

LOST VOICES:  
HOW PRINT MEDIA AND MUNICIPAL POLICY IGNORE THE  
NEEDS OF THE INADEQUATELY HOUSED IN CALGARY, ALBERTA

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses the issues that are prioritized in policy documents, and the concerns which appear in newspaper stories, concerning housing issues in Calgary, Alberta. It holds that certain, 'voices' are accounted for and accommodated over other, more vulnerable, 'voices' in the policy arena. The ways in which these voices are constructed, and how particular agents, subjects, objects, and 'truths' are formed, all result from particular uses of language.

The thesis maintains that those who have the most to gain from supportive housing policies are often excluded from the process of developing, or commenting on, policy altogether. It also suggests that their discursive construction as objects of policy, as moral examples, or as constituent elements of an "issue," has implications both for actions undertaken in relation to them by governments and other agencies, and for their own ability to act effectively to articulate and to address their own concerns.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all of the lost voices in our communities.  
May we move forward to ensure that we become better listeners.

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## **Chapter 1: An Introduction to Housing Issues in Calgary**

This project developed as a result of my participation in a research project in the summer of 2005. I was employed as a research assistant on a project concerning mothers with disabilities in the province of Alberta. As the mothers who participated in the research told stories about their lives, it became clear that their accounts were permeated with frustrations, limitations, and difficulties when it came to their housing circumstances in particular. A majority of women expressed uneasiness with finding adequate housing that would meet their needs over the long term. Stories were told about their concerns with safety, community involvement, proximity to services, residential stability over the long term, crowding, maintenance, privacy, and proximity to parks and services, to name but a few. The life stories of these marginalized women, who told similar tales of inadequate, unstable, and often unaffordable housing, inspired me to engage in my own research about housing issues in the province of Alberta.

Given my interest in public policy, and increasing public awareness and media attention dedicated to affordable housing projects, I felt that a study of housing policy would be a worthwhile and fruitful project. Specifically, I wanted to know more about those with housing difficulties and the policy in place that was designed to help them. I was curious about what issues housing policy addressed, and whether or not policy promises were actually turned into practice. However, once I decided to engage in critical discourse analysis, I developed an interest in looking beyond *what* issues were addressed to *how* they were constructed *as* issues, and what the possible causes and consequences of that construction are. As Dubnick and Bardes (2003) claim, in order to better

understand public policies we should recognize them as both responses to, and sources of, problems. A background in political science helped guide me in this research process, despite my new interest in sociology. I felt a strange sense of competition between the two disciplines and was unsure if a study of public policy was possible from a sociological perspective. Vigoda (2002) provided some support in this arena, as he suggested that the sociological investigation of public policy is an important endeavor.

He explains:

The voice of society has a special role in the study of public administration arenas not only for democratic and political reasons but also because of its fundamental impact on informal constructs of reality such as tradition, social norms and values, ethics, lifestyle and other human interactions (Vigoda 2002, p. 10).

This understanding of the relationship between sociology and public policy is what shaped my initial approach to gaining a better understanding of housing policy and its consequences. In terms of this project, I am interested in how the “voice of society” in Calgary is constructed and reproduced, how the municipal policy is produced within a system filled with social and organizational constraints, and the linguistic and cultural processes and restrictions that are at play in the construction of policy discourse. Despite a broad sociological approach, I have a specific line of inquiry. I am engaging in a content and discourse analysis of media and policy texts, one that regards these texts as social artifacts of specific productive and interpretive processes.

## Developing the project

### *The role of critical theory*

Because this project does not fit within with the conservative, and often positivist, ideals that guide traditional policy analysts, politicians, and policy makers (Rist, 2000; Smith, 1987, 1999) it is important to discuss the value that critical theory can bring to the discussion table, and to clarify what I understand a critical approach to be. Kyle (2005) explains:

A critical theory approach minimally involves unpacking taken-for-granted social relations and institutions. ...I hold that critical theories are interested in seeing an end to or a reduction of oppression. In this way, critical theory aspires to be an emancipatory practice; i.e., an activity that eliminates or reduces the constraints and suffering people experience due to cultural, political, social and/or economic arrangements, practices, and institutions (pp. 4-5).

Another way to describe my emancipatory hopes would be to describe them as “engaged.” As Bauman (2000b) notes, “a noncommittal sociology is an impossibility” (p. 89). To be clear, this approach to research does not begin from the position that entire systems of operations (administration) need to necessarily be destroyed, nor does it make assumptions that existing practices represent a futile situation. But we do know that “social policies shape access to resources,” and it is important to demonstrate an awareness of these realities (Worts 2005, p. 447). A critical approach is one that is concerned about increasing awareness by taking perspectives that are not ‘taken-for-granted’ as a starting-point for research, in order to show how the ‘taken-for-granted’ is not natural and eternal but contingent and political. For these reasons, I believe that a critical approach is the best place from which to start investigating how policy

statements, in the form of textual documents, have the potential to significantly impact the everyday lives of people.

### *Finding a place to begin*

I began this project with an interest in how the Province of Alberta has responded to housing concerns in Alberta, and what impact provincial policy had on the everyday lives of Albertans. It quickly became apparent that such a project was far too broad in scope and that in the interests of time, and with a limited budget, any research would have to be narrowed considerably. My interest turned to the housing problems facing residents of the city of Calgary.

Housing policy in Calgary, Alberta has seen new developments in recent years as the City has actively engaged in policy redevelopment, and as new federal–provincial affordable housing agreements have made funding available for municipal housing initiatives. Upon my initial investigations into the housing policies published by the City, it appeared that the main concern is with affordability, and little attention was paid to the other components of social housing strategies such as suitability, adequacy, and safety. I felt that the apparent absence within the housing policy was a matter worth investigating. One only needs to look to the United States and its history of social housing “projects” in major urban centres to see that the simple creation of spaces without any concern for things such as location to services, aesthetics of the housing and its environment, and community integration can create other social problems and lead to the social concerns, such as the ghettoization of low income earners. The politics behind the policy was of

interest to me, and I wanted to know what sorts of ideas were emphasized in policy, and what was left unexplained, or taken for granted. Recently, the city of Calgary has seen an increase in the discussion about the problem of housing unaffordability, specifically, there has been a push by the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness to eliminate homelessness in the city within ten years (Guttormson 2008, January 26). While I am hopeful that such an endeavour is possible, my research indicates that this kind of plan will likely face a multitude of challenges. Specifically, this project has revealed that the politics of language are a considerable force in the determination of potential policy outcomes, and I am certain that the committee will have to plan and market its proposed solutions very carefully.

### *Why Calgary?*

Calgary has witnessed an impressive population growth in recent years. The city's population grew by 12.4% between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007). Part of this population increase can be attributed to the so-called "Alberta Advantage," a term often touted by the Government of Alberta. This advantage is thought to include a low unemployment rate, a highly skilled labour force, and a profitable oil and gas sector which have all contributed to a rise in the standards of living across Alberta and in Calgary in particular (Alberta, 2005). For quite a time, statistics about average incomes and strong economic growth gave the impression that there was limited poverty in Calgary (K. Morgan, personal communication, October 25, 2005). This impression allowed for the City politicians and policy makers to focus on other issues, such as infrastructure and taxation, rather than dedicate their attention to the development

of inclusive and effective social policies. But despite the positive news about the economy and the prosperity of the region, research began to suggest that there continue to be people who do not seem to benefit from this “Alberta Advantage,” including new arrivals to the city who encounter a tight housing market, and little attention has been paid to this unfavorable reality (Wells, 1998; TD Economics, 2003).

My initial research confirmed that the city of Calgary had published very little in response to the variety of housing concerns that I had become familiar with. Many of the policy documents I came across did not reference issues that fell outside of affordability. It became clear that the City of Calgary chose to frame its social housing program in such a fashion that it primarily reflected economic goals and concerns, and it appeared that the other aspects of social housing were ignored by City policy makers as the fiscal concerns appeared to take priority over others. For example, the program area of the department that oversees housing policy and research is simply referred to as “Affordable Housing.” The decision to have a departmental emphasis on affordable housing, as opposed to suitable, safe, or adequate housing, or on such housing-related issues as transportation, accessibility of services, or security, to name but a few, was a telling feature of the City’s position.

When I began this research project, the City of Calgary had been actively involved in a sweeping redevelopment of City housing policy, and had publicly claimed that “affordable housing is a city priority” (Calgary, 2005g). I found the mention of “priority” to be somewhat alarming, given that the City was aware that nearly 18% of the

city's population struggled with housing affordability in 2005 (Calgary, 2005b). I was immediately struck by a question: how could this be a City "priority" if so many people continued to struggle, despite new investment? I wondered what kind of impact the City might be able to have, by way of policy and program development, on these alarming statistics.

*Background on Calgary's recent housing policy history*

In the mid 1990s many Canadian municipalities were faced with significant housing problems when both the federal and most provincial governments decided to get out of the administration of social housing projects. In 1993, the federal government announced that it would no longer fund social housing initiatives through long-term funding commitments, and in 1996, transferred the responsibility of administration of the majority of social housing stock (that was not already under provincial control) to the provinces. This resulted in a transfer of over 50% of the total social housing stock in Canada, which had a huge impact upon the provinces. Such a move was intended to "clarify jurisdiction" in the social housing field, and the federal government was effectively absent from the social housing debate for nearly a decade (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2003). In Alberta, the provincial government began a similar process of removing itself from administering social housing programs in the mid 1990s (Wolfe, 1998). Responsibility for day to day administration and building maintenance was devolved to municipalities with the idea that each town, city, and district had its own housing needs and challenges. The Alberta government held that evaluation of housing needs was best conducted at a local level, and that it would be most

appropriate if the control over funding was held by individual municipalities (Alberta 2000a, 2000b). The effect of these anti-intervention policies, on the part of both the federal and provincial governments, was to create sudden financial constraints for many municipalities, and the city of Calgary was no exception. This rather quick transfer of responsibility, coupled with the booming Alberta economy which drove up the existing prices of housing, contributed to what many deemed to be a housing “crisis” in the city (Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, 2000).

Towards the end of the 1990s, a significant percentage of the population was paying more than 30% of their income on housing, a standard benchmark used to determine housing affordability, leaving little left over for other necessities such as food and clothing (Wolfe, 1998). Beginning in 2000 there was a gradual acknowledgment across many sectors (government, non-profit, and corporate) that it was no longer possible to ignore the costs associated with a deficit of social housing. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association [AUMA] (2000) issued a report which emphasized the high social costs of the housing crisis, and was particularly adamant that the so-called “Alberta Advantage” was not being shared equally by all Albertans. There were calls for dramatic reinvestment from all levels of government, particularly as new research had suggested that the lack of adequate and affordable housing was also thought to be a social determinant of health (Bryant, 2003). These reports convinced politicians and policy makers that consistent housing policies were needed, given the strong correlation between housing and poverty and the impact of these poor social conditions on the economy.

A trend towards reinvestment began in 2001 (CMHC, 2003) when the federal government re-committed itself to funding social housing programmes. It chose to do so in the form of transfer payments, as opposed to participating in an administrative capacity. New funding has been made available through transfer payments to the province of Alberta and cost sharing agreements have allowed for the development and administration of social housing to remain at the local level (Canada 2002, 2005). This recent reinvestment has allowed for the City of Calgary to engage in social research and to update housing policy in meaningful ways. For example, the City of Calgary recently completed a series of research briefs dedicated to investigating who is in need of social housing. This research has been conducted because of the renewed commitment to affordable housing initiatives. In the past only enough funding was made available to employ a minimum number of staff to maintain the operations of existing facilities. These new developments also constitute an opportunity for research into the policy development process itself: not only into how well the policy redevelopment process is being handled, but also into the specific social, economic and cultural circumstances, and into the discursive constraints, which shape and define policy review and development. This thesis presents the results of research into two specific outcomes of that process; namely the production of policy documents and of media commentary, both of which exhibit characteristic types of content and characteristic ways of discursively organizing that content. These characteristics reflect the fact that the policy development process is not a purely intellectual exercise but a complex *social and organizational* process, of which particular texts and documents are artifacts.

## Project design

### *Theoretical considerations*

I decided to use critical discourse analysis as the primary method for this project. To the individual who is unfamiliar with this approach, it can appear as if “critical” implies that the method simply encourages the research to look for “what’s wrong” and it has been criticized (Chilton, 2005) for coming across as a research method that only emphasizes the negative. I feel that it is important to clarify that this is not the case. As I have come to understand it, the process of critical discourse analysis requires that one pay attention to the ways in which discourses are constructed in specific contexts and in terms of specific assumptions, and how readers interpret, or are encouraged to interpret, what they encounter in documents and statements. When engaging in critical discourse analysis researchers are expected to pay attention to wording, and the meaning(s) associated with these words, as well as the particular ways in which statements are organized into documents or texts. As Fairclough (1992) notes, “as producers we are always faced with choices about how to use a word and how to word a meaning, and as interpreters we are always faced with decisions about how to interpret the choices producers have made” (p. 185). I felt that this was a particularly worthwhile endeavor, because, as many program evaluators know, the assumptions that are built into program design and delivery, along with the language used to describe such initiatives, can often fluctuate between users, administrators, and managers. Also, because that language informs practices, it can have real consequences for the lives of individuals and communities. Often, time is not taken to ensure that the purpose for particular

interventions is clarified, and this can create difficulties for various stakeholders down the line. Lack of clarification can also have the effect of de-politicizing policy issues and of obscuring the politics involved in the definition of stakeholders.

*“Critical” versus “Objective” or “Positive”*

As mentioned above, some policy evaluators, researchers, and analysts have expressed some discomfort around the ideas of “critical” research (Van Wormer, 2004). Some prefer to maintain positivist or value-neutral approaches (Owen, 2007; Pross, 1992) within their research, however, I did not feel that this kind of methodology would be meaningful for my project. Much has been written by sociologists and methodologists from other disciplines (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Schram, 1995; Smith, 1987) about the problems associated with positivist, or so-called objective/neutral methods, arguing that everyone has their own personal or cultural values, and also specific values associated with particular social locations, that will, somehow, surface in their research. Others have responded to the discomfort with existing evaluation perspectives by introducing alternative options. For example, within the field of policy and program evaluation some have placed an emphasis upon “what is working” within programs and departments. One specific approach, coined appreciative inquiry, has begun to see an increase in its popularity as, according to some, a contribution to “the rapidly growing discipline of positive change” (“Welcome” 2008, n.p.). However, such an approach does not allow an evaluator to specifically and explicitly identify problems within certain programs. Instead, references are made to strengths with the organization, and emphasis is placed on strength-based practice. While this can be a helpful and enlightening

technique, it does not do enough to identify and correct specific actions that are problematic, especially when the problems are political in nature.

A critical approach (Fairclough, 1992; Kyle, 2005) allows the researcher to remain dedicated to community development without ignoring or overlooking the role that power plays within the public and political arenas, or the problems that are generated by specific practices or ideas. By stating my politics upfront and acknowledging that I am dedicated to improving on the status quo, I believe that I am in a better position to examine the kinds of problems, or tough questions, that are at work in our community. This project adopts some of the ideas proposed by Smith (1974, 1987, 1999, 2005) around how institutional discourses “are central to the coordinating of work that people do in bringing into being every day the institutional complexes embedded in the ruling relations” (Smith 2005, p. 111). I begin from a position that understands that the social construction of documentary reality (as outlined by Smith, 1974) will emphasize and attend to particular features, or social concerns, while ignoring, or minimizing others. Critical discourse analysis, as proposed by Fairclough (1992, 1995), enables a researcher to examine pieces of information (typically texts) to identify particular discourses, the discursive strategies at play and, in certain situations, the effects of the discourse. Smith’s and Fairclough’s understandings of critical theory, and their emphasis upon the need to question the processes behind the production of texts, have given me an appreciation of the other factors at play in the production and dissemination of ideas within the public and political arenas.

### *Design & content*

As discussed in further detail in the following chapters, I examined newspaper articles and municipal policy documents that were published between June 2001 (when reinvestment in housing was announced) and December 2005. Both of these documentary data sets were analyzed by way of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is a method that allows for thorough analysis of textual materials, and is primarily concerned with the language that is used in order to construct arguments or ideas. The process is more involved than content analysis, although content analysis can be employed usefully along with discourse analysis to make sense of the discursive organization and emphasis of documents. The specific features of this methodological approach are outlined in further detail in Chapter 4. After analyzing both data sets, I compared them to see what kind of messages were foregrounded in each, how they were constructed, what issues were emphasized in one type of text over the other, and what similarities that were apparent in both the content and in the ways specific notions were organized and promoted to specific kinds of readers. I undertook this project with the hope of understanding what kind of issues were prioritized by policymakers and the media, by looking at what concerns were addressed, how they were constructed and how they were addressed and to whom, what was emphasized within policy, and what linguistic or discursive strategies were used when discussing policy. This thesis maintains that certain, 'voices' are accounted for and accommodated over other, more vulnerable, 'voices' in the policy arena. The ways in which these voices are constructed, and how particular agents, subjects, objects, and 'truths' are formed, all result from the particular use of language. The language used in newspaper stories about housing, and in City-produced policy

documents, works to create images of those who have difficulty securing housing and these images of, or assumptions about, those in need are often left unchallenged in both media reports and in policy documents. The thesis holds that those who have the most to gain from supportive housing policies are often excluded from the process of developing, or commenting on, policy altogether. It also suggests that their discursive construction as objects of policy, as moral examples, or as constituent elements of an “issue,” has implications both for actions undertaken in relation to them by governments and other agencies, and for their own ability to act effectively to articulate and to address their own concerns.

This thesis begins with a discussion of relevant housing literature in Chapter 2, drawing attention to what others have discovered about housing and the formation of housing policy in the local, provincial, and national contexts. Chapter 3 unpacks the theoretical approach adopted for this project, and outlines the work of Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough, Nancy Fraser, and Dorothy Smith in discourse analysis, on the organizational, institutional and social settings in which documents are produced and interpreted, and on the relation between discourse and social practice. Chapter 4 describes my methodological approach, and unpacks some of the decisions I made about what I chose to analyze, how I chose to analyze it, and the specific opportunities and constraints which shaped this project. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the analysis of a data set composed of a sample of news articles and news commentary on housing issues, while Chapter 6 focuses on findings from a discourse analysis of policy documents. Chapter 7 offers a comparative discussion of the findings from the media and policy analysis. Finally,

Chapter 8 offers conclusions based on this discussion, and offers some ideas for future work.

## **Chapter 2: A Review of Housing Literature**

Over the last decade and a half there has been a surge in the variety of housing-related research being conducted. Topics range from urban planning and environmental design, to examinations of the barriers that immigrants face when looking for housing, and to explorations of the impact that condominium developments have on a community (Wekerle, 2000; Hulchanski, 1997; Kern, 2006). While there is a vast amount of research available relating to these kinds of issues, many areas of the housing continuum still need to be probed. There are only a handful of projects in existence that specifically address housing policy in the Canadian context, even fewer that speak to housing policy concerns, or successes, in the city of Calgary. This chapter, therefore, has two purposes. First, in order to demonstrate that there is indeed a significant need for research to be conducted on the city of Calgary's housing policy, I will provide a brief overview of what has been published about housing policy and related housing concerns in both the local and Canadian contexts. Secondly, I will note the significant, and sometimes ignored, features of housing policy that have been suggested in the existing literature. In this discussion I will pay particular attention to groups of individuals whose unique needs are often left out of the public dialogue in the process of policy development and implementation.

## Issues in housing policy

### *Impact of the devolution of responsibility for social housing*

Wolfe (1998) published a broad review of Canadian housing policy after the devolution of responsibility for housing was transferred from federal to provincial and municipal governments. It was unclear what roles different levels of government had to play at the time, and this paper was an attempt to describe the “patchwork” of initiatives that have come about as a result of decentralization. Her review of policy indicated that the decentralization resulted in a collage of initiatives that left various parts of the country relatively under-serviced and often ignored. While strongly criticizing the lack of uniformity across the country, and highlighting disparities, Wolfe did not offer solutions for change, but instead highlighted the inequitable policies and practices in place across Canada. While discussing programs and policies specific to each problem, Wolfe highlighted the political environment in Alberta in regards to housing policy noting that, “in Alberta, with a strongly conservative government and a booming economy, social housing is not a priority for debate,” (Wolfe 1998, p. 126).

Carroll and Jones (2000) were also interested in the impact of devolution of housing policy in Canada. They found that in 2000, the majority of Canadian housing policy consisted of little more than an “inertia” and that there was an absence of real change after the federal government withdrew from housing issues in 1993. The authors suggest that this lack of change can largely be attributed to the fact that there has been relatively little money made available to enable housing specialists, such as researchers

and program administrators, to share knowledge with others involved with housing provision. They also note that there appears to be suspicion among the provinces that the federal government will once again become involved in social housing. The provinces are thus hesitant to increase spending on housing programs and jeopardize future federal monies. Lastly, Carroll and James suggest that past housing programs were costly and ineffectual and thus a climate of risk-avoidance developed. These three factors led them to label the state of affairs in 2000 as belonging to the *disengagement and privatization* policy stage. When discussing the response of the Alberta government they explained that, “Alberta, with stronger links to the private sector, has used these to develop programs of social housing that rely upon private sector-community links. But these are very small steps given the magnitude of the problem and there has been almost no emulation” (Carroll and Jones 2000, p. 289). Even today, in 2008, one can see that the legacy of devolution continues in Alberta as municipalities, including the city of Calgary, continue to argue with the Province over funding.

Hulchanski (2002) notes that today, “Canada has the most private-sector-dominated, market-based housing system of any Western nation (including the United States, where intervention on behalf of homeowners is extensive) and the smallest social housing sector of any major Western nation (except for the United States)” (p. iv). His review of Canadian housing policy, and the performances of recent federal governments, is at times quite severe. Hulchanski (2002) explains:

This lack of commitment to housing for all Canadians contrasts not only with housing policies in most other Western nations but also with the philosophy of successive Canadian governments from the 1960s to the 1980s. ...The policy options for the immediate future are neither complex

nor particularly innovative. There is a great deal of experience to draw on (p. 2).

When the federal government opted not to fund social housing programs after 1993, provinces and municipalities became responsible for bearing the costs of the funding cutbacks, including the costs of “physical and mental health care, emergency shelters and services, and policing” (Hulchanski 2002, p. 15).

