an indefensible set of actions . . . you were forcing them to publicly acknowledge that what they were doing was an illegal action, so they had to back off. People did get their money.” Indeed, before the campaign began, Ontario Works was spending $2 million on the Special Diet in Toronto, but by 2007 they were expending $30 million (“A Short History of OCAP,” 2008). Several participants thought it was one of the most successful campaigns to happen in Toronto, and believed the Special Diet supplement often profoundly impacted the lives of the people who received it. Kathy Hardill, for example, remembers,

People would come back to us and say things like, "Thank you so much for helping me get that money, my kids tasted strawberries for the first time in their lives." Or, "I was able to buy a birthday cake for my daughter, and she's thirteen and she's never had one." Or an eight year old boy who opens the fridge which is full of food and he's never seen this phenomena ever, and he says, "Oh mommy, can we take a picture?" Like really profoundly influencing people's lives.
Through various direct action tactics, the Special Diet campaign was able to directly provide access to additional funds for people in poverty, and was able to defend these provisions through tactics such as occupations and protests. Advocates emphasized that these successes, and the speed at which they were won, were directly related to working outside of the political lobbying process and a demonstrated willingness to defend successes using direct action tactics.

Part of the power of direct action, according to several advocates, is that it enables and encouraged people who directly experience injustice to take action on their own behalf. Some participants particularly worried that restricting advocacy to lobbying silences the voices of those most affected, while simultaneously removing the issue from the public eye and diluting the urgency and energy around the problem. Matthew Behrans illustrates this view well,

> Governments are used to being lobbied and pressured. The role of the government is to represent you, and you should be using all the tools available, especially if you think that they’re open to hearing you. Why wouldn’t you? Because the minute . . . you take things off the street, it’s no longer a public concern. So, then it’s just the same people dealing with it in the background, which also limits the voices of those who are most affected, because governments are not going to set up lobby days with residents of social housing, right? It would be NGO people, and the people who wear suits, and who basically understand the political culture. I think there’s a kind of gentleman’s agreement – and I say that with no sense of irony at all, it usually is the men – that they don’t want somebody who has some mental health issues. The real voices.

Behrans’ argument that leaving social change to professionalized lobbying can quickly erode public pressure on the government was shared by a number of participants. Advocates like Behrans also felt that the role and impacts of direct action are sometimes made invisible when change is only attributed to professionalized advocacy work. For participants who shared this view, the media attention that direct action often receives can assist in political agenda-setting in a way that working within the system cannot.

### 4.6.3 Critiques of Direct Action

In contrast, a smaller number of participants believed that direct action is less effective and can disadvantage, hinder, or jeopardize the movement. A majority of these advocates did not reject direct action wholesale, but most felt that in the current political
climate it is a mistaken approach. For example, Tanya Gulliver-Garcia comments, “I’m not opposed to non-violent direct action, but I don’t really think it is going to get us anywhere right now.”

A key concern among these participants was that the use of direct action allows people in positions of power to dismiss the issue and the advocates fighting for it. Tim Richter, who has worked closely with various levels of government for decades, argues:

And in speaking to political leaders, I know certainly the Conservative political leaders, and I think many of the Liberal political leaders, kind of dismiss some of the activist voices as the “same old cranks.” They say the same thing and the public’s not with them. Or some types of activism can alienate the public. Some types of activism are effective at building public support.

Richter’s point here is that direct action tactics often fail to capture politicians’ attention in part because they tend to alienate the public and in part because they involve the same activists, doing and saying the same things. In addition, a few participants felt that direct action tactics are built on historic advocacy models that are no longer appropriate in the current political and economic climate. Steve Gaetz argues,

There hasn’t been a lot of critical reflection on advocacy . . . But a lot of the tactics are ones that are borrowed from the 1920s, and the world has changed, right? But the tactics haven’t . . . One of the overarching things I think around advocacy that has to be important is - the ranting and shouting from the side, and the pointing of fingers - there may be some role for that because we do have to call out power. But I would think that if we really want to help government move, we have to be more solutions-focused in our advocacy.

Advocates with this approach tended to prioritize working collaboratively with government, in combination with community-based organizations and multiple stakeholders. These participants argued that advocates should consider how best to provide or co-create the strategies, models, frameworks, and priorities for government to build policy on, and should think about strategically framing these in ways that are palatable to political leaders and match the current direction and priorities of the government.

Within this perspective, participants often framed governments as unwitting participants in creating and/or maintaining inequality and injustice in Canadian society, the implication being that if governments are shown how to change and given the tools to do better, they will. Consider, for example, the impressive advocacy work of Alex
Abramovich on the issue of LGBTQ homelessness in Toronto. Over several years, Abramovich experienced significant resistance from the City of Toronto to acknowledge and address homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system, but has since gained significant ground on the issue, including the opening of Sprott House – Canada’s first LGBTQ transitional home. Asked what his thoughts were on direct action tactics, Abramovich replied,

So I have a very strong reaction to that [direct action]. Thinking of that, I feel that, [sigh], that that really won’t get us anywhere. And that it will actually do the opposite, right? . . . I feel like, when I think of this issue and it’s like, what was successful? It was really sharing the voices of young people. We’re working on these films and sharing these films and just being really, really thoughtful and just understanding that like, okay, so these people [City of Toronto] are resisting, there’s a reason why the City is not understanding, and so I’m going to have to try to help them understand how this is an issue. So here’s a six-minute film to help you better understand this issue. Whereas I feel like if I were to show up with a whole bunch of youth and we’d all be kind of like camped out and angry with signs, I don’t know, I think it would have been an extremely different reaction.

Interestingly, advocates such as Gaetz, Richter, and Abramovich tended to be more optimistic about the future of advocacy than advocates who advocated for the use of direct action tactics (with a few exceptions).

4.6.4 Support for Broad Spectrum Campaigns

Despite significant disagreement regarding direct action tactics, a majority of participants believed that broad spectrum campaigns, defined as campaigns that utilize numerous tactics simultaneously, are most effective at creating social and political change. Participants offered numerous historic and contemporary examples of instances where the simultaneous deployment of diverse tactics was able to win gains that might not have been won otherwise. In particular, participants emphasized that each tactic provides its own unique advantages and opportunities, both by providing unique pathways to action and change, and by engaging diverse peoples in advocacy. For many participants, the simultaneous deployment of diverse tactics was seen as a key component of success. Reverend Maggie Helwig, for example, explains:

I would say we’ve had a lot more failures than successes overall, but when there have been some successes what has helped is . . . we’ve had a broad spectrum campaign. You’ve got, pretty much, almost the whole range of political tactics
being employed at the same time. You’ve got OCAP, and you’ve got the Wellesley Institute, and you’ve got the churches, and you’ve got the whole different spectrum of possible ways of approaching this politically, and they are all being deployed pretty much at the same time. And that’s really what makes a campaign effective.

Similarly, advocates rarely mentioned examples wherein the use of one tactic functioned to undermine another tactic, even among participants who were fairly hostile towards direct action tactics.

A strong narrative among participants was that there is a productive and creative tension between tactics perceived to be moderate (e.g., lobbying, petitions, deputations, report-writing) and those perceived as adversarial, aggressive, militant, and/or disruptive (e.g., occupations, squats) which can move the issue forward successfully. Several advocates felt that more “aggressive” tactics keep the issue alive for the public and thus foster public pressure on governments, pressure which more moderate advocates are then able to capitalize on and leverage into concrete change. John Andras, a self-identified “Bay Street three-piece-suit” and long-time advocate, explains:

The protesters and the John Clarkes of this world do create an effective show. They get the media out, they get the story told, and I think that role was very important because if we didn’t have protests there would be no coverage, there would be no story, there would be no awareness raising of an issue or a problem. But I think also there needs to be calmer voices as well, to sort of say, “Okay, well, we have a problem, let’s work towards a solution that works for everybody.” The role of the John Clarkes of this world are absolutely essential. He has done more for this city than almost anybody I can think of. But you also have to have the middle ground as well. Without a John Clarke, I wouldn’t be as effective at doing anything. Without people like me, he would be much less effective.

And indeed, John Clarke makes a similar point regarding why some of OCAP’s work has been successful:

I think it’s that we’ve been prepared to take militant disruptive action, but at the same time, that has led to a situation where there’s also been a backup of more moderate people who were also speaking out on issues. When we do stuff, we tend to find that quite conservative agency voices start to get raised, which is really helpful.

While advocates differed on how they framed this dynamic (i.e., direct action “backs up” moderate action vs. moderate action “backs up” direct action), many advocates felt that this was a productive dynamic in the movement.
Advocates need to think carefully about how to strategically use politicians’ and governments’ concern over their public image, and several participants suggested that using multiple tactics is one way maximize pressure in this area. As Matthew Behrans explains,

Whether it’s Trudeau or Harper, we know that they’re very much concerned about their spin and their imagery. And this is not the time to put the placards down. It’s a time to have the discussions with the government, but isn’t it more powerful when they’re negotiating with you and they look out the window and they see 500 people with placards in their arms? That makes your voice stronger.

Indeed, participants offered multiple examples of instances where this exact dynamic was successful. Tanya Gulliver-Garcia, for example, explains,

What I’ve always said is, like OCAP especially, has these nonviolent direct interventions, occupying offices and getting police attention, and media attention. And then TDRC or Housing Action Now or the Multifaith Housing Society would come in and ask for pretty much the exact same thing and get it. Because then the city wasn’t seen as giving in to OCAP. But the people [in these advocacy groups] were all the same – it’s the same groups of people on the committees. I mean like the Heat stuff [the establishment of a Heat Registry in Toronto that provided air conditioners to people experiencing poverty through a clause in OW] that I got through City Hall was just me writing a policy paper and going to the Board of Health with it. You know, like very straightforward, proper lobbying. But a lot of that stuff was stuff we had asked for for years as TDRC, and OCAP asked for some of it . . . Again, that goes back to, I always call it the pendulum, that has OCAP on one side and everybody else on the other end, and the city or the politicians will come and pick something in the middle.

Fascinatingly, Gulliver-Garcia is one of several advocates who pointed out that advocates in the Toronto movement were fairly fluid in their associations with different groups (perhaps much more so during the late 1990s and 2000s), and would frequently move among advocacy groups in order to maximize pressure on government through the use of multiple approaches.

Several participants noted that even when advocates do not support a particular tactic and/or don’t want to use that tactic in their own work, an ethics of mutual respect can function to strengthen the movement. David Hulchanski, for example, compares the TDRC to OCAP in the following way: “We were very clear on the differences between the two of us . . . we were complimentary and we viewed ourselves as complimentary, and not at all in opposition. But just a different approach.” When asked about tactical
conflicts within advocacy groups, Brian Burch similarly emphasized that in his experience, conflict has been fairly minimal because advocates were able to voluntarily shift their role or leave the group to pursue other approaches. Importantly, some participants pointed out that having a broad campaign means that individuals and groups can continue to be active on the issue even if they are facing particular structural, political, or personal barriers to participation. A few advocates also thoughtfully noted that some tactics may be more risky for advocates that are experiencing particular forms of vulnerability or marginalization (e.g., individuals with precarious legal status, single parents in poverty), and thus broad spectrum campaigns allow individuals to choose what kind of participation feels safe for them. As a result, participants argued, a larger number of people have an opportunity to become engaged.

4.6.5 Beyond Efficacy: Tactics as Expressions of Identity

Identity was a presence in discussions of tactics by virtue of its absence. Very few participants explicitly linked their choice of tactics to their personal identity, whether in relation to race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or any other identities. Some advocates did describe their political identity (e.g., non-violent anarchist, anti-capitalist), but for the most part there was silence around identity issues when it came to tactics (although a couple of participants did note that the stakes involved in tactical choices differ along lines of race, class, gender, etc.).

There were a few exceptions to the absence of discussions linking tactics to identity in the sample, but for the most part these exceptions were relegated to a brief comment. In the case of Gaetan Heroux, by contrast, his discussion of tactics clearly linked the history of his class and his class identity with how and why he engages in direct action advocacy. Heroux argues that it is because of the direct action struggles of generations of poor people before him that he and his family have been able to survive. He offers an example:

There were huge, huge relief strikes in the 1930s, in the suburbs. One in New York, at one point, five thousand people, 5,000 families were on strike – almost 20,000 people. And they were cut off relief, so that meant they weren’t getting any money. But they still went on strike, because they wanted more relief and better relief. So when people who are already half starving go and do this, and do
this with their families, and are willing to take on those risks, I owe a great debt to them . . . that’s how I survived.

When asked about how he assesses the efficacy of direct action, as part of his explanation he responds,

So what effect does opening up the Moss Park Armouries have on policy makers, on government? What effect does an inquest – you know, that last four months to do with the deaths of three men on the street – have on the body politic? How do you measure that? For us, it’s everything. It’s our history, it’s how we win things, it’s how we mobilize, and it’s how the world works for us . . . The streets, for us, are very significant.

I isolate Heroux’s response because it highlights how and why tactical choices may extend beyond evidence-based assessments of efficacy. In Heroux’s case, they are also related to his appraisal of his identity and role in relation to the sacrifices and struggles of poor people who came before him. While Heroux provides evidence-based rationales for how and why direct action tactics are effective, he also frames his use of these tactics as related to belonging to group identity (a “we”) that historically employed these tactics. In this way, he is honouring this political and class-based tradition through his use of the tactics that have been so meaningful to the group that he sees himself as part of.

While a small number of participants did mention the historical struggles of poor people, for the most part this rarely involved participants claiming to be part of a tradition based on class identity, or any identity for that matter. For the most part, the only advocates who did reference poor people’s history were advocates who were engaged in grassroots advocacy and were much more likely to identify as poor themselves. While a number of participants were quick to acknowledge the people and groups who had historically challenged powerful forces and won gains for people in poverty, no participants except Heroux framed their own choice of tactics as continuing a tradition begun by a group to which they themselves belonged.

The question this omission raises is: how are the tactical choices homelessness advocates make related to class identity and class history, and why do these connections to class remain latent in most advocates’ discussions of their choice of tactics? It remains unclear how class privilege, combined with other forms of privilege, may operate to guide tactical choices among advocates. Similarly, the desire to maintain class privilege
may also be a factor in tactical choices among advocates. Further research in this area is needed.

4.6.6 A Note: Direct Action = OCAP

It is worth noting that, when asked about advocacy tactics and direct action, a vast majority of participants immediately supplanted the term “direct action” with “OCAP.” On the one hand, this is an intuitive shift – OCAP is perhaps the most well-known and longstanding anti-poverty advocacy group in Ontario that uses direct action tactics. On the other hand, this psychological merging of “OCAP” with “direct action” means that participants are disinclined or inclined to believe in the efficacy of direct action based on their opinion of the work of OCAP. For participants who were less sympathetic to OCAP, this conflation was particularly evident. Interestingly, a few participants also referred to John Clarke as an archetypal figure or representative of a particular kind of approach to advocacy (e.g., “the John Clarkes of this world” (J. Andras)). Again, this shorthand speaks to the power and extent of the intellectual leaps participants made between OCAP and a specific range of tactics. This leap was so complete that participants often didn’t mention specific tactics, they just referenced OCAP or John Clarke. This slippage is worrying because it may prevent participants from engaging in more careful analysis of the many tactics available to them, both within and beyond direct action. It also functions to polarize tactics and groups within the movement, and that may deter advocates from making efforts to facilitate meetings and discussions among diverse advocates insofar as they presume they already know exactly where each other stands.

This “psychological slip” may actually be perpetuated because it serves a helpful function politically. It is unclear what this function is, and undoubtedly it is not uniform across advocates. It is possible that it is perpetuated because it enables advocates to distance themselves from OCAP, a group which has had negative and tense conflicts with municipal and provincial governments. For advocates working within, or in partnership with, the Canadian government, this distancing may assist them in their work. However, further research is needed to determine if and why this is the case, and what other reasons there may be for advocates supplanting “direct action” with “OCAP” in discussions. In
particular, it would be worth investigating whether and how advocates feel supporting OCAP and/or direct action would affect them professionally and politically.

4.7 Tensions in the Movement

The newer generation of advocacy folks, I think a lot of the time, in their quest to be cerebral and appealing to political leaders, they have sometimes been less than forthcoming with the truth. And so, for example, I think that a lot of them have tried to sell us all on the fact that homelessness can end in ten years in a community, if that community has the right plan and the right partnerships. And I think there actually is no model that reliably supports those kind of predictions. There’s no statistical model that supports the idea, plugging in those variables and tells you in ten years, it’ll be time. They’re actually not telling the truth, in my opinion. Sometimes – even people with PhDs – have actually been complicit in that. I think that can be good in the short term, and get some quick wins by maybe getting some short term promises from those political leaders who are now less intimidated, and feel comfortable with who is in front of them. But as a larger community of citizens, you actually can get misleading. And honest people are led to believe that it’s over, that we’re almost there; honest people who care are led to believe that Housing First will revolutionize homelessness, and honest people are led to believe major changes in social welfare are not necessary in order to significantly reduce homelessness . . . Eventually the chickens come home to roost and the advocates who previously used those kinds of narratives like ending homelessness [will] have little choice but to reinvent it . . . over the next several years the “ending homelessness” narrative will not be as appealing as it once was. – Nick Falvo

Within the homelessness movement in Ontario, and Toronto specifically, there are a range of issues which participants felt were divisive or caused significant tension. These included issues that advocates felt conflicted about themselves and within their advocacy group(s), as well as issues that participants felt had created divisions within the movement itself. While these ranged considerably, a number of tensions emerged again and again in advocates’ discussions, and were thought to have considerable power and meaning with respect to the movement’s ability to achieve gains in ending homelessness. This section will address two key tensions in the movement as perceived by participants: (1) Housing First, and (2) the professionalization of advocacy. One or more of these tensions were present in all interviews, and in most cases all three were discussed. In
many cases, participants felt these tensions were critical axes upon which the future of the both advocacy and homelessness hinge.

4.7.1 Housing First

Housing First was one of the most contentious issues amongst participants, in particular because many participants felt there was significant momentum around Housing First as “the” approach to homelessness in Canada. Housing First centers on moving people experiencing homelessness quickly into permanent housing, and providing “wrap around” services and supports as needed (Gaetz et al., 2013). While many advocates agreed with Housing First in principle, some grassroots advocates were particularly critical of the ways in which it has been mobilized in parts of Canada. For Toronto-based advocates this was a particularly sensitive topic, but it remains to be seen whether Housing First is as controversial in other parts of Canada. It is a formidable task to disentangle participants’ many theories and narratives about Housing First, how and why it came to prominence in Canada, its efficacy, its limitations, why there has been resistance to it, its impact on the homelessness movement, and its impact on the future of homelessness.

For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the three main criticisms levied against Housing First by the participants who were critical of this approach to addressing homelessness. These include: (1) The implementation of Housing First in Toronto does not meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, and may be particularly problematic for some populations; (2) Housing First distracts, deflects, or reduces pressure on the federal government to establish a national housing program; and (3) Housing First functions to displace people experiencing homelessness and protect the interests of developers and big business. This section will briefly review each of these concerns as raised by participants.

Problems with the Implementation of Housing First

The most frequent concern raised about Housing First is that its implementation in Toronto, particularly through the Streets to Homes program, does not meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Several participants emphasized that participants in the Streets to Homes program were frequently housed in inadequate and sometimes
unsafe housing, separated from community and resources, has limited access to food and healthcare, and had virtually no money. Gaetan Heroux, who visited many Streets to Homes participants, explains, “You would walk in there and you would look at the cupboards and the cupboards were empty. This was the middle of the month. People had no money and they’re in the middle of nowhere.” John Clarke similarly argues,

> What tends to happen is people get their subsidy, for a period of time, which is not going to last forever anyway, and they are moved out to some suburban location where there are no services, where they end up sitting in a furniture-less place with an empty fridge, with the nearest food bank two miles away. While . . . in theory they are housed, in practice they’re jumping the turnstiles and coming back downtown to try to survive . . . You had a situation where if a unit was refused more than 3 times [by prospective tenants], then they could move somebody from Streets to Homes into that unit.

Indeed, the 2011 film “Unheard Voices,” produced Mike Yam, documents the inadequate conditions and negative experiences had by some participants in Streets to Homes. Further, Kathy Hardill and other participants worried that Streets to Homes’ focus on visible homelessness tends to exclude groups disproportionately likely to experience hidden homelessness (e.g., women and girls).

Participants who defended Housing First with respect to this issue argued that failures in implementation do not mean that the model itself is flawed. Steve Gaetz, for example, argues that misinformation about Housing First can develops in contexts where it is equated with its implementation. He argues,

> We really have to ensure that when new models or ideas come out, that at the community level there is fidelity to the framework, right? Because one of the reasons why Housing First in Toronto is considered suspect is because of the Streets to Homes program. The way it was handled wasn’t a true Housing First program . . . What you need to do rather than just say “it doesn’t work” . . . [is] grab the reins of the issue and flip it around. Say “we’re going to define what Housing First looks like for women fleeing violence” [for example].

Gaetz and others believed that it was necessary for advocates to mobilize their analysis of the shortcomings of Housing First in order to redefine the approach and make it work, rather than reject it wholesale.
Housing First Distracts, Deflects, or Reduces Political Pressure Needed for Real Solutions to Homelessness

Several participants felt that the focus on Housing First within the Canadian government deflects attention, energy, and funds away from producing true solutions to homelessness, including specifically the establishment of a national housing program. Kathy Hardill argues,

Housing First kind of allows us to also not talk about the need for a national housing program. It allows individual municipal applications of the model... but then it kind of deflects energy and attention from the need to push forward a national housing program... So housing people is not a bad idea... but [Housing First] is sort of like putting a lot of resources in a place that makes it appear like you’re housing people, and allows you to kind of deflect attention away from what you are not doing.

Like Kathy, several participants felt that the adoption of the Housing First approach has also meant that resources have been directed away from expanding the social housing sector, increasing income supports, and improving the emergency shelter system. Several advocates maintained that the root of homelessness cannot be solved without major changes in all of these areas, and for the government and advocates to claim otherwise is dishonest and harmful.

According to several participants, there was a conscious strategy on the part of the Harper government to disentangle Housing First from social housing and income supports for political and ideological reasons. According to some participants, there has been significant pushback against Housing First for this reason, even when advocates agree with the guiding philosophy of Housing First. Michael Shapcott explains:

Housing First, of course, was adopted and corrupted by the federal government and Harper and his gang. What they did was they limited the Housing First model just strictly to private rental housing and rent supplements, because they hate social housing, they think it’s bad. So many housing advocates, because of their experience of Harper and Housing First, said Housing First is a terrible thing because look at what Stephen Harper has done. The problem is not that the concept – that when somebody is unhoused that housing is the solution – that’s not the problem. The problem is that the government twisted it ideologically.

Among participants who agreed with Shapcott, several believed that the Housing First model should be entirely abandoned, while others felt that it can be modified and/or leveraged strategically in order to make significant gains for people experiencing
homelessness. In essence, participants who were critical of Housing First for this reason ranged between two poles: those who believed Housing First is a sham and a political weapon used to deter the creation of social housing and a national housing strategy, and those who believed Housing First is effective but has been poorly implemented by governments that advocates should partner with in order to improve program delivery.

There were a few participants questioned the causal logic of this claim, arguing that Housing First was not, and is not, the primary barrier to a national housing program. Interestingly, Tim Richter, President and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, argued that Housing First can be leveraged to win gains in housing across the country, and may actually help to amplify a call for a national housing program or national housing strategy. It is worth quoting him at length on this:

There's been this recognition that Housing First itself isn't going to solve the problem. We need to deal with the housing issue. And I think here's where you're seeing the impact of the activism out of Ontario and Quebec because this call for a national housing strategy is something we've heard forever. It's been this drumbeat of “we need a national housing strategy.” And I think these two things are coming together where this sort of revolution in Housing First, and gaining progress, and getting government involved, and you're starting to see now the political impact of activism over two decades out of Ontario and Quebec and the mainstreaming of the issue. So mayors all over the country are calling on the federal government to be involved in housing, and this is supported by the activism that's been basically relentless since the mid 90s . . . We know in order to ultimately eliminate the issue and deal with the issue we need to deal with the housing, and the housing pressures are acute across the country. And so the mayors have gotten on board and are echoing the same things that have been said by the activists, and that Housing First is showing that actually it is possible to reduce homelessness.

Some participants who defended Housing First emphasized that critics of Housing First might benefit by employing a solutions-focused approach by finding ways to rework, modify, or supplement the program’s approach, particularly given the federal government’s commitment to Housing First.

**Housing First Displaces People Experiencing Homelessness and Protects the Interests of Big Business and Developers**

A number of participants worried that the implementation of Housing First has functioned to visibly remove people experiencing homelessness from the downtown core
and “ship them off” to the margins of the city, in particular through Toronto’s Streets to Homes program. Several participants felt that this practice functions to reduce the visibility of the problem in the eyes of the public, and thus give the appearance that government has solved the problem. Such a move, several participants argued, functions to reduce public pressure on the government to address the issue. In particular, a number of advocates felt that the removal of people experiencing homelessness from the downtown core in Toronto is deeply related to protecting the interests of the business community and developers. John Clarke argues,

In this city, the way that things have been implemented has been highly problematic, because it was all really property-developer driven. The idea is that you want to house people . . . [Toronto Mayor David] Miller wants to house people because he wants less visible homelessness. And so I honestly think if the Chamber of Commerce had come to see David Miller and said, “We’ve been wrong all along, we think people like homeless people on the streets, he’d say, “Well we’ll cancel the program, and that’s fine” . . . the issue becomes one not so much of solving people’s problems in their lives, as actually removing the problem from sight. So, it’s striking when you look at the figures, what premium is put on moving people out of the central part of the city. That’s the focus.

A number of participants who shared this view felt that Housing First in Toronto has functioned to push affordable housing to the outskirts of the city, allowing developers to centralize control of the downtown core. Part and parcel with this, several advocates felt that this approach creates the illusion that the problem of homelessness is exclusively what is visible -- people on the streets -- and if they are housed then there is no longer any problem. In effect it “masks” the problem.

The foundation of this perspective is that Housing First is being implemented because developers and the business community profit from it, and because the government profits from maintaining the interests of these wealthy elites and from appearing to address the issue. This perspective is premised on the belief that government policy is significantly motivated by and responsive to the interests of big business, including at the municipal level. John Clarke argues,

I don’t know how many times now the [Toronto] administration has said they are going to follow the 90% occupancy [rule in homeless shelters] and they don’t do it. And you realize that when council votes to have the 90% [rule], it’s a ceremonial thing, but that’s not where the decisions are really being made. I’m not trying to get into Star Chamber theories here, but there’s actually a working
group of senior administrators, probably the most influential of the politicians, who have a direct link to property industries and developers.

For these participants, Housing First is actually a clever sham used to disguise the actual motivations and implications of this approach. In the words of Beric German, “It grows like a flower. It looks like a flower. But its roots are killing us and taking all the water from us.”

4.7.2 The Professionalization of Advocacy

A second concern among some participants is that advocacy has increasingly become professionalized and this has negatively affected the potential for social change. Although few participants explicitly used the term “professionalization,” this process was latent in participants’ descriptions of the growing schism between so-called “grassroots” advocates and the increasing numbers of advocates who are pushing the agenda forward in professional agencies, government, research, or NGOs. According to some participants, this professionalization of advocacy is highly problematic and is a key driver of the co-optation and/or decline of the movement. For others, as discussed in the section 4.6, there is strength in having multiple types of advocates working on this issue, including those with significant political or economic power. However, participants who were critical of professionalization argued that these groups are not working together currently, and that professional advocates are actually profiting from, and building careers upon, their efforts to end homelessness. Perhaps unsurprisingly, critical advocates linked this professionalization to the adoption of Housing First by the Canadian governments, suggesting that not only has the private sector and developers financially benefited from Housing First, but “professional” advocates have as well.

A few participants suggested that professional advocates have profited professionally and/or financially as a result of their advocacy work. While some professional advocates would undoubtedly freely admit this themselves, the suggestion was often accompanied by one or both of the following suggestions: (1) these advocates’ approaches and tactics are guided by the desire to profit financial or professionally; and/or (2) professionalizing requires that advocates set aside, to some extent, tactics and
approaches that would actually end homelessness. With regards to the first issue, Beric German argues,

People who are advancing Housing First, saying we don’t want any more hostels or band-aid solutions, are sometimes making $150,000, $250,000 a year. They don’t have to wait out the solution – they’ll be fine . . . Some of the professional guys, they want it both ways. They want to make a big buck. But of course, if they want a big buck, they have to go over to The Man. They have to.

A number of grassroots advocates also worried that these professionalized positions are increasingly becoming institutionalized within the sector. John Clarke for example, argues

The poverty reduction, constructive engagement operation is a durable and powerful undertaking. There’s no question – it’s formidable. There’s a whole network of these people and you might even only slightly ironically refer to it as an industry. There are people who build careers on it. These people put extensions on their homes based on this approach, so it’s got formidable staying power.

Clarke and several other grassroots participants argued that part of the reason advocates professionalize is because it benefits them financially, and as a consequence they end up fortifying an emergency response which cannot address the roots of the problem.

A couple of participants also argued that this is occurring at the agency and NGO-level as well, where they felt that some civil society organizations prioritize maintaining their funding sources and charitable status, even if it means setting aside their objectives. Matthew Behrans is particularly eloquent on this issue:

Most of the people who are involved in this work, we don’t get paid. I’m not a staff person, we live by the scruff of our neck most of the time. And there are people who make $80,000 a year to end homelessness, or $100,000 to end homelessness. And if they’re doing good work, and they’re moving it forward, I mean everybody should have a good, decent wage. And I’m not trying to take away from the fact that, you know, you’ve done all this education and you’re really talented at what you do, but as you say, don’t make yourself out to be something that you’re not . . . It’s just such a bureaucracy and over the last 10 years as Harper has politicized the CRA audits of charities . . . This whole thing about Oxfam and how if you want to alleviate poverty that’s charitable, but if you want to end poverty that’s not within your mandate. We should blow that up everywhere. But people are like, “Well, we might lose our charitable status.” Well, if you’re worried about your charitable status, then you’re not really worried about ending poverty, are you? Because if that’s more important to you. Why is it so bloody important? OCAP doesn’t have charity status, and they’ve done a hell of a lot more to get this issue out there and to open up spaces so, maybe charitable status is an obstacle as opposed to a good thing. Can we have
that discussion? “Well, we can’t have that discussion because how do you expect us to fundraise?” What do you need to fundraise for? Have you seen the offices of some of these things in downtown Ottawa, downtown Toronto? If part of your overhead is $100,000 on rent and the photocopying machines and stuff, how do students at OPIRG do it? They’re in some crappy little office and they do it! They’re able to proceed. So again, there’s this professionalization of activism.

Like Behrans, several advocates worried that some NGOS and agencies are dishonest in their representations of their work, and actually care more about maintaining their funding or status than actually reducing or ending homelessness.

In addition to this, several advocates worried that new advocates or new people involved in the sector are increasingly being directed towards professionalizing rather than learning advocacy skills or social movement history. A number of participants were concerned that this was occurring both at the social service level, wherein staff time was increasingly being directed towards professional casework rather than advocacy. Brian Burch explains,

I think a dangerous problem is the whole professionalization and medicalization of what is basically a simple human problem. I haven’t got a place to stay and I end up being in a bad mood because I’ve got no place to stay. You, being the social worker, trying to get me to think about why I’m feeling that way is not going to help me get a place over my head tonight, thank you very much . . . I think also the training in some of the schools of social work and community work programs have taken away the advocacy and replaced it with casework. So if your training is casework rather than advocacy, it’s a bit hard then to overcome something that you worked so hard to achieve yourself.

Brian’s point here is echoed by many advocates who worried that many new people who are entering the sector have limited knowledge of advocacy history and lack advocacy skills.

For the most part, the more “professionalized” advocates in the sample -- i.e. the advocates who have high-level positions in governments, research, NGOs, or social service agencies -- did not raise these issues, nor did I specifically ask for comment on them. One participant, however, when asked about whether and how his work and the work of the movement have been delegitimized, argued that these criticisms have been extremely harmful. Michael Shapcott explains,

One of the things that is most damaging in terms of delegitimization has been this slur that’s continually used - the term “poverty pimp.” That somehow people who are paid to be advocates, paid to be organizers and activists, for some reason they
have a vested interest in this kind of stuff and they actually want to see more poverty. It’s incredible how terrible that issue is. You know, at various points in my life I’ve had people whisper to the *Toronto Star* that I’ve been secretly ripping off money, and that I have a cottage. You know, things that are sort of demonstrably not true, but nevertheless they are an attempt to make the suggestion that people’s motives are not pure . . . All of that is an attempt to turn social, economic and political advocacy into, to shrink it down to something that’s really quite negative.

Referencing his current work at Prince’s Charities Canada, Michael explained,

> We’re learning how to work in collaboration with people that we’ve often fought with. Some advocates haven’t learned that lesson and, I don’t like airing dirty laundry in public, but there are a lot of advocates who just want to be pure, because being pure is somehow better than actually doing something. I’m no longer interested, or I’ve never been interested in - I’ve never been pure. If I have to wear a white shirt and a tie in order to access some resources to advance the issue . . . You know, I don’t think that corporate charities are going to solve the housing issue, but I do think that there are some business practices that can actually help.

Future research might benefit from exploring how other professionalized advocates would respond to these criticisms, and their perspectives on the origins and consequences of these kinds of criticisms.

### 4.8 Resistance to Advocacy

> You have a vision . . . at any point I could have just given up. Like how many times it was like, “No, I won’t meet with you.” No, no, no. How many times have I heard no, right? How many times it was like, “Sorry, you can’t come here.” But . . . you have to be creative, you can’t give up, and you have to be creative. You have to find a way; if you ask someone to meet with you and they say no . . . then you have to find another way.

> – Alex Abramovich

Advocacy invariably faces resistance of various kinds from many sources, and advocates’ abilities to continue to advance an issue is undoubtedly related to how successful they are at negotiating resistant forces and counterclaims (Best, 2013, p. 51). Resistance to advocacy, distinct from barriers to advocacy participation, refers to individuals, groups, and governments’ attempts to adversely affect advocacy work, advocacy organizations, or advocates themselves. Although various kinds of resistance
can function to create barriers to movement participation (e.g., imprisonment), I use the term “resistance” in general sense to refer to active efforts to prevent, deter, punish, silence, delegitimize, or most broadly eliminate existing advocacy efforts. In practice, however, barriers to advocacy participation and resistance to advocacy participation often work in conjunction to make advocacy more difficult to engage in, particularly over time. Resistance to advocacy, in conjunction with barriers to advocacy, occur at the micro level (e.g., arresting individual advocates), mezzo level (e.g., defunding advocacy organizations), and macro level (e.g., enacting laws which prohibit congregating in public spaces).

This section will explore 4 key forms of resistance that homelessness advocates have experienced, as identified by participants. For the most part, participants focused on macro or mezzo forms of resistance, sometimes drawing on micro experiences in order to illustrate their points. While participants discussed various forms of resistance, a vast majority of advocates focused on the Canadian government’s attempts to delegitimize and/or neutralize the movement.

4.8.1 Confuse, Deflect, Ignore, and Deny: Neutralizing Advocacy

Participants identified a range of discursive tactics that the Canadian government has used in its attempts to neutralize and resist homelessness advocacy. In most cases, this was an attempt to neutralize the issue and/or neutralize their responsibility with respect to addressing homelessness. Participants identified that political leadership would often employ a set of discursive strategies to respond to the problem and advocates’ demands for actions, and that repetition of these responses through the media helped fortify their power. These strategies were often used to delegitimize the movement through confusing, deflecting, ignoring, or denying the issue and/or the government’s responsibility with respect to creating or addressing homelessness. With a few exceptions, there was no indication that participants believed politicians were accidently or inadvertently ignoring or confusing the issues. In most cases, participants believed that politicians and government officials were extremely adept at framing and reframing the issue to their advantage and minimizing any potential damage to themselves, their colleagues, and their political party.
Several participants argued that, for the most part, politicians are very adept at manipulating public perceptions of social problems by deflecting the issues in various ways. When asked about how he thinks governments have tried to delegitimize homelessness advocacy, Hulchanski argued,

I don't know if it's ever delegitimized. It's to have an answer, right? The answer of the Liberals, the Paul Martin government, is, "Hey, we are doing something. We appointed the Minister Responsible for Homelessness. We started the SCPI. We care about the issue and we're doing something. Whereas a Conservative will say . . . the solution to homelessness is a strong economy and a good job, and that's what we're in favour of. So that's deflection, but a good deflection for their base - a bunch of people will totally agree with that. They don't understand the issue of homelessness - they think it's a bunch of lazy people, why don't they get a job? . . . The Minister is saying, "Yeah, we are struggling to have a stronger economy . . . that's going to make as many jobs as possible, and in fact we can't raise the minimum wage because we want to maximize the number of jobs to get these lazy people into jobs." So, politicians are good at that, from whatever the perspective is. That's what advocates need to deal with. They can confuse an issue, make claims that aren't true, but it's the government, it's the leader of a political party -- it's going to be reported on as news.

As Hulchanski points out, government officials utilize various kinds of deflective tactics and media coverage can amplify narratives. Most specifically, some participants pointed out that in some political systems, politicians don’t even need to bother manipulating public perceptions or addressing public concerns unless they threaten their ability to remain in power. Hulchanksi, for example, argues that in a first-past-the-post system in Canada, politicians or political parties may not even need to comment on an issue unless they are politically vulnerable to losing an election or losing seats in the House of Commons or the Legislative Assembly.

Ignoring an issue or staying silent on an issue was also a key strategy employed by politicians in response to advocacy. Even in instances where governments themselves produced reports that recommended government action on homelessness, several participants relayed numerous examples when the report was met with silence, or the government simply never enacted key recommendations. For example, Anne Golden argued that the recommendations of the (1999) Toronto Homelessness Action Task Force Report were largely ignored. She argues,

On the whole . . . I would give our report an A+ in terms of identifying issues. I think our recommendations – everybody felt we were right, nobody criticized our
recommendations. But in terms of implementation and execution, I would give us a D+. We weren’t successful in getting more affordable housing. We were not successful. I can tell you one of the big misses is that they didn’t listen to us . . . This is a huge problem for cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and for all major cities across the country.

As Golden points out, despite significant media coverage and popular support for the recommendations, government simply chose not to implement a majority of the recommendations. It is now almost two decades since the release of the Golden Report and very few of the reports recommendations have ever been implemented.

Another key discursive strategy used by government is to leverage the public’s confusion or ambivalence on a social issue in order to neutralize the government’s responsibility for creating and/or responding to the issue, according to several participants. Michael Shapcott explains how this has occurred with respect to housing and homelessness:

A lot of other [public] polls suggest that people are confused, they don’t know if this is a federal issue, a municipal issue, or provincial issue. They don’t know if the private sector needs to be either incentivized or legislatively coerced into doing more affordable housing. So, the fuzziness around public understanding is exploited by politicians. So, you get the federal politicians, including Harper, saying, “Yes, housing is a serious issue, and I wish those damn premiers would get off their butts and do something about it.” And the premiers are very happy to bash Harper, or to do what Harris did, which is to download to the municipalities and say, “God, it’s a terrible problem. One of those mayors at the city council are going to have to take up the issue.” And John Tory. . . says, “This is a terrible issue and somebody else should be dealing with it.” So, you have all this sort of stuff. People are confused, and of course the real answer to the question of whose responsibility it is is very simple. It’s everybody’s responsibility.

