Framing Homeless Policy: Reducing Cash Aid as a Compassionate Solution

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In 2002, Care Not Cash/Proposition N was introduced to respond to public concern over San Francisco's chronic homeless epidemic. The controversial initiative, which significantly reduced General Assistance (cash aid) to unhoused people, diverted funds to direct services such as shelter, food, medical assistance, and substance abuse programs. To investigate the underlying attitudes and beliefs that framed homelessness and the Care Not Cash policy in the months leading up to the citywide vote articles from the San Francisco Chronicle were analyzed. Of particular interest was assessing the prevalence of individualistic framing, constructions of dependency, and the problems Care Not Cash was presented as solving. Our analysis found that homelessness was framed as a threat to businesses, tourism, and residents of San Francisco and welfare as enabling deviant behavior (e.g., substance abuse) among people experiencing homelessness. Similar to federal welfare reform, Care Not Cash was portrayed as a compassionate solution that would both solve the problem of homelessness and address problematic behaviors associated with people who are unhoused (Stryker & Wald, 2009). Implications for economic justice are discussed.

On any single night in 2016, an estimated 549,928 people were homelessness in the United States (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2016). Half of all unhoused people in the U.S. live in five states: California (22%), New York (16%), Florida (6%), Texas (4%), and Washington (4%; HUD,

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2016). California has the unfortunate distinction of leading the nation in home-lessness (HUD, 2016). People experiencing homelessness in California are most likely to live in urban centers, with San Francisco and Los Angeles having the highest per-capita homeless populations in the nation (San Francisco Homeless Service Coalition, 2008). In San Francisco, an estimated 6,000–10,000 people are homeless on any given night (Palomino, 2016). San Francisco's heteroge-neous homeless population includes single adults ($n = 5,518$), persons in families ($n = 618$), and unaccompanied youth ($n = 1,363$), with one-fourth of these young people having experience in the foster care system (26%; San Francisco Depart-ment of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, SFDHSH, 2017). The majority of San Francisco's homeless are adults ranging in age from 41 to 60 (40%), 25 to 40 (28%), and 18 to 24 (19%). Men (61%) comprise more than half of San Francisco's homeless (SFDHSH, 2017). Most are unsheltered (58%, $n = 4,353$) rather than sheltered (42%, $n = 3,146$; SFDHSH, 2017). Approximately 30% of unhoused people in San Francisco identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Across the U.S., public concern about homelessness has fueled the adop-tion of restrictive policies aimed at removing unstably housed individuals from public spaces (CBS News, 2012; Roberts, 2013). Cities across the U.S. have em-braced ordinances that restrict the freedom of unhoused people and criminalize fundamental activities such as sleeping, eating, and sitting (Bullock, Truong, & Chhun, 2017). Although San Francisco is widely regarded as one of the most progressive U.S. cities, it also has a long history of criminalizing homelessness. In 2015, unhoused San Franciscans received more than 27,000 "quality of life" violations for behaviors such as panhandling and obstructing sidewalks (Coalition on Homelessness, 2016). San Francisco has also focused on limiting access to assistance and reducing General Assistance benefits (i.e., cash aid to individuals without dependents, including people who are unable to work and/or people who are unhoused). San Francisco's Proposition N (2002), commonly referred to as Care Not Cash, proposed a reduction in cash assistance (i.e., welfare) to unhoused individuals from $395 to $59 per month.

San Francisco, a touchstone of gentrification, is at the center of debates about affordable housing, homelessness, and economic inequality. This study examined media framing of homelessness in San Francisco and Care Not Cash, a policy that we regard as emblematic of restrictive antihomeless policies and part of a larger pattern of neoliberal retrenchment of welfare services (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). Drawing on prior studies of the interconnections between attributions for poverty, media and political framing of welfare, and welfare policy (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; de Goede, 1996; Furnham, 1996; Kendall, 2011; Lee, Jones, & Lewis, 1990; Lind & Danowaski, 1999; Pascale, 2005; Whang & Min, 1999), we analyze how a major area newspaper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, portrayed homelessness and unhoused people prior

to the adoption of San Francisco's Care Not Cash policy. We were interested in identifying the arguments used to generate support for Care Not Cash, especially the role of attributions for homelessness. Identifying parallels between the purported need to reduce aid to homeless women and men through Care Not Cash and dominant justifications for major welfare reform via the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) was also a central goal. Understanding these parallels can deepen our understanding of how classist stereotypes and judgments of deservingness shape policy design and support across social welfare programs (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2016).

Care Not Cash: A Solution to Poverty and Homelessness in San Francisco, California?

San Francisco is consistently identified as one of the most expensive U.S. cities (Wallace, 2016). The total cost of living in San Francisco is 62.6% higher than the U.S. average and housing is nearly three times more expensive than in other U.S. cities (Wallace, 2016). In 2014, the average price of a home in San Francisco was $737,600 compared to $209,000 nationally (Wallace, 2016). With a median rent of $4,650 for a two-bedroom apartment, San Francisco is the most expensive rental market (Wallace, 2016). Approximately 12% of San Francisco residents live below official federal poverty thresholds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and 8,000 families are on waiting lists for public housing (Coalition on Homelessness, 2016).

