



Sourcing homelessness: How journalists use sources to frame homelessness

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Abstract

This article describes a content and qualitative analysis of quotations from sources in Canadian newspaper items on homelessness. Experts dominate as sources on homelessness. Homeless people are not completely deprived of a voice, but are limited to the devalued voice of experience. Quotes from homeless people themselves promote a narrative of homelessness that marginalizes the people who experience it and contributes to their social exclusion.

Keywords

citizenship, content analysis, framing, homelessness, news sources

As is well established (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Tuchman, 1978; Van Dijk, 1991), journalists do much more than simply report news. They also frame and interpret news and, in doing so, shape public perceptions of issues and events. This article is concerned with how journalists frame and interpret homelessness in newspaper reporting on this topic, and specifically how the sources that are called upon by reporters lead to a particular selection of perspectives that are available to readers. As Silverstone points out (2007), this is no neutral or innocent matter. He identifies the media as a moral force in society and says that at the interface of the media with the life world, the media as a moral force become most relevant, acting as a door to the world, daily presenting categories of difference, sameness, otherness. The media are ‘where the world in its otherness becomes most visible’ (2007: 10). This makes it essential to study the media to understand how this sense of ‘otherness’ is accomplished and to look for ways it might be interrupted in order to

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promote the social inclusion and citizenship of marginalized others. If, as a number of scholars suggest (e.g. Isin and Wood, 1999; Silverstone, 2007), the media have become a shared civic space and an important site of public debate in society, participation in society depends on being able to find a voice in the media. The ways in which and the degree to which homeless people are quoted in newspaper reporting of homelessness thus have implications for those who experience homelessness. Quotes from homeless people themselves promote a narrative of homelessness that marginalizes the people who experience it and contributes to their social exclusion.

Literature review

A number of studies have examined newspaper coverage of homelessness. Buck et al. (2004) surveyed 30 years of coverage of homelessness in four major US newspapers. They found that coverage increased dramatically during the 1980s, peaking in about 1987 with an average of almost one item per day in, for example, the *New York Times*. Over the next 10 years coverage declined almost as quickly as it had increased, and then remained fairly steady into the early 2000s. Contrary to the simplistic view that coverage of homelessness tends to be negative, they found both negative and positive coverage, and contend that coverage became more varied and sophisticated during the period of their study. Bunis et al. (1996) examined coverage in four major US and British news outlets and found that coverage increases significantly during the traditional holiday season of November and December – something they relate to the cultural patterning of sympathy in which gestures of charity and goodwill follow an annual cycle. Widdowfield (2001) looked at coverage in five major British national daily newspapers and found that homeless people are represented in three main ways: as ‘other’, as criminals, and as victims. She concluded that media fail to present a full enough story about homelessness. Schneider et al. (2010) examined newspaper coverage of homelessness in four Canadian papers and found that, in spite of much positive coverage of homelessness in general and homeless people in particular, an overarching narrative of regulation and control threads through the coverage.

These studies have established a base line of information on the amount and content of news coverage of homelessness. However, they have not attended to the degree to which the perspectives of homeless people themselves are included in such coverage. The present study focuses on to what extent and in what ways the voice of homeless people appears in newspaper coverage of homelessness. There is some evidence that homeless people themselves consider their situation and their perspective to be inadequately represented in the media (Reynalds, 2006). Even in street newspapers (i.e. newspapers sold on the streets by people who are homeless), an apparently ideal medium for presentation of the voices of people who have experienced homelessness, limited space is available for this voice (Torck, 2001). People who are homeless typically have limited access to resources (Cress and Snow, 1996), either cultural or material, for gaining access to the media (Greenberg et al., 2006).

The use of sources is a key component in story construction (e.g. Tuchman, 1978). Journalists’ ability to choose who speaks (or does not speak) in news coverage enables them to frame news without appearing to do so. The use of apparently independent and

authoritative sources enables journalists to produce a sense that they are merely conveying the opinions of others while in fact shaping the story through their choices of both sources and specific quotations (Ross, 2007). As Van Dijk says, quotations allow the 'insertion of subjective interpretation, explanations, or opinions about current news events, without breaking the ideological rule that require(s) the separation of facts from opinions' (1991: 152). In addition, as Ross points out, 'Who is invited to speak as commentators on and in the news says crucially important things about who "counts" in society' (2007: 454) and about whose voices have legitimacy.