This repeated deflection of responsibility for the issue undermines advocates’ efforts to mobilize public pressure on government and politicians insofar as the public may not have a clear idea of what governments they should pressure. This confusion may prevail especially in instances where homelessness has been split into numerous sub-issues, and different levels of government claim (or deny) jurisdiction over solutions to particular sub-issues (e.g., addressing chronic homelessness, building affordable housing, establishing harm reduction programs, etc.).

In addition to deferring responsibility for social problems, sometimes governments actually deny that the problem exists, according to many participants. While
denials of the existence of homelessness among politicians are fairly scarce now, this was not always the case. Several participants argued that creation of the Toronto Homelessness Action Task Force was actually the result of such a denial. In 1997, during his campaign to become Toronto’s mayor, Mel Lastman stated to media that “[There are] no homeless in North York,” but the following day a woman experiencing homelessness was found dead in a North York gas station (DeMara & Lackey, 1997). The political fallout and media attention surrounding this comment actually pushed the issue forward, according to numerous participants. However, in many cases such denials often function to delegitimize the efforts of advocates. For example, when trying to bring forward the issue of transphobic and homophobic violence in the Toronto shelter system, Alex Abramovich personally experienced the consequences of this kind of denial. Making numerous attempts to meet with key decision makers on this issue, Abramovich was often met with the response that “this is actually not an issue, and we don’t have the evidence [that this is an issue].” He goes on to recount the consequences of a Toronto Star article in which he spoke out about this issue:

> And then I remember . . . the General Manager of Shelter Operations with the City of Toronto [at the time] . . . he wrote a letter back to The Star and basically denied that these are problems. Basically just said, “I don’t understand how this is possible, in the shelter system we actually have standards and we have policies that, this can’t be happening” basically. They printed it. It was really upsetting . . . I thought, okay, so he doesn’t understand how this is a problem, so I want to meet with him. And he totally refused to meet with me.

However, since that time, the City of Toronto has acknowledged and begun to take action on bias-based violence towards LGBTQ youth in the shelter system, and in 2016 opened Canada’s first LGBTQ transitional home for youth experiencing homelessness, thanks in part to the tenacity of Abramovich.

Interestingly, a few advocates noted that some of the harmful discourses offered by politicians’ and governments’ about homelessness often become absorbed and reflected in the homelessness sector itself, in part because of funding issues. The most obvious of these, as many researchers have documented, are narratives that individualize homelessness and attribute it to individual deficiency rather than systemic issues (e.g., Lyon-Callo, 2004). Consider the following story offered by Gaetan Heroux regarding the narratives around the provision of transit tokens to people experiencing homelessness:
At that time, I was running the drop-in on Parliament [Street]. They [the City of Toronto] used to give tokens out for the Out of the Cold program. So they gave me 400 tokens, and it was a cold day, and I gave out 400 tokens in an afternoon. People were lined up inside the drop-in to get the tokens. And then once I did that, I got a call from the City . . . and they gave me shit. They said, “Why did you give away that many tokens in one day?” And I didn't know, it was a cold day, how do I choose? . . . [And the complaint from the City of Toronto was] “Oh, people were selling them” and “How do you know what they did with them?” . . . So they didn't give me 400 tokens again; they gave me 100. So you're put in an impossible situation and somehow you're supposed to pretend that everything is okay . . . And I know that for the majority of people that transportation is a huge issue . . . But the debate is not that . . . You know what it is? It's: _who gets the tokens, and what do you get the tokens for, and how many tokens do they get?_

What this story demonstrates, among other things, is how government and the sector can reframe evidence of extensive poverty and desperation into evidence of pervasive deception and pathology among people experiencing homelessness. When this narrative gets mobilized, the discussion that ends up taking place is one focused on managing policies around pathological individuals, rather than how to better meet the needs of people who have been made homeless through government policy. For Heroux and other participants, social service agencies often end up focusing their discussions on managing this “pathology” and negotiating the bureaucracies built to deal with it. In effect, these narratives end up functioning as powerful counter-discourses to advocates’ focus on the systemic and structural causes of homelessness.

**4.8.2 “We Can’t Afford It, It’s Not Our Role, the Rules Don’t Allow It”**

Participants argued that an extremely common claim that governments and politicians make, and one that is demonstrably untrue, is that they cannot afford to address the issue, or that it is not within the government’s role or capacity to address the issue. This narrative is undoubtedly related to broader neoliberal discourses that prioritize small government, the retraction of the welfare state, and the belief that government can and should only focus on a few issues at a time (Harvey, 2005). Michael Shapcott argues that advocates can get drawn into the discourse that we should only focus on one issue, or one part of the issue (e.g., veteran homelessness), and end up being disconnected from each other and the collective power they have. He explains,
There is a real challenge in finding that basis of unity [among advocates] and it’s very easy for governments to divide. You see it expressed in some pretty basic ways. [For example] in governments’ pre-budget initiatives, they typically will say what are the one or two things they are going to do. But you should be doing everything, and you should be doing it effectively. And one of the sort of parts of this, the neoliberal agenda, is to spread this notion that governments can’t do very much, and what they do they can’t do very well, so therefore you’ve got to be very focused with government - just give them one or two things. You know I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve sat with politicians and [they say] “Just tell me one thing I need to do,” and I say, “You’ve got to do everything. You can’t just do one thing, because if you do one thing you are not going to do anything.” And besides . . . we are an advanced, wealthy country, we can actually do more than one thing at a time. But we [advocates] tend to sort of go back to this, we feed into this process, and then we get divided.

Indeed, Shapcott’s argument that advocates have adapted their approach to lobby on a few issues, rather than demand government accountability on all issues, was certainly reflected in several participants’ approaches and advice.

More broadly, many participants criticized governments’ claims that they cannot afford to address homelessness, or even afford to meet the most basic needs of people experiencing homelessness. In particular, several participants pointed out the governments’ willingness to pay for war, the Olympics, and bail out big banks during the 2008 financial crisis, but their unwillingness to meet the basic shelter needs of Canadian citizens. For example, when Anne Golden was asked why the recommendations of the Toronto Homelessness Action Task Force Report (1999) were not implemented, she explains:

Well, they said they couldn’t afford it. Of course that’s not true because, since then, we’ve been able to afford a whole bunch of things. Recently we funded military equipment with billions of dollars, we’ve afforded and wasted billions of dollars on a whole bunch of things. So there’s billions of dollars that have been spent several times over, but the cost of my plan was in the range of a million dollars total. It could have been afforded, but they said they couldn’t afford it.

Similarly, Bread Not Circuses’ 1996 campaign against Toronto hosting the Olympics was met with the same kind of resistance. As Michael Shapcott explains,

I’m not against either sport or culture, but it seems like there’s unlimited political will and financial resources for these, and yet when we go to them [the government] and talk to them about housing for homeless people, they said there’s no money.
For many participants, these funding decisions are much more reflective of the government’s priorities and clearly contradicts their insistence that they care deeply about the issue.

A couple of participants mentioned a further discursive strategy government officials used the claim that government procedures, bureaucracies, or policy prevent them from taking action and that they are powerless in the face of these rules or laws. This was the case with respect to Tent City in Toronto, which was located on Home Depot’s private property between 1998 and 2002. John Andras, who was negotiating with both Home Depot and the City of Toronto at the time, explained that Home Depot was willing to give up some of the land for housing but the City of Toronto would not allow it due to zoning bylaws. When asked why this was, Andras responded “The answer I got back was that zoning was there for everybody, that you can’t make one exception without having to make a million . . . There is a policy and a process, and that’s the way it is.” Several participants expressed that this attitude of “those are the rules and that’s the way it is” was a common response to advocacy work, even when the government’s action (or inaction) contradicted its own rules or policy (e.g., in the case of the 90% shelter occupancy rate in Toronto).

Further, participants raised numerous examples of instances in which the government did change rules or policies when it was in their interests. This was certainly the case following the successful Special Diet Campaign, begun by OCAP and allies in 2005. As Kathy Hardill explains,

So we started filling the Special Diet forms out, and the provincial government very quickly thought, “Holy Hanna, this is crazy! We’re spending a lot more money on giving money to welfare recipients. So we’ve got to restrict this list!” So they restricted it. So it has undergone a few different iterations, it’s much more restricted now than it was. It used to be that you could . . . check off a box so they would get extra money to prevent getting things like anemia, iron deficiency anemia, or what have you. But now you actually have to have health conditions like diabetes, or kidney failure, or whatever, before you could qualify.

This example reveals that government’s explanations that “those are the rules and we can’t do anything about it” are, at least to some extent or in some cases, discursive strategies rather than statements of fact.
4.8.3 Aggressive Government Resistance to Advocacy

Participants mentioned many examples in which the state employed more aggressive tactics in order to deter, prevent, and/or punish advocates and homelessness advocacy. Tactics participants perceived as aggressive included arrests, criminal charges, imprisonment, fines, violent confrontations with police, police raids, undercover cops infiltrating advocacy organizations, stolen property (e.g., laptops), and police surveillance. In many cases, these tactics involved the use of, or threat of, police involvement or police violence. John Clarke refers to this broadly as the “criminalization of dissent” (Clarke, 2004, n.p.). More insidious tactics that participants also perceived as aggressive were auditing advocacy organizations, demonizing advocates in the media, and bureaucratically obstructing projects, programs, or the administration of funds to people in poverty. Analysis of the examples provided by participants suggest that these tactics were not only employed in the context of an escalating conflict between advocates and the state, but were also employed in the absence of such an escalation. This is an important distinction insofar as government responses to such incidences often rely on a narrative of necessity and an explanation that advocates “forced their hand” into such actions.

Participants described many instances of arrests or conflicts with the police, particularly in relation to direct action tactics, including specifically protests, marches, rallies, squats, and occupations. One participant could not recount how many times he had been arrested because it had been so frequent, and other participants estimated that some advocates had been arrested over 100 times. For many participants, the so-called “Queen’s Park Riot” in 2000 was the quintessential example of aggressive state action in response to homelessness advocacy. Following this march, 45 people were arrested, many of whom were homeless and remained in jail for months because they could not raise bail. As part of the bail conditions for all 45 participants arrested, they were not to associate with any other member of OCAP, and faced serious repercussions should they be arrested on any minor charges afterwards (Clarke, 2004, n.p.). Three participants were charged (but not convicted) as “organizers of a planned riot,” which carries a two-year jail term. John Clarke was charged with “counseling to participate in a riot,” and “counseling to assault the police,” based on a speech he made prior to the protest. Clarke
would have served a jail term of seven years if he had been convicted (Clarke, 2004, n.p.). According to Clarke, “What has also happened in the wake of June 15 is that we have experienced, on an ongoing basis, the most insane levels of police mobilization against our demonstrations” (Clarke, 2004, n.p.). As described in section 4.5.3, the chill this has created on homelessness advocacy in Toronto was a powerful deterrent to advocacy participation for people who care about the issue.

Importantly, participants also mentioned instances in which advocates “flipped the script” and attempted to use their arrest to plead their case in front of a judge. Recalling the advocacy work done by TASC and OCAP, Tanya Gulliver-Garcia explains,

> Whenever they would plan a protest, they would have like, “If you go in this area, there’s a good chance you’ll get arrested. If you stay in this area, you are safe.” So people could make that choice. So some people would get arrested . . . because then they would get a chance to present their case in front of a judge. Matthew would say, you know, I would have the charges dropped because then I was never allowed to present my case in front of a judge. So that, somebody in whatever level of court, I think, gave some direction there that we are not going to pursue this case because pursuing this case allows him to make testimony, which the government isn’t interested in doing.

This example demonstrates how advocates seek to creatively engage with repressive state tactics in order to push the issue forward.

Participants pointed out that some aggressive tactics used by government were given additional power through particular kinds of media coverage. For example, the negative media coverage of the March on Queen’s Park was seen by several participants as causing serious damage to the reputation of the movement and bolstering support for harsh punishment of the advocates involved. Tanya Gulliver-Garcia explains how the media’s representation of the arrests of advocates can create a harmful depiction of advocates and advocacy work:

> With publicity around that though, the fact that you got arrested . . . those kinds of things get a lot of attention. The fact that the charges got dropped and nothing happened – no attention. So you think of those people as being lawbreakers, the way they’re viewed in the media, but if all their charges are dropped, they haven’t really broken a law. So I think it’s a really good way to get people offside.

Gulliver-Garcia and others pointed out that the media disproportionately covers advocacy that is violent or sensational in some way. For example, she recollects that there was a large prayer vigil at Queen’s Park the month previous to the March on Queen’s Park that
received no coverage. She explains, “We had had a thousand people do a prayer vigil at Queen’s Park, we walked around Queen’s Park for several hours, and nobody [in the media] came, like nobody. It was like, no big deal.” While quite a few participants felt that, in general, media coverage has had a positive effect on the movement, a number of advocates pointed out it has also been mobilized (consciously and unconsciously) to support governments’ or politicians’ agendas to disrupt advocates’ efforts and messages.

Linked to this, several participants argued that there has been a range of tactics used by government officials and politicians to damage the reputation and public image of advocates and advocacy generally. Cathy Crowe recalls, “Right-wing councilors would say horrible things about us, to our faces, in public.” During the Special Diet campaign, Kathy Hardill recalls that the Minister of Community and Social Services at the time called the doctors and nurses involved in the campaign “a bunch of rogue practitioners.” Indeed, this battle against the Special Diet campaign was joined by Rob Ford in 2009, then a Toronto mayoral candidate, when he brought forward a claim against Dr. Roland Wong to the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons for filing inaccurate forms that allowed “undeserving” patients to access the special diet allowance. Dr. Wong’s trial was followed with significant interest by the Toronto and Ontario media, and as a result of the College’s investigation, Dr. Wong lost his license to practice medicine for six months in 2012 and was forced to pay fees in excess of $60,000. Rob Ford argued, “A doctor is there to be a doctor, not to advocate for the poor, or to be the official Opposition in government through taxpayers’ money” (Ford quoted in Eggertson, 2010, p. E401). According to several advocates, such tactics, and the extensive media coverage they received, fostered a culture of fear around engaging in advocacy.

4.8.4 Divide and Conquer

Participants mentioned many strategies through which the government and politicians attempted to divide advocates from each other and weaken their collective power. In particular, advocates mentioned instances where government tried to fracture the issue (e.g., the deserving vs. the undeserving), pit homelessness advocates against each other (e.g., through creating competition for funding), and fracture solidarity across movements. As Michael Shapcott explains,
It’s easy for the government to divide and conquer by employing strategies like who is the most deserving. That single, male, homeless people that are employable are certainly much less deserving that children. That people who are medically vulnerable are certainly more deserving than people who are healthy. So . . . one of the things that we need to do in order to create effective coalitions is a wide range of representation, but that then makes the coalition vulnerable to being divided.

According to a number of participants, movement momentum is often undermined when advocates are not united in some core visions and a commitment to collective action.

A key way in which participants felt that advocates are divided from each other is through funding, especially because many advocates are employed in the sector and have to compete for scarce funds. Cathy Crowe noted that over the years, there has been more in-fighting amongst agencies for funding, and that agencies have become less overtly political. Once again, several participants raised the 10% CRA rule around political activity in charities as a key strategy that the government employed to divide and conquer advocates. Kathy Hardill recounts,

I think that one thing that was happening in the years, I guess between 2000 and 2007, is that . . . healthcare organizations and drop-ins [that support people experiencing homelessness] were definitely feeling more fearful to speak out politically. Funding was being cut and reduced and diminished, and the people in the same neighbourhood that were providing services often found themselves competing against each other for a limited pot of money.

As discussed in section 4.5, several participants argued that agency staff were increasingly being fired for engaging in advocacy work or for being critical of the agency’s direction. For example, Kathy Hardill argues that Street Health is not the same as it was, and in fact there was a campaign several years ago to hold Street Health accountable to its original mandate. And a lot of people were driven out of the organization, and it’s not the same organization it was in terms of political activity.

When asked whether this was a structural issue or more of a staff issue, Kathy explained, “it was really in the bigger picture of the context of strategic positioning within healthcare, and not wanting to piss off funders. Wanting to ensure one’s longevity and all those kinds of things.” Like Kathy, several participants felt that agencies seek to align their agendas with government agendas in order to procure funding, and in recent years that has meant a significant withdrawal from advocacy.
4.8.5 Discussion

These different types of resistance were often woven in and out of participants’ accounts of their experiences of resistance, and to some extent have been synthetically separated here in order to explore their different dimensions. In practice, however, different kinds of resistance were experienced simultaneously, and usually in the presence of a number of barriers to advocacy participation. Indeed, a couple of advocates recounted stories of difficult advocacy campaigns during which they faced such resistance from so many stakeholders that I was unable to disentangle the story. I was frequently awe-struck when participants described to me the many barriers and types of resistance they faced while engaging in advocacy.

While this chapter did not cover all of the forms resistance has taken, it did focus on the types of resistance that participants felt were most common and most powerful. Two interesting observations should be made about what participants did not discuss. First, very few participants discussed how experiences of resistance differ in relation to identity (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, etc.). While two participants did point out that advocates experiencing homelessness are more likely to have more and worse conflicts with the police based on their class status, how gender, race, and sexuality structure experiences of resistance was largely not discussed. An interesting area of future research might be the extent to which homelessness advocates’ experiences of resistance is structured along identity lines.

Secondly, when discussing different forms of resistance, few participants discussed the role of discourses that individualize and blame people experiencing homelessness. As can be seen above, government’s discursive strategies appear to have shifted away from blaming people to deflecting the issue, deferring responsibility, delaying action, confusing the issue, and maligning the reputations of advocates. This shift is meaningful for a number of reasons, but perhaps most importantly because it may indicate that the negative stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness no longer have the power that they once did, and that advocates no longer have to focus on contesting these perceptions. Based on these interviews, it would appear that the most significant discursive battles that advocates are currently fighting are not primarily
focused on dispelling myths about people experiencing homelessness as being bad, crazy, or lazy. As Hulchanski argues,

It’s really hard for somebody to say, well homeless people are mentally ill, or homeless people are all lazy. That’s still around, but really small, and I don’t hear too many politicians saying that. Even the Tories. I think if we look at the last few years of what the Harper government people said, if they said anything about homelessness, it would not be blaming the victim blatantly. It would be, “Well we’re doing this and that,” and back to the thing about a strong economy and good jobs . . . So, they would have a polite answer as opposed to saying, “It’s not a real problem” or “It’s a bunch of lazy people or drug addicted people.”

This shift in discourse is perhaps because advocates worked so hard in the 1980s and 1990s in order to undermine this discourse, and politicians and government had no choice but to change tactics. As Hulchanski argues, public understandings of the issue “is where progress has been made, and where it is possible, and it doesn’t happen by itself.”

**4.9 Common Ground & Winning Strategies**

*You need to look at the opportunities and you need to think strategically. So you need to think sort of high-level, or provincially and federally, but you also need to think locally . . . And then where are the strategic linkages? . . . And then you also need to kind of organize on the ground, so you can’t have this kind of drift. So I believe in participatory development. So then you involve the participants that you’re working with in this kind of work, and some of that means going out on the streets and marches and other things. You’ve got to put pressure and keep that up, pressure points, and then you’ve got to think about what the asks are . . . What’s winnable in the short-term, but then also what’s the bigger prize, right? What’s the long-haul prize? What are the headlights showing down the road? What’s coming? Where are the opportunities? Get ready and then make them an offer they can’t refuse. – Bob Rose*

Finding common ground can be difficult in a movement that has many divisions and tensions, especially if there are fractures in communication between different advocates based on tactical preferences and history. However, it is essential for homelessness advocates to understand this shared ground if they are to move forward collaboratively or collectively. This section is a first attempt at identifying some of that shared ground in the homelessness movement in Ontario, as well as highlights some of the advocacy strategies that many participants agreed were effective. While several of the preceding chapters highlighted the differences among advocates’ perspectives,
comparative analysis of interviews also revealed that participants *share* many beliefs about how to foster social change. Despite ideological, political, and tactical differences, there were many strategies and approaches that participants agreed were effective at moving the issue forward and/or achieving concrete gains for people experiencing homelessness. This chapter will explore eight strategies many participants agreed were effective for creating social change on the issue of homelessness, as well as participants’ advice to new advocates concerning these strategies (see Table 4.3).

| Table 4.3. Key Strategies for Creating Social Change |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Section**                     | **Strategy**                                    |
| 4.10.2                          | Using social capital, social identity, and symbolic power to your strategic advantage |
| 4.10.3                          | Involve the unusual suspects                    |
| 4.10.4                          | Create opportunities for people to speak out, participate, and say “yes” |
| 4.10.5                          | Solutions-focused advocacy                      |
| 4.10.6                          | Tighten your message, strengthen your pitch, shift the conversation |
| 4.10.7                          | Change public perceptions of the issue          |
| 4.10.8                          | Stay grounded                                   |
|                                 | Capitalize on opportunities                     |

In this chapter I distinguish “strategies” from “tactics” insofar as participants often associated the latter with political orientation (*e.g.*, the association of direct action with anarchism), various types of specific group-based actions (*e.g.*, rallies), as well as actual individual organizations (*e.g.*, TDRC). As was examined in section 4.5, discussions were frequently polarizing and divisive. In contrast, I am using the terms “strategy” or “approach” synonymously here to refer to participants’ descriptions of the mechanisms and processes at work behind tactics that make them effective. Strategies might include how to negotiate a tense political meeting, how to create allies in media, how to develop a solutions-focused pitch, or how to leverage one’s social capital for the benefit of the cause. In many cases, strategies refer to the deployment of soft skills in order to negotiate power. Thus strategies are part of, and beyond, tactics and political orientation. For this reason, it is perhaps unsurprising that participants who expressed very divergent tactical views also expressed similar views regarding advocacy strategies or approaches they felt were effective. This section contributes to a better understanding of what these shared approaches are.
4.9.1 A Note on Success: What Have We Achieved and Why Have We Achieved It?

Before delving into participants’ perspectives on effective strategies for social change, it is worth noting what participants believed homelessness advocates have achieved historically. Participants expressed complex and nuanced understandings of how and why social change happens, and why and how it has happened in the case of Canadian homelessness. Interestingly, these were rarely articulated as political theories per se, but instead were largely expressed through storytelling of various kinds. In a vast majority of cases, participants were cautious about describing any particular advocacy strategy or event as “the” strategy or event that moved the issue of homelessness forward. Indeed, the way participants described these strategies suggests they attributed their success less to the strategy itself, but rather to how the strategy functioned in the context of many other factors and actors, including oppositional forces.

A number of participants felt that while the homelessness movement has had quite a few successes, these have been in the context of overall losses for poor people and people experiencing homelessness. Referring to the work of OCAP, John Clarke explains, “We’ve won things, but I think it’s important to acknowledge that’s taken place in a context of overall retreat . . . All we’ve been able to do is win back some of what’s been taken away.” A number of participants articulated that while things are not substantially improved with respect to homelessness in Canada, it would be much worse if it were not for the work of advocates. Hulchanski, for example, explains, “We didn’t diminish the problem, but we did provide better support, in effect as ‘harm reduction,’ if you will, without solving the problem or ending the problem.” When asked to reflect on their legacy, participants largely articulated that the movement has, at various times, been able to: (1) mobilize public pressure on government in order to marshal responses to homelessness (mostly emergency-type responses), (2) educate the public about the issue, and (3) shift the discourses on homelessness in positive ways. The following explores eight strategies participants felt have moved the issue forward politically.
4.9.2 Using Social Capital, Social Identity, and Symbolic Power to Strategic Advantage

While participants seldom used the terms “social capital” (Portes, 2000), “social identity” (Brown, 2000), or “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1994), it was clear that many participants used all three strategically in their advocacy work, particularly when negotiating with people in positions of power. In some cases this use appeared strategic and intentional, in other cases it more latent. Similarly, some advocates “performed” social identities that were not congruent with how they identified (e.g., pretending to be a journalist in order to attend political press releases), while others used their achieved social status draw attention to the issue or establish inroads with government. In contrast, several participants recounted stories in which advocates hid their social identities or social capital to their strategic advantage. In many cases, participants employed strategies that were extremely layered and clever with respect to how they negotiated their identity, class, capital, and power in order to achieve particular ends.

A number of participants highlighted the ways in which the social status of advocates can be effectively mobilized to meet advocacy goals. Kathy Hardill, for example, recounted instances in which doctors and nurses came together publicly on issues of poverty and homelessness, explaining “it was a real kind of joy to be able to use that social status and influence that professionals like us get because of our jobs.” One of the participants who reflected on this extensively was John Andras, a Toronto-based investment broker and Executive Vice-President of the Andras Group. As a member of the TDRC, John recalls that he “sort of tag-teamed with Beric and Cathy a lot in those days.” He explains,

I was a little off, I was sort of “the suit,” and they found it very useful to roll me out because we have all these advocates doing what advocates are supposed to be doing, and then we have this Bay Street broker in a three-piece suit, and it causes this sort of dissonance. And Cathy or Beric could say something, I could say exactly the same thing, but because I was in a suit and because I was a business person, it would be taken very differently.

As Andras highlights here, the TDRC was able to collectively mobilize his social capital and social identity to disrupt politicians’ expectations about who was fighting for the issue, and thus force them to reconsider and renegotiate their response to advocacy.
efforts. In Andras’ example and others, participants described incidences in which advocates were able to selectively and strategically play off each other’s social identities or statuses in order to achieve their objectives.

A number of participants also mentioned instances in which advocates were able to use their high social status to access resources that other advocates had been unable to. Reflecting on the advocacy that resulted in Calgary and Alberta’s plans to end homelessness, Tim Richter argued that one of the key reasons those plans got mobilized is because the business leaders involved had access to politicians that other advocates did not. He explains,

You know, with the CEOs, they gave us some influence, but what they really bought us was access. Because if a guy like me, from the social services, approaches the province, they can see me coming a mile away! They know I’m after money. But . . . the CEO of Trans Alta and Suncor and Imperial Oil can get their phone call answered.

It is worth highlighting, however, that several participants were critical of using status and power to move the issue forward if it was done at the expense of fortifying other social or environmental inequalities. These participants also worried that the use of such tactics may also come at the expense of excluding the voices of people who are homeless. Matthew Behrans, for example, was highly critical of his experience at the 2013 National Conference on Ending Homelessness, which he felt marginalized the voices of people with lived experience and prioritized a professionalized approach to advocacy. He explains,

So, [name redacted] was there, and there was another woman in a wheelchair who was on ODSP, and we used to eat lunch everyday together. On the second day she broke down and just said, “I have tried for so long to get my dignity back, and I’ve worked at it, and I’ve been okay until I came here.” She said, “They ignore me. They don’t want to see me. They don’t want to talk to me.”

While Behrans and others believed in advocates using all the tools they have available to them, including mobilizing status and identity, some participants were highly critical of the movement doing so at the expense of broader social and environmental justice movements.

Some participants also argued that advocates social identities also impact what resistance they face, as well as what opportunities are available to them. Given this,
several participants recommended that advocates need to anticipate and plan for how these identities can be mobilized in effective ways. For example, Michael Shapcott recounts that when the Multifaith Alliance to End Homelessness was able to secure a new shelter or affordable housing in a Toronto neighbourhood, they would inevitably be met with a NIMBY group who would often succeed at delaying the project and/or getting the funding pulled. In response to this,

What we decided was we wanted to have a group of people who could stand up in meetings and say, “Yes, I actually do want these people in my backyard.” And not scruffy housing advocates, who were sort of crypto-communists, as we all know, and have no credibility in the public policy world, but nice elderly church ladies with pearls and lovely coiffed hair, who would say, “I actually want a homeless person living next to me. I think it’s great. And I don’t want people who are elderly like me to be homeless.” So, a group called the Homecoming Community Choice Coalition was formed and they began to actively intervene.

Shapcott goes on to explain that the group was successful in many ways, including in effectively fighting Rob Ford’s proposal to close three transitional homes for seniors. Describing the budget committee meeting on the proposal, Shapcott recounts,

All the advocates were there, all the scruffy, you know, “this is an outrage,” and so on. No visible impact. But the Multifaith Alliance people were there, the church ladies, in their high heels and their lovely tweed skirts. They were saying, “You cannot do this! Raise my taxes if you have to, you cannot do this!” And I’m glad to say that, in the end, only Rob Ford voted to shut down the [transitional homes].

As these stories indicate, many participants suggested that identity, social capital, and social status significantly impact what advocates can achieve, how they can achieve it, and what resistance they will face. Given this, participants advised that advocates be strategic and thoughtful about how they mobilize identity and status in order to achieve their goals.

4.9.3 Involve the Unusual Suspects

A majority of participants emphasized the advantages of involving so-called “unusual suspects” in advocacy efforts – advocates who have different skills, diverse backgrounds, different personalities, and unique professions and connections. For participants who worried that homelessness advocacy is currently in stasis or decline, this strategy was a emphasized as an important tool to move advocacy forward.
Participants told many fascinating, inspiring, and oftentimes humorous, stories about unlikely allies that moved the issue forward or supported their advocacy efforts, sometimes to their surprise. Michael Shapcott, for example, describes a 2000 advocacy action during which a group of activists built a symbolic house on the lawn of the luxury hotel in which the federal and provincial housing ministers met for the (first time in five years). Surprisingly, the Fredericton Police Department became an unlikely ally in the effort. Shapcott recalls,

There was a very nice Sergeant, whose name I’ve forgotten now, but he was so excited about the fact that there was going to be a demonstration. He was really great. He was saying, “Yeah, maybe you should put your house here, because it could be a better angle.” And he said, “I can bring some other guys [cops] down and we can help you nail the house together.” And I said, “I don’t know if that would actually look so good.” He was so totally cool about this, because I originally approached the police because, I said, “Look, we’re going to show up. We’re going to have timber. We’re going to have hammers and nails. Do not shoot us, because we’re not doing anything bad – we’re building a house.”

Shapcott and others emphasized that engaging the “unusual suspects” can broaden and strengthen the movement in unique ways, including by shifting the conversation around homelessness in surprising and fruitful directions. As Shapcott explains, “When church people show up, when imams show up and say that the Quran, the holy Quran, poses an absolute duty on us to take care of each other – that’s unlikely and unusual [in the context of homelessness advocacy].”

Participants emphasized that allies can emerge in unexpected ways and can improve and expand the movement beyond what is possible when advocates only engage the usual suspects. Steve Gaetz explains,

I’ll learn from anybody, and I’m not afraid to talk about marketing and communications because I think that as long as we kind of just stay within our little group and be self-satisfied, nothing is going to change . . . You’ve got to be goal focused, you’ve got to. Like, what are we here for at the end of the day, right? If we really want to solve this then we’ve got to be willing to do what we need to do.

For Gaetz and other participants, this means that advocates need to move beyond their base and engage other sectors and groups in the conversation. He explains,

The homelessness sector has been given the job of solving or addressing homelessness, and it’s like, if we know homelessness is caused by a lack of affordable housing and family violence - that we are dumping people from prison
and child protection into homelessness - why aren’t those people part of the advocacy even more centrally? Why aren’t we engaging them in a different way?

Tim Richter suggests that part of the difficulty of doing this work is that advocates often fail to organize with individuals and groups that don’t share their political viewpoints. He argues, “We activists come at this generally from a social justice point of view, and we let our bias and we let our own ideology get in the way of our ability to mobilize governments of other stripes.”

Through experience, a number of participants found that it is a mistake to assume who is or is not a friend or ally to the movement. As Matthew Behrans explains, “Don’t assume that because they drive a minivan and live in Mississauga that they [are] . . . lost to any potential for revolutionary change. If you believe that, then the women’s movement meant nothing, right?” As Behrans explains, this means that advocates need to think really broadly and strategically about who might be receptive to different parts of your movement or message. He argues, “We really need to go: who is our constituency on this issue? Who is most likely to be open to us? Are they high school students in the Catholic Board? Are they people in the churches? Like, who are they?” This also means tailoring your approach to different kinds of potential allies, and learning from them about how they see themselves contributing rather than assuming you know what they can bring to the table. Tim Richter recounted several interesting interactions with members of the business community, for example, which underlined the need to ask potential allies how they want to contribute. For example, Richter recounts approaching the CEO of Suncor Energy who said, “If you’re interested in my money, I’m not interested. I have skills that I can contribute, and I’d like to be involved. If that’s the case, then I’m interested.” Approaching “unusual suspects” in ways that offered them opportunities to participate, rather than made demands or assigned roles, appeared to be important in several participants’ advocacy experiences. Reaching beyond the usual suspects can also help break down habitual patterns that advocates can fall in to. As Bonnie Briggs argues, “We need new and innovative ideas. Everyone prefers to keep doing what they’re doing. It works up to a point, but it’s come to a point where we have to think of something else.” For a number of participants, engaging the unusual suspects fosters learning, momentum, movement strength, and unexpected opportunities.
4.9.4 Build the Movement by Creating Opportunities for People to Speak Out, Participate, and Say “Yes”

Given the significant barriers and resistance to advocacy that advocates experience, it is unsurprising that participants emphasized the need to create and foster opportunities for people to positively engage with the issue of homelessness. For a number of participants, this meant creating opportunities for people to raise their voices on the issue and become involved in organizing, including specifically people with lived experiences of homelessness. Participants emphasized that these opportunities do not happen by accident and require a significant amount of effort and planning. Some participants also highlighted that advocates need to think about, and work on, creating opportunities for people to be engaged on the issue of homelessness in ways that feel safe, empowering, positive, and accessible. Listening to and valuing others’ contributions and voices was seen as essential for building a broader movement.

Creating opportunities for people to feel empowered to develop and advocate for solutions to homelessness, rather than just opportunities to perseverate on the problem, was seen as an important way to gain movement momentum. Michael Shapcott argues,

Part of the secret of good advocacy is figuring out how to create opportunities for people to be engaged in positive ways . . . with food banks we have created this national network . . . in order to channel donated food into the mouths of hungry people. If we can spend that much time creating a system which doesn’t end hunger, which gets some meager amount of food into the mouths [of hungry people], why can’t we create similar systems and structures that allow people to be engaged in the process of ending hunger and ending homelessness? You know, sometimes it’s our lack of imagination.

As Shapcott articulates here, advocates need to think about how to re-direct energy towards solution-focused efforts that also make people feel good about their contributions. Reflecting on the public consultation process, Michael Shapcott noted,

We just create thousands of opportunities for people to say “no.” And we facilitate it; we put out notices to people saying this is going to be happening, and if you don’t want it then you can come this meeting and then you can do this and that. One of the things we agreed was that we don’t create a lot of opportunities for people to say “yes.” So because of that, is it any surprise that the forces of NIMBY tend to be the loudest voices because they have the most avenues for expression?
Shapcott importantly points out here that the *structures* we put in place to have public discussions about social problems often end up shaping what conversations take place. As advocates, we need to think about re-working these structures in order to facilitate different conversations.

A significant part of creating more space for people to be engaged in advocacy is (1) valuing the voices and contributions of others, and (2) convincing people that their actions matter, according to several participants. Brian Burch explains this eloquently:

One of the things I’m consistently impressed by with OCAP, unlike many of the other groups I’ve been connected to over the years, is that people that would otherwise never be encouraged to have a voice, told to shut up at a meeting, they have a voice and they have a plan . . . [OCAP] will talk to anyone, anywhere, and help them feel that they can have a voice. And if you have a voice, you can have a vision for the future. If you can change your future, you can change the world.

For Burch and others, part of the solution to the practical challenges of organizing is prioritizing social integration and affirming people’s capacity to create change in their worlds. As Michael Shapcott argues,

I think we need to encourage people to understand that activism and advocacy aren’t a niche concern of a small group of people, but they are actually something that everyone can engage in in small ways. So, one of the things that’s really important is that people open their eyes up to what is happening around us and ask basic questions about why things are the way they are. Not assuming that it’s [advocacy] a technical thing, that it’s beyond their capacity to do it. Advocacy and activism are not for experts, they are for everyone.

Shapcott and others point out the need for advocates to consciously demystify advocacy. As Matthew Behrans expresses, “My old dictum is: if you can organize a party, you can organize a protest.”

Advocates also emphasized that creating opportunities for people to speak out and participate in the movement requires many practical considerations. This includes building campaigns, events, and groups that are accessible and feel safe to participants, and developing skills and capacity within the movement so that advocates can negotiate advocacy on their own terms. TASC, for example, provided advocates with training in non-violent, direct-action skills so that direct action participants were aware of their rights and options in conflicts with police and security. This training is especially valuable to new advocates who may want to be involved but feel intimidated by the
skills, knowledge, and experience of well-established advocates. As Matthew Behrans explains,

I think a lot of the so-called social movement-y groups are very inaccessible to people because, like any profession that is specialized, we speak a special language. We have our own weird sense of humor that might freak people out. We do things that, to someone who’s never done them before, seem completely off the Richter scale. We’re going to make some placards and go stand in the street and yell. If you’ve never done that before, or you’ve only been indoctrinated to [think] this is like . . . the people who run around saying, “the end is near,” why would you get involved with a group like that? Wouldn’t you find that scary?

Participants like Behrans emphasized that seasoned advocates need to reflect on how to reduce the intimidation new advocates may feel, and address power imbalances within the group. This also involves making sure that a lot of practical work, such as finding meeting spaces, scheduling meetings, and arranging food, is done in ways that do not reproduce oppressive dynamics (e.g., patriarchy).

4.9.5 Solutions-Focused Advocacy

A significant portion of participants advocated for “solutions-focused” advocacy. For these advocates, there are serious limitations to advocacy that focuses exclusively on the governments’ failure to adequately address the problem of homelessness without articulating and advancing solutions. A majority of participants who emphasized the need for solution-focused advocacy also held particular visions of government and politicians – namely that they can be persuaded to do better, especially if advocates are strategic and political conditions are favourable. Many of the successes participants described involved advocates taking ownership and responsibility for the solution, and assisting or compelling government towards that end. Nonetheless, a number of participants cautioned against cooptation in this process and argued that community-based solutions to social problems can be one way in which the government is able to avoid responsibility for meeting the basic needs of its citizenry.

While few participants defined what they meant by solutions-focused advocacy, it generally referred to (1) communities developing and enacting grassroots solutions to homelessness themselves (e.g., the community-based ownership of land for affordable housing), or (2) strategically developing solutions that governments could implement,
and assisting them in doing so. As with the themes discussed in other chapters, preferences often fell along class and tactical lines, with grassroots advocates discussing more of the former and professionalized advocates discussing more of the latter. What both groups agreed on is that “complaining isn’t enough” (J. Grey). As Josephine Grey explains, “I’ve realized educating government can be very useful. A lot of these people want to do good, and if you give them the tools to do better, they will.”

A key point made by several participants is that solutions-focused advocacy can be especially effective when it helps the government or the sector address an issue they have already identified, or when it dovetails with an approach they are already taking. Tim Richter explains,

When you’re approaching government, we need to look for a mutually beneficial outcome. What do they need and what do we need? How do we give them what they want to get what we need? Ironically, it’s not unlike case management and how we work with clients in Housing First and any other form of case management. And we take a non-judgmental approach with our clients. We’ve got to do the same thing with the politicians.

Similarly, other participants argued that advocates can make progress by showing how housing and homelessness issues are integrated into other government files and funding priorities, thus increasing cross-sector investment in the issue.

Tailoring your approach in relation to existing governmental approaches can also assist in overcoming government resistance, in part because it makes it easier for government to integrate your proposed solution(s). Alex Abramovich, for example, experienced significant resistance from Toronto-based agencies in his efforts to collect data on transphobic and homophobic violence in the shelter system. He explains,

And then I feel like I changed my approach and I thought okay, if these people won’t participate in an interview or a focus group, maybe I could pitch it differently and ask them, “Okay, you’re obviously very busy. Is there any data that I can collect for you that might be helpful?” I was like, “Are there any questions that you want to know, and I can add them on to my interviews or my focus groups.”

