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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indigenous Homelessness: On Social Problems and Silences in Alberta News Media

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Abstract

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness became a much more visible and dire social crisis within Calgary and Edmonton. Despite comprising a fraction of Calgary and Edmonton's overall population, Indigenous peoples disproportionately represent the homeless population but are rarely discussed by the news media. This Indigenous media deficiency is sharpened by the lack of qualitative research that studies the communication of Indigenous homelessness in the news media. Drawing on Van Dijk's critical discourse, this study employs critical discourse analysis to ask, "How is Indigenous homelessness discussed as a social problem in Alberta news media?". This research constitutes the first qualitative study on the discourse of Indigenous homelessness in news media. Findings identified the dominant themes of homelessness: accidentally becoming homeless, homeless individuals as welfare freeloaders, violence, danger, social disorder, the criminalization of homelessness, drug addicts and alcoholics. Together, findings suggest that these dominant themes operate to blame individuals, remove responsibility from the system, create public resentment, construct public fear, and dehumanize homeless people through situational links to poverty, disorder, disease, and violence. This study argues that homeless people undergo a process of othering, leaving them primarily spoken for by journalists in the news media. This study offers insight into Indigenous themes of homelessness, including the overrepresentation of homeless statistics, the cycle of homelessness and reconciliation. However, the main findings identify the operation of a Western discourse, where the ideology of individualism and the cultural values of hard work, wealth, property, and self-sufficiency silences the settler-colonial legacies attributable to Indigenous homelessness. Alberta's news media discussions of homelessness disenchant the unique oppressions Indigenous peoples face which increase their vulnerability to becoming homeless. Conclusively, this analysis reveals the importance of studying the communication of social problems through an Indigenous lens to deconstruct hegemonic portrayals and reinstate the voices of our most vulnerable.

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis, Indigenous discourse, homelessness, settler-colonialism

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Homelessness in Canada is a long-term social problem that continues to be provoked and shaped by the 'intersecting crises' of racism, the overdose crisis, the lack of affordable housing, and the aftereffects of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mauboules, 2020, p. 43). A 'social problem' in the literature refers to the negative consequences derived from systems, such as government and institutions, rather than individual choices (Lawrence, 2000, p. 36, as cited in Best, 2010, p. 78). This is key to the study because homelessness culminates as the consequential social problem of the intersecting crises. Mass media, aside from personal experience, is a primary resource for the public to learn about homelessness (Krewski et al. 2004, as cited in Calder et al., 2011, p. 4). Particularly, news media serves as a critical forum to portray the current state of homelessness and its causes (Hackett et al., 2012, p. 12, as cited in Schwan, 2016, p. 42). The news media is a powerful tool in informing public perception through its discussions of homelessness. General trends in research show a gap in the study of Indigenous homeless portrayals. Qualitative research focused on the news media's discussion of homelessness is essential in promoting Indigenous discussions given their disproportionate homeless population and inadequate representation in scholarship. This study attempts to fill these gaps by asking the question, "How is Indigenous homelessness discussed as a social problem in Alberta news media?" through a qualitative, critical discourse analysis.

Indigenous peoples overwhelmingly encompass Alberta's homeless population, representing 5% of Edmonton's population but 51% of Edmonton's 2016 Homeless Count (Current State of Homelessness in Edmonton) and 3% of Calgary's population (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2016) but 30.1% of Calgary's 2022 Point-in-Time Count (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2022). Despite this egregious representation, communication studies severely lack a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the portrayal of Indigenous homelessness in news media. Reviewing the literature, analysis studying the communication of homelessness in Canadian news media is largely quantitative (Best, 2010, pp. 74, 77; Klodawsky et al., 2002, p. 126; Mao et al., 2012, p.1; Richter et al., 2012, pp. 620, 622; Schwan, 2016, p. 34; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 147). This study is the first of its kind, inspired by Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis to investigate the power structures of the news media. Accordingly, this study follows Van Dijk's notion that news discourse is characterized by its silences, where "'(i)nformation that could (or should) have been given'" (Van Dijk, 1986, p. 178, as cited in Huckin, 2002, p. 352) is purposely left out to advance a certain discourse. As one of the most vulnerable populations in

Canada, research is needed to properly acknowledge the silences towards Indigenous peoples in the media and how dominant themes of homelessness generate deficiencies in their homeless portrayal.