Martin, drawing on the work of Knight (1988), describes three categories, or 'tiers', of sources that journalists can be seen to draw on. The first of these is 'experts', those associated with the 'professional and managerial culture of society's chief political, economic, intellectual and control institutions' (Martin, 1997: 243). These are what Hall et al. (1978) call the 'primary definers'¹ of topics. They 'define essential aspects' of events, issues, and situations and tell audiences what these events are really about. Even when expert sources do not actually appear in a particular item, they form an integral part of journalists' newsgathering networks and provide essential background information (Boyce, 2006).

The second tier consists of secondary sources – 'citizens' or ordinary people who typically are featured as a source of emotional or moral reaction to an event or situation. They normally express personal opinions or talk only about how they feel about a situation or event. The final tier is people who, according to Martin, are those who are excluded altogether from the news even though the event or issue may impinge on them in some way. They often come from the extremes of class structure and may have experienced the problem themselves (1997). People who have experienced homelessness fall into this third category, although, as I show, they are not excluded from the news altogether.

In reporting on marginalized groups, each of these kinds of sources appears in news items in typical ways. Van Dijk (1991), for example, showed that minority ethnic groups were quoted much less frequently than whites, even if there were minority 'experts' available. Teo (2000) showed that in reporting about crime, the police perspective was presented in detail and supported by frequent quotations, while the activities of criminals were presented only from the perspective of the police or some other 'expert'. Bullock (2008) found that in reporting of domestic violence, journalists relied primarily on official sources, omitting context that might have been provided by other kinds of sources. Others (e.g. Davis, 1985) have shown that the higher the social status of the speaker, the more verbatim the quotation is likely to be.

The use of sources and quotations enables journalists to call on the voices of their various sources to frame stories in particular ways. As Entman says, 'To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (1993: 52). Frames therefore define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. They do this by highlighting some kinds of information over others, drawing attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring others, making some ways of thinking about a topic more salient to audiences than other possible ways. McLeod and Detenber (1999) suggest that frames provide guides for journalists in selecting information and sources

and assembling 'facts' and quotations into news stories. Although some frames are likely to dominate (e.g. Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992), a news item can present a variety of competing frames, and a series of articles on a particular topic might present a range of frames.

In the present study I examine one year of newspaper coverage of homelessness in three newspapers, focusing specifically on the quotations from sources that appear in the coverage. Although homeless people are by no means excluded as sources in newspaper coverage, they are permitted a very limited voice in the news. They are quoted speaking primarily about their own experiences, typically in ways that promote their continued marginalization and undermine their potential for social inclusion and citizenship.

Method

Items from three Canadian broadsheet newspapers were collected for the period 1 August 2007 to 31 July 2008: two city papers, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Vancouver Sun*, and one national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*.² These papers were selected to compare coverage in the largest circulation daily papers in two large Western Canadian cities and to compare city papers with the national press. Although newspaper circulation is popularly understood to be declining, in fact, in Canada, newspaper readership (both traditional paper and online) is increasing (NADbank, 2009). Newspapers are still an important medium of public communication and there is some evidence that news in the press is better recalled and regarded as 'better' than television news (e.g. Bruhn Jensen, 1986; Robinson and Levy, 1986).

Each newspaper was searched in the database Pro Quest using the following search terms: homeless*, vagran*, squatt*, street pe*, panhandl*, affordable housing, subsidized housing, social housing, and NIMBY (not in my back yard). As the focus of the study was on how journalists use sources in reporting on homelessness, the items selected for analysis included only those in which homelessness was the main topic and in which sources were quoted. Editorials, columns, and letters to the editor were therefore not included. Also excluded were items about homeless pets, homelessness because of natural disasters, artistic works about homelessness, and items that focused primarily on affordable housing if they did not mention homelessness. This resulted in a total of 270 items in the three papers in which a total of 749 sources were identified.

A coding frame consisting of a set of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories was constructed based on coding information available in previous studies of media coverage of homelessness and a series of trial coding sessions carried out by the author and two research assistants using newspaper items collected for the study. Definitions for all terms that appeared in the coding scheme were also developed. After coding began, inter-coder reliability tests were conducted at regular intervals using two of the items being coded that day. Inter-coder reliability averaged 90 percent. Items were coded for various technical aspects of their appearance in the paper: month of publication, word count, type of item (hard or soft news), location in the paper, and word count of quotations in items. Quoted speakers were identified by the status attributed to them in the items, for example, homeless person, agency representative, government representative,

