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NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF HOMELESSNESS:  
A TEMPORAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

by

Sarah Werman

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

of

MASTERS OF SCIENCE

in

Sociology

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2019

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## ABSTRACT

Newspaper Representations of Homelessness:  
A Temporal Comparative Analysis

By

Sarah Werman

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Leon Anderson, PhD  
Department: Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology

This research focuses on diagnostic framing of the social problem of homelessness in two newspapers in a major city in the intermountain United States. I analyzed newspaper articles with the goal of understanding the dominant diagnostic frames utilized in the public discourse in two ideologically distinct newspaper venues. I examined the news media portrayal of the homeless in 752 articles in these two newspapers during two distinct six-month time periods, one during which the city was nationally recognized as a major advocate for “Housing First,” and a more recent period during which urban gentrification has challenged the location of homeless services. Specifically, I addressed the framing of homelessness in each newspaper, the primary informants drawn upon by the newspapers, and the potential “missing voices” in the media framings. My research provides a model of temporal comparative analysis to complement the previous research on the construction of homelessness as a social problem.

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Newspaper Representations of Homelessness:  
A Temporal Comparative Analysis

Sarah Werman

This research focuses on the ways in which homelessness is discussed in two newspapers in a major city in the intermountain United States. I analyzed newspaper articles with the goal of understanding public discourse in two ideologically distinct newspaper venues. I examined the news media portrayal of the homeless in 752 articles in these two newspapers during two distinct six-month time periods, one during which the city was nationally recognized as a major advocate for “Housing First,” or “solving homelessness,” and a more recent period during which urban gentrification has challenged the location of homeless services. Specifically, I addressed the he primary informants drawn upon by the newspapers, and the potential “missing voices” in the media discussion. My research looks at homelessness in these papers both over time and across papers.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

Homelessness has existed to one degree or another in the United States throughout its history. Nels Anderson's *The Hobo*, published in 1923, is often recognized as the first sociological study of homelessness in the U.S. In the nearly 100 years since *The Hobo* was published, there have been numerous studies of homelessness in America. Sociologists over time have perceived homelessness in different ways and studied many aspects of homelessness. In recent years one lively area of study has focused on the social construction of homelessness in the public discourse and the news media. My project builds upon and extends this line of sociological analysis. In this chapter I provide a review of the sociological study of homelessness in general, and in media representations of the homeless in particular. In the process, I will situate my thesis research at the intersection of two areas of sociological scholarship: (1) homelessness studies, and (2) the social construction of social problems. In the following literature review I provide an overview of these two fields of scholarship, culminating in a discussion of their overlap in research on the social construction of homelessness, especially the social constructions of the homeless in news media. I identify a set of research questions and findings in the existing literature on news media representations of homelessness that serve as guideposts for my thesis research.

## **Homelessness Research**

Sociological studies of the homeless date back at least to Nels Anderson's *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, published in 1923. Most sociological research on homelessness has focused on describing and analyzing the homeless, particularly homeless men, although the field has broadened since the 1980s. In this review of sociological research on homelessness I focus on the last fifty years, from the mid-1960s to the present.

Perhaps the most influential 1960s study of homelessness was Samuel Wallace's *Skid Row as a Way of Life* (1965). Wallace detailed the social structure of impoverished city areas called Skid Row populated primarily by vagrant, transient men. Skid Row as he described it, was marked by inexpensive, hostel-like boarding houses, bars, and poverty. Today, areas that are heavily populated by the homeless still often sport the moniker "Skid Row." Wallace described individuals' socialization into this "deviant" community.

Socialization into the deviant community of Skid Row residents is a multifaceted process that involves more than just experiencing extreme poverty and existing in the Skid Row space. Wallace states, "Skid Row aficionados are those whose life patterns are inherently deviant and lead them to look for a community where they will find toleration, acceptance, and anonymity" (1965:169). An individual begins his socialization after meeting those conditions and making the initial contact with Skid Row and its residents. They are further submerged by learning the verbiage and names for things, people, and

events which allows the new Skid Rower to structure the subcultural society in a way that lends to learning the expectations and values of the group. This socialization leads to an increased isolation from broader society and from groups of which they had belonged prior. This isolation combined with the creation of new vocabulary and bonds leads to a desocialization from “respectable” society as they are educated in a way contrary to mainstream America, making them more likely to be viewed as “unfit to live in it” (1965:174). This public perception as a deviant is one of the defining credentials needed in order to complete an individual's socialization into the in-group of the Skid Row.

Like Wallace, Howard Bahr (1970) discusses the socialization of homeless individuals while he describes the diversity of the population. He explains that one of the most influential factors into this process is a detachment from broader society that is characterized by “the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures” (1970:41). This detachment, he argues, leads to an isolation that prevents the individual from performing customary roles in society and that this stigma prevents strong social bonds from forming, even among the Skid Rower. Bahr believed that this combination of events mirrored Merton’s theory of anomie, in which actors are experiencing strain based on an inability to achieve socially prescribed goals, and that the strain of this inability leads to actors retreating from society all together.

In 1970, Jacqueline Wiseman elaborated on Wallace's description of the

socialization of homeless individuals by suggesting a theory of social margin, or the amount of leeway that a person has to make errors in their life, whether in a job or with interpersonal relationships without suffering serious penalties. Wallace describes that individuals must already be alienated from others to become fully immersed in Skid Row society and Wiseman agrees; the Skid Row resident has no social margin left, due to repeatedly “messing up” and losing the goodwill of people in their social circle.

In 1993, Snow and Anderson published an ethnography of the homeless in Austin, Texas. They describe the homeless they studied in a similar vein; as individuals who have “fallen or been pushed through the cracks of society,” and are therefore no longer affiliated with others who are not homeless. They explain that members of this subculture still try to find meaning and significance in their lives, even while members of mainstream society may never recognize their attempts. They coin this as “salvaging the self,” or an attempt by individuals to make their situation culturally meaningful in an effort to salvage their respectable selves.

In 2009 anthropologist, Philippe Bourgois, and a photographer, Jeff Schonberg, published an ethnographic study, *Righteous Dopefiend*, that follows the lives of homeless heroin addicts in San Francisco. They document a subculture that is characterized by solidarity in shared suffering. Much of the research in *Righteous Dopefiend* was conducted under bridges and in clandestine locations where the homeless were able to reside. Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert examined this ostracization in their book, *Banished* (2009) in Seattle, Washington. Beckett and Herbert looked at the ways in which homeless individuals are excluded from public spaces, under the justification that they

attract crime and deviance just by existing within these spaces. The drive to keep areas visibly appealing lead to “civility codes” in Seattle, which made things like loitering or sitting on the sidewalk illegal. This criminalization, Beckett and Herbert argue, does not “make the homeless disappear,” but rather forces them into more secluded and less stable places and situations, therefore further exacerbating the issue.

While all of the studies described up to this point are focused on the homeless themselves, over the past two decades, significant research has also been conducted on other aspects of homelessness. Martha Burt and her colleagues at the Urban Institute have published books and reports on transitional housing, access to services, and service evaluation. Several recent studies, including Matthew Marr’s *Better Must Come* (2015), Prashan Ranasinghe’s *Helter Shelter* (2017) and Curtis Smith’s 2018 dissertation, *Homeless Social Service Workers as Street-Level Bureaucrats*, have examined the outcomes of social services for the homeless and the challenges experienced by social service providers.<sup>1</sup> Finally, sociologists, and political scientists, and communications scholars have conducted a number of studies on media representations of homelessness. In doing so, they have drawn heavily on scholarship on the social construction of social problems.

### **Social Construction of Homelessness as a Social Problem**

Homelessness has long been regarded as a social problem in contemporary society. A social problem is a condition or behavior that has been identified and confirmed as contrary to dominant social values (Peled 1993). The social construction of a condition or behavior as a social problem initially occurs when an individual or group

comes to feel that it is a threat to them and to the broader society (Anderson 2017). This initial claim can come from anywhere, though a problem does not become classified as an issue in need of societal intervention until it is supported by professionals, policy makers, and the general public (Loseke 1987).

The media plays an important role in the construction of social situations as social problems and in the definition of what constitutes deviance. Deviant populations are groups of people who fall outside of the norms of what is “good,” or “healthy,” or “normal” (Anderson 2017). The nature of reports published in the news has significant impact on the support and social inclusion available to deviant populations (Schneider et.al. 2010). While the media are by no means the sole arbiters of defining deviant populations or social problems, the media are a major venue for reaching public audiences. Without media portrayal of an act or actors as a social problem, the public may not become aware of a potential social problem or deviant population and thus, may not reach the stage of public opinion and collective action (Best 2010).

The sociological approach to social problems that is referred to as the “social construction of social problems” is usually traced back to the writings of Spector and Kitsuse in the 1970s and 1980s. Spector and Kitsuse argued that the “objective” conditions of social problems are far less objective than often portrayed in the media and social science research (1987). Rather than focusing on these conditions, they asserted that the goal of sociological social problems research should be to describe “claims-making” activities. In fact, they argued that social problems themselves should be understood as claims-making activities. “This concept of social problems,” they write,



“directs us to investigate the activities of specific and identifiable individuals who are engaged in defining conditions in particular terms with specific purposes in mind” (1987:12).

While there has been significant push-back among scholars who continue to assert that many aspects of social problems are “objectively real” and harmful to individuals and societies, the social constructionist approach to social problems has produced a large volume of empirical research (Loseke 2010). Rather than denying the objective conditions underlying social problems, many social constructionists today view their analyses as providing insights into how social conditions that can potentially be viewed as social problems are brought to public consciousness and play a role in shaping public opinion and social policies.

Cynthia Bogard’s book, *Seasons Such as These: How Homelessness Took Shape in America* (2003) provided one of the first broad examinations of the construction of homelessness in the U.S. in the 1980s. Bogard draws upon the writings and presentations of social activists, legislative testimony, and media portrayals of the homeless to explore how homelessness came to be defined by official claims-makers and how the media came to be a claims-maker in its own right. She explains that this is because once the media picks up the story, they are able to decide who to cite as claims-makers and which angle to pursue in their story. Bogard found that often the intent of the apparent claims-maker who was cited was not what the media conveyed to the public.

Using homelessness as an example of framing in the media, she traces its beginnings of a media represented social problem to the 1970’s, when a claims-making

group began with rallies and demonstrations in Washington D.C., and then in New York. These rallies were full claims-making activities on their own, presenting homelessness as a problem needing attention, arguing that homeless individuals were worthy of assistance, and demanding programs to alleviate the issue. By inviting the media to be present during these rallies, organizers ensured that they would be documented and disseminated to the masses. These were the first claims-maker driven attempts at framing homelessness as a social problem in the media in what has come to be referred to as the era of the “new homeless.”

Over the past three decades social scientists have created what Rachel Best has termed, “a long and productive tradition of studying media coverage of homelessness” (2010:74). One of the first studies on this topic was a dissertation by Communications Ph.D. candidate, Bernadette McNulty, in 1992. Her dissertation, *Homeless and Hopeless: Resignation in News Media Constructions of Homelessness as a Social Problem*, is an analysis of 92 news magazine articles and 111 CBS news broadcasts about homelessness from 1972 to 1990.

Among other things, McNulty looked at the frequency of the discussion on homelessness, the portrayals of the size, seriousness, and causes of the homelessness “problem,” and related images. She found that there was a steady increase in coverage over time, with three major news networks of that time premiering stories about homelessness for the first time in 1982. There was no clear definition of homelessness in any of the new stories that were reviewed for this research, and McNulty found that this allowed for “homelessness” to be used as a sort of blanket term rather than

a precise definition of a social problem. She explains that this imprecision led to a lack of agreement regarding the size and causes of homelessness which allowed for news articles to offer widely different and inflated estimates or counts with questionable sources for the figures cited.

In an article titled “Network News Construction of Homelessness 1980-1993”, Todd Shields (2001) examined media representations of homelessness during a time in which there was a sharp increase both in the number of homeless people in the US and in the media coverage of homelessness as a social problem. Shields documented a disconnect between what politicians were stating about the issue and what the actual reality of it was, and commented on the way that the media failed to discuss these discrepancies.

Overall he found that the media backed the statements of politicians even when they did not align with fact, all while upholding the appearance of being critical and objective. Like many other researchers (e.g, Bunis et al. 2000), Shields found that media coverage tended to spike during the holiday season and wane during the warmer months. Despite increased coverage, however, he found that the stories tended to focus on event organizers and people who participate in charity for the homeless rather than the structural causes or perpetuating factors of homelessness itself. When the homeless were directly discussed, Shields documented a pattern of “othering,” as homeless people were portrayed as social deviants who threaten greater societal institutions.

Maurice Penner and Susan Penner (1994) looked at newspaper comic strips in an effort to examine media representation of homelessness from 1989 to 1992. Their study

examines primarily editorial illustrations of homelessness, finding that the image is almost always of men refusing responsibility in favor of adventure and drink. Homeless men were often used as props in stories in comics, and were regularly ridiculed or blamed for their misfortune. Drawing on the work of Peter Marin (1988), Penner and Penner defined these representations as “neutralizing homelessness,” because they represent homelessness as something other than a social problem and allow readers to remain neutral passersby rather than actors in a solution to homelessness.

In 1996 Christopher Hewitt published “Estimating the Number of Homeless: Media Misrepresentation of an Urban Problem” in which he examined media claims made by advocacy groups regarding the number of homeless in the 1980s. He found that the media was continuously reprinting questionable “guesstimations” about the number of homeless people there were on any given night in America, despite the availability of more reliable numbers. He posits that this pattern of exaggeration is because “drama sells.” Another likely reason given by Hewitt for why journalists continued to cite these “guessed” numbers is that a significant portion of preparing a news story involves reviewing past coverage of the issue at hand. This review would likely have found these numbers cited repeatedly, making them seemingly acceptable statistics for the issue of homelessness.

In 2002 Fran Klodawsky and her colleagues conducted a content and discourse analysis on media reporting of homelessness in the largest English language paper in Ottawa. They looked at a time period of 4 years from 1994 to 1997, comparing the articles published in the newspaper with citizen and governmental reports from the same

time period to understand how public opinion can be influenced regarding the legitimacy of homeless laws. They found that the media tended to emphasize the “stubborn” unchanging state of homelessness in the city and the ways in which the homeless make the lives of the housed “more difficult.” They described this as “story selection bias,” where journalists tended to avoid sympathizing with the homeless and minimized the diversity in the population. Another component of this bias is found in who the authors cite as claims-makers, emphasizing some sources as the experts and neglecting to interview others.

Rachel Best (2010) conducted a content analysis of 472 newspaper articles in *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* from 1998 to 2000. She specifically looked at the extent to which homelessness was constructed as a social problem. One of the primary ways that she did this was by analyzing who the “actors” were in a particular news story and who the “promoters” were. In this context, the “promoters” are defined as the individual or group who called media attention to the reported event. What she found was that homelessness was broadly recognized as a problem, but not always as a problem requiring social action. When it was presented as a social problem, there was an array of solutions ranging from anecdotal or individual solutions, to broader societal solutions. Best suggests that events in which the promoters and the actors are one and the same were the most likely to frame homelessness as a social problem. In many of these articles, the actors/promoters were in the public service sector, whether advocates or proponents of government research on the issue. This idea seems to support Zufferey’s (2013) findings (described below), that when an advocate or a person with firsthand

experience with homelessness is heard, the narrative surrounding homelessness in the media tends to change.

Barbara Schneider and her colleagues (2010) looked at articles published between August 2007 and July 2008 focusing heavily on the way that homelessness was framed in four Canadian newspapers. Specifically, they chose two cities: Calgary because of the cities ten-year plan to “end homelessness,” and Vancouver because the city was planning for the 2010 Winter Olympics which had sparked concern about the cities visible homeless population.

The researchers accessed 765 articles located using ProQuest. The coding frames that were used included a set of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories that were developed from coding data available from previous studies regarding media coverage of homelessness. These codes included demographic and locational data, as well as portrayal of the main homeless persons, crimes mentioned, associations of homelessness and 25 other factors such as mental illness, addiction, health issues, etc. An additional part of the analysis included whether the articles were primarily about homeless people, or if homelessness just happened to be mentioned in a broader story. They found that the new media they examined perpetuate a stereotype of the typical homeless person being a single adult male in 79.8 percent of the articles. Causes of homelessness were only identifiable in 24.4 percent of the articles, with the *Vancouver Sun* showing a larger number of references to addiction and mental illness.

The authors posit that this may be because of the work of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, which spearheaded efforts to change the discourse surrounding homelessness

by incorporating stories of families and women who are homeless into media discussions. Pragmatic frames focused on solutions were evident in 52 percent of the sample, and 74.2 percent of articles made reference to who should be implementing these solutions.

In 2011 Moire Calder and her colleagues published research in Canada titled, “Framing Homelessness for the Canadian Public.” They examined framing, media influence, and the construction of news. By compiling data from multiple frame analysis works, they were able to determine patterns across provinces in Canada. At the conclusion of their analysis they were able to determine that there are several key factors that may play a role in the way that the media frame homelessness. Those factors include journalistic norms (such as reviewing past publications in order to organize their source list), the influence levels of claims-makers, and the construction of social problems as political events. The way that this data is organized leads to either a social deficiency frame or a focus on systemic issues that contribute to homelessness.

Calder et.al. argue that by resolving these issues, the media can become mediators between the homeless and the public in a way that leads to cooperative solutions. Shirley Truong examined these representations in 2012, looking at 402 articles from newspapers in a variety of major American cities. Her focus was specifically on the criminalization of the homeless, and therefore her search looked for keywords including “policy,” or “ordinance.” Truong found that despite a clear pattern of policing the homeless through criminalization of things such as sitting and laying down in public spaces, the demonstrators, social service workers, and the federal government were opposed to such

measures, claiming that they violate civil liberties. Even though this was found to be the case,

Truong documented a pattern of negative presentations of homeless individuals in the media, with the majority of the articles associating homelessness with negative characteristics such as mental illness, drug addiction, and crime, even in self-described “progressive” cities.

In her Master’s thesis, “Questioning Representations of Homelessness in Australian Print Media,” Carole Zufferey (2013) asserts that the media work as mediators of public conversations about social problems and therefore their representations of people who may be “othered” has societal implications that can reinforce unequal power relations. Zufferey applied questions from Bacchi’s (2009) analysis framework to analyze print media articles. These questions included:

- What is the problem of homelessness represented to be?
- What assumptions underlie this representation of the problem of homelessness?

Her conclusion suggests that print media framings that reproduce inequalities could be challenged if print media in Australia were to include the voices of people who experience homelessness and people who work in services intended to prevent homelessness.