Methodology

The sample for this study includes Alberta news media coverage on Indigenous homelessness in Edmonton and Calgary. These cities were chosen as 55.5% of all Indigenous peoples reside in Western Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021); the top three cities include Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2021). Calgary is included in this sample for its unique characteristic as the first Canadian city that adopted a failed, but comprehensive 10-year plan to end homelessness (Gaetz et al. 2013, as cited in Schwan, 2016, p. 43; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 151). Given the absent inclusion of discussions on Indigenous homelessness in Canadian news media (Ritcher et al., 2012, p. 630; Schwan, 2016, p. 64), purposive sampling is used as the sampling method to ensure Indigenous homelessness is included within the study's sample.

The sample dataset is chosen from five news articles published between 2021-2022, where homelessness became exacerbated and increasingly visible to the public because of the economic, health and social crises following Covid-19 (Mauboules, 2020, p. 43). Selective criteria from Calgary and Edmonton local news media were sourced through ProQuest and Google News, including *The Calgary Herald*, *The Edmonton Journal*, and *The Calgary Star*. The sample dataset's search criteria included one or both keywords 'Indigenous' and 'homelessness'. To connect with social problems, articles within the sample dataset were searched for keywords such as 'violence', 'systemic discrimination', 'shelter', 'social barriers', 'racism', 'trauma', 'domestic violence', 'mental health', 'suffering', 'colonialism' and 'reconciliation', although the existence of these keywords was not necessary in case of media exclusion. These articles included a word count of at least 600 up to 5,500 words. This enables analysis to dive deeper into the discussions of homelessness produced, given the small sample. From the sample dataset, the samples selected for this study include: *Edmonton shelter storage shouldn't be an annual winter tradition* (Gerein, 2022), *'I don't feel safe': Crime and safety always top of mind for downtown residents* (Herring, 2022), *Opinion: Wetaskiwin homeless camp shows disconnect between reconciliation and reality* (Larson, 2021), *In the shadow of an arena:*

How one hockey-loving, oil-rich Canadian city is again displacing Indigenous people (Mosleh, 2022), and *Tackling homelessness is up to every Edmontonian* (Sohi, 2021). The dominant themes of homelessness in the news media were studied at the micro-level of critical discourse in accordance with a set list of questions for each article (see Appendix). After identifying these semiotic elements, the article's social and political context was researched to explore the legitimacy of the claims made about homelessness. The analysis focused on investigating the textual silences and interdiscursivity of the sample to identify a discourse within its set of ideologies.

Analysis: The Dominant Themes of Homelessness in Alberta News Media

Becoming Lost and Falling into Homelessness

The complexity of homelessness is heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic yet obscured by Alberta's news media discussions on how individuals become homeless. Four of the five articles under study linked individuals becoming homeless with the transitory verbs of 'slipping', 'falling' and becoming 'lost' (Table 1). Homelessness is constructed as a pervasive part of everyday life; it can happen to anyone who loses their economic footing, experiences hardships that lead to poor life choices and cannot find stability to permanently remove themselves from homelessness. These descriptors imply that homelessness is waiting to catch anyone when they fall. As this is something that could happen to anyone, it is the individual's fault for allowing themselves to become homeless. Arguably, Indigenous peoples experience a heightened risk of 'falling' into homelessness as their familial networks are destabilized by addiction-related abuse and family separation stemming from the legacies of settler-colonialism (Kneebone et al., 2015, as cited in Lindstrom et al., 2020, p. 64). Thus, Indigenous peoples do not experience a 'slip', but a systemic push into homelessness from these hardships.

Additionally, bad luck is constructed as a pervasive yet latent force of homelessness within this theme. Relating this theme to the literature that cites homelessness in Canadian news media as an "individual trait" (Schwan, 2016, p. 57), bad luck individually finds people as they 'fall' into homelessness. The complexity of homelessness is simplified through the implication of accidental forces that semantically validate the claims that anyone could happen to be homeless. This disenchants the unique oppressions Indigenous peoples face that make them more

vulnerable to becoming homeless. Through this theme, it becomes logically sensical that because anyone can become homeless, those who do become homeless simply did not try hard enough not to prevent their fall, rather than being pushed to the edge of an already fragile situation.