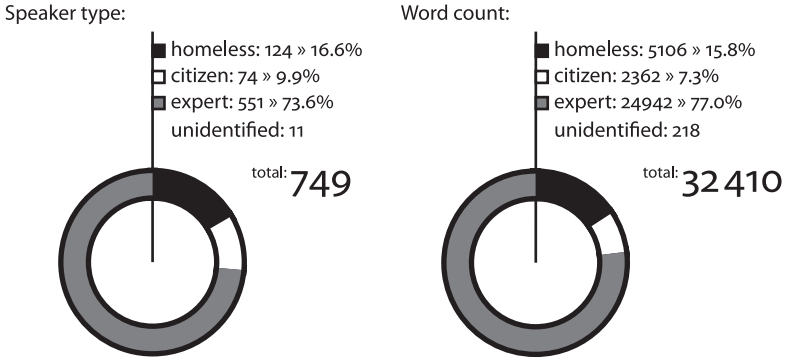


Figure 1. Speakers and word counts in articles about homelessness

private citizen. We used Martin’s (1997) three-part classification of journalists’ sources (discussed above) to condense speakers into three categories: expert, citizen, and homeless.³ While sources are often paraphrased as well as quoted directly, we were unable to achieve inter-coder agreement on paraphrases, so have not included these in the study. The quotations themselves were coded for a range of characteristics including the topics mentioned, solutions referred to, and frames invoked. The coding frame is available on request from the author. Data were analyzed using SPSS, a statistical software package for the analysis of quantitative data. A small qualitative analysis was also conducted to illustrate the quantitative findings.

Results

In our sample of 270 articles, 105 were in the *Calgary Herald*, 89 in the *Vancouver Sun* and 76 in the *Globe and Mail*. The number of sources in the articles ranged from one (35.1%) to 16 (one article in the *Globe and Mail*), with 86.9 percent of articles quoting four or fewer sources. There were some small differences between the three newspapers; however, these were relatively minor, so the aggregated results are described for the whole data set rather than being broken down by the individual newspaper. Although citizen or men-on-the street sources appear in the data, the analysis focuses on the degree to which expert sources and homeless people are quoted.

Journalists rely heavily on experts in constructing stories about homelessness. Overall, experts of various kinds (including government officials, agency representatives, corporate representatives, healthcare practitioners, and academics) were quoted 551 times (73.6%), homeless people 124 times (16.5%), and citizens 74 times (9.9%) (Figure 1). Homeless people were quoted slightly more often in the *Globe and Mail* than in the other two papers. The word counts of the quotes, however, indicate that expert speakers are given more space when they are quoted than either homeless people or citizens: 77 percent for experts, 15.8 percent for homeless people, and 7.3 percent for citizens. This was consistent across all three papers, so although a larger number of homeless people were quoted in the *Globe and Mail*, they were afforded exactly the same amount of space as in the other papers.

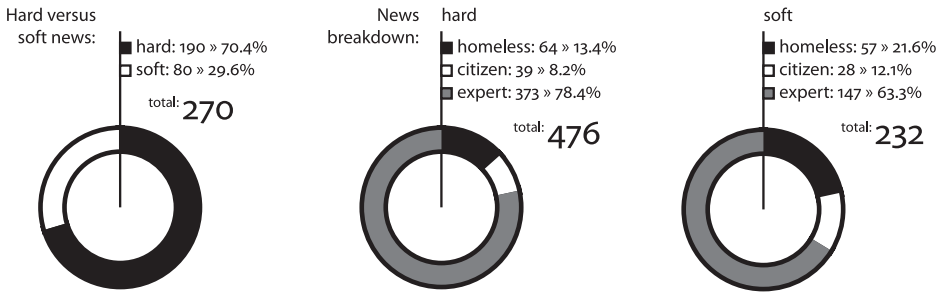


Figure 2. Hard news articles vs soft news articles about homelessness

Homeless people are quoted more frequently in soft news than in hard news (Figure 2). The distinction between hard and soft news is a somewhat problematic one and it can be difficult to assign items to these categories. Generally, items that report on or respond to specific events are referred to as hard news; items that offer human interest stories are referred to as soft news. In our sample, 190 (70.4%) items were hard news, and 80 (29.6%) were soft news. In hard news, 78.4 percent of quotes come from experts; 13.4 percent come from homeless people. In soft news, 63.3 percent come from experts; 21.6 percent come from homeless people. Soft news items, which are more likely to ‘tell the story’ of specific homeless individuals than hard news items, draw more heavily on quotes from homeless people, although still quote homeless people less than a quarter of the time.