Carter and Polevychok (2004) also express concern about the social and economic impact that the decentralization of housing policy has had upon Canadians. After retracing the history of Canadian housing policy, the authors conclude that:

Canada has moved from a situation where it had an active and substantive social housing program to a point where it no longer has a national social housing policy. ...The shifts in policy and unit production have had a significant effect on Canadians. In the 1980s, very few Canadians were without a home but today many people are homeless and without the stability that an adequate, affordable home provides (p. 4).

Clearly, homelessness is a major problem for many municipalities, large and small, and the devolution of responsibility from the federal government to the provincial government has contributed to the growing problem of housing insecurity. But are all municipalities facing the same level of crisis?

### *Cities and the housing crunch*

Bunting et al. (2004) note that there are a handful of “very fast growing Canadian metropolitan areas, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, Kitchener, and Oshawa, [and] all experience real estate markets where excessively high demand fuels spiralling costs” (p. 364). Interestingly, one of the factors contributing to skyrocketing

costs is the personal incomes of two-income earning families. The authors explain that “the new class of two-income households enjoys significantly enhanced consuming power. ...Consumer markets have expanded and transformed themselves in response to this new level of affluence” (p. 365). The authors set out to examine where people who were paying 50 percent or more of their income towards shelter were living in the city: inner city, inner suburbs, suburbs, or exurbs, also referred to as a “bedroom community.” The results of their study revealed that the suburbs, especially those developed between the end of World War II and the early 1970s, are where a majority of those facing extreme problems with housing affordability live, and these proportions of suburban struggle are much higher than were previously thought. They conclude that any future policy on affordability and homelessness needs to be sensitive to the “distinctive sub-markets” coping with housing in-affordability (Bunting et al. 2004, p. 389).

Skaburskis (2004) suggested that the increasing levels of homelessness in Canada appear to be the singular condition that motivates the federal government to take an interest in housing issues. He was interested in knowing whether or not city differences mattered in the growing problem with housing affordability, and specifically, “to what extent is the growth in the housing problem concentrated in the large cities where they are getting the most attention?” (p. 118). Skaburskis concluded that that employment levels, source of income, migration, immigration, and household change affect all cities the same way, and that “there is no merit in downloading the financial responsibility for dealing with housing affordability problems” onto municipalities (p. 142). Local financing of programs is a regressive approach, he argues, as lower-income tax payers

have to pay proportionally more than their higher-income counterparts in more affluent cities.

### *Social housing, crime, and violence*

There is research that suggests that the incidence of crime is higher in social housing communities than it is in other neighbourhoods (DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz and Tomaszewski, 2003). There are various aspects of crime that appear to have higher rates in rental and social housing. Brownridge (2005) notes that women living in rental housing are twice as likely to experience violence at the hands of their partners than are their counterparts living in owner-occupied housing. In fact, “women on the lower end of the socioeconomic continuum, living in public housing, have been shown to face a number of unique difficulties in relation to partner violence” (Brownridge 2005, p. 60). Menard (2001) echoes this claim, and notes that “without viable housing options, many battered women, particularly those already living in poverty, are forced to remain in abusive relationships, accept inadequate or unsafe housing conditions, or become homeless and perhaps increase their risk of sexual and physical violence” (p. 707).

A common stereotype of public, or social, housing is that once it is established, and people move in, it can quickly become a hotbed of criminal activity. In an attempt to address some of the stereotypes and legitimate concerns about public housing, DeKeseredy et al. (2003) studied the effects of crime and poverty in an unnamed public housing community, and the role that policy plays in the community. The authors are strongly critical of the role that neoconservative policy, policy that encourages a

reduction in government role and size via downsizing, privatization, and deregulation, has played in contributing to the problems that face public housing communities. The authors suggest that the “get tough on crime” approach that has recently been touted as the only solution for crime-ridden, and often low-income, neighbourhoods is ineffective. They note, for instance, that neoconservative “crime and social policies target individuals instead of broader social, economic and political forces” and that this does little to increase safety, either real or perceived, in communities (DeKeseredy et al. 2003, p. 105).

Much attention has been paid to the impact of the ghettoization of the poor, and the negative public image that social housing frequently solicits (Walks and Bourne, 2006). Walks and Bourne (2006) studied the impact of racial segregation and poverty in Canadian cities. They found:

Increasing inequality within individual minority group populations coupled with the general growth in such populations has meant that the poorest segments are becoming concentrated in low-cost rental districts containing high-rise apartments, including the social housing stock (Walks and Bourne 2006, p. 295).

The policy implications resulting from this research include attempts to counter growing income inequality and, specifically, “addressing the lack of affordable rental housing” (ibid).

#### *Affordability is a public policy issue*

Skaburskis and Mok (2000) examined the impact of withdrawing federal subsidies for new rental housing units, and concluded that without the development of additional rental stock there will be a multitude of problems, both social and economic,

that municipalities would then be faced with. While a shortage of rental units will encourage the development of basement suites as an alternative to reliance on federal funding for housing initiatives, it will also place a great strain on a number of different groups. Seniors will likely feel the shortage and will probably find it difficult to secure adequate, affordable, and safe accommodations. A lack of affordable housing could also deter immigrants from settling in a particular area, potentially hampering economic growth (Skaburskis and Mok 2000, p. 192).

Moore and Skaburskis (2004) have drawn attention to the rise in affordability burdens for Canadians. They tracked the number of people paying over 30%, and those paying over 50%, of their total income for shelter and drew attention to the changes over the past two decades. They argue that affordability concerns are increasing at an alarming rate, and that such a problem is a legitimate public policy concern, as opposed to simply being an issue that the markets themselves can work out. They note that some problems with affordability are a “result of rigidities that preclude the market from responding to the demands of low-income people who cannot afford to pay for the ‘minimal’ quality of housing as set by zoning ordinances” (p. 397). Moore and Skaburskis argue that immediate policy intervention is required as the affordability burdens themselves are becoming “socially unsustainable,” and that Canadian housing policy now lags behind that of the United States, contrary to popular Canadian public opinion that a strong social safety net is in place in Canada, a fallacy discussed in greater detail below. They conclude by arguing “the housing problem has many roots, meaning that the policy responses have to be multi-dimensional and expand well past the housing sector... What

is needed is a long-term commitment to provide adequate housing for the whole population” (Moore and Skaburskis 2004, p. 411).

*Policy is not necessarily kind, nor is it cradle-to-grave in Canada*

One of the myths about social policy is that governments use it in such a way that it supports and protects those who most need to be cared for, and that the welfare state only acts to *support* citizens, ignoring aspects of social control in place in social welfare policies. Issues surrounding housing are not immune to these assumptions. Harris (1999) has challenged this conjecture in the Canadian context:

Canadians like to think that they live in a kinder, gentler society than that of the US. They point to their wider array of social programmes, including welfare, a state pension scheme, and public health care... [But] ‘Social’ housing policy has always been a fragile creature. ...Expenditures on housing have been politically vulnerable. They have not been entrenched in legislation, as is the case with the Canada Health Act, and have had to be regularly defended. As recent cutbacks have shown, they have been one of the most vulnerable categories of expenditure (pp. 1170, 1172-1173).

Lightman (2003) has also commented on a number of other assumptions that have been made about the so-called welfare state. He claims that a central assumption underlying the development of the post-war welfare state was a broad societal consensus for social progress. Lightman argues that this idea has since been questioned. He believes that current discussions about the welfare state now include a debate about whether or not it is even possible for Canadians to come together and form a single opinion on the issue or, in other words, whether Canadians can develop a national stance on ideas of social development. He argues that any kind of national unity on this issue is unlikely as the number of survivors of the Great Depression and World War II dwindle. The economic crises associated with both of those events worked to solidify widespread public support

for the development of a social safety net, but as memories of these events fade, the impetus for a costly social safety net is no longer as powerful as it once was (Lightman, 2003). He also draws attention to the fact that social policy is often intertwined with economic policy, and that the motives for any policy can, at times, be difficult to identify, but that the process of identification is “central to separating the benevolent social policy from the malevolent,” (ibid., p. 46). The suggestion that there are policies that intentionally, or inadvertently, cause harm to some is important to keep in mind when evaluating the impact of policies and programs.

### *Special groups*

#### *Women & housing*

The impact of inadequate housing upon women and children has been well represented in the literature for the better part of three decades. A significant amount of literature has examined the relationship between gender and the welfare state, and has specifically revealed the ways in which “social policies shape access to resources” for women (Worts 2005, p. 447). Housing policies are not immune to these gendered realities. A large volume of Canadian research has been published, claiming that the specific housing needs of women have failed to be adequately addressed by policy makers (Klodawsky and Mackenzie, 1987; Wekerle 1990, 1997; Novac, 1990; Bell and Clark, 2000; Reitsma-Street, Schofield, Lund, and Kasting, 2001; Rude and Thompson, 2001; Worts, 2005).

Policies, particularly social and economic ones, often have the potential to influence the lives of women in a much more dramatic sense than men. Wekerle (1997) has written a comprehensive review of gender as it relates to housing disadvantage, and has addressed numerous ways in which the Canadian housing system is “deeply gendered, producing and reproducing gender-based inequalities” (p. 171). She emphasizes that overall, women have a lower homeownership rate than men, while single mothers have the lowest homeownership rates of all low income groups, which demonstrates a deeply gendered housing reality. According to 2002 data, women in Canada, on average, make only 62% of what Canadian men earn in a given year (Status of Women Canada, 2005). Lower incomes make it more difficult to qualify for a mortgage and to purchase a home. This inability to access secure, long term housing means that women are more likely to be dependent upon rental housing than are men. Wekerle (1997) explains:

Women are far more reliant than men on the public sector to meet their housing needs as a result of the combination of low incomes, insecure employment, and their periodic absences from the workforce to care for children and the elderly (p. 178).

Difficulties with housing affordability seep into other aspects of women’s lives. McCracken (2004) explains how housing affordability issues directly impact a woman’s physical, mental, and emotional health. Participants in her study explained that they had priorities for spending: rent first, utilities next, and finally, food and other necessities last. She explains that as rents increase, there is less money available to spend on other essentials such as clothing, medications, and food. Women will often sacrifice their own health and needs to ensure that their bills are paid and, if they are caregivers, that their children are taken care of first.

Numerous other studies have highlighted the importance of safe housing to women (Novac, 1990; Bell and Clark, 2000; McCracken, 2004; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; Worts, 2005). “Safety” can refer to the condition and layout of a house or apartment facility, and also to the neighbourhood in which one resides. Women have reported concerns with their physical aspects of their housing, and have noted that adequate home security systems, such as apartment buildings with main doors that lock, and homes with intact window screens and locks that work are extremely important to them (Rude and Thompson, 2001; Bell and Clark 2000). Some women have expressed concern with living on the main floor of apartment buildings, stating that they feel less secure than they would if they were to have an apartment on a higher level. Many have also cited the importance of well-lit, above-ground parking areas, fenced yards for their children to play in, and main level laundry facilities. Bell and Clark (2000) also noted that some of the women they interviewed mentioned that the availability of pet-friendly rental accommodations was a factor in their housing decisions. One of their study participants explained that she felt unsafe without a dog, noting a history of abuse (p. 30). Interpretations of safety also extend out into the community, and much housing literature has revealed that women are particularly concerned with having a home in a clean, quiet, and brightly lit neighbourhood. Rude and Thompson (2001) note that women who have housing affordability issues often end up living in low-income, “high crime neighbourhoods – in the urban ghettos,” and these neighbourhoods often contribute to the stress that women experience (p. 23).

McCracken (2004) has drawn attention to the difficulties that some women have had in ensuring repairs to their rented homes are carried out. She notes:

Most of the women who were renting privately told us they had difficulties getting repairs done in a timely manner, if at all. One woman made a deal with her landlord; the landlord paid for the repair materials and she did the repairs herself. The other women in the group said that this was a good arrangement if you know how to fix what was broken, but they did not (ibid, p. 16).

In other studies, women have reported that the repairs their homes needed which they cannot do themselves “affected their sense of well being and their psychological health” (Rude and Thompson 2001, p. 24). Others have noted that affordability issues have led to some women living in sub-standard housing that has negatively impacted their health. Women have reported that problems such as mould, poor water quality, and infestations of mice and insects in their homes dramatically affect both their physical and mental health, and these claims are supported by a significant body of research within the public health community (Bashir, 2002; Srinivasan, 2003; Bryant, 2003).

Women, particularly single mothers, have reported that they have difficulties accessing rental housing because of discrimination (Bell and Clark, 2000; Novac et al., 2002). Landlords have been reported to reject “families living on social assistance and most prefer working couples, which puts single mothers and other types of households at a disadvantage” (Novac et al. 2002, p. 2). Women with children often report difficulties in finding an adequate place to live. Bell and Clark (2000) highlight that a majority of their study respondents felt that they had been denied housing because of their status as a single mother. However, finding housing is not the only obstacle. Once women secure accommodation they often run into other problems. Researchers have documented

incidents of sexual harassment of women by their male landlords, building superintendents, and other male tenants (Novac et al., 2002; Worts, 2005).

Finally, others have argued that the design of communities has worked against women. The idealized nuclear family of a male breadwinner and a female caregiver has shaped the design of neighbourhoods, and has limited the choices available to women.

Novac (1990) explains:

Research has shown that, for the most part, suburbs work for men and against women. A variety of problems for women have been identified, from physical and social isolation to lack of access to transportation and paid work. ...Planning for residential communities has not included services such as laundries and cleaners, day care for children and frail elderly, at-home services for the sick or disabled, flexible transportation services or an integration of opportunities for paid employment. While the state focuses on housing needs only in terms of affordability, physical adequacy and crowding (and does a very poor job of that), the requirements of all citizens who are not able-bodied adult males and serviced by women demand the consideration of additional criteria (pp. 54, 56).

Given that we have a basic understanding that women's experiences are different than that of men's, it would seem reasonable for a municipal housing authority to take into consideration some of these issues in their policies and strategies. Unfortunately, Reitsma-Street (2001), McCracken (2004), and Wekerle (1997) have demonstrated that this has not been the case.

### *Immigrants & integration*

The difficulties new immigrants to Canada face when looking for housing has also been identified in the literature (Hulchanski, 1997; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; Graham and Thurston, 2005). Hulchanski (1997) studied barriers that immigrants in

Toronto face when looking for housing. He was interested in the level of openness of cities, neighbourhoods, housing markets and housing waiting lists “to the ‘others’, to people who are new and often very different” (p. 1). He concluded that ethnicity, race, class and gender do are all factors that matter in terms of access to housing and, “the housing system, like any other set of markets and institutions, apportion resources and opportunities selectively” (Hulchanski 1997, p. 8).

Reitsma-Street et al. (2001) spoke of the problems that immigrant women have negotiating the complex social welfare system. Drawing from interviews with immigrant women in Victoria, BC, the authors highlight the difficulties they have encountered. They drew attention to the experiences of Hawa, a refugee woman who recognized that her “lack of knowledge and her lack of ease with English as barriers, inhibit[ed] her access to better housing and social services” (p. 40). Other researchers concur that there are many barriers and hierarchies in place that create disadvantages for immigrants, as Graham and Thurston (2005) note:

For recent immigrants, discrimination is an important component of the migration experience in Canada. ...Hierarchies are created through formal and non-formal definitions of who is and is not Canadian. These hierarchies are reinforced through social policies leading to unequal access to services (such as health services), limited employment opportunities and increased exposure to dangerous substances (p. 65).

Negotiating the often-complex public housing system is difficult enough, but it is even more so for immigrants. Adding the potential for discrimination, language barriers, and differing cultural expectations to the search for, and tenure of, housing, immigrants are often faced with additional burdens and challenges that those who are born in Canada do not have to tackle (Graham and Thurston, 2005; Walks and Bourne, 2006).

### *Aboriginals & housing issues*

Aboriginals in Canada face many of the same challenges that immigrants to Canada do, in that discrimination and difficulties securing safe, affordable, and adequate housing are challenging tasks. Walker (2003) has drawn attention to some of the difficulties that Aboriginals face as they move from rural reserves and establish themselves in urban centres. He notes that urban aboriginals are among the most poorly housed social groups in cities, and this problem is exacerbated by systemic racism that exists in the housing sector (Walker 2003, p. 100). The number of Aboriginal people living in *core housing need*, those who are unable to afford shelter that meets adequacy, suitability and affordability norms in Canada, is over three times higher than the number of non-aboriginal households, and Aboriginal people make up between 20 to 50 percent of the total homeless population in Canada (ibid.). Walker envisions a solution that includes aboriginal people in the planning process. As far as urban planning is concerned, he believes that integrating attention to the special housing needs and preferences of Aboriginal people, such as the existence of culturally appropriate services and the acknowledgment of the need within policy for Aboriginal people to maintain residential mobility between urban centres and reserves, is crucial for improving the housing situation of urban Aboriginals (Walker 2003, p. 104).

In a study of women detailing stories of their housing struggles in Lethbridge, Alberta, Bell and Clarke (2000) note that many of the female Aboriginal participants experienced a “sense of being denied” in their search for housing. They note that the “most frequently cited reason for being denied housing was the belief that landlords

exhibited discriminatory attitudes: of the 45 aboriginal participants, 19 reported feeling they had been denied housing on the basis of race” (p. 10). McCracken (2004) has also noted the additional struggles that Aboriginal women encounter. She explains:

Aboriginal and visible minority women face additional challenges. They have spoken about the racism and oppression they have experienced, both as individual women and as members of a group who have been systematically marginalized for years and the difficulties this has created in finding and affording suitable housing (pp. 3-4).

Rude and Thompson (2001) reach similar conclusions, noting that when broken down by Aboriginal ethnicity and needs, however, the housing data shows an inverse relationship. They reveal that, “regardless of gender, considerably higher numbers of female and male Aboriginal people are in need of housing” (p. 11).

#### *Accessibility & inclusion*

There has been a relatively recent acknowledgment in the literature concerning the various impacts that personal disabilities have upon an individual’s search for housing, tenure of housing, and the supply of accessible and suitable housing for disabled individuals. Rude and Thompson (2001) have drawn attention to the role that disability plays in housing need. Not surprisingly, they claim that people with disabilities are more likely to be in need of housing than those who do not have disabilities (p. 11). Although the word “disability” is often interpreted as referring to mobility issues alone Imrie (2003) argues that:

A range of research suggests that property professionals, including developers, surveyors, site managers and architects, have little or no knowledge of disabled people and their design needs... Property ‘developers’ definitions of disability and disabled people show a limited notion of what disability is, or alternatively, a broad-based conception

relating to an exclusive set of, usually, mobility impairments (pp. 392-393).

This indicates that the needs of disabled individuals are typically ignored or, if they are included, accommodations are typically made solely for those with mobility issues. This, in effect, ignores the needs of those who have other impairments, especially those who are mentally ill, or deemed “hard to house.” Gurstein and Small (2005) explain that “‘hard to house’ denotes a population whose multiple diagnoses impede their ability to secure housing because they are deemed problematic by housing providers” (p. 718). They note that it is crucial that services are designed to fit those trying to access them, rather than requiring that people change to fit the services they are trying to use (ibid.).

Wood (2004) explains that including people with disabilities in the community has been the “thrust of social policy since the hospital closure movement in the 1980s” (p. 185). Despite some of the attempts by policy makers to foster inclusion, this plan to include people with disabilities in neighbourhoods has been met with challenges, and Boyce et al. (2001) explain that “well-meaning, yet paternalistic, efforts of bureaucrats and policy-makers to provide for persons with disabilities have made it difficult for individuals and their organizations to make their needs and views known” (p. 3). Thanks largely in part to a strong disability rights lobby, there has been a shift in the language that is used when talking about the needs of people with disabilities, and disability-rights advocates have argued for a more inclusive approach to policy making. This approach has been moderately successful in working to integrate the varying needs of people with disabilities into policy and its resulting programs (Boyce et al., 2001). This is particularly important, given that a majority of people with disabilities live in some form of social

rented housing, as opposed to living in homes that they own (Wood, 2004). This reality should be of particular concern to those who study housing policy, and to those who develop it, given the disproportionately low rates of homeownership amongst those with disabilities.

## Issues in housing theory

### *Social justice & social exclusion*

Issues of social justice are an integral part of housing discourse, and are a critical aspect of this project for two reasons. First of all, the idea of social justice is an important factor to consider when evaluating a social program, as House (2005) explains:

Principles of social justice are used to assess whether the distribution of benefits and burdens among members of a society are appropriate, fair and moral. ...When applied to society as a whole, social justice pertains to whether the institutions of a society are arranged to produce appropriate, fair and moral distributions of benefits and burdens among societal members. As such, social justice is linked directly to the evaluation of social and educational programs because these entities, and their evaluations, affect directly the distribution of benefits and burdens (p. 1074).

Secondly, research suggests that those who are inadequately housed are at greater risk of social exclusion. Social exclusion is a form of social disadvantage that encompasses economic and non-economic factors where individuals are separated from institutions and wider society and left voiceless (Jary and Jary, 2000). Somerville (1998) has paid particular attention to the implications of social exclusion as it pertains to housing. He argues that there are two prevalent meanings attached to the term "social exclusion." The first refers to exclusion from labour markets in advanced capitalist countries, while the

second relates to the “denial of social citizenship status to certain social groups” (Somerville 1998, p. 762). House further claims that this latter definition of social exclusion relates to the social division of welfare, and can refer to many things, whether one has the right to a minimum income, or to the right expect a decent standard of living. Somerville (1998) explains how opportunities can be denied:

One approach is to assume that everybody should have the same opportunities in life, and there should be no exclusion on the basis of class/race/sex/age/sexuality/disabilities/etc; but there remains the possibility that people may be excluded on other grounds. ...The exercise of a right could be contingent upon the discharge of certain obligations, and failure to meet these obligations could mean forfeiture of the right and consequently exclusion from the benefits which that right secures. For example, failure to sign the employment register can lead to exclusion from the unemployment benefit, or failure to pay rent can result in eviction from one’s home. In each case, a distinction is being made between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ persons, and it is argued that it is only the latter who can legitimately be socially excluded (p. 762).

While the relationship between housing and social exclusion is multi-faceted, Somerville suggests that this exclusion occurs only if the “effect of housing processes is to deny certain social groups control over their daily lives, or to impair enjoyment of wider citizenship rights” (Somerville 1998, p. 772). This exclusion can include such things as landlords refusing to rent to single mothers, or to the phenomenon of “not in my back yard,” or “NIMBYism,” a strategy where the more powerful residents in a particular area lobby their representatives to exclude new housing development from their area, especially development that is geared towards housing low-income earners.