Table 1

News Media Descriptions of Becoming Homeless as Accidental

Article	Situation
Sohi	"Given how easy slipping into houselessness can be…" (2021).
Gerein	"While there are good things in the package that will hopefully prevent more Albertans from falling into homelessness…" (2022).
Mosleh	"(H)e soon got lost in the system and ultimately the streets…" (2022).
Larson	"(F)olks who have nowhere else to go…" (2021).

Note. Statements are derived from four of the five articles sampled. Quotations are highlighted to identify the themes present for 'becoming lost' and 'falling into homelessness.'

Homeless Individuals as Welfare Freeloaders and a Tax Advantage

The housing crisis was the most prevalent social problem attached to homelessness throughout the sample (Table 2). Additionally, Herring, Sohi and Gerein's articles linked the action of addressing homelessness to the public advantage of saving taxpayer funds (2022; 2022; 2021) (Table 2). This creates the knowledge that homeless individuals are at the root of a massive public expense. By discussing how expensive homelessness is (Table 2), news media

construct a salient theme that homelessness is preventing taxpayer funds and government subsidies from alleviating other social issues like "an already strained emergency room and our backlogged justice system" (Sohi, 2021) (Table 2). Blame is attached to homeless individuals for creating such a strain on resources that it leaves Edmonton with "little discretionary funding left to tackle other priorities" (Gerein, 2022) (Table 2). Furthermore, Paquette, an Indigenous Edmonton city councillor (CBC News, 2017), furthers what Van Dijk calls polarizing, syntactic strategies (2007, p. 127) by referring to homelessness as "their issue" (Table 2). Problematically, the news media propagates the notion that homeless individuals are freeloading off welfare reserves and directly hindering collective social progress (Table 2). This theme powers the validation of attitudes that blame, resent, and deny compassion toward the homeless. As such, homeless individuals are perceived as lazy by straining tax funds. Although the theme of 'falling into homelessness' creates the understanding that becoming homeless is accidental, the characterization of homelessness as a welfare burden individually blames homeless individuals for depleting public funds that could be used elsewhere. This shifts the narrative to homelessness as a social problem for the citizenry, as opposed to a social problem for those left vulnerable on the streets.

Table 2

Discussions of Housing Affordability, Taxpayer Expense, and the Burden of Public Funding

Article	Statement
Herring	"It's a vicious cycle, and it's expensive to taxpayers," said Smith, who said the cost of keeping a person in jail is magnitudes greater than providing them with subsidized, affordable housing (2022).

Sohi	Addressing houselessness is also a cost-saver for governments and taxpayers… Getting people into housing diverts them from a costly stay in an already strained emergency room and our backlogged justice system, and allows our first responders to focus on other vital emergencies (2021).
Gerein	(C)ouncil appears set to withdraw $7.5 million from an emergency reserve to pay for a temporary shelter of 209 spaces in the west end… As well, the move will use up most of the available money in the reserve, which means the city has little discretionary funding left to tackle other priorities (2022). "That surplus is four times greater than our entire annual budget and yet we are the ones who have to use our (stabilization reserve) to try to solve their issue," Paquette said. (2022, as cited in Gerein, 2022)
Mosleh	"Missteps in city planning created a downtown that lacked affordable housing" (McKeen, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022).
Larson	We must invest in their known solutions, which include permanent housing (2021).

Note. Statements include the entire sample. Bolded quotations represent the identification of the themes of homelessness being discussed as 'welfare freeloaders' and a 'tax advantage.'

Solving Homelessness as Citizen's Collective Responsibility

While becoming homeless is constructed as an individual accident left to the discrete forces of bad luck and where resentment lingers towards yielding public funds, the theme of citizens' collective responsibility to end homelessness is also persistent (Table 3). This collective effort is

not framed as an act of public good, but as an individual benefit to increase safety on the streets for citizens (Table 3). In Sohi and Mosleh's articles, this collective effort extends to the gratification felt through individuals' and businesses' self-sacrifice in promoting public safety (Table 3). Solving homelessness is not for the benefit of homeless people but for the increased safety of citizens and the pleasure felt in dealing with 'charity' cases. There is a clear division between the rights to security that citizens feel owed and the rights to safety that have become an inaccessible privilege for homeless people. This theme disassociates homeless people from being seen as deserving of help because the lines between homeless individuals and homelessness become intertwined. Homeless people lose their agency and become characterized as the social issue they find themselves in. Although they 'slip' into homelessness, they become blamed, sidelined and demonized from receiving support as human beings. This suggests that the themes of violence, destitution, social disorder, and danger also exist within Alberta news media to criminalize homelessness and foment public fear.