The data were coded for the topics that were spoken about (Figure 3). These included such topics related to homelessness as government programs and activities, non-profit agency programs and activities, homeless activities, police activities, and corporate activities. On all the topics coded for, experts were quoted more often than homeless people. This is not surprising given that experts are quoted so much more often than homeless people. The only topic on which homeless people were permitted a significant degree of comment is homelessness itself. For example, on the topic of non-profit agency activities, 86.1 percent of quotes come from experts; 10.9 percent come from homeless people. On the topic of homelessness, 62.4 percent of quotes come from experts; 27.7 percent come from homeless people. Homeless people are also quoted speaking about homelessness itself significantly more often in soft news than in hard news – 36.6 percent in soft news and 22.8 percent in hard news. So although experts still dominate in speaking about homelessness itself, the voice of homeless people is more evident on this topic than on any other.

Comments on homelessness were broken down into two categories: descriptions of the personal reality of homelessness (for example, a homeless single mother describing a typical evening in her and her children’s lives) and descriptions of the general reality of homelessness (for example, a general statement about how many homeless single mothers there are and how hard life is for them) (Figure 4). Homeless people offered 54.5 percent of the comments on the personal reality of homelessness and only 12.6 percent of comments on the general reality of homelessness. By contrast, experts offer 31.5 percent of comments on the personal reality and 79.7 percent on the general reality of homelessness. In part this may be because government officials and agency representatives are

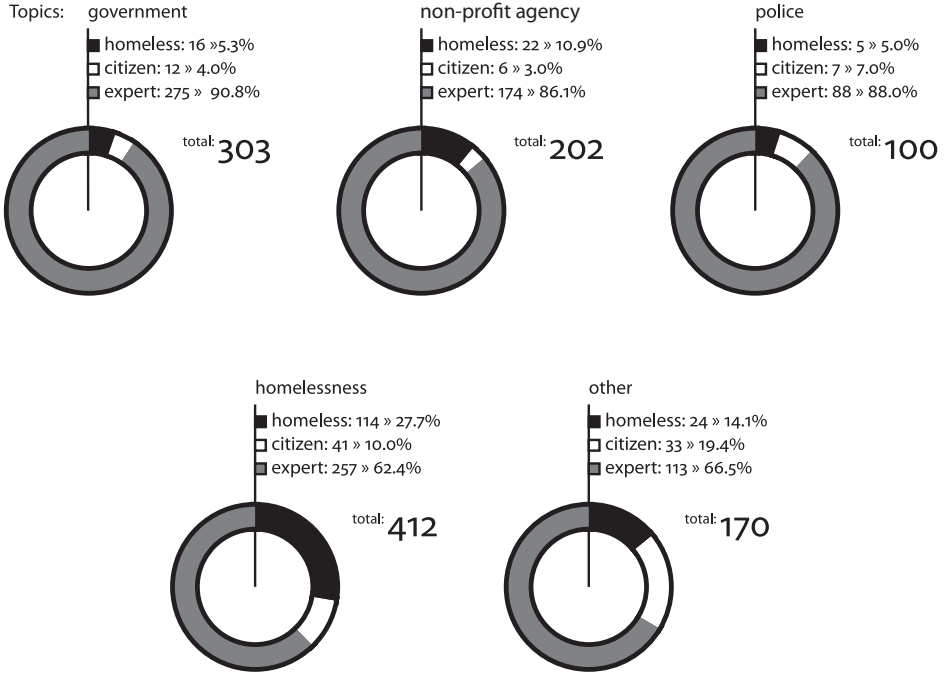


Figure 3. Topics discussed in articles about homelessness

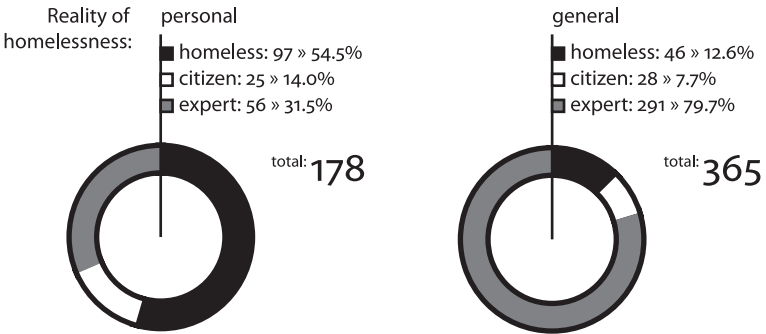


Figure 4. Reality of homelessness in articles

constrained by the requirement for confidentiality from talking about specific individuals or their experiences. Nevertheless, experts are the dominant speakers about homelessness in general. Homeless people are quoted speaking about their own experiences but rarely quoted speaking about homelessness in general.