### *Hard to house*

Gurstein and Small (2005) are acutely aware of the impact that social exclusion has on those who are “deemed hard to house.” The inability for these members of the

population to secure safe, affordable housing means that they are at risk of homelessness. Part of the problem, according to the authors, is that programs and services need to fit the people rather than fitting people to services. They write that “the focus of analysis remains on the troublesome individual who does not conform rather than the system that cannot adapt to the individual” (ibid., p. 733). Given that concerns about the rising rates of affordability difficulties and homelessness continue to make the news, Gurstein and Small’s suggestion that the troublesome individual is held responsible for their housing difficulties and thus defined or definable as ‘undeserving’ is duly noted.

Like Gurstein and Small (2005), Wekerle (1997) maintains that the neo-conservative agenda has shaped the prevailing discourse on housing, and that this approach places an emphasis on an individual’s ability to pay, or compete, for housing in the private market. Unlike Gurstein and Small (2005), her focus is not on the problems that hard-to-house individuals face, but on the difficulties that women face overall. As discussed earlier, Wekerle’s (1997) comprehensive review of gender as it relates to housing disadvantage has addressed numerous ways in which the Canadian housing system is “deeply gendered, producing and reproducing gender-based inequalities” (p. 171).

### *Challenging the status of “affordable”*

Bratt (2002) raises the question of the meaning of “affordable housing.” The standard for “affordability” is currently defined by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation as spending no more than 30% of the gross household income on rent

(CMHC, 2007), although this figure has been the subject of public debate. She draws attention to Stone's concept of "shelter poverty" which he bases upon the idea of a "market basket" assessment, an estimate of what households can truly afford to pay (Stone, 1993, as cited in Bratt, 2002). According to Stone's research, 30 percent of an income is too much to pay for housing. If too much of the household budget is allocated towards rent or mortgage costs, there is little left to pay for "food, medical care, transportation, clothing, as well as recreational opportunities" she argues (Bratt 2002, p. 19). Bratt goes on to suggest that "research on this point, however, is skimpy" (ibid.), pointing out that the connection between housing "affordability" and family well-being has generally been made in reference to the state of a family's physical health. This would, of course, include such things as adequacy of nutrition for children, and the stress that the adults would have to bear in order to cope with paying for the cost of the family's housing.

### *Housing as a social determinant of health*

Issues of inadequate housing, referring to substandard or deteriorating housing, are as well documented as the problems of unaffordable housing. Research has demonstrated, for example, the "harmful association of asthma, neurological damage, malnutrition, stunted growth, accidents, and injury with household triggers like poor insulation, combustion appliances, cockroach and rodent infestation, dust mites, hyper- and hypothermia, unaffordable rent, and dangerous levels of lead in soil and household paint" (Bashir 2002, p. 733). Despite the fact that the consequences of poor quality housing are just as detrimental to one's physical, mental and emotional health as the

consequences of unaffordable housing, more often than not it is concerns about unaffordable housing that catches the media's attention. There has, however, been a recent explosion in the literature demonstrating a link between adequate housing and health (see Raphael, 2004; Bashir, 2002; Krieger and Higgins, 2002; Graham and Thurston, 2005; Bryant, 2003). Traditionally, the focus on health has been limited to attention from those who approach the housing issue from a public health perspective. Krieger and Higgins (2002) highlight this by drawing attention to the growing body of evidence that has "associated housing quality with morbidity from infectious diseases, chronic illnesses, injuries, poor nutrition, and mental disorders" (p. 758). However, there has been a change in focus from simply identifying those physical concerns to attaching meaning to the social aspects of housing problems. This shift has resulted in more information produced through a lens that examines the social determinants of health, factors such as age, genetic makeup, sex, and lifestyle that influence health but fall outside of the parameters of the more commonly understood physical determinants of health. Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) explain, for instance, that one's personal health is directly impacted by his or her social and economic circumstances, as "poor social and economic circumstances affect health throughout life" (p. 10). Social determinants of health can include various disadvantages, either absolute or relative, such as employment in a hazardous or dead-end job, receiving poorer education in adolescence, or having few family assets (*ibid.*). Housing is thus, a prime social determinant of health (Raphael, 2004; Bryant, 2003; Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003).

Other researchers have begun to work from within a population-health framework to identify housing as a socio-economic determinant of health (Bryant, 2003). Dunn (2002) highlights three aspects of housing relevant to population health. *Material dimensions* include the physical integrity of the home and housing costs; *meaningful dimensions* refers to the sense of belonging and control in one's own home, which is associated with home ownership, stability and permanence in a community; and *spatial dimensions* includes the immediate environment of the home, as well as the community in which one lives, the resident's proximity to services, schools, employment, and recreational activities. It is the last two aspects, meaningful and spatial dimensions, which are often overlooked in policy.

Bryant (2003) explains that housing policy decisions “create the conditions that influence the availability and affordability of housing and other social determinants of health” (p. 55). Those who study social determinants of health typically establish a link to policy, and as Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) argue, if policy “fails to address these facts, it not only ignores the most powerful determinants of health standards in modern societies, it also ignores one of the most important social justice issues facing modern societies” (p. 10). Unfortunately as Bryant (2003) points out, relatively little has been written linking inadequate housing, or housing insecurity, to the health of Canadians. Consequently, the health-related implications of funding cutbacks for housing programs have largely been ignored by policy makers in Canada. Only now is this issue coming to the forefront of discussion. Finally, after years of devolution of responsibility on the part of the federal government, there is a growing awareness of the seriousness of the problem

of failing to have a clear political strategy to address the growing inequality that results from inadequate housing (Bryant, 2003).

### Discourse analysis and housing policy

Research on housing policy using discourse analysis has been carried out by other researchers. In an analysis of how policy changes were carried out and talked about by key policy actors in Queensland, Australia, Marston (2000) identified that the use of metaphors and myths was a common practice used to justify particular changes in policy. Using discourse analysis, Marston was able to demonstrate that key policy actors used myths about 'bad' housing tenants to draw attention away from the policy changes themselves. Marston (2000) notes:

[T]he focus of the policy debate that followed the introduction of the 'reforms' was directed at policing the behaviour of public housing tenants. In terms of discourse practice, this had the effect of silencing alternative discursive representations of the policy 'problem' such as government funding cuts, increased targeting, inappropriate housing stock location and poor quality housing (p. 367).

Marston also identified the common tendency for policy actors to draw attention to the needs of taxpayers:

The protection of the 'taxpayer' against the evils of 'layabouts' is a pervasive feature of contemporary welfare state discourse in Australia. This theme appears to be linked to the intense fiscal focus on how much welfare services like public housing are 'costing' governments (p. 369).

Marston argues that there are multifaceted implications for the use of critical discourse analysis by housing researchers; he maintains that social policy practitioners and academics will be required to think outside normative policy frameworks that privilege

measurement over meaning if they are to adopt the use of CDA in a meaningful way. Marston also highlights that “problematizing the way policy issues are discursively framed and represented in social policy debates is the starting point” for this kind of critical discourse analysis (2000, p. 371).

Jacobs and Manzi (1996) highlight how “policy language is often accepted as being a neutral medium in which ideas and an objective world can be both represented and discussed” (p. 544). The authors maintain that policy language is anything but. In a study of the language used in housing policy in the UK, Jacobs and Manzi identify the social consequences associated with word choice:

This is a deliberate endeavour on the part of policy-makers and managers to alter perceptions of staff towards consumers of services. Therefore, models of 'tenant' or 'client' are seen as no longer appropriate due to connotations with the idea of a 'dependency culture'. The new model of user choice is consciously linked to market processes. It is a calculated effort to alter attitudes towards acceptance of a competitive environment (p. 560).

Jacobs and Manzi undertake a kind of textual analysis that attempts to explore policy issues by way of official policy documents, though such an approach is not without its critics. In a review of discourse analyses of housing issues, Hastings (2003) critiques the work of Jacobs and Manzi (1996), claiming that the strict analysis of official policy documents is a narrow approach, given the multitude of avenues available for study. She notes that “the wealth of unpublished documents associated with policy development, such as background papers, internal memos and minutes of meetings, remain largely unexplored by housing researchers” (p. 133). As is discussed in chapter 4, this project integrated additional documents, such as minutes from Roundtables on Affordable Housing hosted by the City of Calgary and an application form for housing occupancy, in

order to have a more expansive dataset. Hastings' point about the potential 'narrowness' in policy analysis is duly noted. However, in this particular project, access to information was hampered (a concern further discussed in chapter 6), but her points about a wide-ranging and encompassing set are important to consider, and should remain in the mind of any critical discourse analyst with an interest in policy.

Hastings (2003) notes that the method of discourse analysis can be helpful for housing researchers in that it allows analysts to explore new issues of power and resistance in the housing field. And yet Hastings also offers up a warning for those involved in housing studies, writing that "researchers, in particular, need to be aware of how their own use of language is inevitably perspective-bound, given the legitimacy which is often afforded to academic perspectives" (p. 138). Hastings is correct in asserting that researchers need to consistently engage in reflexivity and question the assumptions and values that are built into their own research programs. This project might be criticized because I am arguing that the voices of those who have difficulties securing decent and affordable housing are often left out of the discussion, and yet, I have not made room for them here, either. However, this project was designed to study whose voices were included and how particular ideas about housing support certain social positions and perspectives at the exclusion of others. I never set out to make claims about what needs might be, or should be, prioritized over others in policy produced by the City, though this too, might be an interesting area of study. That said, it was important for me to reflect upon my abilities as a CDA researcher to see how my perceptions were influenced by my own status as a Calgarian who was, and is, securely-housed. Again, I

agree with Hastings' critique of CDA housing research, though it is my hope that this project will not be dismissed because of its concern with the structure of policy and media accounts of housing concerns, rather than on the claims made by those in housing need.

### Findings and implications

The literature confirms that gender, age, class, race and disability affect access to adequate housing, and that adequacy of housing affects physical health and social wellbeing. It also verifies that policy, or its absence, plays a crucial role in shaping the Canadian housing context. Despite the plethora of housing research that employs discourse analysis coming out of Europe and Australia, relatively little has been published about Canadian housing policy using discourse analysis. This gap in the literature suggests that the Canadian housing policy landscape is ripe for exploration, and that a project on housing policy in Calgary would be a worthwhile endeavour. This chapter addressed some of the major issues that should be considered in the discussion about housing, and to consider new contexts for ensuring a more inclusive and effective housing policy. Good policy should be as comprehensive as possible in addressing the social and health issues of housing, as well as economic need, because the domino effect of addressing one issue, but not another, can be particularly troubling for those who would benefit from comprehensive housing policy.

In an attempt to develop and implement comprehensive policy, policy makers must be cognizant of the ways in which labels can both positively and negatively affect attempts to address the needs of citizens. The review of housing related literature revealed that there are two main issues to consider in any attempt to address housing issues. First, there are problems associated with categorizing and labelling of people in need of housing. The labels ascribed to individuals and the stigmas that often accompany them bring challenges in the search for housing. The difficulties faced by single mothers with children who need a place to live are documented by researchers and journalists, as are struggles faced by immigrants who cannot find adequate housing for their families. On the flip side, researchers have highlighted the ways in which an insensitivity towards certain groups can be just as damaging as the ascription of labels (Gurstein and Small, 2005; Novac, 1990; Rude and Thompson, 2001; Wekerle, 1997; and Worts, 2005). Clearly, a delicate balance needs to be struck between identifying the particular needs of individuals and groups, and ensuring that people are not lumped together in such a way that the individual is viewed as merely a prop or placeholder in a specific circumstance.

Affordability is often cited as the source of many housing problems, but recent research suggests that affordability is not the only issue one should be concerned about. This review provided a glimpse into a number of issues that are tied to housing policy and its implications for Canadians. With the exception of a few studies that address homelessness in Calgary, very little has been written about the housing situation in that city. Thus there is a real need for research into the implications of City housing policy in Calgary, in light of the concerns about adequacy of housing addressed in this chapter.

Throughout this project, I made an attempt to maintain a heightened state of awareness about the power of labels and loaded terms. Labelling theory is “an analysis of the social processes involved in the social attribution (labelling) of positive or (more commonly) negative characteristics to acts, individuals, or groups” (Jary and Jary 2000, p. 328). While it is important to remain sensitive towards the specific needs of particular groups, it is equally important to not over-interpret these needs or make hasty assumptions about what might produce greater benefits for one group versus another based on generalizations. In relation to this issue, the discursive construction of needs and resulting “needs talk,” as described by Nancy Fraser, are discussed in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations**

This project was designed to examine the ways in which the discourse of public newspaper articles and that of municipal policy documents address housing issues and concerns in the city of Calgary. The methods employed for this research primarily involved Fairclough's (1992) version of critical discourse analysis (CDA), and while the actual practice of this method is discussed further in the following chapter, this section will address some of the theoretical issues and perspectives that influenced the choice of discourse analysis as the central methodological focus of this project. The purpose of this chapter is to draw attention to the major theoretical works on the subject of discourse, and to integrate Fraser's (1989a,b) conception of "needs talk" into this project. This chapter will include a review of the work of some social theorists who offer guidance for a proper accounting of the multiple approaches to discourse and the politics of naming discursive practices. The following pages will discuss some competing ideas about discourse, integrating and synthesizing some of the theoretical contributions to its definition and study, and will conclude with a description of the analytical framework that was developed for this research project.

#### Defining Discourse

'Discourse' is a word used liberally within academic research, but it is often left undefined (Baxter, 2003; Hastings, 2000). 'Discourse' is a relatively obscure term, and reviews of discourse-related literature revealed that some academic attempts to clarify and define 'discourse' have led to "conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated

from a range of theoretical and disciplinary standpoints” (Marston 2000, p. 351). Mills (2004) supports this claim, adding that “it [discourse] has perhaps the widest range of possible significations of any term in literary and cultural theory, and yet it is often the term within theoretical texts which is least defined,” (p. 1).

Hastings (2000) notes that discourse is a term primarily used in two fields: linguistics and social theory. The aim of analysis in the field of linguistics is primarily to understand how language is used, why it is used in a particular way, and what effect is achieved by that use. Social theorists, on the other hand, often begin from a standpoint that sees language as something that produces, or constructs, reality, and “specifically, our perception or knowledge of the world and the meanings we make about it” (Hastings 2000, p. 131). Given that my own interests fall under the umbrella of social theory, further discussion about discourse, its implications, and the requisite theories behind it will be largely limited to literature produced by social theorists.

#### *Foucault: A central figure in the debate over discourse*

Though much has been written on the subject of discourse, it is the work of Michel Foucault that is most central to this discussion. Foucault popularized the concept of ‘discourse’ in the 1970s and 1980s (Fairclough, 1992), and his works have been hugely influential in the social sciences and humanities, and particularly powerful in post-structuralist social theory (Hastings, 2000). In fact, his discussion of ‘discourse’ has become so prevalent that it is, at times, taken for granted; much of his work has simply become embedded in the discourse literature without proper reference (ibid.). Foucault’s

substantive interpretations of the discursive aspects of social life have inspired a wave of interest in the subject of discourse and in the methodological approach of discourse analysis, and he is heavily cited in most discourse-related publications (Fairclough, 1992).

When discussing discourse, theorists often start with Foucault and then criticize and dismiss, or modify and proceed. Some have made adjustments to Foucault's conceptualization of and approach to discourse in their attempts to create a workable framework for discourse analysis, while others simply adjust and extrapolate from where they believe Foucault left off. While this project is concerned with discourse, it will not follow a strictly Foucaultian approach, as there are limitations to such a project, which are discussed in detail below. Instead, this project will follow a model of discourse analysis that is primarily influenced by Fraser (1989, 2003) and Fairclough (1992, 1995), along with some insights provided by Smith (1974, 1987, 1999, 2005) and Mills (1997, 2004). These authors have all written about the ways in which ideas about social issues are constructed and communicated in both public discourse and in policy. The following pages will present a brief overview of some of these theories that have been integrated into this project, and will conclude with the working definition of "discourse" and "discourse analysis" used for the purposes of this project.

Foucault's conception of discourse is highly nuanced and somewhat difficult to wade through. Mills (1997) feels sympathy for those who find his work overly complex and difficult to understand. She explains:

Foucault's work is not a system of ideas, nor a general theory; his work ranges over an extremely wide variety of subjects and it is very difficult to pin him down as a historian, a philosopher, a psychologist or a critical theorist. ...The term discourse is not rooted within a larger system of fully worked out ideas, but is one element in Foucault's work. ...A discourse is something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself which can be analyzed in isolation (Mills 1997, p. 17).

Mills is not alone in producing explanations that are complex. Baxter (2003) provides yet another interpretation of Foucault's approach to discourse:

Discourses are forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectation and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices. They are systematic ways of making sense of the world by inscribing and shaping power relations within all texts, including spoken interactions (p. 7).

Others contend that Foucault provided a rich framework in which he described discourse as "actively constituting or constructing society," and that he also emphasized the ways in which discourse practices are interdependent within a society (Fairclough 1992, p. 39). In this sense, "discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute' them" (Fairclough 1992, p. 3). These conceptions of discourse represent the power of language practices more effectively than other, more traditional approaches to language such as linguistic analysis or content analysis. Foucault used the term 'discourse' to refer to different ways of producing and structuring areas of knowledge, truth claims, and social practice through the making of statements in certain salient and characteristics ways. He argued that 'discursive practices' not only designate and construct a social world or fields of action but also recursively identify the speaker or actor as a particular kind of agent.

The *Collins Dictionary of Sociology* explains that discourse refers to “the particular ‘Scientific’ and specialist language(s), and associated ideas and social outcomes, which, according to Foucault, must be seen as a major phenomenon of social power, and not simply a way of describing the world...It is an important aspect of Foucault's conception of discourse(s), that, in part at least, social phenomena are constructed from within a discourse; that there are no phenomena outside discourses” (Jary and Jary 2000, p. 157). This entry is an exemplar of the ways in which competing ideas and uncertainties about discourse have developed over the past several decades, as even a reputable sociological dictionary fails to provide a simple explanation of what discourse *is*. Judging from the myriad of explanations about Foucault’s conception of discourse, it appears that ‘discourse’ can be thought of as both a set of practices with particular effects and as a descriptor for the effects produced by the practices – a meaningful or textual “world” populated by agents and objects.

Baxter (2003) draws from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to discuss the plurality of discourses, and to maintain that Foucault made a link between *discourses* and *discursive practices*; discursive practices being those “social practices that are produced by/through discourses,” (p. 7). To Baxter (2003):

Discourses are forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations governing mainstream social and cultural practices. They are systematic ways of making sense of the world by inscribing and shaping power relations within all texts, including spoken interactions (ibid.).

Baxter interprets Foucault's work in a way that suggests that there will always be dominant discourses and resistant (or oppositional) discourses that are intertextually linked at all times, as they cannot operate, nor can they be defined, in isolation from one another. Mills (2004) also emphasizes that discourses do not exist in isolation. In fact, discourses only develop in "relation to, or, more often, in contrast and opposition to other groups of utterances," (Mills 2004, p. 10).

In *The Order of Things* Foucault (1994) outlined the ways in which the deployment of language in the production of statements and practices produces reality and he convincingly articulated the process by which language is not simply a reflection of arbitrary word choice. He suggests that people should not take the terms they use for granted, nor dismiss the power embedded within verbal communication, as "language is, wholly and entirely, discourse," that is, language exists only in the actual making of statements (Foucault 1994, p. 96) However, there are interpretations of Foucault's work that have detected variations in his approach to discourse. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) assert that Foucault's ideas about discourse changed over the course of his career. They note that Foucault initially gives a description of discourse as the "historical articulation of a paradigm," but note that in later work, his interpretation morphed into a conception that saw "discourse as part of a larger field of power and practice," (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, p. 199). Wickham (1986) notes that Foucault has defined discourses as those "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak," (p. 161), and this observation fits well with Dreyfus and Rabinow's assessment that Foucault latterly maintained a definition of discourse as the practical articulation of power. Allen (1990)

also concurs with Dreyfus and Rabinow, and Wickham that Foucault maintained that discourses articulate, and form part of, practical relations of power.

### *Critiquing Foucault*

While Foucault is widely respected for the introduction of the concept of discourse (Fairclough 1992, Smith 1999, Naples 2003, Mills 2004) he has been criticized for a number of reasons. There are particular aspects of Foucault's conceptions of discourse that have proven to be especially difficult for those who are concerned with the practical impact of discourse and discursive practices. Given that Foucault has been critiqued by several feminist theorists, and this project has a political commitment that is sensitive to gender politics, the critiques of two prominent social theorists, Dorothy Smith and Nancy Fraser, are considered in detail below.

### *Dorothy Smith*

Some feminist theorists have found Foucault's notion of discourse to be exclusionary, and thus of limited value for their own studies. Dorothy Smith (1999) moves away from what she takes to be Foucault's ideas, explaining:

Brilliant as it is, it accredits the stasis of the text. ...In doing so [Foucault] discards actual subjects, whether as 'author' or as reader, and the materiality of the text as in print, on screen, or in some other mode in which enters local settings of reading, watching, etc. ... But here the materiality of the text, its replicability, and hence iterability, is key to addressing discourse as actual social relations between reading, speaking, hearing subjects – actual people, you and me (p. 134).

Smith explains that discourse cannot be treated as a simple product that can be examined and interpreted in the same way by all audiences, claiming that Foucault suggests that it

can be. She asserts that an author must consider who their audience will be, and that the audience must consider what status the author (or speaker) holds. She provides us with an example of an academic speaking at sociological meetings in Cambridge to demonstrate her point. This particular academic was speaking of a particular “freedom.” Upon further analysis of his talk, she found that the freedom he spoke of was really limited to the “hidden subject [who] was a [member of a] white, male-dominant European intelligentsia,” and that this freedom would really not be interpreted in the same fashion by others who were not like him (Smith 1999, p. 153).

From Smith’s perspective, discourse must be analyzed, and even critiqued, in its own specific, practical context. A researcher must always remain cognizant of how the discourse constructs the audience and defines its “speakers,” and how the producer of the discourse is positioned (Smith, 1974). Discourses have the power to ascribe statuses and identities, but only as particular speakers and hearers in particular locations construct their own identities discursively. Given these assertions, Smith (1999) contends that what she takes to be Foucault’s suggestion, that one should attempt to isolate discourse from its subjects, is impossible. Thus she makes adjustments to his conception of discourse for her own purposes. Smith does, however, acknowledge the power that textual materials have. In an early piece of work, she notes that importance of what she calls “documentary reality.” Smith (1974) explains:

Factual statements in documentary form, whether as news, data, information or the like, stand in for an actuality which is not directly accessible. Socially organized practices of reporting and recording work upon what actually happens or has happened to create a reality in documentary form, and through they are decisive to its character, their traces are not visible in it. ...The social scientist’s ordinary knowledge of

her society originates in and depends upon these documentary forms (p. 257).