Table 3

Discussions of Collective Efforts, Citizen Responsibility and Safety

Article	Statement
Herring	"...it's delivering on that feeling of safety from all of us doing our individual parts" (Thompson, 0:00-0:48, 2022, as cited in Herring, 2022). "(W)e need to come together to be able to work together to make sure that people feel safe coming into the downtown" Inspector Clare Smart, Calgary Police Service (2022, as cited in Herring, 2022).
Sohi	From a city councillor's office that started the process… it was a collective effort. Her experience is a reminder of the duty we all have to support fellow

	Edmontonians, and to ourselves, to ensure that no one goes unhoused in our city (2021).
Mosleh	“The business community is having to make a decision about the role that we want to play in this,” McBryan said. “And I think for the vast majority, everyone sort of put up their hand and said, ‘How can we help and what can we do to make this better?” (2022).

Note. Statements include three of the five articles sampled. Bolded quotations represent homelessness as being linked to actions of collective responsibility and positioned as a threat to citizen safety.

The Violence, Danger, Social Disorder, and the Criminalization of Homeless People

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the dominant themes of homelessness linked to violence, crime, danger and destitution escalated in severity. Herring (2022) and Mosleh’s articles (2022) furthered the knowledge of homeless individuals as violent, dangerous, lethal and unhinged by describing homeless people through the disorderly actions of ‘punches’, ‘screaming loudly’, ‘flailing’, ‘shouting’ and ‘curses at them angrily’ (Table 4). This dramatized verbiage reduces the homeless individual’s humanity by positioning homeless people as the source of social disorder with no additional context. Within these news articles, homeless people’s social disorder sets the scene of public danger. Furthermore, dominant homeless themes on social disorder link homeless individuals to the symbols of poverty and filth (Table 4), where Larson links their living environment to “ragged tents and tarps” (2021) and “a porta-potty and an overflowing garbage dumpster” (2021). Homelessness becomes collectivized under the living conditions that Larson describes as “hell” (2021). As well, homeless people symbolize carriers of diseases, including Covid-19 (Larson, 2021) and shigella (Gerein, 2022). These living conditions again inform the public of the risk that homeless people pose to them, inciting the message to stay away from homeless people.

Table 4

Homelessness Linked to Themes of Violence, Danger, Disease, and Social Disorder

Article	Statement
Herring	(A) man punches a utility box, screaming loudly in agony (2022). Farther down the platform, another man lets out a guttural yell and hurls a string of profanities at no one in particular. Yet another staggers toward commuters and in aggressive, rapid-fire speech, launches into a conspiratorial rant (2022).
Larson	I see 20 or so ragged tents and tarps, held down against the incessant gale with strategically placed sticks and rocks. There is a porta-potty and an overflowing garbage dumpster. People mill about bundled in ill-fitting layers… (2021). There have been many COVID outbreaks in emergency shelters across Canada (2021).
Gerein	(O)ur city is seeing big safety worries right now with encampments, tent fires, frostbite and shigella infections (2022).

Mosleh	"You said you'd give me 10 bucks for that point!" a young, agitated fellow in sagging jeans and a sports cap screams at her, flailing his arms (2022). As a shouting match about some drug deal gone awry carries on (2022). When the two first responders arrive, the man curses at them angrily and says he doesn't need any medical attention (2022).

Note. Statements include four of the five articles sampled. Bolded statements identify homeless people's descriptors linked to themes of violence, social disorder, danger, and disease.

With the prevalence of social disorder, violence, and deviance (Table 4) and the rise of crime in Calgary and Edmonton's downtown, homelessness has become criminalized. The news media's prominent discussions of homelessness inform citizens about new dangers. The concerns for citizen's safety on transit (Table 5) further social anxieties and public fear surrounding homelessness. This discursive strategy focuses on homelessness as the issue, rather than the social problems that produce homelessness. With discussions prioritizing citizen's personal accounts of their lack of safety on transit (Table 5), homelessness is a problem not only for public funds but for the safety of citizens. Within these themes, the urgency for homeless individuals has become lost. Dominant themes of violence, crime and disorder utilize traditional stereotypes of homelessness which operate to dehumanize homeless individuals, alienating them through fear and stigma. Such stigmas arise when the news media poorly informs the public about homelessness and denies homeless individuals the opportunity to be seen as human. This demonization enables homeless individuals to be silenced by remaining nameless and when identified by news media, described by their passion for alcohol and drugs.