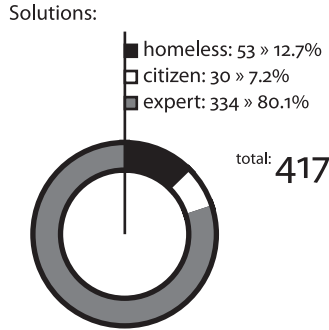


Figure 5. Solutions mentioned in articles

Relatively few quotes in the data set addressed the causes of homelessness, but when causes are mentioned, homeless people are more likely to be quoted identifying individual causes for their homelessness (for example, personal circumstances or bad luck) and experts are more likely to be quoted citing societal causes. A significant number of quotes about solutions appeared in the data set. Only 12.7 percent of quotes about solutions come from homeless people, while 80.1 percent come from experts (Figure 5). The solutions homeless people are quoted mentioning are primarily individual (33.3%) and non-profit agency solutions (37.3%). That is, they are quoted attributing their problems to individual issues that they can or should be assisted in addressing by charitable or non-profit agency agencies. In contrast, experts are quoted suggesting that solutions should come from government action (47.4%) and to a lesser extent agency action (32.4%).

This may be because the experiences of homeless people bring them into frequent contact with agencies and only to a much lesser extent with governments. The attempts at solutions that they have come into contact with are associated with non-profit agencies. Even when solutions are supported, initiated, or mandated by governments, they are typically administered by non-profit agencies (for example, in Calgary's 10-year plan to end homelessness, the housing first project supported by various levels of government is administered by a community health agency). However, it may also be that when they are invited by journalists to tell their individual stories, any solutions that they mention are solutions to their individual problems, rather than solutions to the problem of homelessness in general. In any case, even if they do speak to journalists about societal causes and more general solutions, the quotes chosen by journalists restrict them to commentary on individual causes and solutions. As already established, homeless people are quoted speaking about their experiences, not speaking about homelessness in general, so it is not surprising that they are quoted speaking primarily about individual solutions.

The frames that can be identified in the quotes support this (Figure 6). Iyengar distinguishes between episodic frames and thematic frames. Episodic frames 'depict concrete events that illustrate issues', while thematic frames 'present collective or general evidence' (1991: 14). Although episodic frames were invoked much less frequently (311 times) in the quotes than thematic frames (1661 times), of the episodic frames, the

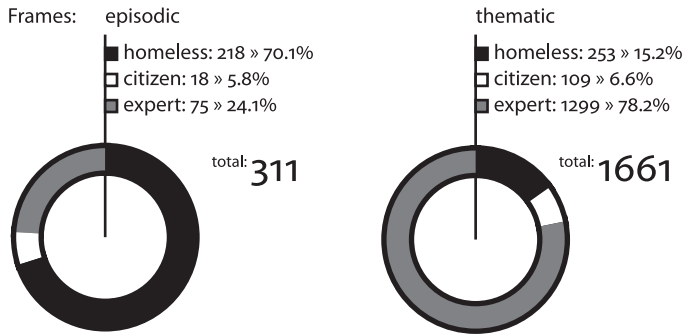


Figure 6. Frames in articles about homelessness

majority were invoked by homeless people (70.1%). As already established, they are quoted primarily speaking about their personal experiences. In contrast, of the thematic frames, 78.2 percent were invoked by experts.

In his research on episodic and thematic frames, Iyengar (1991) found that when television news framed poverty episodically, viewers tended to assign responsibility for the problem to individuals. A closer look at some of the quotes from homeless people in the data for the current study shows how the episodic frames in those quotes promote a view of homelessness as a matter of individual responsibility. Three typical kinds of quotes associated with personal stories appear in the data: stories of the hardships of homelessness, inspirational stories of change and redemption, and stories that demonstrate that ‘we are not all bad’. All of these kinds of quotes are something of a double-edged sword, presenting the apparent ‘realities’ of homelessness while at the same time showing homelessness to be an individual rather than a societal problem and thereby undermining the potential for social inclusion of homeless people.