Smith's ideas about documentary reality tie in nicely with studies of policy documents. She asserts that "the object constituted as known is already socially constructed prior to the knower's entry into the relation," and this observation encourages the researcher to be cognizant of her relationship with the given texts, with the data contained within them, and to examine how these relationships, as well as texts and data, are produced (ibid.).

### *Nancy Fraser*

Nancy Fraser is a feminist theorist whose approach to discourse has been primarily influenced by the work of Foucault and Jurgen Habermas. While enthralled by Foucault's "great themes," Fraser was disappointed that his work seems to invite questions that it is "structurally unequipped to answer" (Fraser 1989b, p. 26). She is troubled by what she takes to be Foucault's suggestion that individuals are simply docile bodies shaped by power, and thus are unable to offer any resistance to this power. Fraser is also troubled by what she understands to be Foucault's accounting of power as something that is neutral and unengaged. It is, according to her, "anything but" (Fraser 1989b, p. 28). Fraser (1989b) adds, "the problem is that Foucault calls too many different sorts of things power and simply leaves it at that. ...Granted, there can be no social practices without power - but it doesn't follow that all forms of power are normatively equivalent nor that any social practices are as good as any other" (p. 32). This statement relates to Fraser's concerns about gender analysis, and what she perceives as a lack of sensitivity on Foucault's part to how power can operate differently upon women.

Dean (1994) notes that Fraser's assertions are in keeping with other feminists' concerns with a lack of a sensitivity to gender in Foucault's approach to discourse analysis. In reference to Fraser's critique, Dean (1994) builds upon the argument:

As feminists have noted again and again, many poststructuralists and more generally postmodernists, who turn everyone into a creator-actor and privilege no point of view, often replicate patriarchal structures of domination in their own work and so in fact privilege a point of view in spite of their claims to the contrary... Foucault's work presumes a construction of men's, but not women's, subjectivity. This presumption represents not just an empirical oversight but grounds his entire antihistoricist method (pp. 275-6).

Fraser also finds it particularly troubling that Foucault suggests that claims put forward through discourse need not be judged as "legitimate" or "illegitimate." Fraser suggests that a strictly Foucaultian take on discourse would hold that the legitimacy of a claim is irrelevant, and she takes issue with that suggestion. However, Olesen, a researcher concerned with the implications of feminist research, issues a warning to feminist qualitative researchers who attempt to make corrections to existing positivist accounts without being responsible for the account, the text and the voices. Olesen (2005) claims:

A ...parallel task is how to address overarching issues of credibility or, put another way, how to indicate that the claims produced are less false, less perverse and less partial, without falling back into positivist standards that measure acceptability of knowledge in terms of some ideal, unchanging body of knowledge (p. 257).

Fraser does not outwardly share her reflections about whether her own claims are "less false" with her readers, and Olesen's point about ensuring that new research does not replicate the very problems it seeks to address is well taken.

Fraser also finds difficulty with Habermas, a theorist concerned with communication and communicative action, arguing that Habermas, like Foucault, demonstrates a blindness towards the complexities of gender in his writing. His dualistic

conceptions of “public” and “private” worlds “fail to do justice to the struggles and wishes of contemporary women” (Fraser 1989b, p. 8). However, Fraser takes what she sees as a shortcoming on Habermas’ part, and finds some value in exploring it. Fraser (1989b) notes:

One of these lessons is that apparent indifference to gender often masks implicit masculinist bias. Another is that ideology loves dichotomies. It follows that critical theorists need to problematize gender-associated binary oppositions lest their theories succumb to the disease they aim to diagnose (p. 8).

Despite some frustrations with the limitations associated with Habermas’ inadequately reflexive conception of the “public” and “private” spheres (or, the “system level” and the “lifeworld”) Fraser has gained an awareness about the creation and use of exclusionary dichotomies thanks, in part, to the limitations of Habermas’ own work. Fraser’s later writing specifically draws attention to particular “indifferences” and problematizes the apparent lack of concern that particular forms of language use, such as those involving dichotomies, can create. Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue that, in fact, “keywords [that] typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate – in part by constituting a body of doxa, or taken-for-granted commonsense belief that escapes critical scrutiny” (p. 310). The gender blindness that Habermas demonstrates encouraged Fraser to further investigate such meaning embodied in the discursive acts of indifference, and to integrate her findings into her own theoretical framework.

### *Defining discourse for the purposes of this project*

Given the myriad of competing ideas and understandings of what discourse “is,” it is important to offer an operational definition of the term for the purposes of this project, even if it is only a tentative one. Discourse refers to language use, that is, the organized making of statements, as a form of social practice. It enables people and groups to act upon the world and one another, to make sense of social constructs, and to make and judge truth claims. Discourse is a vehicle for the construction of social reality, including the designation of subjects and agents as well as objects and circumstances. Most importantly, and borrowing from Fairclough (1992), “discourse contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief” (p. 64).

### From theory to analysis

Hook (2001) notes that, “despite the apparent indebtedness to many such methods of discourse analysis to Foucault, there exists no strictly Foucauldian method of analysing discourse” (p. 521). While there are several options available to the researcher who is interested in engaging in discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough provides one of the most coherent attempts to address questions relating to the process of discourse analysis.

### *Fairclough and CDA*

Unlike some others who engage in discourse analysis, Fairclough has refused to offer simple explanations of “discourse.” While it would be easy to regard Fairclough

primarily as a methodologist and practitioner of discourse analysis, it is appropriate to discuss his theoretical contributions because he is considered by many to be one of the foremost authorities on critical methods of discourse analysis (Cotter, 2001), and he has developed a canon of work that provides rich descriptions of what discourse looks like, and how to approach it. He explains that discourses are “diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned – differently positioned social actors ‘see’ and represent social life in different ways, different discourses” (Fairclough 2001, p. 123). He argues that the term *discourse*, as opposed to *use of language* “implies the imbrication of speaking and writing in the exercise, reproduction, and negotiation of power relations, and in the ideological processes and ideological struggle” (Fairclough 1995, p. 94). That is, language that is used in the everyday world mobilizes and reproduces dominant ideologies and is a reflection of power that “naturalize[s] particular relations and ideologies” (ibid).

Fairclough (1992) is particularly concerned with the political aspects of discursive practices. He writes:

Discourse as a political practice establishes, sustains and changes power relations, and the collective entities (classes, blocs, communities, groups) between which power relations obtain. Discourse as an ideological practice constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations. ...Furthermore, discourse as a political practice is not only a site of power struggle, but also a stake in power struggle: discursive practices draws upon conventions which naturalize particular power relations and ideologies, and these conventions themselves, and the ways in which they are articulated, are a focus of struggle (p. 67).

Fairclough, along with others such as van Dijk (1997), and Fowler (1991) are considered “critical” discourse analysts (engaging in “CDA”) because they believe that engaging in

an analysis of discourse will “reveal societal power operations and invok[e] a call to social responsibility” (Cotter 2001, p. 418). van Dijk (1997) adds that ‘discourse’ describes the representation of ideologies that are “socially situated in text and talk” (p. 24). Fairclough has been critical of Foucault’s invocation of discursive *practices* as he believes that Foucault, actually, for all intents and purposes, limits his discussion to discursive *structures* (Fairclough, 1992). Such a framework does not provide a scholar with a set of skills to easily identify discursive practices, according to Fairclough. Fairclough set out to develop a textually oriented method of discourse analysis (critical discourse analysis, or CDA) which allowed him to pull from Foucault’s theoretical insights, while providing researchers with a framework for examining the actual practices of discourse. This attempt to create a framework for research, and the resulting method, is the reason that Fairclough’s model was chosen as the most appropriate methodological guide for this research.

When first introducing his method, Fairclough (2001) immediately cautions readers against wholly adopting his method of critical discourse analysis (CDA), as he has “certain reservations about the concept of ‘method’” (p. 121). He explains:

It can too easily be taken as sort of ‘transferable skill’ if one understands ‘method’ to be a technique, a tool in a box of tools, which can be resorted to when needed and then returned to the box. CDA is in my view as much theory as method – or rather, a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis... which gives rise to ways of analysing language or semiosis within broader analyses of the social process (ibid.).

Fairclough’s ‘method’ of CDA is based upon a view of “semiosis as an irreducible part of material social processes”, and believes that “semiosis includes all forms of meaning making – visual images, body language, as well as language” (Fairclough 2001, p. 122).

Thus, CDA is the analysis of the “dialectical relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices” (ibid., p. 123). Discourses, to Fairclough, are “diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned – differently positioned social actors ‘see’ and represent life in different ways, different discourses” (ibid.). Fairclough also argues that when it comes to analyzing the orders of discourse, hegemony is a useful concept to employ, as there are ways that semiotics legitimizes ideas about “common sense” and sustains relations of domination.

CDA alternates between focusing on structure and focusing on action, and Fairclough (2001) has mapped out his perception of the analytical framework for CDA in the form of a chart. It reads:

1. Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect
2. Identify obstacles to it being tackled, through analysis of
  - a. The network of practices it is located within
  - b. The relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned
  - c. The discourse (the semiosis itself)
    - Structural analysis: the order of discourse
    - Interactional discourse
    - Interdiscursive analysis
    - Linguistic and semiotic analysis
3. Consider whether the social order (network of practices) in a sense ‘needs’ the problem
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles
5. Reflect critically on the analysis ( Fairclough 2001, p. 125)

As Fairclough (2001) notes, this method of analysis is a form of “critical social science, which is envisaged as social science geared to illuminating the problems which people are confronted by with particular forms of social life, and to contributing resources which people may be able to draw upon in tackling and overcoming these problems” (ibid.).

This description suggests that Fairclough is recommending that social scientists

investigate problems with the goal of emancipation, and not to simply look for issues without the ability to instigate some form of change that might alleviate the problem. To illustrate how CDA can be used in policy studies, Fairclough used a British governmental policy document about the “new global economy,” a White Paper, to demonstrate how language can be used to “manage perception” about the government and its agendas. Fairclough’s application of critical discourse analysis to this document begins with the placing of the textual document into context. He notes that the simple act of producing the White Paper is a political one, and the paper is but one small piece in a large web of networks that constitute and locate “government.” Next, he engages in an analysis of the text to look for structural and interactional terms, looking at the language itself to determine what it indicates about the nature of the relationships that exist between the speaker and the knower, and between what is represented within, and what is absent from, the discourse. Through his analysis, Fairclough (2001) determined that the government’s representation of itself is actually a series of “misrepresentations which clearly contribute to sustaining unequal relations of power” (p. 134). Fairclough took a familiar, institutionalized form of communication, the White Paper, and unpacked it to reveal a politics contained within it, in order to demonstrate how particular notions and representations - in this case, the celebration of neo-liberalism and the new global economy - can become embedded in popular discourse at the expense of other ideas.

Fairclough’s work has had a particularly noteworthy impact amongst housing studies scholars, particularly those interested in housing policy issues (Hastings, 2000). A

significant amount of housing research using CDA has been published in the last ten years (Hastings, 2000; Marston, 2000). I suspect that part of the reason housing policy researchers have been so attracted to Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis (and his conclusions about the power embedded in discourse) is that he remains hopeful about possibilities for change and improvement in the social world, arguing that by identifying the ways in which behaviours and changes are limited by discourse, scholars are able to identify "possibilities for change within the way things are" (Fairclough 2001, p. 127). Fairclough (along with others in his cohort of CDA practitioners) also addresses Smith's concerns about Foucault's alleged loss of the "subject" in the practice of discourse analysis.

#### *Criticism of CDA*

Chilton (2005) has challenged the claims that CDA has the potential for emancipatory effects, and whether CDA has any "credible efficacy" (p. 21), but his challenge is severely hampered by his limitation of discussion to the role of cognitive and evolutionary psychology. In fact, his approach does little to directly address whether or not CDA actually fails in its quest to reveal bias and identify power structures (and struggles) in discourse that is analyzed. Bayley (2005) surveyed the critiques against CDA, and has drawn attention to some issues that should not be overlooked. Some have argued that CDA is a "model muddle" as it both adopts the "relativity and indeterminacy of Foucault and yet still claim[s] to be able to make authentic readings" (Bayley 2005, p. 5). Others believe that CDA "is only looking for textual confirmation of a bias that is presumed to exist in a given text" (ibid). In response to the critique about the

“model muddle,” much has been written (specifically by Fairclough) about Foucault’s conceptual shortcomings and difficulties, and some of this has been discussed earlier in the chapter and it need not be repeated. In response to the assertion about the hunt for bias, one might claim that the identification of bias is certainly not the only goal of CDA, and the suggestion that bias is not, or should not, be present in discourse is a naïve position at best. Foucault would have argued that bias cannot be present without making the claim that there is such a thing as objectivity; in other words, both “bias” and “objectivity” are produced effects of discursive strategies. Given that this project maintains that ideas about objectivity are products of discursive practices, Bayley’s critique is beside the point.

What Bayley (2005) legitimately contributes to the discussion, is a suggestion that any discourse analysis should include discourse from multiple sites. As there is no question that housing concerns in Calgary have become a political issue, any debate, discussion, and policy that is produced is *political* discourse. According to Bayley (2005), political discourse can be broken down into several different registers and “a single text cannot be considered as an autonomous act of communication” (p. 3). He argues that any instance of political discourse is but a part of a much wider network of intertextual relations, and cautions that the discourse analyst must “beware of drawing strong political conclusions from the study of single texts” (Bayley 2005, p. 4) or of texts produced within single social locations.

## Operationalizing discourse: Applications of CDA

Fraser has become well known for her accounts of the development of “needs talk” in the context of the practices which constitute “on the ground,” the welfare state (Fraser 1989a, 1989b). Fraser agrees with many of Habermas’ claims about the welfare state, particularly his assertion that the welfare state engages in crisis management, and partially manages to overcome the separation of public and private at the system level. Habermas was also correct, in her view, when he asserted that welfare state capitalism inflates the consumer role and deflates the citizen role. Lastly, the suggestion that the discourse of the welfare state increasingly positions its subjects as clients also finds support from Fraser (Fraser, 1989b). From this discussion of the welfare state, and the struggles that women, in particular, have gaining recognition, Fraser developed a concept of “needs talk” (see Fraser 1987, 1989, 1990, and 1994). While Fraser does not claim outright that her approach to “needs talk” is a form of discourse analysis, she does “assume that terms that are used to describe social life are also active forces shaping it” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, p. 310). She borrows heavily from Foucault’s genealogical approach to analyzing texts, and notes that “keywords typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotation that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate” (ibid.). Fraser acknowledges that language, ideas, structures and practices are all interrelated, though she does not provide her readers with a detailed description of what discourse is, or what it looks like, to her.

Fraser suggests that “through needs talk, experts – social workers, public health nurses, journalists, psychotherapists, policy analysts, and the like – struggle to determine what exactly various groups of people really do need and... who should have the last word in such matters” (Brush 1997, p. 721). In doing so, they frame and define those designated as “in need.” Fraser suggests that there are three moments that are significant in the production of needs talk. First, there is a struggle to establish or deny the political status of a need. Second, is the struggle over the interpretation of the need, who has the power to define it, and who makes the determination over what would satisfy the need. Third, there is a struggle over the satisfaction of the need, and the fight over who has the ability to secure or deny provision (Fraser, 1989b).

There are five components to the model of social discourse that Fraser has developed in order to examine the politics of needs interpretations. First, there are officially recognized idioms used for claims-making. Idioms are recognized speech forms in terms of which one can press claims. For example, one might use rights-talk to press for certain legal protections for particular groups of people, such as prisoners, or refugees. Second, there are specific vocabularies available for instantiating particular idioms, such as socialist vocabularies, or feminist vocabularies. A discussion about maternity leave benefits might inspire a discussion about repression, or the performance of motherhood, using a feminist vocabulary. Third, there are paradigms for argumentation, or for the “authoring” of argumentation, that are accepted as authoritative. For example, there are some voices that will be heard as having more credibility; one might examine who is constructed as an ‘expert’ who offers the final say on a particular

issue and, ultimately, whose perspective is given priority. Fourth, there are narrative conventions used in telling stories that construct social identities. Such a narrative convention might include a narrative organization of a letter to the editor, or of a report to the complaints office of a police department, for example. Fifth, Fraser holds that there are modes of subjectification or, in another manner of speaking, of the ways in which discourses place people as agents or as objects of action. This could include the process of labeling someone, or a particular form of behaviour, as 'normal' or 'deviant' (Fraser, 1989b). Fraser suggests that these components work together to create the general discursive space. It is within this discursive space that:

Needs-talk appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and non-discursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs. Dominant groups articulate need interpretations intended to challenge, displace, and/or modify dominant ones. In both cases, the interpretations are acts and interventions (Fraser 1989b, p. 296).

According to Fraser, the central tenet of her theory is that “needs talk functions as a medium for the making and contesting of political claims” (Fraser 1989a, p. 161).

Like Foucault, Fraser has also engaged in producing genealogies of terms and the discourse that they are embedded in. The term genealogy refers to the “historical reconstruction of how we have become what we are which acts as an immanent critique of what we are” (Jary and Jary 2000, p. 242). This understanding is borrowed from the work of Foucault, who often engaged in meticulous descriptive histories of how certain concepts, practices, and understandings were produced and have come to influence or define existing practices. Part of Foucault’s process involved examining claims of scientific “truths” or “discoveries” that had been discovered, and tracing their histories to

reveal ways of seeing and saying that were built upon “unscientific, irrational, and partial assumptions” and also on particular struggles over the “politics of truth” (ibid.). In *A Genealogy of Dependency* (1994) Fraser and Gordon outline the genesis and historical development of the term “dependency,” drawing attention to the discourse in which it is currently entangled. They encourage the reader to note the contradictions in dependency discourse, and the assumptions that “permeate the public sphere” in relation to it (Fraser and Gordon 1994, p. 329). They argue that the terms “used to describe social life are also active forces in shaping it... Keywords typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate – in part by constituting a body of doxa, or taken-for-granted commonsense belief that escapes critical scrutiny” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, p. 310).

Fraser (2003) has also addressed issues of recognition, particularly as they apply to political claims and social conflicts. Fraser’s concept of recognition is based upon Hegel’s work, specifically the idea that “identity is constructed dialogically through a process of mutual recognition” (Fraser 2003, p. 23). Simply put, the status of one party is confirmed only when it is recognized by another party. To draw from the Hegelian example of the master-slave relationship, the master does not exist in and of his/herself without the slave. Both parties are required to acknowledge, or recognize, the other, if unequally, in order to confirm that such a relationship exists. However, according to Fraser, Hegel’s ideas about mutual recognition have often been limited to discussions about identity. Fraser believes that it is important to note that the phrase “politics of recognition” is not equivalent to “identity politics,” as this would encourage “both the

reification of group identities and the displacement of redistribution by recognition” (p. 24). She argues that the agenda of neoliberalism has shifted the debate about rights from a discourse of egalitarianism to a process of claims-making, or from “redistribution to recognition” (Fraser 2003, p. 22). The power and influence of the “expert opinion” comes into play when discussing struggles for recognition, as “expert discourses become the bridge discourses linking loosely organized social movements with the social state” (Fraser 1989, p. 174). Thus, political groups have shifted their emphasis from a discourse that emphasizes egalitarian ideals. Fraser (2003) explains:

Once the hegemonic grammar of political contestation, the language of distribution is less salient today. Movements that not long ago boldly demanded an equitable share of resources and wealth no longer typify the spirit of the times. They have not, to be sure, wholly disappeared. But thanks to a sustained neoliberal rhetorical assault on egalitarianism, the absence of any credible model of ‘feasible socialism,’ and widespread doubts about the viability of state-Keynesian social democracy in the face of accelerated economic globalization, they have ceded pride of place to movements focused chiefly on recognition” (p. 21).

Fraser works toward an understanding of the struggle for recognition that can “accommodate the full complexity of social identities, instead of one that oversimplifies and reifies them” (p. 23). She suggests that a new approach to understanding the conflict over recognition, which is essentially a fight over, and for, status, is needed. Fraser cites the example of marriage laws that deny “participatory parity” to gays and lesbians, as a situation where misrecognition has occurred (due to a heterosexist pattern of cultural values), and where a conflict over recognition is situated.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, debates over housing have become a site of struggle. Many have argued, albeit in vague language, that shelter is a basic human right

(McCracken, 2001). It follows, then, that housing debates (in public discourse, policy, and in private discussion) would also be sites of struggle for recognition, and would likely produce a variety of interpretations about what is required for such recognition. Arguments about the distinction between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ occur frequently in housing discourse, and Fraser’s assertion that these arguments are, in effect, struggles for power in the form of recognition, should not be overlooked.

*Media & Discourse: Theoretical and practical considerations*

“Media” is a broad term for a variety of informational outlets that include a wide range of communicative possibilities from print, to spoken word, to visual, to tactile. To limit the myriad of options available for study to what is practically do-able, the examination of media products in this project is limited to a discourse analysis of newspaper articles concerned with housing published in Calgary.

Fowler (1991) has addressed the role of discourse and ideology in the press, holding that news is socially constructed, and challenging the assumption that journalists are able to maintain impartiality in the news. Not only is the content of the news unlikely to be impartial, but so is the act of the announcement or the reporting itself. He explains:

What events are reported is not a reflection of the intrinsic importance of those events, but reveals the operation of a complex and artificial set of criteria for selection. Then, the news that has been thus selected is subject to processes of transformation as it is encoded for publication; the technical properties of the medium – television or newsprint, for example – and the ways in which they are used, are strongly effective in this transformation. Both ‘selection’ and ‘transformation’ are guided by reference, generally unconscious, to ideas and beliefs. Analysis of output can reveal abstract propositions which are not necessarily stated, and are

usually unquestioned, and which dominate the structure of presentation  
(Fowler 1991, p. 2)

He asserts that the production of news is a practice, and these discursive practices are central to the social construction of reality, and also to the very production of “impartiality” and “objectivity” as discursive effects.