Abramovich also had success doing deputations to Toronto City Council, in which he “would be like, okay: here are three things that you can actually do right away. All you have to do is change so and so policy, or add this, or do that.” Like Abramovich, several
participants emphasized the advantage of enumerating and prioritizing concrete solutions that government and communities can take up.

4.9.6 Tighten Your Message, Strengthen Your Pitch, Shift the Conversation

According to a significant portion of participants, developing a communication strategy and a succinct message is essential. Participants tended to emphasize that the influence of advocacy is greatly increased when advocates invest time, energy, and thought into crafting a message and communication strategy. Crafting different messages for different stakeholders was also seen as important, as well as developing messages that can reach across political divides. While several participants were critical of the need to “sell” the social problem of homelessness, distaste for the marketization was often set aside in pursuit of efficacy by several participants.

It appears that participants’ approach to messaging ranged between two poles: those who would employ almost any type of issues framing as a means to an end, and those who only employed framing they felt tackled the structural causes of homelessness and other social and environmental injustices (e.g., capitalism, neoliberalism). In some cases, participants moved between these poles depending on the advocacy context. Reverend Maggie Helwig, for example, explains, “In the short term, you know, if we are working with the City [of Toronto] on a cold weather response, it’s not immediately helpful to say this is also related to climate change, even though it is.” Like Helwig, many participants tended toward pragmatism in short-term framing or in relation to specific advocacy efforts.

A number of participants were very conscious that homelessness necessarily competes with other social problems for government resources and public attention. As Tim Richter explains, “the issue is how do you position your ask over and above, or in league with, the others?” Given this challenge, participants employed a range of strategies they felt would grab the attention of the public and government officials, including some that they felt “backfired.” For example, a few participants mentioned that when homelessness first emerged, advocates attempted to “pull at heartstrings” in ways that were problematic and sometimes ineffective. Michael Shapcott explains,

When I first started, I’m sorry to say, that we also used the kind of pathetic, “feel sorry for these people,” and we would put people up in front of the camera and
then we would tell horrendous stories about how rotten it was. That was the 1970s, early 1980s, when there was a lot of stuff about starving kids in Africa and so on. Everybody and their uncle was competing to create a pathetic story that you could sort of summon public sympathy [with]. So, we thought if we could say this is a really terrible thing, and it’s even closer to home . . . then we could excite some public support . . . I think we’ve come to realize that that actually does backfire, because when you invite people to sort of peer into the lives of other people, they instantly put on their judgment hat.

Further, Shapcott and others argued that the limits of “pulling at heartstrings” is that even when it does work, it only appeals to a particular segment of the public. In order to engage more people, a number of participants recommended that advocates develop framings that move beyond the base of people that they typically appeal to.

Several participants recounted stories in which they effectively framed or “pitched” solutions to homelessness, many of which involved creativity and careful planning. Alex Abramovich, for example, recounted sharing a six-minute film that he had co-created about transphobic and homophobic violence in the shelter system with the City of Toronto’s General Manager of Housing and Shelter Services. After seeing the film, the Manager’s response was an immediate commitment to finding a way to address these issues – Abramovich reports he “got it” right away. Similarly, Steve Gaetz explains that the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness [COH] strategizes about how research can successfully gain traction in the media by thinking about “what’s the hook, from the media perspective? What’s the sound bite?” For example, in developing the State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014 report, the COH and colleagues determined what it would cost to end homelessness in Canada: an additional investment of $46 a year, per Canadian (Gaetz et al., 2014). Strategizing how best to communicate this, the COH developed various infographics to make it clear that Canada could solve homelessness for less than the cost of a night out for two (see Fig. 1) or less than a cup of coffee per week (Fig. 2). Gaetz explains that when they launched the report and did the press release,

We were like: this is the message, this is the pitch, this is the headline. And you know what? The press scooped it up right away and went with exactly that message . . . [The key is to] give them [the media] a hook that’s something they can write about. They are busy, and so help them come up with a story. And that’s a different way than just the usual kind of “you should be interested in this because I’m interested in it” way of thinking.
Given this, Gaetz and others recommended thinking about the interests of, and constraints on, the media when developing your messaging, in addition to developing messages that can be easily and quickly understood by your target audience(s). This may be particularly important given that several participants noted, “there has been a loss of creativity” about how to cover homelessness in the media, as well media fatigue on the issue (C. Crowe). Nonetheless, several advocates raised concerns that “pitches” or messaging can “box you in” (M. Behrans) and necessarily cannot represent the complexities of the problem.

![Figure 1](image1.png) For less than the cost of a night out for two you could end homelessness (Gaetz, et al., 2014).

![Figure 2](image2.png) I would be willing to give up coffee once a week to end homelessness (Gaetz, et al., 2014).

### 4.9.7 Change Public Perceptions of the Issue

Public perceptions of homelessness matter because public pressure on government matters (see Best, 2013). Many participants argued that the key reason public perceptions are important is because they drive governments and communities to take specific kinds of action. In the absence of public pressure or public concern about a social problem, participants agreed that it is unlikely that the government will address the problem. As Tim Richter argues, “Politicians will only do what the electorate gives them permission to do. They don’t do anything that will lose them votes.” As a result, participants argued that advocates should strive to impact public perceptions of the issue, ideally in ways that are “innovative, clever, and honest” (D. Hulchanski).

Several participants argued that politicians’ gain access to public perceptions through a plethora of means. For this reason, a majority of interviews supported a diversity of tactics in part because different tactics will appeal to, and mobilize, different
Hulchanski argues that discussions of the extent to which advocacy impacts social policy are really discussions about the extent to which advocates are “successful at moving people to try to move politicians.” Given that a majority of participants felt that a combination of tactics are often the most influential, participants emphasized advocacy actions that: (1) persuade politicians that many different segments of the public are invested in the issue, and (2), employ a range of tactics for communicating that public interest to government and politicians (e.g., letter-writing, media coverage, social media, deputations, marches, etc.).

Related to the above discussion on engaging unusual suspects in advocacy, several participants argued that in order to move the public, advocates need to communicate with people beyond their communities and their base supporters. Discussing effective approaches to advocacy, Tim Richter argues,

> I think it's important to move public opinion and activists need to ask themselves is our approach - are we talking amongst ourselves, are we talking to other people who believe what we believe, or are we reaching the voters and mainstream public opinion? Because ultimately I think you need to have public opinion with you, or have politicians believe you can bring public opinion with you. So we activists can spend a lot of time talking amongst ourselves in a way that we understand, you know, the social justice argument for example. There's a saying that Canadians will absolutely agree with a social justice argument on ending homelessness, but is that enough to move elections?

While reaching the public and shifting the conversation was seen as a priority for many participants, some believed that public pressure was not a primary driver of social policy.

What was clear during many interviews was that public opinion and public pressure matters most (or only) when politicians or political parties are vulnerable to losing elections or seats. Participants recounted stories during which policy and funding changes took place because governments or government officials were politically vulnerable, as well as instances in which broad advocacy mobilization was ineffective because governments or government officials were not politically vulnerable. In these instances, the connections between democracy, the electrical system, advocacy, and homelessness were made explicit. For example, Michael Shapcott recounts a story that illuminates this. He explains that during the minority parliament of 2005, Paul Martin was about to present a budget that was going to be defeated. Jack Layton asked Shapcott to come to Ottawa to ensure that if the NDP cut a deal to support the budget based on the
inclusion of funding for housing, post-secondary education, and the environment, they 
“wouldn’t weasel out of this after the budget.” The deal was made and the budget was 
successfully passed with NDP support, but by the fall, “not a penny has been spent . . . 
The clock was ticking, it was absolutely clear, Martin . . . was reneging.” He explains,

So . . . the NDP did, in December, vote to defeat, and they still hadn’t moved the 
money. We mobilized the Multifaith Alliance and every church leader we could . . . we thought [that was] the only way we could get through, because they was no way he’d take a meeting with us. Our simple message was “parliament authorized 
it, you should go ahead with it.” We know he didn’t like it, but you know what, it’s how the system works. So, we had a whole bunch of people go in, bishops, . . . Salvation Army, everybody talked to him. And when Flaherty released the first 
budget, there was 1.4 billion dollars for housing over 2 years . . . And that was some brilliant advocacy, but it was also this collective building process – it was 
faith leaders, it was a lot of media attention.

What is so powerful about Shapcott’s explanation here is that because of political 
vulnerability, federal investment in affordable housing was secured, and it was 
successfully defended in part because of massive community lobbying efforts by a range 
of community members. In this instance, political vulnerability, political pressure, and 
public pressure came together to move significant resources to address homelessness.

Similarly, David Hulchanski discussed and instance in which a lack of public 
pressure was a barrier to political action. Hulchanksi describes a meeting in which he and 
another advocate met with David Collenette, Federal Liberal Party Minister, regarding 
the need for federal action housing and homelessness. In response to their concerns, 
Collenette responded,

“Well, there are condominiums to rent.” Then I said, "But, we both know that they are very expensive, and that isn't what we're talking about." See, he's a decent guy and so he doesn't try to play any of those games, nor do I - we're both on the same page. Kira says, “We're going to be organizing on this issue during the upcoming election.” Then he says, "But most of them are safe seats for us.” The next thing he says, at one stage, is "Where is the NDP on this?" Think about that . . . Here is the Federal Liberal Party Minister of the government saying, "Where is our opposition party on that?" What he meant by that, very clearly in the context, was we're not getting enough pressure . . . He couldn't be frank because he is a member of the Cabinet and . . . [and there is] Cabinet confidentiality and legalities around that. So he was doing everything but that. I think I read him correctly . . . [He was saying] that's the best he could do. . . [He was saying that] you've got to put pressure on us. So that's the way change comes about. They have to have enough pressure through a variety of ways.
Hulchanski’s experience suggests that in the absence of significant pressure from political opponents, politicians may not be able to take action, even if they want to. While participants disagreed as to whether politicians do genuinely try to “do the right thing,” a majority shared the view that public pressure from multiple directions towards multiple governmental targets is essential. Nonetheless, a few participants pointed out that the possible effects of this pressure are significantly constrained by Canada’s electoral system. Hulchanski, for example, argues that in our first-past-the-post system, MPs and MPPs are “protected from us. They know which seats are safe, reasonably safe, and they know if there is an issue in some riding that could cost them a seat or get them a seat, they will do something there”

4.9.8 Stay Grounded

For many participants, the homelessness movement should be grounded in the voices of people with lived experiences of homelessness. According to a number of participants, this means advocates need to create opportunities to amplify the voices of people who have experienced homelessness, as well as consciously organize in ways that create space and opportunity for these community members. Rationales for this approach took many forms, including: (1) it is an ethical imperative, (2) it concretizes the issue for the public and politicians, and (3) it is necessary for accurately understanding the issue. Several participants worried that the professionalization of the movement has marginalized the voices and experiences of people in preference for professionalized advocates who are adept at negotiating the political culture of government.

According to several participants, staying grounded in lived experience is essential for adequately understanding the nature and scope of the problem. Participants who were engaged “frontline” social service work often held this view. Gaetan Heroux, for example, explains,

So, for instance, when I worked at Central Neighbourhood House, I would see 300 to 400 people a day. So I would get to know people. I was powerful in the sense that I knew whether people ate or not, or whatever. I had a lot of power. But more importantly, I had access to people. And for the last 16 years I’d go into shelters and I’d help people replace their identification. And I would have dealt with, over the 16 years, maybe tens of thousands of people. And again, it’s that direct contact with people that really, really allows you to see and understand the conditions that people are living in . . . I don’t think I could do this work.
[advocacy] if I wasn’t working – like going to hostels. I don’t think I could do it. Because I wouldn’t be in contact with people as regularly. I wouldn’t understand as well as I do . . . It’s like a house fire. If I’m not in the house, and the further and further away you get from the house, then you can’t see the smoke and you can’t really understand.

For Heroux and others, being deeply familiar with homelessness through personally working and organizing with people with lived experience was an analytic imperative for advocacy work. For several participants, no amount of professional or academic expertise can supplant the need to personally work with and organize alongside people who are homeless.

More broadly, a significant portion of participants felt that their advocacy work was more effective because of their close contact with people experiencing homelessness. In some cases participants described it as a key motivator or inspiration in their advocacy work, and others felt that it improved their advocacy by enabling them to think through and communicate the links between local experiences and structural issues. Kathy Hardill, when asked what advice she would give to new advocates, explains:

The advice I would say is to understand the political and economic causes of homelessness, and to focus your efforts there - upstream. Although, one of the things I find as a nurse is . . . situated way downstream, you know, pulling bodies out of the river every day, I feel as though that keeps me accountable to homeless people. And it also helps me understand, I mean, I just told you a few stories, right, about people I’ve known. It’s powerful to tell those stories because they are powerful stories! And they are kind of stories that people go, “holy shit, really?”

So, I think being situated downstream allows me to understand people’s stories, to be able to bear witness to what I know, which allows me to go upstream where the solutions are to be found. I feel as though being situated downstream allows me to work better upstream, because I really know what the situation is for people, and I can articulate that. I think that understanding the political and economic causes of homelessness is critical, but I think understanding, you know the lives of homeless people is also critical because it helps you illustrate and bear witness to the downstream suffering when you are working upstream. So, for me that has been really key, that I need to be able to say, “Last week I met a man who was homeless and blah, blah, blah.” I need to be able to kind of make it real for people, the stories that I know are real . . . So this provides not only your inspiration and your motivation to work for justice but it also, I think, it enriches the way we can do the work when you are grounded in those communities.
As expressed by Hardill, sharing the stories of people experiencing homelessness can be a powerful tool for advocates because it concretizes and personalizes the issue for the public, government, and politicians.

For these participants, honouring the lives and experiences of people who have died while homeless was both an ethical imperative as well as a tool to mobilize pressure on government. Bonnie Briggs, who began the Toronto Homeless Memorial, explains that she began the Memorial because, “It showed people these are names, they’re not just lumps on the grate, they’re actual people. Keep it in their [politicians’] face – these are real people that are dying out there.” Michael Shapcott similarly recounts the death of Jennifer Caldwell, a Toronto woman who burned to death in 2000 in a tent under the Don Valley Parkway. In response to Jennifer’s death, the TDRC, FRAPU, and other advocates organized a rally in Ottawa during which they took the charred remains of Jennifer’s sleeping bag to the Prime Minister’s Office. Shapcott recounts that, having slipped past security, he and several other advocates ended up in an empty office called “Public Policy.” He explains that when the Public Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister came to talk to them,

He was very nervous. By this time there were TV cameras and all that kind of stuff, it was like a big deal. So I handed him the sleeping bag, and you could smell -- it was very charred. And he kind of recoiled and said, “Is there any human parts to it?” And I said, “No, this is not about disrespect or respect. This is about trying to say to you that the housing and homelessness crisis is real.”

In both actions described by Briggs and Shapcott, making the horrific consequences of homelessness “real” to people in power and the public is an important tool that advocates can use to foster political pressure.

4.9.9 Capitalize on Opportunities

Even when you’ve got stuff you think is going to happen, and you’re confident it’s going to happen, it’s not necessarily going to happen. So either good or bad you can really depend on. To me, I think you have to depend on serendipity. The accidental good things. . . You still have to do all the preparation as if it’s going to work out, too. You have to do all that and keep that hope alive and at the same time realize that tomorrow [everything] . . . could change. – Brian Burch

All participants described moments in advocacy during which both planned and serendipitous circumstances came together to create change or momentum. While
participants’ descriptions of serendipity were context-specific, it was obvious that almost all participants believed that chance, timing, serendipity, and/or luck play major or minor roles in advocacy, and thus in shaping the trajectory of homelessness as a Canadian social problem. This section will describe how and why participants felt serendipity created opportunities for advocates to move the issue forward, and key strategies participants recommended for capitalizing on these serendipitous opportunities. To take advantage of these opportunities, participants recommended: (1) thoughtfully determining how and when to work from “the inside” or “the outside,” (2) leveraging moments where the government or politicians’ public image is vulnerable, (3) developing organizational strength to take advantage of serendipitous moments, and (4) identifying where power is located in different contexts.

Participants argued that in moments when unique opportunities arise, strategically determining whether and how to work from “the inside” or “the outside” (or both) is important. Steve Gaetz, for example, argues,

Sometimes you can only work from the outside, right? . . . [But] you need to also find those opportunities to work from the inside . . . When there is an opportunity to engage government you have to come at it differently . . . the context for advocacy shifts based on who is in power.

Like Gaetz, a majority of participants agreed that strategies need to be based on careful analyses of who is in power and what is possible within the existing government’s approach.

Participants also identified that carefully choosing an interpersonal approach that can capitalize on the political or social context can make a significant difference to advocacy outcomes. For example, I asked John Andras, a self-described “middle-man” in negotiations between the City of Toronto, grassroots advocates, and Home Depot during conflicts concerning Toronto’s Tent City, what skills he used to negotiate these high-stake negotiations. He explained,

I guess the main strategy is just to keep talking, and don't pound on the table, don't yell, don't swear at somebody, and keep apologizing for putting someone in an uncomfortable position. Bureaucrats, most of them, want to do the right thing, but they are constrained and restricted by the rules and by the laws. And often what they would like to do, they can't. And sometimes the good ones feel really bad about it, and it doesn't help to scream at somebody and call them every name under the sun, when they are just doing their job, and not enjoying it particularly.
... You just keep talking, you keep the lines of communication open, and you stay nice. And that seems to work, because people want to do things, if it is non-confrontational. Everybody wants to help, and if they can they will, especially if they are going to be thanked for it.

Again, Andras’ approach is illustrative of many participants’ belief that at a micro level, advocates need to be strategic about the interpersonal approaches they take with people in power. This also means assessing what is actually possible for people in power to do, based on their position, level of responsibility, knowledge, laws, regulations, and so on. Strategically assessing whom to target (i.e., what departments, what individuals), with what approach (e.g., shaming, collegial, etc.), and when to approach these individuals, was viewed as imperative.

A third common theme was the need to identify and leverage moments when politicians’ and political parties’ images or reputations are vulnerable. Participants argued that many key moments of federal and municipal action were related to their public image being threatened or tarnished. For example, David Hulchanski argued that the federal government established the Homelessness Partnering Initiative and appointed a minister responsible for homelessness in part because they realized they were “getting a black eye for doing absolutely nothing towards homelessness.” Similarly, numerous participants mentioned public relations errors that advocates were able to capitalize on because they put the reputation of government or politicians in jeopardy. For example, John Andras recounts,

Mel Lastman helped tremendously when he declared [in 1997] that there were no homeless people in North York. That night somebody died in a North York gas station . . . I asked Jack Layton to use it [that quote] for everything he could, and all of a sudden it became front page news.

While participants acknowledged that many factors are at play in such instances, many participants argued that capitalizing on the media’s penchant for scandal can be used strategically to move the issue forward.

For advocates to be able to take full advantage of serendipitous opportunities as they arise, they need to have the organizational strength in place to enable quick responses, according to a number of participants. Michael Shapcott reflects on this in relation to the Rupert Hotel fire in Toronto:
When ten people died in the Rupert Hotel fire in the Christmas of 1989, that prompted the province to take some long overdue action in terms of rooming houses . . . That’s a good thing, but I think one of the keys is just to take those moments, when there is some pressure on government to actually take some action, and have the organizational strength to be able to push those into something that’s more than just a quick response. I think we were able to do that, because of the combination of progressive municipal politicians, progressive community advocates, and the federal government that was at least willing to let us come and talk to them.

As Shapcott identifies here, organizational strength is a key factor in mobilizing pressure on government. While organizational strength was not explicitly defined by participants, in interviews this was often related to factors such as the number of advocates, availability and flexibility of advocates, resources (e.g., funds, meeting spaces), and established relationships with media or government officials, among others.

Identifying where power is and steering advocacy energy in that direction was a crucial feature of taking advantage of serendipitous events, according to a number of participants. Several participants described instances where advocates effectively challenged powerful organizations or figures that were not the “usual targets” of homelessness advocacy. This was apparent in the successful advocacy work of the Bread Not Circuses Coalition, which has been credited with defeating Toronto’s bid to win the 1996 Olympics (Edwards, 2014). Michael Shapcott attributed part of the success of the Coalition to their unexpected coverage in the Atlanta press. He explains,

The IOC [International Olympic Committee] initially dismissed us as being a bunch of communist malcontents, but we kept getting good press, and the main reason we got good press was we realized early on that the Toronto media hated us because they were cheerleading for the Toronto Olympic bid. But Atlanta was also bidding, and the Atlanta media thought the best way to undermine Toronto was to give us publicity. So, I used to get on the front page of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, two, three times a month. And they blew us up . . . we went from being thirty or thirty-five poverty advocates to being this formidable group.

This media coverage was complimented by innovative and theatrical actions, including erecting a tent inside a luxurious Tokyo hotel where the IOC was meeting, as well as bombarding IOC delegates around the world with faxes telling them Toronto doesn’t want to host the Olympics. Shapcott recalls,

So, we started faxing, on a daily basis, petitions to these guys saying “Don’t come to Toronto” . . . I’m sure the IOC delegate in Mongolia was just thinking, “What
the hell is going on? I’m getting all these emails from these guys in Toronto and it looks like it’s a big thing.” Meanwhile it’s like 30 to 35 people. But we realized, I think, that one of the things you had to do is to understand where power was.

The Bread Not Circuses Coalition serves as an illustrative example of how targeting powerful figures or organizations in creative ways, including organizations that don’t intuitively appear to be a match for the issue, can push the issue forward in unconventional ways. This strategy may be particularly effective when advocates are able to play powerful figures against each other to their advantage (in this case, capitalizing on Atlanta’s interest in hosting the 1996 Olympics).

While there was significant overlap in advocates’ approaches to advocacy, their estimations of the future of homelessness varied significantly. The next section will compare and contrast advocates’ perspectives on what homelessness will look like in Canada in the coming years, exploring the key barriers to ending homelessness in Canada, as identified by advocates.

4.10 The Future of Homelessness and Barriers to Ending Homelessness

Participants differed wildly in their estimations of the future of homelessness in Canada, and this subject was easily the most emotionally charged topic for participants. This section explores participants’ perceptions of the future of homelessness and their rationales for those beliefs. On the whole, participants tended to be pessimistic or skeptical about the possibility of ending homelessness in the next ten or twenty years in Canada. Second, I discuss three key barriers participants identified to ending homelessness: (1) neoliberalism and capitalism, (2) entrenchment of homelessness and the sector, and (3) divisions in the movement.

4.10.1 Competing Visions: The Future of Homelessness

I don’t like to think about the future because I don’t have much short or medium-term hope... But you have to keep hoping for things to get better, you know, even if I don’t realistically think it’s going to happen, there has to still be some part of me that hopes that tomorrow morning, all levels of government are going to wake up and say, “Hey, let’s change this.” – Maggie Helwig
Participants who were optimistic about the future of homelessness tended to be professionalized advocates who felt that the Canadian government’s current approach to homelessness (Housing First, 10-Year plans to end homelessness, etc.), however imperfect, had potential for success. These participants differed in their belief about what positive changes were likely to occur and whether we will actually see an end to homelessness in Canada, but all were optimistic that positive changes were likely to occur in the near future.

Among advocates who were optimistic, some were optimistic on principle: they believed in believing. Alex Abramovich, for example, argues, “I just don’t see how it’s not going to happen, right? . . . I believe that anything is possible, obviously, right? So I believe that it’s very, very possible for us to work towards that type of future.” Similarly, Steve Gaetz expresses, “I am hopeful. Like, you have to be.” Other participants believed that it was strategically necessary to believe, as Shapcott argues:

> I think if we [advocates] don’t believe, then it’s going to be pretty difficult for us to convince everybody else. I think we have to believe it, and then we have to figure out how we take that belief and turn it into reality. There is a famous medieval saint, Saint Anselm of Canterbury . . . his phrase was “faith seeking understanding” [fides quaerens intellectum]. So . . . what he meant by that was you have to believe certain things, then you have to figure out how to make them true. He said that’s the job of people of faith. I think that’s also a job of housing and homelessness advocates.

Several of these participants thought that they had to believe that homelessness would improve on the grounds that having faith and hope was motivational, inspirational, and, as Shapcott articulates, strategically necessary in order to motivate the public and government to believe.

Optimism was also linked to some participants’ belief that the current government is genuinely interested and invested in addressing homelessness, at least in particular areas. Cathy Crowe, for example, expresses, “Today, I feel very naïve. I have a high believability quotient that Adam Vaughan will do what he promised me he will do, and that we’ll see a diminished number of homeless people and more housing.” Other participants expressed optimism about the current approach of the federal government and expected that with the spread of 10 year plans, homelessness could be eliminated in
Canada. Tim Richter, for example, believes that ten years from now, homelessness “will be rare, brief, and non-reoccurring.” However, an interesting critique of this was raised by Nick Falvo, who is worth quoting at length on this issue:

The newer generation of advocacy folks, I think a lot of the time, in their quest to be cerebral and appealing to political leaders, they have sometimes been less than forthcoming with the truth. And so, for example, I think that a lot of them have tried to sell us all on the fact that homelessness can end in ten years in a community, if that community has the right plan and the right partnerships. And I think there actually is no model that reliably supports those kind of predictions. There’s no statistical model that supports the idea, plugging in those variables and tells you in ten years, it’ll be time. They’re actually not telling the truth, in my opinion. Sometimes – even people with PhDs – have actually been complicit in that. I think that can be good in the short term, and get some quick wins by maybe getting some short term promises from those political leaders who are now less intimidated, and feel comfortable with who is in front of them. But as a larger community of citizens, you actually can get misleading. And honest people are led to believe that it’s over, that we’re almost there; honest people who care are led to believe that Housing First will revolutionize homelessness, and honest people are led to believe major changes in social welfare are not necessary in order to significantly reduce homelessness.

While Falvo was the only interviewee to raise this particular critique, his comments illuminate how the focus on messaging can be problematic if it operates to obfuscate the large changes that will be necessary to address or end homelessness.

A smaller portion of participants were hesitant to make claims about the future on the basis that it is unforeseeable. When asked about the future of homelessness, Anne Golden replied, “I have no idea, I mean everybody can pretend that they know. It has been more of the same. We deserve much better.” John Clarke similarly articulated that the future of homelessness is “going to be decided by the balance of forces, and we can’t know that.” However, Clarke and others felt that the future of homelessness will depend, to some extent, on how sophisticated advocates can become at responding to adversarial forces. Other participants emphasized that the question will really be whether it is able to become a political priority for governments. Tim Richter asks, “Will it be an issue where the government will say: ‘Well, I can spend billions on climate change, billions on indigenous issues, billions on fancy fighter jets,’ and they will say ‘either I can do all of that, or if I have to choose, I’m going to spend it on housing.’ That’s the test.” Like Richter, several participants articulated that the future of this problem is related to it’s
ability to compete with other social problems in the minds of government officials, politicians, and the public.

In general, a majority of participants were pessimistic about the future of homelessness in Canada. When asked what she thinks about the future of homelessness in Canada, Maggie Helwig replied, “I don’t want to think about it. I seriously don’t want to.” Josephine Grey exclaims, “Well, within the next ten years it’s a fucking disaster.” Participants tended to be very concerned about the growth of income inequality, the lack of government investment in housing and social supports, the high cost of housing, globalization, the entrenchment of the emergency response model, and/or the decline of homelessness advocacy. Most commonly, participants were pessimistic that there will be a reinvestment in the welfare state. Maggie Helwig explains,

I just think the damage that has been done has been so immense, to repair it . . . would require such a huge investment of goodwill and resources from all levels of government that I don’t see forthcoming. I see them as throwing us little dribs and drabs.

Indeed, a significant portion of participants did not believe the government would be willing, in the near future, to make the investments and commitments necessary to address homelessness. Most specifically, many participants argued that the root causes of homelessness are so entwined with our social and economic systems (e.g., capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy), that in the absence of addressing these drivers of homelessness, we shouldn’t expect to see an improvement.

4.10.2 Barriers to Ending Homelessness

Regardless of their perspective on the future of homelessness, all participants discussed the barriers they felt impeded progress towards ending homelessness. These were numerous and often portrayed in participants’ accounts as mutually reinforcing. This section will consider three clusters of barriers that participants described with the most frequency and intensity: (1) neoliberalism, capitalism, and the decline of the welfare state; (2) the normalization of homelessness, the entrenchment of the homelessness sector, and the rise of the third sector; and (3) divisions in the movement.
Neoliberalism, Capitalism, and the Decline of the Welfare State

The language of austerity and breaking out of that is hard work to do. It’s like the people from the 1930s who are still collecting string in the 1990s. We have a psychological habit . . . There is a whole generation of people that haven’t had that training that austerity isn’t the only way to look at the world, coming forward into the activist world, into the political world. – Brian Burch

Neoliberalism, capitalism, globalization and austerity were all terms used by many participants to describe the current socio-economic climate in Canada and explain the decline of the welfare state. At a national level, many participants believed that the major barrier to ending homelessness is that the government has reduced investments in housing, supports, and income, and is unlikely to reinstate sufficient investment to adequately address and prevent homelessness. For many participants, this declining support is inextricably linked to the rise of neoliberal governance, in combination with the rise of capitalism and the dominance of discourses which prioritize small government, low taxes, the outsourcing of labour, and profit over all else. Participants felt that the intersection of these systems and ideologies make it difficult to gain significant headway on the issue of homelessness.

Several participants felt that since the rise of neoliberal approaches to governance, Canadian political culture has increasing undermined the notion that government is the most efficient or effective actor in public policy. With respect to housing and homelessness, many participants felt that this discourse manifested itself in the government’s retreat from investment in housing and social supports, the downloading of responsibilities for housing and homelessness to the municipalities and the third sector, and a pervasive belief that the government should have a limited role in addressing housing needs. Michael Shapcott explains,

Through the 1990s, there was the . . . delegitimization of the state as a sensible actor in the policy realm, and the notion that governments were, by nature, inefficient and can’t do stuff very well. The private sector is very, very efficient – best that we deliver housing through private sector markets where it could be efficiently allocated, rather than through government where there is a lot of wastage and so on. So . . . that notion began to take hold, and also the notion that homeless people are the authors of their own misfortune . . . when those perceptions dominate, it inhibits the discussion of realistic alternatives. So talking about restoring nation housing programs, giving greater security of tenure to tenants, providing them with the adequate income to cover their shelter plus other
things, all those fall by the wayside because of course that’s not the reason why there is mass homelessness in Canada . . . it’s because people are lazy or crazy or stupid. It’s pathology and not the lack of housing.

Shapcott’s explanation here typifies several participants’ analysis of how prejudicial attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness have intersected with neoliberal beliefs in small government and thus have validated the retreat of governmental responsibility and action on this issue.

Many participants emphasized how formidable neoliberal discourses have been in shaping public policy, particularly with respect to reducing public expenditure and deregulating the market on the basis that these initiatives will stimulate economic growth and create more jobs. This process has often involved discourses that emphasize that progressive taxation and government interventions are not in the interests of the Canadian public according to participants. When asked about the barriers to ending homelessness to Canada, Steve Gaetz identified one as being “the incredible hegemony of wealthy interests convincing low-income people that government interventions are not in their interest.” Several participants also mentioned that this approach to governance also involves a narrowing of government focus to a few priorities (e.g., chronic homelessness) rather than broad commitments to solving social problems. Michael Shapcott, for example, explains that in his advocacy work, he often attempts to convince politicians that it is possible to address all of these issues, rather than just a few. When asked how politicians respond, Shapcott explained,

Well, it’s such a different frame to look at the world that it is almost self-evident we can’t do everything. So therefore to even suggest that we can do what needs to be done is just, it’s hard to even discuss that.

Participants like Shapcott argued that in the absence of government and politicians believing they can and should end homelessness, increase taxes, and increase expenditure on housing and the social safety net, Canada’s ability to end homelessness is seriously restricted.

Many participants also saw neoliberalism and capitalism as dominant ideologies among the Canadian public that contribute to lack of political engagement on issues like homelessness. In particular, several participants identified that the intersection of these ideologies manifest themselves in the widespread belief among large segments of the
public that economic inequality is unavoidable, that people are responsible for their own hardships, that housing is a privilege not a right, and that taxes should not be raised. While a number of participants believed that the rise of economic inequality across Canada will contribute to more people experiencing and understanding poverty and precarious housing, participants also felt that this can result in greater public resistance to increased taxation. Hulchanski, who has studied the growth of economic inequality extensively, explains

> We know that the middle-income group is way smaller than it was in the past. But a majority of people still call themselves middle class, but they don’t have the middle class lifestyle, and that’s because they’re not earning, in real terms, what middle income people used to earn . . . So there’s more and more resentment out there, not resentment necessarily at the poor or anything like that, but . . . life is hard. You don’t have what you think you should have. Even if you own a house and have two cars, you think you should also have a really good vacation in Europe or something, and you don’t . . . So, there’s resentment there, so “don’t raise my taxes.” There’s a very strong “don’t raise my taxes” [sentiment]. The NDP is afraid of it, the Liberals are afraid of it, and the Tories make themselves the party of “We won’t raise your taxes!” So . . . people don’t make the connection between that and having lousy transit service, having broken-down highways, having everything else like we have. And then they can’t afford to go see what Copenhagen has, or what Utrecht or Amsterdam has!

As Hulchanski points out here, while middle-income and low-income groups suffer as a result of neoliberal approaches to governance, they often fail to see how increased taxation and government investment would help address, rather than intensify, some of the problems they experience in their daily lives. Some participants also felt that these neoliberal ideologies can also seep into the approaches advocates adopt.

A smaller number of participants focused on the impact of globalization in this context, arguing that the deindustrialization of Canada and the outsourcing of employment to the Global South means that inequality and poverty will continue to increase in Canada. Some participants argued that it will be very difficult for advocates to reverse these globalizing shifts. For example, a couple of participants argued that because of the increased centralization of manufacturing in the Global South, where there are less stringent environmental regulations, climate change will continue and cause greater numbers of homeless climate refugees.
The Normalization of Homelessness, the Entrenchment of the Homelessness Sector, and the Rise of the Third Sector

A significant number of participants were very concerned that homelessness, and the homelessness sector, has become a normal, accepted, and/or entrenched part of Canadian society. Participants worried that this entrenchment is a key barrier to ending homelessness in Canada, and that social services may actually be perpetuating homelessness in various ways. Matthew Behrans, for example, argues:

Food banks were started thirty years ago in Canada as a temporary fix, and they’re now institutions. They are a permanent part of the landscape. So, if we look at where we’ve been as a guide for where we’re going – unless we radically change our framework, homelessness will be with us thirty years from now, because we’re not getting at the root of the problem.

Some participants worried that Canadian society’s belief in the permanency or unavoidability of homelessness significantly deters the pressure and vision needed to end homelessness in Canada. David Hulchanski argues, “The problem has been institutionalized – it’s a fact of life. Nobody is in favour of homelessness, but to do something is tough.” For some advocates, the widespread belief in the permanency of this issue is related to an intersection of factors, including neoliberal and capitalist ideologies, declining media interest in the issue, economic factors, and other social problems competing for public attention.

According to some participants, the sector itself has become involved in fortifying the problem by focusing on services that isolate and manage homelessness, rather than end and prevent it. For example, Steve Gaetz notes that agencies can function to create a segregated world for people experiencing homelessness. As such, he asks, “How we are actually the creators of the category of homelessness, of the “homeless person.” Not necessarily creators, but we are complicit in the production and reproduction of that very thing we suggest we are against.” Other participants emphasized that various parts of the sector are complicit in perpetuating narratives and practices that stigmatize and individualize people who are homeless. For many participants, these approaches damage efforts towards ending homelessness by drawing analysis and attention away from the structural drivers of homelessness and poverty.
Participants also argued that there are many drivers of homelessness in other systems (e.g., corrections, the child welfare system) that the homelessness sector cannot solve itself. Gaetz argues that we often make the homelessness sector responsible for homelessness, when it really shouldn’t be. Because the sector doesn’t create the problem, although it can reproduce it, right? So I think advocacy would shift if we shifted our focus to prevention . . . because the conversations would shift and you’d have to hold other systems that are producing the problem to account. Whereas now, we are just scrambling after the outcomes from the failures of these other systems’ responses, and then focusing on the intervention. But, it’s like, you wouldn’t need an intervention for people who are chronically homeless if we did a better job to make sure that they don’t become homeless is the first place.

A number of participants similarly felt that the sector is largely overburdened with the consequences of other systems that create and perpetuate poverty and disadvantage. These participants argued that as long as government and advocates only focus on change in the homelessness sector, we will be unable to effectively work upstream towards ending homelessness.

According to a number of participants, in parts of Canada the sector has become quite rigid in its approach, and several argued that social service agencies often have difficulty shifting their procedures and approaches to the issue. While participants described this variably, a significant portion of participants felt that, broadly, there is resistance to change in the sector. Tim Richter, for example, asks, “Are we interested in solving it or not? Because I’ve actually found resistance from within the system to do something different to solve the problem. Active opposition, and vocal opposition, from shelters and some others.” Other participants described similar resistance, including agencies or organizations refusing to meet with them or engage in discussions about issues within the system.

**Fragmentation in the Movement**

As evident in previous sections, there are significant divisions in the movement with respect to theories of social change, tactics and approaches, understandings of power, and analyses of the solutions to homelessness. Recognizing these divisions, it is perhaps unsurprising that many participants noted that one of the barriers to ending homelessness is a lack of cohesion among advocates. Participants had numerous
recommendations about the directions in which advocacy should develop in order to make significant headway on the issue; however, these visions were frequently divergent and sometimes incongruous with each other.

A significant concern for some participants is that homelessness advocacy is declining. Cathy Crowe, for example, argues that for periods of time in Canada there was significant momentum and movement muscle. She explains, “It was a force, and it was a people’s movement, and it was even national for a certain period of time, and it definitely made a difference . . . I wouldn’t say we have a people’s movement now.” Some advocates felt that, as a movement, “it’s never kind of cohered that well” (S. Gaetz), with some participants characterizing it as a social reaction rather than a social movement. Matthew Behrans argues,

I think a social movement, the very nature of a movement, is to get at the root of the problem and have an analysis which sustains it through the ebbs and flows of interest in the issue . . . So much of what you would call the “antipoverty movement” is coming from a charitable base, and that’s something that is harder to sustain and . . . a movement comes from the people who are most directly affected. I think OCAP comes as close to that as you’re likely to get.

Many advocates worried that this decline in homelessness advocacy in recent years has resulted in diminished pressure on government to make policy changes.

A number of participants also argued that advocates in some cities are struggling to renew energy on the issue of homelessness and get new advocates involved. Cathy Crowe, for example, describes it in the following way:

You know the environmental movements are being fuelled by really young and really rich ideas. I don’t see that here, I see a lot of academics and mayors and local groups calling for housing, but not able to make it come alive in the form of a social movement . . . For a whole bunch of reasons we have lost [the] skills, people aren’t being taught how do it, there are no mentors . . . This is where I have the most worry . . . Because if we can’t build this up again, we are going to be in jeopardy of not winning everything we can possibly win.