Care Not Cash/Prop. N was introduced in May of 2002 by San Francisco Supervisor Gavin Newsom to respond to public concern over San Francisco's chronic "homeless epidemic" and to galvanize support for his mayoral campaign. Newsom asserted that by reducing General Assistance (cash aid) to unhoused people, the city could use the "savings" on direct services for homeless individuals, including shelter, food, mental health, medical assistance, and substance abuse programs. The initiative sparked considerable controversy. Proponents were enthusiastic about the potential of the initiative to reduce visible homelessness in San Francisco, while opponents charged that reducing aid would do little to foster the structural change needed to reduce homelessness. The San Francisco's Voter's Guide (2002, para. 1) illustrates the position taken by Newsom and city advocates on the initiative:

> Currently, San Francisco provides vastly larger amounts of money than other counties in the region. Many people believe that this causes two problems: (1) homeless people from other places come to San Francisco; and (2) homeless people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol end up spending their welfare checks on their addictions instead of meeting their basic needs. Care Not Cash attempts to remedy this problem by shifting the city's general assistance support for homeless individuals into the form of vouchers for food and shelter instead of cash.

This description is notable for its inclusion of unsubstantiated but common classist stereotypes—that poor people flock to liberal communities such as San Francisco to collect generous benefits, that homeless people misuse the benefits that they receive, and that unhoused people are a drain on community resources. Surveys of unhoused women and men in San Francisco find that the majority of respondents are from the area (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2013) and while substance abuse and addiction is an important correlate and consequence of homelessness, its prevalence tends to be overestimated. On any given night, slightly over one-third of sheltered adults report having a chronic substance abuse issue (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, 2011). There is limited empirical evidence that welfare benefits are routinely used to support addiction or squandered. In seven states that have required testing of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients, over $1 million dollars was spent to find minimal drug use (Michener & Kohler-Hausmann, 2017). In six of these states, fewer than 1% of beneficiaries tested positive compared with approximately 10% of the general population (Michener & Kohler-Hausmann, 2017). Importantly, no counter-information or alternative narratives were presented in the Voter's Guide, a source that many registered voters may take at face value.

In November 2002, the proposition passed with 59% of public support (Lelchuk & Gordon, 2002). The Voter's Guide provides insight into how Care Not Cash was framed but this is just one source of information. Examining mainstream media framing of Care Not Cash prior to its passage is crucial to understand its broader framing and the role of attributions and stereotypes in justifying this change in support.

Media Framing of Homelessness and Care Not Cash: Synergies and Contrasts with Poverty and Welfare Reform

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward social and political issues (Bullock & Fernald, 2005; de Goede, 1996; Iyengar, 1990, 1996; Limbert & Bullock, 2009). Media frames communicate organized belief systems that define problems (e.g., present costs and benefits in terms of common cultural values), diagnose causes (e.g., identify causal agents), communicate moral judgments (e.g., perceived deservingness), and suggest remedies (e.g., justify responses and predict likely effects; Entman, 1993). In doing so, media frames communicate socially constructed understandings of marginalized groups and ultimately, influence how we understand, remember, evaluate, and act upon (or not) social problems (de Goede, 1996; Entman, 1993).

An extensive body of social science research documents the prevalence of classist, racist, and sexist framing in media coverage of poverty and welfare reform. The framing of welfare recipients as lazy "takers" who choose welfare over work, sexually irresponsible mothers, and apathetic innercity African Americans

contributes to both the scapegoating of the poor and support for restrictive welfare reform (see Bullock, 2013; Bullock & Reppond, 2018; Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Gilens, 1999; Kelly, 1996; Limbert & Bullock, 2009; Schram & Soss, 2001; van Doorn, 2015). These frames share an individualistic focus—the portrayal of low-income people as responsible for their economic situation—and individualistic attributions for poverty are among the strongest predictors of antiwelfare attitudes (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Gilens, 1999; Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004; Hunt & Bullock, 2016).

Media representations of homelessness have garnered considerably less attention, with homelessness itself, receiving limited media coverage (Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004; Lind & Danowski, 1999). Content analyses reveal that unhoused men living on the street often stand in for the homeless population in news stories, rendering family and youth homelessness largely invisible (Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010). Sensationalized "guestimates" about the size of the homeless population (e.g., describing homelessness as rising without concrete evidence) are also common, as are claims that homelessness is a growing threat to society (e.g., lowered property values due to an influx of homeless people in a neighborhood; Hewitt, 1996; Whang & Min, 1999).

People who are poor are not a homogenous group and unhoused people and welfare recipients are distinct but overlapping subgroups. Parallels and divergences in how these groups are portrayed in mainstream news stories are likely. Both welfare receipt and homelessness are stereotyped as a "lifestyle choice" and both groups are dehumanized and viewed as objects of disgust (Harris & Fiske, 2006). Moreover, the same types of individualistic attributions that have framed poverty and welfare reform may also characterize representations of homelessness and policies such as Care Not Cash.

A Closer Look at the Power of Individualizing Narratives

Causal Attributions for Homelessness

Nationally, the primary causes of homelessness are structural—a chronic shortage of affordable housing, stagnant low wages, and insufficient investment in housing subsidy programs (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013). Similarly, the primary causes of homelessness in San Francisco are lack of affordable housing, unemployment, poverty, and insufficient mental health services (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2016). For example, in a survey of 534 homeless San Franciscans, more than half (52%) of respondents reported inability to pay rent and lack of a job/income (44%) as the primary obstacles they faced to securing stable housing (San Francisco Human Services Agency & Applied Survey Research, 2009).