Personal stories in which people are quoted describing the hardships of homelessness might generate sympathy for the troubles of homeless people, but they also typically highlight aspects of homeless people’s lives, either their own lives or the lives of those around them, that the domiciled audience fears or at the very least does not condone. For example, Bill is quoted describing his life of bottle-picking. He has a new cart that he found at the bottle depot, after the police took his old one because it was blocking the sidewalk while he slept nearby. ‘They wake you up at six o’clock [in the morning] and if you don’t wake up the first time, you get a \$150 fine ... I’ve got \$4000 in fines. How am I going to pay that?’ (Langdon, 2008). The following quotes come from an item about crowding in a homeless shelter. ‘Someone just punched me in the nose for no reason.’ And later in the item, referring to the situation in the shelter, ‘It’s highly volatile’ (Wilton, 2008). Or, referring to a blanket he has scrounged, a man is quoted saying, ‘They’ll come and steal it from you’ (Chapman, 2007). Another describes being evicted from her apartment because she was ‘hooked on heroin’. Referring to her relationship with a particular policeman, she says ‘Stuart has arrested me a couple of times, but he is always nice’ (Culbert, 2008). In these quotes, people describe themselves or others as engaged in violent, marginal, or outright illegal behaviours that are not socially acceptable and contribute to a sense that these people are unworthy of full membership in society.

Inspirational stories of personal redemption typically quote a homeless person describing the changes in his or her life as a result of receiving help from a non-profit agency. The following quotes come from two former homeless drug addicts describing themselves before they received help. 'I was out of control, I was wasting away' (Pynn, 2008). 'I was a crackhead. I was in psychosis and fighting people for no reason' (Shore, 2007). In telling their stories, they are quoted ascribing their homelessness to personal deficits that they have worked, with agency help, to overcome. These inspirational stories often close with a final quote such as these: 'I've said, "You're not going to get the best of me." I'm going to get out of here one way or another ... Right now I have to focus on me' (Cryderman, 2007). 'I have the strength and courage and understanding that if I create a life for myself, my children will be able to come back into it and I'll be able to come back into their lives' (Komarnicki, 2008). 'I had kind of accepted myself as a homeless person. I was into self-destruct mode ... There's a lot of things I'm grateful for. I would still be spiraling. It's [the non-profit agency program] turned everything around' (Zickefoose, 2007). In each of these quotes, and in the items in which they appear, the speakers identify individual issues, such as addictions and mental illnesses, rather than larger social structural forces, that led them into homelessness, and that they themselves have to work to overcome to become full members of society.

In the next three examples speakers claim not to be like other homeless people. In these quotes, the speakers use a discursive strategy known as distancing (Snow and Anderson, 1987) that also works to reinforce negative perceptions of homeless people. In an item on panhandling, a panhandler describes her difficulties after a person identified as a panhandler committed a murder in her community. 'Because of what happened, people are terrified of us. They roll up their windows when I walk by. We are not all bad' (Andreatta, 2007). In an item about street newspapers, a paper seller is quoted saying, 'I detest panhandlers. I am not panhandling. I'm working' (Glascock, 2008). Another is quoted saying, 'I'm somebody now. I'm not just some person lying in the back alleys, sitting there putting a needle in my arm' (Ghandi, 2008). In all of these examples, the speakers distance themselves from negative characteristics typically associated with homeless people. However, in doing so they both acknowledge and legitimize the negative perceptions of homeless people that a domiciled audience is likely to have. That is, the people in these quotes speak not only about themselves; they also speak about homeless people generally, reinforcing a sense that homelessness is a result of personal deficits that they but not others are working to overcome. All three kinds of quotations thus reinforce the idea that homeless people are not worthy of full citizenship.

Discussion

The data analyzed for this study illuminate a number of ways in which the use of sources in newspaper coverage of homelessness, particularly quotations from homeless people themselves, works to marginalize homeless people. The use of only certain kinds of quotations from homeless people and the extensive use of expert sources contribute to the production of a problematic larger social narrative of homelessness in which homeless people are positioned as 'other', setting up an opposition between 'them' and 'us' that promotes the social exclusion of homeless people. Journalists may believe that in 'telling

someone's story' they can generate sympathy and promote more positive public perceptions of homeless people. However, sympathy and charity are in themselves 'othering', as it is only 'we', domiciled people, who can offer 'them', homeless people, sympathy and charity, not the other way around. Journalistic accounts that focus on the dire straits of particular individuals promote a view that factors such as mental illness or personal incompetence push people into homelessness. People are thus personally responsible for their homelessness, rather than, for example, stigmatization and poor availability of adequate treatment for mental illness, or lack of fair wage employment and reasonably priced housing. These accounts therefore work to depoliticize homelessness as a social issue and let society off the hook for making major structural changes that might address the problems of poverty and homelessness.