For Crowe and others, the ability to re-enliven homelessness advocacy is in part related to the movement’s inability to recruit new advocates with new ideas. Participants identified various reasons for this. For Gaetz, this difficulty is related to issues of ego among advocates and leaders within the homelessness sector, and these actors’ desire to
be recognized as influential. He argues that this desire actually contributes to organizational and tactical stasis among advocates, explaining:

    The issue is around organizations not wanting to let go of their beliefs, organizations and individuals wanting credit . . . Who gets credit for progress on youth homelessness? Who gets credit for shaping government shifts around policy? I think that’s probably a big thing around social movements and advocacy . . . To what degree is that hugely distracting and draining and a waste of time? . . . Again, from a collective impact approach, at the end of the day you have to go back to: what are we doing this for? And for whom? Is it for us personally? . . . We’re all working on an issue about people experiencing deprivation and poverty, and we’re passionate about it. But we also get something [out of it] ourselves. There’s attention, and people come up to you, and that kind of stuff, and boy, you’ve got to watch that. It can be very seductive. There’s almost a kind of celebrity piece that you have to be really careful that you don’t get caught up in.

For Gaetz and others, the movement has not done a skillful job at creating space for new leaders and new ideas to emerge. As he explains, advocates need to consider: “How do you create space? How do you make everyone feel important? How do you support people? You [need to] push yourself out of the way so that other people can do and learn.” A number of participants worried that in the absence of advocates doing this, new ideas and fresh perspectives that could renew the movement will not be forthcoming.

    More broadly, divisions among advocates often came down to participants’ differing tactics. Participants of all political persuasions identified tactics they felt are jeopardizing the movement’s ability to effect change. Professionalized participants tended to worry that direct action tactics were no longer effective and could actually damage the movement, while grassroots participants were more concerned that the movement has been sold out or co-opted through professionalization and the rise of “careerists” in the field. A number of participants were concerned that these fractures are weakening the movement and will make it more difficult for advocates to mobilize the pressure needed to compel government action.

4.11 Discussion

This chapter has explored homelessness advocates’ perspectives on a range of key topics related to the development of “homelessness” as a social problem in Canada.
Given the central role that advocates play in social problem development (Best, 2013), this chapter has provided a scoping review of how these advocates have made sense of, and framed, the development of this social problem and their roles in bringing about social change. Importantly, many of the themes that emerged during interviews converged in participants’ perspectives on the future of homelessness in Canada, a topic that was highly emotional for some participants. As discussed in section 4.11, a majority of participants did not believe that homelessness would be reduced or eliminated in the next ten to twenty years in Canada. Instead, many participants felt that homelessness would continue to increase given the trajectory of current socio-economic and political forces. By contrast, a smaller group of advocates felt very optimistic about the likelihood of preventing, reducing, and/or ending homelessness in Canada. When I shared these findings with the CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Tim Richter, he responded: “That is a really, really, really important and interesting finding. And the question is: why?” Reflecting on this chapter, Richter’s remarks caused me to consider a key question that draws many of these themes together: What can explain why some advocates have come to feel that the forces producing homelessness are unlikely to be stopped?

The findings of this chapter suggest that advocates’ contrasting visions of the future are representative of a broader split in the homelessness movement in Ontario and possibly other parts of Canada. This split, I would argue, is best described as “first wave advocacy” and “second wave advocacy.” While there is no literature to date on different “waves” of advocacy within homelessness movements, my findings suggest that homelessness advocates in Ontario can be roughly clustered into these two groups based on their distinct (1) professions and socio-economic status, (2) theories of social change, and (3) tactical preferences. First wave advocates are more likely to be engaged in grassroots advocacy, employed in frontline social service work, experience poverty, and employ oppositional tactics. In contrast, second wave advocates are often “insiders” in the political system (Best, 2013), exhibit greater job security and financial stability, and are more likely to employ cooperative social change tactics. It was evident that first wave advocates were more likely to be skeptical that Canadian homelessness will decrease in
the near future, while second wave advocates were much more confident change was on the horizon.

In this section, I will briefly explore how these waves differ in advocates’ professions and socio-economic status, theories of social change, and tactical preferences. Highlighting key findings from the previous sections, I argue that because of these differences, each wave has had contrasting experiences of (1) the barriers and disincentives to advocacy, and (2) structural and local changes to policy, programming, and funding that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s in Canada. While participants often attributed divisions over tactics to contrasting political ideologies, this research suggests that these divisions have also been *structurally produced* through advocates’ divergent experiences of the constraints on advocacy in a shifting political landscape. More specifically, this research suggests that many of the barriers and disincentives to advocacy have increasingly and disproportionately affected first wave advocates. I end by briefly exploring the implications of this for the state of homelessness advocacy in Ontario.

### 4.11.1 Differences between First Wave and Second Wave Advocates

While sometimes overlapping in vision and membership, first and second wave advocates exhibited differences in three core areas: (1) profession and socio-economic class, (2) theories of social change, and (3) tactical preferences. This section will explore differences in each of these areas, illuminating how these differences have structured participants’ experiences of advocacy and understandings of their role in social change processes.

**Profession and Socio-Economic Status**

Perhaps the most evident difference between first and second wave advocates was their professions and socio-economic class. While first wave advocates tended to be employed in “frontline” social service work and/or various “survival” jobs (e.g., janitorial work or factory labour), second wave advocates were often employed in NGOs, research, government, charities, or the private sector. Though second wave advocates rarely discussed their income or class status, first wave advocates discussed a range of financial difficulties they had faced, ranging from actual homelessness to “scraping by” on income
supports or low-paying jobs. Many first wave advocates reported job insecurity and job loss, as well as poor pay, difficult working conditions, and limited healthcare benefits (regardless of whether they were working within or outside of the homelessness sector). First wave participants also noted that poor advocates often face financial barriers to advocacy participation (e.g., being unable to afford childcare, transportation, or time off work in order to attend a meeting or event). Similarly, first wave participants also reported financial difficulty procuring basic organizational tools (e.g., meeting spaces, telephone lines, websites, photocopying, etc.). In contrast, second wave advocates rarely mentioned any of these challenges in relation to their advocacy work.

Linked to these factors, first wave advocates were more likely to express feelings of anxiety, anger, “burnout,” emotional exhaustion, frustration, and stress in relation to their advocacy work. Indeed, two first wave advocates expressed that their advocacy work had almost “killed” them. Further, a source of significant anxiety for several first wave participants was the fear that their poverty would escalate to homelessness. This anxiety appeared particularly acute for participants who had previously been homeless and/or worked directly with people experiencing homelessness. These findings suggest that the lived experience of advocacy was often very different for participants of each wave, in part related to their professions and class status.

Because first and second wave advocates often have divergent professions and roles in the movement, they also operate within different organizational cultures that have unique norms, constraints, and incentives. For example, professionalized organizations and their staff are incentivized to strategically develop advocacy efforts that will also meet the expectations of funders, governments, and/or boards of directors (Kallman, 2016; Wies, 2008). Interviews with advocates suggest that this often requires performing more “professionalized” social identities in order to maintain legitimacy with stakeholders (e.g., by wearing a suit and tie). By contrast, some first wave advocates and the organizations with which they worked (e.g., OCAP, TDRC) rarely saw themselves as accountable to any groups or organizations beyond people experiencing homelessness. First wave participants were more likely, for example, to describe people experiencing homelessness as “friends” (e.g., “we are seeing our friends dying” (M. Helwig)), while some second wave advocates referred to this group as “clients.” While such differences in
language need not suggest second wave advocates are any less sincere or caring towards people experiencing homelessness, it does reflect the differing contexts in which each wave is pushing the issue forward.

These findings provide some evidence that, in general, first wave advocates tend to be “outsider claimsmakers” and second wave advocates tend to be “insider claimsmakers.” Best (2013) argues that insider claimsmakers tend to have more direct connections to policymakers (see also Useem & Zald, 1982), while outsider claimsmakers tend to have fewer connections to individuals in positions of power and have more limited social or institutional power or prestige themselves (p. 64-65). While there were a number of advocates in this study that appeared to straddle this insider/outsider divide, or shift between these statuses at different times, this framework generally typifies a core difference between the two waves.

**Theories of Social Change and Tactical Preferences**

While participants rarely articulated their theories of social change in concrete terms, it was evident that many of the tensions in the movement have their origins in advocates’ incompatible views about how and why social change takes place. Broadly, these differences in views might be conceptualized as diverse “institutional logics” (Alford & Friedland, 1985; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Fligstein, 1987), a sociological concept that refers to the process by which “socially constructed belief systems shape people’s cognition and behavior in a given environment” (Kallman, 2016, p. 11). There are at least two key institutional logics that appear to have guided participants’ advocacy tactics: “oppositional logic” and “cooperative logic.” Moseley (2014) suggests that oppositional logic operates under the premise that “advocacy [i]s best done outside of government and require[s] challenging government positions,” while cooperative logic is guided by the belief that advocacy is best done “through inside channels and requires close, trusting relationships with policy makers” (p. 305). The findings of this study suggest that these two logics roughly correspond with the first and second waves of homelessness advocacy in Ontario. While there is significant variability in vision, values, and tactics within each wave’s mobilization of these logics, this framework provides a helpful way of understanding some of the core differences between the two waves.
In general, first wave advocates were more likely to employ an oppositional logic. A clear example of this logic was offered by OCAP member John Clarke, who argued that “[the reason] governments provide anything to the poor is because they are scared of social unrest . . . So we [OCAP] place a premium on disruptive action.” In this framework, some participants saw the interests of poor people as inherently antithetical to the interests of the government (e.g., “When we come together, we are many, they are few” (B. German)). Given this, many first wave participants tended to prioritize tactics such as occupations, demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, and other adversarial tactics that they felt were essential to creating political change on this issue. Some of these first wave advocates were highly critical of the “constructive engagement” framework. Clarke, for example, argued,

The whole theory of constructive engagement is based on this notion that you don’t, in fact, condemn. Like if the government puts the knife in 6 inches and pulls it back 3 inches, the approach of constructive engagement is to always begin by, you know, “It’s so important and wonderful that the government is doing something and we really appreciate it, but perhaps you might just do a little bit more?”

Given this understanding, some first wave advocacy groups have found themselves in direct conflict with some second wave advocates. Nonetheless, in practice, many first wave advocates utilized these oppositional tactics in tandem with multiple other strategies, some of which would be more consistent with a cooperative logic.

By contrast, a number of second wave advocates rejected these “angry” tactics, arguing that these tactics often alienate the public and allow people in positions of power to dismiss the issue. Instead, second wave advocates emphasized that advocacy needs to be focused on co-creating solutions to homelessness with government, and that advocates should help guide governments in the implementation of these strategic solutions. Given this, second wave advocates prioritized tactics such as networking, developing communication strategies, and establishing partnerships with government, the homelessness sector, the private sector, and the community. These advocates tended to believe that advocates should “help,” rather than aggressively demand, governments to produce social policy that will prevent and reduce homelessness (see Moseley, 2014, for similar findings).
These distinct theories of social change were also driven by opposing perspectives on the extent to which public policy actually reflects public opinion and/or the “public good” (however conceived). Second wave advocates were more likely to believe social policy does reflect, at least to a significant degree, the opinions and interests of the public insofar as government officials “will only do what the electorate gives them permission to do” (T. Richter). This view is illustrated in Anne Golden’s contention that the lack of “headway on affordable housing” in Canada is an indication of limited improvement in the public’s understanding of housing and homelessness issues. In contrast, many first wave advocates were more likely to believe that the interests of wealthy elites shape Canadian public policy, particularly in a first-past-the-post system. Each wave’s tactics directly flowed from such understandings.

Importantly, tactical differences were also crucially related to identity for both first wave and second wave advocates, although often in inadvertent ways. For example, in explaining their advocacy approach, many second wave participants defined themselves in relation to some first wave tactics, and often in relation to specific first wave groups (e.g., OCAP). In some narratives this was used as a distancing mechanism (i.e., “we don’t do that kind of activism”). In others, second wave tactics were framed as an advancement from first wave tactics (e.g., “We’re learning how to work in collaboration with people that we’ve often fought with” (M. Shapcott)). Such identity work was visible in the narratives of first wave advocates as well, some of whom articulated that their tactical choices were an expression of class-based collective identity (“For us, it’s everything. It’s our history . . . it’s how the world works for us. The streets, for us, are very significant” (G. Heroux) (see Polletta & Jasper, 2001, for a discussion of collective identity).

To some extent, these findings challenge social problem scholars’ focus on resource mobilization with respect to tactical choices. Joel Best (2013), for example, argues that outsider claimsmakers often engage in “attention-grabbing” tactics like sit-ins or demonstrations because they don’t have enough powerful political connections to get their claims heard otherwise (2013, p. 64; 1990). While this may be true in some cases, this research suggests that tactics are also chosen or avoided because they are powerful expressions of identity. In the case of first wave advocacy, for example, some participants
saw direct action tactics as a class-based tradition and an expression of collective identity. Given this, first wave and second wave advocates likely have divergent preferred identities to which they aspire, linked to their tactics and theories of social change.

4.11.2 The Shifting Political Landscape of Homelessness Advocacy in Canada

Despite these differences, section 4.10 revealed significant common ground between first wave and second wave advocates. Most specifically, a majority of both first wave and second wave advocacy participants believed in the efficacy of broad spectrum campaigns, often arguing that the tension between oppositional and cooperative approaches can help move the issue forward. Indeed, this chapter has offered many examples of advocates working together across tactical and organizational lines. Participants reported that prior to the 2000s, a range of diverse advocacy groups were collaborating or coordinating their efforts. Michael Shapcott, for example, expressed that in the 1980s, “everyone was talking to everybody else and we were all sharing ideas.” If indeed many advocates believe in the efficacy of broad spectrum campaigns, why did so many participants report that significant divisions have developed amongst homelessness advocates in Ontario?

The findings of this study suggest that there were a number of structural and local changes to policy and funding that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s that shifted the landscape of homelessness advocacy significantly. While undoubtedly many such changes have occurred over the course of this social problem’s history in Canada, this section will focus on four shifts that many study participants raised as crucial factors in the growing distance between advocates and the decline of broad based advocacy.

First, many advocates emphasized that beginning in the 2000s, there was an evident decline in advocacy participation by social service agencies. This was directly tied to the Harper government’s increased regulatory scrutiny of the “political activities” of Canadian charities by the Canadian Revenue Agency (Broadbent Institute, 2014), escalating to the audits of a range of anti-poverty charities in Canada (e.g., OXFAM). Given that charitable status has a significant impact on charities’ abilities to generate financial and legitimacy resources (Levasseur, 2008), charities and other related organizations became increasingly wary of being associated with advocacy and
homelessness advocates (what Michael Shapcott called “the A word”). In this context, alliances between advocates and social service agencies were increasingly strained and broken.

Second, with the establishment of the National Homelessness Initiative in 1999, some increased funding was available for social service agencies addressing homelessness. While many advocates celebrated the establishment of the NHI as a “win” (C. Crowe), a number of study participants argued that it also functioned to increase competition between agencies and deter agency staff from speaking out for fear that the agency’s funding would be cut. A number of study participants were fired from various agencies for continuing to engage in advocacy despite these constraints, and many felt that there was a “hush” on some critical discussions within agencies as well. According to a number of participants, there continues to be difficulties addressing various systemic problems in Toronto’s homelessness sector because agencies fear admitting to problems that may put their funding or reputation in jeopardy.

Third, numerous participants felt that homelessness advocacy in Ontario is currently at a crossroads with respect to tactics and how to influence policy. In the context of Toronto, a number of participants felt that these tensions could be traced back to OCAP’s March on Queen’s Park on June 15, 2000 (dubbed the “Queen’s Park Riot”). According to a number of participants, the violent conflicts with police that day “forced a lot of discussions about tactics and militancy that hadn’t really been happening” (K. Hardill). As a consequence of the March, a number of individuals, groups, and organizations, which had previously been working together, began to distance themselves from each other and from OCAP.

Fourth, as homelessness was increasingly responded to through emergency-relief measures rather than prevention or solution-focused efforts (Gaetz, 2010), homelessness continued to increase in many communities. As a result, many participants argued, social services became the primary way in which this problem was addressed and these services became an increasingly entrenched part of the human services sector. Organizations like Out of the Cold, which had begun as a political statement meant to shame government into action (M. Helwig), became absorbed into the shelter system and city-based statistics on homeless shelter usage. In this context, a range of participants felt that, “Many of us
are involved in casework stuff so much that we’re not putting the people power that we need to into the bigger picture stuff” (M. Behrans). Many participants argued that most jobs in the sector are ultimately “emergency roles” which do little to facilitate collaborative advocacy directed at structural change.

4.11.3 Outcomes of a Changed Landscape

First and second wave participants discussed a range of outcomes of these structural and local changes that occurred in the late 1990s and 2000s. In particular, first wave advocates argued that these changes have generally negatively impacted their ability to engage in advocacy. For example, a number of first wave participants felt that the social service sector’s resistance to advocacy has fractured advocacy networks that had previously been in place. Some participants reported that as many first wave advocates continued to do advocacy, such individuals were “driven out” of organizations (K. Hardill) and staff were increasingly being fired for engaging in advocacy work or for being critical of the agency’s direction. One advocate felt that she had been blacklisted from employment opportunities because of her advocacy work (C. Crowe).

Further, a few participants argued that there have been dramatic increases in police presence at advocacy events, and OCAP reported experiencing “the most insane levels of police mobilization against our demonstrations” (J. Clarke). As a result of these experiences, some first wave participants reported increased financial precarity and job insecurity, in addition to increased stress and exhaustion.

More broadly, a number of participants felt that, to the extent that the problem of homelessness has been “institutionalized” in Canada (D. Hulchanski) and emergency responses to the problem have become the norm, a greater emphasis has been placed on professionalized casework rather than community organizing. As part of this shift, some of the resources that used to be directed towards advocacy have increasingly been directed towards emergency responses. For example, Michael Shapcott explained that beginning in the 1990s, charitable foundations increasingly decided to fund service provision, rather than the advocacy efforts they had previously supported, on the basis that there was an imperative to “deal with the immediate needs.” As such, some first
wave advocates have found it more difficult in recent years to access the resources and finances needed to continue in advocacy.

First wave advocates also linked this increased focus on casework to diminished opportunities for people to learn advocacy skills and advocacy history, in part because fields like social work have increasingly focused on clinical skills. Given this, some participants felt that fewer young people were entering the movement or focused on addressing the structural causes of homelessness. As such, first wave advocates often expressed that homelessness advocacy is no longer “alive as a movement” (C. Crowe), making it difficult to recruit more social movement participants (e.g., Maggie Helwig argued “people tend to want to join in on something that’s already winning”). A broad consequence of this, according to many participants, is that homelessness has been depoliticized.

As part of these shifts, it appears that some of the social capital that first wave advocates had in the 1990s has declined to some extent. As will be explored in Chapter 5, it appears that the “go-to” authorities on homelessness in Toronto have increasingly shifted from key grassroots advocates (including homeless advocates) to “experts” in various fields (e.g., research, universities, the private sector, etc.). While Chapter 3 found that early newspaper coverage of homelessness often quoted social service providers and first wave advocates, reporters have increasingly turned to organizations like the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness or the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness to make sense of issues related to homelessness. For some first wave advocates this was a point of contention, in part because they felt that these “professionals” were too distanced from the “real voices” of people experiencing homelessness.

4.11.4 Implications: The Structural Production of Waves of Homelessness Advocacy

These findings suggest that, as a result of these (and other) structural and local changes that occurred in the late 1990s and 2000s in Canada, the political landscape within which homelessness advocacy operates has shifted. Many first wave advocates have argued that because of these changes, the barriers and disincentives to engaging in advocacy based in oppositional logics have escalated. In contrast, many second wave
participants felt that some of these changes have created new opportunities for cooperative-based advocacy in some governments (e.g., municipally in Calgary, provincially in Alberta, and arguably at the federal level) and for some types of advocates (e.g., researchers). A consequence of this is that first wave and second wave advocates have had increasingly divergent lived experiences of advocacy engagement, making it more difficult to bridge diverse professions, classes, political ideologies, and tactics.

This finding has several noteworthy implications. First, while it is evident that differences in political ideology and theories of social change have created divisions in homelessness advocacy, these differences have also been magnified by various structural and local changes to policy, programming, and funding that have been differentially experienced by each wave. This suggests that these “waves” of advocacy, rather than solely emanating from incongruous perspectives, have also been structurally produced. As such, it is clear that advocates have differential access to advocacy engagement because the risks and benefits of advocacy involvement are inequitably distributed in relation to class and profession.

Similarly, these findings suggest that experiences such as advocacy “burnout” are not just personal experiences but are political experiences linked to advocates’ unequal access to resources, supports, employment, and organizational tools. This further suggests that, rather than viewing first wave advocates as inherently less optimistic or hopeful about the future of homelessness, it may be that these advocates have less access to the conditions or resources which are likely to produce hope or optimism.

Research is needed to further test this conceptualization of two waves of homelessness advocacy in Ontario, and I invite future researchers to revise and betray this framework. Most pointedly, further research is needed on second wave advocates, particularly related to how they conceive of barriers and constraints to their advocacy and how they perceive themselves as agents of social change. Given the fluidity with which a few participants moved between first and second wave advocacy, further research is also needed on how such actors are able to straddle different advocacy worlds and how this impacts their understandings of social change.
4.11.5 Limitations

There were several methodological limitations in this study that are worthy of mention here. First, participants were overwhelmingly drawn from Ontario, and most were from Toronto. Generalizing participants’ perspectives on advocacy to the rest of Canada should be done with caution. A sample that included more advocates from different parts of Canada would have assisted in creating a more comprehensive national picture of advocacy on this issue. Second, limited demographic data was collected from participants. While most participants disclosed various kinds of identities during the interview itself (e.g., gender, class, sexuality, etc.), the absence of this quantitative data precludes describing the demographics of the sample quantitatively. Future research would benefit from more closely analyzing the relationships between these identities and advocates’ perspectives on this issue and social change more broadly. Third, a key limitation was that none of the participants included in the sample were focused on indigenous homelessness in their advocacy work. Indeed, indigenous homelessness was a largely absent issue in discussions with advocates (with two brief exceptions). This is, politically and ethically, a significant problem and limitation for this study. While several indigenous leaders and advocates were approached to participate in the study, unfortunately I was unable to conduct an interview with any of them for various (largely logistical) reasons. Future research in this area should make more extensive efforts to focus on the advocacy efforts of indigenous community members in this area given the extremely high rates of indigenous homelessness in Canada and the connections between indigenous homelessness and colonial violence (See Belanger et al., 2007; Wente, 2000).
Chapter 5: The Historical Development of “Homelessness” as a Social Problem in Canada, 1980 – Present

5.1 Introduction

Why has the social problem of “homelessness” developed in Canada in the way that it has? While there have been two large-scale studies on the development of homelessness as a social problem in the United States (Bogard, 2003; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012), no such studies have been conducted in the Canadian context. This dissertation is a first attempt to develop such an account for Canada. To that end, this chapter brings together data from previous chapters, in combination with key event analysis, document analysis, policy analysis, and analysis of public polls, in order to identify and explain the “career” of Canadian homelessness. In particular, this chapter addresses three questions: What stages has the social problem of “homelessness” passed through in Canada? Why has the social problem of “homelessness” progressed in the ways that it has? What is the current status of “homelessness” as a social problem in Canada?

Building on social problem theorists’ natural history models (Blumer, 1971; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977) to explain the progression of social problems through developmental stages, this chapter argues that the social problem of homelessness has progressed through six distinct stages over time in Canada (see Table 5.1).3 In Stage 1, 1985-1986, homelessness emerged as a social problem in Canada due to public recognition that there was an emerging group of Canadians who lacked housing and differed from previous groups understood as “the homeless” (i.e., disaffiliated, poorly housed men). In Stage 2, 1987-1990, homelessness became legitimized as a social problem with the widespread adoption of the term to describe a decidedly unique and public problem, which various claimsmakers competed to define and describe. In Stage 3, 1991-1995, claimsmakers competed to assign blame and responsibility for homelessness.

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3 I utilize the term “stage model” rather than “natural history model” insofar as the latter implies an objectivist perspective which (ironically) implies that such progressions are governed by natural laws rather than constructed by social actors. Nonetheless, I reference other scholars’ use of natural history models throughout the text insofar as my study builds on these scholars work without adopting their terminology.
as municipalities and emergency services tried to keep up with increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness. In Stage 4, 1996-2001, there was an explosion of advocacy and public agitation around the issue due to the clear failure of the emergency response model. In 1999 the problem peaked in parts of Canada, resulting in official responses from the federal government and many municipal governments. In Stage 5, 2002-2007, various governments across Canada implemented responses to the problem and there was a notable decline in media attention and urgency surrounding the issue, linked to both “saturation” and a backlash against the population. A transformation of homelessness advocacy also took place during Stage 5, significantly shifting “ownership” of the problem. Stage 6, 2008-present, has involved both an institutionalization of the problem and a transformation of the problem (what I refer to as its “second generation”). Following exploration of each of these stages, this chapter discusses the implications of my findings for the future of this social problem in Canada, as well as the relevance of these findings to social problem theory more broadly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-problem</td>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>No “homelessness” problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>1985-1986</td>
<td>Emergence of homelessness as a social problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>1987-1990</td>
<td>Legitimization of homelessness as a social problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>1991-1995</td>
<td>Assignments of blame &amp; emergency responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>1996-2001</td>
<td>Social problem peak and development of an official response</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>2002-2007</td>
<td>Implementation of official response, saturation, and transformation of homelessness advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>2008 - present</td>
<td>Institutionalization and transformation of the problem</td>
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5.2 Theoretical Approach

The social constructionist approach used in this chapter is informed by social problem theory, which takes as its starting point the assertion that social problems are not putative conditions in society but are the *definitional activities* of people who assert a particular societal condition or behaviour is problematic (Frank, 1925; Blumer, 1969, 1971; Best, 2008, 2013; Gusfield, 1984; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). In order to understand a social problem such as “homelessness,” these theorists argue that research must focus
on the processes by which conditions are identified, named, defined, and framed as problematic through definitional activities, and how these efforts are linked to societal responses to the “problem” (Best, 2013). Of focus for some social problem theorists in recent years has been an attempt to model the developmental process whereby social problems are established, a task called for by Blumer (1971). Many of the theoretical models of social problem development utilize a natural history model which involves a number of consecutive steps through which social problems pass in order to become established and acted upon (e.g., Fuller & Myers, 1941; Kitsuse & Spector, 1977, 2000). Guided by this literature, numerous scholars have employed variations of these models to explain how and why social problems, big and small, have developed and declined in the way that they have (sometimes referred to as their “career”).

Social problem scholars have demonstrated that there is no necessary or linear relationship between collective societal recognition of a social problem, objective conditions in that society, and socio-political action with respect to that social problem (Blumer, 1971; Bogard, 2003; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Consequently, scholars have argued that the process of collective definition “determines the career of social problems, from the initial point of their appearance to whatever may be the terminal point of their course” (Blumer, 1971, p. 301). As Robert H. Lauer (1976) identifies, there appear to be at least three dominant patterns of public concern with respect to social problems: (1) problems which are of “more or less continual concern,” (2) problems which appear periodically over time, and (3) problems which have a “natural history of emergence and disappearance” (p. 125). Given research which has demonstrated “homelessness” emerged as a new and distinct social problem in Canada in the 1980s (see Hulchanski et al., 2009), determining its pattern of emergence and (potential) disappearance is essential for understanding this social problem. This section will briefly detail the key theoretical models proposed by social problem theorists to trace the emergence and disappearance of social problems. Expanding on these models, this chapter explains my inductive approach to modeling the history of a social problem called “homelessness” in Canada.
5.2.1 Literature on Natural History Models of Social Problem Development

The earliest natural history model of social problems was developed by Fuller and Myers (1941), who proposed a rudimentary three stage process through which social problems progress: (1) awareness (in which “definers” make a convincing plea that particular conditions constitute a social problem), (2) policy determination (determining what to do about the problem), and (3) reform (policy action) (see also Rainwater, 1974, p. 7-10). James Bossard’s (1941) commentary on Fuller and Myer’s model offers a much more elaborate set of stages:

(1) Recognition of the problem, (2) Discussion of its seriousness, (3) Attempts at reform, usually intuitively arrived at, often ill-advised, promoted by the “Well, let’s do something, folks,” (4) Suggestions that more careful study is needed – “What we need is a survey,” (5) Here follows some change in personnel of people interested, (6) Emphasis upon broad basic factors, (7) Dealing with individual cases, (8) Another change in personnel, (9) Program inductively arrived at, (10) Refinements of techniques of study and treatment, (11) Refinement of concepts, and (12) Another change in personnel. (p. 329)

Building on this research, Herbert Blumer (1971) developed his own natural history model based on the contention that societal recognition of a social problem is a highly competitive and selective process. Blumer (1971) modelled the progression of social problems in five stages: (1) the emergence of a social problem, (2) the legitimation of the problem through recognition in arenas of public discussion, (3) the mobilization of action with regard to the problem, (4) the formation of an official plan of action, and (5) the transformation of the official plan in its empirical implementation (p. 300). Blumer and other scholars have emphasized that many social problems do not progress through all steps but are “blocked” for a variety of different reasons, or do not even make it to the first stage (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998; Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998). Importantly, Blumer introduces the concept of “contingencies,” referring to certain events that may or may not occur and move the social problem to the next stage.

The most heavily relied on natural history model is the one offered by Spector and Kitsuse in their 1977 book, Constructing Social Problems. While many scholars have offered critiques, commentary, and revisions of these natural history models, new models have not been forthcoming in the literature and Spector and Kitsuse’s text remains the major orienting statement on social problem progression and “often the sole theoretical
citation in modern-day empirical work” (Loseke, 2015, p. 8). Spector and Kitsuse argue that social problems progress through various stages as a result of claims-making activity, where claims are defined as “a demand that one party makes upon another” (p. 83). Expanding beyond Blumer and Fuller and Myers models, Spector and Kitsuse set out a four-stage natural history model describing the claims-making activities that constitute the social problem process. In the first stage, groups assert the existence and offensiveness of a particular condition, oftentimes moving a previously relegated “private” problem into the public sphere. They argue that claims-making can take various forms, including protests, lawsuits, petitions, policy-making, publications, speeches, and so forth. If such activities are successful, this may lead to political debate and/or social discussion and conflict (p. 43). In the second stage, official agencies or institutions become involved. This may result in one or more institutions taking on some responsibility for changing the condition(s) and establishing measures to address it (e.g., proposals for reforms, the creation of institutions, etc.). In the third stage, a dissatisfied response to these institutional responses emerges and new claims, grievances, and demands are likely to be made or re-framed. In some cases, this leads to debates over legal, moral, judicial, or social responsibility over the problem, claims that new institutions or programs need to be established, or specialized programs or procedures need to be developed. Stage four of this process emerges when one or more groups claim that it is no longer possible to “work within the system,” and alternative, parallel, or counter-institutions are claimed to be necessary to sufficiently address the social problem (p. 153). Groups with such grievances may split apart or come together in different ways throughout this process, depending on their assessment of the efficacy of tactics, among other reasons.

Building on these natural history models, the next section briefly turns to my process for developing a stage model to explain the progression of homelessness as a social problem in Canada.

5.2.2 Developing a Stage Model for Homelessness in Canada

In developing a stage model for homelessness in Canada, I took seriously the critique raised by Hilgartner and Bosk (1998) and Schneider (1985) that natural history
models are highly idealized and that succession from one stage to another is a crude explanation of what happens in the empirical world. In particular, Hilgartner and Bosk argue that social problems may exist in numerous stages at the same time, and that the path of succession differs so dramatically among problems that it is questionable whether a model of this nature is helpful at all. Keeping these critiques in mind, data analysis proceeded inductively. When comparing the data on Canadian homelessness to the models offered by Fuller and Myers (1941), Blumer (1971), and Spector and Kitsuse (1977), it was clear the data did not entirely match these models. Making the data “fit” with any of these models would require either a synthetic collapsing of distinct phenomena (e.g., the legitimization of homelessness in Canada was fairly temporally distinct from the assignment of blame for the problem, unlike in Spector and Kitsuse’s model) or a synthetic separation of phenomena that were occurring concomitantly (e.g., Blumer’s separation of mobilization and official responses did not fit with evidence that both occurred simultaneously in 1999 and 2000 in Canada). Nonetheless, all three models provided crucial insights into how to distinguish between the different stages in the progression of Canadian homelessness as a social problem. Consequently, throughout each stage I utilize parts of the models developed by these theorists in ways that fit with the data, but do not adopt any particular model. While my proposed model is specific to Canadian homelessness, it may lend insight into patterns of development among other social problems as well.

My goal in developing this stage model was to articulate a broad national picture, necessitating that much important and perhaps contradictory data be excluded. Developing a broad national picture was an especially difficult task in such a large country with a loose federal model, within which different communities (e.g., indigenous communities) and regions (e.g., Canada’s north) have diverse histories of homelessness. Given this, I echo Wagner and Barton Gilman’s (2012) sentiment that “the stages are meant to represent the predominant attitude of the period, not a total of all the attitudes in each period” (p. 37). Acknowledging this, I position this proposed model as a first attempt to sketch some of the main developments of the problem nationally and in some key cities and regions. I invite future researchers to extrapolate from, complicate, and transform this model as new analysis and new data are brought to bear on it.
5.3 Methods

There are few cases in the social problem literature that provide useful examples of how to methodologically tackle the social construction of a social problem using such sizeable amounts of data, over such a significant period of time, in such a large nation (key examples include Best, 1990; Gusfield, 1984; Bogard, 2003; Nelson, 1984). With regards to the historical development of homelessness as a social problem, the literature is even more limited (examples include Bogard, 2003; Hulchanski et al., 2009; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012). Beyond one MA thesis published in 1991 (Hemmingson, 1991), the only researcher that has investigated the historical development of homelessness as a socially constructed problem in Canada has been David Hulchanski and his colleagues, perhaps most notably in a short 2009 article titled “Homelessness: What’s in a Word?,” in which they trace the origins and development of the content and meaning of the term “homelessness.” This article and others (Hulchanski, 2005, 2010b, 2013) provide a helpful starting point for thinking about the emergence of this problem in Canada, and the findings they offer parallel my own (particularly with regards to social problem emergence). However, these articles lack the data necessary to provide a robust account of the development of the issue, most specifically because they do not involve an analysis of Canadian media coverage of the issue, key advocates’ perspectives, public polls, advocacy history, or other sources of information that provide crucial data for articulating this development with more precision. This dissertation in general, and this chapter specifically, aims to extend the work begun by Hulchanski and his colleagues in order to provide a robust account of the development of Canadian homelessness as a social problem.

This chapter incorporates data used in the previous two chapters, as well as several additional data sources, including: key documents (e.g., influential governmental reports), key events, key policy changes related to housing and homelessness, reviews of the academic and grey literature, public polls, and advocates’ perspectives on the history of the problem and homelessness advocacy. Data from all sources was compiled and
analysed chronologically using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), allowing key themes to emerge inductively through a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The periodization of each stage was developed inductively and was revisited several times with additional data to ensure accuracy. Data analysis focused on the emergence of broad trends at particular points in this history (e.g., NIMBYism), while attempting to acknowledge and account for the diverse emergence of this problem in various parts of Canada. While data on newspaper coverage extended only to 2013, other data sources were analysed until early 2016.

The enormity of all potential data required a process of selection. Data was selected based on the importance it was seen to have within the history, as determined by a number of factors, such as expert interviewees identifying it as significant, widespread media coverage, significant financial investment or bureaucratic mobilization, among other factors. Assessment for inclusion was often conducted with the benefit of triangulated data on the item’s relative importance (e.g., a particular event was covered extensively in media, identified as important by numerous interview participants, and noted in both governmental reports and academic literature).

5.3.1 Methodological Limitations

Several notable methodological limitations are worthy of mention here. First, while multiple sources of data were brought to bear on whether a particular event or document should be considered significant enough for inclusion in this brief history, this process nonetheless ran the risk of underemphasizing or overemphasizing particular events, documents, or shifts in policy. Second, I echo Wagner and Barton Gilman’s (2012) caution that “[i]n applying these stages, the exact years become somewhat fluid, because we cannot, even in retrospect, account with precision for all the vast political and other developments across different parts of the nation” (p. 37). This is true for my study as well, though I endeavour to explain specifically why a transition to a new stage is evidenced in each case. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the data sample is somewhat Ontario and Toronto-centric, despite efforts to focus on national shifts and include data from other provinces and cities across Canada. While this bias undoubtedly emerged because the author lives in Toronto, it is also the case that Toronto has often
experienced the highest levels of homelessness in the country (Daly, 1996; Laird, 2007) and has been the site of some of the most powerful homelessness advocacy in Canada, particularly when it first emerged as a problem (Greene, 2014b, p. 77). Further research is needed to develop a more comprehensive account of the development of this problem in other cities and provinces across the country.

5.4 No “Homelessness” Problem, 1980 - 1984

It appears that the social problem of “homelessness” did not emerge in Canada until approximately 1984. While obviously there were people without homes prior to 1984, the condition of homelessness was not named and problematized in Canada until this time. This paralleled understandings of this problem at the international level as well, with lack of housing seen as an issue that was largely restricted to the global south. As noted by Hulchanski et al. (2009b), when the UN established 1987 as International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) in 1981, the resolution sought to bring international attention to the difficulties faced by “homeless people in urban and rural areas of the developing countries” (my emphasis) (p. 2). The Assembly’s 1981 resolution did not use the term “homelessness,” nor did it imagine the issue to be one affecting countries in the global north. During these years, Canada did not have a “homelessness” problem (see also Hulchanski et al., 2009b).

Likewise, the United States did not have a social problem called “homelessness” until the late 70s/early 80s (Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, p. 61-2). As Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) explain,

There were many young people living on the street [in the US] in the 1960s and 1970s, but they were not usually considered a social problem... Usually in the 1970s, the “unkempt” poor went back to a lodging house or a single-room occupancy in the central city. By the 1980s, many lacked a room at all. (p. 13)

This certainly parallels the Canadian experience, where until the 1980s it was assumed that even the very poor had housing, however inadequate (Hulchanski et al., 2009b). This is evidenced in a number of reports from Canadian governments and research centres during the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s. A good example of this is The Canadian Welfare
Council’s 1969 report, *Transient Youth – Report of an Inquiry in the Summer of 1969*, which ostensibly sought to describe the growth of what we would now frame as “youth homelessness.” This report argues that the increasing numbers of unhoused “travelling youth” or “alienated youth” in Canada can be divided into two groups: (1) youth united around subcultural values of freedom, a rejection of nationalism, and experimentation with drugs, and (2) “badly damaged children and youth” who had experiences of “familial discord” (p. 166-7). The report surprisingly affirms the former group (“If there are young Canadians who are disposed to reject nationalism for more spacious commitment, let us affirm and strengthen them” (p. 117)), and calls for government-funded social supports for both groups. While the lack of services for these groups was explicitly described as an issue, the problem these youth suffered from was not homelessness.

More specifically, there were a number of governmental and non-governmental Canadian reports between 1980 and 1984 which describe individuals as “homeless,” but refrain from using the term “homelessness.” These “homeless” individuals are explicitly described as having housing. For example, a 1960 report described the “resident homeless man” as living “predominately in cheap rooming houses” that are largely “below standard” (p. 1). These reports describe “the homeless” as lacking familial connections and as predominantly single men (City of Toronto Planning Board, 1977; Social Planning Council, 1960, p. 1; see also Amster, 2003; Wright et al., 1998) The Canadian Welfare Council 1961 report describes a “homeless person” as:

> [O]ne who is completely cut off from or has no relatives or friends. Though he may be receiving some form of outside support, he has few independent resources other than the clothes on his back, has no immediate means and in some cases has little future prospect of self support. He is without a home and lacks most of the social or economic supports a home normally provides. (p. 2)

In many of these early reports, “the homeless man” was described in pathological and moral terms (*e.g.*, “overly dependent”), and was often labeled “a welfare problem” (rather than experiencing a *social problem* like homelessness) (Canadian Welfare Council, 1961). It was clear in these framings that this was a particular *kind* of man, with early reports sometimes offering typologies of these men. The 1961 report by the Canadian Welfare Council, for example, describes three types of “homeless men”: “(1) Unattached
men residing in urban centres, who are often inhabitants of Skid Row, (2) Migratory, seasonal, or casual workers, and also perhaps single men who have been employed but have been laid off work, and (3) Tramps and hoboes” (p. 2-3). In this typology and others, housing status was largely an extraneous variable to describing the population.