Although structural inequalities are the root causes of economic status, mainstream news stories may echo dominant explanations by attributing poverty and homelessness to personal or individual shortcomings (e.g., lack of effort, laziness, drug and alcohol abuse; Bullock et al., 2001; Cozzarelli, Tagler, & Wilkinson, 2002; Furnham, 1996; Lee et al., 1990). Substance abuse and mental health issues contribute to homelessness but the role of these causes tend to be overstated, framed as antecedents rather than outcomes of homelessness, and presented in ways that deepen stigma (Lee et al., 2010; Lind & Danowaski, 1999; Whang & Min, 1999). Previous analyses find that media portrayals of unhoused individuals emphasize presumed character deficits (e.g., laziness), perceived "inappropriate" behaviors (e.g., public drunkenness), and "disordered" qualities (i.e., mental health issues) as the primary causes of homelessness (Best, 2010; Lind & Danowaski, 1999; Whang & Min, 1999). For instance, Pascale (2005) found that when public officials discussed homelessness they reported personal observations and anecdotes as substantive facts, emphasizing substance abuse, mental illness, and antisocial behavior. The emphasis on individualistic over structural explanations echoes the strong cultural value placed on individualism in the U.S. and illustrates the fundamental attribution error, the tendency for observers to attribute the behaviors of other people to dispositional factors and to minimize situational causes (Ross, 1977). Ultimately, these individualistic attributions frame people who are unhoused as in need of regulation and state control much in the same way that welfare recipients were portrayed prior to PRWORA's passage (i.e., welfare reform; Stryker & Wald, 2009).

Episodic Framing

By focusing on individual experiences of poverty rather than broader trends (e.g., poverty rates, statistics on hunger), episodic frames reinforce individualistic understandings of poverty and homelessness. Media representations of poverty and homelessness favor episodic over thematic frames, which situate economic hardship in societal context (Kendall, 2011). Negative image frames, one type of episodic framing, are often subtle, spotlighting culturally accepted stereotypes associated with homelessness such as "dependency" and "deviancy" (Kendall, 2011). The impact of these frames is significant; exposure to episodic frames is associated with perceiving low-income individuals as responsible for their situation and reduced support for progressive antipoverty policies (Iyengar, 1990).

Analyses of discourse surrounding welfare reform illustrate synergies among individualizing frames and policy positions. Prior to welfare reform's passage, news reports emphasized individualistic attributions for poverty (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, laziness) over structural causes (Misra, Moller, & Karides, 2003), undergirding the framing of cash aid as encouraging "dependency" and perpetuating poverty (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Stryker & Wald, 2009). Consistent with

these negative-image, episodic frames, changing welfare recipients' behavior was treated as a more important policy goal than the structural reduction of poverty (de Goede, 1996; Hancock, 2004; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Lott & Bullock, 2007). Consequently, the "compassionate" policy response to poverty was to reform the welfare system by instituting strict time limits and work requirements that would teach poor single mothers the behaviors needed to lift themselves out of poverty (Stryker & Wald, 2009). In welfare reform's wake, many policymakers and mainstream news sources have framed declining rolls as the primary indicator of PRWORA's success, reinforcing the perception that welfare rather than poverty is "the problem" and that strict policies are needed to teach poor people discipline and economic self-sufficiency (Schram & Soss, 2001). Feminist and poverty scholars have challenged these dominant frames by drawing attention to the significant number of families who remain poor after exiting welfare and by critiquing the paternalistic assumptions embedded in reform policies (Bullock et al., 2001; Ford, 2009; Rice, 2001; Schram & Soss, 2001).

Understanding parallels and divergences in the framing of homelessness with welfare receipt is crucial to deepening our understanding of neoliberal retrenchment and the significance of individualizing frames. Was Care Not Cash framed as a "compassionate solution" for reducing "dependency" among people who were homeless? Paralleling welfare reform, would reduced caseloads dominate the evaluation of Care Not Cash rather than secure housing and poverty alleviation?

The Current Study

To assess how homelessness and Care Not Cash were framed, newspaper articles published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a primary print news source in the area, were analyzed. Because we were interested in how media framing can influence public support and policy outcomes, we focused on articles leading up to the vote. Our overarching goal was to better understand underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values used to frame homelessness and the Care Not Cash policy. We were particularly interested in assessing the prevalence of individualistic framing, constructions of dependency, and the "problems" Care Not Cash was presented as solving.

Method

Materials

The *San Francisco Chronicle* is a newspaper that serves the San Francisco Bay Area in the state of California. The newspaper's daily circulation is approximately 163,307 (Hearst Bay Area, 2018). A keyword search for "Care Not Cash" in the *San Francisco Chronicle* was conducted using Newsbank's Access World News

online database. The keyword "Proposition N" was also tested but was discarded because it produced irrelevant articles about prior propositions with the same letter assignment or yielded articles that were redundant with those obtained by searching by "Care Not Cash." Because we were interested in how media framing can influence public support and policy outcomes, we analyzed news articles that were published during the 5 months prior to the citywide vote (June–November 2002; $N = 39$; please see the Appendix for a chronological list of newspapers). This was a particularly "lively" time period in terms of public debate and discussion regarding Care Not Cash. Editorials and letters to the editor were excluded from analysis.