Stacey Daoust (2013) conducted an analysis comparing media representation of the homeless in two major Canadian newspapers in 1999 and in 2009. She found that the media had a vast reduction in coverage in 2009 when compared to 1999 and also a reduction in the loaded phrases and implications used. Her most significant finding was



that people who were actually experiencing homelessness lacked representation almost entirely in either paper, for either time period. Daoust posits that this leads to an increased ability to “other” homeless individuals, and that this othering increases marginalization.

She states:

As the findings indicated, the voice of the homeless is one that is often not heard, instead being replaced by those who have become voices of authority on the issue. These stories and their portrayals, however, only leave the homeless a group to be tolerated, rather than promoting acceptance or equality. For the act of “tolerating” the homeless only allows this population to be further marginalized and forced into the role of the modern *homo sacer*. Once occupying this position, the homeless run the risk of being pushed to the extreme margins of society and all together forgotten (2013:69).

Daoust suggests that a many of the loaded phrases that are used in the media she examined leads the reader to view the homeless not as temporarily unhoused, but as a group that is in direct opposition to individuals who are members of the housed population and that this suggestion makes the homeless further vulnerable to the housed (2013:15).

In New Zealand, Celia Mandeno conducted research for her Master’s thesis looking at “The Construction of Homelessness in Online News Media” (2015). She found that the media she examined presented a narrative of homelessness as caused by personal deficits with no discussion of economic or social causes. Mandeno argues that this framing of homelessness allows broader society to ignore things such as growing

inequalities and limited social mobility. By emphasizing that homelessness is a direct result of poor life choices, the general population is able to maintain a sense of structure in which an individual is able to better themselves and their standings through hard work and perseverance, independent of the state (2015:77). Mandeno argues that this pattern is pervasive due to the media's representation of specific organizations rather than representing homeless individuals themselves, effectively silencing the homeless.

In another Master's thesis project, Katrien Cokeley (2017) examined media representation of Portland's tent cities during a time in which there was an increase in homelessness and a push to legislate solutions. She suggests that her work is valuable and important because media frames are "an integral part of urban space" (2017:130). Cokeley looked at the two major newspapers in Portland, Oregon in the time following the sanction of official "tent cities," specifically looking at the increase in coverage as a response to a lack of emergency homeless shelter space. She found that one paper seemed to demonstrate an almost unbiased representation of the tent cities, specifically discussing pros and cons as a solution to the cities issue. The other media source included a statements from the mayor justifying the change, as well as numerous editorials from citizens berating the city for allowing homeless camps and pushing for sweeps (2017:150). Cokeley suggests that these differences in representation show varying ways in which social issues can be framed as crises; demonstrating both centrist views and conservative perspectives.

Overall, as this literature review documents, homelessness was framed as a problem needing control and regulation, and the media rarely cited first hand sources such as homeless individuals themselves. This can be problematic, because news narratives become common knowledge, or what “everybody knows,” about a situation. There were two major implications about homeless people, one being that they were victims of a capitalist society that has failed them, therefore, they deserve help. The other dominant implication being that the homeless have freely made bad decisions that have landed them in the situation in which they find themselves, and therefore do not deserve assistance. The narrative created and sustained in the media throughout time and space appears to be one that maintains a narrative driven by representatives of organizations and government rather than those experiencing homelessness.

Table 1.1: Exemplary Research Projects on Homelessness in Media, 2001-2018

Study	Publication Date	Data Sources	Data Analyzed
Best	2010	Denver Post Rocky Mountain News 1998-2001.	475 newspaper articles
Buck et al.	2004	New York Times Washington Post Los Angeles Times Chicago Tribune 1974-2003	574 newspaper articles
Cokely	2017	The Oregonian Portland Tribune Street Roots Jan. 2010- March 2016	189 newspaper articles
Daoust	2013	National Post Toronto Star 1999 and 2009	677 newspaper articles
Glover	2010	Canadian Newsstand Georgia Straight Jan. – June 2007, 2008, 2009	1473 newspaper articles

Grant et al.	2018	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Chronicle Herald Daily News Metro Halifax The Coast	261 newspaper and online articles
Hodgetts et al.	2005	British Independent Television News 1993-2002	99 television news portrayals of homelessness
Klodawsky et al.	2002	Ottawa Citizen 1994-1997	79 newspaper articles
Mandeno	2015	online news media provider stuff.co.nz June 2013-June 2015	103 online articles
Penner & Penner	1994	San Francisco Chronicle San Francisco Examiner April 1989 – March 1992	231 comic strips
Schneider et al.	2010	Calgary Herald Vancouver Sun Vancouver Province Globe and Mail August 2007 – July 2008	765 newspaper articles
Shields	2001	ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly newscasts 1980 - 1993	“Exhaustive set of articles” Number not reported
Zuffrey	2013	Sydney Morning Herald Age Australian 2000-2011	324 newspaper articles

The literature on media constructions of homeless that I have reviewed here is summarized in Table 1.1. My research has been designed to contribute to this field of scholarship by examining representations of homelessness in two newspapers in a large intermountain west city. Specifically, I engage in a comparison of representations of the homeless in two newspapers at two periods of time when homelessness was a particularly salient topic in the community.

The specific questions addressed in this research are as follows:

1. Has the framing of homelessness and the descriptions of the homeless in these news media remained consistent over time or has it changed?
2. Is the framing of homelessness in each newspaper largely the same or are there significant reporting differences?
3. Who have the newspaper reporters used as claims-makers about the “homeless problem”?
4. Are there key constituencies in the homeless story that are not represented in the newspaper articles?

In the following chapter I describe the research context and methodology for this study.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

Similar to the scholarship discussed in the previous chapter and summarized in Table 1.1, my research focuses on media representations of the social problem of homelessness. Specifically, I examine media representations of the homeless in the two major newspapers in Salt Lake City, Utah. I analyze newspaper articles with the goal of understanding the dominant diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames utilized in these newspapers at two significant points in time for understanding the “homeless problem” in this urban context. Additionally, I analyze news articles on the topic of homelessness in terms of what groups of claims-makers were given voice in the articles and the thematic associations or issues and events that have been linked to homeless people that may or may not directly involve the homeless raised in the articles. In this chapter I describe the data sources used in this research, the data collection strategies, and the data coding and analysis process for this project.

### **Data Sources and Context**

In order to examine media representations of the homeless in Salt Lake City, I decided to collect data from the city’s two major print media sources, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*. The *Salt Lake Tribune* is owned by Huntsman Family Investments and claims to be Utah’s “Independent Voice Since 1871.” In 2015 the weekday circulation

was at 74,043 and on Sundays it was at 84,137. A media bias fact checking site lists the *Salt Lake Tribune* as left center bias, due to their use of loaded wording when reporting factual information. The same site states that the newspaper is a reliable source of accurate information, but that “the reader should be aware of their liberal leanings” (MediaFactCheck 2018).

The *Deseret News* is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. As of May, 2014 the weekday circulation was at 40,718 with the Sunday newspaper subscriptions at 109,330. The same media bias fact checking site lists the *Deseret News* as right center bias due to their use of loaded words to favor conservative causes. Despite the trend of using loaded words, the *Deseret News* is also rated highly in reporting on factual information (MediaFactCheck 2018).

While my decision to include these two newspapers was based on the fact that they represented the two major print media sources in Salt Lake City, their arguably ideologically distinct affiliations or biases also provide an opportunity to study potential differences in the framing of homelessness from different positions on the ideological spectrum. In her master’s thesis research at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Stacey Daoust (2013) selected two widely circulated Canadian newspapers, *The Star* and the *National Post*, specifically because *The Star* is “viewed by Canadian standards to be ‘liberally’ aligned” while the *National Post* is “one of only two nationally distributed papers in the country that is known to be conservative” (Daoust 2013:24).

In addition to analyzing two different ideological orientations in the newspapers she studied, Daoust also strategically decided to analyze the time periods of 1999 and

2009 because they were characterized by significantly different dominant social issues. She explains that she selected these years “specifically for their historical significance: 1999 was the heyday of invoking broken windows theory in Canadian cities; while 2009 was in the midst of the financial crisis” (2013:25).

While the different ideological orientations of the Salt Lake City newspapers were serendipitous rather than planned as part of my research strategy, I did select the two time periods in which to study the newspapers’ framings of homelessness based on significant differences in the local context in which homeless issues were being debated in Salt Lake City. During the first time period, in 2012, Salt Lake City was nationally recognized as a major exemplar of efforts to “solve homelessness” through “Housing First” programs.<sup>2</sup> This movement and Salt Lake City received national attention, both in the academic and public sphere. Since that point in time, there has been an uptick in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Salt Lake City. In the more recent period of 2017, urban renewal was mobilized to challenge the location of homeless services in the city which lead to increased public debate and news media discourse regarding the causes of and possible solutions to homelessness. The year of 2017 was also a major time of public debate in the city in relation to the hot-button issue of relocating Salt Lake City’s largest homeless shelter, the Road Home, and potential future gentrification of the downtown locale at which the current shelter is located.

In terms of urban context, Salt Lake City is the capital of the state of Utah and the location of the world headquarters of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In 2016 city records showed that there were 193,744 residents within city limits. At the time



of the 2010 census 75 percent of residents were white. In 2007, 41 percent of the 186,440 people living in SLC were members of the LDS church.

In terms of homeless population and services, verifiable data are difficult to come by when looking for the total number of homeless people in Salt Lake City. The 2017 Utah Comprehensive Report on Homelessness (UCRH) claims that there are just under 3,000 homeless people in the state. This number was acquired by homeless services, however, so it does not include those experiencing homelessness who are not sleeping in homeless shelters. Many homeless individuals sleep in vehicles or outdoors without coming into contact with state sponsored social services which means that those people are not counted in this data. At the time of the 2017 UCRH, 94 percent of available beds in homeless shelters in SLC were being utilized nightly. A full 100 percent of rapid rehousing options were being used, and 97 percent of permanent supportive housing was full (Utah 2017).

### **Data Collection**

Using the *NewsBank Database* I was able to access a total of 948 articles in the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News* that used the keyword “homeless” between January 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012, and from July 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017. I eliminated articles that were titled “News Roundups,” and that were lists of article titles that the newspaper suggested as important reading on the topic. I also eliminated obituaries, which came up in the search often due to the deceased having been someone who helped the homeless in some way. After cleaning my data in this manner, I ended up with a total of 752 articles for analysis. As shown in Table 2.1 below, in 2012 the *Deseret*

*News* had a total of 43 articles meeting my parameters, and the *Salt Lake Tribune* had 99.

In 2017 the *Deseret News* had 283 and the *Salt Lake Tribune* had 327 articles that matched the keyword “homeless.”

Table 2.1: Articles in Project Data Set by Paper and Year.

	<i>Deseret News</i>	<i>Salt Lake Tribune</i>
2012	43	99
2017	283	327

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

Following data collection, I coded each article according to several dimensions. Analyzing data presented in the headings and body of articles, as well as examining the underlying tone of written documents is a commonly used method when looking at content analysis of texts (e.g., Grant et.al 2018; Di Gregorio et.al 2012; Gould and Company, 2004). For my research, I looked primarily at claims-makers, diagnostic, prognostic, motivational frames, and “associations.” I did this to gain an analytical understanding of the construction of homelessness as a social problem in primary newspapers in Salt Lake City.

One key coding category in my analysis was “claims-makers.” Claims-makers are defined as individuals or groups who are engaged in making public claims about the nature, causes, and potential solutions for activities or conditions that they define as social problems (Best 1987, Anderson 2017). I found nine primary categories of claims-makers. These categories include residents, journalists, service organizations,

public officials, business owners, formerly homeless, homeless people, academics, and religious leaders. I further coded service organizations, public officials, and religious organizations into subcategories. Service organizations were organized to include advocates of the homeless and also religious service organizations, such as Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army. The public officials category includes the subcategories of the mayor, police or the district attorney, legislative house representatives, city representatives, the governor, and the health department. The religious leaders category was subcoded to include whether the leaders were from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Muslim religion, or the Catholic faith. Interestingly, no Protestant denominations were represented among claims-makers. Following coding for claims-makers, I looked at diagnostic frames.

Diagnostic frames are defined as the identification and assignment of cause or blame of a social problem by claims-makers (Benford and Snow 2000). In the context of this research, diagnostic frames tell us what the claims-makers suggest are the reasons that homelessness exists. This is one of my most significant coding categories. There were 15 coding categories in the diagnostic frames, with two of them containing subcategories. The 15 categories were education, immigration, economic, natural disaster, personal disaster, lack of faith, domestic violence, violence, disability, addiction, LGBTQ, single mothers, veterans, laziness, and immorality. Type of disability was sometimes specified and therefore had subcategories of mental health and physical disability. Addiction contained coding to include drugs and alcohol separately when articles specified.

I also coded for motivational frames, which are claims-makers' arguments or statements that make a case for why people should become involved in the fight against a social problem (Benford and Snow 2000:615) and suggested solutions, or what Snow (2013) refers to as "prognostic frames" designed by claims-makers.

In addition to looking at the ways in which claims-makers identify the issue, motivate supporters, and suggest solutions, I also wanted to examine the events and actions with which homeless people are associated. I refer to these as "associations" throughout my work. The categories that I developed for associations include incarceration, crime, talent, victim, youth, civil rights, property devaluation, and Rio Grande. In some articles, the type of crime was specified as either theft or violence, so I coded for those subcategories as well.

In order to optimize reliability in my coding of the data, I conducted two separate rounds of coding practice. In the first round of coding, I inductively coded broadly for relevant thematic categories that I saw in the articles. In my second round, I re-coded everything, but also focused on cleaning up my codes. For example, in the first round of coding I might have coded for "police," but not for "public official." In my second round of coding, I made sure that where I coded for "police" I also coded for "public official." Once these codes were documented and organized into frequencies and percentages, I was able to compare the major categories of each frame and group them into relevant patterns. During this process, I was able to determine the general tone of articles as positive/negative, or sympathetic/hostile. I was also able to create umbrella codes

regarding prognostic frames, allowing me to more clearly analyze whether there has been shifts in suggested solutions over time and across newspapers.

By analyzing claims-makers and frames I am able to look at big picture patterns in the discussion of homelessness in Salt Lake City. In addition to being able to look at the patterns of claims-makers in different categories, I have organized the data in a way that shows differences between the two newspapers being examined, and also how these frames and associations have been consistent and/or changed over time.

By analyzing the frames used in the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*, as well as the claims-makers who are featured in news articles, I have analyzed the patterning and changes in the framing of homelessness in Salt Lake City during the two time periods I am investigating. My findings and analysis provide a deeper understanding of news media representations of homelessness during periods of time in which treatment of the homeless underwent major changes in Salt Lake City. Identifying claims-makers, diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framings, as well as key themes associated with the homeless in newspaper articles provides not only an understanding of the social construction of homelessness in these news media, but also helps to shed light on potential missing voices and other pieces in the story of homelessness in Salt Lake City.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described my data collection and analysis processes. I began by identifying the major sources of print media in Salt Lake City, Utah. I then accessed articles published in the two major papers, the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* from January 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012, and from July 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017 and

conducted a search for the key word “homeless.” I then cleaned my data by eliminating articles that were not directly applicable to my research.

Once my data was cleaned, I conducted two rounds of coding in which I identified claims-makers, diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic frames, and “associations” in the articles. I created frequency tables from these codes, and then used those codes to find patterns in the data which are displayed in bar graph tables in the next chapter, which reports the findings of my research.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the previous chapter I discussed the methods by which this study was conducted. This research consisted of a content analysis of 752 articles from two time spans -- one six month period in early 2012 and one later in 2017. The articles were coded to examine the ways in which homelessness was framed as a social problem needing public attention. This chapter consists of the delivery of the results of the aforementioned research.

From 2012 to 2017 there were shifts in the representation of homelessness in Salt Lake City print media along several dimensions. This includes in who the claims-makers were, the diagnostic frames used, the motivational frames represented, the prognostic frames suggested, and in the associations that were made with homelessness. Additionally, the sheer number of homelessness related articles in both newspapers rose from 142 articles in 2012 to 610 in 2017.

### **Claims-Makers**

One of the primary categories that I identified when coding the articles was “claims-makers.” As noted in Chapter Two, claims-makers are defined as individuals or groups who are engaged in making public claims about the nature, causes, and potential solutions for activities or conditions that they define as social problems (e.g., Anderson 2017, Best 1987). In this data, the primary codes for claims-makers were as follows: local residents, journalists, service organization representatives, public officials, business owners, formerly homeless individuals, currently homeless individuals, and religious

organization representatives. Since multiple claims-makers were reported in some articles, the total number of claims-makers can be larger than the total number of newspaper articles. Some articles also had no clear claims-makers, and therefore were not included in this coding category.

Residents are defined for the purposes of this research as individuals who were cited as being residents of the greater Salt Lake City metropolitan area. In some articles, residents were identified by reference in the article to a specific part of the city or metropolitan area. In others, individuals were simply described as “local resident.” Journalists were coded as claims-makers when articles featured primarily the voice of the journalist herself or himself. Some of these articles were opinion pieces or editorials. Others were reporting pieces written in the first person voice of the author.

Articles in which the primarily cited source was individuals representing an organization aimed at aiding the homeless such as shelters, outreach groups, and other charities were coded as service organizations. Public officials included claims-makers such as the mayor, police, district attorney representatives, legislative house representatives, city representatives, the governor, and health department officials.