Although it is unsurprising that many of these reports describe people experiencing homelessness as incompetent, idle, lazy, or immoral, what was interesting was that these individuals were framed as victims of a different social problem: industrialization and technological lag. According to several reports, the inability of parts of the workforce to keep up with industrialization and technological change resulted in a surplus of unskilled (male) labourers who congregated in “skid row” areas in Canadian cities. For example, the 1960 report of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto asserted:

In its present form it [the problem of the homeless or transient man] is a product of the industrial revolution of the past two centuries. The movement of population from settled agricultural life to less secure industrial work, the demands of the primary and transportation industries for mobile, seasonal, and casual labour, continuing changes in demands for labour (business cycles), and technological changes have all been factors in the displacement of men from the place of birth and upbringing or accustomed domicile. Increasingly the homeless transient man has turned to the large cities where opportunities for work are more available and where resources to meet his needs at times of emergency exist in greater abundance. At the same time there has developed within the modern industrial city a corps of resident unemployable men less mobile and predominately occupationally, physically or mentally handicapped. Having few resources the homeless man congregates in older and poorer sections of the city, known generally as “skid row.” (p. 2)

Similarly, in 1974 the City of Toronto Planning Board published a report that argued,

The Skid-Row individual is a socially isolated person who because of physical, emotional, and/or education disadvantages, is unable to participate successfully in our complex and highly competitive technological society. (p. 2)

Such framings, which explicitly positioned the “homeless person” as inadequate to deal with the demands of modern society, were evident in a number of reports in the 1960s and 1970s. Most notably, concerns usually centered on issues of employment and familial structure, rather than housing (see Canadian Welfare Council, 1961; City of Toronto Planning Board, 1974, 1977).
Interestingly, there are a few examples of reports during these years that position the issue as an “emergency” or “disaster” – frames which were utilized extensively by advocates in the 1990s and beyond. For example, in 1983 the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto published a report titled *People Without Homes: A Permanent Emergency*, in which they argue,

The issue of homelessness has reached a level of urgency not witnessed since the Great Depression. And for many low income people in Toronto who are experiencing a crisis in affordable housing, the shelter crisis cannot simply be called an 'emergency.' It is a long-term state, a permanent emergency. (p. i)

It appears this framing of homelessness as an emergency may have begun long before its ubiquity in the late 1990s.

### 5.4.1 Media Coverage and Public Perceptions, 1980 - 1984

Newspaper coverage of “homelessness” as a social problem in Canada was extremely low during this time. Only one newspaper article among all the newspapers sampled utilized the word “homelessness” during this time (a *Globe and Mail* article in 1984 (Swan & Camilleri, 1984)). Similarly, no public polls or surveys were found before 1984 that asked the public to comment on “the homeless” or “homelessness.” While poverty was clearly an issue, (highlighted most notably by the renowned “Croll Report” of 1971) and hunger was becoming an issue (Canada’s first food bank was established in 1981 (Hurtig, 1999, p. 37)), homelessness had not yet emerged as an articulated social problem for Canadian society. By contrast, Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) found that in the United States, the mid to late 1980s represented the height of societal concern about the social problem of homelessness (p. 37), while Uzelec (1990) noted that by the late 1980s, the term “compassion fatigue” was being widely used to describe the American public’s exhaustion with the issue. As will be seen in more detail below, it appears that the development of homelessness as a social problem in Canada has lagged behind its development in the United States.

### 5.4.2 Advocacy Efforts to Establish Homelessness as a Social Problem, 1980 - 1984

While it was clear that “homelessness” had not yet been identified as a social problem by Canadian society, advocates and progressive organizations were well aware
of this emerging issue and made efforts to establish it as a public problem. For example, longtime advocate Michael Shapcott identified that during the 1970s and early 1980s, he and his fellow advocates competed with other social problems to gain media coverage of the issue. This led to the adoption of various strategies to gain coverage, such as putting people experiencing homelessness “in front of the camera to tell horrendous stories about how rotten it was” (M. Shapcott). While Shapcott identified the shortcomings of this approach, it was clear that he and his colleagues were consciously adopting competitive strategies to establish “homelessness” as a social problem. Other interviewees recounted similar efforts to frame the issue as a public problem, often focused on providing counter narratives to the pathologization of this population.

There were several advocacy groups that emerged prior to 1984 that were either focused specifically on homelessness, or that addressed the issue of homelessness as a subset of a larger issue (e.g., housing, unemployment, poverty, etc.). Perhaps most notable during this time was the founding of Front d’action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU), a direct-action anti-poverty organization in Quebec that subsequently became a leading grassroots advocacy organization addressing issues of homelessness and poverty in Canada (Shragge, 2013, p. 92-3). In Toronto, the Single Displaced Persons Project (SDPP), a network of people from downtown churches and social service agencies, gained influence in its efforts to “respond to the need of the homeless and poorly housed in the city” (perhaps most notably through their “Housing Not Hostels” campaign) (Ontario Ministry of Housing, 1988, p. 99; see also Greene, 2014a, p. 25). In 1988, the Ontario Ministry of Housing identified that the SDPP were “instrumental in raising public awareness of homelessness in Toronto” (p. 99). Similarly, the Homes First Society (HFS), developed in 1983 by SDPP and the Fred Victor Mission, engaged in substantial advocacy efforts to position non-profit housing as a solution to homelessness, opening Canada’s first federally supported transitional housing project for singles in 1984 (Greene, 2014a, p. 25). The efforts of such advocacy groups undoubtedly assisted in the emergence of homelessness as a Canadian social problem in 1985, and these efforts likely assisted in the widespread framing of homelessness as a housing issue during the 1980s.
5.4.3 Political and Policy Context, 1980 - 1984

Looking at the political and policy context of the early 1980s in Canada, it is perhaps not unsurprising that “homelessness” had not yet emerged as a social problem. With regards to housing, Canada’s national housing plan was still in place up until 1993 and between 1964 and 1984 the federal government engaged in “building a non-market social housing sector as part of a broader social safety net” (Hulchanski, 2004, p. 179). Indeed, when the Minister of Urban Affairs, Ron Basford, introduced the housing legislation of 1973, he explicitly identified housing as a right for Canadians - one that the government has the obligation to assure (Basford, 1973, p. 2257). In 1983 federal funding for social housing peaked at 25,000 new units, steadily declining until 1993 when it was eliminated completely (Hulchanski, 2004).

However, 1984 marked a sea change in policy and political ideology in Canada with the landslide election of Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, whose policies focused on global economic competitiveness and the retrenchment of the welfare state (Graham et al., 2012). Mulroney’s election resulted in deregulation and public spending cuts that negatively affected most national social programs (Graham et al., 2012). As a result, “the major national anti-poverty advocacy groups were forced to spend much of their time defending past gains” (Greene, 2014b, p. 79). In 1984, the federal government cut $217.8 million from various housing programs, asserting that housing programs should only assist those “in the greatest need” and that non-profit and co-operative housing “restricts private sector activity by reducing demands for market accommodation” (Canada, 1985, p. 46). Simultaneously, some provinces engaged in policy change that decreased security of tenure for low-income households (e.g., Gilbert, 1989). This move towards a market state and the erosion of traditional social welfare policies created a prime context within which homelessness could emerge as a social problem in Canada.

5.5 Stage 1: Emergence of Homelessness as a Social Problem, 1985-1986

Beginning in roughly 1985, “homelessness” began to emerge as a social problem
in Canada. This new term was used to describe an emerging group of Canadians who lacked housing and differed from previous understandings of “the homeless” as disaffiliated, poorly housed men. As Hulchanksi et al. (2009a) argue, “By the early 1980s, countries like Canada needed a new term for a widespread mass phenomenon, a new social problem found in many wealthy, developed nations” (p. 5). According to a number of interviewees, the emergence of homelessness as a social problem was crucially related to the increased visibility of street homelessness during the early to mid 1980s. Public awareness also increased as a result of emerging media reports describing “the new homeless” that were increasingly appearing on Canadian streets.

Empirically, major Canadian cities were reporting high numbers of people experiencing homelessness during this time (Daly, 1996), with Montreal, for example, reporting 5,000 women to be homeless and living on the streets (O’Reilly-Fleming, 1990, p. 61). Throughout the 1980s there was also a growth of emergency shelter and support services for distinct subpopulations of people experiencing homelessness, such as shelters for “abused women” (Daly, 1996), and services for indigenous people experiencing homelessness (e.g., the opening of Native Men’s Residence in Toronto in 1985) (see also Greene, 2014b).

5.5.1 Early Media Coverage and Reports on Homelessness, 1985 - 1986

Newspaper coverage of the issue of “homelessness” began to take shape in Canada during this time (11 articles in 1985 and 47 articles in 1986). Media coverage of homelessness advocacy was very limited, however, beginning most notably with advocacy related to the death of Drina Joubert (e.g., Fulton, 1986; McLeod, 1986). Most reporters primarily interviewed social service workers and frequently sought to describe the observed and imputed physical and behavioural characteristics of “homeless people.” People experiencing homelessness were interviewed less frequently and rarely (if ever) asked to comment on the nature of this new social problem. Precise definitions of homelessness were both scarce and variable in newspaper coverage, as well as governmental and non-governmental reports. For example, among the six Canadian newspapers sampled, no definitions of homelessness appeared until 1987. While it was clear that a social problem was emerging in Canada, what it was, exactly, was unclear at
this time, with most documents focusing on “who are the homeless” rather than “what is
homelessness.”

As discussed in Chapter 3, when the issue of homelessness first emerged, Canadian newspapers often described the “new homeless” in ways which positioned them as unwitting victims of political and economic changes, largely deserving of sympathy and services, and as morally superior to the “old homeless” who were understood as “winos,” “bums,” or “down-and-outers” (see, e.g., “How Gary Fell,” 1985; Flavelle, 1989; Webb-Proctor, 1987). The identities of the “new homeless” (i.e., women, youth and children, families, people with disabilities or poor health, etc.) were framed as an indication that (1) this was a distinctly different and new social problem and, (2) this group was inherently less to blame for their poverty. In describing the first stage of social problem development, Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argue, “Initial social problems activities often consist of attempts to transform private troubles into public issues” (p. 143). It appears that framings of the “new homeless” evidenced such a transformation, shifting cultural understandings of “the homeless” from the private issue of dysfunctional men with personal problems to viewing “the homeless” as demographically diverse victims of systemic problems. These new framings began in 1985 and 1986, but were particularly present between 1987 – 1990.

This framing appears to be relatively consistent across reports, media coverage, many social service agencies, and some advocacy groups during this time (based on the data available). For example, Chez Doris, a shelter for women experiencing homelessness in Montreal, compared the women they serve to the “typical Skid Row Man” in the following terms:

The women are never as far down as the men. They always retain some spark. When they’re not drunk, they wash their hands and faces. They’re better at survival; they look almost normal to people who don’t know them. Men fall down in the street, wet their pants, and don’t give a shit. Women would be deeply humiliated if that happened to them. (Ross quoted in McLaughlin, 1986)

Such attempts at “categorizing” the “new homeless” were endemic in almost all reports and media coverage of the issue during this time, although race and ethnicity remained exceedingly absent in such reports and coverage. This absence is interesting, given that this problem has been found to disproportionately affect indigenous peoples in Canada.
5.5.2 Creating a Problem, Catalyzing a Movement: The Death of Drina Joubert, 1985 - 1986

According to Spector and Kitsuse (1977), “Social problems activity commences with collective attempts to remedy a condition that some group perceives and judges offensive and undesirable” (p. 143). Although reporters, faith-based communities, some municipal leaders, and advocacy groups were problematizing this new issue, it wasn’t until the death of former fashion model Drina Joubert that the issue was powerfully thrust into the public arena and created opportunities for actors to publicly frame the problem for a much larger audience. Joubert’s death occurred in the context of growing public recognition of the issue and spurred the development of a highly mobilized collective of people who demanded government action on homelessness. According to Jonathan Greene (2014a), “it was the ‘moral shock’ associated with the death of Drina Joubert, a homeless woman found frozen to death in the back of a pickup truck in December 1985, that catalyzed a small movement” (p. 25). Joubert’s death received national media attention, originating with the efforts of housing outreach worker Beric German to publicize the issue despite resistance from the Toronto Police Force (Crowe, Baker, Boyd, Briggs, Briggs, Clarke, The Colonel, Dri, Lang, & Tipping, 2007, p. 13).

Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argue that, “The most critical aspects of this formative stage of social problems are the ways that complaints are raised and the strategies used to press claims, gain publicity, and arouse controversy” (p. 143). Several interviewees identified Joubert’s death as a “huge” moment in the beginning of this history because of the drama associated with such a beautiful figure suffering from an experience traditionally thought to be relegated to older, single men with substance abuse issues. In this way, Joubert’s identity particularly dramatized the issue, symbolized the extent of the problem, and moved it forward as a social problem. The death of Joubert received significant media coverage in Toronto and beyond. Indeed, I would suggest that media framing of this event constituted a “landmark narrative,” which Nichols (1997) and Best (2013) describe as a particularly powerful typifying example which comes to dominate news coverage because it is seen as particularly compelling (Best, 2013, p. 144.). Best
(2013) argues that landmark narratives like this one “guide news worker’s thinking about the nature of the problem and how it should be covered,” as well as “shape the terms by which the news audience understands the problem” (p. 144). There is evidence to suggest that newspapers’ framings of Joubert’s death were repeated in coverage of homeless deaths in years to come, and likely helped shape public understandings of the issue.

Following Joubert’s death, Toronto’s Affordable Housing Not Hostels Coalition quickly formed and successfully pressured the government to convene an inquest into Joubert’s death, which was conducted in February 1986. As street nurse and homelessness advocate Cathy Crowe explains,

The Joubert Inquest was the foundation for numerous political wins: the development and funding of an innovative mental health Hostel Outreach Program (HOP) to reach homeless men and women [in Toronto]; a 9 percent average increase in welfare rates [in Ontario]; and new affordable housing [in Ontario]. Project 3000, as it was known, combined three thousand new units of affordable housing with support services. Under this provincial program, Ontarians became eligible for social housing for the first time. (Crowe in Crowe et al., 2007, p. 13)

The Joubert Inquest was one of the earliest efforts by Canadian homelessness advocates to utilize the court system to seek justice for people experiencing homelessness and publicize the social problem of homelessness. Many similarly efforts have since taken place in cities across Canada.

5.5.3 Early Framings of “Homelessness,” 1985 - 1986

During this time, there was significant confusion regarding the causes of this new social problem in Canada, a confusion that perhaps peaked between 1987 and 1990, but has since continued for decades. Many actors emphasized the structural causes of homelessness, diverging significantly from previous framings of the “homeless person.” The structural causes various actors and reports attributed to homelessness were variably described as poverty, housing, economic changes, unemployment, inadequate social assistance, deinstitutionalization, low wages, familial breakdown, domestic violence, and many others. In 1986, for example, the Canadian Council on Social Development argued that “the four major direct causes of homelessness are: unemployment, inadequate social benefits, displacement, and deinstitutionalization” (p. 7). It is likely that the plethora of
causes attributed to this new social problem, to some extent, contributed to the confusion as to whether homelessness was a new issue, or merely a continuation of older social problems. For example, in 1960 the *Social Planning Council’s Report of the Committee on Homeless and Transient Men* argued, “The problem of the homeless or transient man is as old as human history” (p. 2). Despite the emerging focus on structural causes (e.g., The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, 1983), homelessness continued to be framed as an issue crucially related to mental health issue, substance abuse, and incompetence (see, e.g., Fulton, 1986; “How ‘Gary Doe’ fell,” 1985; Taylor, 1986).

The definition of homelessness as a *housing* issue was clearly an emerging discursive thread that took place during this time and continued into the 1990s and 2000s. There were clear efforts on the part of some governments, advocacy organizations, and social service agencies to frame the issue as related to affordable housing. For example, the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto’s 1983 study, *No Place to Go: A Study of Homelessness in Metropolitan Toronto*, concluded that “Many . . . are homeless primarily due to a combination of current economic conditions and the shortage of affordable housing” (p. 14). Toronto’s Affordable Housing Action Group, formed in 1986, similarly positioned homelessness as the direct result of the limited availability of affordable housing (see also Greene, 2014a, p. 23).

In Vancouver, significant attention was drawn to the connections between housing and homelessness when, during the lead up to Expo 87, there were mass evictions of people living in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels. In order to accommodate visitors to the World’s Fair, the BC government permitted the eviction of 791 men from SROs and 3,500 low-income housing units were lost in the process (O’Reilly-Fleming, 1990, p. 61). Such events created a favourable context for advocates to position homelessness as a housing issue, capitalizing on and amplifying the significant public concerns and media coverage about the availability of affordable housing for Canadians during this time. While attention to indigenous housing and homelessness issues remained limited during this time, in 1985 the Auditor General of Canada’s Task Force on Program Review found that on-reserve housing for indigenous peoples was among the worst in Canada, concluding that one quarter of units were in need of major renovation and one third were overcrowded (Nielsen, 1985). As a result of
the framing efforts of a range of actors, the issue of homelessness was linked to housing early on in its emergence as a social problem.

### 5.5.4 Political and Policy Context, 1985 - 1986

Several scholars and advocates have argued that the emergence of mass homelessness, both in Canada and the US, was perhaps the most visible manifestation the urban restructuring which characterized the political and economic shift towards a market state. In Canada, this was characterized by a shift towards neoliberal policies and a post-Fordist economy during the 1980s (see, e.g., Klein, 2007; Greene, 2014a, p. 22-23). However, as Greene (2014a) argues, “in comparison to the United States and Britain, neo-liberalization in Canada was still in its infancy” (p. 24). In Ontario, for example, the provincial Liberals, elected in 1985, funded new affordable housing and extended government subsidies to single persons (Greene, 2014a). Thus while homelessness in the US was seen as a “crisis of major proportions in many cities” during these years (Hambrick & Johnston, 1998, p. 28), some governments in Canada were funding new affordable housing. Nonetheless, the federal government’s shift towards a market-based housing system during this time resulted in a significant loss of affordable housing which exacerbated the number of people experiencing homelessness (Layton, 2008). The emergence of neoliberal approaches to governance also involved “privatizing crown corporations, contracting-out public service work, and reducing the availability and accessibility of a wide range of public services” (Ilcan, 2009, p. 215). As Ilcan argues, “Such public sector transformations are reflected in terms that emphasize ‘outcomes’ ‘missions’ ‘performance’ and ‘prevention’ in the use of a language of business where users and citizens are viewed as ‘stakeholders’ ‘partners’ ‘consumers’ or ‘clients”’ (p. 216). As discussed below, this approach and language has grown in strength over time and has even emerged in advocates’ framing of the issue.
5.6 Stage 2: Legitimization of Homelessness as a Social Problem, 1987 – 1990

A range of evidence suggests that roughly between 1987 and 1990, homelessness became legitimized as a social problem in Canada. This is evidenced by the widespread use of frames that describe the problem as a new and increasingly urgent public problem that demands government action, rather than collection of disaffiliated, “skid row” men with personal problems. Importantly, this required distinguishing the “new homeless” from the “old homeless,” and emphasizing the moral superiority of the former and their need and entitlement to sympathy, supports, and services (see Chapter 3). This framing was fairly consistent across media accounts, surveys, reports, conferences, and various events during these years. Given the widespread recognition of this problem, the IYSH corresponded with, and spurred, acknowledgement of this issue be many governments across Canada. This period was marked by increased media coverage, growing public concern, more extensive research efforts to understand the problem, and the development of powerful advocacy forces that framed the problem as structural in nature.

5.6.1 The Legitimization Process for Canadian Homelessness, 1987-1990

The legitimation of a social problem is a key stage in its progression towards societal action. Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argue that in order for stages to be considered discrete, each stage must be “characterized by its own distinctive kind of activities, participants, and dilemmas” (p.147). How does the legitimation of a social problem differ from its emergence? As Blumer (1971) explains, a social problem becomes legitimized through social endorsement, a status that is not present at the emergence stage, during which claimsmakers struggle to frame a condition as a social problem. Blumer argues,

A social problem must acquire social endorsement if it is to be taken seriously and move forward in its career . . . If a social problem does not carry the credentials of respectability necessary for entrance into these [public] arenas, it is doomed . . . it flounders and languishes outside the arena of public action. (p. 303)

While for Blumer the second stage of social problem development is legitimation, for Spector and Kitsuse (1977) it involves responses from official agencies or institutions. They explain,
When governmental agencies or other official and influential institutions to which claims might be put respond to the complaints of some group, the social problems activity undergoes a considerable transformation. This transformation begins when the agencies start to recognize a group and respond to its complaints. (p. 147)

In the case of Canadian homelessness, the second stage in both Blumer’s and Spector and Kitsuse’s model applies to this period, evidenced by both significant social endorsement and official recognition of the issue.

However, while Spector and Kitsuse’s model suggests that Stage 2 involves “recognition of the legitimacy of these group(s) by some official organization, agency, or institution” (p. 143), it appears that the inverse may have been more true in the case of Canadian homelessness. The shift towards legitimizing this new problem was marked most pointedly by the United Nations International Year for the Shelter (IYSH) in 1987, during which many national, provincial, and municipal events and conferences were held (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 1). While undoubtedly the claimsmakers of the early 1980s fostered greater interest and engagement in Canada’s IYSH, IYSH events and conferences were planned before much of the claimsmaking around homelessness had risen to a steeper pitch in 1985 and 1986. In this case, the IYSH was not established in recognition of these groups’ claims (as Spector and Kitsuse’s model would suggest), but instead lent retroactive credibility to these claims. It is likely that the public attention brought to Canadian homelessness through the IYSH functioned to extend further credibility and legitimacy to Canadian homelessness advocates themselves (which likely proved beneficial to subsequent advocacy efforts).

5.6.2 Defining and Framing a New Problem, 1987-1990

As Mark Stern (2012) suggests, “Once we agree that a social problem exists, there is competition over what the nature of the problem is” (p. 292). This principle was evident in the discursive struggle and confusion surrounding homelessness as a public issue in Canada at this time, as well as into the mid-1990s. Confusion and competition over the issue were evident in both research reports and newspaper coverage during these years, both of which particularly increased during the IYSH (e.g., newspaper coverage nearly doubled between 1986 and 1987). Indeed, the first newspaper series on Canadian
homelessness was published in 1987 by June Callwood, who traveled across Canada to
document and publicize the “realities” of this new social problem in different

During this time, many researchers, commentators, politicians, advocates, and
government officials fluctuated in their attribution of personal and structural causes to
homelessness. The main points of debate included: how to define homelessness, how
many people were homeless, what caused homelessness, how to address homelessness,
whether homelessness was related to housing, and to a lesser extent who is responsible
for homelessness and “the homeless” were (the latter occurring more pointedly in the
early to mid-1990s).

If nothing else, it is evident that there was significant confusion regarding what
this new problem was (see Daly, 1996). The first definition of “homelessness” in
Canadian newspapers was not offered until 1987, arguing that it includes situations in
which “you don’t know from day to day whether you will be kicked out or not” (Sarti,
1987). Nonetheless, this was one of only four articles between 1987 and 1990 that offered
a definition, vastly outnumbered by articles that commented on confusion over the issue.
For example, a 1987 article quoted John Jagt, Manager of Metro Toronto Hostel
Operations, as commenting, “The problem is no one agrees what homelessness is”
(Picard, 1987). Similarly, reviews of governmental and non-governmental reports on
homelessness found significant dissent on the issue. Oberlander and Fallick’s (1991)
review of all available Canadian reports and surveys published in response to IYSH
found that “there is yet no general consensus as to the most reliable definition of
homelessness” (p. 11). They also found that “analyses of homelessness in Canada
indicate that no single causal factor can exclusively or successfully explain why people
Homelessness, published in 1991, similarly stated, “Although existing knowledge of the
subject is based on a substantial body of research and publications, experts have
advanced as many explanations of homelessness as solutions for curbing its growth”
(Begin, Casavant, Chenier, & Dupuis, 1991, p. 3).

As attempts to grapple with the nature of this problem increased, so did research
on the problem, particularly following International Year of Shelter for the Homeless
(Laberge, Cousineau, Morin, & Roy, 1995). Nonetheless, research mirrored many of the confusions seen in governmental reports. Oberlander and Fallick’s (1991) review of the research literature stated, “It became evident from the review that considerable variation exists in terms of the conceptual focus and methodological rigour among the many research studies of homelessness; this raises questions about the reliability of extrapolating results generated at local scales to the national context” (p. 13). They linked this to difficulties estimating the number of people experiencing homelessness in Canada, arguing, “There is currently as much confusion and debate over who ought to be counted among the homeless in Canada as there is over what constitutes homelessness” (p. 15). This confusion was further amplified by research demonstrating that homelessness varies significantly across provinces, regions, and cities (Daly, 1989), that the causes of homelessness may vary between different subpopulations, and that different subpopulations have unique needs which require specific interventions (Oberlander & Fallick, 1991).

In the context of this confusion over the problem, claimsmakers competed to frame the problem in ways that would gain public attention and raise public awareness. One primary strategy was to frame homelessness in relation to nationalistic pride, arguing that it was shameful, immoral, and outrageous that Canada had allowed this problem to emerge and persist. This framing was evident in many early newspaper articles (e.g., Callwood, 1985; Todd, 1985) and advocates’ descriptions of the problem (see Chapter 4). For example, some advocates argued that homeless Canadians were living in “third world conditions,” and sought to publicize what they were observing. Michael Shapcott, for example, recounts the following experience:

I remember in the mid-1980s, I think it was ’86, a friend of mine who was giving some street outreach came to me and said, “I just met this woman who is 8 months pregnant and she’s living in Maple Leaf Square.” I said, “No, you’re wrong, she can’t, this is Canada, things are bad, but we don’t have pregnant women on the street. That’s just not happening!” . . . We went, we met her, and yep, she was there. She actually gave birth in Maple Leaf Square, taken by ambulance over to Saint Mike’s . . . I’m sorry I still get just a little bit emotional about this because I am very old fashioned, and what little memory I have does remember a time when there was a notion that it was indecent that elderly people, that pregnant women, and that infant children, would be homeless. Now it seems that that kind of decency is gone.
By publicly sharing such stories and framing homelessness as damaging Canada’s international reputation, some advocates were able to gain significant traction on the issue.

5.6.3 Public Perceptions, 1987-1990

While there may have been a plethora of competing definitions of homelessness circulating in research and governmental reports, the public was exposed to very few. Instead, newspaper reporters continued to use physical descriptions of “the homeless” to stand in for definitions of the problem. Despite lack of definitional clarity, it appears that Canadians came to see homelessness as one of the key social problems facing the country. Numerous letters to the editor revealed that members of the public were shocked at the visible homelessness they were seeing on the streets, and were particularly concerned that homelessness was affecting women, children, and families (groups characteristically seen as innocent and vulnerable) (see Hambrick & Johnson, 1998; Webber, 1991). For example, Marlene Webber (1991) reported that

After Runaways: 24 Hours on the Streets aired in September 1987, alarmed Canadians jammed CBC telephone lines with calls and flooded the desks of newspaper editors with letters, generally registering horror at the televised images of emotionally racked, penniless, and homeless adolescents on the streets of our major cities. (p. 3)

Public polls also reflected Canadians’ concern about the issue. A 1989 national survey by Canadian Health Monitor asked Canadians, “Which one of the following do you feel is the most important health and social issue Canadians have to deal with today?” Results showed that the public ranked homelessness as the second most serious social problem facing the country, with 23.6% of the population rating it the most serious problem, second only to AIDS (28.8%) (Canadian Health Monitor, 1989).

5.6.4 Emerging Political Advocacy and Action Addressing Homelessness, 1987-1990

Despite debate about the nature of the problem, passionate advocates, charities, social service agencies, faith groups, and non-governmental organizations became more organized and creative in their advocacy and responses to the issue. This passionate
energy was reflected in Stephen Lewis’ 1987 keynote address at the Canadian Conference to Observe the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, during which he commented, “the IYSH is a way of consciousness raising around the world; a year where the issues are so urgent and the necessary responses so passionately held that perhaps we might evidence a breakthrough” (Lewis quoted in Charette, 1991, p. 11).

Fueled by outrage, urgency, and public interest, emerging networks of actors, groups, and organizations sought to address the issue in various ways across Canada. In Atlantic Canada, for example, significant mobilization around the Atlantic Women and Housing Conference in April 1987 was a catalyst for action on housing and homelessness issues affecting women in the region (Oberlander & Fallick, 1991, p. 19). In Toronto, the first Out of the Cold Program was founded by Sister Susan Moran in 1988, followed by the city’s first Street Patrol, founded by members of Toronto’s indigenous communities in 1989. In 1989, StreetCity in Toronto was built and run by the Homes First Society as an alternative to traditional emergency shelters. During this time, various social service providers and advocacy groups also emerged to “cater to, and advocate for, the specific needs and demands of new homeless subpopulations such as young people (Covenant House Toronto), pregnant teenagers (Nellie’s), and psychiatric consumer survivors (Supportive Housing Coalition)” (Greene, 2014a, p. 25). Nonetheless, the patchwork of services, programs, and funding that emerged to deal with homelessness during this time was predominantly municipal (see Daly, 1996).

Homelessness advocacy in Toronto during these years, especially nearing 1990, was particularly powerful and creative, perhaps in part because Toronto was seeing the highest levels of homelessness in any city across Canada (Daly, 1996, p. 158). Toronto advocacy groups captured provincial, national, and international media attention and successfully achieved some political change at the municipal and provincial levels. Some of the Toronto groups that were active during this time included Bread and Shelter in Canada Poverty Action Group (BASIC), the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) (formed in 1990), the Single Displaced Persons Project (SDPP), the Toronto Union of Unemployed Workers (TUUW), the Affordable Housing Action Group, and Bread Not Circuses, all of which have their own vibrant histories and overlapping memberships. As Jonathan Greene explains (2014a),
Some of the individuals who would become central figures mobilizing poor and homeless people for collective action were already active in the unemployed workers movement and helped to create new services or found work in the growing network of drop-ins and outreach programs. (p. 25)

While there are numerous examples of creative and successful advocacy efforts during this time, two notable examples include: (1) BASIC’s orchestration of the unexpectedly popular 1988 mayoral campaign of anti-poverty activist Carolann Wright, and (2) Bread Not Circuses’ successful campaign to deter the International Olympic Committee from selecting Toronto as the site for the 1996 Olympics, given the extent of poverty and homelessness the city was experiencing.

Homelessness advocates across Canada, for the most part, analytically and ideologically framed homelessness in relation to a range of issues affecting poor communities, including gentrification, inequality, neoliberalism, social assistance rates, unemployment, urbanization, deindustrialization, and others. Thus while homelessness was being legitimized as a distinct social problem, advocates were framing the issue in relation to the intersection of numerous structural conditions that were producing a continuum of issues, of which homelessness was only one. There is evidence to suggest that the public was fairly amenable to this framing during this period of time. For example, a 1990 Decima Quarterly survey of the Canadian public asked,

Some people say that solving problems of poverty and homelessness only helps the poor and the homeless. Others say that when you solve the problems of poverty and homelessness, you’re building a stronger economy which everyone benefits from. Which of these two views best represents your own? (n.p.)

Across Canada, 82.2% of Canadians reported that they felt addressing poverty and homelessness helps build a stronger economy which benefits everyone. Interestingly, advocates framing homelessness in relation to some of these structures and systems (e.g., neoliberalism) became much less common as time went on (see Stage 6).

Interviews with advocates revealed that many felt the issue of homelessness has often been moved forward on the political agenda through a combination of creative and strategic advocacy, media coverage, public concern, and serendipitous events (both tragic and fortunate) that advocates were able to use to draw attention to the issue. In Hemmingson’s 1991 Master’s thesis on the development of homelessness as a social
problem in Canada, she worries that the claims-making activities that brought the issue to the public’s attention in the late 80s might not continue. She argues,

[A]t any time a problem can move from one stage to the next, or even fall off the agenda altogether. The social problem of homelessness is perched precariously on the edge, always in danger of falling off the public agenda, often long before it reaches the political one. Constant effort is required to keep the problem moving through each of the stages. Claims-making activities are instrumental in keeping up the momentum . . .” (p. 79)

Writing in 1991, Hemmingson was concerned that homelessness was precariously positioned as a social problem during this time. Retrospectively we can see that homelessness was clearly on the public agenda in some parts of Canada and increasingly on the political agenda of some governments, particularly municipal governments. During these years there were several serendipitous events (e.g., the Rupert Rooming House fire in 1989 in Toronto which caused the death of 10 people), combined with creative and relentless advocacy (e.g., Bread Not Circuses erecting a house inside a lavish Tokyo hotel to discourage the IOC from accepting Toronto’s Olympic bid), and sympathetic media coverage (e.g., Callwood’s 1987 Globe and Mail series) which clearly helped homelessness move forward in the social problem process.

5.7 Stage 3: Assignments of Blame and Emergency Responses, 1991-1995

Once homelessness was legitimized as an important social problem in Canada and the “new homeless” were established as a group deserving of sympathy, various claimsmakers competed to define who was responsible for homelessness and who was to blame for homelessness. These occurred in the context of a recession in Canada and a decidedly conservative swing in politics and social policies (Graham et al., 2012). As Canada increasingly abandoned a welfare state model, the number of people experiencing homelessness increased and the emergency responses that were increasingly set up to serve this new population were severely overburdened in some cities (see Daly, 1996, p. 155-160). As a result, the visibility of homelessness increased steeply in many cities and debates about who was responsible for homelessness took a more urgent tone. This urgency resulted in what appears to be a polarization of public views regarding who was
to blame for homelessness, with an increasing number of Canadians blaming people experiencing homelessness themselves, abandoning the structural framing that had been fairly prevalent when the issue emerged. As advocates and agencies struggled to keep up with the escalating numbers of people experiencing homelessness, advocacy decreased in some cities, and a focus on responding to the immediate needs of the population dominated most responses and discourses.

Perhaps most importantly, the policy changes that took place during these years set the stage for an empirical escalation of homelessness upon which claimsmakers were able to use to push the issue forward on the political agenda in the late 1990s. While many established and emerging advocates spent much of the early 1990s overwhelmed with frontline work, by the mid 1990s this energy was increasingly re-directed into the political arena.

5.7.1 The Escalation of Homelessness in a Shifting Political Context, 1991 - 1995

As Graham, Swift, and Delaney identify (2012), “the turning point in the history of social spending in Canada occurred in the early 1990s,” escalating the emergence of the market state that had begun in the mid-1970s (p. 38). Between 1991 and 1995, the federal government enacted a package of social policies that significantly reduced its social welfare responsibilities and eroded traditional social policies (Graham et al., 2012). As outlined in Table 5.1, many of the Government of Canada’s choices during these years reduced social spending and devolved responsibility for social programs to the provinces in ways that had dramatic effects on people in poverty. As a result, the number of people experiencing homelessness and utilizing emergency shelter and support services across Canada increased dramatically between 1991 and 1995 (Daly, 1996). For example, the use of hostels in Toronto increased from 694,000 units in 1990 to more than 1 million in 1995 (one unit equals one person using a hostel for one day), with 15% of those being children (Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto quoted in Daly, 1996, p. 158-59).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Policy Change</th>
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<td>1992</td>
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Federal budget cuts $665 million from spending on social housing nationally, spread over five years (Hulchanski et al., 2009b).

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>The federal budget eliminated, as of 1994, any further spending on new social housing and capped the total spent on the existing national social housing portfolio at $2 billion annually. Later that year, the Liberal Party was elected and terminated the social housing supply program. To date, it has not been reinstated (see Hulchanski et al., 2009b; Layton, 2008).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993-1998</td>
<td>Dramatic reduction in the federal government’s social transfer payments to provincial governments (see Hughes, 2012).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Changes to eligibility for federal unemployment insurance decreased the number of eligible unemployed workers receiving UI from 74% in 1989 to 36% in 1994 (Lin, 1998).</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Income assistance policy in Canada shifted dramatically. Until 1995, federal funding for social assistance was provided through the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP), which was eliminated and replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), which consolidated federal funding for social assistance, postsecondary education, and health. The new legislation arrived with a $2.5 billion cut in 1996-97 and $4.5 billion cut in 1997-98, removing programmatic regulations governing provinces’ use of the funds and giving them “pretty much a free hand to design and operate their health and welfare systems as they wish” (Battle, 1995, p. 2-3). The CHST devolved funding of social services from the federal government to the provinces, and even to communities in some provinces (see Graham et al., 2012, p. 12-13; Hulchanski, 2004, p. 179-193).</td>
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Fueled by the recession of 1990, many provincial leaders promised and enacted massive cuts to social assistance that further disadvantaged poor people across Canada (Stapleton, 2009). In Ontario, this political shift was evident in Mike Harris’ “Common Sense Revolution,” which vowed to slash “Cadillac” welfare rates and end “the public housing boondoggle” (Harris quoted in Cohen, 2001, p. 75). In 1995, the Harris government ended the provincial housing program, canceled 17,000 homes already approved for development, and cut the shelter allowance of social assistance recipients by 21.6 percent. Commenting on these provincial shifts, John Stapleton argues, “Somewhere around the middle of 1993, for reasons that we do not really understand, we started to dislike the 5 percent of working-age people in Ontario who are social assistance recipients and low-wage workers” (2004, p. 116).

Given the increased visibility of the homelessness during these years, there was widespread concern that homelessness was not a passing issue but was here to stay and worsening, as it had in other countries in the global north. In 1991, the FCM’s Big City Mayors’ Caucus’ Recommendations for a National Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness argued, “Housing problems and homelessness in Canada’s large cities can
no longer be thought of as accidental events. Poverty – and housing problems – exist everywhere” (p. 4). As panic over the issue began to emerge, assigning blame and responsibility for homelessness became a key claimmaking activity.

5.7.2 Framing Homelessness and Assigning Blame, 1991 - 1995

Given the growing public concern caused by the rise of visible homelessness in major cities, it is perhaps unsurprising that the dominant discussions around homelessness during these years appear to have shifted from “who are the homeless” to “who is responsible for dealing with homelessness” and “who is to blame for homelessness.” At the municipal and local levels across Canada, agencies, advocates, frontline workers, faith-based organizations, and the third sector increasingly came together to discuss how to address the problem and what responsibilities the various levels of the Canadian government had for addressing the problem. At a more formalized level, this process began perhaps most notably when the “Big City Mayors’ Caucus” of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) held its first housing symposium in Vancouver in 1991.

On the issue of responsibility, it appears that there was, and continues to be, fairly widespread agreement at the local and municipal level that all three levels of government are fiscally responsible for addressing the issue, and that the issue cannot be adequately addressed in the absence of federal investment. However, many policies at the provincial and federal levels did not reflect this sentiment. Many provinces were themselves making cuts to housing, income assistance, and social programs of various kinds, and were increasingly relying on the third sector to address the needs of citizens (Shapcott, 2004).