Coding and Analysis

Our coding framework was informed by de Goede's (1996) discourse analysis of ideology underlying U.S. welfare reform debates. Similar to de Goede's study, news articles about Care Not Cash were coded to "uncover ideological notions underlying the presentation" of the proposition and homelessness (de Goede, 1996, p. 330). After being trained in the coding protocol, all articles were coded by three research assistants. The primary investigator resolved discrepancies. Overall reliability, measured using percentage agreement, was 92%. All articles were coded in terms of the following major categories (also see Table 1).

Actors

To assess ingroup–outgroup status, articles were coded for the presence and absence of key stakeholders (e.g., policy makers, advocates, people experiencing homelessness) and their relative "importance" within the articles. More specifically, we coded for characterizations of and tone toward core actors, the prevalence of actors' supporting and/or opposing Care Not Cash, and whose voices were prominent and whose were absent.

Attributions and Stereotypes

Articles were analyzed for individualistic and structural representations of poverty (e.g., causal attributions) and characterizations of people experiencing homelessness (e.g., stereotypes).

Tone

The overall tone (supportive, neutral, or critical) of the article toward the proposition and homelessness was assessed.

Table 1. Codebook

Coding Category	Questions
Actors	Was a politician mentioned? Who? Directly quoted? Did she/he/they support Care Not Cash?
	Was a homeless person mentioned? Individual or group? Directly quoted? Did she/he/they support Care Not Cash?
	Was a local resident mentioned? Individual or group? Directly quoted? Did she/he/they support Care Not Cash?
	Was an advocate or critic mentioned? Individual or group? Directly quoted? Did she/he/they support Care Not Cash?
	Was a business owner mentioned? Individual or group? Directly quoted? Did she/he/they support Care Not Cash?
	Was a tourist mentioned? Individual or group? Directly quoted? Did she/he/they support Care Not Cash?
Context of Homelessness	Was poverty discussed in the article?
	Was there an explanation of how the person became homeless?
	What, if any, behaviors were associated with homelessness individual or group?
	Who was describing the homeless individual or group and associating these behaviors with her/him/them?
	Is homelessness described as a social problem (e.g., unemployment, low wages, weak economy) or an individual-level problem (e.g., poor work ethic, "bad" behavior)?
	Are statistics about homelessness provided? – If so, is comparison info presented (i.e., *before and after*)?
	Is the environment the homeless live in discussed? – If so, how is it described?
	Is homelessness defined? – If so, how?
Tone	Prop N – Care Not Cash (*Pro, Neutral, Against*) – Illustrative quote?
	Description of politician, if any? Tone of description (supportive, neutral, unsupportive) – Illustrative quote?
	Description of homeless individual or group, if any? Tone of description (supportive, neutral, unsupportive) – Illustrative quote?
	Description of local resident, if any? Tone of description (supportive, neutral, unsupportive) – Illustrative quote?
	Description of advocate, if any? Tone of description (supportive, neutral, unsupportive) – Illustrative quote?
	Description of business owner, if any? Tone of description (supportive, neutral, unsupportive) – Illustrative quote?
	Description of tourist, if any? Tone of description (supportive, neutral, unsupportive) – Illustrative quote?
Policy Comparisons	Are there comparisons between other Bay Area and/or national policies made?
	Was the comparison between another Bay Area city or national policy or both? Please specify.
	How does San Francisco compare? (more generous, less generous, about the same)
	Were facts and figures provided? If so, what was the source?
Policy: Logistics	Are specific aspects of Care Not Cash discussed?
	What types of care will homeless people receive?
	How is housing going to be secured for homeless people?
	Who is going to provide food to homeless people?
	How is the city/state going to track benefits?
Policy: Goals	Are end goals discussed? If so, what are they?
Policy: Repercussions	What will happen after the legislation is passed?
	Are the repercussions of reduced assistance discussed? If so, what are they?
	What happens if the legislation does not pass?

(*Continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Coding Category	Questions
Sources of Information	Are public opinion polls discussed? If so, what is the source of this information? Are references to documents made? If so, which documents are being referenced? Are references to laws made? If so, which laws are being referenced?

Policy Impact

Analyses focused on three aspects of the policy and its impact on homelessness and homeless services in San Francisco: (1) *logistics* focused on the framing of welfare assistance (i.e., harmful, helpful, neutral) and discussion of how resources promised in the proposition would be delivered (e.g., securing housing, distributing food, providing medical services, assisting with substance treatment); (2) *goals* focused on the implicit and explicit identification of policy goals; and (3) *repercussions* examined postulated outcomes of the legislation's adoption or defeat as well as potential consequences for people experiencing homelessness. We also coded for comparisons of Care Not Cash to other Bay Area and national policies.

Sources of Information

The use of informational statistics about homelessness was examined. Reporting of public opinion was also assessed.

Findings

Four key findings emerged in our analysis: (1) homelessness was framed as a problem for the city rather than a human welfare or poverty-related concern; (2) homeless people were characterized as "deviant" and detrimental to business; (3) cash aid was portrayed as "harmful" and as encouraging "deviant" behavior; and (4) similar to federal welfare reform, Care Not Cash was framed as a "compassionate" solution that would both solve the problem of homelessness and address problematic behaviors associated with people who are unhoused (Stryker & Wald, 2009). We discuss each of these findings separately, however, these representations and frames co-occurred and reinforced each other.