Table 5

Citizen Safety a Top Concern in News Media

Article	Statement
Herring	Crime and safety in Calgary's core and throughout the city have become a mounting worry for residents and leaders in the first months of 2022, coinciding with a broader societal move out of the COVID-19 pandemic (2022). "There's a level of enhanced fear for the everyday Calgarians who go, 'What about me?'" Boyd said (2022, as cited in Herring, 2022). That's a concern for Ward 7 Coun. Terry Wong, who said he's been hearing from constituents who feel unsafe navigating inner-city streets (2022). "Transit is just not safe anymore. I wouldn't take my younger sisters, I wouldn't take my niece or nephew on the train…" Soles said (2022, as cited in Herring, 2022).
Mosleh	Anne Stevenson, the city councillor in downtown Edmonton, has heard numerous complaints from residents who are scared to use the transit system, especially in the core (2022). Last month, there were several reports about transit users feeling unsafe in the stations due to gang violence, open drug use and harassment (2022).

Note. Theme amongst two of the five articles sampled, in both Edmonton and Calgary's downtown. Bolded quotations identify language which criminalizes homelessness by prioritizing citizen's feelings of danger and vulnerability.

Reinforcing Dominant Themes of Homelessness: On Silences and Othering

Under the force of these dominant homeless themes, homeless people undergo a process of othering where they lose their agency and are primarily spoken about by journalists (Table 6). Homeless people were rarely given the space within the sampled news articles to discuss their experiences of homelessness. When they were included, their representation was limited only to their personal accounts of drug and alcohol use (Table 7). This connects with the literature, where studies cite homelessness as being primarily portrayed through substance abuse in the news media (Huckin, 2002, p. 359; Klodawsky et al., 2002, p. 126; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 159). Additional findings in the literature note homelessness being framed as "an irresponsible lifestyle choice" (Klodawsky, 2002, p. 135). Taken with the literature, this study shows the continued portrayal of homelessness remains consistent with contemporary themes. Homelessness is much more complex than a drug and alcohol addiction, but these individual causations simplify its deep socio-economic causes. The news media inadequately discuss homelessness by reverting to common descriptions, trapping homelessness within its stereotypes.

Table 6

Homeless People's Voices

Name	Description	Indigenous?	Speak for themselves? Or Spoken About?
Man	(A) man punches a utility box, screaming loudly in agony (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).

Man (2)	(A)nother man lets out a guttural yell and hurls a string of profanities at no one in particular (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).
Another	Yet another staggers toward commuters and in aggressive, rapid-fire speech, launches into a conspiratorial rant (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).
Groups	(S)everal groups of people sit on the grass, immobile and unresponsive (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).
Man	One man told me that when he was too thirsty, he had to drink from the lake. He said that made him feel sad (2021).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Larson).
Man	“It’s down,” he says indifferently, untroubled as he lights the foil from underneath… (2022).	Unknown	Speaks for themselves and is spoken about (Mosleh).
Fellow	“You said you’d give me 10 bucks for that point!” a young, agitated fellow in	Unknown	Speaks for themselves and

	sagging jeans and a sports cap screams at her, flailing his arms (2022).		is spoken about (Mosleh).
Man	(Y)oung man with a red jacket and tattoos on his face; he's writhing in agony (2022).	Unknown	Speaks for themselves and is spoken about (Mosleh).
Laura Janvier	"It's anti-freeze," she says with a wink and a laugh (2022).	Yes	Speaks for themselves and is spoken for (Mosleh).

Note. Statement derived from four of five articles sampled. Bolded quotations reveal the lack of personal identification amongst homeless people, allowing them to be spoken about by the journalist. Gerein's article did not include a direct discussion of homeless people.

Table 7

Homelessness Discussed Through Individual's Drug and Alcohol Addictions

Article	Statement
Herring	Many people they meet are facing crises linked to mental health and addictions (2022).