It also appears that beginning in the early 1990s, the question of who was to blame for homelessness was increasingly answered with “people experiencing homelessness themselves.” Michael Shapcott argues that during the 1990s this narrative emerged in a particular way in government rhetoric:

The government’s response [to the issue of homelessness] was to pathologize people and say that they were either lazy, crazy, or stupid. So, nice politicians would say that they are crazy people, they’re all ex-psychiatric inmates and blah, blah, blah, and we should feel sorry for them . . . all these crazy people. Those were the nice politicians. The nasty ones would say they are lazy or stupid –
they’ve made bad life choices, they would rather have the carefree life of sleeping on a bench and dying at the age of 35 than putting in an honest day’s work.

Indeed, a range of evidence suggests that segments of the Canadian public, the media, and various politicians and government officials viewed people in poverty and those experiencing homelessness as lazy, incompetent, and/or unjustifiably receiving “free hands outs” that should be clawed back and subjected to greater surveillance. In a *Financial Post* article in February of 1991, Conrad Black argued that Canada is a “society of over-compensated self-pitiers,” suffering from the “spirit of slug entitlement” (Black quoted in Barlow, 2011, p. 73). While undoubtedly representing a small portion of the public’s views at the time, Black’s statements mirrored a broadening cultural feeling that was reflected in federal, provincial, and municipal policy choices during the 1990s.

5.7.3 Public Perceptions, 1991 – 1995

The status of public opinion between 1991-1995 with respect to homelessness remains somewhat unclear, with opinion undoubtedly differing by province and city. According to a 1993 newspaper article by Michael Valpy, “Poverty, homelessness, shortage of food and other social deprivations are not items high on the political agendas of most Canadians” (p. A2). While it appears that there had been an uptick in public sympathy towards people experiencing homelessness during the late 1980s, and a flurry of emerging advocacy in some Canadian cities that received media attention, it also appears that between 1991-1995 there was an emerging backlash towards people experiencing homelessness and the agencies that serve them. This backlash may have been tied to public fears and anger that social assistance was being overused and abused in some provinces. In Ontario, for example, the number of people receiving social assistance had risen to 12.2% of the population, up from 4.5% in 1985 (Morrison, 1998, p. 3). In Ian Morrison’s 1998 review of Ontario Works, he argues, 

> With one in nine Ontarians on the welfare rolls, the increased visibility of the program fuelled increasing resentment of both the system and the people who used it. By the mid-1990s, a public backlash against welfare - always the least popular social welfare program in Canada - was becoming increasingly apparent. Welfare became even more of a flashpoint for a complicated set of public fears, anxieties and anger towards racial minorities, immigrants, "criminals," teens, single mothers and so on. (p. 3-4)
The intersection of these issues undoubtedly informed public understandings of homelessness during these years, although this link needs further exploration.

Public frustration towards homelessness and people experiencing homelessness was also reflected in emerging discomfort with panhandlers among some members of the Canadian public. During these years some business associations in several cities exhibited various forms of NIMBYism, and newspapers across Canada increasingly ran stories about pedestrians being “victimized” by “aggressive panhandlers.” In particular, several articles emerged which pitted hard-working blue-collar workers against panhandlers. For example, a 1994 article recounts a taxi driver saying,

" 'Give me a quarter, give me a quarter,' that's what they say to me," he says. "I have to drive four blocks to make a quarter." He is Jamaican. He understands poverty. He does not understand people who beg, who go dirty. If it was up to him, people who make homelessness a lifestyle would be shot. (Bragg, 1994)

Such polarizations between industrious citizens and lazy panhandlers appeared more frequently in Canadian newspapers than in previous years, as did depictions of people experiencing homelessness as mentally ill or substance abusers.

5.7.4 Advocacy, 1991 - 1995

Interestingly, homelessness advocacy during this time appears more limited than in the late 1980s, at least based on what documentation is available. In Ontario, this is perhaps somewhat unsurprising given that an NDP government was in power between 1990 and 1995 and had made campaign promises to address issues of poverty, welfare, hunger, and homelessness. OCAP describes the advocacy context in Ontario during the early 1990s in the following way:

The emergence of OCAP coincided with the election of an NDP Government. This posed major difficulties for us in that the climate became tough for an organization that wanted to take a strong stand. The backsliding of the Rae Government away from its promises to raise welfare rates above the poverty line and ‘end the need for food banks’ created a lot of confusion and demoralization.

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4 Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) similarly identified that one of the issues observers in the US named for the “backlash” towards people experiencing homelessness was the “perceived ‘assertiveness’ of homeless people” (p. 134). They go on to argue, “It makes sense that assertive poor and homeless people would seem less deserving to many who were once charitably inclined. An intriguing aspect of the issue is the degree to which sympathy for homeless people rests on their very inertness and lack of resistance” (p. 135).
For quite some time, people were unclear on how to confront a Government that they had expected and hoped would offer them more than the Liberals and Tories. Resources to carry on our work were very hard to come by and our base of activity was largely confined to Toronto. (OCAP, 2008)

Many of the advocates interviewed were working as frontline agency staff during these years, and for many just trying to keep up with the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness was overwhelming and exhausting. Michael Shapcott argued that the advocacy community in the 1990s was really “being defeated and just scrambling to keep pace with a growing wave of homelessness.” Most interview participants didn’t mention any particular campaigns that stood out for them between 1991 and 1995.

Further, it also appears that financial support for advocacy was dwindling at the time. Michael Shapcott explained that during the 1990s, charitable organizations that had previously supported advocacy decided to refocus their funding on service provision instead. Reflecting on their rationale, he explains,

If the choice is: do you support advocacy initiatives, or give a person a bacon sandwich? The so-called “sensible people” would say, well you’ve got to deal with their immediate needs. The trouble is . . . the processes that are generating poverty and hunger and homelessness are so robust, that after a while it’s like bailing out the Titanic.

This “Titanic” issue did not improve during these years, even as services were expanding, and by the late 1990s it was perceived to have reached a “crisis point” in some Canadian cities.

5.7.5 Assigning a Stage to Canadian Homelessness between 1991-1995

The stages described in the natural history models proposed by Blumer (1971), Spector and Kitsuse (1977), and others do not readily correspond with the empirical data on Canadian homelessness between 1991 and 1995. However, this period of time was decidedly different in Canada than the previous stage (Stage 2, 1987 – 1990). Contrary to Stage 2, in this stage legitimization had already occurred in many public arenas, early homelessness advocates and advocacy organizations were established (rather than emerging), and the “content” of this public problem was widely solidified in public consciousness under the term “homelessness” (even if definitions remained scarce and variable). Further, it appears that there was an increasing polarization of public views
with respect to homelessness during this time, indicating that the public had moved beyond identifying and affirming the existence of a public problem to competing to frame responsibility for the problem.

If anything, this period may have been characterized by somewhat of a decline in the status of the problem, an overall decrease in public and political sympathy for people experiencing homelessness, and a pushback on the structural framing of the problem that had ascended in the late 1980s among advocates and parts of the media. Given that social problems compete for dominance in institutional arenas (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1998, p. 56), the issue of homelessness may have experienced a decline in status and attention in relation to the ascendency of public concerns over social assistance and social spending in many provinces (as evidenced by significant media coverage of these issues during this time). Indeed, James Struthers argues that the Ontario election campaign of 1995 “was the first provincial contest in Ontario since the Great Depression in which welfare was a core issue, indeed perhaps the core issue” (1996, p. 2). This appears true in Alberta as well, with the 1993 election of Ralph Klein who had campaigned on instituting “massive cuts” to social spending (Shapcott, 2004). The growth of public concern over social assistance may have sidelined the homelessness problem in some public arenas, especially given the discursive separation of these issues in Canadian newspapers. This decline in interest concerning homelessness is reflected in media coverage as well between 1991 and 1995, with all of the Canadian newspapers sampled publishing on average less than 50 articles a year on homelessness, less than 4 a month on average. However, as will be seen below, this decline of the problem was dramatically reversed in 1996.


While undoubtedly some social problems do not “peak” in any definitive way or at any definitive moment, it is fairly clear that homelessness peaked as a social problem in parts of Canada between 1998 and 2000 (perhaps 1999 specifically). During these
years, advocacy, public concern and debate about the issue, media coverage, and governmental responses were at an all-time high in some parts of Canada, with newspaper coverage of the issue being more extensive in 1999 than it ever was before or has been since. The few years leading up to and following this crescendo also involved significant public attention and concern, major and minor governmental efforts, strong and creative social movement work, and significant panic over some dimensions of the issue. In this section I argue that homelessness peaked as a social problem during this time in parts of Canada, not just because homelessness was empirically increasing, but because of the number and diversity of claimsmakers involved in framing the issue, their unique deployment of successful frames, their unity and perseverance, and the social and political power of some of these claimants.

Among the relevant natural history models available, this stage would most closely resemble Spector and Kitsuse’s (1977) second stage (institutional involvement), Fuller and Myers (1941) second stage (policy determination) and third stage (reform/policy action), and Blumer’s (1971) third and fourth stage, mobilization of action, followed by the formation of an official plan of action. In the case of homelessness in Canada during this time, it seems that mobilization around the problem, peak public concern over the problem, and the development of some official government responses were all occurring simultaneously in different parts of the country. Given that homelessness was often seen (and experienced) as a city- or region-based problem, there are parts of the country for which it would be inappropriate to describe “homelessness” as a key social problem during this time. However, this section describes important moments, events, media coverage, policy, and discussions that suggest that this social problem peaked in some parts of Canada during this time, resulting in a response from the national government. In particular, this section focuses on the crucial advocacy work that pushed the problem to its peak.


The year 1996 marked a turning point for housing policy in Canada, during which a range of policy and funding changes further contributed to increases in homelessness that had begun in the early 1990s. In 1996, the federal budget confirmed that
responsibility for social housing programs would be downloaded to the provinces and municipalities, and that federal funding would be eliminated entirely over a period of 10 – 15 years. As a result, the building of social housing steeply declined in many provinces, while at the same time increasing numbers of Canadians were finding themselves cut off from social assistance programs or were receiving significantly less financial support. The result was a boom in the visibility of homelessness, the number of people using social services, and the number of people who were becoming homeless for the first time (e.g., Toronto’s homeless population increased by 400 percent between 1980 and 2000 (Falvo, 2009, p. 15)). In Ontario, these conditions worsened in 1997 when changes to tenant protection laws introduced swifter tenant eviction processes and eliminated rent control for vacant units (Porter, 2004).

During these years, homelessness worsened at a rapid pace. Data from social service agencies paint a picture of drastic increases in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness during these years (see, e.g., City of Toronto report card on homelessness, 2000). Agencies and organizations across the country were unable to keep up with the demand and consequently were providing deteriorating, inadequate, and substandard services under the pressure (e.g., the Toronto shelter system experienced outbreaks of tuberculosis and bed bugs). Interview participant Tanya Garcia Gulliver, who was working at a men’s shelter in Oshawa during the time, saw a huge increase in the number of men frequenting the shelter who hadn’t been homeless before the Harris government’s cuts to social assistance. Guided by rumours that General Motors in Oshawa was hiring (they weren’t), men came from neighbouring cities and provinces to find work but found themselves living in a shelter with limited employment prospects (personal communication) (see Falvo, 2010, for a discussion of rising shelter use in Toronto during these years). Many interview participants who were doing frontline work during this time recounted similar stories of being overwhelmed with the number of people and the depth of need, often describing the horrific conditions they were seeing people live and die in. If we understand social service agencies as “barometers” of community need (B. Rose), it is clear that homelessness was a problem of escalating proportions during this time.
5.8.2 Homelessness Advocacy, 1996 - 2001

As many social theorists have articulated, harmful or problematic conditions in society are not enough by themselves to move a social problem forward on the public agenda (Best, 2008; Blumer, 1971). One of the key reasons that homelessness was able to move forward as a social problem in Canada was because of the skills and resources of claimsmakers during this period of time, skills made more effective in the context of a number of unique features of the problem (e.g., its visibility (see Greene, 2006)) and the occurrence of unexpected events which captured public attention (e.g., freezing deaths of people experiencing homelessness). Among key claimsmakers during this time, advocates were a particularly strong force and were able to make substantial political inroads on this issue, both among policy-makers and the public. Homelessness advocacy during these years was vibrant, with diverse advocates often working together across professional, political, and tactical lines to address the issue. As one interview participant explained, during these years “you just moved, and moved as fast as you could, as hard as you could” (B. German). Some advocacy groups included or worked with political leaders (e.g., Jack Layton) and other national organizations (e.g., the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Auto Workers Union) that were able to provide resources and move the issue forward in political contexts other advocates did not have access to. There were also a growing number of national advocacy organizations between 19996 and 2000. For example, in 1999 the National Housing and Homelessness Network (NHHN) was formed and created “a nationwide coalition of housing and homelessness groups that shared information and collaborated on national campaigns” (Layton, 2008, p. 248). Similarly, in 1997 BC anti-poverty activists formed PovNet, an online community that provided tools and information for addressing poverty across the country. Several interview participants believed advocacy during this time constituted a social movement in Canada.

A key reason advocates were successful in moving the issue forward was due to the cohesive action taken by many diverse advocates and advocacy groups. While Rucht argues that competition and conflict can emerge when groups “differ in their ideological leanings, social bases, experiences, and strategic preferences” (2004, p. 204), it appears that although there were clearly divergent ideological and political orientations among
advocacy groups in cities like Toronto, these tensions did not inhibit cooperative or collaborative action during this time. Advocates from faith-based communities, low-income communities, city council, anarchist groups, academia, healthcare, social service agencies, political parties, and unions were increasingly showing up together at political offices, community meetings, protests, and marches, voicing similar demands (M. Shapcott). Klodawsky and Evans’ (2014) interviews with key informants in the federal government revealed that one of the reasons the federal government was forced to respond to the issue was because of this unified political pressure from many sources. They explain,

The extent to which social forces and local, provincial, federal, and big-city governments were speaking with a common voice about an issue was very unusual and certainly helped to make the case within the PMO [Prime Minister’s Office] that the federal government needed to respond in some significant way. (p. 83)

As Klodawsky and Evans identify, this cohesion was unique, and resulted in a unique response from the federal government and many big city governments (see also Smith & Torjman, 2004).

A second successful feature of the advocacy during this stage was the relative simplicity of the demands, the clear framing of responsibility for the problem, and the clarity of the solutions proposed. As Spector and Kitsuse (1977) hypothesize, “The more vague the sense of dissatisfaction, the less able is the group to affix responsibility or propose remedies for its discontent” (p. 144). In the case of homelessness advocacy between 1996 and 2000, the nature of the dissatisfaction was clear, responsibility for the problem was placed squarely on government (the federal government specifically, and the provincial and municipal governments to a lesser extent), and clear and specific solutions were being assertively pushed by advocates (solutions which had, by this time, been developing for over ten years).

The rallying cry among many advocates was for a national housing program based on the right to housing. Differing from advocacy in previous years, groups were becoming national in vision, clearly articulating a critique of the emergency response model and demanding a political solution to homelessness that required significant federal investment (See Greene, 2006; Crowe et al., 2007). Staff working in emergency
shelters and support services across the country increasingly articulated that they “weren’t in the business” of solving homelessness (e.g., Superintendent of Seaton House quoted in Daly, 1996, p. 156). Some of these organizations and agencies even chose to re-focus energies and resources on long-term political solutions (see, e.g., Crowe et al., 2007). For example, John Andras, co-founder of Project Warmth – an organization that distributed tens of thousands of sleeping bags to people living on the street – decided to discontinue the program in 2000 despite high demand for fear that it was actually perpetuating the crisis (J. Andras). This concern that emergency services perpetuate homelessness was raised by previous advocacy groups, including the SDDP in 1983, who argued:

> It is increasingly well understood that hostels are not an adequate response to the present lack of long-term housing for low-income singles. However, it is less well understood that the present functioning of the hostels reinforces the homelessness of the people who use them. (SDPP quoted in Daly, 1996, p. 155)

By the late 1990s, there was an emerging understanding that emergency responses participated in fortifying homelessness. The rejection of an emergency response model, combined with advocates’ framing of homelessness as an “emergency” or “crisis,” enabled advocates to mobilize the urgency associated with crises and attempt to direct it towards structural solutions, rather than emergency measures.

As Greenberg, May, and Elliott argue (2005), “Success in persuading officials to change policy is often based on the ability of advocacy groups to attribute responsibility for the problem or condition to a blameworthy agent” (p. 144). A group that clearly voiced both who was to blame and how to solve homelessness, and gained significant political power in doing so, was the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC). The TDRC was a steering committee comprised of eclectic collection of researchers, frontline agency staff, real estate developers, people experiencing homelessness, business people, healthcare professionals, activists, and others. On October 8, 1998, the TDRC declared homelessness a “national disaster” in Canada, framing homelessness as “man-made disaster” that, far from being “natural,” was caused by deliberate political choices. This framing gained significant traction, and was adopted by the Toronto City Council, followed by the municipalities of Ottawa-Carlton, Vancouver, Victoria, Peel, Durham Region and the Big City Mayors’ Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities
This framing was even recognized in the 1998 Report of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which stated:

The Committee is gravely concerned that such a wealthy country as Canada has allowed the problem of homelessness and inadequate housing to grow to such proportions that the mayors of Canada's ten largest cities have now declared homelessness a national disaster. (quoted in Holmstrom, 2003, p. 102)

As Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argue, strategically engaging the press and “staging . . . a ‘national event’ may be crucial in transforming private troubles into public issues and controversies” (p. 145-146). The TDRC was adept at both.

An effective frame developed by the TDRC was the “1% solution,” which proposed that all levels of Canadian government could solve homelessness by spending an additional 1% of their budget on affordable housing. This framing was based on David Hulchanski’s research findings which indicated that prior to the cuts, governments had spent an average of 1 percent of their budget on housing (TDRC, 1998). The simplicity of this demand, its specificity, its basis in research, its source (a top university professor), its media coverage (e.g., front page coverage in the Toronto Star during 1998 (Crowe et al., 2007)), its broad endorsement among many groups and actors, and the numerous ways advocates creatively used it to mobilize action (e.g., songs and poems (see, e.g., Crowe et al., 2007, p. 157)), meant that the framing gained political traction and assisted in positioning homelessness as a specific problem with a clear solution.

A third factor which positively impacted advocates’ ability to move the problem forward was the successful framing of unexpected events, many of them horrendous. One example of this was advocates’ abilities to strategically frame the many homeless deaths that were occurring during these years and transform these deaths into important symbols of the urgent nature of the crisis. Due in part to the work of advocates, Toronto-based deaths gained particular national media attention during these years. In early 1996, three homeless men froze to death on Toronto’s streets: Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson, and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani. Earlier that year, Brent Simms died when he was run over by a car while sleeping in public, and the following year Edmond Yu was shot to death in a streetcar by the Toronto Police Force. Both before and since those deaths, hundreds more Canadians have died while homeless. These deaths, documented by the Toronto Homeless Memorial and similar memorials which consequently emerged across the
country, enabled advocates to push the issue forward on the public and political agenda through demonstrations, petitions, vigils, declarations, occupations, inquests, and marches. In Toronto, one form this took was the formation of the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness (TCAH), which successfully campaigned for an inquest into the three 1996 deaths. According to Cathy Crowe, 1996 “was a tragic year, but it shaped a movement” (Crowe et al., 2007, p. 12). Framing these deaths as unjust, un-Canadian, avoidable, and deeply immoral, advocates were able to mobilize the media’s penchant for tragedy, gore, death, and moralization in order to capture public attention. As John Burret of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities argued, by late 1998 “reports of overloaded shelters, tragic deaths on cold winter nights, and news of the ‘hidden homeless’ of children and families were starting to permeate the public consciousness” (2013, n.p.). By 1999, media coverage and public concern was peaking.

Adding to this fervour, other advocacy groups were employing direct action tactics to demand action on the issue, including groups such as OCAP, FRAPRU, the Alberta Coalition Against Poverty (ACAP), and the Toronto Action for Social Change (TASC). These groups were engaging in occupations, sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, and protests that drew significant attention and controversy to the issue. Simultaneously, communities of people experiencing homelessness were increasingly claiming abandoned land and buildings for themselves to live in, and often faced intense resistance and media coverage in response. Tent City in Toronto, erected in 1998 by a small community of people experiencing homelessness and their allies, fostered significant public debate, media coverage, and drew “all kinds of attention” (Laird, 2007, p. 41), enabling it to survive until September 2002. The so-called “Queen’s Park Riot” of 2000 brought the urgency of the crisis of homelessness and the desperation of advocates to a fevered pitch (Greene calls this the “pinnacle moment” of mobilization during this time (Greene, 2014b, p. 75)). The diversity and quantity of these actions, events, and campaigns helped reach different segments of the public and push homelessness to the top of the public agenda.
5.8.3 Public Perceptions of Homelessness, 1996 - 2001

It appears that while segments of the population continued to blame people experiencing homelessness for their plight, the loss of interest and backlash against homelessness that emerged in the early 1990s was transformed into frustration that the government hadn’t solved an issue that was so visible and clearly had structural causes (even if many Canadians felt individual causes were key determinants as well). Interview participants indicated that they were seeing record high numbers of people attending marches, demonstrations, and events demanding action on homelessness. While in 1996 an Environics Focus Canada poll found that 41% of Canadians felt that there was “no excuse for hunger and homelessness in a society like ours,” between 1997 and 2002 this number grew to 54.3%. Similarly, in 1998 Environics Focus Ontario found that 71.5% of respondents disapproved of “the way the government was handling the issue of homelessness” (Environics, 1998) and between 1997 and 2002 89.5% of respondents across Canada felt that poverty and homelessness was either more of a problem (43.9%) or had stayed about the same (45.6%) (Centre for Information and Research Canada, 2003). Many Canadians were very concerned about this decidedly visible problem and were unhappy with government responses which they viewed as inadequate. Several scholars and advocates have argued that this public concern, reaching a crescendo prior to the 2000 federal election, was an important factor in the Canadian government’s response (see Klodawsky & Evans, 2014; Smith & Torjman, 2004, p. 1-3).

5.8.4 Media Coverage, 1996 - 2001

Newspaper coverage of homelessness peaked between the years 1997 and 2001 in Canada (n = 1001), with 1999 seeing the most coverage of homelessness in the years before or since (n = 476). Media coverage of homelessness advocacy and homeless deaths was quite high during these years, though the coverage of advocacy declined in some newspapers following the “Queen’s Park Riot.” Shortly after the TDRC’s Disaster Declaration, the problem of homelessness was on the front page of the Toronto Star for 11 days in a row, and subsequently the Toronto Star was the first media outlet in Canada to assign a full-time journalist to cover homelessness (Crowe et al., 2007, p. 24). Nonetheless, not all coverage portrayed homelessness as a structural issue, and there was
certainly a growing number of reporters who sought to “uncover” false beggars, re-affirm stereotypical depictions of people experiencing homelessness, or promote more disciplinary approaches to address homelessness. John Stackhouse’s (1999) three-part series for the Globe and Mail, “Living with the Homeless,” was perhaps one such example that was particularly controversial for both its analysis and its premise (Stackhouse had pretended to be homeless for a week in Toronto to assess the problem firsthand). The controversy around such coverage helped move the issue forward as a public problem as it competed with others claimmakers’ framings of the issue.

5.8.5 Governmental Responses to Homelessness, 1996 - 2001

Among some municipal governments, there was substantial action on the issue of homelessness between 1996 and 2001, specifically taking the form of expanded services (e.g., Falvo, 2009) and the creation of many studies, reports, committees, and task forces aimed at defining and measuring the problem in order to (ostensibly) build long-term solutions (see, e.g., Golden, Currie, Greaves, & Latimer, 1999). Such efforts to study the problem participated in establishing a definitive social object that could be observed, laying the groundwork for methodological debates about how to measure homelessness that would peak in later years. Advocates were able to use the data in these studies and reports as fodder for their demands and evidence that the government was only interested in studying the problem and was delaying action. By 2000, the following comment from Hulchanski represented the views of many advocates across political lines:

We already know more than enough about the nature and magnitude of the problem to embark on rehousing and prevention programs. Addressing “homelessness” is a political problem, not a statistical or definitional problem. (2000, p. 5)

While there may have been an “anti-intellectualism” among advocates at the time (S. Gaetz), a key strategy that began to develop at the municipal level was to study the problem. An important municipal report which had significant ramifications at the provincial (Falvo, 2010) and federal level (Klodawsky & Evans, 2014, p. 79) was the Report of the Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force (known as the “Golden Report”) (Golden et al., 1999). According to Gordon Laird (2007), this report “made waves in 1999 because it argued that Canada’s homeless crisis was largely created through policy
decisions” (p. 33). Klodawsky and Evans (2014) argued that the Golden Report “was the first significant study of Canadian homelessness noticed by the federal government and quoted liberally in parliamentary debates” (p. 79), and was one of three significant reports during this period which influenced federal action (joined by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ “Call to Action” and the Library of Parliament’s discussion paper, “Definitions of Homelessness”) (p. 79). Prior to this, academic research on homelessness had been increasingly steeply and in 1996 Gerald Daly published the first comprehensive international study of homelessness, which compared homelessness in Canada to the United States and England.

While Hughes (2012) argues that “homelessness did not resonate with either the public or federal politicians as a policy issue until the late 1990s” (p. 4), it is clear that public concern had been growing for years and federal concern peaked in 1999 when the federal government appointed a Federal Coordinator on Homelessness, Claudette Bradshaw, and launched the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) with an investment of $753 million over three years. Most of the $753 million was funneled into two programs: the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), focused on homelessness, and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), a long-standing federal housing renovation program (Layton, 2008). The federal government allocated $305 million of the $753 to cities with significant homelessness problems, developing a community-based model for administering programs and funds. As Smith and Torjman (2004) explain,

In the mid-to-late 1990s, the prevailing opinion in the senior ranks of the government of Canada (GoC) was that they had no particular role in responding to the needs of Canada’s homeless people. Leadership on this issue, they suggested, should come from the provincial governments, whose business it was to respond to the most needy through welfare and social services and through the housing programs devolved to them by the GoC in the early 1990s. Yet, as turn of the Millennium approached, it became apparent that the GoC would find it increasingly hard to ignore the issue . . . The National Homelessness Initiative was the federal government’s response in 1999 to highly publicized efforts by the mayors of major Canadian cities to highlight homelessness as a “national emergency.” (p. 1-2)
It is clear that the political pressure from numerous powerful sources, combined with homelessness being identified as a “hot button issue” among the public prior to the 2000 federal election (Smith & Torjman, 2004), forced the federal government to respond.

As is evident in the next stage, advocates’ and agencies’ responses to this federal action were mixed. Several interviewees noted that the federal action was celebrated as a political win among advocates, and that advocacy subsequently declined (C. Crowe). Many social service agency staff were encouraged by the prospect of new funding and federal investment in the issue (K. Hardill). However, other advocates worried that the appointment of a Minister was largely a publicity stunt, the funds were inadequate to address the problem, and that the strategy perpetuated an emergency response model (Hulchanksi, 2005, p. 2). Toronto’s first annual report card on homelessness concluded that much of the federal and provincial responses involved targeting funds to services rather than long term solutions. It argued, “A service response is only one piece of a much larger strategy. Sustainable solutions must target the root causes of homelessness - poverty and the lack of affordable and supportive housing” (City of Toronto, p. 6).


The stage following the peak of the social problem of homelessness was a crucial moment in its development, in part because the fervor created in relation to the problem could have propelled action along several different paths. The early years of the 2000s were characterized by some optimism in relation to the federal government’s establishment of a Federal Coordinator on Homelessness, the NHI, and the 2001 Quebec Housing Agreement. As a result of the new funding and programing during this time, the patchwork of services, programs, and funding for people experiencing homelessness was expanded in many communities across Canada (see, e.g., Falvo, 2010). The federal government was able to use these efforts to both repair its public image in relation to the issue, as well as temper the urgency and panic around the problem. Such public relations efforts were clearly a priority given the “blizzard of press releases” produced by the
federal government during this time, vastly outnumbering the housing units actually produced (Layton, 2008). The public was bombarded with evidence in the media that the federal government was serious about addressing the issue, even though the same project or agreement was often re-announced multiple times (see Chapter 3).

At the same time, there was a decline in advocacy in parts of the country, in part due to conflicts among advocacy groups, burn-out, professionalization, and the view among some advocates that the federal government’s response constituted a “political win” on the issue of homelessness. Media coverage of the issue declined, with coverage of grassroots advocacy declining steeply in Ontario following the Queen’s Park Riot. While public polls reported continued public concern about the issue, there was also a growing NIMBYism that was evident in many communities. In general, the implementation of the official response was followed by a decline in media coverage and advocacy, and a more punitive turn in public opinion.

It appears that the decline of media coverage was related to what Hilgartner and Bosk (1998) refer to as “saturation.” They argue that a social problem may become saturated if “decision-makers decide simultaneously to produce a lot of material on one problem” (p. 61). The result of this may be that the dramatic value of the social problem is lost in the process, and that sustained bombardment of material about the problem will decrease its power and value. Cynthia Bogard (2003) argues that this is precisely what happened to homelessness in the United States when the drama associated with it was no longer attractive to media conglomerates. It appears a parallel process may have occurred in Canada during the 2000s following the peak in coverage and advocacy in 1999. Into the 2000s, reports of the deaths of people experiencing homelessness, overcrowded shelters, or violence against people experiencing homelessness became more and more commonplace. As a result, many interviewees worried that events that used to shock Canadian sensibilities lost their dramatic value.

The dramatic value of homelessness was also negatively impacted by the establishment of the National Homelessness Initiative by the federal government in 1999, which was followed by a decline in advocacy in some cities. As Spector & Kitsuse (1977) explain, this often occurs when powerful and official agencies take over
ownership of the social problem and neutralize the public pressure that protest groups
were able to mobilize around the issue (p. 149). They argue,

While official response may give the protest group its finest hour, it may also
represent the beginning of the end of its control over the claims it raises. The
response to its complaints may take the edge off its protest that “nothing is being
done.” (p. 149)

This process appears to have played out with respect to homelessness in Canada. Once
the federal government acknowledged and committed to take action on the issue of
homelessness, the power of many advocates and other actor’s claims was diminished and
they *themselves* saw a decreased need for advocacy. As part of this process, discourses
about how to address homelessness became more bureaucratic, economic, and scientific
in nature, rather than pivoting on the values of justice and morality that many advocates
had previously used to frame the problem (see Stage 6).

**5.9.1 Advocacy, 2001 - 2007**

Homelessness advocacy between 2001 and 2007 arguably hit a turning point in
terms of who was dominating the conversation about homelessness, how the issue was
being framed, and what tactics were being used. Most specifically, this period was
characterized by a growing rift between many of the “grassroots” advocates that were
aiming for major structural changes, and an emerging set of new professionalized
advocates that were frequently tied to the private sector, research, NGOs, or government.
While there is no literature available on this split in Canada, in 2016 Nick Falvo
published a blog post in which he noted it. He argues that in 2005, a split occurred
between older advocates that were increasingly seen as “glass half empty,” and a newer
generation of advocates who framed themselves as “glass half full” (n.p.). He suggests
that,

many of the people who’d previously been strong advocates for the homeless on a
national level started to ‘run out of gas’ (not to mention resources). Meanwhile, a
new crop of advocates started to emerge. Suddenly, the most vocal advocates
were more ‘glass half full’ than their predecessors. (2016, n.p.)

While Falvo cites the end of the TDRC in 2005 as this turning point, interviews with
advocates suggest that the seeds of this fracturing can be traced back to the so-called
“Queen’s Park Riot” in 2000, which Greene describes as “one of the most militant
demonstrations in contemporary Canadian history” (2014b, p. 75). Many interviewees explained that following the “riot,” significant numbers of agencies and advocates backed away from certain forms of advocacy (e.g., direct action) and refused to work with advocacy groups that they had previously been collaborating with (see Chapter 4). The previous unity of “first wave” advocates, as I call them, had begun to fracture in some parts of the country during this time, especially Toronto.

Further, with the emergence of the NHI, some first wave advocates moderated their demands and/or distanced themselves from advocacy in efforts to procure and/or retain funding for the social service agencies in which they worked. Other advocates took up positions in the administration of new programs funded by the federal government. According to several interview participants, some advocates set aside their advocacy work in order to enjoy the professional and financial benefits that federal investment offered. As part of this process, as Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) argue, “a variety of stakeholders gain[ed] a vested interested in the issue and in attending to it in a bureaucratic fashion” (p. 36). This professionalization of some first wave advocates, combined with burnout, conflict within the movement, and decreased interest among the media, set the stage for a decline in first wave advocacy.

Nonetheless, many first wave advocates continued to be very active. A strong grassroots social movement addressing housing and homelessness continued in Quebec, led by the formidable FRAPRU. The battle for a national housing strategy continued, and in 2002 MP Libby Davies introduced a Housing Bill of Rights in the House of Commons (Bill C-304). With the United Nations continuing to be critical of Canada’s failure to meet its international housing obligations, there was a small but growing movement across Canada to seek recognition for the right to housing within domestic law (Shapcott, 2010, p. 29). Simultaneously many advocates challenged the criminalization of homelessness in courts of law, pursuing cases against municipalities who were banning sleeping, resting, panhandling, and other activities in public spaces (see Gaetz, 2013).

While first wave advocates were struggling, a second wave of advocates was emerging in parts of Canada. According to Falvo, the new generation of advocates often (implicitly) argued that the “public resources for the homeless had been mismanaged in the past and that, if they were better managed going forward, we would see major
reductions in homelessness (possibly without a great deal more public spending)” (2016, n.p.). Focused less on affordable housing, a national housing program, or changes to social assistance or minimum wage, these second wave advocates were often the early champions of Housing First in Canada and sought to mobilize evidence-based approaches to build community-based solutions to homelessness. These new advocates were very clear: the emergency response model wasn’t working, and a new framework and strategy to deal with the problem was necessary. To achieve their goals, these advocates were much more likely to partner with the private sector and government officials, rather than occupy city council chambers. Second wave advocates often focused on lobbying and framing homelessness in ways that were palatable to conservative politicians and Canadians (e.g., the economic argument that it is more expensive to not solve homelessness than it is to solve it) (T. Richter). Employed in research, the social service sector, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector, the voices of these more professionalized advocates were increasingly appearing in newspaper coverage of the issue towards the end of the 2000s. Among the second wave advocates interviewed, these advocates tended to be more optimistic about the future of homelessness in Canada compared to first wave advocates.

A major point of tension among advocates during this time was the arrival of Housing First in Canada, which was championed by some second wave advocates but criticized by many first wave advocates (particularly those in Toronto, who were highly critical of the Streets to Homes program). Support for Housing First among municipal leaders and some advocates increased during the mid-2000s as Phillip Mangano (George Bush’s “homelessness czar”) and Sam Tsemberis (founder of Pathways to Housing) toured cities across the country and consulted on how Canadian communities could develop their own 10-year plans to end homelessness. Perhaps two of the most influential groups that pushed the Housing First agenda forward was the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness (formed in 2007) and the Calgary Homeless Foundation, which together, in 2010, developed and launch Canada’s first 10-year plan to end homelessness. During these years, the “centre of gravity” for homelessness advocacy increasingly shifted to Alberta (S. Gaetz). Focused on measurement, accountability, evidence-based interventions, and communities taking responsibility for solving homelessness.
themselves, the concerns of first wave advocates were increasingly drowned out as a new generation of advocates, many of them with significant social and political power, increasingly dominated public discourses about how to solve the problem. This period was characterized by a transformation of homelessness advocacy that has continued into the 2010s.

5.9.2 Public Perceptions, 2001 - 2007

Public perceptions of homelessness during this time appear mixed and city- or region-specific. While the public was exposed to (exaggerated) coverage of the federal government’s response to the crisis, they were at the same time seeing no visible decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness in most cities and were continuing to hear about emergency services that were severely overburdened (e.g., in 2007 the Globe and Mail reported on secret video footage of Toronto shelters that were so full that dozens of people were sleeping on the floor) (Gray, 2007). I would suggest that this created, to some extent, a disjunction: the public was hearing about governmental investment on the issue, but seeing limited change. The political pressure around the issue had declined since 1999 and 2000, but many cities were still stuck with the problem.

Even for advocates who were deeply involved in the issue, it was difficult to determine how much of the promises made by the government had actually come to fruition and what impact they had had. Given evidence that the media failed to help the public understand how many government promises related to housing had fallen through during the 2000s (see Layton, 2008), it is perhaps not surprising that discourses that blamed people for their homelessness reemerged, along with stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness. In some communities that continued to experience high levels of visible homelessness (e.g., Calgary, AB), this took the form of NIMBYism and the criminalization of homelessness and panhandling. In 2006, for example, the Calgary Downtown Association distributed a series of posters around the city which depicted panhandlers using spare change to purchase drugs or alcohol, requesting that passersby refrain from giving money to these individuals (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). While such efforts were met with resistance in many cities, they also represented a segment of the public
who felt that given the size of the homelessness sector and the (purported) investment of government funds, the continuation of homelessness revealed that the real cause of homelessness was personal dysfunction.

Relatedly, there were increasing numbers of reports of crimes against people experiencing homelessness in the media, such as the murder of Paul Croutch by three reservists. A witness to Croutch’s death recounted that one of the perpetrators “thrust his military dog tags in her face and screamed, ‘This gives us the right to kill all the homeless bums, crackheads, whores’” (Blatchford, 2008). Other acts of violence were reported across the country, and it appears that indigenous people experiencing homelessness were particularly subject to violence from both citizens and the state (see Kingfisher, 2007; Patrick, 2014). While such acts of violence are undoubtedly connected to discriminatory views about people experiencing homelessness, it is difficult to assess the pervasiveness of these views among the public and caution should be taken when extrapolating Canadians’ views from such events or NIMBY campaigns. According to several interview participants, advocates of NIMBYism are largely a well-organized and vocal minority. What most interviewees were concerned about, however, was the growing normalization or acceptance of homelessness among the public (see also Lyon-Callo, 2008, for his reflections on this in the United States). Many interviewees felt that the urgency and pressure around the issue was declining among the public during this time.

*Figure 3. Your Generosity is Killing Me* (Calgary Downtown Association, 2006).
In contrast, there were multiple public polls during this time that indicate there was strong public support for viewing homelessness as a structural issue that required more government investment and action. In 2005, for example, a national survey by Pollara found that 63% of Canadians felt homelessness had increased in the past three years, 52% felt that the high cost of housing was the primary cause of homelessness, and 81% felt homelessness could be reduced (Layton, 2008). Similarly, in 2007, an Environics study asked Canadians, “Keeping in mind that increasing services could increase taxes, do you think the federal government should spend more, less, or the same on each of the following: homelessness?” (Envirosfocu Canada, 2007). A majority of Canadians felt the government should spend more on homelessness and were willing to have their taxes raised to do so (59.1%), while only 7.9% of Canadians felt that the government should spend less (Envirosfocu Canada, 2007). Such polls suggest that homelessness continued to be on the public agenda as an important social problem, particularly in some urban cities, even as support had grown for more disciplinary approaches to addressing the issue among some community members.

5.9.3 Researching and Measuring Homelessness, 2001 - 2007

This period of time also saw an expansion of research on homelessness among academics, governments, NGOs, and social service agencies. The measurement of homelessness became a key concern for municipalities, resulting in a proliferation of committees and task forces to study the problem, as well as the emergence of city-based “report cards” on homelessness and the use of point-in-time counts (see Gaetz, et al., 2013, p. 47). The expansion of these reports, commissions, task forces, and studies may have participated in decreased urgency associated with this problem, and may have dislocated, to some extent, first wave advocates. As Spector & Kitsuse, 1977 explain, The establishment of a committee to study the problem may cool the controversy and make the issue less visible in the mass media. Although the group may be called to testify before the committee, it finds itself cast in the role of providing information, rather than defining and negotiating the nature of the problem. The committee may seek out other and opposing views on the topic, reducing the original group to simply one voice among many. When the hearings are over, the
members of the committee will be the new experts and authorities on the subject. While the original group may comment on the report of the committee, it is that report that will define the issues, summarize the facts, and put various groups into perspective and into their places. Thus, as official and powerful agencies or institutions begin to take part in the social problems activity, they may lend prestige to the original protest group, but at the same time may begin to overshadow and thus reduce the significance of its activities. Finally, the responding agencies may take over the issue, make it their own, and neutralize or eliminate the original protest group . . . Commissions may be the burial ground of a great many social problems. (p. 148-50).