Homelessness as One of the City's Most Pressing Problems for the City

Although San Francisco's homeless population is heterogeneous in experiences, histories, and needs (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2016), homeless people

were regularly characterized as "the homeless" ($n = 28$; 72%) in news reports, contributing to the impression that unhoused people are a large, homogenous group. People experiencing homelessness were rarely discussed in terms of demographic characteristics or group differences (e.g., youth, families, veterans).

Not only were homeless people framed as a homogenous group, but public attitudes toward homelessness were reported as unvaried as well. In more than one-third of the articles ($n = 15$; 38%), people experiencing homelessness were described as a "problem" for San Francisco and a top concern among city residents. For example, lamenting the scope and intractability of homelessness, it was noted, "From the economy to City Hall, the homeless have become the city's most vexing problem. A poll released last month showed that San Francisco voters overwhelmingly believe homelessness is the city's No. 1 problem" (Lelchuk, 2002b, para. 3)." Similarly, another article claimed that "...38 percent of voters said homelessness was San Francisco's most crucial problem, topping high housing costs, employment, crime, traffic and education" (Lelchuk, 2002a, para. 4). By presenting homelessness as a shared concern for the city and its residents, homelessness was framed as a consensual problem that was ripe for action. Bolstering this call to action was the portrayal of homelessness as draining city resources, "Major issues [in San Francisco] include dirty streets, homelessness, schools and lack of city services" (Hoge, 2002, para. 3). These depictions mirror media representations of welfare benefits as bankrupting the federal government when, in fact, welfare expenditures claimed a very small percentage of spending. In 2015, spending on cash and near-cash transfer programs to low-income families accounted for less than 5% of the federal budget; TANF comprised just 0.54% of total federal outlays (Kearney, 2017).

Increasing rates of homelessness in San Francisco were used to underscore the urgency of addressing homelessness. However, reporting was often vague, contributing to a sense that actual estimates of homelessness were impossible to obtain:

> Frazzled by thousands of homeless people living on the city's streets.... More than 8,000 homeless people live in doorways, cardboard boxes, cars, shelters and hospitals, according to one estimate, creating a quagmire...that has tested the compassion of the most liberal big city in America. No one knows exactly how many homeless people live in San Francisco, but the official estimate is 8,500 to 15,000, compared to an estimated 6,000 in 1989...." (Lelchuk, 2002b, para. 1, 2, 14)

Although accurate estimates of homelessness are notoriously difficult to collect, the concerns voiced in this passage extend beyond concern with accurate counts of the homeless population. Embedded in this passage is the message that, if not controlled, homeless people could overtake the city. Moreover, it is the well-being of "frazzled" city residents not the homeless that is prioritized. Notably absent was consideration of homelessness as a human welfare issue or its human cost: instead, homelessness was consistently framed as a problem to be solved.

Homeless San Franciscans: Deviant and Bad for Business

Consistent with previous research, classist stereotypes of people who are unhoused were common, with homelessness attributed to individualistic causes (Best, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Lind & Danowaski, 1999; Whang & Min, 1999). Nearly half of the news articles ($n = 18$; 46%) associated homelessness with substance abuse and "deviant" antisocial behaviors such as frightening people and public urination. These behaviors were rarely contextualized or explained in terms of their relationship to being homeless (e.g., that public urination might be a necessity when living outside). The following quote is illustrative of these representations:

> He [a tourist visiting San Francisco] was still fuming about his work trip to the city by the bay, where a panhandler frightened his wife, a dozen people slept on the sidewalk near his hotel and a young boy in his party witnessed a fight between two homeless people . . . "People get drugs, do an immediate shoot-up, can only make it a few hundred feet before they pass out," said [a local merchant] . . . The merchants in that area have drugged homeless all over their doorsteps. (Lelchuk & Said, 2002, para 3)

This animalistic framing echoes Loughnan and his colleagues (2014) finding that across cultures stereotypes of low-income people are correlated with the stereotype content of apes—primitive, bestial, and not fully human. Moreover, the decontextualized ascription of homelessness to psychological/psychiatric conditions rather than social, political, and economic conditions, positioned homeless people as "the problem" and homelessness as the symptom of that problem (Buck et al., 2004; Kendall, 2011). This framing divorced the issue of homelessness from systemic interrogation of poverty and high housing costs as possible causes of homelessness (Bogard, 2001).

Deviant, animalistic behavior was often discussed in terms of its negative impact on tourists and residents. As one article lamented, "With the homeless population more visible than ever, city residents and shocked tourists have expressed their frustration to hotel owners, the mayor and the media about aggressive panhandlers, people urinating and defecating in public and eating from trash cans . . . " (Lelchuk, 2002b, para. 17). It is noteworthy that the concern voiced here is with the visibility of homelessness and the alleged danger unhoused people present to tourists and residents rather than the conditions contributing to high rates of homelessness in the city (e.g., lack of affordable housing). In this way, people experiencing homelessness were overwhelmingly portrayed as possessing a constellation of negative characteristics' that were bad for business and tourism.