According to Cotter (2001) there are two primary components to news media discourse. These include the written text, and the process involved in producing the text. Cotter claims that the primary focus of most media researchers to date has been limited to analyzing actual texts, as opposed to a dedicated study of their production. The text “encodes values and ideologies that impact on and reflect the larger world” (Cotter 2001, p. 416). This project must necessarily limit itself to actual written text of news articles rather than an ethnographic study of newsrooms. The objective of the study is to identify what Cotter (2001) calls the registration of the “presence of bias or ideology in language, or the problematizing of power relation in society,” (p. 420). However, this examination must be accompanied by a recognition that “bias” and “ideology” do not simply exist “behind” or “in” news texts, but are *produced* by the discursive practices that also produce the text. Cotter is not the only one to discuss the implications of ideology in media discourse, as others have also addressed the presence, and implications, of ideology in media discourse. van Dijk (1997) argues that there are three new ideas about ideologies that are important to consider. First, the study of ideologies need not be limited to the conventional view that ideologies are simply involved with the reproduction and legitimation of class domination, because “dominated groups also need ideologies, for example, as a basis for resistance” (van Dijk 1997, p. 24). Secondly, he suggests that

ideologies in general are not wrong or right, but rather are more or less effective in promoting the interests of a group. Thirdly, the main social function of ideologies is the “coordination of the social practices of group members for the effective realization of the goals of a social group and the production of its interests. ... Given this general function of ideologies, it is of course true that many ideologies develop precisely in order to sustain, legitimate or manage group conflicts, as well as relationships of power and dominance” (ibid.). Along with providing readers with examples of critical discourse analysis, van Dijk concludes that there are practical suggestions for those doing ideological analysis. First, one must examine the context of the discourse. Second, analyze which groups, power relations and conflicts are involved and how they identified. Third, the analyst should look for positive and negative opinions about *Us* and *Them*. Fourth, one must spell out what is presupposed and implied in the statements or documents under study, and finally, the analyst must explore all formal structures (headlines, placing, *et cetera*) that emphasize or de-emphasize polarized group opinions (van Dijk 1997, p. 61).

*Policy & Discourse: Theoretical and practical considerations*

Mills (2004) cites government policy as an example of something that both shapes and is shaped by discursive practices. She explains that while activist groups often influence policy, the form that policy takes can also impact activist groups. For example, lobbyists will present their issues to policy makers and the media in the style of government or scientific reports, as opposed to a more politically motivated and informal style, in the hopes that their position will be viewed with more credibility. In this

instance, “each group will have its discursive parameters defined for it in part by the other” (Mills 2004, p. 10).

A number of academics from a variety of disciplines have highlighted how methods of discourse analysis can be helpful for policy analysis (Naples 2004; Bayley 2005). As discussed above, Fraser (1989, 1994), for example, has developed compelling arguments about the power of discourse in public policy. Her work has highlighted the ways in which talk about people’s needs has become “institutionalized as a major vocabulary of political discourse” (p. 291). According to Fraser, welfare-state societies are consistently flooded with competing ideas about needs and are therefore engrossed in what she describes as the *politics of need interpretation*. Fraser suggests that all too often, public policy ignores, or incorrectly interprets, the needs of those who are impacted by policies in question.

### Concluding thoughts

The work of many theorists, in some form or another, has influenced the methodological and analytical approaches to this project, and as a result, a blended theoretical model of analysis was developed for this research.

My model primarily draws from the work of Foucault, Fraser, Smith, and Fairclough. First, it is imperative to note that this project acknowledges that power is discursively organized and often operates in unacknowledged ways. All of the authors

discussed have expressed an interest in the way in which power operates in the production of truth, impartiality and identity as politically-charged discursive effects, and in the societal influence that ideologically-driven discourse has. As this project involves the collection and assessment of policy from an institution (the municipal government), and as this institution is directly involved with service delivery (via the Calgary Housing Company), Foucault's understanding that institutional power is constituted and maintained through discursive practices, is useful for analysis.

Second, I have integrated Fraser's (1989b) ideas about needs talk into my model. Fraser's approach to analysis of talk, namely, the vocabularies used, the intended audience(s), and the paradigms of argumentation will be integrated into the analysis (Fraser, 1989b). Her acknowledgment of the power associated with particular idioms, and the ways in which people compete for recognition of their claims, will be considered throughout the process of data analysis. The awareness of this competition, and the politics involved in the struggle over who is able to effectively communicate the legitimacy of their claims, or de-legitimize the claims of others, will be particularly helpful for analysis. This project will attempt to gauge what "needs" are perceived to be paramount in the policy making process, how these needs are defined, and whose interests are represented when making such claims.

Third, this project relies upon Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, but also integrates Bayley's (2005) suggestion that political discourse be selected from multiple sites, so as to not assume that any one document or statement type be considered

as authoritative or entirely reflective of reality. Smith (1987), however, put it very succinctly when she asserted that “it is the texts that define the issues” (p. 220), and while no one text will be viewed as “truth,” each individual text will be considered to be a smaller piece in the discursive construction of a larger picture. The importance of Bayley’s (2005) discussion about obtaining data from multiple sites has been taken into consideration. A “site” is a social place where social activity, including the production of texts takes place; a site might refer to the street, the newspaper office, or a government department, for example. This project includes material produced from two sites, newspapers and a municipal office. Ideally, a project would include material from several sites, but given time and budgetary restrictions attendant on this project, in the scope of this project such a comprehensive study was not possible. In an attempt to address Bayley’s suggestion that multiple areas of study be included in any project that examines textual materials, documentary information from six areas within the two sites was gathered. Newspaper articles and other materials were obtained from three different newspapers that cater to different audiences. The policy discourse included material produced as a result of meetings (not open to the public); an application form for community housing (an artifact of a process in which individuals directly interact with the government); and research documents that build upon information produced by other “credible” sources. This material will be further discussed in the following chapters, but it is important to note that, within the two general sites selected for inclusion in this project, documents produced in different ways by specific agencies can be distinguished from each other, and this addresses Bayley’s primary concern, that texts be obtained from multiple sites.

Finally, it is important to make clear that this model is not intended to engage in extensive ideological analysis. The model is designed to examine statements from the point of view of discursive practice, and it holds that ideology is taken to be an effect produced by discursive practices. As Dorothy Smith says, the “documentary reality” of government policy and public issues is a *product of specific production practices in specific locations*. Therefore, assumptions built into particular texts are seen as being enacted by discourse and as effects of discursive practices. The documents I examine will be treated as windows opening on to these locations and practices, even if this project is necessarily limited in the extent to which it can make suggestions about actual ethnographic examination of the latter.

## **Chapter 4: Methods and Scope of Project**

I set out to study housing policy in the city of Calgary after being involved with a research project that examined the experiences of mothers with disabilities in Alberta.<sup>1</sup> Stories of housing struggles were a consistent theme amongst most of the research participants; the women interviewed frequently claimed that their housing needs were unmet. All were able to specifically describe what their housing requirements were, and what their ideal housing situation would look like. Most of the participants in the research project claimed that they wanted to live in secure homes in safe, family-friendly neighbourhoods that were close to schools and had amenities such as shopping and recreational facilities. Others noted that their transportation needs required that they live in established communities with good public transit networks, while many of the women expressed a simple desire to live in adequate housing with enough space for their families. Most of the women with physical disabilities noted that they were in desperate need of housing that was physically accessible. As a result of hearing these stories about housing struggles, I was interested in discovering if these problems were, or were not, addressed in, or possibly exacerbated by, public policy.

### *An emancipatory project*

Traditionally, much of the literature concerning policy and program evaluation literature has claimed to be value-free (House, 2005). These kinds of declarations have been problematic for many (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005; Meyer, 1995; Rist, 2000). House (2005) has claimed that it is very nearly impossible for analysts to separate

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<sup>1</sup> Malacrida, Claudia. (2004-2007). "Dis/Enabling Mothers: Embodied and Social Aspects of Parenting with a Disability," Social Sciences and Humanities Standard Research Grant # 410-20004-1147.

themselves from their own values when engaging in evaluations. Such is the case as “facts and values (factual claims and value claims) blend together in the conclusions of evaluation studies and, indeed, blend together throughout evaluation studies” (House 2005, p. 1073). Given that the purpose of this study was to identify the gaps between housing policy promises made by the City of Calgary and the resulting policy practices, I knew that I could not deny that I was out to look for ways to help those who are negatively impacted, or inadequately helped, by policy and I was concerned about the implications of trying to “hide” or deny my politics in this project. After coming across literature written by critical theorists, I realized that I could reconcile many of my concerns by adopting some of the methodologies and practices from the critical research paradigm.

The critical research paradigm allows scholars to address the problem created by those “traditional researchers [who] cling to the guardrail of neutrality” by ensuring that research “becomes a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label ‘political’ and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness” (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005, p. 305). With the above information in mind, it should be made clear that the political affiliations of this research are aligned with those who are impacted by housing policy in the city of Calgary. That is, the political affiliations of this work lie with those who typically are talked about, but not included, in the policy-making process and who are often excluded from legitimate participation in problem solving. As a researcher, my goal was to produce an emancipatory piece of work that could address,

and possibly propose solutions, to some of the problems associated with housing policy in Calgary.

Emancipatory politics refers to those ideas that are concerned with combating exploitation and oppression (Jary and Jary, 2000). Ideas about emancipation are, at times, confusing and emancipatory messages can occasionally become convoluted as participants struggle to cope with a complex and sometimes hostile environment. Christians (2005) succinctly explains the politics behind the development of emancipatory research projects. He writes:

Arrogant politicians – supported by a bevy of accountants, lawyers, and social science researchers – trivialize the nonexpert’s voice as irrelevant to the problem or its solution. On the contrary, transformative action from the inside out is impossible unless the oppressed are active participants rather than being a leader’s objects of action (Christians 2005, p. 156).

This statement might have been seen to suggest that this research might not meet the criteria required to be considered as an emancipatory project, as this project does not entirely draw from specific voices – the oppressed, in particular – to make specific claims on behalf of those who, typically, might not be heard in the political arena. However, this project has been framed from a critical position, one that sees value in self-reflection and is centered around the idea that legitimate and emancipatory social change is possible. It should also be made clear that this project is not out to dismiss the good intentions of policy makers, make broad generalizations about what policy makers “do,” nor will it claim that all politicians, lawyers, or accountants are interested in housing policy for the wrong reasons. However, this thesis will not shy away from issues of social justice and, specifically, it aims to identify those junctures at which the interests of marginalized

people are repressed or misrepresented. It is my goal to avoid methods of analysis that over-emphasize a requirement to label and categorize people (poor versus wealthy, for example) and those that encourage planners to make assumptions about the needs of those who are personally impacted by the policy in question.

By engaging in critical emancipatory analysis, and acknowledging that there is a space for the voices of those who are oppressed, and often ignored, within policy research, this project will be better able to present research that provides a more rounded accounting of the implications of housing policy in the city of Calgary. This project seeks to serve those who are often overlooked in the policy process, and starts from a political position which aims to provide a critical and emancipatory perspective on the impact of policy upon the lives of Calgarians.

#### The method: Critical discourse analysis

This project was developed to investigate housing policy statements and promises made by agencies of the City of Calgary, and to determine whose interests were represented, and whose interests went unnoticed in these statements and promises. Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (1992, 1995, 2001) was drawn upon to investigate where these lacunae might be found, and two sets of documents were evaluated in order to address five specific questions about housing policy in the city of Calgary. The first set of material included policy documents published by the City of

Calgary, while the second set was composed of articles from three local newspapers: the *Calgary Herald*, the *Calgary Sun*, and *FFWD: Weekly*.

These texts were examined in order to answer five questions about housing policy in Calgary. First, whose housing needs are being addressed, and specifically, what are the needs that have been identified and addressed by municipal housing policies? Second, which housing requirements have been highlighted (or given importance to) within public discourse? Third, what affinities between policy and media discourse can be seen? Are there, for example, shared embedded stereotypes of those deemed to be in housing need? Fourth, are housing requirements, as identified by both the municipal policies and in public discourse, adequate and encompassing? Is there a difference in interpretation between the newspaper coverage and policy documents over what housing needs encompass? Fifth, are housing decisions made by low-income individuals limited by, or represented in, particular ways by textual documents? For example, does the paperwork associated with the application for community housing create barriers to accessing community housing?

#### *'Discourse' and why it matters*

As discussed in the previous chapter, 'discourse' is a term liberally used in academic research and, is used differently by many academics, as it is "frequently left undefined and therefore carries a kind of multi-accentuality – varying in meaning according to user and context" (Baxter 2003, p. 7). Social theorists interested in discourse often begin from a standpoint that sees language producing or constructing reality, and

“specifically our perception or knowledge of the world and the meanings we make about it” (Hastings 2000, p. 131). For the purposes of this project, *discourse* is generally defined as “a form of social/ideological practice” (Baxter 2003, p. 7). By this I mean language as it is used to make statements in the everyday world both draws on, and reproduces, dominant ideologies. Discourse can be thought of as both a product, and a producer, of power that “naturalize[s] particular relations and ideologies” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 94). Ideology materializes within, and is reproduced as, discourse.

Discourse is worthy of study because it helps to construct and articulate social relationships between people. The way we speak with one another; for example, the way a professional talks to a client or the way in which a citizen makes requests from the government using particular rhetorical strategies, are all shaped by discursive practices and, produce recognizable discourses in the form of various kinds of documents or texts. These contribute to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1992, p. 64). Following this line of reasoning, one can see how published public policies work to construct ideas about problems by representing those problems in particular ways and encouraging particular ways of making sense of them, and thus how policies can also be constructed in such a fashion that they manipulate public opinion . For example, when people who cannot afford market rents apply for subsidized housing, they are evaluated and categorized based upon their reliance on the benefit system (Calgary, 2005d). A brief synopsis of the story that policy documents tell is one of dependency; people are not simply low-income earners, instead they are also “reliant” on the system. This is an example of the way in which dominant ideologies are often packaged in texts (in this

case, it is concern over the way taxpayer dollars are spent) in such a taken-for-granted manner that they could easily go unnoticed. This particular feature of policy discourse has the ability to shape the ideas that a person might have about their own relationship with the welfare system (as one who contributes to it, or derives benefit from it). The power that any discourse can wield, whether it is political, social, or economic, should not be ignored; especially not by policy analysts and program evaluators.

*The art and politics behind discourse analysis*

The term *discourse analysis* can be thought of as a process that is interested in how the use of language to make statements or pose questions interacts with social settings or contexts, and the purpose of this type of analysis is to “understand how the deployment of language has social content and social effects” (Hastings 2000, p. 132). Since my research questions could not be adequately addressed with a series of simple checklists and conclusions based upon cost-benefit analysis, as traditional policy evaluations tend to rely upon (Rist, 2000; Bryant, 2002), I felt that a program involving a form of discourse analysis would be the best fit for this research project. There are many different methods that fall under the category of “discourse analysis.” Before delving into the reasons for choosing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for this project, it is important to explain some of the features and corresponding shortcomings of other methods of discourse analysis.

One of the most well known forms of discourse analysis is the method of conversation analysis (CA). CA is a process that usually involves transcribing recorded

interviews or conversations and then looking for things such as turn-taking between the speakers, pauses in the conversation, and the explicit and implicit meanings evident in speech (Fairclough, 1992). Given that this project is primarily concerned with policy that has been published and made publicly available, rather than examining conversational interactions between bureaucrats and clients, for example, it was clear that conversation analysis would not be an effective method to use for the purposes of this research.

Critical linguistic analysis is another method that falls under the general umbrella of discourse analysis. Fowler (1991) explains that this is a process that involves an “enquiry into the relations between signs, meaning and the social and historical conditions which govern the semiotic structure of discourse, using a particular kind of linguistic analysis” (p. 5). This method has been criticized for focusing too much on “text as the product, and too little emphasis upon the processes of producing and interpreting texts” (Fairclough 1992, p. 28). Again, my interest lies in the contextualized aspects of housing policy, and this approach eludes the possibility of extending discourse analysis to an understanding of how the disparity between what is promised, and what is delivered in housing policy is produced in particular settings.

In the 1980s, Potter and Wetherell (1987) developed a popular form of discourse analysis, a non-critical approach which focused on the form and content of a conversation, and specifically, how individuals change their way of speaking to suit different audiences (Perakyla, 2005; Fairclough, 1992). The key theoretical supposition to this approach holds that “mental realities do not reside ‘inside’ individual humans but

are rather constructed linguistically (Perakyla 2005, p. 871). While the practice of this method could be modified to include textual exchanges, it has been criticized for its one-sided approach to evaluation in that it only encourages the researcher to examine what choices the speaker makes without taking in to consideration the reaction of the listener, or what impact the speaker's information might have (Fairclough 1992, p. 24). As with the other methods discussed so far, this approach would not have facilitated my goal of identifying the gaps between promise and practice, and thus would not have been an appropriate method to employ.

In response to the above criticisms and difficulties with other methods of discourse analysis, Fairclough (1992) developed his own approach to discourse analysis that he described as critical discourse analysis (CDA). Fairclough's methodology was informed by Michel Foucault's suggestion that social practices are discursively shaped; however, Fairclough notes that his textually-oriented approach is not as "abstract" as Foucault's, and that he believes that CDA lends itself to "more satisfactory social analyses" (Fairclough 1992, p. 37). His understanding of discourse goes beyond the traditional, linguistics-based interpretation of what discourse analysis entails. His method adopts some of Foucault's premises about discourse as discussed in an earlier chapter, but builds upon and specifies these ideas so that researchers can identify actual discursive *practices* as opposed to simply identifying discursive *structures*. CDA is a textually-oriented approach to discourse analysis and has three main stages: a description of the language text, an interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes and

the text itself and, finally, an explanation of the relationships between discursive processes and social processes (Fairclough 1995, p. 97).

Fairclough (1992) has argued that his conception of discourse is one that “sees language use as a form of social practice... a mode of action,” (p. 63). CDA is useful in the study of housing policy, as its key feature is, according to Fairclough, “the link between texts and society/culture is seen as mediated by discourse practices” (Fairclough 1997, p. 144). This position enables one to see that there is power in the textually-oriented material, and that the information contained therein, and its manner of representation, can influence one’s own understanding of issues and concerns. The textual material might include, for example, a newspaper story about potential property tax increases, a catalogue with lists of municipal services available to home owners (such as garbage removal), or City-produced brochures about water-saving techniques. All three of these documents are designed to have some kind of influence or impact upon the reader. The decision to water one’s lawn for one hour a day (instead of two, or three perhaps) might have been influenced by a brochure that made claims about by-law enforcement, or about the need to protect the water supply. The textual material creates links between the individual and society. CDA allows researchers to examine textual materials in order to examine the methods by which information is presented, what kind of information is deemed to be important, and whose interests— along with how these interested are defined - are embedded in texts as produced artifacts.

The ways in which textual information is presented is of interest to a CDA researcher, as are other questions around what is deemed to be “valid” or “relevant” information by the publisher or producer of the text. The researcher is interested in what kind of information is determined to be worthy of dissemination. Therefore, questions around what is hidden, or left out, are often just as important to the CDA researcher as are those things that appear blatantly in print. For example, if a policy document, produced by the municipal government contained a number of statistics about poverty rates in the city, the CDA researcher might be interested not only in the information included, but also what appeared to be missing, whether or not some facts were highlighted or prioritized ahead of others, if data was placed into context, or if the reader was expected to understand the context themselves, and so on. Given that CDA is a research method that is sensitive to the influence of power relations on the production, content, structure, and interpretation of texts, there are a number of possibilities that could be explored in any one particular text.

CDA has two unique dedications: the first is a commitment to interdisciplinarity, and the second involves a critical commitment. Fairclough (1997) strongly maintains that this methodological approach is not limited only to those scholars interested in sociolinguistics, and maintains that CDA was designed to be as helpful to English scholars as it might to sociologists, political scientists, or to social workers. He describes the critical component of this methodology as an interest in “how people’s lives are determined and limited by the social formations we are blessed or cursed with,” (Fairclough 1997, p. 144). Such a stance acknowledges that power that can be exercised

over citizens in a latent and unassuming fashion; that it not only “represses” or excludes, but also shapes social action and identities.

*Policy analysis: CDA versus traditional approaches*

Given the amount of literature concerning policy analysis that has been published, one can assume that most scholars would agree that the consequences of public policies are worthy of study. However, when it comes time to choose a method of evaluation, difficulties arise as there are a myriad of approaches to policy analysis, and each comes with its own research agenda embedded in its method of analysis. Traditional approaches to policy analysis prevail in most policy fields, and these methods are often billed as ‘practical’ approaches to policy evaluation (Just, Hueth, and Schmitz, 2004), or “traditional forms of scientific knowledge,” (Bryant 2002, p. 89). Traditional methods of policy analysis have typically been limited to empirical analyses that are primarily concerned with the quantifiable, and typically economic, consequences of a particular set of policies (Hastings, 2000; Weimer and Vining, 1989; Dubnick and Bardes, 1983; Vigoda, 2002).

Howlett and Ramesh (2003) argue that much of the literature that claims to be policy analysis is “often only applied welfare economics,” (p. 33). When a problem requires state intervention, welfare economists seek out the most efficient way for the state to intervene. From this perspective, the most ‘efficient’ way is always the least costly one (Howlett and Ramesh 2003, p. 35). Such an approach is often problematic as, “there is no acceptable way of putting a dollar value on various intangible costs and

consequences” (Zechhauser 1975, cf. Howlett and Ramesh 2003, p. 36). Thus one might argue that this approach results in partial policy analysis and also policy analysis which turns a blind eye to its own definitional choices, a problem not uncommon amongst many traditional approaches to policy analysis (Blank and Reimers, 2003).

Recently, some policy analysts have begun to recognize the value of qualitative analyses that are not limited to cost-benefit analysis (Rist, 2000). Historically, policy evaluation was the domain of political scientists and economists, but recent changes in the field of policy analysis have encouraged scholars from a variety of disciplines to join in the process of policy evaluation and critique. Sociological analyses of policy have witnessed a surge in acceptance from some more traditional analysts because “many scholars became convinced of the necessity of incorporating social and cultural variables as core elements in the administrative analysis of public arenas” (Vigoda 2002, p. 11). Economists Blank and Reimers (2003) are in favour of integrating approaches from other disciplines in order to conduct more thorough analysis. They explain:

Economic models often ignore the concept of social norms and the behavioural effects that emerge from membership in distinct communities and often take little notice of institutions. ... Theories not based on economics and evidence from other disciplines can help us understand these issues better and can, in turn, make us more effective analysts of policies and their impacts and outcomes (Blank and Reimers 2003, p. 164).

Similarly, Vigoda (2002) notes that the acknowledgement of the usefulness of sociological concepts has primarily stemmed from the realization that “culture-focused observations and analyses possess the merit of being sensitive to individuals’ (as citizens or employees) norms, values, traditions, and dispositions, and sometimes they overlap

with other politics and policy-oriented studies” (p. 11). The admission that there are significant limitations with some of the more conventional approaches to policy analysis gives credibility to other, non-traditional, options for policy analysis, such as CDA, that are more socially-embedded.