Sohi	It makes our whole community safer to help people who are struggling and vulnerable — perhaps struggling with mental health or addictions (2021).
Mosleh	He pulls out a nickel-sized wax-paper bag, dumping a few small, dark, brown and black clumps onto a piece of tinfoil… He shrugs when he's asked what he's about to use, his eyes not leaving the task at hand… "It's down," he says indifferently, untroubled as he lights the foil from underneath and inhales the smoke through a long metal pipe… (2022). "It's mostly fentanyl," explains a woman… before adding that it could also be contaminated with benzodiazepines… or maybe carfentanil, an opioid a hundred times more potent than fentanyl (2022). Laura Janvier, wearing reflective sunglasses and a snug Columbia jacket, looks around before lowering the white wool scarf tied around her face and taking a gulp from a vodka bottle tucked into a purse… "It's anti-freeze," she says with a wink and a laugh (2022).

Note. Statements derived from three of the five articles sampled. Bolded quotations reveal homeless people's few opportunities to speak for themselves to be linked to their drug and alcohol addictions.

The statements made by three unnamed homeless individuals that "'It's down (drugs)" (Unknown, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022), "'It's mostly fentanyl'" (Unknown, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022) and "'you said you'd give me ten bucks for that point!'" (Unknown, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022) are among the four statements made by current homeless people within the sample (Table 6). The fourth account was made by Laura Janvier, the only Indigenous homeless person who spoke for themselves about her homelessness who was introduced as "taking a gulp from a vodka bottle tucked into a purse" (Mosleh 2022) and explained her situation through alcohol, stating "'(i)t's anti-freeze" (Janvier, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022)

(Table 7). These statements harness a strategy of discourse that relies on embedding "subjective experience" (Van Dijk, as cited in Meyer, 2001, p. 21) to validate social representations, known as the common perception of a group (Van Dijk, as cited in Meyer, 2001, p. 21). Through very few of their own words, homeless people legitimize the perception of 'careless' druggies and alcoholics who do not deserve help. Besides Laura, all other homeless people in the sample were not provided with their names, known as a man, woman, group or a fellow (Table 6). Without their names, homeless people lack common identification with others, are stripped of their power to share their personal stories and become generalized as homeless, instead of as people who are homeless. This makes it easier to resent or lack compassion for those who are nameless.

The Overrepresentation of Indigenous Homeless Statistics and Reconciliation

Of the news articles sampled, Indigenous homelessness was directly discussed in Larson, Sohi and Mosleh's articles. The primary themes directly linked to Indigenous homelessness were the statistics of overrepresentation, solving homelessness as an act of reconciliation and the mention of the 'cycle of homelessness'. Indigenous homelessness was contextualized by statistics of overrepresentation, where "they comprise five percent of the city's population but more than 50 percent of people experiencing homelessness" (Mosleh, 2022), "70 percent of children in government care have Indigenous heritage" (Mosleh, 2022) and "(w)e see the results of this trauma in the overrepresentation of Indigenous people among those experiencing houselessness" (Sohi, 2021). These statistics speak for the entirety of the Indigenous homeless problem by focusing on population density. The Indigenous community is categorized as the leading population of homelessness within these statistics. While homelessness is a social problem, it is largely an Indigenous problem. Indigenous homeless representations are fueled by the dominant homeless themes which implies that this community is inadequate and especially lazy, violent, and comprised of drug addicts and alcoholics.

Furthermore, the theme of 'falling into homelessness' relates to the theme of the "cycle of homelessness" (Larson, 2021) and 'history repeating itself' (Larson, 2021; Mosleh, 2022). The 'cycle of homelessness' perpetuates the idea that Indigenous people are controlled by an external force to repeatedly fall in and out of homelessness. Their relationship to homelessness is normalized as persistent and inevitable, given 'history repeating itself' (Larson, 2021; Mosleh,

2022). Rather than the force of bad luck, history is contextualized as the force of Indigenous homelessness. As history cannot be changed, Indigenous peoples are linked to an enduring legacy. The call for reconciliation (Table 8) is conducive to citizens' collective responsibility to end homelessness. Reconciliation is a collective duty which ignores calls for the government to intervene. The dominant themes of homelessness blame and demonize homeless individuals, erasing their individuality, personal stories, and humanity. The discrimination, trauma, abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome and oppression at the root of Indigenous homelessness are erased within these dominant themes. Particularly, Indigenous themes of homelessness do little to subvert the discourse these dominant homeless themes construct.