This process was mirrored in stories recounted by many first wave advocates I interviewed, some of whom felt that the “street energy” or “people power” around the issue had declined or was coopted through the establishment of committees to study the problem.

5.9.4 Media Coverage, 2001 - 2007

Newspaper coverage of homelessness between 2001 and 2007 declined significantly since its peak in 1999 (see Graph 1). Coverage ranged considerably in tone and was often city-specific. Reporters tended to focus on individual events or calamities (e.g., individual deaths, public relations errors, city-based plans, shelter conditions in particular cities, municipal politicians campaigning on homelessness, etc.), rather than commenting on the problem broadly. Consistent with previous years, few definitions of homelessness were offered, although there were some discussions of how best to define homelessness in order to measure it. Coverage of distinct groups experiencing homelessness remained low throughout these years (and since), and discussions of the “new face of homelessness” that had been so prominent in the late 1980s and early 1990s were very rare between 2002 and 2007. Indeed, to some extent there was a return to representing the typical person experiencing homelessness as an older male with mental health issues and substance abuse problems. For example, a 2007 article was titled “Dead Addict remembered as a reliable volunteer; Businessman says binner would ‘bend over backwards to help people’” (Bula, 2007). Such articles, which defined people experiencing homelessness in relation to their panhandling, substance use, or mental health issues, were common. Homeless deaths were also a frequent topic, and reporters often narrated these deaths in relation to the person’s substance use or mental health
status. While newspaper coverage on all sides of the political spectrum continued to frame homelessness as a “crisis,” “disaster,” “emergency,” and “disease,” reporters differed on whether people experiencing homelessness were *themselves* the problem or disease.

### 5.9.5 Government Action on Homelessness, 2001 - 2007

By many accounts, most government action on homelessness was disappointing between 2001 and 2007, perhaps most specifically because the National Homelessness Initiative was unable to fund and create the massive infusion of affordable housing needed to stem the growth of homelessness. As Klodawsky and Evans (2014) explain,

Its [the NHI] rationale, as presented by the federal government, was to contribute to ending homelessness, but it is clear that it has no capacity to achieve such a goal, whether in three years or in thirty. Thanks to the now extensive research funded by the initiative, it is widely agreed that homelessness will not end without a significant expansion in the stock of housing that is affordable to households in the lowest income quartile. Yet incentives to expand such housing are explicitly outside the CHI/HPS mandate. The façade that the NHI/HPS is a temporary program is another problematic element. On the one hand, this characteristic suggests that homelessness is a problem amenable to a “quick fix” solution, if only the correct elements are properly aligned. On the other hand, the short timelines for each extension limit the extent to which long-term planning is feasible, in part because each looming deadline demands that effort be devoted to lobbying politicians to ensure program renewal. (p. 98)

While the NHI was renewed in 2003 and again in 2007, when it was renamed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), the number of people experiencing homelessness did not decline in most Canadian communities (Gaetz et al., 2014). When the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) evaluated the NHI program in 2009, it determined it could not conclude that homelessness was shrinking (Hughes, 2012, p. 6). With a renewed focus on Housing First, the federal government initiated a new public-private partnership venture in April of 2007 that aimed to solve homelessness on the principle that housing stability is a necessary precondition to employment, education, life skills development, and treatment for mental health and substance abuse issues. This shift involved greater private sector involvement, predicated on the principle that it was fiscally responsible and necessary for the economic health of communities to solve homelessness (see Ilcan, p. 217). In so
doing, the HRSCD positioned private businesses as invested in addressing homelessness in order to create “the right operating conditions for long-term sustainable enterprises” (HRSCD, 2008). This framing mirrored the Housing First approach implemented across the US and advocated for by many of the emerging second wave advocates in parts of Canada.

At the provincial and municipal level, government action largely remained within an emergency response model and “spurts of funding” and “one-off programs” were largely the norm (Layton, 2008). As Jack Layton (2008) explains, “A bit of money here, a limited program there – some federal, provincial, municipal and other initiatives that are poorly funded and often inconsistent” (p. xxiv). In general, 2001 to 2007 was characterized by the continued expansion of emergency services and the growth of parallel institutions for this population (e.g., healthcare centres, job training, etc.). As Hughes (2012) explains,

In response to the increase in homelessness in the 1990s, provincial governments mostly did more of what they were already doing. In general, they did not develop more creative or effective interventions. The clearest illustration of this was the increase in the extent of homeless shelters. Between 1995 and 2005, shelters in Canada’s biggest cities became some of the largest institutions in the not-for-profit sector. In fact, some of them dwarf many public institutions in terms of the number of clients and beds. (p. 9)

In addition, many charitable and faith-based organizations providing services to the population continued to expand, and organizations like Out of the Cold proliferated in cities across the country.

5.10 Stage 6: Institutionalization and Transformation of the Problem, 2008 – Present

Following the development and implementation of official responses by some governments in 1999 and 2000, the social problem of homelessness in Canada experienced a decline in urgency, media coverage, and first wave advocacy in the early and mid 2000s. However, a second peak of media coverage occurred in 2007 and 2008, in part linked to the ascendancy of research, the growth of second wave advocacy, and
the arrival of Housing First and 10-year plans to end homelessness that were beginning to take shape in communities across Canada. This change involved not only a shift in strategies to address homelessness, but importantly involved a change in understandings of the nature of the problem and its attendant solutions (as constructed by key claimsmakers). Key actors, organizations, and governments successfully reframed homelessness as an economic problem, a bureaucratic problem, a scientific problem, and an identity-based problem. This shift, I would suggest, was able to reinvigorate some public interest and concern in the problem, preventing it from declining as a social problem and becoming largely normalized and/or institutionalized. This section will explore this new framing and how it transformed homelessness into a “second generation” problem. In contrast to Wagner and Barton Gilman’s (2012) argument that homelessness in the United States has become an institutionalized, bureaucratic problem largely seen as intractable, I suggest that through the work of a range of actors the problem of homelessness has been “kept alive” in parts of Canada.

5.10.1 Framing a New Problem: An Economic, Bureaucratic, Scientific, and Identity-Based Problem, 2008 - Present

By 1990, Mitch Snyder, one of the most prominent homelessness activists in the United States, was commenting “[There is a] backlash, a psychic numbing over the homeless . . . Politically, the issue isn’t there; it’s gone” (Snyder quoted in Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, p. 121). Did this occur in Canada, and if so, when? My findings suggest that political urgency around the issue of homelessness didn’t peak in Canada until 1999, 9 years after Synder’s comment, and began to decline in the early to mid 2000s, suggesting that the career of homelessness as a social problem in Canada may have lagged behind the United States. While the problem could have declined, to some extent the issue of homelessness was “reborn” in the late 2000s through the efforts of municipal leaders, researchers, lobbyists, and a second wave of advocacy. In its second iteration as a social problem, homelessness has increasingly been framed as an economic, bureaucratic, scientific, and identity-based problem. Each of these framings is explained briefly below.
An Economic Problem

Starting in the mid-2000s, “a business case for governments to start fighting poverty on an investment basis” was starting to emerge as research increasingly documented the tremendous costs of maintaining an emergency response model (Laird, 2007, p. 17). Consistent with powerful neoliberal discourses guiding social policy during this time (Graham et al., 2012, p. 38), the cost savings associated with housing people experiencing homelessness, rather than “warehousing” them in shelters, hospitals, or prisons, was increasingly being emphasized by researchers, advocates, mayors, NGOs, and business leaders across the country. A consequence of this framing is that there has been a particular targeting in policy and programming, especially in the United States, of people who pose the most expense to the state (e.g., people experiencing chronic homelessness who have frequent interactions with the medical system, shelter system, and prison system) (e.g., in 2015 Ontario committed to ending chronic homelessness in 10 years; for a discussion of this in the United States, see Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, p. 155).

This framing of homelessness as an economic problem was progressively reflected in government plans to address homelessness, gaining particular media and public traction when the first extensive report card on Canadian homelessness found that homelessness costs the Canadian nation $7.05 billion a year (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 33). This framing appealed to more conservative politicians and government officials for whom the social justice argument for addressing homelessness was less persuasive. For example, the Mayor of Medicine Hat, the first city in Canada to claim that it “eliminated” homelessness in 2015 after adopting a 10-year plan, expressed that he was originally an active opponent of the plan (“Medicine Hat becomes the first city in Canada to eliminate homelessness,” 2015). Mayor Clugson explains, "I even said some dumb things like, 'Why should they have granite countertops when I don't? . . . However, I've come around to realize that this makes financial sense . . . This is the cheapest and the most humane way to treat people” (“Medicine Hat becomes,” 2015). This framing shifted the motivation to solve homelessness towards cost-benefit analysis, reflected in the increased use of “marketized language” in discourses on homelessness during this time (see also Sparks, 2012). As Graham and colleagues (2012) argue, “the ‘market’ has become a
defining metaphor, the benchmark by which government and non-government sectors operate” (p. 38). Several first wave advocates I interviewed felt that homelessness has increasingly become a problem that agencies and NGOs “market,” rather than a key social justice issue.

**A Scientific Problem**

When Phillip Mangano stated, “research is the new advocacy” (McGray, 2004), he could easily have been commenting on changes to the Canadian homelessness advocacy landscape over the last ten years. Researchers and research institutions have increasing taken centre stage *publicly* in defining the problem of homelessness in Canada and how to solve it, and in so doing have framed homelessness as a scientific problem rather than (and sometimes in addition to) a moral or political problem. Similarly, social policy related to homelessness has increasingly relied on research, particularly following the At Home/Chez Soi Initiative, which was the “world’s largest and most in-depth evidence-based exploration of the effectiveness of Housing First” (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 4). This study, whose pilot project received $110 million in federal funds, arguably solidified “Housing First as a paradigm-shifting approach to homelessness in Canada” (Gaetz et al., p. 4).

Simultaneously, this period was characterized by the growth and expansion of research institutions specifically devoted to studying homelessness, including most notably the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (formerly the Canadian Homelessness Research Network), as well as the growth of research departments and research staff within social service agencies (e.g., Covenant House Toronto). This increasingly large network of experts commonly frame homelessness as a problem that can be ended through benchmarking, measurement, database development, system integration, program evaluation, and outcome-based strategies. Indeed, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness’ 10-year plan to end homelessness in Canada was aptly named, “A Plan Not a Dream,” reflecting this framing and mirroring the U.S.’s approach (*i.e.*, strategy over values). In 2012, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness produced the first Canadian definition of homelessness, disaggregating homelessness into four primary categories: unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2012).
In recent years, this change has been evidenced by the growth of point-in-time counts across the country, as well as execution of the first federally-coordinated point-in-time count in 2016. The Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia (2009) argued,

Counts provide a starting point from which further extrapolations about the nature and extent of the homeless population can be made . . . they are an important tool as they provide a measure of the relative size of the problem and the trends over time. (p. 30)

As a result of such framings, first wave advocates who were originally seen as experts on the nature and extent of the problem, were sometimes displaced by researchers who were often framed as the more legitimate holders of knowledge about the issue. Interestingly, some grassroots advocacy groups who are most well known for their direct action tactics have begun to conduct their own community-based research reports (e.g., OCAP’s Out in the Cold (2016) and FRAPRU’s Emergency in the House! Report of the Popular Travelling Commission on the Right to Housing (2013)), arguably in part to utilize this format that had been increasingly mobilized to frame the issue, as well as to compete with the social and political power of these new experts.

A Bureaucratic Problem

In recent years, frames which position homelessness as an economic and scientific problem have been accompanied by an increased focus on the bureaucratic and administrative issues associated with the problem, particularly at the service level. While claimants rarely frame homelessness as a bureaucratic problem exclusively, they have increasingly argued that a key solution to the problem is improved coordination and administration of the diverse services, programs, and funds developed to serve the population. The identification of issues in these areas has led to calls for better systems integration, and many reports, plans, committees, and conference sessions have been developed to address this issue.

At the service level, bureaucratic and administrative issues are deeply tied to competitions over funding. Given the increased emphasis on Housing First and results-based programming, this has created a context wherein competition between agencies is likely fuel the nature of debates about “best practices” in service delivery. As Sparks (2012) argues in the American context, scarcity of funding combined with an emphasis
on Housing First has created a context in which agencies that focus primarily on meeting the basic needs of “clients” are increasingly defunded in preference for agencies which can provide evidence that clients are transitioning off the streets. An outcome of this expectation is the necessity of developing elaborate information systems to track the delivery of services and the trajectory of individuals accessing services. Over the years, increasingly sophisticated data collection methods have been developed to count the number of people experiencing homelessness and determine their demographic characteristics and service needs. According to Sparks (2012),

This system, justified both by the desire for federal dollars, and the need to “better understand” the homeless population, completes the shift from the management of homelessness, to the management of homeless individuals, through high-tech surveillance of their everyday movements and practices. (p. 1525)

Some interview participants argued that debates over data collection often depoliticize the issue, and it is evident that such concerns are often a far cry from first wave advocates’ framings of homelessness.

An Identity-Based Problem

In recent years, the framing that people experiencing homelessness are a particular “class of people” has also gained significant traction. Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) identify that this framing has been part of process by which homelessness became institutionalized in the United States. They argue that this framing positions this group as having “long-term interests and rights,” not unlike women or people with disabilities (p. 159). Although such advocacy has led to important political wins in both Canada and the US, particularly with respect to discrimination and hate crimes faced by this population, it also attributes a permanency to the issue by reifying the category of “the homeless” as a stable and definable group in society. Indeed, such a shift was most poignantly reflected in the creation of Canada’s first Homeless Charter of Rights, launched in June 2015, which articulated the unique rights of this population (Campbell, 2015). Broadly, this fits with a shift in social policy that has been occurring since the 1990s, which might be understood as “moving from an institutional era of justice as distribution and redistribution, to a market era of justice as the politics of recognition and individual rights” (Graham et al., 2012, p. 44; see also Bakan, 1997; Fraser, 1995).
More broadly, as research and services for this population have expanded, there has been an increased focus on meeting the unique needs of particular demographic groups, both in the sector and in government (Gaetz et al., 2013 p. 4). Toward this end, there has been a proliferation of strategies for developing and targeting services for particular demographic groups (e.g., youth, women fleeing violence) and groups with particular experiences (e.g., survivors of human trafficking experiencing homelessness). In 2016, for example, Canada opened its first transitional housing for LGBTQ youth, inspired by research that revealed the discrimination and violence faced by this group in the traditional shelter system (Monsebraaten, 2016). While such targeted programs have undoubtedly improved services for many of these populations, and have been deeply politically and culturally important in some contexts (e.g., regarding Aboriginal homelessness), they have also participated in shifting the problem from one of housing (as articulated in many early frames) to a fractured, demographic-specific problem with many entry points. While this has enabled the connections between homelessness and systematic forms of oppression (e.g., racism) to become more visible than they have been in the past, it has also reframed homelessness as a multi-layered, complex social problem. Once again, this perceived complexity has justified the creation and funding of elaborate information systems in order to better deliver services to particular subpopulations. Further, this has required the development of experts and specialists focused on each of these subpopulations and management of data about them, as well as the development of training and education targeted to professionals who want to work with particular subpopulations.

5.10.2 Advocacy, 2008 - Present

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, the “new wave” of advocates increasingly dominated public discourses about the problem. Advocates in government, the private sector, NGOs, and research have continued to push forward Housing First, 10-year plans, and community-led research and solutions to homelessness, oftentimes in partnership with government. Among these advocates, the rally cry has been an end to homelessness, rather than the creation of a national housing program. Highly motivated to undo the emergency response model created to deal with the problem, these advocates have
utilized a range of framing techniques and forms of communication (e.g., social media, videos, webinars, infographics) to reframe homelessness as a problem that Canada can successfully end. As Tim Richter, Present and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, explains, “I’m trying to very consciously change the conversation to homelessness as a solvable problem.” Cyber technology has undoubtedly changed the landscape of advocacy in this area, and second wave advocates have been very strategic and skilful in their use of these technologies (the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness is an excellent example of this). In interviews with these advocates, quite a few expressed their concern that parts of the homelessness sector itself is actually resistant to ending homelessness, and that part of the struggle will be getting these agencies and organizations on side. Some interviews with first wave advocates revealed significant skepticism and concern about how homelessness is being framed by second wave advocates.

Among first wave advocates interviewed, many were concerned that homelessness advocacy no longer constitutes a social movement in Canada. As Cathy Crowe explains,

You know, the environmental movements are being fuelled by really young and really rich ideas. I don’t see that here. I see a lot of academics and mayors and local groups calling for housing, but not able to make it come alive in the form of a social movement. (C. Crowe)

While a number of Toronto-based interviewees expressed that protests and marches are less well attended now than in the past, they also felt that there were important political struggles during these years (particularly as related to the right to housing) and that some parts of the country continue to have lively social movements related to housing (most specifically Quebec). One major advocacy effort during these years was the 2010 landmark legal challenge filed against the federal and provincial governments by Ontarians with experiences of homelessness. The challenge sought a Court declaration that Canada and Ontario had “violated their rights under section 7 and section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by creating and maintaining conditions that lead to and sustain homelessness and inadequate housing” (Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, 2014). Although the claim was denied in 2015, it exemplified the work
of a growing number of Canadian advocates focused on establishing the human right to adequate, affordable housing in Canada.

**5.10.3 Public Perceptions, 2008 - Present**

While there was always evidence that a segment of the Canadian public was unsympathetic to people experiencing homelessness, it appears that from the late 2000s and beyond there was a further polarization of views. Polls have increasingly revealed mixed results about the extent to which the public views homelessness as a structural/systemic problem or a personal problem. In the Salvation Army’s 2010 study, Canadians were asked to rank a list of “major” factors that influence homelessness, and the highest ranked factors were alcohol and drug addiction (85%), mental illness (74%), and unemployment (67%). Substance use and mental health issues were also viewed as primary causes of homelessness in other public polls during this time (see, *e.g.*, Schoenfeld & Hunke, 2013). Similarly, while researchers and advocates have consistently emphasized that people experiencing homelessness want housing, the Salvation Army’s 2011 national poll found that a staggering 40% of Canadians believed that most people experiencing homelessness want to live on the street and in shelters (Norris, 2011). This is striking, especially given that the Salvation Army’s 2010 poll found that approximately 1 in 9 Canadians have experienced homelessness or been close to experiencing homelessness (close to 3 million people). It also appears that some particularly violent and cruel forms of backlash against homelessness developed (or at least gained recognition in newspaper coverage) in the mid-2000s and beyond, evidenced by increases in NIMBYism, documented violence against people experiencing homelessness, and the criminalization of homelessness in cities across Canada (*e.g.*, Abramovich, 2012; Gaetz, 2004; Tutton, 2015).

Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest the public has continued to view homelessness as a serious social problem, regardless of the causes they attribute to it (see, *e.g.*, Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat, 2012). Most Canadians do not feel that the problem of homelessness has improved. In 2010, the Salvation Army released a national poll which found that only 6% of Canadians felt that homelessness was decreasing, and 50% felt that the severity of homelessness had increased in recent years.
Other studies have found that Canadians continue to see government as responsible for addressing homelessness (e.g., a poll by the Calgary Homeless Foundation (2013) found that 61% of respondents ranked “all levels of government” as being most responsible for addressing homelessness (Schoenfeld & Hunke, 2013)). In addition, a number of polls have found that Canadians view affordable housing as both a cause and solution to homelessness (e.g., Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat, 2012; Schoenfeld & Hunke, 2013).

How, when, and to what extent the public is exposed to information about homelessness powerfully shapes their perceptions of the problem (Reynalds, 2006). It may be that since the late 2010s, homelessness has had difficulty competing for public concern in light of recent national and international social movements in Canada that received widespread media attention, including the Occupy Movement, Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter. These movements focused conversations of injustice on issues of racism, colonialism, and inequality. While these injustices are clearly linked to homelessness, homelessness was not a core concern for any of these movements. As Hilgartner and Bosk (1998) suggest, the ascendance of one problem is likely to be correlated with the decline of another insofar as the carrying capacity of each public arena (e.g., media) defines how many social problems can be addressed at one time (p. 59). It is likely that these movements, as well as other major world events such as the Syrian refugee crisis, overshadowed homelessness in various public arenas during these years.

In such competitive environments, “problem blocking” often becomes essential in order for a social problem to stay on the political agenda (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1998, p. 59). One example of such blocking is the backlash among some poor Canadians following broad public sympathy for Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016. For example, in February 2016 the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty took a lot of calls from people living in poverty who question whether refugees should be allowed into Canada when so many are experiencing homelessness and hard times. An expression we keep hearing is that ‘we should take care of our own first.’ (n.p.)
Such efforts reflect a desire among some community members for OCAP to lead a public reframing of the Syrian refugee crisis in order to reposition homelessness as a top social concern in Canada.

5.10.4 Media, 2008 - Present

The second peak of media coverage during this history was in 2007 and 2008, after which coverage slowly declined. This peak was likely related to the adoption of Housing First in cities across Canada and the announcement of 10-year plans in a number of Alberta’s cities specifically. Newspaper coverage was dominated by reports, research findings, announcements of programming and services, and governments’ plans to end homelessness. While there has continued to be coverage of homeless deaths (e.g., several freezing deaths in Toronto in the winter of 2015) and violence against people experiencing homelessness, the outrage and advocacy that had historically accompanied such events was more minimal during these years.

Part of the difficulty of assessing the significance of newspaper coverage in recent years is that the public’s sources of information about social problems have immensely expanded and diversified (Best, 2013). With the rise of cyber technology, and hand-held devices in particular, it is safe to assume that the way that the public accesses knowledge about homelessness has shifted dramatically. Certainly NGOs, advocacy organizations, researchers, and governments have become increasingly more technologically savvy in the way they communicate about the issue. Organizations like the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, for example, have large teams focused on mobilizing information and research about the problem for general public consumption. Further, there has been an increased marketization of homelessness as a social problem, including through the use of dramatized events (e.g., in 2015 Raising the Roof erected a fake shelter in Toronto to capture on tape the neighbourhood’s NIMBY reactions). As a result, the manner in which the public encounters framings of the problem has undoubtedly diversified beyond traditional news sources. More research is needed to determine how this has impacted public understandings of the issue, how framings compete in these various spheres, and what information the public is accessing and absorbing about homelessness through these numerous sources.
5.10.5 Government Action and Policy, 2008 - Present

The two main shifts that occurred in governmental approaches to homelessness during these recent years is (1) the increasing adoption of Housing First and 10-year plans to end homelessness, and (2) the increased use and mobilization of research in directing homelessness policy. This movement towards plans to end homelessness really took shape in Alberta during between 2007 and 2009, when “the 7 cities” of Alberta (Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat) adopted 10-year plans and the Alberta government committed to end provincial homelessness in 10 years. Additionally, steps to end homelessness in Alberta’s cities are coordinated through the Interagency Council on Homelessness, through which all human-serving provincial entities report on their steps to ending homelessness.

Following in the footsteps of Alberta’s leadership, a number of cities across Canada have adopted plans to end homelessness, including Saskatoon (2013), Winnipeg (2014), Vancouver (2010 and 2011), and Toronto (most recent plan adopted in 2014), among others, and in 2015 the province of Ontario committed to end chronic homelessness in ten years. A crucial factor in these developments was the At Home/Chez Soi Initiative, which played an enormous role in establishing Housing First as a key federal approach to addressing homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2013). When the Homelessness Partnering Strategy was renewed in 2013 for a five-year period (2014-19), Housing First was identified as a key focus and priority. Unfortunately, the annual investment in HPS dropped from $134.5 million annually to $119 million.

During these years, several cities and a few provinces have begun to move beyond a model of primarily offering services to people experiencing homelessness and instead have begun to invest in, and build, affordable housing. The BC government, for example, announced in 2009 a $34 million investment to purchase or lease properties with a total of 600 units to house people with experiences of homelessness (Hughes, p. 10). More broadly, this period was also marked by increases in information sharing between parts of the sector and some government partners. In 2014, for example, the FCM launched the National Forum on Housing and the Economy, which includes NGOs, stakeholder groups, industry, business groups, and professional organizations to share information ideas, and consult on the challenges facing Canada’s housing sector. Similarly, in 2015 A
Way Home was launched, consisting of a coalition of six national collaborating organizations to address youth homelessness across Canada.

5.11 Conclusion

Findings from this research suggest that the social problem of “homelessness” has progressed through six distinct stages between 1980 and 2013 in Canada. Transitions between each of these stages have generally involved shifts in how the problem is framed, often in one or more of the following areas: (1) the nature of the problem, (2) who is responsible for addressing the problem, (3) who or what is to blame for causing the problem, (4) who “owns” the problem and has expert knowledge about the problem, and (5) how the problem should be solved. Most specifically, this chapter has argued that one of the key shifts in the history of this social problem has been the shift from an emergency/disaster framework to an economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework. This shift involves a fundamental reversal of how we have been thinking about and dealing with this problem in Canada. As Manabu Akagawa (2015) points out, it is very difficult to undo the initial choices a country makes in how it deals with a social problem, as well as the institutional arrangements it establishes based on that choice. Mobilizing the concept of “path dependency,” he argues that “once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchment of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice” (Levi quoted in Akagawa, p. 63). In the case of Canadian homelessness, the “track” that we have been going down for most of its history is one which positions the problem as an “emergency” requiring emergency responses (i.e., immediate provision of (ad hoc) services to meet basic needs). In response to this, second wave advocates have struggled to mobilize a reversal of an entire ideological and institutional framework for addressing the problem, reframing homelessness as a solvable problem amenable to strategic, long-term planning.

In assessing the development of homelessness in the United States, Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) conclude that
The social construction of homelessness as a problem by advocates, activists, the media, and experts has been most effective at a symbolic level (transforming the homeless from a despised class into victims of society) and in terms of civil rights (the right to vote and the right to receive social benefits, with many court cases won on behalf of the homeless). The construction of the issue has been far less successful in changing, much less ending, the economic and social conditions that produce homelessness, and would continue after the issue left the front pages. (p. 169)

In the Canadian context, this has been largely the case as well. The success of Canadian claimsmakers has been in establishing homelessness as a public problem, a structural or systemic problem, and a problem for which all levels of government are responsible. While many interview participants felt that advocates have succeeded in educating the public about the issue, it appears that public polls continue to indicate some public confusion regarding whether people experiencing homelessness are to blame for their homelessness, whether housing will solve homelessness, and whether people want to be homeless. The final chapter will turn to a broader summary of the state of homelessness as a social problem in Canada, articulating how this study has contributed to the homelessness literature and the social problem literature.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Very little is known about how “homelessness” emerged and developed as a social problem in Canada. As the first extensive study on this social problem’s historical development in Canada, this research answers four primary questions:

1. How did “homelessness” emerge as a social problem in Canada?
2. Why was “homelessness” framed in particular ways when it first emerged?
3. How have framings of “homelessness” changed over time?
4. Why have framings of “homelessness” changed over time?

Utilizing a contextual constructionist approach to the study of social problems, this study focused on developing a persuasive account of how “homelessness” was identified, legitimized, and transformed over time by various claimsmakers, including the media and advocates. This chapter answers to each of the above questions, followed by an explanation of how these findings contribute to literature on homelessness and the study of social problems more broadly. This study’s limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for social work are also discussed.

6.1 How Did “Homelessness” Emerge as a Social Problem in Canada?

While there has been some research about the emergence of the use of the term “homelessness” in Canada, much less is known about the process by which this term came to refer to a specific set of (problematized) issues and conditions. As this study demonstrates, the term “homelessness” was not widely used in Canada until the mid-1980s, first appearing in Canadian newspapers in 1984 and gaining legitimacy as a public problem in approximately 1987. Not unlike other nations in the global north, a variety of claimsmakers identified and legitimized “homelessness” as a public problem in contradistinction to previous conceptions of “the homeless” as single, disaffiliated men who were poorly housed and suffered from “pathologies” of particular kinds (e.g., substance abuse, immorality, laziness, incompetence). While these “winos,” “transients,” and “bums” were viewed as a “welfare problem,” the “new homeless” were victims of a social problem called “homelessness.” Beginning in the mid-1980s, claimsmakers in various public arenas began to consistently and publicly assert that a new and distinct
population was actually unhoused and most claimed it was the result of structural problems such as unemployment and lack of affordable housing.

During these early years, a range of claimsmakers emphasized the demographic difference between the “new homeless” and the “old homeless,” particularly stressing that “the new homeless” included children, women, people with disabilities, the unemployed, people with health issues, families, and others. The media and advocates generally portrayed this new group in highly sympathetic ways. Both advocates and reporters consistently sought to emphasize the suffering of this population, often offering detailed portraits of their physical and psychological pain. In Toronto, the 1985 freezing death of Drina Joubert was constructed as a “landmark narrative” by advocates and media alike, many of whom framed her death as an indication that Canada was facing a new, severe, fatal, and escalating problem.

Consistent with research in both Canada and the United States, this study found that early public concern over this problem was linked to panic that “innocent” populations, such as children and pregnant women, were living unhoused in North America. The claim that “anyone could become homeless” was consistently used to emphasize that this group was not to blame for their homelessness (see Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, for similar findings). Some early advocacy groups positioned homelessness as a sub-issue of poverty, unemployment, and labour issues, sometimes offering critiques of capitalism, neoliberalism, and globalization in their framings of homelessness. Early advocacy groups like Front d’action populaire en réaménagement urbain, for example, framed homelessness as crucially related to increases in poverty and gentrification (Neigh, 2015). Despite such efforts, the media and many subsequent advocacy groups largely framed homelessness as a singular issue, often discursively separating it from poverty (see Blasi, 2000, for similar findings).

More broadly, this study found that in their attempts to disaggregate the “new homeless” from the highly stigmatized “old homeless,” Canadian reporters spent considerable time emphasizing the personal characteristics of this new population. While early accounts consistently named structural causes, the overwhelming focus of journalistic coverage was on the personal suffering of people who didn’t deserve it. In effect, reporters participated in discursively substituting a social problem
(“homelessness”) with a victimized population (“the homeless”), resulting in an intense focus on the population rather than concern over the structural processes which produced a growing number of people who were absolutely unhoused. As Bogard (2003) concluded about the United States, homelessness “became defined by the characteristics of those who are homeless rather than the characteristics . . . of the wealthy society that failed to house some of its member” (p. xiii). Fortifying this framework, subsequent claimsmakers in Canada (including untold numbers of researchers) focused their energies on understanding and describing this population – their characteristics, needs, histories, behaviours, health – to the exclusion of studies on homeless-making processes (see Janiel, 1992, for similar findings). This focus has had profound effects on the trajectory of responses to homelessness in Canada, including most specifically the emphasis on disaggregating and categorizing people who are unable to afford housing. These findings both contradict and confirm previous studies which have found that media overwhelmingly individualizes homelessness (e.g., Buck et al., 2004; Hodgetts et al., 2005). In the case of Canadian newsprint media, most of the early coverage labeled homelessness a structural problem but illustrated it in highly individualized ways.

This study has several unique findings with respect to the emergence of homelessness in Canada. First, this research reveals that early constructions of “homelessness” in Canadian newspapers fairly quickly began to disaggregate deserving members of the “new homeless” from non-deserving members, oftentimes reinscribing the stigma historically attached to “vagabonds,” “hobos,” “transients,” and other subsets of “the old homeless.” The assignment of stigma and deservingness were distinctly class-based, with reporters utilizing physical appearance (most specifically dress and hygiene) as an indicator of class. Importantly, reporters also used physical appearance to structure how they represented the cause of homelessness for the individuals they depicted. While individuals who appeared “just like you and me” or “middle-class” were depicted as the victims of structural changes, articles on individuals who were “disheveled” or “dirty” invariably framed these individuals as homeless due to personal characteristics (usually poor mental health and substance use, both of which were often framed as choices). As discussed below, this had significant ramifications for how homelessness progressed as a social problem in Canada.
Second, consistent with research on homelessness in the United States, this study found that early framings of this problem by both media and advocates markedly refrained from discussions of race (see Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, for similar findings). Given the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples and people of colour among homeless populations in Canada (see, for example, Belanger et al., 2013; Wente, 2000), this absence is glaring. Even though early reporters stated that “the new homeless” were demographically heterogeneous, being part of “the homeless” often eclipsed all other identities in newspaper coverage, including race, gender, ethnicity, age, and sexuality (see Pascale, 2005, for similar findings). This participated in the homogenization of diverse groups and individuals into a group called “the homeless,” a process which produced a singular population to which state interventions could be targeted. More broadly, this collapsing of unique groups with diverse experiences into one category, “the homeless,” has obscured understandings of how homelessness intersects with other forms of systemic oppression (e.g., racism, patriarchy, etc.).

Third, this study revealed that early framings of homelessness constructed this problem as morally reprehensible and inconsistent with Canadian values and Canadian identity. Concerns that Canada was becoming apathetic, immoral, and uncivilized, and thus damaging its international reputation as a compassionate and caring society, were emphasized by claimsmakers who demanded action on both moral and political grounds. Interestingly, this study suggests that this framing was re-packaged in the late 1990s and 2000s to support the criminalization of panhandling and homelessness on the same grounds. As visible homelessness continued into the 1990s and 2000s, panhandlers and “the homeless” were increasingly depicted as victimizing passersby and monopolizing public space, thus threatening a vision of Canada as democratic, safe, and attractive to tourists and businesses (for similar findings, see Gaetz, 2004; O’Grady et al., 2011; Schneiderman, 2002).

6.2 Why was “homelessness” framed in particular ways when it first emerged as a social problem in Canada?

Determining why “homelessness” was framed in particular ways when it first emerged is a challenge. Many answers can be offered, and have been offered in the
American context (e.g., Blasi, 1994; Bogard, 2003; Stern, 1984; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012; Wright, 2009). Certainly claimmakers across Canada had a range of motivations and rationales for how they framed the problem during these early years, some of which were undoubtedly unknown to even themselves. Reconstructing these many reasons is outside the scope of this study. Nonetheless, this study has provided some insight into the claimmaking process and its effects in this context, some of which can assist in explaining why particular framings dominated early understandings of the problem.

First, consistent with both theoretical (Best, 2013; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) and empirical (Greene, 2006) literature, it appears that particular claims about homelessness were pursued with the social problems marketplace in mind. More specifically, many claimmakers used vivid descriptions of the suffering of innocent victims because these framings had the drama and urgency to “win” in competitions with other social problems. Some interview participants recounted instances in which they consciously constructed victims they felt could successfully “compete” with the victims of other social problems (e.g., children suffering from famine in the global south) in the eyes of the public and the media. Canadian newspaper reporters similarly utilized the claim that “anyone can become homeless” to accentuate the scale of the problem, its escalation, and its volatility. Emphasizing that national identity and reputation was under threat because of homelessness also functioned to heighten the dramatic value of the problem, and numerous articles positioned homelessness as an indicator of the collapse of Canadian values and morality. These framings were undoubtedly used for their dramatic effect, which claimmakers used to heighten the status of the problem.

Second, the reason that many claimmakers emphasized “homelessness” affected a new population was because they sought to distance this problem’s victims from the stigma attached to previous understandings of “the homeless.” Had the “new homeless” been framed as a continuation of the “old homeless,” it likely wouldn’t have warranted nearly as much concern, attention, or action. However, by focusing on the demographic characteristics of these new victims, claimmakers (advertently or inadvertently) participated in the individualization of this problem, an orientation that has haunted policy responses for decades. A further effect of such distancing efforts is that such
claims making may have further stigmatized people experiencing mental health problems and substance abuse issues (particularly poor adult men struggling with these issues). Interestingly, this finding suggests that when a social problem cannot be readily tied to a historically stigmatized population (e.g., texting with driving (Parilla, 2013)), claimsmakers may not need to spend such considerable time discussing the demographic characteristics of the people involved. This finding raises questions about whether claimsmakers are more likely to individualize a social problem when the victims of that problem can be easily associated with a historically stigmatized group.

Third, by creating a distinct and homogenous population (“the homeless”), claimsmakers were able to demarcate this new problem from broader issues such as poverty and affordable housing (whose victims are seen as much more diffuse). If claimsmakers’ aim was to establish “the homeless” as highly sympathetic victims, distinguishing “the homeless” from “the poor” was an important strategic move given evidence that negative attitudes towards poor people were common during many of these years in Canada (see, e.g., Stapleton, 2004). By disaggregating “the homeless” from “the poor,” claimsmakers were able to establish this new problem as all the more urgent because these victims were morally superior to “the poor.”

Fourth, such dramatic framings are likely nurtured by a journalistic culture that prioritizes coverage of new, urgent social problems with highly sympathetic victims (see Min, 2009). The pressure to deliver such drama can even lead some reporters to fabricate these victims, and Canadian newspaper coverage of homelessness was no exception to this. In 2000, for example, the Toronto Star made a public apology after it published an article (with images) portraying a homeless boy in a wheelchair. The image and story were later determined to be fabricated; the boy was not homeless and instead had stolen the wheelchair from a Toronto hospital for amusement (Wanagas, 2000). Such incidents demonstrate the pressure claimsmakers experience when competing for the public’s attention. The drama endemic to these early constructions undoubtedly played an important role in the subsequent popularity of framings which positioned homelessness as “national disaster” and “crisis” in the mid to late 1990s.
6.3 How have framings of “homelessness” changed over time?

Developing the first stage model of the development of “homelessness” as a social problem in Canada, this study has argued that since 1980, homelessness has progressed through six distinct stages in Canada. These are summarized in Figure 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-problem</td>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>No “homelessness” problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>1985-1986</td>
<td>Emergence of homelessness as a social problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>1987-1990</td>
<td>Legitimization of homelessness as a social problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>1991-1995</td>
<td>Assignments of blame &amp; emergency responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>1996-2001</td>
<td>Social problem peak and development of an official response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>2002-2007</td>
<td>Implementation of official response, saturation, and transformation of homelessness advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>2008 - present</td>
<td>Institutionalization and transformation of the problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While each stage exhibits unique characteristics, dominant framings of homelessness have not necessarily shifted with each new stage. For example, the claim that homelessness is a “lifestyle choice” has circulated for decades, waxing and waning at different times, places, and in different public arenas. Given this, this section will focus on how these dominant framings have shifted between 1980 and 2013 in Canada. I argue that once homelessness became legitimatized as a social problem, many dominant frameworks positioned homelessness as an emergency or disaster. In the mid- to late-2000s, however, homelessness was increasingly framed as an economic, bureaucratic, and scientific problem. My findings suggest that this new framing has increasingly taken hold in recent years, in part because of its compatibility with broader neoliberal approaches to governance in Canada. While not entirely incompatible with previous framings, this new framework significantly reorients approaches to addressing homelessness and engaging in advocacy. Nonetheless, these framings have overlapped in interesting ways at different times and places across Canada, and both frameworks continue to be very visible in Canadian social policy and the homelessness sector.