Hastings (2000) has written an impressive argument in favour of integrating CDA into housing studies. Highlighting the value of discourse analysis for housing studies, she writes:

It is clear that discourse analysis does have critical potential and, used appropriately, offers opportunities for critical housing researchers to explore new issues of power and resistance in the housing field.... [There is] potential for discourse analysis to expose the way in which language is used in housing and policy processes to wide scrutiny. Used in this way, discourse analysis can help to democratize not only language use, but the policy process more generally (Hastings 2000, p. 138).

This particular rationale for integrating CDA into housing studies convinced me that such an approach would produce gainful results for my own project.

One of the reasons I decided to use the work of Norman Fairclough, the developer of CDA, as my guide for this project was because the goal of CDA is to “better understand how societies work and produce both beneficial and detrimental effects, and of how the detrimental effects can be mitigated, if not eliminated” (Fairclough 2003, p. 203). This method of discourse analysis allows a researcher to be critical of existing power structures but it does not necessarily *require* the researcher to call for the overthrow, or complete disregard, of those structures as some other, more radical methods might. I believe that it is important to conduct research that identifies the

problems at hand, and also provides practical opportunities to alleviate the “detrimental effects” of discourse in the form of policy as mentioned above. It would be a disservice to marginalized and struggling people in the city of Calgary if I was to simply suggest that the entire social welfare system is “irreversibly flawed” and that people need look elsewhere for help. CDA allows me to both highlight problems and also make suggestions for change to current housing policy.

Not only were the theoretical assumptions behind CDA compatible with the goals of this project, it was also possible to integrate the work of other social theorists into this method of discourse analysis. Specifically, this method of inquiry allows one to account for, and incorporate, Smith’s (1999) ideas about social relations. Smith maintains that the act of mapping social relations is not simply about identifying basic human relationships such as parent-child or employer-employee. She explains:

Rather, it [the act of mapping social relations] directs attention to, and takes up analytically, how what people are doing and experiencing in a given local site is hooked into sequences of action implicating and coordinating multiple local sites where others are active. ... It is a practical realization of the commitment to the discursive problematic of the everyday/everynight world (Smith 1999, p. 7).

After examining a number of methodological options that were available to me, I felt that Fairclough’s approach to discourse analysis could easily facilitate the incorporation of Smith’s concepts of “ruling relations” into this study. CDA is a tool that provides insight into the ways in which housing issues are shaped through texts, produced in specific ways in specific social locations, and to engage in policy analysis that is more meaningful than simple calculations of cost-benefit analysis that are so common in conventional policy evaluation studies.

CDA allows the researcher to be cognizant of the ways in which the power, or lack thereof, of particular groups (such as administrators, tax payers, or clients, for example) is embedded within and reproduced by policy statements. This method of research enables one to work from a position that assumes that the “truth” claims expressed in government policy are not necessarily correct and are produced in specific circumstances. The problem with truth claims lies in how these claims are produced and established, as it has been argued that the notion of “‘truth’ is a matter of social (including scientific) agreements on reality, reached in a context of open discourse,” (Jary and Jary 2000, p. 647). Foucault suggests that it is not the content of the truth claim that is of importance, but “how the effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false” (Rabinow 1984, p. 60). Foucault would also point out that “open discourse” is not always egalitarian discourse. Often, ‘truth’ claims found in policy documents reproduce assumptions or beliefs that some may find difficult to support or even recognize in relation to their lived experiences. CDA allows room for the possibility for alternative explanations, whereas other, more traditional, methods of investigation and evaluation do not, as “truth” is pitted against “falsehood” and there is little room for debate on the merits of one particular notion over another.

### *Why focus on policy?*

While there are many aspects of the social housing continuum that are intriguing and worthy of study, I decided to focus my attention on housing policy in Calgary for a number of reasons. First, it is important to pay attention to the policies that have the potential to shape the programs and services that impact the average citizen. Public

policies have consequences, and it is particularly important to identify what those consequences mean for the most marginalized people in any given community. The personal consequences of policies are, according to Dubnick and Bardes (1983), the “most salient element of public policy for most of us” (p. 203). However, traditional approaches to policy consequence evaluation have often been results-based, focusing on whether or not specific programs were successful in producing the desired outcomes of the planners (Meyer, 1995; Weimer and Vining, 1989), and one might add, in reproducing what these outcomes assume.

Accordingly then, it is crucial to determine which factors policy makers consider when they make decisions about affordable housing programs and policies for a community, and what issues they perceive as being important, and what definitions and terms they use in relation to such factors and issues. These ideas have been echoed by many social researchers concerned with housing issues. Bryant (2003) asserts that the study of housing policy is important because policy decisions directly impact the conditions that influence the availability and affordability of housing. She emphasizes that “unaffordable housing and housing insecurity do not occur in a vacuum” (Bryant 2003, p. 55). If the problem then, is housing insecurity, then it is important to study those factors that can contribute to it, one of which might be the way in which it is defined and discussed in housing policy. Thus the study of policy itself, and the processes by which it develops, is as important as talking to those who are impacted by it.

### *Why municipal policy?*

I have limited my study of housing policy to municipal housing policy because municipalities across Canada have had to take a lead in this area. In the mid 1990s many Canadian municipalities were faced with significant housing problems when both the federal and most provincial governments decided to get out of the administration of social housing projects (Wolfe, 1998). In 1993, the federal government announced that it would no longer fund social housing initiatives through long-term funding commitments and, in 1996, transferred the responsibility for administering social housing stock (that was not already under provincial control) to the provinces (CMHC, 2003). This transferred stock comprised the vast majority of social housing stock in Canada at that time (Wolfe, 1998). Such a move was intended to “clarify jurisdiction in the social housing field,” and the federal government was effectively absent from the social housing debate for nearly a decade (CMHC 2003, p. 11). In Alberta, the provincial government began a parallel process of removing itself from administering social housing programmes. Responsibility for day-to-day administration and building maintenance was downloaded onto municipalities based on the premise that each town, city, and district had its own housing needs and challenges (AUMA, 2000). The Alberta government held that evaluation of housing needs was best conducted at a local level, and that it would be most appropriate if the control over funding was maintained by individual municipalities (Alberta, 2000a). The effect of these anti-intervention policies, on the part of both the federal and provincial governments, was to create sudden fiscal constraints for many municipalities, and the city of Calgary was no exception (Calgary, 2005b; Rude and Thompson, 2001; Wolfe, 1998).

Conversely, a trend towards reinvestment began in 2001 when the federal government agreed to fund social housing programmes once again (CMHC, 2003). This reinvestment came in the form of transfer payments to the provinces, while cost-sharing agreements allowed for the development and administration of social housing to remain at the local level. Recent research at the municipal level has only been conducted thanks to a renewed commitment to affordable housing initiatives as, in the past, only enough funding was made available to employ a minimum number of staff to maintain the operations of existing facilities. This reinvestment has allowed for the City of Calgary to engage in social research and to engage in a significant process of updating housing policy.

#### *Why Calgary?*

During my tenure as a research assistant with the mothers with disabilities project mentioned earlier, I was responsible for identifying which policies had the potential to impact disabled mothers. It was during this time that I came across housing policy documents from the City of Calgary, and I noticed that the concerns mentioned by the women involved in the research project did not appear to be addressed in policy that I encountered. These needs were missing from both policy documents and the official visions for future community development. Most of the housing documents I found repeatedly mentioned affordability as the primary concern (Calgary, 2005a). The City of Calgary has chosen to frame its social housing program in such a fashion that it primarily reflects economic goals and concerns, and this suggests that, while there are many other important aspects to social housing, fiscal concerns appear to take priority over other,

non-economic needs, for policy makers in Calgary (Calgary, 2005b). The City's approach fails to acknowledge that there are other elements, in addition to affordability, that are worthy of inclusion in housing policy. While I am unwilling to claim that such an approach is unique to Calgary, it became clear to me that the City's approach is not in line with the direction taken by other municipalities, such as Edmonton or Lethbridge, where there was a strong lobby on the part of local non-profit agencies to address housing issues. For example, one of the leading non-profit foundations that addresses issues pertaining to homelessness and housing concerns in the city of Calgary, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, was not established until 1998. The Edmonton Social Planning Council, on the other hand, was established in the late 1930s to address community needs (ESPC, 2007). The Lethbridge Interagency Housing Committee already had a large working group that was committed to investigating the housing needs in Lethbridge, and in 2000, published a comprehensive report about the specific needs of women (Bell and Clark, 2000). The City of Lethbridge was a partner in this project, and by signing off on the report, acknowledged that there were specific instances in which the City could be doing better. Calgary has lagged behind other municipalities in the province in the drive to combine community knowledge with information provided by the City.

It should be acknowledged that Calgary has a somewhat unique set of circumstances under which it must develop and implement policy. Over the past decade, Calgary has witnessed a population boom unseen in other major Canadian metropolitan centers; Calgary's population grew by more than 207,000 people between 1995 and 2005 (Calgary, 2005i). Another distinctive factor rests in the contradiction between Calgary's

image as a prosperous city, and the seeming inability of the City to meet the needs of a significant number of Calgarians. The so-called “Alberta Advantage,” often touted by the Government of Alberta, includes a low unemployment rate, a highly skilled labour force, and a profitable oil and gas sector – all which have contributed to a rise in the standards of living across Alberta, and Calgary in particular (Alberta, 2005). The economic advantages have given some outsiders the impression that “the streets of Calgary are paved with gold,” (Wickens 1997, p. 15). Yet despite all of the positive news about the economy and the prosperity of the region, there continue to be people who do not seem to benefit from this “Alberta Advantage,” (Wells, 1998; TD Economics, 2003). There is a great divide between low and high-income earners in the city, although Calgary’s average income per capita is higher than other urban centers in Canada. This gives the impression that poverty is less of a problem in Calgary and until recently, little attention has been paid to the social crises that actually exist in the city (K. Morgan, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Recent activity in the Calgary real estate market has driven housing costs up for most buyers and renters, and this surge has encouraged discussion in both the public and political spheres about housing policy as it relates to such things as urban sprawl, affordability, and sustainability (Ferguson, 2006). However, as was discussed earlier, most studies on housing in Calgary have focused on homelessness, while relatively little research about the impact of Calgary’s housing policy has been published to date. The City’s relatively unique approach to housing policy, coupled with the implications of

Calgary's economic prosperity and population growth, and the absence of substantive analyses of the City of Calgary's housing policy make Calgary an ideal city to study.

## Research design

### *Discursive materials*

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bayley (2005) has argued that any projects involving discourse analysis should ideally include discourse from several sites, or areas, as "a single set of texts cannot be considered as an autonomous act of communication... any instance of political discourse is but a part of a much wider network of intertextual relations" (Bayley 2005, p. 3). He argues that it is crucial to include material from several sites in any project of analysis in order to provide some context, and to ensure that strong political conclusions are not based upon the information drawn from a single site.

Following these recommendations, I developed a data set that included policy documents published by the City of Calgary and I also drew from newspaper articles from three local newspapers in Calgary. Evaluating texts produced by the City, and also from a media site provides a clearer picture of the attitudes, ideas, and counter-opinions of multiple players in the arena of public discourse. The inclusion of multiple sources of discourse from two different areas will produce a better reflection of concerns about housing in Calgary.

Allen (1998) notes that the absence of a feature can often be just as significant as what is present. This is especially true for housing policy, and CDA enables a researcher to determine what is 'left out' from policy. For example, I was particularly interested in

whether or not policy documents addressed issues of safety, as much research indicates that this is consistently a concern for women (Rude and Thompson, 2001; McCracken, 2004; Novac, 1990; Wekerle, 1997; Bell and Clarke, 2000). If there little or no mention of safety (neighbourhood safety or building security) in the policy documents, yet repeated mentions about safety concerns in news stories which quote tenants of public housing, or other inadequately-housed people, this might be indicative of a discontinuity between official interpretations and the actual housing needs of clients. Collecting policy documents (traditional forms of political discourse) allows me to identify the ways in which housing policy goals, problems, and visions are constructed within the governmental sphere. Comparing this information with the stories published by local print media about housing policies and practices enabled me to see how housing issues are constructed in other spheres of public discourse. I used these documents to map out the ideas and power relationships that are embedded in housing policy.

### *Narrowing the scope of the project*

#### *Homelessness*

This project does not aim to address the problems with homelessness in the city of Calgary. Instead, I have limited this study to looking at the policy implications of the discursive construction of policy documents for individuals and families that are inadequately housed, have affordability problems, or both. Much has been written about homelessness in the city of Calgary (Clarke and Cooper, 2000; Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2000; Donahue et al., 2003) but little attention has been directed towards those who live in less than ideal circumstances, or those who are only one paycheck

away from homelessness. I wanted to know how policies were shaping the lives of those who were not necessarily living on the street, but were disadvantaged nonetheless. I did, however, include documents that do address homelessness in this study, because some of this literature helps to paint a more accurate picture of housing in general in Calgary. For example, it is helpful to know how many people rely on shelters from year to year and, if these numbers are increasing, how the City defines and addresses these trends.

### *Interviews*

Another approach to understanding the issue of housing policy in Calgary could have been to conduct a series of interviews with people who are directly involved in the policy making process, and with those who coordinate and administer social housing programs. I decided against conducting these types of interviews for this project after making initial contact with policy researchers at the City of Calgary, and with a senior administrator at the Calgary Housing Company. I encountered a significant amount of resistance from both administrators and researchers at the City of Calgary. In particular, the General Manager with the Calgary Housing Company told me “there is nothing to study here” (D. Stamm, personal communication, October 3, 2005). Given this resistance, I felt that pursuing this avenue would involve a great expenditure of time and energy but would only produce a limited amount of fruitful information for this project.

Affordable housing issues are addressed by many different departments within the city, and no one person has the official responsibility for being “in charge” of affordable housing policy. After several phone calls to the City of Calgary and a significant amount

of time spent on the City's website, I soon realized that there were a number of people who knew a little bit about the affordable housing policy goals in the city, but I was unable to find a specific person who would be willing to speak on behalf of City initiatives more generally. While this does not, in itself, indicate that interview research would have been impossible, it does point to the need for a large-scale interview research project which would be beyond the scope of a Master's program.

I did not feel that it was necessary to interview those who were experiencing difficulties in finding adequate or affordable housing. I was involved with another research project involving women with disabilities, and in the majority of the 46 interviews that were conducted, most women expressed some level of distress and disappointment with their housing situation.<sup>2</sup> Reading these interviews helped to give me a strong sense of what marginalized people struggled with in terms of housing. Many of these concerns have been echoed in other Canadian housing studies, as there has been an extensive range of Canadian literature published on the struggles that low income women have in finding and securing safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing (Novac, 1990; Wekerle, 1997; Bell and Clark, 2000; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; Rude and Thompson, 2001; McCracken, 2004). I felt that it would be somewhat redundant for me to engage in this kind of study, given that much has been written about what the actual problems are (from both an academic perspective and also in a variety of newspapers, magazines, and community bulletins), while relatively little has identified what the causes of the problems are. The focus of my study is on the role that the discursive construction of

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<sup>2,3</sup> Malacrida, Claudia. (2004-2007). "Dis/Enabling Mothers: Embodied and Social Aspects of Parenting with a Disability," Social Sciences and Humanities Standard Research Grant # 410-20004-1147.

policy has in relation to the articulation of housing concerns in the city of Calgary, and given that I was aware of a number of existing problems experienced by housing clients and people struggling to achieve adequate housing, I felt my time would be best spent examining the actual policies that many have claimed to be the source of the problem.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Data collection*

For the purposes of this study I have limited my analysis of policy and media texts to those published in the city of Calgary between June of 2001, the year in which major reinvestment in housing began, and December of 2005. While housing concerns continue to be of significant importance in Calgary, I had to make a decision to stop collecting documents so that I could begin my data analysis. It should be noted that the women's stories of housing concerns that were discussed earlier in the chapter were told during this time period. While these narratives will not be analyzed, it is important to note that their frustrations were expressed during the same time frame and in the same political environment as those in which the texts included in the data set were produced. Given that my interests lie with municipal housing policy and practice, analysis will not include any provincial or federal publications.

#### *Policy documents*

A variety of policy documents from the City of Calgary were selected for this project, and every category of these texts provides different information for the project. A large portion of the data set includes research briefs published by the city of Calgary in 2004. These briefs reflect research undertaken by the city of Calgary, using information

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from the 2001 census data in order to collect more detailed information about what the need was for affordable housing in the city (Calgary, 2004a). These briefs use statistics concerning personal income, disability, aboriginal status, and sex, in combination with numbers involving housing adequacy, suitability and affordability. These research briefs have been included because they represent the largest chunk of up-to-date housing information that has been made available to the public. Another reason these briefs were selected was because their contents provide the reader with an idea of what policy makers appear to value, or are concerned about, and what the planners'/policy makers' categories of analysis are, as revealed in the discursive organization of the briefs themselves.

Two "Mayor's Roundtable" documents were selected for inclusion, "Opening Doors: Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing, Executive Summary and Summary of Proceedings," and "Opening Doors: Mayor's Follow-up Roundtable on Affordable Housing." These publications document the five key priorities for the city to pursue, along with a listing of commitments to affordable housing solutions by the City of Calgary. These documents were published in the fall of 2003 and early in 2004. Their inclusion is significant as the current mayor of Calgary, Dave Bronconnier, has made affordable housing a priority, as this is listed under his "community development initiatives" (Calgary, 2005g). Mayor Bronconnier has been hailed as an advocate for affordable housing initiatives (Babin, 2003). He has consistently drawn attention to the difficulty that low-income Calgarians have finding decent housing (Ferguson, 2006).

City of Calgary research summaries were also included in the data set. The five “Affordable Housing Calgary Research Summaries” provide readers with additional information about housing options available in the city, the affordability difficulties of low income earners, information about homelessness in the city, and information about home ownership trends in the city over time. These documents differ from the aforementioned research briefs because they do not solely draw from information provided by Statistics Canada. These summaries include information from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and they also amalgamate information produced by multiple departments operating under the city of Calgary umbrella.

“Affordable Housing Calgary” publications were also a main component of the data set. The *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy*, the *Affordable Housing Action Plan*, *Thresholds for Locating Affordable Housing*, and three *Affordable Housing Fast Facts*, which contain information about affordability and homelessness concerns in the city, were included. These publications differ from the research summaries and briefs as they provide snapshots of some of the challenges the city faces. Generally speaking, this group of documents contains fewer statistics, and the information is presented in a goal-oriented manner. These documents draw stronger conclusions about the housing needs and affordability struggles of low-income earners in the city than do other City publications.

An application form from the Calgary Housing Company rounds off the policy document data set. This five-page document is used when individuals or families apply to live in social housing (as opposed to those who apply for rental subsidies). This application form was somewhat difficult to come by, as it was not publicly available at the time I collected it. One is required to go into the Calgary Housing Company office (in Northwest Calgary) in person to pick one up, or to request that it be mailed to one. This application form was last modified in April 2005.

### *Newspaper discourse*

Newspapers have become a popular data source for academics as they are an “important creator and transmitter of cultural values and ideas, and socio-political ideologies” (Soothill and Grover 1997, p. 591). Newspaper articles were included in this project in order to compare official perceptions of housing need against claims made by members of the public which are often highlighted in newspaper coverage. Articles from three local newspapers, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Calgary Sun*, and *FFWD:Weekly*, were collected for this research. The *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun* are both daily papers, while *FFWD:Weekly* is published once a week.

When looking for newspaper discourse I had a strict set of selection criteria. First, the articles had to have been published between June 2001 and December of 2005. A variety of search terms were used when searching for housing related articles. “Housing” was the primary key word, and additional key words included, but were not limited to: affordable; problems; rising costs; subsidies; families; need; homeless families; working

poor; conditions; shortages; crisis; and neighbourhood services. I limited my collection of articles to actual news stories. I did not include any letters to the editor, nor did I include editorials. I did this in an attempt to find articles that attempted to present multiple sides of an issue, or presented the information with an impartial tone. Tone was an important feature, as the appearance of impartiality suggests to the reader that the information contained therein represents “truth” and “objectivity” (two concepts discussed earlier). The number of stories written by columnists was limited in order to ensure that there was a variety of sources of information. Only stories that had a direct link to housing in the city of Calgary were included in the data set. Articles about federal or provincial housing announcements were only included if they made reference to how a particular program or funding arrangement would impact Calgarians. After filtering for the criteria mentioned above, I was left with 88 articles for analysis.

The *Calgary Herald* is a daily newspaper owned by CanWest Mediaworks Publications Inc. The *Herald* has the largest circulation and readership in the city, and one might be safe to assume that it is an influential paper within the community, given its large circulation. An average of 275,000 people read the paper on weekdays and nearly 500,000 on weekends, and the *Herald* claims that it reaches “40% of Calgarians with a household income in excess of \$75,000” on weekdays (Calgary Herald, 2006). This paper’s target audience is adults aged 25 and older, who have at least some post-secondary education, and who are mid-to-high income earners. I was interested to see how this paper frames housing issues and concerns in the community, given that the

majority of their readers' household incomes are higher than those who are thought to be in housing need. 29 articles from the *Calgary Herald* were included in the data set.

The *Calgary Sun*, owned by the Sun Media Corporation, claims that it is “Calgary’s other voice” (Calgary Sun, 2006) and while it does not publicly provide information about who its readers are, one can infer that its target audience would not be the same as the *Calgary Herald’s*, given their differing format. Stories appearing in the *Sun* are generally concise, and the *Sun’s* strongest emphasis in its content is on sports coverage. I chose to include 29 articles from this paper because I suspect that the *Sun’s* target audience is geared more towards low and middle income earners, and those with less post-secondary education than is the *Herald*. While the *Sun* is a relatively conservative newspaper it has, in the past, been sympathetic to the concerns of low income Calgarians and has, in the past, maintained a populist orientation. For this reason, articles from the *Sun* were included because I was interested to see if the *Sun* constructs housing concerns differently than the other two papers.

*FFWD:Weekly* bills itself as Calgary’s “news and entertainment weekly.” It is a relatively left-leaning (and occasionally controversial) publication that has, in the past, published critical stories about social issues relevant to Calgarians. This paper is free and is distributed widely (1200 locations) throughout Calgary, Canmore and Banff. This paper does not offer a public accounting of its circulation or any information about who its readers are. 30 articles from *FFWD:Weekly* were included in the data set.