Table 8

Statements for Reconciliation

Article	Statements
Larson	(T)he disjunct between lip service being paid to reconciliation and the truth is stark (2021).
Gerein	(H)ousing can be an important reconciliation effort (2022).
Sohi	Addressing homelessness and poverty is fundamental to our reconciliation efforts (2021).

Note. Statements derived from three of the five articles sampled. Bolded quotations identify the theme of 'reconciliation' when articles discuss Indigenous homelessness.

The Discourse of Indigenous Homelessness: On Western Ideologies

The legacy of settler-colonialism is evident in the white power structures that still dominate and control the news media (Haque & Patrick, 2015, as cited in Jahiu and Cinnamon, 2021, p. 4550) today. When employing Van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis, a Western ideology remains prevalent amongst Alberta news media. Thus, the social values central to the Western ideology that manipulates the discussion of Indigenous homelessness stem from the "contemporary nation-state values premised in neocolonial and neoliberal principles which are in direct opposition to Indigenous philosophies and experiences" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 18). The principles of welfare, housing and community are not homogeneously understood across cultures. As journalists retain the power to speak on homelessness, their cultural values control the discussion of Indigenous homelessness. Importantly, the dominant ideology should not be taken as the status quo, but as the form of knowledge that retains the privilege to construct the discourse of news media. Therefore, the communication of Indigenous homelessness legitimates "relations of power abuse (dominance) in society" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 467) to maintain hegemony. In this sense, even the themes of resistance that link homelessness to the failure of social structures, such as reconciliation, are submerged by the logic that denies homeless people their voice, separates blame from the government and social systems, makes individuals blameworthy through bad luck and addiction and foments resentment and fear through the growth, complexity, criminalization, and cost of the homeless problem in Calgary and Edmonton.

Individualism, Personal Welfare, and the Cultural Values of a Western Discourse

The themes of the 'welfare drainer', the 'social delinquent' and the 'drug addict' are constructed via cultural values embedded within Western ideologies on "property, ownership and personal wealth" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 31). Homelessness, as a taxpayer's burden, is separated from other social issues as a social problem that is undeserving of public welfare. This theme is heavily influenced by the West's ideological emphasis on individualism, where society upholds the values of "hard-work, self-sufficiency, individual merit-systems, and accumulation of individual wealth and private property" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 31). In Western discourse, public welfare is legitimized only when social problems are worthy of public support. This stems from

the ideology's creation of a specific, "'deserving poor'" (Garlington, 2014, p. 289, as cited in Lindstrom, 2020, p. 33). The themes of drugs, alcohol, 'falling' and laziness validate the knowledge that homeless people drain the system and do not deserve public funds. This discourse gives those in power the ability to decide who receives help and which populations are seen as "deficient and dependent" (Bastien, 2016, as cited in Lindstrom, 2020, p. 33). In this study, homeless people are seen as dependent and disorderly. As Indigenous homelessness is not understood as a distinct community social problem, it follows this discourse.

By investigating the social context of housing affordability in Calgary and Edmonton it is evident that Indigenous peoples face a far greater shortage of housing that makes them acutely prone to homelessness. According to Edmonton's 2021 Administrative Count's Annual Report, Indigenous peoples experience drastic income inequality because of systemic discrimination where the median income of Alberta's Indigenous households in 2016 was $29,522 as opposed to the $42,717 of non-Indigenous individuals (p. 35). In addition, there is very little Indigenous-owned housing for Indigenous peoples who become homeless, where the 2016 census found that only 273 Indigenous-owned housing existed for the over 3,000 Indigenous homeless peoples in Calgary (Lindstrom et al., 2020, p. 6). With less income to cushion rising inflation rates, barely any houses to turn to and their inhibition towards submitting to white-controlled social services (Lindstrom, 2020, pp. 45, 53), the Western discourse on homelessness silences the reality that Indigenous peoples are not in fact taking too much from the system; their homelessness is the product of not having the appropriate resources to begin with. It is this ideology of individualism cemented within the Western discourse that frames Indigenous people as greedy thieves of public funding. Deconstructing the social context shows their severe lack of public support.