Although people experiencing homelessness were rarely interviewed ($n= 5$, 13%), business owners, tourists, city officials, and San Franciscan residents were regularly interviewed ($n= 25$, 64%) as the following passage illustrates:

> . . . Stuart Chi [sales clerk] told two homeless people to move away from his door, because they were jumping up out of a cardboard box, startling the tourists and asking for

> change . . . Some business leaders say the homeless problem is dampening future economic growth beyond tourism. "It's gotten to the point where we're ashamed to bring new industry into San Francisco to build their businesses and hire people and create local jobs," said Ken Cleveland, director of government and public affairs for the Building Owners and Managers Association, which represents commercial office building owners and managers. "We're ashamed to go out there and tout San Francisco as a good place to live." (Lelchuk & Said, 2002, para. 36, 44, 45)

Overall, homeless people were framed as plaguing the city, affecting everything from residents' quality of life to the tourist industry. As a consequence, it was businesses not homeless people that were framed as deserving empathy and assistance.

Welfare is the Problem: Encouraging Dependence and Deviant Behavior

Welfare programs, notably Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) have long been stereotyped as causing "dependence" among low-income mothers (Bullock & Reppond, 2018). These same concerns extended to General Assistance for San Francisco's homeless. Not only were structural sources of homelessness not interrogated, but homelessness was depicted as a lifestyle facilitated by government assistance programs. Cash aid was repeatedly portrayed as enabling both substance abuse and dependency, and thereby harmful ($n = 21$, 54%). The equation of welfare receipt with drug and alcohol use is reflected in the statement, "Instead of handing homeless people monthly checks that now range from $320 to $395 – money that Newsom says often gets spent on drugs and alcohol . . . " (Gordon & Lelchuk, 2002, para. 12). No evidence was provided to support this claim. Similarly, another article claimed, "Where a sizable share of that money goes is fairly obvious. You can time the jump in drug overdoses and drug-related deaths in San Francisco and elsewhere to the 15th of each month, when welfare checks are handed out" (Garcia, 2002a, para. 7).

Although the opinions and perspectives of unhoused people were rarely represented, 2 days before the citywide vote on November 5th, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an article devoted entirely to interviews with unhoused people. Through their voices, the article reiterated the claim that welfare checks were improperly spent on drugs and alcohol:

> Ruben is a homeless heroin addict and a street hustler. He hustles because the $342 he receives each month from San Francisco only lasts about three days and his hunger for heroin seems to last a lifetime . . . Many [homeless people are] drunk, high on drugs or planning to get high soon after the money [welfare benefits] hit their hands . . . Bruno . . . has spent half his life in prison . . . Because Bruno was in the middle of a 30-day methadone program through San Francisco General Hospital, he planned to spend the rest of his check buying drugs – but not for himself. "I'm not going to lie. Sometimes I do buy dope so I can turn it around and make more money," he said. (Lelchuk, 2002c, para. 1, 2, 5, 33, 37, 38)

These narratives, while representing the lived experiences of a small number interviewees, reinforced classist stereotypes that depict welfare benefits as spent on drugs and alcohol. These accounts were likely highly impactful, given readers' rare opportunities to learn about experiences of homelessness from unhoused people. However, this narrow sample portrays their experiences as representative of the larger homeless population. Missing were stories from other homeless subgroups such as families, youth, domestic violence survivors, and veterans. Not surprisingly, cash aid was depicted as facilitating drug and alcohol dependence:

> The bottom line for me [the author of the article], though, is I don't want to let people live on the sidewalks – drinking, shooting up, urinating, defecating and dying because of drugs taxpayers pay for. Tolerance doesn't mean tolerating the city as a toilet, with nothing flushed away but taxpayers' money ... [Voters] don't like the city wasting millions on homeless programs that only succeed in keeping the sidewalks full of drunk and drug-addled people. (Morse, 2002b, para. 21)

This passage reflects the belief that welfare, itself, enables addiction and dysfunctional behavior. Similar to claims that AFDC/TANF encourages out-of-wedlock births and dependency (Limbert & Bullock, 2005, 2009), cash aid for unhoused people was framed as both ineffectual and as enabling drug and alcohol abuse.

Care Not Cash: The Only Compassionate Solution to an Intractable Problem

Care Not Cash was routinely framed as the best solution to San Francisco's homeless problem ($n = 20, 51\%$), by taking the majority of monthly aid checks out of the hands of homeless people and instead providing services. Not only would it ostensibly reduce visible homelessness by moving people off the street, it was also promoted as reducing dysfunctional behaviors and welfare dependency. As such, Care Not Cash was an opportunity to break the vicious cycle of homelessness and substance abuse:

> Newsom said one look at the state of San Francisco's streets shows that the status quo isn't working, and that local governments across the nation have embraced the conversion of cash grants into services. Newsom believes that some people spend their [welfare assistance] money on drugs and booze. (Gordon, 2002, para. 15)

By framing welfare as harmful, the replacement of cash assistance with non-cash services was posited as the only option for compassionate, responsible care. For example:

> The most electric issue in the city is Proposition N, which asks where compassion lies for those lying in the streets. Its author, Supervisor Gavin Newsom, calls it the Care Not Cash initiative, because it would reduce the city's relatively generous cash payments to the homeless so they won't buy drugs and alcohol ... We all want to see the poor souls on

the streets receive care and stop depositing used wine on the sidewalks . . . (Morse, 2002c, para. 16, 18)