*CDA & the study of housing in the city of Calgary*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Fairclough (2001) provides a model for discourse analysis that: is mindful of truth claims; enables a researcher to be aware of the myriad of ways in which power results from, and operates by way of, discourse; enables the researcher to engage in analysis at a number of different sites; and emphasizes the processes involved in *producing* and *interpreting* the texts, as opposed to limiting the study to the final, textual result (Fairclough, 1992). All of these features make it an appropriate method for this project.

By including housing policy and newspaper stories related to housing in this project, I examined the different interests at play in the discourse and was able to unpack policy and newspaper texts by employing a number of strategies. For example, I was interested in the construction of authorial or organizational “voices,” such as “The City” and the construction of “other” voices. I was interested in the adoption, promotion, or rejection of particular definitions that appeared in both policy and media documents. I was also concerned with the identification of omissions, linkages, juxtapositions, binary oppositions, rhetorical emphases, and the use of examples, loaded terms and symbols. The “rules for reading” that were embedded in presentations that “rule in” or “rule out” particular kinds of readers was of interest, as was the construction of “impartiality,” “objectivity,” institutional authority, and anonymity, by way of specific sorts of language use. These strategies enabled me to carry out a critical discourse analysis of policy and media texts by using a computer software program, AtlasTi, which allowed me to code the documents from the ground-up and group my findings into appropriate themes and

categories. The findings generated from the process of engaging in a critical discourse analysis of media and policy documents are discussed in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 5: Media Findings**

This project began with a ground-up approach to research. I was originally informed about some of the problems that women face in regards to housing through the documented and unfiltered life stories of individual women. Their narratives, told in the private sphere and thus considered to be “grassroots” political discourse, inspired me to examine textual documents that had the power to influence their lives. These stories, while not examined in this project, had an important role in informing my research questions. I wanted to examine the textual documents that had the power to influence their lives and, as a result, I chose to collect traditional forms of political discourse in the form of housing policy documents. Bayley (2005) argued that it is imperative to include discourse from several sites, so as not to draw strong political conclusions from a single text, or text type. For this reason, I chose to include data from several Calgary newspapers. Newspaper stories that were related to housing issues were included in this project because these stories result as a response to traditional forms of discourse that are typically published by governments.

As mentioned earlier, critical discourse analysis was the method of choice for this project. While the theoretical advantages have already been addressed in an earlier chapter, there were some practical considerations that made this method advantageous. Berg (2004) has highlighted some of the advantages of employing any form of content analysis. One of the benefits of using such a process is that this project involved a research process that was relatively unobtrusive. The search for data included library

work (obtaining newspaper articles via microfiche), internet archival work (City of Calgary website searches for policy, and online newspaper collections), and a limited number of phone calls to gain access to documents, specifically, the application form for social housing. This, at the very least, helped to limit the financial costs of doing research. Another benefit of this process of data collection was that it provided an opportunity for me to include data that was created over an extended period of time, specifically, a five year period. Finally, this method was useful because it was, what Berg notes, a “particularly beneficial procedure for assessing events or processes in social groups when public records exist” (Berg 2004, p. 288).

### *The Process of Data Analysis*

This was a large-scale project in discourse analysis; the final total included over seven hundred pages of data. In order to effectively manage such a large volume of information Atlas/Ti, a qualitative data analysis management program, was used to code the data. This software allows one to assign codes to specific pieces of text, and to build models based on codes ascribed by a researcher. This software enables the researcher to develop rich data sets, with multiple levels of codes that provide the investigator with a framework in which to develop an understanding of some of the issues and themes in the texts. In total, the collection of policy documents exceeded 650 pages, and there were nearly one hundred pages of newspaper discourse. The news stories included in this project were grouped together according to which paper published them, not according to the author of the story itself.

Each document was assigned a unique identification number and entered into the computer software. As some of the newspaper articles were obtained via microfiche, these articles were first transcribed and then entered into the software. This process of searching for, transcribing, and entering the information into the software program allowed me to become quite familiar with the data, and to work hands on, with the documents. Given the sheer size of the data set, the process of coding of documents took place over a number of months. The codes were inductive, and evolved throughout the process. As my set of codes grew, I frequently returned to previously-coded documents to ensure that I included new codes alongside old ones. This evolving nature of the project required me to frequently reflect upon what the data was revealing, and to reevaluate what coding strategies I needed to employ.

While the large collection of policy documents was, at first, overwhelming, it quickly became apparent that many of the documents included entire sections that were repetitive in nature. For example, many documents repeated the same statistics about the problem of homelessness, and other papers included similar, if not word-for-word, accounts about affordability struggles in the city of Calgary. Given that there was some overlap of information, I found that this volume of data was manageable for analysis.

The initial coding process resulted in 219 specific codes, and these codes applied to both newspaper discourse and policy. These ranged from codes such as “affordability barriers – land costs” to “illegal suites – prevalence of” to “social activism.” In the next stage, these codes were arranged according to their similarities. For example, all of the

specific “affordability barriers” were combined together, as were all the codes that mentioned the role of specific social agencies in the city. This second stage narrowed the total number of codes down to 81. In the third, and final, stage of the coding all the codes were examined to determine if there were central themes that emerged from the codes. In the final analysis, nine major themes were identified. These included:

Activism/Community Concerns; Discursive Issues; Economic Issues; Homelessness Concerns; Personal Income; Physical Location Issues; Political Issues; Research & Funding; and Role of the City of Calgary.

*Activism/Community Concerns* includes such codes as: “advocates,” “responsibility – community,” and “urban sprawl/density.” This group of codes includes any expressed concerns with social issues relevant to community development and health, with the exception of any explicit discussions about homelessness. As homelessness was frequently cited as an issue, any direct references to homelessness fall into a single category (further discussed below). “Poverty,” however, was included in this group as many mentions made about poverty were done so in a context that discussed ways to prevent, or mitigate the effects of, poverty all together.

*Language Issues* refers to those codes found in the literature that were built upon specific terms used in the media publications and in policy documents. Some of these codes included direct quotes such as “fresh start,” “Alberta advantage,” and “taxpayers’ money.” Other codes included in this group referred to terms used in the data that had varying interpretations depending upon where the definition was taken from. For example,

“affordable housing - definition” was a term that meant different things in different contexts and thus it was included in this group.

*Economic Issues* is the category with the highest number of codes by far. This category includes such codes as “affordability barriers,” “Associations – Calgary Homebuilders,” and “profitability.” These codes are related to the economic impact of rising housing costs, business interests and their needs, and the pressures related to changing markets.

*Homelessness concerns* included all codes directly related to homelessness. There were only three codes in this category. These included “homelessness,” “shelters,” and “clients/at-risk population.”

*Personal Income* includes only three codes as well. The exhaustive list includes “money – personal income,” “deserving poor,” and “fresh start.” These codes were almost always in reference to the income required to pay for shelter in the city. The “fresh start” codes were used when claims of “getting a fresh start” were used when discussing financial situations.

*Physical Location Issues* refers to challenges and changes to the physical environment. For example, this includes “gentrification,” “housing – community living,” and “safety.” These codes typically refer to the built environment, and include the stability and suitability of different housing options.

*Political Issues* consists of codes that make references to governments, politicians, and political action. A few of these codes are “lobbying,” “provincial comparisons,” and “government continuity.” This category does not include any claims of which level of government is responsible for services. These codes are found under *Physical Location Issues*, because the comments that were made concerning responsibility typically involved concerns about the development and maintenance of social housing stock. Given that these concerns were about the availability of places in which people can live, and where these spaces should be located, these codes were placed under *physical location issues*, and not under *political issues*.

*Research & Funding* is a category that includes several codes. These codes were similar in that they discussed the availability of knowledge and resources concerning housing. A few of these codes included “housing – research,” “foundations,” and “funding – private sector.”

After the coding was complete and these categories of analysis were developed, it became clear that there were issues that were primarily addressed in policy, and those that were primarily found in the public discourse. These categories provided insight into the priorities of the municipal government and of those who make choices about what is included in media publications. The findings from the public discourse (the newspaper articles) will be discussed in the proceeding pages, and the policy discourse will be addressed in the next chapter.

### *Activism/Community Concerns*

Public awareness about the need for affordable housing, coupled with concerns about the prevalence of NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard) in the city of Calgary were the key issues amongst all of the codes in this category. Community activists, politicians, and researchers were all given relatively equal press time when it came to addressing the impact of NIMBYism in Calgary.

#### *NIMBYism*

The *Calgary Herald* quoted Avi Friedman, a McGill University Professor, when discussing the issue of legitimate problem solving. He explains, “‘NIMBYism is a serious issue for affordable housing,’ he adds. ‘People say they support affordable housing but also want to maintain the status quo (in their neighbourhoods)’” (Hope 2003a, p. HS9). Another story drew attention to the fact that local politicians were aware of the effects of NIMBYism in their districts. While highlighting the cyclical nature of problems with housing affordability and homelessness, the story in the *Calgary Herald* identified that there are problems with residents who are unwilling to have rental housing built in their neighbourhood, and this poses challenges for elected officials. One passage reads:

According to a count this year conducted by the homeless Awareness Society of Calgary, 2,000 people are living on the street or accessing shelters and services every night, representing a 34 percent increase in just two years. “(The increase) is surprising and worrying,” said Ald. Madeleine King. “We have to see shelters as part of a continuum, not a solution. A key will be working with communities to get more rental units in their neighbourhoods and diminishing the not-in-my-backyard attitude” (Myers 2002, p. 1).

The *Calgary Sun* suggested that politicians are complicit in the NIMBY problem, as some have been slow to adapt to program changes and ingenuity in program development. One journalist claims that “for any of these programs to succeed, what is needed most is a change to politicians’ and the public’s ‘not in my backyard’ attitude” (Holden 2001, p. 6).

Of the articles that were selected from *FFWD:Weekly* (*FFWD*), most approached the problem of NIMBYism in the community from a public awareness perspective. This method did not directly mention the problems of NIMBYism, but instead frequently cited activists and community leaders who were working to raise awareness about the realities of the affordable housing crisis, and commented on social justice issues. Wild (2002) wrote:

We pour millions of dollars into the expansion of Calgary’s shelter system, and think we are solving the social problem of homelessness. However, without the complementary provision of affordable housing the response is patently inadequate. Worse still, the shelter-focused response to homelessness flies in the face of justice and serves to allow the various levels of government to largely ignore the basic needs of the most marginalized of our citizens. For many, this has little impact on our lives. In fact, some may think it is an appropriate response for “those” people. Taxes are kept down and we can sleep well at night knowing that the new workhouses of post-industrial capitalist society are at least keep the social problem largely out of political consciousness. Certainly, we get upset when we hear about people freezing on the streets, and we feel some temporary outrage when we hear about violent attacks on street people. But we are happy to assume that if the shelters exist, the problem of homelessness is being dealt with (Wild 2002, n.p.).

This approach of deconstructing the post-industrial capitalist society was unique to *FFWD*; however, all three newspapers addressed problems associated with community ignorance and apathy, albeit the *Calgary Sun* and the *Calgary Herald* put it more delicately than did *FFWD*.

### *Utility costs*

Another concern found in this category was that of rising utility costs, and the impact this has on housing affordability. Economists were often cited as the authority on the impact that rising utility costs had on the average consumer (Hope, 2004), and special attention was given to builders who constructed homes that were more energy-friendly, thus reducing the costs for low-income families (McCormick, 2005a). Rising energy costs were often cited for being the problem for decreasing affordability. “It would appear affordability will continue to decline, not just here but across the country – although it will vary depending on house price increases, interest rates and rising energy costs. There is no doubt that in her wake, Hurricane Katrina will have a major impact on heating costs throughout North America this winter and probably long beyond that,” (Hope 2005, p. J10).

The *Calgary Sun* failed to make any links between rising utility costs and housing affordability in the articles found for this project. *FFWD* took a different approach than the *Calgary Herald* did when discussing the impact of these increasing prices by telling stories of individuals, rather than relying upon expert analysis. This is exemplified through the story of a woman whose power was cut off:

In mid-May, Maggie Pompeo’s utilities were disconnected. For the next 79 hours and 20 minutes, she and her three children remained without power in energy-rich Alberta. “I went without my electricity, but the government doesn’t know how hard it is to keep a family going. We lost a freezer full of food. We had to buy food daily... the laundry had to be done. I fell further into debt,” say Pompeo, a single mother on social assistance... In many ways Pompeo’s tale marks the flipside of the so-called “Alberta Advantage.” She was caught in the crunch between inadequate welfare rates and skyrocketing increases in utility costs (Wild 2003, n.p.).

While rising utility costs are an economic issue, they are also a greater community concern that has impacted the bottom lines of all citizens, and has caused many to lobby for changes and support, particularly after the period of electricity deregulation was phased in 2001.

### *Economic Issues*

Throughout the newspaper discourse, there was an emphasis on financial well-being, and how the housing market could positively impact the lives of Calgarians. This positive outlook was quite common in the stories published by both the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun*. This discussion was implicitly directed towards middle class Calgarians, and the stories were often framed from a position that sought to reassure those already in the housing market that their lives were about to substantially improve, and to ease the fears of those not yet in the housing market that things were still affordable.

### *Housing as an investment*

After evaluating sixty pieces of discourse published by the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun*, it became apparent that there was a strong financial undercurrent running through these articles. There were implicit, and sometimes explicit, suggestions as to how the average citizen could improve his or her financial lot. Often these stories were little more than a how-to guide for Calgarians to make more money, and the target audience was certainly middle, to upper middle, class residents. This became clear when articles concerning the changing trends in the real estate market were analyzed.

One of the more pervasive issues to consistently appear throughout the daily newspaper stories was the emphasis on viewing real estate as an investment opportunity. The approach to housing as an investment was geared towards those looking to get into the housing market, and for those looking to diversify their investment portfolio. Some stories did focus on the strain that the relatively recent trend in real estate has created for those who simply need a roof over their head:

Waning faith in beleaguered stock markets has led to new problems for home-seekers, who must now compete against a wave of property buyers looking to funnel investment cash into Alberta's biggest markets... "I'm seeing more investors in real estate doing investment buying – either buying properties to hold, rent or to renovate, fix up and flip," said Ken Shearer, president of the Edmonton Real Estate Board. "For homebuyers, that's competition they wouldn't normally see," he said, adding new home starts in July were sold out, while inventory of used homes is nearly depleted (Wood 2002, p. 10).

However, it is not long before the pressures in the real estate market are framed in such a way that readers are told that these pressures are not so bad. While discussing the challenges that strong immigration in the city has brought, one community planner explained that "Calgary's growth may create a challenge, but it also indicates that the city has a healthy economy and is an attractive place to live. 'There are problems, but they're good ones,' he adds. 'Problems of growth are better than the alternative, decline or stagnation'" (McNamee 2001, n.p.). This language is an attempt to reassure readers, especially those already established in Calgary, that all is well.

This discourse appears to be written from the perspective of, and is geared towards, a middle class or upper middle class resident who has enough of a slush fund to

weather a little extra competition in the housing market. Readers are trained to treat the market as an investment opportunity with houses as commodities, and are led to believe that the added competition will create more wealth and bring prosperity over the long term, and encourages readers to ignore the difficulties that the changing market conditions create. Those who can afford to invest in housing and buy up additional housing stock are treated only as an added pressure in the market, a minor irritation at worst, and are often encouraged. Real estate investment, after all, is a way in which the middle class, not just big business, can make money. Therefore, housing is treated as simply a business transaction in the media. Housing issues are rarely framed in a light that gives a voice to the people who live in these homes, the relationships that are built in these communities, or the problems that could result when adequate and affordable housing is not available. The people who struggle are talked about, as opposed to included, in the housing debate.

### *The Role of Social Agencies and Business Interests*

After the data analysis was complete it became clear that there was a pattern amongst the newspaper articles from the two major daily newspapers, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun*, when detailing the struggles that some people have with housing in the city of Calgary. There was a sequence of story-telling from which journalists and columnists rarely deviated. First, those affected by housing insecurity make a claim, or a claim is made on their behalf. Those making the claims, or those who are talked about, are almost always described in such a fashion that sees them as being part of the deserving poor. Next, the story typically includes some type of people-friendly

comment from an organization or interest group, often carried out in such a fashion that business and government are rarely criticized. Frequently, a spokesperson from a foundation or agency comments on the unfortunate situation of those who simply cannot keep pace with the ever-expanding market. The newspaper story then ends with some kind of claim that those affected need only the opportunity to make a “fresh start,” and in many cases, the business foundation or association mentioned in the article is there to help.

There were sixteen agencies that were mentioned throughout the media discourse. In addition to the well known Mustard Seed Ministry, the Calgary Drop In and Rehabilitation Society, the United Way, and Habitat for Humanity, there were also several smaller agencies dedicated to particular client populations that were quoted in the newspaper discourse. These agencies, such as the Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Homeless Awareness Calgary, and Inn from the Cold, were typically only mentioned once. Interestingly, a small handful business foundations and associations were frequently referenced. The Calgary Home Builders’ Association and the Calgary Home Builders’ Foundation were cited frequently, more often, in fact, than many of the social agencies combined.

The *Calgary Herald* made several references to the activities of both the Calgary and Canadian Home Builders’ Associations:

With a possible federal election looming, the president of the Canadian Home Builders’ Association isn’t worried inroads made with housing issues in Prime Minister Paul Martin’s government will be forgotten. “As an association, we try hard to make sure our own concerns and the issues

of the industry and consumers are explored with both sides of the (House of Commons),” says David Wasmandorf (McCormick 2005b, p. J11).

The city has set in place a multi-point strategy it hopes will lead to the development of all kinds of additional affordable housing. But, Purvis admits, she hasn’t talk to the city’s house building community. ...The Calgary Region Home Builders Association has been very involved – through the Calgary Home Builders Foundation – in the development and construction of diverse housing projects. Next week, in fact, the Bob Ward Residence will officially open its doors to a 61-unit facility just off Glenmore Trail that will provide housing for working poor as well as mentally-challenged individuals. The foundation and builders’ portfolio also includes a Children’s Cottage and a halfway house for troubled teens – so it might not be a bad idea to given the association a call (Hope 2003a, p. HS9).

These quotes are indicative of a strong pro-business perspective, and this ties in to the frequent discussion of the interests of the private sector in the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun*.

One of the codes that developed from this research was ‘Business interests.’ This code encapsulated any references to benefits to homebuilders, the involvement of home builders in housing policy discussions, profitability, charitable donations (from business), and investing in housing for profit. This code was one of the most frequently occurring codes in the ‘Economic Issues’ category. From the research, it was clear that business interests were of great importance in the discussion of housing issues in the city of Calgary. There was a wide range of concerns about the private sector. These included:

“There are positives about the slowdown [the number of new housing starts in 2003]” he said. “Builders won’t be run as ragged as they were last year, and consumers will be happier because possession dates will come back to more normal ranges” (Hope 2003b, p. HS3).

Builders have shown that they are committed to helping needy Calgarians through such charitable organizations as the Calgary Home Builders' Foundation – partner in the \$4.5 Bob Ward Residence for homeless people with mental and physical difficulties, she said. “We want to provide housing to those who need it, but we don't want anything mandated,” said Moore. “We want to work in partnership with other groups, but on a voluntary basis” (Hope 2002a, p. HS1).

Shrinking inventories may only get worse, given there's little incentive for builders to create new rental units (Holden 2004, n.p.).

### *Housing Development Issues*

The problems associated with building new units, or introducing new units (such as renting illegal basement suites) appeared throughout the newspaper data. A problem that builders (in most cases and homeowners, in others) encounter with economic barriers was a recurring theme. The approaches taken by the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun*, and with *FFWD* were strikingly different. The *Herald* and the *Sun* generally concentrated on the development issues as seen through the eyes of homebuilders, and those involved in monitoring the economic issues that impact the housing market. The following examples highlight the style of language used, and who the “authorities” are regarding development issues:

One such study now underway will examine the effects of municipal development charges on housing affordability – an issue that is a priority with the Canadian Home Builders' Association (McCormick 2005b, p. J11).

“Labour shortages are one of the major reasons your house will cost more to build these days. Essentially, with all of the infrastructure construction, as well as the residential and commercial construction, the amount of labour needed is not being met. We are all vying for the same person.” The trades market continues to affect the industry with no sign of slowing down, says Shane Wenzel, senior vice-president of sales and marketing for Shane Homes. Besides the labour shortage, world events such as the

tragedy of Hurricane Katrina are also being felt in Calgary. ...Oil and gas prices are also forces to be reckoned with, adds Bobyk (Radke 2005, p. H13).

*FFWD*, on the other hand, approached development issues from a strong community and neighbourhood design perspective as opposed to those from an economic one. This standpoint included opinions from activists and academics, and the articles published in this paper were often critical of plans developed by the City of Calgary that were deemed to be short-sighted. Given that *FFWD* presented such a strikingly different perspective about development concerns, this is an appropriate time to discuss the physical aspects of housing that emerged in the public discourse.

#### *Physical Location Issues*

As mentioned earlier, physical location issues include references to the physical aspects of housing. This includes many issues such as neighbourhood gentrification, community living, sustainability of buildings, the physical problems with housing (such as parking), safety, environmental design, and ghettoization, to name a few.

#### *Development & Responsible Growth*

*FFWD* draws attention to development issues in a manner that is distinct from stories that appear in the *Herald* and the *Sun*. Their points of interest are often framed in discourse that concerns community development, land use, and long term visions for city development. For example:

Instead, Sandalack says Calgary's leaders and citizens need to look at the source of the problem – neighbourhoods that are being designed for cars instead of people, and for sleeping instead of living. As long as we continue to build low-density suburbs that force people to use their cars to

go for a coffee, do the grocery shopping and get to work, traffic will continue to get worse whether we build more roads or not (McNamee 2001, n.p.).

Despite the agreement that redevelopment is required, there are major concerns about the project approved by council. Setbacks from the river, the height of the buildings, the amount of retail space, the future of existing neighbourhood amenities, homelessness, the impact on current residents, the city's partnership with developers, and public input into the project have all raised concerns among community leaders and residents (Babin 2002a, n.p.).

Harvey Cohent, a community activist opposed to many aspects of the East Village project, calls the process bonusing. He says the city wants to develop the East Village so badly – it will, after all, bring in a hefty amount of money – it has changed its own rules to accommodate its development (Babin 2002b, n.p.).

These concerns draw attention to the concepts of community living, urban sprawl, the problems associated with growth, and fair business practices. Gentrification in the inner city has also been discussed from the perspective of a low income earner, and by way of analyzing City plans and policies.