These accounts also undermine the rights of homeless people to full citizenship. One of the challenges of thinking about citizenship in relation to homelessness is that most (though certainly not all) homeless people want to change their situations so that they are no longer homeless. That is, they want to leave the group rather than change the social identity of the group. Taylor's discussion (1997) of the politics of recognition offers a way to think about this challenge. He points to two opposing threads within the politics of recognition. On the one hand it includes a politics of universalism and equal dignity that requires acknowledgement that all human beings are equally worthy of and have equal right to the benefits and inclusion of citizenship. On the other hand it includes a politics of difference requiring acknowledgement of each individual or group's right to a unique identity, distinct from everyone else. A citizenship discourse in which group differences are celebrated and valued does not really fit well with discussions of homelessness. However, a politics of recognition in which every person is of equal moral worth and is entitled to participation in public discourse on an equal footing with others points to a strategy for realization of citizenship (Fraser, 2000).

Homeless people do not participate in public discourse on an equal footing with others. The extensive use of expert sources, particularly in hard news items, makes experts the key shapers of the narrative of homelessness. Homeless people themselves are displaced from the larger societal story of homelessness. Experts are the intermediaries who speak for and about homelessness, translating for readers the 'facts' about the 'experiences' of homeless people. Experts thus work as filters to separate homeless people from their own experience by effacing their public voice. This sets up an opposition between those who are entitled to speak about homelessness, 'experts', and those who are spoken about, 'them', whose stories are there primarily to give the experts something to comment on.

Homeless people are not completely deprived of a voice, but they are relegated to a very specific kind of voice. They are quoted more extensively in soft news items and speak primarily about their experiences of homelessness. They rarely offer abstract understandings of or solutions to the problem of homelessness. As a number of scholars (e.g. Conquergood, 2002; Harding, 1991) have noted, experiential ways of knowing are in general valued far less than abstract ways of knowing. Thus the way of speaking in news coverage afforded to homeless people is a devalued one, one that places them in the background of discourse on the problem of homelessness. In part, suggests Eliasoph, the fault lies with non-'expert' speakers, who tend to emphasize emotion when talking

to reporters, and with journalists, who quote them in ‘overly narrow, passionate, devalued professions of self-interest’ (1998: 217). Thus when journalists interview homeless people as possible sources for their stories, they come away with overly emotional statements from which they then quote only the details of the personal experience of homelessness.

Another example of how quotes from homeless people themselves work to marginalize them is the way in which homeless people are quoted commenting on the activities of non-profit agencies. They are quoted numerous times making positive comments about charitable agencies (for example, how much a particular agency has helped them), but only once in the data set is a homeless person quoted saying something negative about an agency. As Stern (1986) points out, an expectation of gratitude on the part of recipients accompanies the provision of charity. While charity recipients may not always feel grateful, they are typically constrained from expressing any other sentiments by their need for services (Schneider, 2010). It may be that homeless people feel this constraint and do not typically say negative things about agencies to journalists, or it may be that journalists know of this expectation of gratitude and do not want to jeopardize their informants’ access to services. Whatever the case, the fact that homeless people are quoted in newspapers saying only positive things about agencies is another example of the way in which homeless people are ‘other’ – agency representatives can comment on them, but they cannot comment on agency representatives in any meaningful way. Thus, items in which journalists use quotes from homeless people to tell the story of non-profit agency successes also work to further marginalize homeless people and deny them full citizenship.

While both experts and homeless people are quoted framing homelessness as ‘another world’, something quite apart from what domiciled people experience, homeless people are quoted doing so in larger proportion than experts. In these quotes homeless people can be seen to invoke themselves as ‘other’, people who do not belong to normal society. Frames that might offer an alternative view of homelessness and assert the right of homeless people to invoke this alternative are seldom used by journalists. For example, the idea of homelessness as a ‘lifestyle’, that is a reasonable and workable living arrangement that individuals have a right to choose, appears almost never in quotes from expert sources, and only occasionally in quotes from homeless people. This is a frame that might put homeless people in a group with others who have chosen to throw off the shackles of a conventional middle-class life (itinerant ski instructors, for example), people to whom ‘we’ grant the right to make such choices and might even sometimes envy. This may or may not be a perspective held by homeless people, but it is one that would put homelessness in a very different light, one in which the people who experience it are not pathetic incompetent individuals but active choice-making individuals, just like domiciled people. This would immediately change the view of homeless people to one that would acknowledge their right to social inclusion.