In articles where the journalist uses quotes from individuals who own businesses in the Salt Lake City area, I coded the claims-makers as business owners. In some—relatively few—articles, people who were formerly homeless were cited, and those were coded accordingly. Similarly, quotes from currently homeless individuals were coded as homeless claims-makers. The final category I coded for was representatives of religious organizations. I further dissected this category by identifying

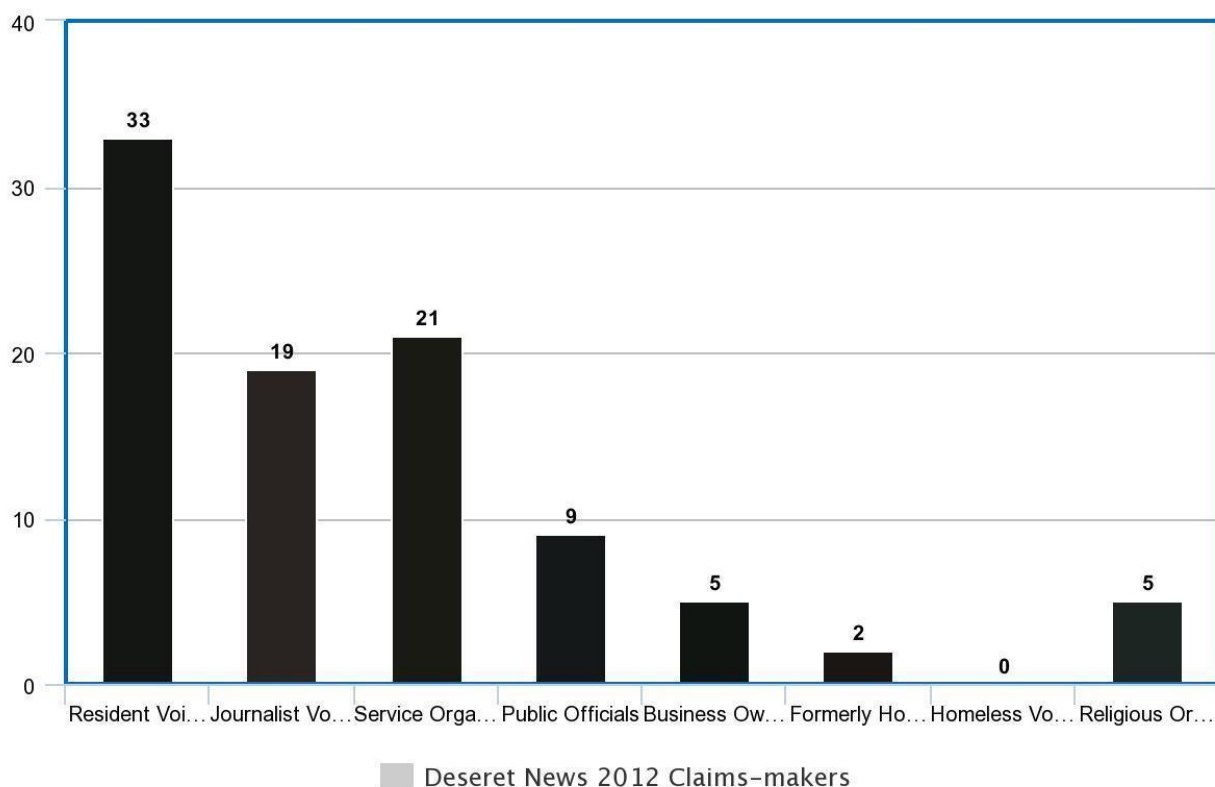


the specific religious faiths of the representatives, which across the data set included the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as well as Catholic and Muslim faiths. No other faiths were cited.

These categories were organized into frequency charts and then into bar graphs for clarity. When the data was organized into bar graphs, it was very easy to see patterns and the differences both between newspapers and in each paper across the distinct time periods. Overall, the most significant category of claims-makers was public officials, at 39 percent of total articles. The data also reveal other significant claims-maker voices that were represented, as well as differences between newspapers and time periods.

In 2012, the *Deseret News* had a total of 43 articles that met the standards of admission into the study. Of those articles, 33 percent featured residents as the primary source, 21 percent cited service organizations, and 19 percent of the claims-makers were journalists themselves. Religious organization representatives and business owners counted for five percent each. Public officials came in at nine percent of the articles from the *Deseret News* in 2012. Formerly homeless individuals were quoted occasionally, in two percent of the articles.

Chart 3.1: Deseret News 2012 Claims-makers

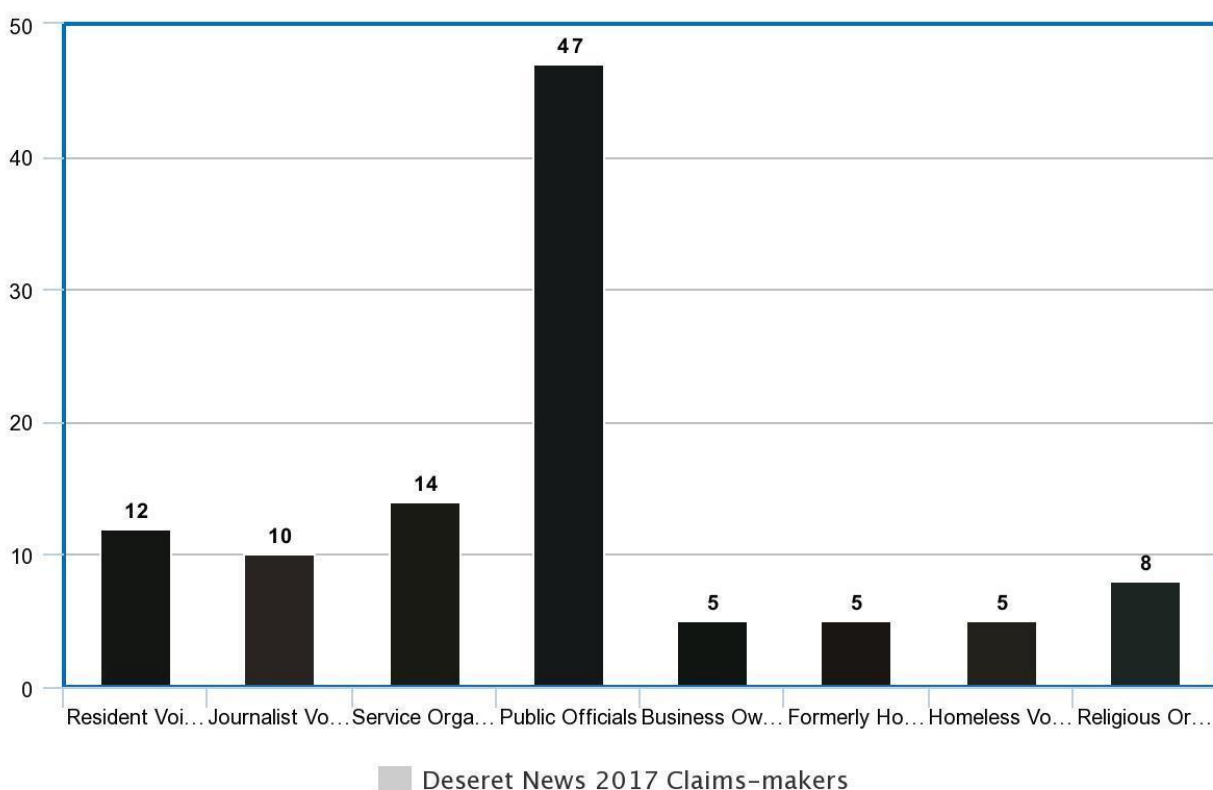


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In the 2017 time-period, the number of homeless-related articles increased dramatically—by nearly 700 percent—in the *Deseret News* to 283. The breakdown of 2017 claims-makers in the *Deseret News* also looks very different from the 2012 data. In 2017 public officials were the primary claims-makers in 47 percent of the newspaper articles, more than a five-fold increase from the nine percent in 2012. In contrast, some other claims-maker categories were significantly lower in the 2017 time period than in 2012. Resident claims-makers, for instance, declined by almost two-thirds, from 33 percent in 2012 to only 12 percent in 2017. Service organizations were also cited less frequently at 14 percent, though they were still the second largest category in 2017.

Journalists were claims-makers 10 percent of the time. Business owners, the formerly homeless, and homeless voices were all cited in five percent of the time each in the articles published in the *Deseret News* in 2017. Religious organizations came up slightly more often, at eight percent.

Chart 3.2: Deseret News 2017 Claims-makers

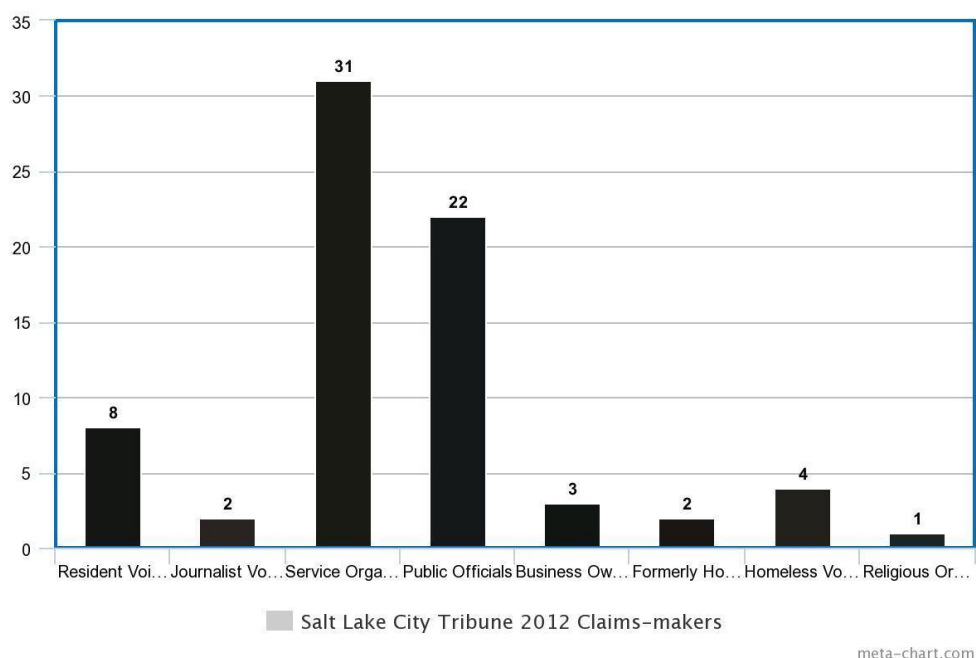


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In summary, while *Deseret News* articles in the first time period invoked primarily residents, service organizations, and journalists themselves as claims-makers, in the second time period there was a marked shift to reliance on public officials with major declines in the incorporation of other claims-maker groups, most notably in service organization and resident claims-makers.

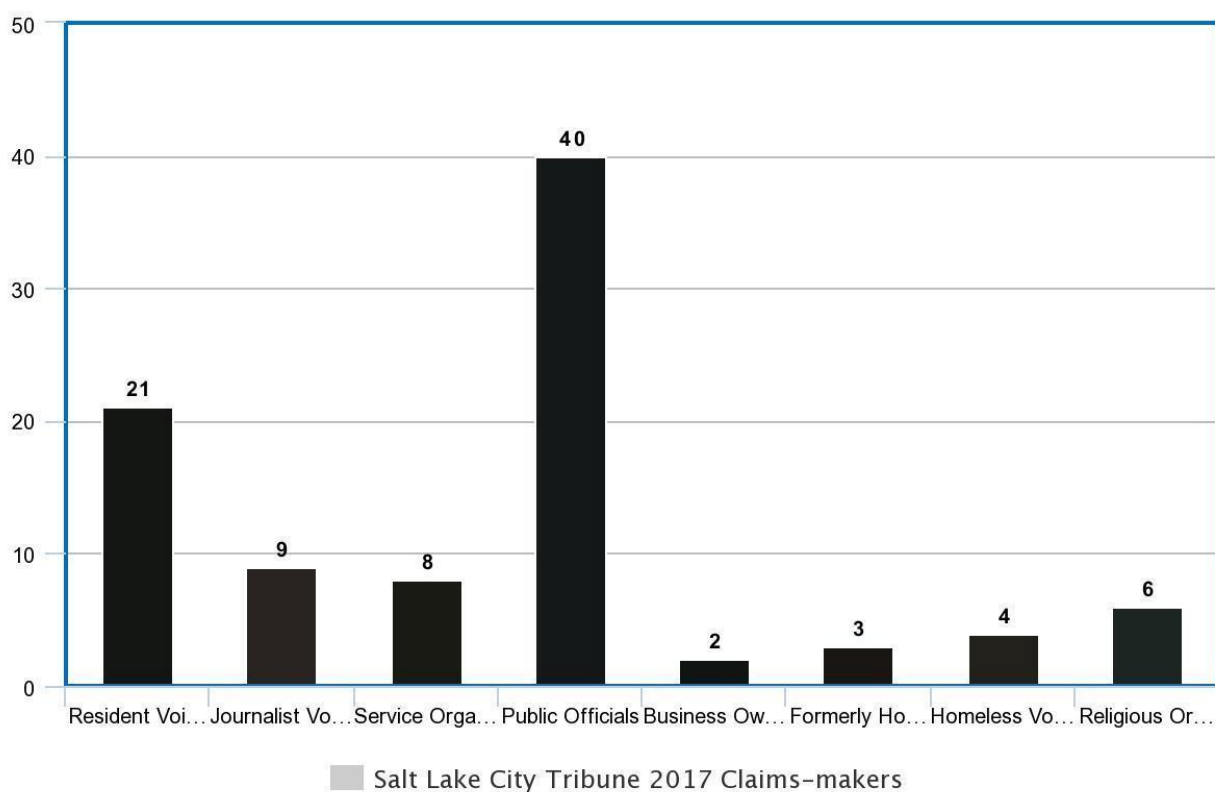
The claims-makers cited in *Salt Lake Tribune* looked very different from the *Deseret News* in 2012. For one thing, there were over twice as many articles on homelessness, a total of 99 articles that met the study criteria for inclusion published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in 2012. Of those, 31 percent featured claims-makers who were representatives of service organizations. The second most significant category was public officials at 22 percent. No other claims-making group was cited in double-digit percentages. Residents were the primary claims-maker in only eight percent of articles, while the homeless were cited four percent of the time, or in one out of every 25 articles. Business owners were not cited as significant claims-makers, being quoted in only three percent of the articles. Journalists were claims-makers only two percent of the time, as were the formerly homeless. Religious organization claims-makers were almost completely absent, being cited in only one of the 99 articles.

Chart 3.3: Salt Lake City Tribune 2012 Claims-makers



In 2017 the *Salt Lake Tribune* looks very different from 2012. There was a sharp, over three-fold, increase from the 99 articles in 2012 to 327 in 2017. The primary claims-makers in the *Tribune* in 2017 were public officials, being quoted in 40 percent of the articles—twice the level of their inclusion as claims-makers in 2012. Residents were the second most significant category at 21 percent—more than twice their level of claims-making prominence in 2012. Journalists and service organizations came in at nine percent and eight percent respectively, while religious organization representatives were claims-makers six percent of the time, with homeless and formerly homeless claims-makers being included in four percent and three percent of articles respectively. Business owners were the least cited category at two percent -- relatively consistent with their meager claims-making representation in the 2012 time period.

Chart 3.4: Salt Lake City Tribune 2017 Claims-makers



meta-chart.com

In summary, while *Salt Lake Tribune* news articles in the first time period invoked primarily service organization claims-makers, followed by public officials. In 2017 the use of service organization claims-makers declined by two-thirds while reliance on public officials and resident claims-makers doubled.

When we turn to comparing coverage in the two newspapers, we see some consistencies across papers. Specifically, the number of articles in each newspaper increased significantly between the two time periods examined. Further, regardless of whom the most significant claims-makers were in 2012, the use of social service organization representatives as claims-makers declined dramatically in the later time frame for both newspapers and the dominant claims-makers in both newspapers in 2017

were public officials.

The foregoing consistencies notwithstanding, there were some clear differences between the two newspapers in terms of claims-maker inclusion. In the *Deseret News* in 2012 one-third of claims-makers were residents, but they were only eight percent of *Salt Lake Tribune* claims-makers in that time period. The most common sources being cited in the *Tribune* were service organizations, at 31 percent, a rate that was 50 percent higher than their use as claims-makers in the *Deseret News* in the 2012 time period. Public officials, the most significant category in the total number of articles, were cited 22 percent of the time in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in 2012, a much larger percentage than the nine percent they were claims-makers in 2012 in the *Deseret News*.

2017 showed a vast increase in the percentage of articles citing public officials in both newspapers. In the *Deseret News*, public officials were claims-makers in 47 percent--nearly half—of the articles, similar to the 40 percent they were cited in the *Salt Lake Tribune* during the same time period. Residents were cited 21 percent of the time in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, but only a little more than half that often (12 percent of the time) in the *Deseret News*. I will explore the analytic significance of these findings, as well as those that follow, in the next chapter.

### **Diagnostic Frames**

Diagnostic frames were examined along several lines in this research. Diagnostic frames are defined as the identification of and assignment of cause or blame of a social problem, as by claims-makers (Benford and Snow 2000). Diagnostic frames were coded

in 16 categories, which were then organized into the two categories of positive or negative implications. A bar graph was created of these positive/negative trends for each of the time frames, and for the total overall. Like claims-maker frames, the total percentages for a coding category may be over or under 100 percent, because not all articles used diagnostic frames, and some used more than one.

Positive diagnostic frames are frames in which the homeless person was not seen as at fault for their circumstances. Causes of homelessness that fall in the positive category are ones that imply that homeless people are worthy of assistance. The coding categories that were documented as positive were educational deficit, economic problems, natural disaster, personal disaster, domestic violence, violence, disability, LGBTQ status, and veteran's status.

The most significant category across time was disability (the idea that homeless people are homeless because they are disabled) at 12 percent. Domestic violence (two percent), and other forms of violence (11 percent) that result in homelessness frame homeless people as victims came up a significant number of times as well. Educational deficit as a diagnostic frame implies that the reason that people are homeless is a lack of access to educational resources, and was mentioned in a total of five percent of the 752 articles. Economic frames of homelessness came up in nine percent of articles and suggested that homelessness is the result of a failure of the system, not a personal deficit of the individual. Economic frames include discussions of low wages, lack of jobs, and cost of housing. Articles discussing economic frames often talk about the system and



capitalism as having failed to provide even full time workers with the things they need to survive in current society.

Natural disaster as a diagnostic frame comes up when something like an earthquake or tsunami results in homelessness, whereas personal disaster refers to something more like a house fire. Disaster related diagnostic framings showed up relatively infrequently, with natural disaster identified in one percent of articles overall, and personal disaster identified as the cause of homelessness in three percent of total articles. and LGBTQ (homeless people are homeless because their family rejects their sexual/gender identity; one percent). There was also relatively infrequent (three percent of articles) citing of lack support for veterans as a cause of homelessness.