These arguments parallel the compassionate paternalism that pervaded welfare reform. By attaching conditions to the receipt of cash aid (e.g., work requirements, time limits), PRWORA seeks to promote responsible behavior among single mothers by discouraging out-of-wedlock births and requiring work outside the home (Soss, Schram, Vartanian, & O'Brien, 2001; Stryker & Wald, 2009). Accounts of Care Not Cash reiterated a similar rationale to those used to undergird federal welfare reform: reduce welfare benefits to modify behavior and reduce welfare dependency—all in the interest of fostering greater recipient well-being and protecting unhoused people from their own base instincts and self-defeating behaviors. In this vein, appropriate behaviors (e.g., having shelter, eating at home or in restaurants) were contrasted with deviant behaviors (e.g., sleeping in cardboard boxes, loitering, eating out of trash cans, public substance abuse). Implicit in these arguments was an added boon—that the city would prosper from increased tourism and residents would feel safer.

Care Not Cash was not only portrayed as the only compassionate solution to homelessness, but also as highly popular. In August 2002, after 2 months of reporting on the Care Not Cash initiative, the *San Francisco Chronicle* began reporting on the proposition's popularity among voters. The following three excerpts from different articles illustrate the portrayal of the proposition as popular: (1) " . . . 74 percent said they'd vote in November for Newsom's Care Not Cash initiative to drastically reduce city welfare checks to single homeless adults and give them food, shelter, housing and health services instead of cash" (Lelchuk, 2002a, para. 4); (2) " . . . Supervisor Gavin Newsom's Care Not Cash initiative to reform the city's homelessness problem has become overwhelmingly popular with the city's mainstream voters" (Garcia, 2002b, para. 9); and (3) "Newsom's initiative, which would cut large cash payments to the homeless and stop enabling their addictions, is overwhelmingly popular with the voters" (Morse, 2002a, para. 6). Limited information about the polls was provided ($n = 2$, 5%), nevertheless, reporting on its popularity created a seeming consensus on the proposition. Consequently, critical questions about the implementation of the proposed services were largely unasked, including how housing would be secured and whether $300 per person would be sufficient to provide the array of services promised by Care Not Cash.

Concluding Thoughts

Analysis of the discourse surrounding Care Not Cash not only offers much needed insight into the attitudes and beliefs surrounding homelessness but also how restrictive public assistance policies are legitimized. Homelessness was framed

as a threat to businesses, tourism, and residents of San Francisco and welfare as enabling inappropriate behavior among people experiencing homelessness. By depicting cash aid as destructive, its replacement with in-kind services was presented as compassionate care (Stryker & Wald, 2009). We concur that housing is essential, but the paternalism embodied in depictions of homeless people as unable to responsibly manage their money and lives is deeply problematic.

Combatting economic inequality requires a comprehensive understanding of how classism operates and how judgments of deservingness inform policy design and discourse (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2016). Our findings lend further insight into these processes. Proponents of Care Not Cash relied heavily on characterizations of homeless people as intoxicated deviants who were unable to care for themselves. Our analysis is based on a single policy in one city, but related initiatives are being considered across the U.S. The dominant frames reported in this study echo the pathologization of homelessness in other metropolitan cities (e.g., New York and Washington, D.C.) to justify ordinances that criminalize homelessness in public spaces (Bogard, 2001; Mathieu, 1993). Comparative analyses of framing in cities such as San Francisco that pride itself on its reputation as a liberal city and more conservative cities is needed. Given the negative stereotypes surrounding homelessness, there may be less variability across politically diverse cities on these issues than others.

The effects of individualizing narratives of homelessness and Care Not Cash extend beyond the proposition itself. Portrayals of unhoused people as threatening mainstream societal norms reinforces distancing from unhoused individuals, legitimizes exclusion, and widens the gap between unhoused and housed people. By diverting attention from the structural roots of homelessness and poverty, these individualizing narratives deepen the stigma of economic hardship (Williams, 2009). The media communicates powerful messages about whose lives matter when the perspectives of businesses, tourists, and housed individuals are privileged over the experiences and voices of homeless people, and paternalistic narratives reinforce the belief that these more privileged groups know best. People, however, are not passive consumers of media. Further research is needed to understand how the public interprets, responds to, and interacts with dominant media frames and the extent to which policy discussions centered on rights, economic security, and social justice are undermined by classist frames (Blasi, 1994). With all aspects of society, including political communication, shaped by media consumption, understanding these processes is crucial (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010).

We view Care Not Cash as emblematic of neoliberal responses to poverty, and our findings offer insight into how such policies are framed and justified in mainstream news media. In moving from a "war on poverty" to a "war on the poor," cash aid is increasingly depicted as fostering dependency and deviancy, with reduced assistance as the compassionate solution. Meanwhile, poverty and homelessness persist in San Francisco, California, and across the nation.

Understanding how the media frames economic inequality, diverse low-income groups, and welfare policies is pivotal to identifying strategies for interrupting widespread retrenchment and fostering support for economic justice.