However, it would be naïve to suggest that journalists could simply report differently on homelessness and in so doing promote the social inclusion of homeless people. A number of factors conspire to make it very difficult for journalists to write differently. News coverage has been described as a form of storytelling (e.g. Bird and Dardenne, 1988; Zelizer, 1990). Indeed, journalists themselves introduce their work as story – for example, when the news anchor tells the audience that they will be ‘really interested in

this next story'. But news is not just a series of individual stories; rather, individual stories constitute and are constituted by a larger ongoing narrative, one that both journalists and readers rely on to frame and interpret individual stories. The sources and quotes journalists use both tap into and continue this larger narrative. The ongoing narrative of homelessness provides a set of expectations not only among audiences but also among journalists themselves and among others in the institutional settings within which news reports are produced, such as editors and owners. Journalists are constrained by these expectations and cannot just write whatever they want.

Before journalists start to write, before interviews with sources are conducted, stories are shaped by journalists' own ideas or by editorial direction as to what the item is about. Interviews are then conducted to fill slots in items. As someone who has on occasion been interviewed for news reports, I have been frustrated by journalists' attempts to get me to provide a particular answer for an item they already have in mind, rather than being willing to hear my thoughts about what the story is or could be. Genre expectations of newspaper stories also encourage journalists to use sources in specific ways. For example, many of the items in the data set open and close with either a description of a homeless person's situation or a quote from a homeless person. The rest of the item typically quotes a number of expert sources commenting on the situation of that homeless person or on homelessness generally. This standard pattern can be found in items on many topics, driven in part by journalists' need to establish the what story is about and to draw readers in before calling on expert sources to frame the story. It is also driven by the valued journalistic principle of balance. However, in items on homelessness, balance is achieved not by the use of several homeless sources, but by the use of two or more expert sources. Homeless people do not provide balance, only material for the commentary of others.

Homeless people themselves participate in the maintenance of the ongoing problematic narrative of homelessness. The fact that the frames that maintain this narrative are so readily available to journalists in the speech of homeless people is probably not coincidental. Homeless people may not have homes but they are not stupid. They have been trained by what currently appears in the media to have as good an idea of the social narrative about themselves as people who do have homes (e.g. Hodgetts et al., 2006) and speak in this 'borrowed discourse' (Champaign, 1999: 51) when speaking to journalists. They may also believe that generating sympathy for themselves by telling stories of dire need will have a positive effect, without understanding the negative implications of such stories that I have highlighted here. This provides journalists with ample material for shaping into the stories that maintain the larger story of homelessness, and makes it very difficult for journalists to portray homeless people in any other voice.

So routine has the strategy of inclusion and exclusion become that it is naturalized, part of common sense. However, as my analysis makes clear, the taken-for-granted conventions of media representation in which the other ('them') can comment on their own experience but not on the experience of the majority ('us') offers a way to think about how to change coverage. Silverstone (2007) offers an example that he describes as a breaking of this media taboo: an Afghan blacksmith appears on western television news commenting on the West's involvement in Afghanistan. Silverstone asserts that the journalist's decision to give the blacksmith space to speak not just about his own experience but about the activities of Westerners offers an opportunity for connection and discovery

of common humanity. Transgression of norms of media representation requires a rethinking by journalists of their choices about who they select to quote, what topics the sources are quoted speaking about, and how stories are assembled. It requires that homeless people be given the opportunity to comment on us, just as we experts and domiciled people comment on them.

Full citizenship and social inclusion means having the same right to comment on political and social problems and to participate in public discourse on homelessness as other members of society. It means having the same right to be seen as active citizens who frame their own experiences and participate in understanding causes of and generating solutions to their problems. Journalists have the opportunity to contribute to making this a reality by acknowledging their role in promoting a particular narrative of homelessness and a particular version of homeless people and by including homeless people differently in their news stories. This might be just one small step in addressing the problem of homelessness, but as so many scholars have pointed out (e.g. Hall, 1997), representations are the means through which reality is constituted. By quoting homeless people as legitimate speakers about the problem of homelessness, as experts on the topic of homelessness, not just victims of homelessness, journalists can have a vitally important role in changing representations of homeless people and thereby in changing the realities of homeless people's participation as full members in society with the same rights to membership and social inclusion as domiciled people.

Notes

- 1 The notion of primary definers has been critiqued by, for example, Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994. Nevertheless these scholars acknowledge that journalistic practices do generally work to promote the views of authoritative sources as the 'facts of the matter' (Ericson et al., 1989).
- 2 Weekday circulation of the three papers in 2007: *Calgary Herald* 125,000; *Vancouver Sun* 165,000; *Globe and Mail* 323,000. Source: Canadian Newspaper Association.
- 3 The term 'citizen' is used in Martin's (1997) scheme as a shorthand to refer to ordinary people and man-on-the street sources. Homeless people are of course also citizens, but are categorized as homeless for the purpose of this analysis.

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