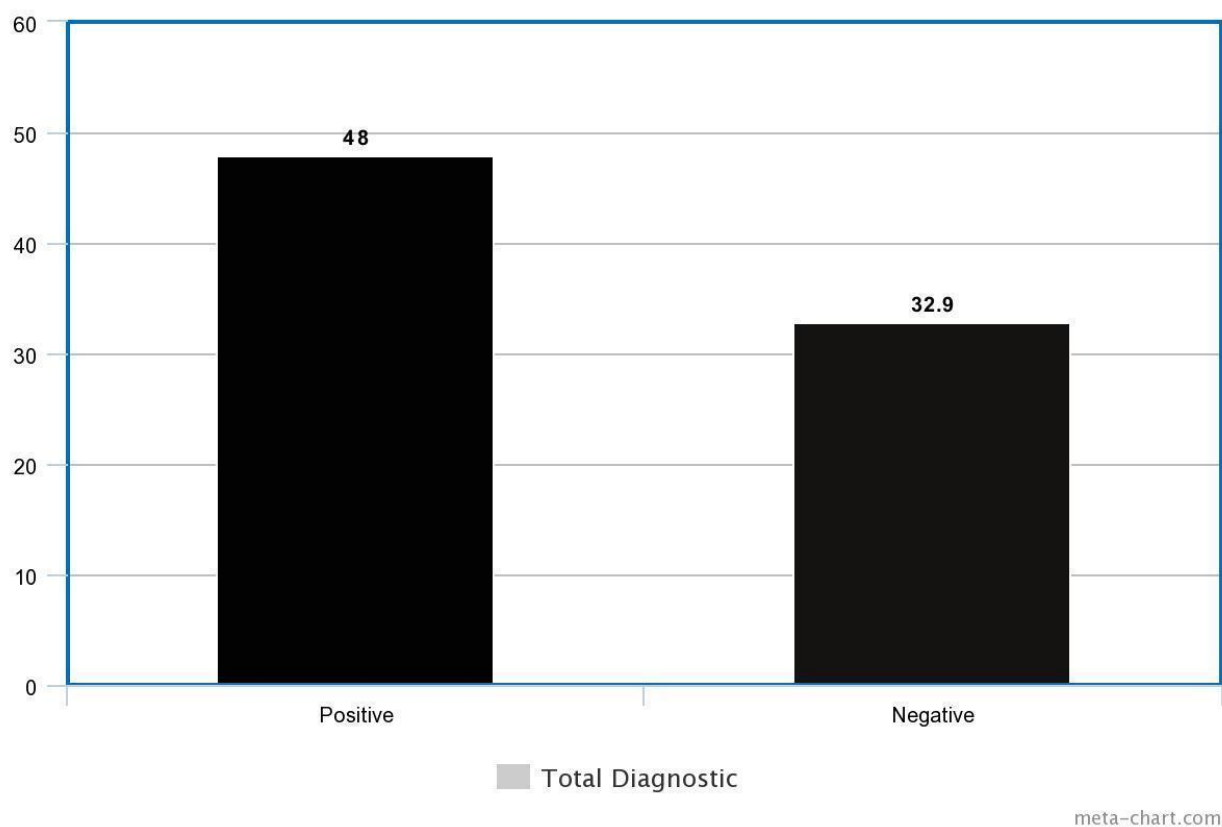
Frames that were grouped as negative were grouped together because they implied that the reason that a person is facing homelessness is because of some poor choice or personal deficit. Codes that fell into this category include lack of religious faith, addiction, single motherhood, laziness, and immorality. The largest overall suggested cause of homelessness was addiction, cited in 25 percent of overall articles as the reason that people are homeless. An example of addiction as a diagnostic frame can be found in an article from October 29, 2017 in the *Deseret News*. In this article, a service provider who works with the homeless is cited explaining that there are many reasons why someone may “fall off the ledge,” citing opioid addiction after surgery as a reason why people may need help re-entering mainstream society.

This category included both drug and alcohol addiction, though often the type of addiction was not specified. Being a single mother was cited in three percent of articles as

the reason that someone was homeless, which was categorized as a negative because the articles did not call these homeless families “families,” but focused on single motherhood. Only occasionally did laziness (0.6 percent of articles) or immorality (one percent) show up as diagnostic frames.

Once my codes were organized into a frequency table and then into positive or negative causes of homelessness, I created bar graphs that clearly show the trends and differences between newspapers and across time.

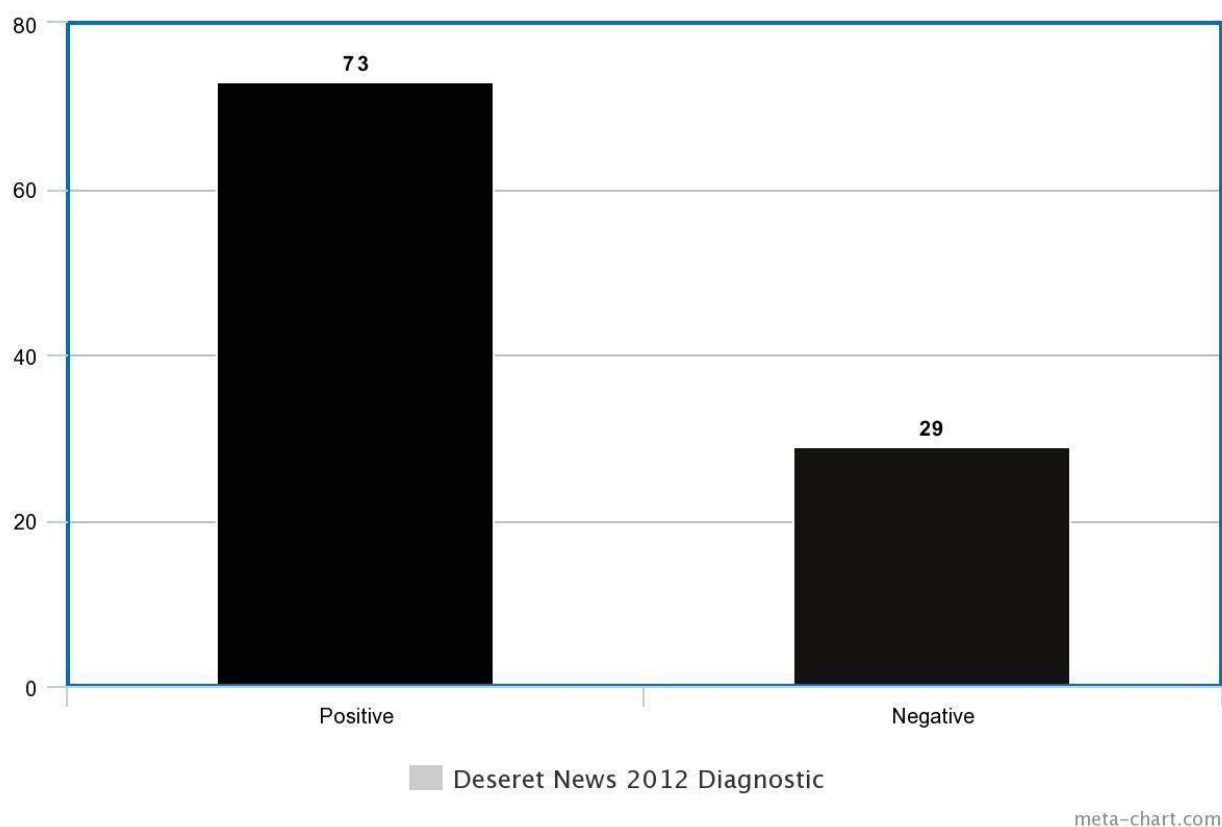
Chart 3.5: Total Diagnostic



In 2012 the most significant diagnostic category in the *Deseret News* was the economic diagnostic frame, at just under 19 percent of the total 43 articles in that time

period. In 2017 in the same paper, economic frames declined to only seven percent of articles. The second most significant categories in the *Deseret News* in 2012 were disability and addiction, coming in at 12 percent each. The only other category that appeared in ten percent of articles or more in the *Deseret News* in 2012 was immigration at exactly ten percent.

Chart 3.6: Deseret News 2012 Diagnostic

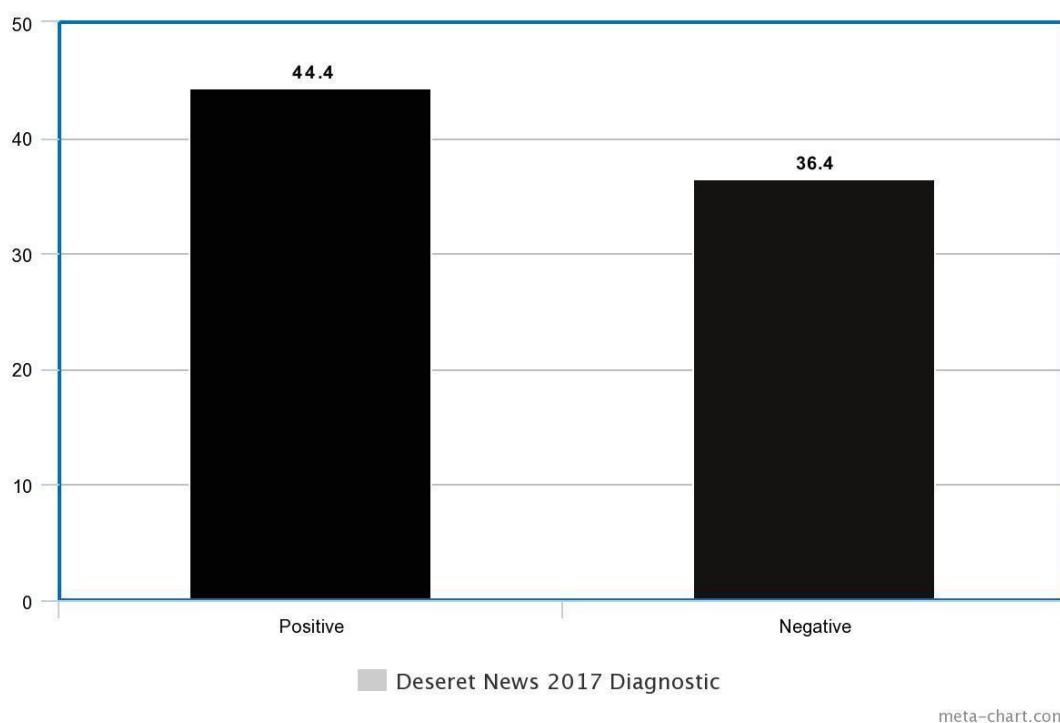


Disability and addiction were also significant in 2017 in the same paper, with addiction being the most frequent frame at 30 percent of the 283 articles half times as much as in 2012. Violence came in second in 2017 in the *Deseret News* with 16 percent of the articles mentioning it as a reason people were homeless, more than a three-fold increase when compared to the five percent that it was mentioned in 2012 in the same

paper. Disability was the third most significant in that time frame at ten percent of articles, roughly the same as found in 2012. No other categories were present in ten percent or more of the articles in this paper in that time frame.

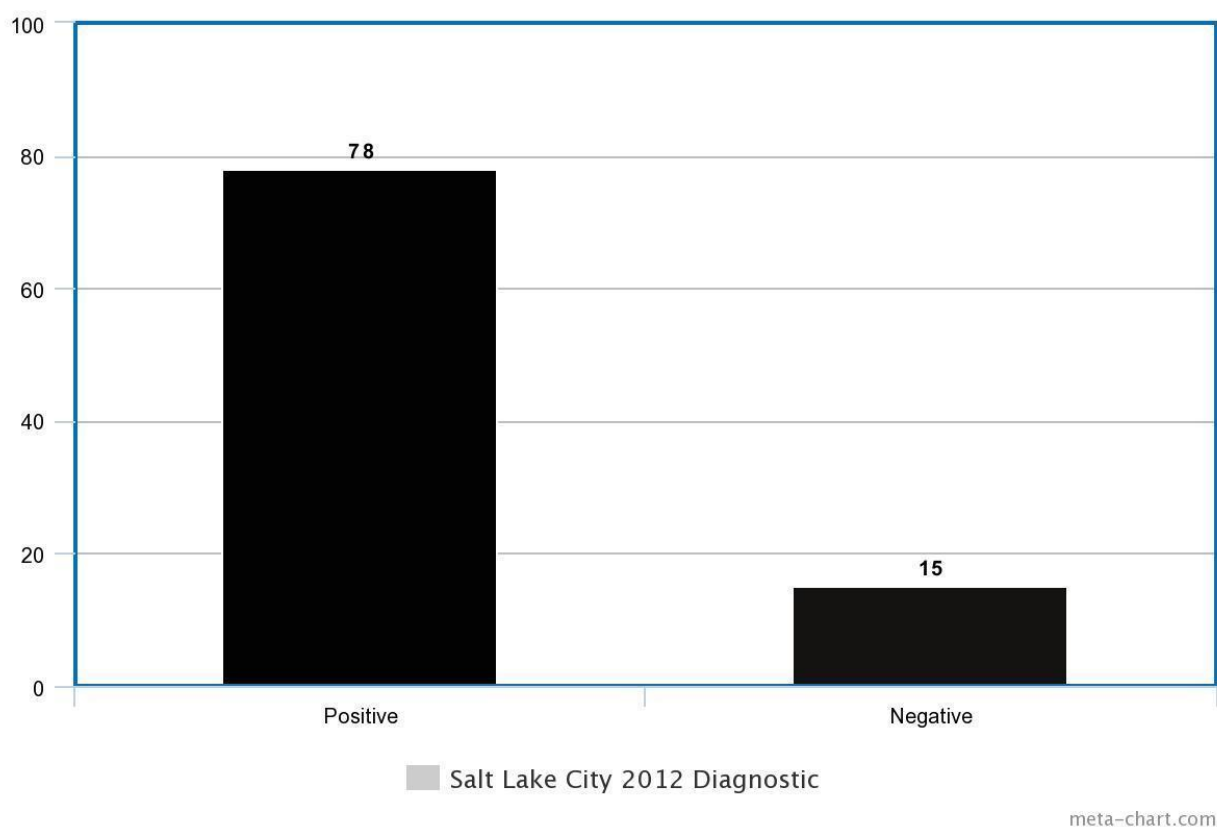
When the diagnostic coding categories were organized into positive and negative implications of homelessness, we find that in 2012 73 percent of the diagnostic claims in the *Deseret News* regarding homelessness were positive in that they did not present the homeless as disreputable and at fault for their plight, while 29 percent of the diagnostic framings were negative. In 2017 we see a big shift, with only 44.4 percent of diagnostic framings as positive, a sharp decrease from the 73 percent in 2012. Not surprisingly, given the sharp decline in positive diagnostic framings, there was also an uptick, although not nearly as extreme, in negative framings, with 36.4 percent of articles making negative diagnostic framings in comparison to 29 percent in 2012.

Chart 3.7: Deseret News 2017 Diagnostic



The diagnostic framings of homelessness in the *Salt Lake Tribune* showed even more dramatic changes across the two time periods. In 2012, 19 percent of the *Salt City Tribune's* 99 articles discussed economic frames as causes of homelessness, making it the most significant category, while 14 percent invoked a disability diagnostic frame, and addiction framing was the third most significant category at 13 percent. There were no other categories in 2012 that had ten percent or greater frequencies.

Chart 3.8: Salt Lake City Tribune 2012 Diagnostic

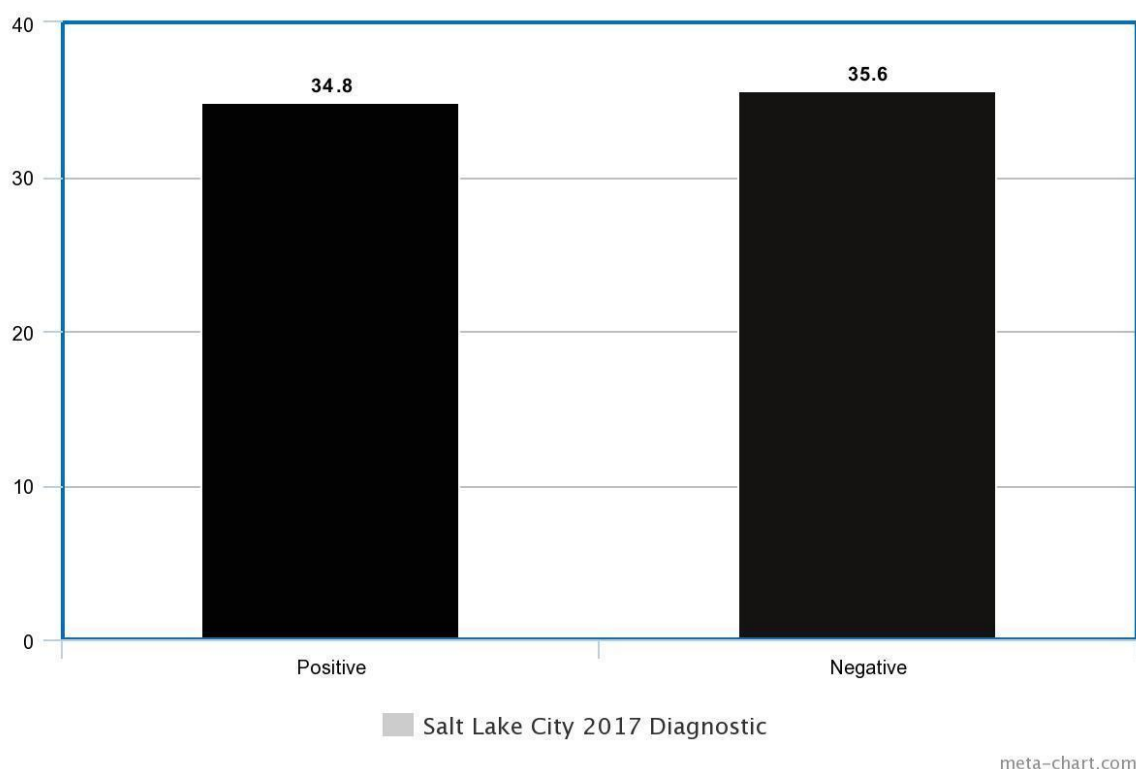


In 2017, however, economic frames that were the most commonly made in 2012 were mentioned only seven percent of the time, a decline of over 60 percent. In 2017, addiction became the largest diagnostic category, coming in at 26 percent—or double its proportion in comparison to 2012 reporting. 13 percent of 2017 articles published in *Salt Lake Tribune* mentioned disability as a diagnostic frame. Violence was the third most frequent frame at nine percent. No other frames appeared in ten percent or greater articles in 2017.

In 2012, 78 percent of the conversations about causes of homelessness in the *Salt Lake Tribune* were positive frames and only 15 percent were negative. In 2017, however,

less than half as many articles were positive, at 34.8 percent, and more than twice as many—35.6 percent—were negative. In short, both newspapers saw the same pattern of change, with a decline in positive and an increase in negative diagnostic framings across the two time periods, but the *Salt Lake Tribune* experienced a far more dramatic shift.