Our findings have meaningful theoretical and practical implications. The stereotyping, stigmatization, and zero-sum interpretations documented in our analysis vividly illustrate some of the most fundamental dynamics of conflictual intergroup relations (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). As an applied case study, our findings could prove useful in raising voter awareness of how stereotypes are used to leverage policy support. We also see the significance of this work for anti-poverty advocates working to build stronger alliances and understandings of cross-cutting classist stereotypes and shared media representations of different low-income groups.

Epilogue

In November 2002, 59% of San Franciscans voted in favor of Care Not Cash, however, the initiative faced a major, unanticipated obstacle—voters cannot legally make decisions regarding the distribution of funds from social programs to eligible recipients. In May 2004, Care Not Cash was reinstated after 2 years in court. To assess postimplementation framing, we analyzed 31 articles published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* during the 12 months following its implementation (May 2004–May 2005; $N = 31$). Editorials and letters to the editor were excluded. Utilizing a slightly adapted coding framework, two trained research assistants coded all articles to establish validity, with the primary investigator resolving discrepancies. Overall reliability, measured using percentage agreement, was 93%.

Although recognized as a "work in progress," Care Not Cash was framed as a success. As with welfare reform, success was defined by reduced caseloads and spending (Bullock et al., 2001; Schram & Soss, 2001). Only 805 people—out of an estimated 6,000–15,000—received the promised services (Fagan, 2005). Absent from the articles was discussion of how homeless San Franciscans were faring without cash aid. Despite a 73% decline in caseloads, the visibility of homelessness in San Francisco did not diminish, and individualizing narratives of deviance and substance abuse continued to characterize news articles about homelessness and Care Not Cash ($n = 16$, 52%). It appears that Care Not Cash failed to deliver the compassionate benefits it promised.

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Appendix

Newspaper Articles Coded in Chronological Order

Matier, P., & Ross, A. (2002, June 3). Ruffled feathers at lame-duck defender's office. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. B1.

Lelchuk, I. (2002, June 15). Newsom Asking voters' help in slashing welfare checks. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A15.

Wellman, L. (2002, June 25). Much ado about Mission District's 17 Reasons. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2

Garcia, K. (2002, July 2). Homeless measure makes sense; Care Not Cash plan should make ballot. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A13

Matier, P., & Ross, A. (2002, July 8). Coincidence or revenge?; Jobs story embarrasses Davis, bites publisher. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. B1.

Gordon, R., & Lelchuk, I. (2002, July 9). 2 hot potatoes being tossed at S.F. voters; Homeless, tenant measures both look likely for November ballot. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A15.

Morse, R. (2002, July 10). A blanket appeal for a citywide security zone. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2.

Lelchuk, I. (2002, August 6). Anger over homeless boosts Newsom; Poll of possible S.F. mayoral candidates places Ammiano in second. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A17.

Lelchuk, I. (2002, August 8). Ammiano unveils plan for homeless; Measure would provide 1,000 housing units, drug treatment. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A17.

Morse, R. (2002, August 9). Ammiano's homeless plan is anti-Newsom. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2.

Morse, R. (2002, August 11). Assembly takes a cue from Big Tobacco. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2.

Wellman, L. (2002, August 15). Candidates can be juicier than tomatoes. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2.

Gordon, R. (2002, August 17). Homeless measure has big price tag: S.F. puts yearly cost at $24.5 million. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A16.

Garcia, K. (2002, August 20). Funny guy Ammiano flubs on his punch line: Ammiano's homeless plan a ruse: Ballot measure meant to confuse S.F. voters. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A17.

Morse, R. (2002, August 23). Strike no way to celebrate Labor Day. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2.

Garcia, K. (2002, September 6). Frustrated citizens turn to Plan C. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A1.

Lelchuk, I. (2002, September 7). Lawsuit over Prop. N voter guide: Homeless advocates say it's misleading. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A15.

Staff. (2002, September 11). San Francisco: Suit fails to prevent printing of voter guide. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A16.

Staff. (2002, September 13). What do you think of Supervisor Gavin Newsom's "Care Not Cash" plan for the homeless? How should San Francisco officials care for the homeless- with care or cash. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A1.

Lelchuk, I. (2002, September 22). CAMPAIGN 2002; BAY AREA IMPACT; S.F. homeless crisis spills onto ballot; Rival propositions vary on cash grants, city services. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A1.

Levy, D. (2002, September 22). Good looks aren't enough to entice office tenants. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. H3.

Morse, R. (2002, September 30). S.F. isn't moving to the right – it's just dizzy. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A2.

Lelchuk, I. (2002, October 3). System to track homeless services begins in S.F.; Shelter beds can be reserved. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A17.

Matier, P., & Ross, A. (2002, October 14). Wealthy group's mayday on S.F.'s quality of life. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A21.

Matier, P., & Ross, A. (2002, October 16). S.F. City Hall glows bright orange at night for Giants. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A21.

Gordon, R. (2002, October 18). Daly challenged in diverse district. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A3.

Hoge, P. (2002, October 18). Supe battles erupt in sleepy Sunset. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A3.

Hoge, P. (2002, October 18). Homelessness motivates Castro-Noe's candidates. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. A6.

Lelchuk, I., & Said, C. (2002, October 20). The search for solutions; Stung by the disorder on the streets, S.F. businesses support a ballot measure reallocating funds for the homeless. *San Francisco Chronicle,* pp. G1.

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