On the Control of a Western Discourse

According to Van Dijk, social power is directly linked to a specific group's ability to control the cognition of other groups (2015, p. 469). Although homelessness continues to persist as an ever-growing social problem post-COVID-19, the way the news media discuss homelessness has not changed. By continuing to discuss homelessness through a Western discourse, the news media can "reproduce dominance and hegemony" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 472).

The hegemony of white power structures continues to silence the personal experiences of homelessness except for recounts of drugs or alcohol and links homeless people to the escalation in violence to control the narrative of criminalization. For Indigenous peoples who are homeless, this discourse further reduces them to the prejudice that they need Western, authoritative assistance, reducing them to settler-colonial logics of paternalism.

Under a Western discourse, Indigenous peoples are not differentiated from other homeless demographics. This discourse silences the largely structural causes contributing to their overrepresentation in the homeless population. Under this discourse, addiction to alcohol and drugs is portrayed as standing in the way of Laura's ability to achieve permanent stable housing, where "she sometimes worries her living situation could be jeopardized because she drinks and sometimes uses drugs" (Mosleh, 2022). The Indigenous peoples portrayed in these articles did not simply become addicted to alcohol and drugs as a disposition of their race and then became homeless; they turned to alcohol and drugs to cope with the legacies of discrimination against their race. Homelessness is not a biological disposition, but a social legacy. The Indigenous populations represented lack regular community support, where their forceful separation from family "draws them to alcohol" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 40). It is not alcohol that foments their homeless crisis, but the isolation experienced from the many systemic barriers that continue today. Western discourse focuses on these themes, silencing the colonial legacies that have established and upheld many contemporary social problems. This construction of homelessness is not the reality of homelessness, but a social representation which furthers hegemonic power structures.

Understanding Homelessness as an Indigenous Social Problem

In Lindstrom et al., (2020, p. 41), Menzies introduces a definition of Indigenous homelessness, where "homelessness is a condition that results from individuals being displaced from critical community social structures and lacking stable housing" (2009, p. 14). Specifically, individuals do not just become homeless by chance, Indigenous peoples become homeless because of their historical displacement. Through this definition, homelessness is an Indigenous social problem; a notion silenced by Western ways of thinking. This study serves as a critical starting point for research to contribute qualitative findings to how the news media portrays

homelessness with a focus on Indigenous peoples. This study is limited by its small sample which analyzes five news media articles, experiencing further limitations with its focus on two urban cities within Alberta. Future research could contribute a broader analysis of how Canadian news media discuss Indigenous homelessness or focus on another province within Canada to engage in comparative studies. Such research would also diversify the sample and could potentially study and compare different news outlets. This study was also limited by the small time frame to conduct research and the article's publication within the years 2021-2022. As such, future research could analyze how discourse has been constructed, sustained, or shaped over time. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that as a piece of qualitative research, reflexivity in the analysis and findings exists. While links were made to literature on Indigenous homelessness (Lindstrom et al., 2020), Indigenous homelessness is still analyzed through an outside, non-Indigenous lens.

However, this research challenges the silences of news media which construct an ill-informed social representation of homelessness. This study reveals how Western discourse operates to remove blame from the system and maintains colonial power hierarchies by stripping the Indigenous people of their agency and voice. When Indigenous peoples are silenced and spoken for, this allows for the continued proliferation of Western ideologies that misconstrue, invalidate and other homelessness. Homelessness is an Indigenous social problem, not a population phenomenon. When this ideology is delegitimized to halt the stigmatization of poverty, reconciliation can be better pursued by giving Indigenous peoples the space to humanize themselves and move beyond colonial discourse.

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Appendix

Questions for Discourse Analysis

- Are there any metaphors in the article?
- Who is included/excluded within the social representation of homelessness?
- Who carried speaking power?
- How often do homeless people speak in the article?
- How is homelessness characterized?
- Does the news article have any implications about homelessness?
- How do people discuss homelessness?
- What stereotypes/prejudices circulate homelessness?
- Is there a narrative?
- How are Indigenous peoples discussed? Is this different from homelessness?
- Who is talked about the most?
- Who do news articles bring in to primarily speak on homelessness?
- What social issues are being discussed the most? How are they contextualized?
- How is the Indigenous person depicted through images and text?
- How is homelessness understood as a growing problem?

- What/who is being blamed?
- Are these discussions homogenous?
- Does it look like the Indigenous community agrees?
- Is there enough space for Indigenous voices?