Chart 3.9: Salt Lake City Tribune 2017 Diagnostic



### Motivational Frames

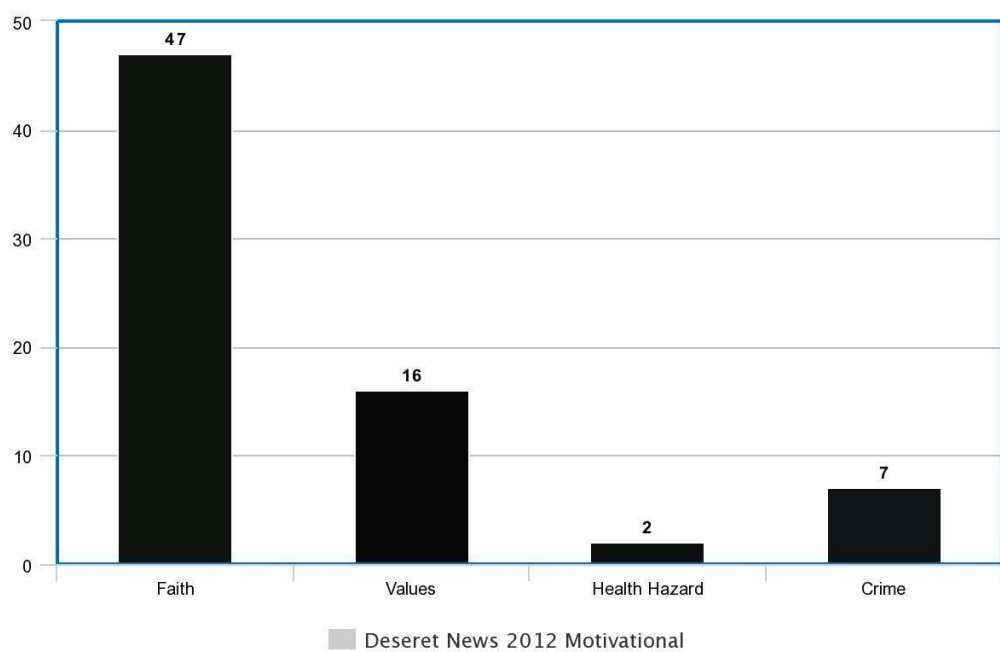
Motivational frames are defined as claims-makers' arguments or statements that make a case for why people should become involved in the fight against a social problem (Benford and Snow 2000). Motivational frames were coded for in articles that specifically indicated a reason for which a reader should care about the social problem of homelessness. For example, in some articles claims-makers stated that by resolving the

“homeless issue,” there would be a reduction in crime or health hazards. Other articles indicated that individuals and groups should assist the homeless because of their faith, or values. Like with the other frames, not all articles explicitly described a motivational frame, and some may have used more than one, meaning that totals may not add up to 100 percent.<sup>3</sup>

The most frequent motivational frame that was found in this data was the frame of “crime reduction.” Across all articles, 26 percent used the motivational frame of crime, which means that they promoted involvement in dealing with the social problem of homelessness because homelessness is connected to crime. An example of this is in an article from June 22, 2017 in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in which the Mayor suggests moving a liquor store frequented by the homeless in order to reduce crime. In this example, the Mayor links the homeless to crime and suggests that the public should support the endeavor to relocate the liquor in order to disperse the homeless and reduce crime. In 2012 in the *Deseret News* seven percent of the 43 articles used the motivational frame of crime reduction. This is in stark contrast to the 31 percent of 283 articles using crime as a motivational frame in the same paper in 2017. In 2012, the *Salt Lake Tribune* used the motivational frame of crime in 14 percent of articles, while the percentage basically doubled to 27 percent in 2017.

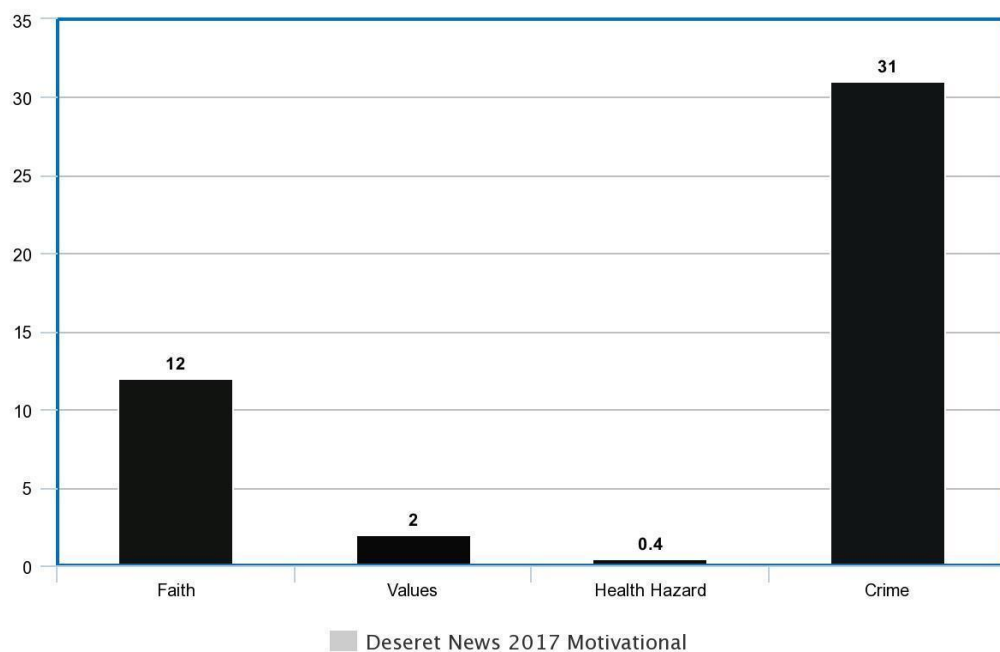


Chart 3.10: Deseret News 2012 Motivational



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Chart 3.11: Deseret News 2017 Motivational



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Chart 3.12: Salt Lake City Tribune 2012 Motivational

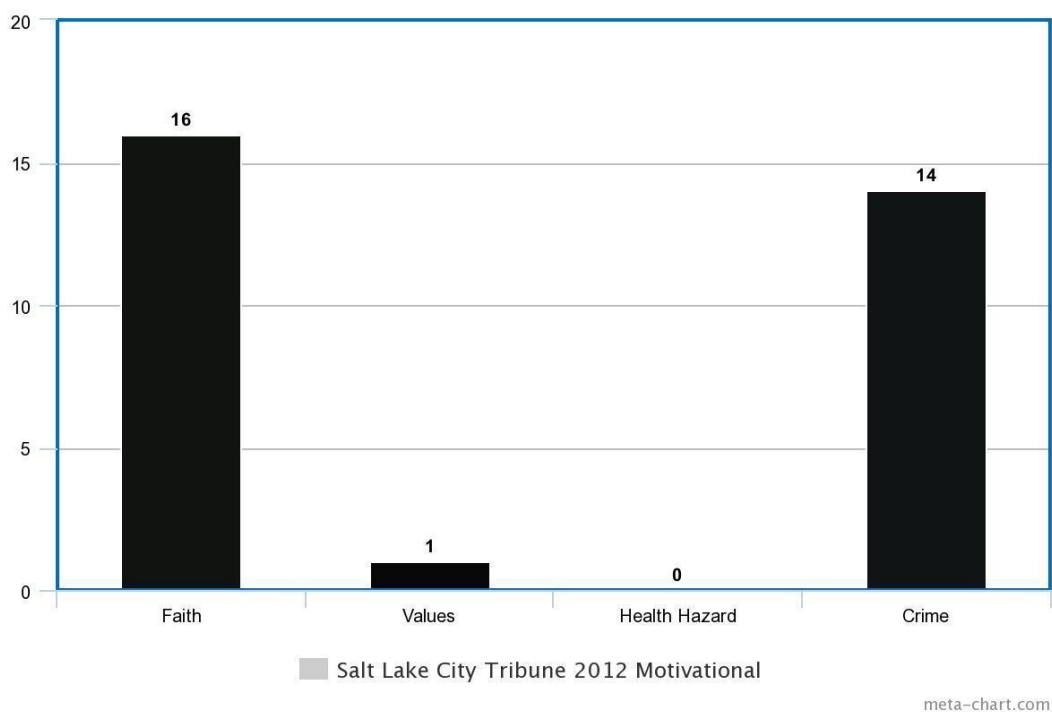
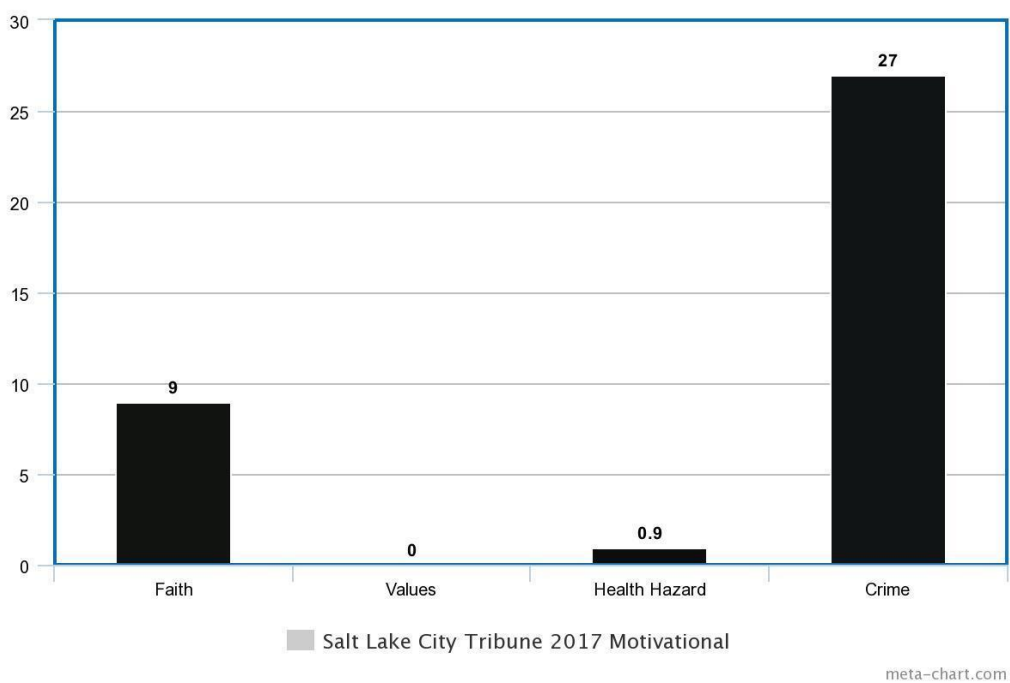


Chart 3.13: Salt Lake City Tribune 2017 Motivational

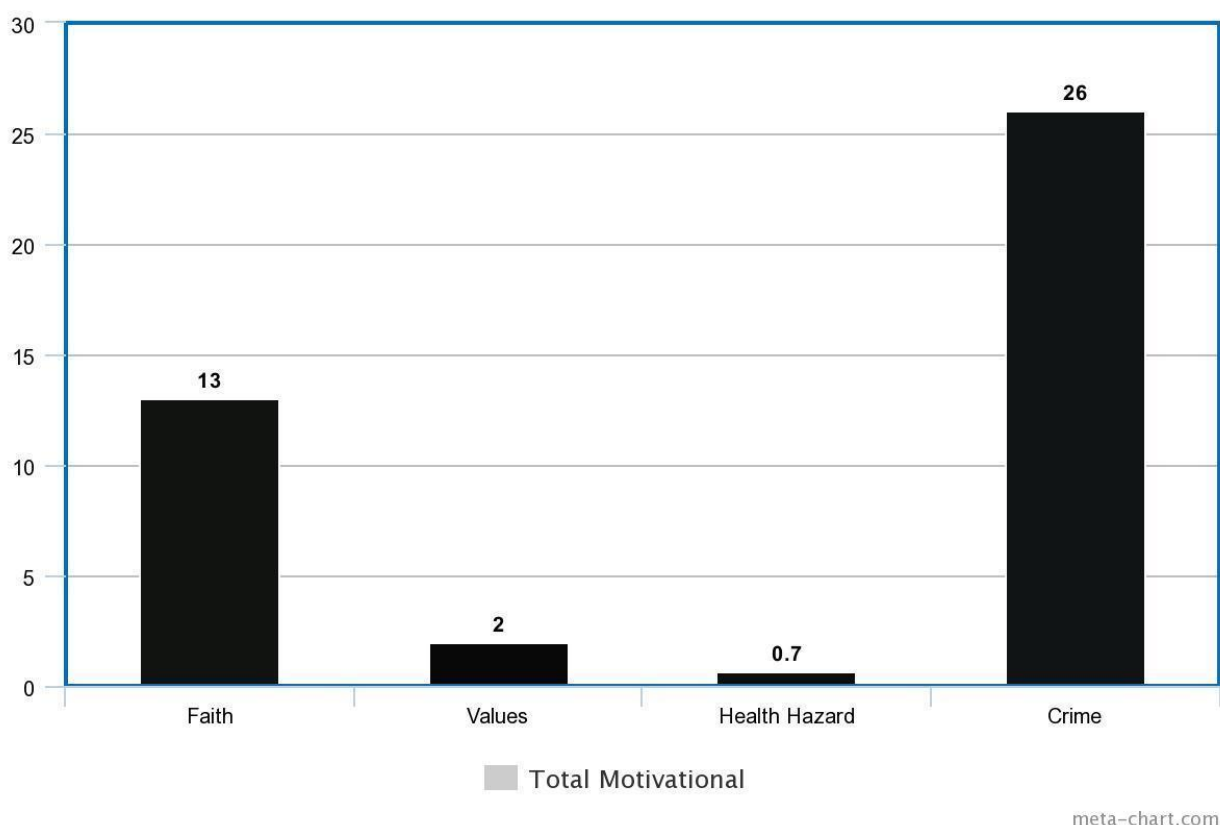


Articles coded “values” described teaching or maintaining personal values as reasons for which people should assist the homeless. An example of this is found in an April 17, 2012 article published in the *Deseret News*. This article describes volunteering at the food bank as an ideal way to teach children “a lifetime of values,” and suggests that families volunteer together at soup kitchens and other charitable organizations. In the *Deseret News* in 2012, 16 percent of the total 43 articles published included the “values” motivational frame while the percentage using that frame declined to just two percent in the second time period. Only one percent of the *Salt Lake Tribune* articles published in the same time period used the motivational frame of values, while no articles in that newspaper invoked a “values” frame in the 2017 time period.

Articles coded “faith” specifically mentioned faith or religion as a motivation for caring about homeless people. An example of this is an article from November 23, 2017 in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in which the primary claims-maker is quoted stating, “God told me ‘Go feed my people -- mind, body and soul.’” Overall across both time periods, 13 percent of articles were coded as using faith as a motivational frame, making it the second largest motivational coding category. In the *Deseret News* in 2012, 47 percent of the 43 articles cited faith as a motivational frame. This is compared to 16 percent of articles in the same time period in the 99 *Salt Lake Tribune* articles analyzed. The use of “faith” as a motivational frame declined significantly in the second time period, especially in the *Deseret News*, where in 2017 only 12 percent of the articles used faith to motivate a response to homelessness—a proportional decline of almost 75 percent. The

decline in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, which invoked faith-based motivation far less than did the *Deseret News*, showed a smaller decline for the 2017 time period, dropping from 13 percent to nine percent.

Chart 3.14: Total Motivational



### Prognostic Frames

Prognostic frames are claims-makers' suggested solutions for the identified social problem (Benford and Snow 2000). I coded 12 prognostic framing categories, which were then combined into four broader categories: individual/community solutions, structural solutions, geographic solutions, and punitive solutions. The individual/community solutions category is comprised of the prognostic frames of volunteering, charity, and kindness. The category of structural solutions is made up of

housing, employment, healthcare access, and service accessibility. Geographic solutions involve the codes Rio Grande, relocation, and homeless czar (a position that was developed specifically to oversee relocation of homeless services). Punitive solutions involve criminalization and mandated addiction or mental health treatment. Like other categories, not every article suggested a solution to the social problem, while some articles offered several.

In 2012 in the *Deseret News* the most common prognostic frame was charity, at 28 percent of 43 articles. Volunteering was a close second, coming in at 23 percent. Housing was suggested as a solution to homelessness in 16 percent of articles. The only other prognostic frame that was mentioned in this paper at this time was relocation, which came up in five percent of the 43 articles.

In the *Deseret News* in 2017, Rio Grande was the most common prognostic frame at 31 percent, with charity and housing tying for second at 17 percent each. Healthcare access was suggested as something that would alleviate homelessness in 13 percent of articles. Relocation came up 11 percent of the time, more than twice as often as it had in 2012. Treatment was mentioned in ten percent of articles, and no other frames were mentioned ten percent of the time or more. Volunteering came up in nine percent of the articles in this paper in 2017, with kindness closely following at seven percent.

Accessibility and employment were each mentioned as solutions to homelessness in five percent of articles, with a “homeless czar,” or unelected, appointed official designated to make final decisions about homelessness suggested as a primary solution four percent of the time. Criminalization was only mentioned one percent of the time.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* used charity as its dominant prognostic frame in 2012 at 26 percent, and volunteering was tied in second place with accessibility for most common prognostic frames 17 percent. Housing was suggested as a solution to homelessness in 14 percent of articles. The final prognostic frames mentioned in the *Tribune* in 2012 were healthcare access, employment, and relocation. Healthcare access came up in four percent of the 99 articles, whereas employment was mentioned three percent of the time. Relocation only came up in one percent of the overall articles in this paper at this time. In 2017 in the *Salt Lake Tribune* Rio Grande came up in 29 percent of articles, and relocation came in second with housing at 17 percent. Charity and healthcare access were both suggested as prognostic frames 14 percent of the time. Accessibility was mentioned in ten percent of articles. Kindness came up just under that at nine percent, followed by volunteering at seven percent, with treatment and employment each being suggested in five percent of the overall articles in this time period in this paper. Criminalization came up a mere two percent of the time.

When the data was organized into solution groups and bar graphs, patterns became more visible. Individual community solutions, or solutions that involved solving homelessness through community or personal involvement were the most significant category in 2012 across papers. In the *Deseret News* in 2012, 51 percent of total articles suggested this type of prognostic frame, as did 43 percent of articles in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. In 2017, individual community solutions dropped in both newspapers, most dramatically in the *Deseret News*. These solutions saw a decrease from 51 percent in

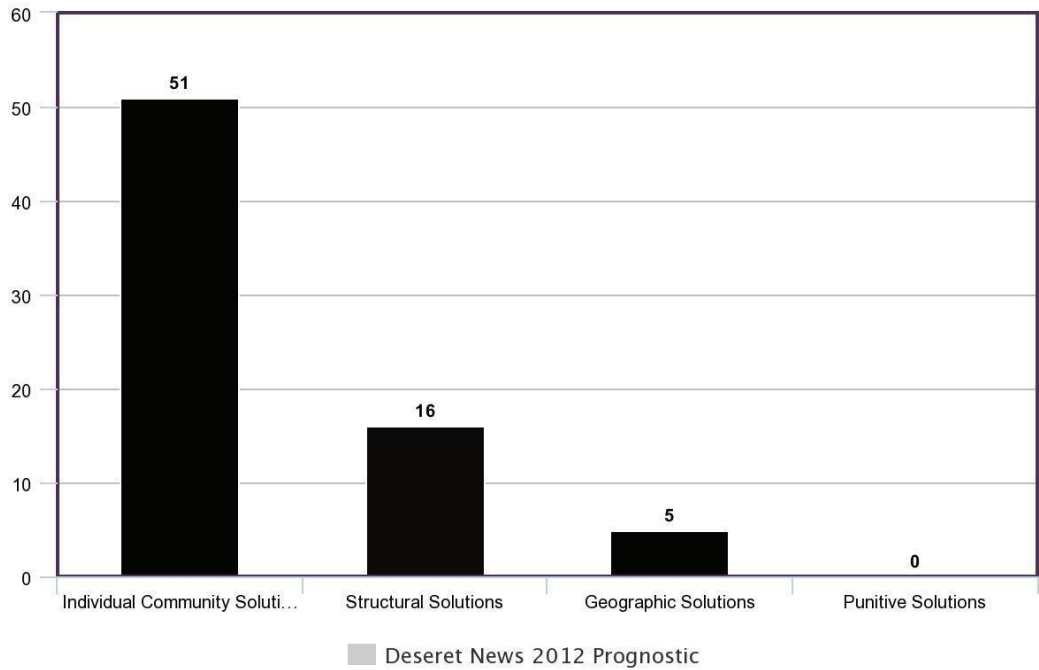
2012 to 16 percent in 2017 in this paper, and a drop from 43 percent to 30 percent in the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

Structural solutions also varied in frequency over time and between papers, most significantly in the *Deseret News* between 2012 and 2017. In 2012, structural solutions were offered in 16 percent of articles, but in 2017 they were the second most frequent prognostic frame at 40 percent. In the *Salt Lake Tribune* in 2012, structural solutions were the second most significant category at 38 percent, and that number rose to 46 percent in 2017, tying it with geographic solutions for the most frequent solution in that paper at that time.