My findings further suggest that advocates have successfully played crucial roles in defining and fostering these two dominant frameworks. This study uncovered significant differences in tactics and theories of social change between advocates who
promoted an *emergency/disaster framework* and those that promoted an *economic/bureaucratic/scientific framework*. I have argued that these differences are best conceptualized as two “waves” of homelessness advocacy that have developed over the history of this problem, both of which continue today in complimentary and conflictual ways. While distinct and sometimes incompatible, both waves do share some of the same members, values, and approaches. Nonetheless, advocates of each framework have frequently competed for discursive space to frame the problem. Below, I explain in detail how each of these frameworks has developed over the course of the “career” of homelessness in Canada.

### 6.3.1 The Historical Development of the Emergency/Disaster Framework

When homelessness first emerged as a social problem in Canada, advocates and the media framed it as a structural problem affecting a distinct group of innocent victims (“the homeless”). However, as federal and provincial governments continued to enact policy choices that dramatically increased homelessness in the 1990s, my findings suggest that many media framings became less sympathetic towards this group. Reporters increasingly typified “the homeless” as people with mental health issues and substance abuse problems, many of whom had made poor life choices and were causing problems for their community. The “new homeless” increasingly resembled the “old homeless” in some Canadian newspaper coverage (i.e., dirty, disheveled, substance abusers, disaffiliated, and mentally ill). In contrast, however, other reporters continued to emphasize the deservingness of this new group and assert the right to housing for all Canadians. Increasingly polarized understandings of this problem led to intense discursive debate during the 1990s in the media and other public domains. This conflict played out in communities across Canada, with some major Canadian cities witnessing the emergence of NIMBY groups engaged in their own types of anti-homeless claimsmaking.

In this context, homelessness advocates became extremely active in the mid-1990s and early 2000s in their efforts to frame this problem and mobilize political pressure. Fueled with outrage at the suffering they were seeing on Canadian streets, several advocacy groups led actions and campaigns that received national attention. This
spike in advocacy was reflected in the media, with reporting on advocacy accounting for the major spike in newspaper coverage during the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Graph 1 in Chapter 3). This period of time marks the peak of the “first wave” of homelessness advocacy in Ontario and beyond. During this peak, many advocates and other claimsmakers promoted what might be referred to as the disaster/emergency framework.

There are several unique features of the disaster/emergency framework, most central of which is the contention that Canadian homelessness constitutes a “disaster,” “crisis,” and/or “emergency.” Claimsmakers who promoted this framework argued that homelessness required immediate ameliorate action because of: (1) the escalating numbers of people affected, (2) the “life and death” nature of the problem, (3) the intensification of the economic and political factors that produce homelessness, (4) the absence of adequate supports for people experiencing homelessness, and (5) the absence of strategies to reduce, prevent, or end homelessness. The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee’s State of Emergency Declaration (1998), is a good example of this framework, arguing that “Any delay in firmly and massively responding will only contribute to compounding the present crisis of suffering and death which is already an epidemic which no civilized society can tolerate” (p. 5). Characteristic of this framework, the TDRC positioned homelessness as threatening the moral integrity of the Canadian state, often utilizing such terms as “shameful,” “unthinkable,” “unconscionable,” and a “nightmare,” to highlight its inconsistency with dominant Canadian values and identity. Positioning the Canadian government as responsible for causing homelessness through intentional funding and policy choices, advocates of this framework called on all levels of government for both emergency relief and long-term commitments to housing and welfare reform. In the 1990s, this framework was frequently mobilized by reporters, advocates, the social service sector, some governmental officials, and some members of the public.

As this framework continued into the 2000s, concerns about emergency supports became the primary focus for many claimsmakers. For example, this study found that while homeless deaths in the 1980s and 1990s were explicitly framed in relation to a lack of affordable housing, from approximately 2000 onwards these deaths were often framed in relation to the inadequacy of emergency services. Similarly, as time progressed, some
“first wave” advocacy groups became more focused on local and municipal struggles, often demanding more and improved emergency relief rather than national solutions. Protests, marches, or occupations were commonly focused on demands for emergency supports rather than a national housing program or the 1% solution.

Findings from this study suggest that the ascendency of the emergency/disaster framework, and its adoption by various municipalities across Canada, was likely an important factor in the federal government’s decision to establish the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) in 1999 (see Klodawsky & Evans, 2014, for similar findings). However, while this framework helped mobilize the pressure needed to move the issue forward politically, it also laid the groundwork for the problem to be responded to through temporary, ad hoc, relief efforts that only dealt with the manifestations of the problem. Consistent with studies on this social problem in the United States (Lipsky & Smith, 1989; Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012), this framing ultimately supported the postponement of “confrontation with more deeply rooted underlying conditions” (Lipsky & Smith, 1989, p. 5). While the rallying cry of homelessness advocates in the 1990s was the need for a national housing program, the framing these advocates used was that of a “national disaster.” It was this framing, rather than the long-term solutions they proposed, that the federal government responded to.

6.3.2 The Historical Development of the Economic/Scientific/Bureaucratic Framework

Beginning in approximately the mid-2000s, there was a growing recognition that the steps taken by the federal government were not leading to tangible decreases in homelessness across Canada, and there continued to be limited provincial action on the issue. While there was some optimism amongst advocates following the establishment of the NHI, those on the front lines of the “crisis” were continuing to see homelessness deepen in most cities. Advocates continued to highlight that federal funding was insufficient to deal with the scale of the problem and that federal promises for housing were being abandoned (Layton, 2008), but media coverage of both advocacy and the issue was falling (see Graph 1 in Chapter 3). While there had always been conflicting tactical approaches and political ideologies amongst homelessness advocates, many of
the advocates interviewed indicated that beginning in the early 2000s, collaboration and coordination across these divides became less common in some parts of Canada.

In this context, a new framework and a “second wave” of advocacy began to emerge in parts of Canada in the mid-2000s. Crucially linked to the arrival of Housing First and 10-year plans to end homelessness, this new framework was promoted by new advocacy groups, targeted to new audiences, and attempted to shift understandings of the nature of the problem and how to address it. This new framework positioned homelessness as an economic problem, a bureaucratic problem, a scientific problem, and an identity-based problem. This re-framing of the problem is still emerging today, often in relation to (and competition with) elements of the emergency/disaster framework.

There are several key components of this framework that are quite distinct from the emergency/disaster framework. In this framework, a business-like approach is mobilized to emphasize the cost savings of ending and preventing homelessness, particularly through the implementation of Housing First. This is frequently combined with claims that responses to homelessness need to be evidence-based, and thus that indicators of progress should be tangible and measurable. Focused on demonstrable outcomes, this framework positions homelessness as an object of scientific inquiry that can be positively shaped through scientific methods and successful business practices. Approaches characteristic of this framework include: “benchmarking,” counting the number of people experiencing homelessness (point-in-time counts), information database development, program evaluation, and systems integration and coordination. This framework was promoted by, and fortified the authority of, a new wave of advocates who were more professionalized and often employed in research, government agencies, universities, NGOs, and the private sector. The voices of these professionalized advocates increasingly appeared in newspaper coverage of the issue toward the end of the 2000s, to some extent displacing first wave advocates who were previously the “go-to authorities” on the issue. The rise of these experts correlated with federal interest in funding agencies that can offer evidence of progress and re-housing among “clients.”

In addition, this framework has sometimes involved or correlated with frames that position homelessness as an identity-based problem (i.e., a problem which involves the
unjust treatment of group of people based on their identity). In this framing, people experiencing homelessness are constructed as a distinct “class of people” or population with unique interests and rights (see Wagner with Barton Gilman, 2012, for similar findings). As such, issues such as discrimination and “homeless rights” were sometimes part of the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework, in some cases bolstering interest in researching, documenting, and addressing the intersections of homelessness with other identities (e.g., discrimination against LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness).

In distinction to the emergency/disaster framework, this framework is decidedly less focused on the moral or social justice argument for addressing homelessness. While the emergency/disaster framework frequently focused on a national housing program, the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework primarily emphasizes Housing First and 10-year plans to end homelessness on the basis that these are evidence-based and cost-effective solutions. More broadly, advocates of the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework have put less emphasis on the political causes of homelessness than advocates of the emergency/disaster framework, seldom mentioning, for example, neoliberalism or capitalism.

My findings suggest that these diverse frames are crucially related to the tactics, political ideologies, and class of the advocates who helped establish them. The next section briefly turns to why these framings have shifted over time, including how shifts in advocacy are crucially related to these changes.

6.4 Why have framings of “homelessness” changed over time?

Framings of homelessness have changed in various ways, for innumerable reasons, over the course of this problem’s history in Canada. My findings suggest that there are two dominant framings that have competed to frame the issue of homelessness in Canada: the emergency/disaster framework and the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework. This section will offer some hypotheses about why a shift from the disaster/emergency framework to the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework has occurred in recent years, although the disaster/emergency framework continues to dominate in some public arenas and parts of the country.
6.4.1 Emergencies Necessarily Decline

As seen above, a key reason that the emergency/disaster framework became dominant was because it created a highly dramatized picture of a country on the edge of abandoning its identity and moral code by condemning untold numbers of innocent victims (“the homeless”) to death. These kinds of frameworks make for dramatic media and, if they are legitimized and gain momentum, intense public concern and debate. Such frameworks help sell newspapers and build careers for reporters, as well as provide advocates and social movements with the moral and political power to recruit social movement participants. They also provide opportunities to reflect on conceptualizations of Canadian identity and justice, providing crucial opportunities for politicians to articulate political platforms and gain votes (consider that, for example, Politicians Debating Homelessness was the 9th most common topic in newspaper coverage of homelessness out of a total of 19 topics). Perhaps most crucially, as Lipsky and Smith (1989) point out, governments prefer to respond to social problems as “emergencies” because it usually deflects attention away from structural inequities and their attendant solutions, thus restricting the scope and cost of governmental responses. For these reasons, numerous claimsmakers – politicians in search of votes, citizens in search of causes, advocates in search of social movement participants, governments in search of fiscal conservatism – can benefit from such a framing politically, professionally, and personally. As such, part of the reason this framework became dominant is because it served the interests of a range of claimsmakers (see Archer, 2015, for similar findings).

Unfortunately, the urgency and drama of any emergency framework cannot be sustained over time. Emergencies, by their very definition, are short term and expected to decline. As Lipsky and Smith (1989) argue, “There are limits to the extent that society will respond to increases in emergency claims by increasing resources. At some point, public agencies will respond to increased claims by routinizing the provision of aid to the claimant population” (p. 9). While there is little data to suggest that the numbers of people experiencing homelessness decreased following the establishment of the NHI, emergency support and shelter services increased and became more routinized and monitored. In the wake of hundreds of press releases about supports and services provided through the NHI, it became more difficult for claimsmakers to maintain that
“homelessness” was an emergency that was being ignored by the Canadian government. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that newspaper coverage of homelessness and homelessness advocacy significantly decreased beginning in the early 2000s: it appeared that the emergency was being responded to. As the legitimacy and saliency of this framework decreased and homelessness continued to increase, more communities turned to punitive measures to address this seemingly intractable issue. Far from being an “emergency,” homelessness was beginning to look like a permanent problem.

6.4.2 Change in Ownership of the Problem of “Homelessness”

The shift from the emergency/disaster framework to the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework was also likely related to a shift in ownership of the problem amongst advocates. My findings suggest that over the last 10 years, homelessness has been increasingly “owned” by second wave advocates. The shift from the emergency/disaster framework to the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework had its basis in the contention that managing homelessness through emergency relief has not, and cannot, solve the problem. As a result, there was a demand for articulating long-term solutions, which second wave advocates argued were best achieved through measurement, benchmarking, and tracking outcomes. This framework also fit with the American approach to homelessness in recent years, and fostered the development of 10-year plans and Housing First strategies in some cities across Canada. As part of this reorientation, the key authorities on homelessness were no longer social service agency staff or grassroots advocates but experts in the scientific or business community who were viewed as having expert knowledge upon which long-term planning could be built. As a result, the framework for understanding this problem increasingly reflected the epistemologies, worldviews, and approaches characteristic of these new advocates and their professions (e.g., positivism, cost-benefit analysis, etc.).

While researchers and research institutions were increasingly seen as authorities on homelessness in the mid-2000s, beginning in approximately 2000 there were increased barriers to advocacy participation for first wave advocates. My findings suggest that, in Ontario in the 1990s and early 2000s, there were a number of structural and local changes to policy, programming, and funding that shifted the landscape of homelessness advocacy
Following these changes, there was a decline in first wave advocacy and mounting conflicts between advocates in some parts Ontario, most specifically Toronto. Interviews with advocates suggest that these factors resulted in a fracturing of alliances amongst some advocates and between advocates and agencies. Several first wave interview participants felt they were increasingly punished and criminalized for advocacy participation during these years, resulting in employment precarity and poverty for some. These difficulties often occurred in tandem with the physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion caused by years of difficult advocacy work.

Importantly, these findings suggest that shifts in social problem frameworks and declines in advocacy may be crucially related to who has access to the resources and supports to engage in advocacy, and who is buffered from any negative consequences of advocacy involvement. As discussed in Chapter 4, second wave advocates were frequently of a higher class and often had stable jobs and/or financial security, likely reducing the stress of engaging in advocacy. Further, second wave advocates were more likely to be “insider claimsmakers,” meaning that they had direct or indirect connections to important institutional decision makers (Best, 1990). These connections undoubtedly increased opportunities to network with and influence key decision makers, some of whom may have been uncomfortable with the confrontational tactics employed by other advocates. While participants often attributed divisions over tactics to contrasting political ideologies, my research suggests that these divisions have also been structurally produced through advocates’ divergent experiences of the constraints on advocacy in a shifting political landscape. More specifically, this research suggests that many of the barriers and disincentives to advocacy have increasingly and disproportionately affected first wave advocates.

6.4.3 Shifts in Frameworks are Consistent with Neoliberalism

A further reason why the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework may have become dominant is because it fits well with dominant neoliberal approaches to governance in Canada. More specifically, this framework fits with neoliberal concerns about competitiveness, privatization, reductions in government spending, and the growth
of the third sector and private sector to address social problems (see also Lyon-Callo,
2004). As Steger and Roy (2010) explain,

Rather than operating along more traditional lines of pursuing the public good
(rather than profits) by enhancing civil society and social justice, neoliberals call
for the employment of governmental technologies that are taken from the world of
business and commerce: mandatory development of ‘strategic plans’ and ‘risk
management’ schemes oriented toward the creation of ‘surpluses’; cost-benefit
analyses and other efficiency calculations; the shrinking of political governance . . .
the setting of quantitative targets; the close monitoring of outcomes; the creation
of highly-individualized, performance-based work plans; and the introduction of
‘rational choice’ models that internalize and thus normalize market-oriented
behavior. (p. 12)

These emphases are extraordinarily in sync with the economic/scientific/bureaucratic
framework, even though some of the advocates who promote it see neoliberal policy as
responsible for creating homelessness. In this context, it is unsurprising that this
framework might be more amenable to government officials given its compatibility with
established neoliberal approaches to policy and its focus on fiscal savings. More
specifically, this framework, frequently tied to 10-year plans and Housing First, often
does not promote expensive investments such as increases to social assistance, the
creation of a national housing program, or increases to the minimum wage, all of which
were advocated for by first wave advocates. Undoubtedly the compatibility of this
framework with Canadian neoliberalism has positively impacted its dominance in recent
years.

6.5 Additional Findings and Study Contributions

There are several additional findings of this study that are worth highlighting here
for their contribution to the empirical and theoretical literature in this area. First, this
study’s findings suggest that natural history models or stage models can be very helpful
tools for capturing broad paradigmatic shifts in thinking that occur over the course of a
social problem’s “career” (in this case, the shift from the emergency/disaster framework
to the economic/scientific/bureaucratic framework). The process involved in attempting
to periodize a social problem requires that the researcher move back and forth between
different public arenas and different time periods in a way that can be very analytically
helpful for learning about a social problem. However, as discussed below, it is difficult to
capture some of the intricacies and subtleties of social problems through this method. Broadly, I would suggest that natural history models may function well as *methodological tools* rather than just analytic frameworks.

Second, this research has found that claimsmaking and tactical choices are not just strategic efforts to establish a social problem, but are also powerful expressions of personal, professional, and collective identities. My findings suggest that claimsmaking efforts may also be grounded in historical, class-based traditions. Given this, social problem studies would benefit from analyzing not just claims, but the interests, identities, and histories which structure claimsmakers’ motivations (see Archer, 2015, for similar findings).

Third, this study has offered the first conceptualization of “waves” of advocacy within homelessness movements or homelessness advocacy. Importantly, my findings suggest that while different political ideologies and theories of social change do create divisions within such movements, these divisions are also *structurally* produced by advocates disparate *class-based* experiences of the constraints and barriers to advocacy participation. This finding suggests that class should be a more central concern for social problem scholars who are analyzing claimsmaking within social movements.

### 6.6 Limitations and Areas of Future Research

Tracing the history of a social problem is a daunting task and necessarily involves several limitations. While many of the limitations of this study have been discussed previously chapters, this section will explore some over-arching limitations and areas in which further research is needed.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this study is the simplification entailed in providing a national portrait of a social problem that has unique histories in different parts of Canada. Offering a linear, stage-based model of the development of this social problem necessarily requires a marginalization of these vibrant local and regional histories. More pointedly, it is likely that different communities may have gone through particular stages at different times (e.g., the “peak” of this social problem may have occurred at different time in Toronto than in Calgary). Further, my stage model offers some evidence that stages often involve significantly opposing frameworks and clashing
trends, some of which extend into other stages. These findings complicate the dominant
approach to modeling the natural history of a social problem, which commonly frames
social problems as progressing along a singular, linear path. Given this, social problem
theory is in need of more complex modeling of the progression of social problems that
can account for multiple “paths” of progression, and multiple stages, occurring
simultaneously and diversely in different public arenas and geographic places.

Relatedly, a further limitation of this study is that some data collection and
analysis has been Toronto and Ontario-centric, particularly with respect to homelessness
advocacy. The vibrant history of the Quebec housing and homelessness movement, for
example, was not explored in detail, nor were the important social movements occurring
on the west coast of Canada. There are many activist groups in Vancouver, for example,
whose social justice work focuses on integrating efforts to end colonialism, patriarchy,
capitalism, border imperialism, and address injustices faced by people experiencing
homelessness (see Walia, 2013). Further research on such efforts is needed in order to
offer a more robust account of how the social problem of homelessness has developed in
Canada.

A further limitation of this study is the absence of perspectives from government
officials, politicians, and social service agency staff. Given that government officials and
politicians have been central to the development of homelessness as a social problem,
future research might explore how these claimsmakers view themselves as participating
in the development of this social problem. In particular, future researchers might explore
how these actors’ values, worldviews, and theories of social change influence their
claimsmaking choices. Given that this work primarily addressed two sectors in Joel
Best’s “iron quadrangle” (1999), future research should build upon this work in order to
offer a more comprehensive picture of the development of this social problem.

Similarly, while some of the advocates interviewed felt that parts of the social
service sector have resisted or deterred social change, it is unclear how social service
agency staff and executives conceptualize their role in the history of this social problem.
Developing a better understanding of why, how, and when these actors and organizations
engage in public claimsmaking, and the barriers they face to doing so, may provide
crucial insight into how stronger alliances might be built between advocates and the homelessness sector.

An area of study that would benefit from further exploration is the relationships between homelessness advocacy and other social movements in Canada, including movements grounded in identity politics. Researchers have argued that a key way in which claimsmakers can expand the reach of their claims is through *piggybacking* (when a problem is constructed as an instance of another problem) or *domain expansion* (when the content of a social problem is expanded to include new people or conditions) (Loseke, 2009, p. 61-62). Research is needed to determine whether and how Canadian homelessness advocates have engaged in piggybacking claims about homelessness on claims made in other social movements (e.g., LGBTQ2SA movements, Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, the Occupy Movement). Determining how, when, and why this has (or has not) occurred may shed light on inter-movement claimsmaking. While Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012) conclude that identity politics “has failed to arouse a universal (or even majority) basis for political and social action,” empirical research is needed in the Canadian context to determine what political gains can be made through the coordination of claimsmaking across movements of various kinds (including identity-based movements) (p. 168).

A fruitful area of future research might be a careful consideration of the differences and similarities between the development of homelessness in Canada compared to the United States. As shown in Chapter 5, many of this study’s findings mirror the findings of Wagner and Barton Gilman (2012), and a more critical comparison of each country’s construction of this problem may provide important insight into how discourses transgress national boundaries and are shaped by regional and national particularities.

Future research should also explore the roles that race has played in the construction of homelessness over time, particularly given the overrepresentation of people of colour in homeless populations in Canada (Belanger et al., 2013; Wente, 2000). It remains unclear why Canadian reporters have essentially erased race in their depictions of homelessness, or why the connections between race and homelessness have been largely absent in advocacy efforts. Similarly, there is limited research exploring the
histories of indigenous homelessness, or investigations into what a history of homelessness would look like from an indigenous perspective. Research contrasting indigenous and settler views on the social construction of homelessness may be a fruitful area of inquiry. Clarity on the intersection of homelessness and race is needed if we are to better understand how claimsmakers engage with, and may participate in, the socio-economic marginalization and erasure of people of colour who are homeless.

Given this study’s findings regarding the relevance of class to advocacy participation, research is needed to explore how class intersects with other identity locations (e.g., gender, sexuality) in ways which structure claimsmaking and advocacy participation. This study did not explore whether advocates felt their identities impacted how they engaged in claimsmaking or how their claims were received. Further, this study did not explore how cultural perceptions of class, race, gender, and other identities affect what is considered claimsmaking, and who is understood to be an “activist” or “advocate.” Several scholars have critiqued social problems theorists’ exclusive focus on public domains of debate, arguing that this focus marginalizes individuals who may be engaging in “social problems talk” but do not have access to public domains (Bogden & Lynch, 1993, p. 214; Gordon, 1993, p. 314; Loseke, 2003). In particular, Miller (1993) asserts the need to re-politicize the speech acts of marginalized individuals through broadening our definition of what constitutes “social problem talk” or “claimsmaking activity.” Insight into the process by which some people come to be defined as “activists” or “advocates” may help illuminate why particular claims become dominant in social movements.

Further, there are limitations to historisizing “homelessness” without historisizing conceptions of wealth and cultural norms about wealth accumulation. Cultural concepts such as “rich” and “poor” have historically developed in relation to each other, and thus give meaning to each other (see Scott, 1991). Understanding this co-constitutive relationship may help explain how claimsmaking about homelessness draws on “everyday knowledge” and “common knowledge” in ways which perpetuate or challenge capitalist or neoliberal ideologies.
6.7 Implications for Social Work

What does the social construction of homelessness have to do with social work? The efficacy of social work interventions is dependent on funds and infrastructure, both of which are predicated on the ability to convince others, mostly powerful others, that the social problem at hand requires action. The development of social work services, programs, and education is thus intimately tied to how we frame the issues we want to take action on, whether that be gender equity in the workplace, PTSD among war veterans, suicidality among LGBTQ2SI+ youth, or any number of other issues social work aims to address. Unfortunately, social work has produced very limited research on how framing work relates to the field of social work and how it impacts our ability to create a more just society. If we don’t have a better understanding how framing works, and how to be smart about framing efforts when advocating for social justice, we lose crucial opportunities to advocate for and with the communities we work with. In particular, because some of the communities we work with are highly stigmatized and occupy low status positions in our society, we need to be thinking about how to intelligently and collaboratively frame the struggles these communities experience in order to achieve justice for these groups. Developing both knowledge and skills in this area is a political necessity for the discipline of social work.

The findings of this study also have several specific implications for the field of social work. First, it is evident that some homelessness advocates in Ontario and beyond view social service agencies as resistant to change or as blocking advocacy and/or punishing advocates. While further research is needed to explore these issues, social workers in social service delivery or administration might consider how to better build bridges with local advocacy communities given both groups share some of the same goals. Second, my findings suggest that both social work research and practice is insufficient for creating broad social change unless it is actively and strategically mobilized (see also Wharf, 1990, for similar findings). Given this, social work education in Canada might benefit from offering greater opportunities for social work students to develop and practice advocacy skills. Third, it was evident in this study that social problem “ownership” can clearly impact how social problems are addressed in policy and programming. Given that social workers may be framed as “experts” or “owners” of the
problem of homelessness, it is essential that social workers develop strategies to use their status in ways that can amplify and support the voices of people who are homeless.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

**Interview Questions:**

1. **HISTORY OF HOMELESSNESS**
   1.1. What do you see as the major events that have impacted the way homelessness is understood in Canada today? I have compiled a brief list of some key events in the history of homelessness and homeless activism in Canada (attached). Are any of these events particularly important, or should any be removed? What else do you think should be on this list?

   1.2. What individuals/groups played important roles in defining “homelessness” when it first emerged?

   1.3. As part of my research thus far, I have looked at the extent and nature of Canadian media coverage of homelessness since 1980. As you can see on the attached graph, there were two peak periods of newspaper coverage: 1997-2001 and 2005-2009. I am trying to explain the jump in coverage during these periods. What is your perspective as to why coverage would increase during these periods?

2. **ACTIVISM AND FRAMING HOMELESSNESS**
   2.1. Why did you become passionate about addressing homelessness and how did you become involved in advocacy/activist efforts to address it?

   2.2. Thinking about the history of advocacy surrounding homelessness in Canada, what events/actions/campaigns do you think were especially effective? Why and how were they effective? What role did the media play in these cases?

   2.3. Do you think there were any advocacy events/actions/campaigns that were particularly ineffective, problematic, and/or harmed efforts to end homelessness in Canada? Can you explain your thoughts on these, what went wrong, and what the consequences of these were? What role did the media play in these cases?

   2.4. Deciding how to “frame” a social problem can be an important part of any group or individual’s advocacy efforts. How did you, or the organization(s) you were a part of, frame homelessness during important events/actions/campaigns? Why did you/your group frame the issue in this way? Were there internal conflicts over how to frame homelessness?

   2.5. Sometimes groups and individuals decide that how they are framing a particular issue is no longer effective at meeting their goals. During your years of
advocacy/activism, were there times when you decided you needed to re-frame homelessness in order to achieve your goals? If so, why and how have you changed your framing of homelessness in your advocacy over the years?

2.6. Thinking about the history of your efforts, were their times when you/your group’s framing of homelessness conflicted with other advocacy groups? Can you describe any incidents like this, how these conflicts played out, and any consequences?

2.7. Thinking about this history of advocacy in Canada, would you say that diverse advocacy groups with diverse tactics were able to work together, or were there divisions? Any examples?

2.8. What sorts of tactics have the municipal, provincial, and/or federal governments used in attempts to delegitimize your resistance or dissolve your resolve?

2.9. What do you see as the legacy of the work you / your organization(s) have done?

2.10. Do you think the struggle against homelessness in Canada has been organized in concert with other social or environmental struggles, or do you think it has largely been addressed as a singular issue? Why? How do you think this has impacted its efficacy?

2.11. Do you think there are particular tactics that lend themselves to a struggle against homelessness in Canada?

2.12. What are the impediments to galvanizing a broader and stronger movement against homelessness?

2.13. Based on your experience, what guidance would you share with people hoping to use activism or advocacy to end Canadian homelessness?

3. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF HOMELESSNESS
3.1. How have you seen public understandings of homelessness change over time? What do you think are the consequences of these changed understandings?

3.2. Do you think the public, or particular public or private sectors, have come to see homelessness as a normal part of Canadian society? If so, when and why do you think this occurred? Do you think any particular events or factors influenced this normalization?

4. DEFINITIONS AND SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS
4.1. A frequently cited definition of homelessness in the Canadian context is the definition offered by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012): Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a typology that includes 1) Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) At Risk of Homelessness, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

Do you think this definition adequately captures the nature of homelessness? Would you add, remove, or change anything?

4.2. The solution to homelessness is often framed as being a combination of housing, supports and income. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2012), for example, explains: The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required services as needed (supportive), in addition to income and supports.

Would you agree? Would you add, remove, or change anything?

4.3. In recent years, Housing First has become perhaps the most dominant approach proposed to solving homelessness in Canada. Can you share your perspectives on Housing First and what you think it can (or cannot) accomplish?

5. FUTURE OF HOMELESSNESS
5.1. Do you think homelessness in Canada is getting better or worse?

5.2. Thinking about the future of Canadian homelessness, what do you think are the biggest impediments to ending homelessness in Canada?

5.3. What do you think are the key factors to ending homelessness in Canada?

5.4. What do you think homelessness in Canada will look like in 10 years? 20 years? 50 years?
## Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Key Events</th>
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| 1983 | - Single Displaced Persons Project (SDPP) first voiced the demand for “housing not hostels” in its treatise, *The Case for Long-term Supportive Housing*.  
- Development of the Homes First Society (HFS), Toronto’s first “alternative” non-profit housing company. |
| 1984 | - Federal government cuts $217.8 million from non-profit, rural, and native housing programs, residential rehabilitation assistance programs, and housing research programs. |
| 1985 | - Death of Drina Joubert in Toronto. Following Joubert’s death, the Affordable Housing Not Hostels Coalition was created and pressed for a coroner’s inquest into Joubert’s death. |
| 1986 | - Affordable Housing Action Group established in Toronto. |
| 1987 | - The U.N. International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. |
| 1989 | - Rupert Rooming House fire in Toronto, causing the death of 10 people.  
- Development of StreetCity in Toronto. |
| 1990 | - Ontario Coalition Against Poverty is formed.  
| 1992 | - Government of Canada’s budget cut $665 million from spending on social housing.  
- The first *Street Health Report* was published, first of its kind in Canada. |
| 1993 | - Ontario govt begins freezing social assistance rates and reducing social housing construction.  
- *April 26*, the Government of Canada’s budget eliminates, as of 1994, any further spending on new social housing, ending a set of programs that had been in existence since the late 1940s. |
| 1995 | - Ontario government cancels the provincial housing program and 17,000 homes already approved for development. |
| 1996 | - Federal government announces plans to entirely abandon social housing by transferring administrative responsibility for existing federally-funded social housing units to provincial and territorial administration. Through the signing of provincial/federal agreements, federal funding will be eliminated entirely over a period of 10 -15 years.  
- Death of three homeless men in Toronto resulted in public outcry and a coroner’s inquest.  
- Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness is formed. |
| 1998 | - Ontario government transferred the funding responsibility for provincial social housing programs to municipalities.  
- *January*, Toronto’s Mel Lastman forms the Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force.  
- Formation of Toronto’s Tent City on Toronto’s port lands.  
- Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) established. TDRC releases *Homelessness in Toronto: State of Emergency Declaration*. TDRC’s launches campaign to have homelessness declared a “national disaster.” Three weeks later, Toronto City Council declares homelessness a national disaster and passes a motion to pressure other governments.  
- *November*, Homelessness declared a “national disaster” at FCM’s “Big City Mayor’s Meetings.” |
| 1999 | - The Ontario government passes the *Safe Streets Act*, outlawing “aggressive” panhandling.  
- Federal government off-loads administration and funding of social housing to Ontario |
through the signing of the federal/provincial agreement.
- Claudette Bradshaw appointed federal Minister of Homelessness, tours across Canada
- The Government of Canada launches the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The NHI funds the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), the Shelter Enhancement Program (SEP), and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP).
- OCAP Safe Park action.

2000
- June 15, OCAP’s “Queen’s Park Riot.” Demonstration to support the right of a delegation of homeless people to present their demands to the legislature.

2002
- Eviction of Tent City residents in Toronto.
- Federal Government signs agreement with Ontario under the Canada/Ontario Affordable Housing Program pledging $245 million or $25,000/unit over 5 years to build 10,500 units of “affordable housing.” The Provincial Government pledges only $2,000/unit, passing on responsibility for the other $23,000/unit of matching funds to municipalities & nonprofits.

2005
- February, Toronto’s Streets to Homes (S2H) program began, aiming to end street homelessness.

2007
- April, Federal government replaces NHI with Homelessness Partnership Strategy (HPS).
- Report by UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing in Canada.

2008
- First Canadian 10 year plan to end homelessness introduced in Alberta.
- Mental Health Commission of Canada’s At Home/Chez Soi research project launched.

2010
- TDRC Charter Challenge

2012
- First Canadian definition of homelessness by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network.

2013
- $600M for the five-year renewal of the HPS.
Appendix C

Representation of Homelessness in Canadian Newspapers in Four Major Cities, 1985 – 2013


Kaitlin Schwan, University of Toronto
21 May 2015
Data compiled by K. Schwan.
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Appendix D

Canadian Definition of Homelessness

DEFINITION

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a typology that includes 1) Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) At Risk of Homelessness, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one’s shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.

The problem of homelessness and housing exclusion refers to the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing. The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required services as needed (supportive), in addition to income and supports.

Numerous populations, such as youth, individuals from different ethno-cultural backgrounds, families, newcomers to Canada, people impacted by family violence, the elderly, etc., experience homelessness due to a unique constellation of circumstances and as such the appropriateness of community responses has to take into account such diversity. The over-representation of Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples), for instance, amongst Canadian homeless populations, necessitates the inclusion of their historical, experiential and cultural differences, as well as experiences with colonization and racism, in their consideration of homelessness.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) (formerly the Canadian Homelessness Research Network) established a working group with leaders from the areas of research, policy and practice, to develop, refine and test a new definition. The CHRN Working Group included: Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Director, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University; Carolann Barr, Executive Director, Raising the Roof; Anita Friesen, Senior Policy Advisor, Program Policy and Planning, Family Violence Prevention and Homeless Supports, Alberta Human Services; Bradley Harris, Social Services Consultant, The Salvation Army, Cherie Hill, Executive Director, National Aboriginal Housing Association; Dr. Kathy Kwasie-Burris, Associate Director, Health Sciences Council, University of Alberta; Dr. Bernie Pauly, Associate Professor, School of Nursing, University of Victoria; Bruce Pearce, President, Canadian Housing Renewal Association; Alina Turner; VP Strategy, Calgary Homeless Foundation; Allyson Marsolais, Project Manager, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.
### TYPOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPERATIONAL CATEGORY</th>
<th>LIVING SITUATION</th>
<th>GENERIC DEFINITION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. UNSHELTERED</strong></td>
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| This includes people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation. | 1.1 People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract | - Public space, such as sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, etc.  
- Private space and vacant buildings (squattting) |
|                      | 1.2 People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation | - Living in cars or other vehicles  
- Living in garages, attics, closets or buildings not designed for habitation  
- People in makeshift shelters, shacks or tents |

| **2. EMERGENCY SHELTERED** |                  |                    |
| This refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports, generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents an institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations and / or volunteers. | 2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless | These facilities are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Such short-term emergency shelters may target specific sub-populations, including women, families, youth or Aboriginal persons, for instance. These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. Some emergency shelters allow people to stay on an ongoing basis while others are short term and are set up to respond to special circumstances, such as extreme weather. |
|                      | 2.2 Shelters for individuals/families impacted by family violence |                    |
|                      | 2.3 Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods, etc. |                    |

| **3. PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** |                  |                    |
| This describes situations in which people, who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter, access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by government or the non-profit sector, or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation. | 3.1 Interim Housing for people who are homeless | Interim housing is a systems-supported form of housing that is meant to bridge the gap between unsheltered homelessness or emergency accommodation and permanent housing. |
|                      | 3.2 People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing | Often referred to as 'couch surfers' or the 'hidden homeless'; this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even strangers. |
|                      | 3.3 People accessing short term, temporary rental accommodations without security of tenure | In some cases people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc. |
|                      | 3.4 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements | People who may transition into homelessness upon release from:  
- Penal institutions  
- Medical / mental health institutions  
- Residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centers  
- Children's institutions / group homes |
|                      | 3.5 Accommodation / reception centers for recently arrived immigrants and refugees | Prior to securing their own housing, recently arrived immigrants and refugees may be temporarily housed while receiving settlement support and orientation to life in Canada. |

| **4. AT-RISK OF HOMELESSNESS** |                  |                    |
| Although not technically homeless, this includes individuals or families whose current housing situation is dangerously lacking security or stability, and so are considered to be at-risk of homelessness. They are living in housing that is intended for permanent human habitation, and could potentially be permanent (as opposed to those who are provisionally accommodated). However, as a result of external hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, a lack of other available and affordable housing, and / or the inappropriateness of their current housing (which may be overcrowded or does not meet public health and safety standards) residents may be "at risk" of homelessness. | 4.1 People at imminent risk of homelessness | - Those whose employment is precarious  
- Those experiencing sudden unemployment  
- Households facing eviction  
- Housing with transitional supports about to be discontinued  
- People with severe and persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use, and / or behavioural issues  
- Breakdown in family relations  
- People facing, or living in direct fear, of violence / abuse |
|                      | 4.2 Individuals and families who are precariousely housed | Those who face challenges that may or may not leave them homeless in the immediate or near future. CMHC defines a household as being in core housing need if its housing:  
- Fails below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards). |

For a more detailed typology of the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, go to: [www.homelesshub.ca/homelesssdefinition](http://www.homelesshub.ca/homelesssdefinition)
Appendix E

Information & Consent Form: History of Homelessness Study

Research Project:
Why Don’t We DO Something? The Societal Problematization of “Homelessness” and
the Relationship between Discursive Framing and Social Change

Investigators:
Kaitlin Schwan, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

This information & consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and
reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of
what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail
about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask.
Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.
Should you have further questions or concerns that I cannot address, you can contact my PhD
Supervisor, Dr. David Hulchanski, at david.hulchanski@utoronto.ca.

STUDY INFORMATION

What is the purpose of the study?
This study has its roots in trying to understand why the Canadian nation has been
unable or unwilling to end homelessness in our country. This involves understanding
how and why the status of homelessness as a social problem has declined significantly
since the late 1990s despite increases in the number of people without homes. In order
to explore this question, this study is tracing the history of the development of
“homelessness” as a social problem in Canada, as well as the role that activists and
advocates have had in creating social and political change with respect to homelessness.

What will I do?
This study will compare the perspectives of advocates regarding the role of advocacy in
contributing to positive change to address homelessness in Canada. You are being
asked to take part in an interview about your involvement in, and perspectives on, the
history of homelessness in Canada and how advocacy has impacted the trajectory of
this social problem. I estimate that this interview will take between one and two hours.
What are the risks and benefits of the study?
You may experience some feelings of distress as a result of discussing your experiences and memories of participating in advocacy efforts to address homelessness. The benefits of the study is that you will contribute to a study on the positive impacts that activism has had on homelessness policy and programming in Canada.

Is the study voluntary and confidential?
The decision to participate or not is voluntary and will be kept completely confidential. You can withdraw at any time prior to publication without consequence. You can choose whether you would like to keep your name confidential or not. Should you choose to remain confidential, all the information collected will be strictly confidential and your name will be replaced by a number code to ensure privacy. All information will be kept on a secure computer and access to the computer will be secured by use of specific passwords known only to me.

Results of the Study:
The results of the study will be made available to you in the form of a digital copy of an executive summary and a full copy of the dissertation.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I, ______________________________, understand that Kaitlin Schwan, a PhD Candidate at the University of Toronto, is conducting a study about the history of homelessness in Canada and the role of advocacy in creating social and political change. I understand that I will complete an interview about my perspectives on the history of advocacy addressing homelessness. Any risks or benefits that might arise out of my participation have been explained to my satisfaction. Any questions I have asked about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that my decision to participate or not will be kept completely confidential. I further understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. I understand that information collected for this study is strictly confidential and that all data will be securely stored.

☐ I consent to have my name used in Kaitlin Schwan’s dissertation

☐ I do NOT consent to have my name used in Kaitlin Schwan’s dissertation

I, ______________________________, hereby consent to participate.

(Please print first and last name)

___________________________________
Signature of participant

___________________________________
Date

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