Geographic solutions were offered in a mere five percent of articles in the *Deseret News* in 2012, comparable to the one percent they came up in the *Tribune* in the same time period. In 2017, both papers massively increased their usage of geographic solutions to homelessness. The *Deseret News* suggested geographic solutions in 46 percent of its articles in 2017, making it the most significant category in that paper at that time. This is the same percentage of articles (46 percent) as were published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* suggesting geographic solutions in the same time period.

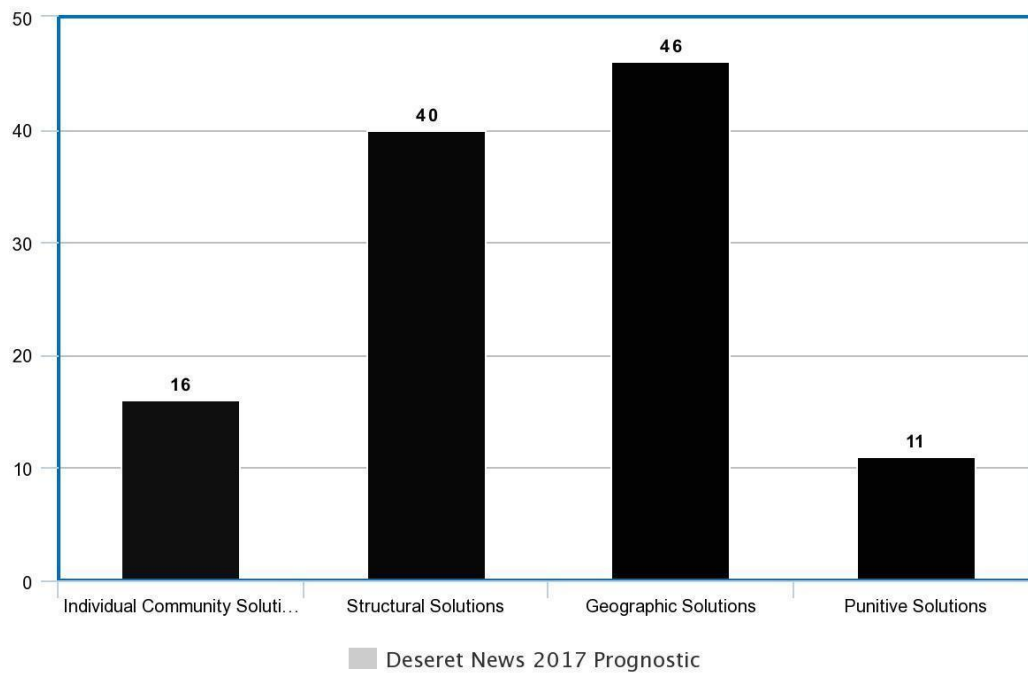
The final category was punitive solutions, which were not suggested at all in either news paper in 2012. In 2017 the *Deseret News* published punitive solutions to homelessness in 11 percent of their articles on the topic. The *Salt Lake Tribune* suggested punitive solutions in seven percent of its 2017 articles.

Chart 3.15: Deseret News 2012 Prognostic



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Chart 3.16: Deseret News 2017 Prognostic



meta-chart.com

Chart 3.17: Salt Lake City Tribune 2012 Prognostic



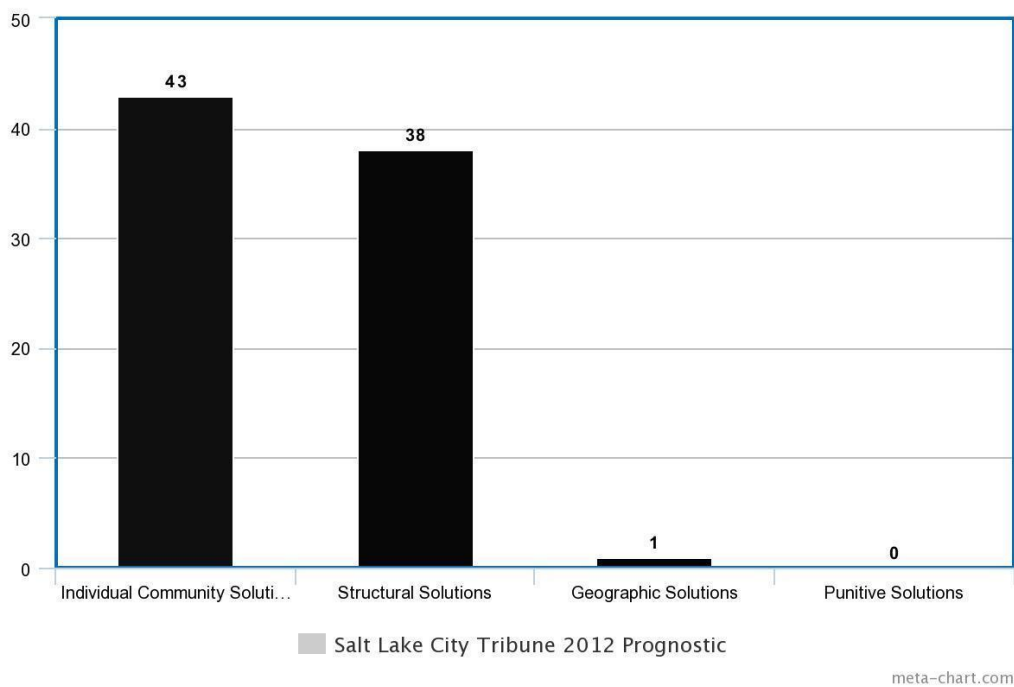
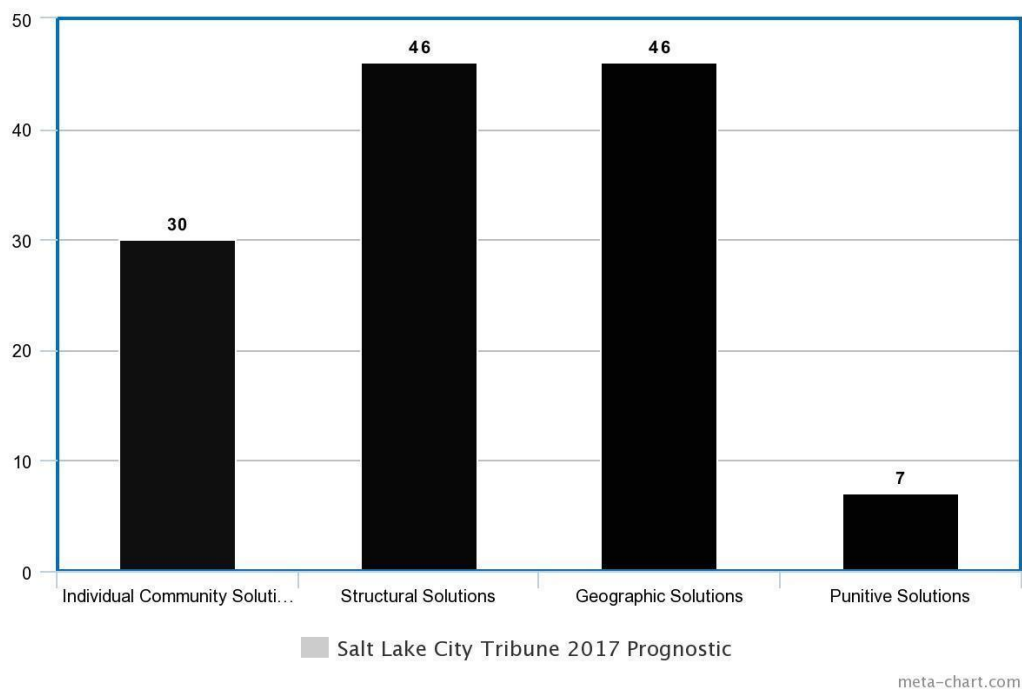


Chart 3.18: Salt Lake City Tribune 2017 Prognostic



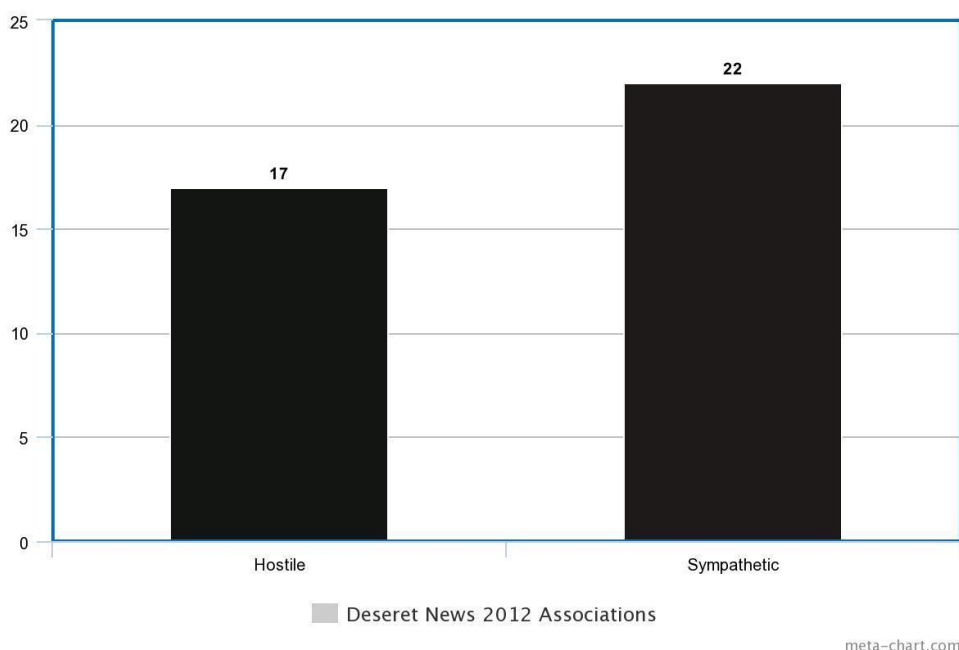
### **Associations**

The final coding category was associations. Associations are defined as issues and events that may or may not directly involve the homeless but do imply certain kinds of characteristics or affiliations. One example of this would be an article discussing the incarceration rate and mentioning homeless people in the same article. A more frequent example is found in articles discussing crime in geographic proximity to homeless people, especially in articles such as the article published in the *Deseret News* on August 10, 2017 in which it was reported that increased police presence in the Rio Grande homeless shelter area has led to “noticeably less criminal activity around the shelter area.” Because there is no direct link to homeless people as criminals but by the nature of the location discussed and mention of the shelter, this is an example of homelessness being associated with crime rather than a direct claim that the homelessness are criminals.<sup>4</sup>

The most significant association in the *Deseret News* in 2012 was youth. Associating homelessness with youth came up in 12 percent of the articles in this paper at this time. An example of this is from the June 9th, 2012 article in which the journalist is documenting a reduction in funding to an ROTC program. In the article, homelessness is only mentioned briefly, as a statistic regarding the number of students at the high school who are experiencing homelessness (4.9 percent). The second largest category in the *Deseret News* in 2012 was violence, which came in at nine percent. Crime came up as a association in seven percent of the 43 articles published in the *Deseret News* in 2012, and

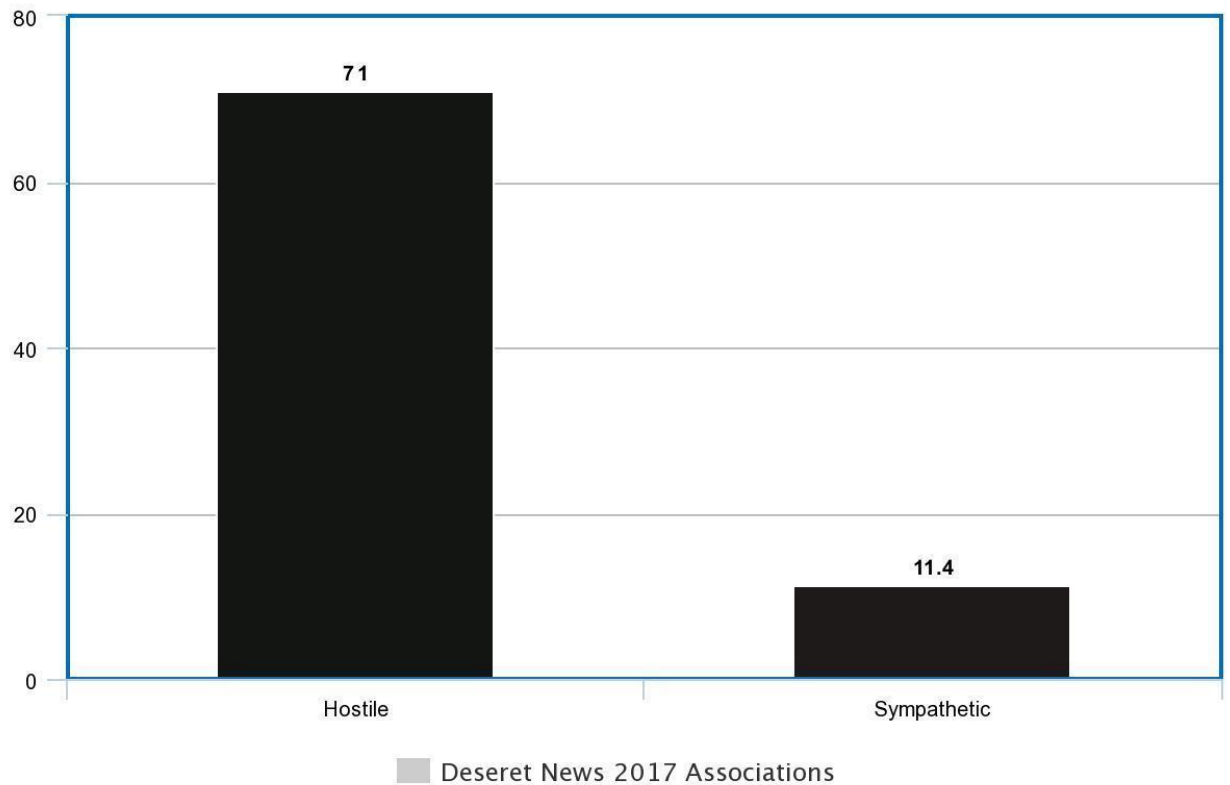
incarceration came up at five percent, along with relocation. The final association that came up in this paper in 2012 was talent, at two percent.

Chart 3.19: Deseret News 2012 Associations



In 2017 in the *Deseret News*, the homeless were associated with crime in 31 percent of the 283 articles. They were associated with Rio Grande the same number of times, at 31 percent. In 17 percent of the articles, finding increased public funds (funding) was associated with homelessness. Violence was a theme in 16 percent of articles. Homelessness was associated with incarceration in 11 percent of articles, a more than 100 percent increase from 2012. Youth was mentioned half as often at six percent, and the homeless were mentioned in articles focused on victims four percent of a time, a significant increase from the 0 that they were mentioned prior. Property devaluation was associated with homelessness one percent of the time.

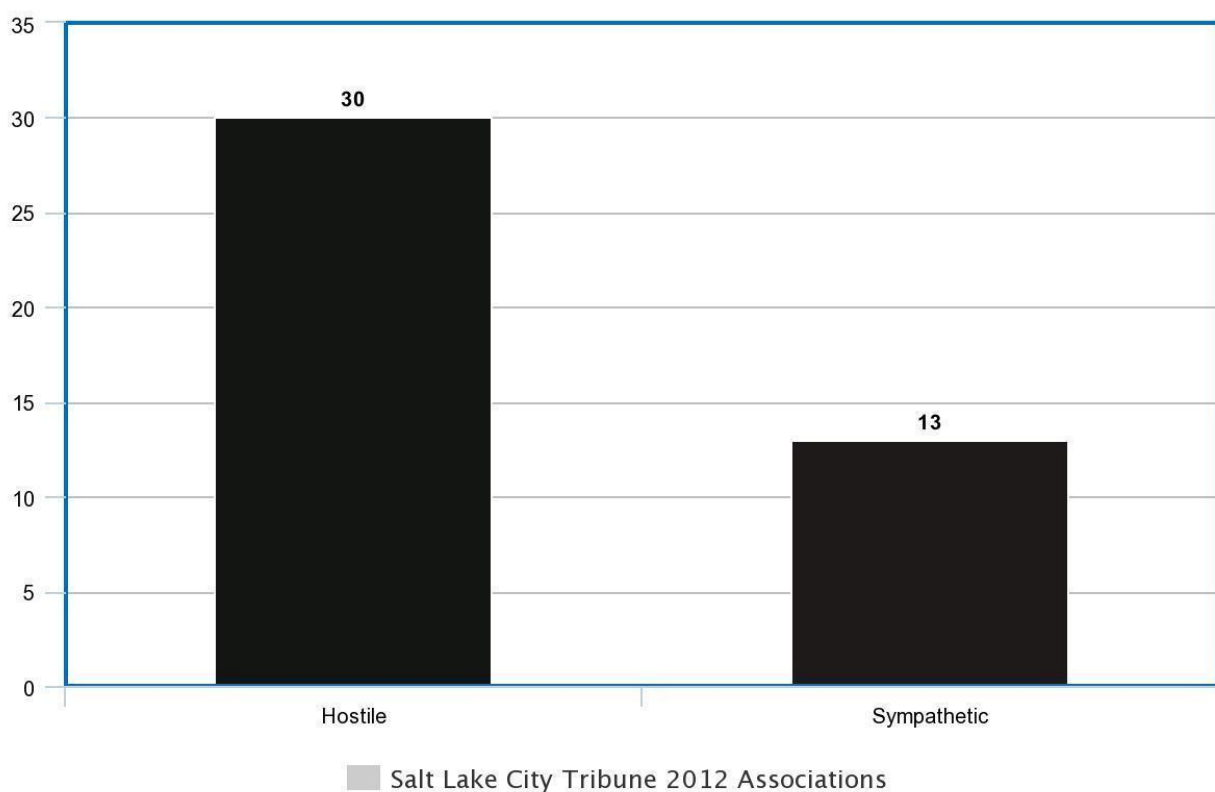
Chart 3.20: Deseret News 2017 Associations



meta-chart.com

The *Salt Lake Tribune* had similar, but differing patterns. In 2012, the most significant association was incarceration, at 15 percent. Crime was a close second at 14 percent, followed by what was the most significant category in the *Deseret News* in this time period, youth. Youth was associated with homelessness in ten percent of the 2012 *Tribune* articles. Civil rights came up in five percent of the 2012 articles in this paper, followed by victims (two percent).

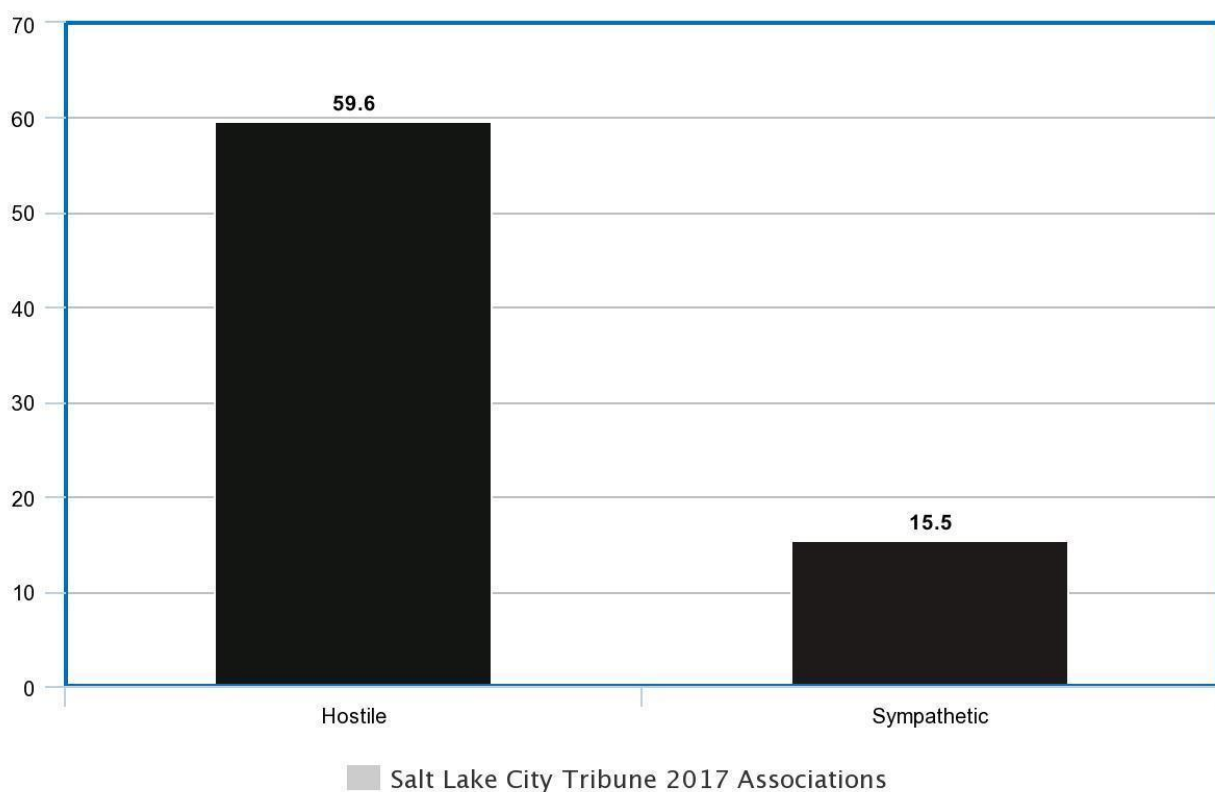
Chart 3.21: Salt Lake City Tribune 2012 Associations



meta-chart.com

In 2017, the *Tribune* most significantly associated homelessness with Rio Grande at 29 percent. Crime was the second most frequent association at 27 percent. Victimization and violence both came up as associations in nine percent of the articles in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in 2017. Funding was discussed in seven percent of the 327 articles. Youth was associated with homelessness five percent of the time, slightly more often than civil rights, which was discussed in four percent.

Chart 3.22: Salt Lake City Tribune 2017 Associations



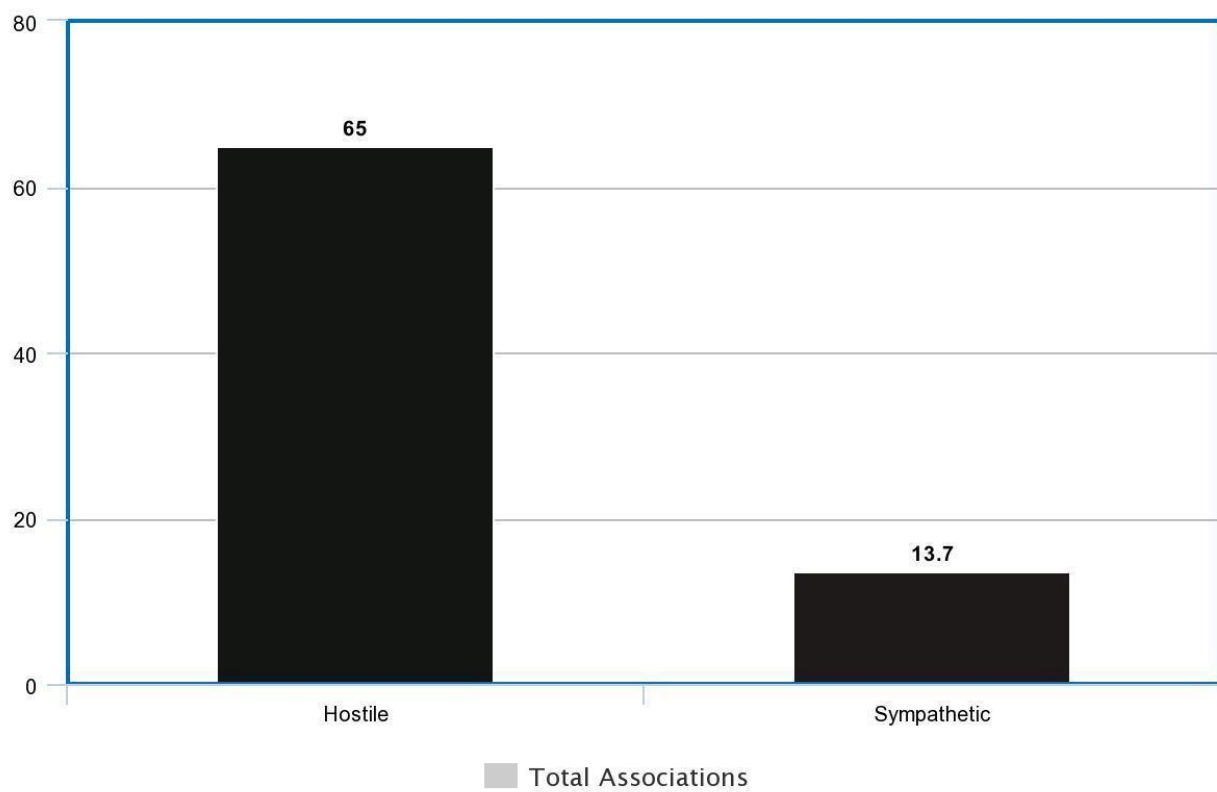
meta-chart.com

As with diagnostic framings, I organized associations into two categories, in this case, hostile and sympathetic. Hostile associations presented “loaded” negative terms implying that the homeless are among the “disreputable poor” (Matza 1971), including associations with things such as incarceration, crime, property devaluation, and funding burdens for the community. Sympathetic associations presented “loaded” positive terms, or terms that implied the homeless were among the “worthy poor,” or at least not responsible for their plight. Such associations included youth and/or victim status, special talents, and claims that liberal democrats, not the homeless themselves, were the cause of the homeless problem. Overall, 65 percent of the total 752 articles had some association that was hostile. In contrast, 13.7 percent of articles overall included some type of

sympathetic association. As with the other categories, some articles multiple associations, leading to percentages not adding up to exactly 100 percent.

In 2012 in the *Deseret News*, 17 percent of the four articles had a hostile association, which was less than the 22 percent that had sympathetic associations. In 2017, however, 71 percent of the 99 articles listed some hostile association, with only 11.4 percent including a sympathetic association. In 2012 in the *Salt Lake Tribune* 30 percent of associations were hostile, with 13 percent being sympathetic, which suggests that the *Tribune* was more significantly more likely than the *Deseret News* to suggest hostile associations in 2012. In 2017 the *Salt Lake Tribune* nearly doubled its hostile associations, jumping to 59.6 percent from 30 percent in 2012. It also experienced a slight increase in sympathetic associations, from 13 percent in 2012 to 15.5 percent in 2017.

Chart 3.23: Total Associations





## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

### Introduction

In the preceding chapter I presented findings regarding the representation of the homeless in the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* during two six month periods. I reported framings of homelessness across five categories: claims-makers, diagnostic framings, prognostic framings, motivational framings, and associations. In this chapter I look in more depth at the coverage of homelessness, comparing shifts in dominant framings in the two newspapers across the two time periods. I also examine changes in sympathetic versus hostile framings, as well as structural versus individualistic framings of homelessness. Throughout this discussion I will note similarities and differences in my findings from previous research. But before examining news framings of homelessness, I begin by looking at the visibility of homelessness in the two newspapers' coverage of homelessness in the two time periods. As several scholars (e.g., Best 2010, Buck et al. 2004, Bunis et al. 1996, Shields 2001) have observed, the visibility of homelessness in the media is subject to significant shifts over time. My data bear out this finding as well.

### Visibility of Homelessness in Newspaper Coverage

Several scholars have found that the extent of coverage of homelessness waxes and wanes over time. Taking a broad look across decades, Buck et al. found a "steep increase in media coverage of homelessness during the mid-1980s, a steady decline throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, and a plateau since the mid-1990s"

(2004:151). Others have focused on yearly seasonal cycles of media visibility of homelessness. Bunis et al. (1996) and Shields (2001) found annual seasonal variation in news media coverage of the homeless, especially with an increase in coverage during the Thanksgiving/Christmas holiday season.

Visibility of homelessness in the two Salt Lake City newspapers was significantly different in the two time periods under study. Over all, during the first time period, that is the first six months of 2012, in comparison to the last six months of 2017, the total number of articles addressing homelessness in both newspapers combined was 142 in 2012 compared to 610 in 2017. More specifically, the figures for the *Deseret News* were 43 in 2012 and 283 in 2017, while the number of articles on homelessness in the *Salt Lake Tribune* for 2012 and 2017 time periods were 99 and 327 respectively. In short, the number of articles in the latter time period was dramatically higher than in the earlier time period.

One likely reason for part of the increase of coverage in the 2017 period is that it captured that year's holiday season. Consistent with Bunis et al. (1996) and Shields (2001), we would expect to find more coverage based on this time frame. However, the increase in coverage is not entirely due to the "holiday span of sympathy toward the homeless" (Bunis et al. 1996:399) since months outside of the November and December holiday season also showed robust increases.

Another factor influencing the number of articles published in each time period could be changes in the way the city handles homelessness in general. In 2012 Salt Lake City was the epicenter of a social service movement called Housing First which touted

successes to the point of being on track to “eradicating homelessness.” However, since that point there has been an uptick in the number of people experiencing homelessness in SLC. This increase in the number of homeless people has very likely had an impact on the level of coverage the topic received in print news media in 2017. The year of 2017 was a major time of public debate in Salt Lake City about homelessness, especially in relation to the hot button debate about the relocation of the city’s largest homeless shelter and potential future gentrification of the locale at which the current shelter is located.

#### COMPARISON OF FRAMES IN *DESERET NEWS* AND *SALT LAKE CITY TRIBUNE*

##### **Claims-Maker Framing**

There were two primary claims-makers groups in the *Deseret News* in 2012; housed local residents and service organizations. Housed residents were the primary claims-makers in 33 percent of the 43 articles, and service organizations were claims-makers in 21 percent. In 2017, residents represented only 12 percent of claims-makers, and service organizations dropped to 14 percent. What we did see in 2017 was a sharp increase in the percentage of articles that gathered information from public officials -- from nine percent in 2012 to the most represented claims-makers in 2017 at 47 percent. Despite their drop from 21 percent to 14 percent, service organizations remained the second most frequent claims-makers in the *Deseret News*.

In 2012, the *Salt Lake City Tribune* had very similar patterns of representation as the *Deseret News* did in 2017-- that is the two most significant claims-maker categories were service organizations and public officials. In the 2012 *Tribune*, service organizations

were represented in 31 percent of the 99 articles. Public officials were claims-makers in 22 percent. Public officials became the most significant category in 2017 in this paper, represented in 40 percent of the 327 articles, which is comparable to the 47 percent in the *Deseret News* at this time. Resident voices were the second most cited claims-makers in the 2017 *Salt Lake City Tribune* articles, coming up in 21 percent of them.

So, in both papers public officials became the dominant claims-makers in 2017 and the voices of social service organizations declined dramatically. Residents were cited significantly less in 2017 than they were in 2012 in the *Deseret News*, but were cited more often in 2017 than in 2012 in the *Salt Lake City Tribune*.

### **Diagnostic Framings**

In the *Deseret News*, 2012 saw three main diagnostic frames. Economic frames, disability, and addiction came up as causes of homelessness in the largest percentage of the 43 articles published in that time period. Economic frames were presented in 19 percent of articles, while disability and addiction each appeared 12 percent of the time. In 2017, this changed a little bit. Addiction became the most dominant diagnostic frame at 30 percent. The only other significant category was violence, which appeared in only five percent of articles in 2012, but 16 percent in 2017.

The *Salt Lake City Tribune* looked extremely similar in both time frames. In 2012, economic causes were discussed in 19 percent of articles, the same percentage as in the *Deseret News* at that time. Like in the *Deseret News*, disability was the second most frequently cited cause of homelessness in the *Tribune* at 14 percent, two percent greater than in the *Deseret News*. In 2017, the *Salt Lake City Tribune* again shared its primary

diagnostic frame of addiction with the *Deseret News*. Addiction was the most significant category at 26 percent. The second largest code differed -- in the *Deseret News* in 2017, violence came in second, whereas the *Tribune* maintained its second largest diagnostic frame in of disability from 2012. Disability was discussed in 13 percent of the 327 *Salt Lake City Tribune* articles in 2017.

In both papers personal deficits were far and away posited as the main drivers of homelessness in 2017, while references to structural or economic causes of homelessness declined dramatically. Disability remained a largely cited cause of homelessness across time in both papers, maintaining a second tier slot in both papers in each time frame. Both papers also saw an increase in the number of articles that cited addiction as a primary cause of homelessness in 2017.

### **Motivational Framings**

There was not a large number of motivational frames offered in the articles analyzed for this research. In total, across all papers, we saw four. The *Deseret News* used religious faith as its primary motivator for readers to care about the social problem of homelessness in 2012, with the idea appearing in 47 percent of the 43 papers published in that time frame. Values was the second largest motivational frame at 16 percent at that time. In 2017, crime became the most significant motivational frame, jumping from just seven percent in 2012 to 31 percent in 2017. Faith dropped dramatically from 47 percent to 12 percent, but was still the second largest motivational frame in 2017.

The *Salt Lake City Tribune* also used faith as the primary motivational frame in 2012, however, it appeared in significantly fewer articles at 16 percent. Crime was the

second most frequent motivational frame in the 2012 *Tribune* at 14 percent. In 2017, the *Salt Lake City Tribune* had the same top two motivational frames, faith and crime. Crime became the most dominant frame, however, appearing as a reason that readers should care about homelessness in 27 percent of the overall articles. Faith appeared in just nine percent.

In both papers there was a reduction in faith, moral commitment, and values as the reasons posited for addressing the homeless problem, while the need for protection from crime related to homelessness became the dominant motivational framing.

### **Prognostic Framing**

The two most common prognostic frames in 2012 in the *Deseret News* in 2012 were charity and volunteering. Charity was discussed as a solution to homelessness in 28 percent of the 43 articles. Volunteering was suggested in slightly fewer, at 23 percent. Rio Grande was not discussed at all in 2012, but was the primary prognostic frame at 31 percent of the 283 in 2017. Rio Grande as a prognostic frame involves discussion involving doing “something” about the area, often unspecified. It also includes discussions about increasing funding and closing off the street to require homeless IDs in order to make a “safe space for the homeless,” and also relocating the homeless from Rio Grande and relocating the homeless shelter and other resources in that area. Charity and housing were both discussed as solutions to homelessness in 17 percent of articles, making them the second most frequent suggested solution to homelessness.

In the 2012 *Salt Lake City Tribune*, 26 percent of the 99 articles discussed charity as a solution to the social problem of homelessness, making it the largest category in this

paper in 2012. Volunteering, which was also the second largest category in the *Deseret News* at this time, came in second at 17 percent. Accessibility was also a proposed prognostic frame in 17 percent of the 2012 *Tribune* articles. Like the *Deseret News*, 2017 in the *Tribune* saw Rio Grande jump from 0 mentions to being a prognostic frame in 29 percent of articles. Again, there was a tie for the second most frequent frame at 17 percent, with housing and relocation both appearing in a significant number of articles.

In both papers there was a reduction in framing charity and volunteering as solutions to homelessness in 2017 and a new dominant prognostic focus on geographic relocation of homeless shelters as a way to deal with the homeless problem. This is a shift away from prognostic framings that emphasize personal involvement of citizens with the homeless to removing the homeless from the community.

### **Associational Framing**

The most frequent association with homelessness in the *Deseret News* in 2012 was youth at 12 percent. Violence was a close second association at nine percent in 2012. In 2017, both crime and the Rio Grande area were associated with homelessness in 31 percent of overall articles. This made them the most frequent associations. Public funding came up in 17 percent of articles, so the homeless were associated with use of public monies frequently in 2017.

In the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, 2012 saw incarceration as the most frequent association to homelessness. Articles published at that time discussed incarceration with homelessness in 15 percent of the 99 covering the social problem of homelessness. Crime

was discussed nearly as frequently, at 14 percent. In 2017, 29 percent of articles associated the location of Rio Grande with homelessness, whereas none had prior. Crime was again the second largest association category at 27 percent, an increase from 2012.

These findings indicate that there may have been an increased homeless presence in the Rio Grande area sometime between the two time periods that were analyzed for this study, as the location was not mentioned prior to 2017. There does not seem to be a significant shift in the tone of associations over the two time periods, except in the sense that youth (a generally sympathetic association) was not a top frame at all in 2017 when it had been a top frame in 2012 in the *Deseret News*.

#### COMPARISON OF SYMPATHETIC VERSUS HOSTILE FRAMING

Sympathetic and hostile frames were also tracked over time and between papers. Overall, across all of the data analyzed, frames were overwhelmingly hostile. When we look at the total 752 articles, 65 percent of them included associations that indicated a hostile perspective on homelessness, whereas only 13.7 percent discussed more sympathetic frames. The *Deseret News* in 2012 is the only time in either paper in which sympathetic frames outnumbered hostile ones, with sympathetic frames occurring in 22 percent of articles. Hostility appeared in 17 percent at that time. In 2017, the *Deseret News* experienced a dramatic shift from being more sympathetic to significantly more hostile. Hostile frames appeared in 71 percent of the articles published in 2017, a dramatic shift from 17 percent in 2012. Sympathetic frames were cut nearly in half, dropping from 22 percent in 2012 to 11.4 percent in 2017.



The *Salt Lake City Tribune* published more hostile than sympathetic frames in both time periods. In 2012, 30 percent of the 99 articles expressed hostility, while 13 percent were sympathetic. 2017 saw an increase in both categories, with hostile frames appearing in 59.6 percent of articles, and sympathetic frames appearing in 15.5 percent. In 2012 there was a clear difference between the papers, where the *Deseret News* was more sympathetic than hostile and also more sympathetic than the *Salt Lake City Tribune*. At that time, the *Deseret News* was sympathetic in 22 percent of its articles, while the *Tribune* was sympathetic in 13 percent. In 2017 the papers framed homelessness sympathetically in 15.5 percent of articles in the *Salt Lake Tribune* and 11.4 percent in the *Deseret News*. The relatively rare sympathetic framings contrast with the rate of which hostile framings were suggested.

Hostile frames were presented twice as common in the *Tribune* in 2017 and four times as frequently in the *Deseret News*. When these percentages are contextualized in the dramatic increase in the number of articles in the 2017 time period, we see that Salt Lake City newspaper readers were presented with hostile framings of homelessness at a far higher level than in 2012. While the percentages themselves are striking between the two time periods, the actual number of articles in this change is significant as well. Between 2012 and 2017 the number of hostile articles being disseminated to the public rose from 24 to 395. This is a 1545 percent increase in the amount of negative media about the homeless the public was receiving from Salt Lake City print media in 2017 when compared to 2012.

## COMPARISON OF INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SYSTEMIC FRAMING

Overall, structural solutions to homelessness were offered most frequently. Out of the total number of 752 articles, 42 percent of them suggested structural solutions to homelessness, including housing, employment, healthcare access and accessibility. However, in 2012, in both papers, structural solutions came up less frequently than individual ones. In the *Deseret News* in 2012, 51 percent of articles discussed individual solutions, making it more than 3 times as common as structural solutions. Structural solutions were offered far less frequently, appearing in just 16 percent of articles in that time period in the *Deseret News*. In 2017, however, structural solutions were offered most frequently between the two, appearing in 40 percent of articles. Individual solutions were offered in 16 percent of the articles.

The *Salt Lake City Tribune* more than doubled the *Deseret News* representation of structural solutions in the 2012, offering them in 38 percent of their articles. Despite this higher number, individual solutions were still offered more frequently at 43 percent. In 2017, structural solutions were suggested more often than individual ones, appearing in 46 percent of articles. Individual solutions came up 30 percent of the time. Individual solutions were the most frequently suggested solutions to homelessness in both papers in 2012. The *Deseret News* suggested them 51 percent of the time, while the *Salt Lake City Tribune* suggested them 43 percent of the time. Both papers followed the same pattern of change in 2017, offering structural solutions far more frequently than individual ones in that time period. The most notable finding is the *Tribunes* coverage of solutions of homelessness overall-- the *Salt Lake City Tribune* offered either individual or structural

solutions in 81 percent of 2012 articles and in 76 percent of 2017 articles, while the *Deseret News* offered either type in 67 percent of articles in 2012 and in 56 percent in 2017.

### **Conclusion**

My findings regarding claims-makers are congruent with findings in several other studies focused on media analysis of representations of homelessness. One clear finding is that certain claims-maker groups dominated the newspaper representations of the homeless that I analyzed. Consistent with Gould (2004), Grant et al. (2018) and others, my research found that public officials were cited more often than those directly affected by the social problem under consideration.

In my set of data involving claims-makers in Salt Lake City print media, currently homeless and formerly homeless individuals were cited a combined total of only eight percent of the time across the two time frames in the newspapers, in contrast to the nearly 40 percent of the time overall that public officials were cited as claims-makers. Daoust (2013) and others have observed this pattern as well, noting that the voices of the homeless are often unheard in issues regarding them specifically. Schneider (2010) found in her research that over 70 percent of direct quotes in the stories she analyzed were attributed to “experts” rather than individuals with firsthand knowledge. Klodawsky (2002) suggested that this trend was likely in part due to journalistic biases, with the authors of the articles choosing to emphasize one perspective as the expert view and neglecting to interview others.

Hostile frames as the overwhelming majority is a trend in other research as well. In this study, we found hostile frames in 65 percent of articles, a vast increase to the 13.7 percent that discussed sympathetic ones. These hostile frames that dominated the discourse in 2017 and overall are congruent with Fran Klodawsky's 2002 findings in which the media emphasized the "stubborn, unchanging" state of homelessness and the ways in which homelessness and homeless people inconvenienced the lives of those who are housed.

However, like in this research, Daoust (2013) found a shift over time. In 1999, she found that articles were more likely to be hostile, associating homelessness with danger and substance abuse than they were in 2009, just after the housing crisis. This study found that in 2012, when Salt Lake City's use of housing first was a prominent national discussion, frames were more likely to be sympathetic than in 2017 when the city was primarily discussing the downtown area of Rio Grande. Buck et.al (2004) also found differences in sympathetic vs hostile frames over time; while they found that coverage was overwhelmingly hostile, there was more sympathetic coverage in 1982 to 1987 than there was in any other portion of the 30 year time frame that they analyzed.

Structural framings were overall the most significant frames for the solutions of homelessness in this research at 42 percent. This mirrors prior research of similar data. Structural frames were also the dominant solution to homelessness in research conducted by Cokeley (2017). She found that the majority of local media supported housing and legal tent cities as a path to ending homelessness. Shields (2001), who covered network news coverage of homelessness from 1980 to 1993 also documented a trend of media

suggesting structural solutions such as soup kitchens and temporary shelters as primary solutions to homelessness. Daoust (2013) described in her analysis a pattern of solutions to homelessness as the responsibility of the government.

Overall, this study adds to a growing body of literature on the way that popular news media discusses homelessness and presents the social issue to the public. My findings are significant in respect to the information being disseminated in Salt Lake City, Utah, and they are largely congruent with prior research conducted in other major cities both in the United States and in other dominant countries around the world.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I described the findings of this research in comparative terms -- that is I examined the differences between each paper and over time across different frames and coding categories. I linked these findings to other media analysis studies focused on homelessness in both the United States and abroad. In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which these findings are connected to the greater context of what was happening in Salt Lake City, Utah during the time periods in which I chose to source my articles. I posit reasoning for the shift noted in previous chapters, and offer solutions to what I find to be problematic.

### **Discussion**

In the first time period Salt Lake City was nationally recognized as a leader in the “Housing First” approach to homelessness which focused on providing housing to the homeless as a first step in assisting them to become integrated members of the community. While homeless social service workers continued to pursue housing first objectives (with only limited success) five years later, the local context of and policies toward homelessness had shifted dramatically. In the summer of 2017 Salt Lake City officially began implementation of “Operation Rio Grande,” the title given to the city’s new plan for ameliorating homelessness and improving the Rio Grande neighborhood in which the major Salt Lake City homeless shelter, the Road Home, provided shelter and other support to over 1,000 homeless clients. At that time, Salt Lake City embraced a

largely punitive approach to the homeless. As the American Civil Liberties Union described the new orientation toward homelessness several months into “OGR”:

Since August 2017, more than 5,024 people have been arrested in the Rio Grande neighborhood, with 80 percent of them picked up for misdemeanors or warrants. During the same period, social service agencies added 243 new treatment beds while 120 individuals pled into drug courts. The 13-to-1 imbalance is a direct result of the law-enforcement dominance of Operation Rio Grande from its inception. (ACLU 2018)

In the context of this shift in policy from a housing first approach to what could well be called a “jail first” approach, newspaper treatment of the homeless in Salt Lake City took a decidedly less “homeless friendly” tone. Reporting in both the arguably conservative *Deseret News* and more liberal *Salt Lake Tribune* during the Operation Rio Grande era framed homelessness in distinctively different ways from their framing of homelessness in 2012. This “jail first” approach is evident in the ways in which the major print media in Salt Lake City was discussing homelessness in 2017.

In 2012 the primary claims-makers across newspapers were residents and service organizations, and the most frequent diagnostic frames were economic and disability. In 2017, public officials became the dominant claims-makers in both newspapers by a significant amount, with residents as the second most cited. The most frequent diagnostic frame became addiction in both papers, followed by violence. These patterns suggest that not only was there a shift in who was being cited to make claims about homelessness as a social problem, but also that there was a major change in the way that homeless was being discussed by the people being cited. When compared with the major increase in the

number of articles being published in that time frame -- from 142 in the six months analyzed in 2012, to 610 in the six months in 2017-- we see that not only is the media more overwhelmingly negative towards the homeless, but that the amount of coverage has increased so significantly that the more positive coverage that may have occurred in 2012 is completely overshadowed.

The increased reliance on public officials' claims and decline in presenting the views of social service organizations had a major impact in the framings of homelessness in general. The change from social service representatives to public officials as claims-makers represented a shift away from people with more up-close experience with the homeless, replacing them with official voices that reflected official agendas that did not necessarily coincide with policies that would best service the homeless. The ACLU noted this discrepancy as ORG took full force, commenting that:

Operation Rio Grande remains primarily law-enforcement focused, with multiple law enforcement agencies involved in a dramatic “clean up” of this small area of downtown Salt Lake City, at great expense to taxpayers statewide. Treatment and other supportive services have been secondary considerations in the implementation of this operation. (ACLU 2018)

The ACLU further criticized the official narrative by observing, “Entirely missing from the official narrative is the impact of these thousands of new arrests, fresh criminal records, and additional stints in jail—mostly due to minor offenses.” The report concludes, “Undoubtedly, ORG has made it harder for many people to rebuild their lives” (ACLU 2018).



Beyond the reduction of claims-makers from social service organizations in 2017 news articles, a more striking characteristic of the newspapers' treatments of homelessness across both time periods is the extremely limited inclusion of the voices of homeless people themselves. As Truong, among many others, has noted, the lack of homeless claims-makers is a general feature of mainstream news reporting. "Marginalized groups such as the homeless," she writes, "are typically excluded from discussions surrounding policies that inevitably affect them" (2012:99). That observation is supported by the current research. Truong goes on:

Homelessness should be presented in mainstream news media in a more contextualized way with the inclusion of homeless people's perspectives and discussion of broader structural factors that contribute to homelessness (e.g., lack of affordable housing)". (2012:100)

In many ways the shifts in the framing of homelessness in the Salt Lake City newspapers in 2017 read as if they were out of a playbook focused on mobilizing support for official interests and policies. Through journalistic editorial decisions regarding their framing of homelessness in Salt Lake City, the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake City Tribune* served, whether wittingly or unwittingly, as media advocates for supporting public officials' policies toward the homeless, including increased arrests and planning to move homeless services out of the Rio Grande area.

Further evidence for this shift to a "jail first" perspective in Salt Lake City's treatment of the homeless is found in changes I have documented in the prognostic frames and associations in both newspapers' articles on homelessness. Criminalization

became an frequently repeated prognostic solution for homelessness in 2017, despite having not appeared at all in the prior time period. Claims-makers were cited suggesting that harsher laws, such as making panhandling illegal and enforcing rules making it against the law for the homeless to sit on the sidewalk, would be viable solutions to the social problem. There was also a significant uptick in the number of articles stating that government agencies should intensively police the areas in which the homeless reside and/or congregate.

The homeless were more often associated with crime and were discussed more frequently in articles regarding allocation of public funds in 2017, suggesting that there was more debate than in the prior time frame about how much money should be used to aid the homeless, and what the source of those funds should be. In fact, the number of hostile associations rose very significantly, with many 2017 articles including more than one hostile association -- many articles not only included hostile associations with homelessness, but that a significant number of those articles (about a third of them) included more than one hostile association.

Shifts from the 2012 time period to 2017 in the *Deseret News*' and the *Salt Lake Tribune*'s framings of homelessness over all represented changes in the treatment of the "homelessness problem" in ways that fit well with the Operation Rio Grande emphasis on a punitive approach. These included, heavy reliance on claims-makers who were voices for the change and increasing the negative framings of homelessness and the homeless, especially increasing claims-maker references to the homeless as threats on several dimensions (e.g, violence, crime, drug abuse).

Newspaper framings of homelessness in the 2017 time period were also more likely to align with the OGR agenda if they decreased incorporation of claims-makers who would emphasize alternative approaches. In terms of this last point, there was a significant decline in the percentage of articles in 2017 that incorporated social service organization voices as claims-makers. This was not lost on social service workers in the Rio Grande area, as was observed by Curtis Smith who was doing ethnographic researcher with homeless social service workers at the Road Home during that time period. In talking with social service workers about the city's changes in homeless services, he found social service workers were very demoralized, feeling that they were being left out of the conversation/deliberations even though they were the personnel who worked most closely with the homeless (Smith 2019). They would have jumped at the opportunity to share their views with newspaper reporters, but as barriers were installed, additional police assigned, and arrest mounted they weren't asked.

These findings raise interesting questions about the role of newspapers in the providing an understanding of homelessness, and construction of social problems more generally. Is the role of newspapers one of educating the public about a social problem or to simply serve as public relations advocates for shifting city policies? In this case study of Salt Lake City newspapers, a strong case can be made that they functioned largely in the latter capacity.

### **Conclusion**

This study commenced with the goal of answering the following questions about media representation of homelessness in Salt Lake City print media:

1. Has the framing of homelessness and the descriptions of the homeless in these news media remained consistent over time or has it changed?
2. Is the framing of homelessness in each newspaper largely the same or are there significant reporting differences?
3. Who have the newspaper reporters used as claims-makers about the “homeless problem”?
4. Are there key constituencies in the homeless story that are not represented in the newspaper articles?

As my findings indicate, there was significant change both between each newspaper and in each newspaper over time. Homelessness was framed in primarily positive diagnostic frames in both papers in 2012, and while positive framing was still the dominant discussion regarding the causes of homelessness in 2017, these frames appeared in significantly fewer articles, and the number of negative frames rose dramatically.

Motivational frames shifted from positing that people should care about homelessness and homeless people because it's the right thing to do (according to faith) to suggesting that people should care about homelessness because homeless people are criminals who are connected directly to increases in crime. There was also a noteworthy adjustment in the newspapers reporting of prognostic frames over time. In 2012 the dominant discussion suggested individual solutions such as charity and volunteering, whereas in 2017 newspapers were suggesting more “geographic cure” or punitive solutions, such as relocation and incarceration.

These shifts can be explained most clearly when looked at in conjunction with the changes in primary claims-makers. Instead of citing social service workers and people directly connected to homelessness as they had in 2012, newspapers were more likely to cite public officials, both police and elected, when looking at homelessness. The change in who is represented as claims-makers logically leads to a change in the things that the claims-makers are suggesting about homelessness and its causes and solutions -- in this case that change lead to an overall alteration of the discussion from one that is balanced and frequently sympathetic, to a more aggressive approach that appears to be aimed at driving public support for the relocation of the “Road Home” homeless shelter on Rio Grande.

The biggest, most remarkable thing I observed when looking at representation in these papers across both time periods is the lack of homeless voices being heard in a discussion regarding homelessness. In all 752 articles, homeless people were directly cited in only 32 of them, just four percent. As sociologists, we understand that this is problematic. Dorothy Smith’s standpoint theory (1987) and institutional ethnography (2005) offer one of several sociological perspectives on human knowledge that suggest that the best way to learn about a marginalized community is to allow that community to participate in research and discussions. Standpoint theory argues that the unequal power relations of outsiders to these groups leads to biases and missed questions (Smith 1990). Journalists who aspire to provide deeper insight into social justice issues would benefit from embracing an approach that recognizes the critical value of paying attention to the people whose lives they are describing for their readership

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## ENDNOTES

- 1: For a more thorough review of the homeless services literature, see Curtis Smith (2019).
- 2: For a thorough discussion of the principles and practices of the “housing first” model, see Padgett et al. 2015.
- 3: “Health hazard” as a motivational frame refers to articles that suggested that people should care about the social problem of homelessness because of the supposed health hazards presented by homeless individuals. An example of this is found in the *Salt Lake City Tribune* in an article published on July 10, 2017. In the article, a House Speaker discusses the city power washing the sidewalk near the homeless shelters downtown, stating that the water was “filthy and black,” and that it was “a public health hazard.” The Speaker goes on to say that measures need to be taken to reduce the number of homeless people in the area. Health hazard was used as a motivational frame in 0.7 percent of overall articles, and was used most frequently in 2012 in the *Deseret News*. The second most significant occurrence was in 2017 in the *Salt Lake City Tribune* at 0.9 percent, followed by 0.4% in 2017 in the *Deseret News*. Health hazards were not used as a motivational frame at all in 2012 in the *Salt Lake City Tribune*.
- 4: Civil rights was also coded as an association, but was kept independent of the collapsed coding categories due to the complication that it crosses both hostile and sympathetic associations. This is because even in some individual articles, the tone used to discuss it was complicated. One article published in the *Salt Lake City Tribune* on October 18, 2017 describes homeless people as “scruffy,” with criminal warrants, but

goes on to posit that that police may be violating their rights in stopping them and asking for ID. The journalist interviewed people experiencing homelessness and explained that people are feeling threatened by the police practices, but then goes on to state that they are frequently violating trespassing and loitering laws. Another article published in the same paper on March 20, 2012 expresses thankfulness at an ordinance limiting panhandling, claiming that homeless people are “wrangling” money from passersby, but then goes on to explain that criminalizing the homeless for panhandling doesn't make sense because they don't have money to pay the fines anyway. Civil rights came up in a total of three percent of the overall 752 articles. It was mentioned zero times in the *Deseret News* in 2012, and in two percent of the 2017 articles in that paper. Civil rights were discussed in five percent of 2012 articles in the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, and in four percent of the 2017 articles in that paper.