Gentrification is the process of buying and renovating homes and businesses in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper- or middle-income families or individuals, thus improving property values but often displacing low-income families and small businesses (Smith, 1982). In an article covering the benefit dinner for the Calgary Homeless Foundation, one low-income housing activist challenges the purpose of the event. “And [Dufresne] doesn't hide his anger about what he claims is the gross hypocrisy of Alberta's ruling class. ‘One of the sponsors tonight is the Calgary Stampede,’ he says ‘What are they doing there? They are tearing down houses where I live, in Victoria Park, putting people out on the street’” (Laird 2002, n.p.). Discussion of

the impacts of gentrification are nowhere to be found in the *Calgary Herald* or in the *Calgary Sun*. In fact, it is not referred to as gentrification, it is known as “revitalization” (Myshrall, 2001). Clearly, the language can be modified to fit one’s own opinion of the changes that take place in these deteriorating neighbourhoods.

When the *Calgary Herald* reported that the City’s goal was to increase inner city density, there was no evaluation of the merits or drawbacks of such a goal. “Construction has begun on a major affordable housing initiative called the Manchester project. The complex is being built a few blocks north of the Chinook LRT station and strives to meet the city’s goal of increasing inner-city density” (Bracegridge 2003, p. N1). While this goal is not challenged, those who complain about the parking problems that are associated with basement (and frequently “illegal”) suites, are given space to voice their concerns:

City development inspectors have investigated 752 complaints of illegal rental suites this year as of Aug. 25. Last year, the city received 1,043 complaints for the year... Gerry Baxter, of the Calgary Apartment Association, said the issue of illegal rental suites is a delicate one. “We understand that it’s illegal to put suites in places not properly zoned for that,” said Baxter. “And we also understand the concern of neighbours because of increased parking costs.... I think parking, typically is the biggest issue” (Toneguzzi 2003, p. B1).

Increasing inner city density, the stated goal of the City, will likely contribute to the big concern over parking frustrations. However, these connections are not made in the discourse. Unless a City decision upsets a business group (such as the 2% solution) critical analysis of City decisions was rare in the selection of articles from the *Calgary Herald* and *Calgary Sun* that were included in the project.

Concerns about urban sprawl and housing density were mentioned in the newspaper discourse, but again, this was limited to those articles published in *FFWD*. Despite the five and a half year time frame from which articles were collected, I was unable to locate any stories about housing issues that addressed the concerns about urban sprawl or density issues in the *Calgary Herald* or in the *Calgary Sun*.

### *Safety*

The four comments concerning safe housing in the newspaper discourse were all found in the *Calgary Herald*. All of the comments were directly related to stories about those living in subsidized housing. Interestingly, the housing mentioned in these quotes was subsidized by charities, not through government programs. For example, a story appeared in the *Calgary Herald* on March 19, 2005 regarding the Habitat for Humanity Sun Court project that opened in a south east Calgary neighbourhood.

The article abstract includes the claim that “stable, safe, affordable housing reduces the risks for children” (McCormick 2005a, p. K1). Such a statement implies that there would be a frank discussion about stable, safe, and affordable housing, but this was not the case. The story emphasized the economic benefits of the new home for the family, especially for the breadwinner. The discussion of safety was limited to a comment about the design of the home, noting that “a window on the landing on the second floor is oriented to the backyard so that parents can see their children at play and neighbourhood safety is promoted” (McCormick 2005a, p. K1). This comment is the only mention of safety in the article. There is no mention of any other aspects of safety, either real or

perceived risks, such as the actual safety of the neighbourhood itself, the privacy of the home, secured play areas for the children in question, or proximity to major roadways, to name but only a few issues that many parents are likely to be concerned with in regards to the safety of their children.

This story was not really about the stability, suitability, safety or affordability of the home. As mentioned earlier, the article conformed to the standard formula. It begins with the personal tragedy twist, emphasizes the contributions, or “sweat equity” the family must contribute, and ends with pats on the back for those politicians and business leaders involved in the project. A particularly telling portion reads:

Sun Court was collaboration between public and private groups as well as volunteers and families, says Brian O’Leary, senior partner with Burnet Duckworth and Palmer. Volunteers from the law firm have built four homes with Habitat. “We don’t talk about it, we get it done,” says O’Leary (McCormick 2005a, p. K1).

This story works to share information with the public about the benevolence of those who have more money than do others. It is a token article, and it enables those who might be concerned about the struggle of the poor in the city to feel better about the situation. The media is complicit in the problem because they fail to address the real issues that low income families face. In terms of genuinely addressing safety in housing, the claim that the window is a safety feature (one worth mentioning, at least) is merely for show. Claiming that a window contributes to community safety is really a non-issue. The window only works when parents are there to watch their children playing, and it does not contribute to a safe community when mom or dad is away because they have rushed off to their second job. These are just a few of the real issues that poor families have, and

they are not legitimately addressed in the story. In actual fact, this story has little to do with the impact of stable, safe, and affordable housing for families. Instead, it works to create a strong image of what ‘deserving poor’ looks like, and affirms only the positive aspects of business and government.

### *Location of Residence*

When attempting to find a place to live, there are many considerations for the potential renter or homebuyer in addition to the suitability, adequacy, and affordability. One of the factors that goes into any decision made about housing is the location of residence. Proximity to schools, services, transit, employment and recreational activities are a few features that influence the decisions of renters or owners. When vacancy rates are low, many of these issues are compromised in order to get adequate housing. In the public discourse, there were several mentions about the factors that relate to the location of one’s home. The importance of having affordable housing located near transit was noted by both the *Calgary Herald* and *FFWD*.

One City of Calgary proposal, the “2% solution,” drew fire from critics concerned about transportation links and accessibility. The proposal would have seen two percent of land in new communities dedicated to the creation of affordable housing. However, as highlighted by those in the industry, “some areas might also lack sufficient access to public transportation, leaving residents who can’t afford vehicles stranded, said Ferguson” (Hope 2002a, p. HS1). Leaving people in new suburbs without adequate infrastructure (schools, grocery stores, health clinics, et cetera) is problematic for low

income earners who cannot afford a vehicle. The suburbs, however, are not the only areas with service difficulties.

*FFWD* notes that as the city grows, the inner city loses services as these services are spread out through the expanding city. As property tax increases hit inner city homeowners (and are often passed on to renters) at a sharp rate, the inner city is at risk of losing some of their educational, medical, and recreational services, as these are being closed in order to meet the needs of new communities:

The school board recently approved the closure of five schools, including one in Parkdale and one in Tuxedo Park, the Calgary Health Region is closing medical labs in Mission and Bridgeland, the city is closing Georgina Thompson library at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Northmount Drive NW and may consider closing three others, and although this year's city council budget spared outdoor pools, most of which are located in inner-city neighbourhoods, they will no doubt be considered for closure again in the future (LaFortune 2003, n.p.).

Such a reality is problematic for low income earners looking for adequate housing solutions. The competition between those living in the inner city (where gentrification continues at a fast pace, eroding the existing affordable housing stock) and the suburbs (where services are slow to develop, and the number of new communities that are developed are further away from business centers and, inevitably, places of employment) makes for a difficult choice for those already struggling. *FFWD* is sensitive to these difficulties, and to an extent, the *Calgary Herald* is too.

The *Calgary Sun* covered the stories resulting from the relocation of residents in affordable housing units in Ogden, where the land the housing units were on was found to be contaminated. After the contamination was discovered, Imperial Oil bought the land

(and the infrastructure) back from the City of Calgary, and those living in the units were asked to leave. The residents were initially offered \$4,000 for the inconvenience (this was later raised to \$5,000) and were asked to leave in February. This move presented several issues for the residents of this housing complex, and the *Calgary Sun* drew attention to the concerns of the residents:

Having lived in the community for years, Bev said the prospect uprooting her 10 year old daughter is unpleasant, doubly so given Calgary's current affordable housing crisis. "I really feel they didn't take into consideration our feelings, this is our home," she said. "They say there's a silver lining in every cloud, and maybe there is, but right now my daughter is doing really well in school and I don't want her out of there. Bottom line is it's a crock of bull." (Wood 2002b, p. 3).

Bev, a long time resident of the housing complex, drew attention to the problems of relocation. Moving children from one neighbourhood to another can often present difficulties for the family. Changing schools, especially in the middle of the school year, leaving areas with established child care routines, and familiar activities and programs present challenges to those whose lives are impacted by the shortage of affordable (and adequate) housing.

For most people, one's location of residence is not just about economics. The decisions concerning where one might choose to call home often include concerns about schools, access to services, the proximity of the bus stop or the grocery store, and some times crime rates in the community. However, the economic factors, such as affordability of rent, the profitability to builders and developers, or the cost to the City for housing programs, was typically the focus in the mainstream, daily newspaper reporting. Low income struggles were highlighted in *FFWD* on a much more meaningful way than they

were in the *Calgary Herald* or *Calgary Sun*. It was almost as if the issues about housing were too political, hot potatoes as it were, which was a limiting factor in the discussion.

### *Homelessness*

Homelessness was a pervasive issue that appeared throughout the articles selected from the *Calgary Herald*, *the Calgary Sun*, and in *FFWD*.

### *Selling the Problem*

Mentions were repeatedly made about those who were living on the street or in the shelter system because of the rising affordability burdens in the city. The language used was sympathetic, and was typically written in such a fashion that tried to remove the blame from the homeless individual, and told a story of their personal circumstances that led them to life on the street. Some stories describe the consequences of domestic violence:

Tammy Caron did the right thing. She has been in an eight-year relationship with a man who had become progressively more abusive as his addiction to drugs and alcohol took hold. She has been willing to live with the abuse while it remained verbal, but Caron says the first time he touched her she walked out the door. So it was on one cold October night four years ago the unemployed Caron found herself walking the streets of Calgary with her 11 year-old son in town and thought: What now? (Hope 2003b, p. HS3).

Other articles include statistics about the economic status of those living on the street. “In a study released earlier this month for the Calgary Homelessness Foundation, University of Calgary researchers found that although about half the city’s homeless have jobs, they can’t afford a place to live” (Hope 2002a, p. HS1).

These stories are framed in such a way that they illicit some form of compassion for those living on the street from those whom are adequately housed. The implication from this style of discourse is that there is a segment of the newspaper audience who blames the homeless individual for their housing difficulties. The language suggests that the story functions as an educational campaign about the causes of homelessness, and that there might not always be fault or blame ascribed to the individual in question. What is striking about this discourse is that the journalists who write these pieces for the papers know their audiences well; the root causes of homelessness are not taken for granted. In fact, every piece reads like a school lesson: issues of social justice are discussed and stereotypes about homelessness are challenged. Given that there were so many articles that followed the pattern of education and awareness, it suggests that the audience targeted by each newspaper remains ignorant to the realities of homelessness and that, in fact, for most people on the street, homelessness is not a choice.

### *Rising rates of Homelessness*

There is no question that as the city of Calgary has grown, and so too has its homeless population. An article published in 2005 claims, “Up to 19,000 people, from other parts of Canada and the rest of the world, are expected to arrive here annually over the next three years, flooding Calgary’s housing market. Many are feeling squeezed between being able to afford what they’re accustomed to or not being able to afford anything at all in a market where prices have risen up to 13 percent over the last year” (Ferguson 2005, p. B1). This mass of in-migrants to Calgary has created pressure within the housing markets, driving more people on to the streets. A July 2004 article appearing

in the *Calgary Herald* highlights the crisis, “The city, which last week announced its homeless ranks have swollen to nearly 2,600 people, wants more affordable housing to meet the demand” (Seskus 2004, p. A9).

Throughout the media documents there was ample discussion about the rates of absolute homelessness, that is, the numbers of people who actually live on the streets. There was little talk, however, about the numbers of people who are at extreme, or relative, risk of homelessness. These are the people who are one paycheque away from eviction, or those who are couch surfing, staying with friends or family because they cannot afford a place of their own. In 2002, *FFWD* noted that at least “1,300 [people] are homeless – the Calgary Homeless Foundation estimates that another 8,700 are marginally housed and are at risk of homelessness” (Wild 2002, n.p.). In fact, the numbers found in the City’s 2002 Biennial Count of Homeless Persons was 1,737. Given that the City of Calgary’s 2006 Biennial Count of Homeless Persons resulted in 3,436 people being enumerated and considered “homeless,” one can only image how high the numbers are today, in 2008, of those who are marginally housed.

*Shelters: Are they a blessing or are they part of the problem?*

The research indicated that there was some debate about the role of homeless shelters in the city. There were basic claims about the benefits of the shelters. “Last year the Calgary Drop In and Rehab Society processed 7,500 people through support and rehabilitation found jobs and improved their lives” (“The bottom line on homelessness,” 2004, p. A5). But there are other claims about the inadequacy of the shelter system. One

particular article drew attention to the concerns of a homeless individual from a social justice perspective, and questioned why shelters are continually bursting at the seams. “And so street people have taken to the streets. ‘Shelters are often full to capacity,’ Dufresne says, with a tired look. ‘We’re Canada’s richest province – where does the money go?’” (Laird 2002, n.p.).

Others, however, have a different take on the shelter system. “We pour millions of dollars into the expansion of Calgary’s shelter system, and think we are solving the social problem of homelessness. However, without the complementary provision of affordable housing the response is patently inadequate. Worse still, the shelter-focused response to homelessness flies in the face of justice and serves to allow the various levels of government to largely ignore the basic needs of the most marginalized of our citizens” (Wild 2002, n.p.). From this perspective, the shelter system enables the problem of homelessness to continue without a genuine public debate about the fairness of building temporary solutions instead of legitimately investigating long term solutions.

To summarize the articles that address homelessness, it is seen as the central issue in the affordable housing debate. Absolute homelessness and public reminders of it, in the form of the squeegee kids, bottle pickers, and panhandlers that paint a picture of what life on the street looks like, seems to be what is driving the discussion about homelessness. The newspaper articles focus on getting these people off the street, but there is little mention about what these people truly need, besides affordability. This paints a picture that homelessness can be solved with simple infrastructure, when the

readers are told that most of those living on the street did have a roof over their heads at one point, and things such as violence, addiction, illness, or simple economics created problems in the first place. These issues cannot necessarily be solved by the simple construction of buildings with minimal rents. The public discourse addresses only part of the problem – the roof, but fails to unpack other needs of those who are inadequately housed.

### *Personal Income*

There was a strong emphasis amongst the media discourse on one's personal income, and that wages, particularly for low-paying jobs, are not keeping pace with the rise in the cost of living. One aspect of the “deserving poor” discourse is that people who have trouble paying their bills are often employed.

### *Minimum wage and the poverty line*

“Advocates say a compounding factor is that Alberta will have the lowest minimum wage in Canada as of Nov. 1 [2002]” (Myers 2002, p. B1). On September 1, 2005 the minimum wage in Alberta was raised from \$5.90 to \$7.00 an hour which, according the Government of Alberta, would directly impact approximately 45,000 workers in the province. At the time, the increase saw Alberta rise to the level of being the province with the fourth highest minimum wage in Canada. According to Statistics Canada the 2005 Low Income Cut Offs (LICO), after tax, for one person living in an urban zone with a population over 500,000, is \$17,218 (Statistics Canada 2006, p. 18). One earning minimum wage in Calgary were certainly fall below this cutoff, and would

certainly have difficulties meeting all of his or her needs for food, shelter, and clothing even if there was not an existing housing crisis in the city of Calgary. This reality was echoed in some of the newspaper discourse, as “market housing generally isn’t an option for people working minimum-wage jobs” (Klaszus 2004, n.p.).

This reality is particularly troubling for those trying to leave the shelter system.

An article appearing in *Calgary Sun* addressed the problems with minimum wage jobs:

“Very few people who stay in an emergency or transitional centre are there for long. They are not ‘recycled’ week after week or month after month,” explains Currie. “They take counseling, skills upgrading programs, and find jobs.” The trouble is, the jobs, at least initially, are low paid and the “victims” generally when it comes to paying the rent – or even the telephone bill – they are one paycheque away from being back on the streets. “When you are taking home only \$950 a month and can afford only \$450 for a place to live but can’t find a place for under \$650, it’s obvious how perilous your situation is” says Currie (Jackson 2002, p. 15).

*FFWD* frequently focused on income inequality in the city, and often chose to discuss alternatives to a minimum wage. When discussing the cyclical nature of poverty, one author suggests that “to break the cycle would require finding a way to support a society from the ground up so that access to education, a living wage and services and benefits of society are equitable and poverty is controlled or eliminated, leading to a healthier society” (“Health,” 2001, n.p.). The concept of a living wage, as opposed to a minimum wage, was raised in three separate articles that appeared in *FFWD*, which there was no discussion of such an approach in the *Calgary Herald*, nor in the *Calgary Sun*.

### *Income Inequality*

There were two strikingly different perspectives on the range of personal incomes in Calgary, and the implication that statistics about average incomes has. The *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun* documented the rise in average wages in the city as a sign of prosperity for the city. When reporting on housing affordability in the city, one *Calgary Herald* article published in 2005 claimed that housing was improving in the city. “A strong jump in Albertans’ household income in the past three months of 2004 combined with softening mortgage rates to sharply improve housing affordability in the province, already the easiest place to own a home in Canada, RBC Financial Group said Tuesday. ... ‘It’s hard to get much better than what you’ve got: some of the strongest income growth in the country, and some fairly strong house price growth and still the best level of affordability in the country’” (Scotton 2005, p. D1). However, the article fails to go into detail as to whose wages are increasing, and whose remain stagnant. An article in the *Calgary Sun*, however, notes that “a groundswell of highly paid, white-collar jobs in Calgary last year fuelled big gains in disposable income of the city’s workforce” (Nogier 2002a, p. B1). One might infer that the previous statement concerning “gains in disposable income” would, in all likelihood, be limited to those individuals with the white-collar jobs in question.

On the other hand, *FFWD* draws attention to the difference between the wages earned by the high and low income earners in the city, and highlights the difficulties of drawing conclusions from averages. One comment reads:

While not widely acknowledged in Calgary, the gap between the rich and the poor is dramatic. The Canadian Council for Social Development

recently released statistics spelling out the income gap explicitly – the top 10 per cent of Calgarians makes an average of \$248,000 per year while the bottom 10 per cent makes less than \$19,000. Looking at it another way, 109,000 Calgarians were below the poverty line in 2000, with a combined annual income of nearly \$2 billion a year, while the combined annual income of the top 100,000 wage earners in Calgary exceeds \$24 billion a year (Windsor-Smith 2003, n.p.).

The striking difference in incomes between the polarized groups of income earners in the city of Calgary is not addressed by the *Herald*, nor the *Sun*. Problems associated with low income are addressed, but there is a limited discussion about the problems associated with high incomes, such as alarming rates of inflation and costs of living in a city where certain sectors of the population have a significantly larger proportion of disposable income to spend than do others. *FFWD* drew attention to the lack of discussion about poverty and struggle in Calgary. “Wilfreda Thurston, associate professor in the Department of Community Health Services at the University of Calgary, says it’s a complex set of sentiments that result in prevailing attitudes towards the poor. ‘In Calgary, especially,’ she says, ‘it’s easier to forget about the poor when you’re young, healthy and wealthy. There’s a cultural attitude, widely represented in policy discourse, of, *pull yourself up by the bootstraps and get on with things*’” (“Health,” 2001, n.p.).

#### *Paycheque to paycheque dependency*

There was a demonstrated awareness on the part of all three of the newspapers about the stress that is placed on individuals and families whose expenses eat up all of their paycheques (if not more) and have nothing left over for savings. This was one area in which all three papers were on equal footing with one another concerning the struggles of those who do not have a left month left over to put towards saving for a future, or even

ensuring they have enough money to make it through the next month. As one article explains, “an injury, an extra bill, or an illness can throw off an already tight budget so some find themselves without the means to purchase gift for family or groceries for a holiday dinner, let alone save for a downpayment on a home or even make next month’s rent” (Holden 2001, n.p.).

Comments were frequently made about the difficulty that many have with coping with their existing housing costs. “According to the Homeless Awareness Society, 15,000 families in Calgary spend more than half of each paycheque on accommodations and could be one payday away from homelessness” (Myers 2002, p. B1). There was also an acknowledgement of the struggles involved with improving one’s housing situation due to the difficulties of saving enough money to move into rental accommodation or to purchase a home. “It’s hard to scrounge up enough. You’ve got to pay first month’s rent, damage deposit, utilities. That adds up to at least \$1,500 for most places. And you have to eat, too.” (Ferguson 2005, p. B1).

### *Discursive Issues*

One of the most interesting aspects of this project was the identification of terms and expressions that reflect dominant ideas, and naturalize particular relations and ideologies. This section of the project was designed after reflecting upon what Fairclough (1995) had to say about discourse and the assumptions that can be embedded within it. Throughout the newspaper discourse there were several assumptions, claims, and

expressions that I felt necessary to highlight and consider the implications of the use of this language.

### *Alberta advantage*

The “Alberta Advantage” is a phrase frequently touted by businesses, economic development agencies, and the provincial government (Alberta, 2005). It was first used to describe the prosperous economic conditions of the province beginning early in the decade, and refers to what the Government of Alberta calls “performance indicators,” such as: a strong economy; a young, skilled and productive workforce; a modern and efficient infrastructure; and an abundance of natural resources, to name but a few (Government of Alberta, 2006).

There were several direct references made to the Alberta Advantage in the newspaper discourse. Every reference found in *FFWD* challenged the reality of the Alberta Advantage. A sample of these comments reveals the cynicism:

In many ways, Pompeo’s tale marks the flipside of the so-called ‘Alberta Advantage.’ She was caught in the crunch between inadequate welfare rates and skyrocketing increases in utility costs. Unfortunately, she isn’t alone – and her personal story reflects a broader issue (Wild 2003, n.p.).

Government supports and services are needed to provide authentic choices for older adults, and when Dorothy talks about the provincial government’s support, the smile drops from her face. “On the whole, they treat us rather dismally,” she says. “It’s a disadvantage. The Alberta disadvantage!” ...“The Alberta Advantage cheque for seniors bounced,” says Calgary senior Jerry Pitts, the president of the Coalition of Seniors Advocates (COSA), a group that started in 002 when a group of citizens came together to fight for the rights of seniors (Wild 2004, n.p.).

The *Calgary Sun*, however, did not directly mention the “Alberta Advantage,” but instead repeatedly made reference to the many positive aspects of the economic reality in Alberta. When discussing the struggle over finding affordable housing, many quotes were still phrased in such a way that the positives were emphasized first, and the difficulties that occasionally arise with a strong economy were mentioned as aftereffects:

“We’re victims of our own success,” said Ald. Ric McIvor, a member of the CHC board, who believes the city’s growth has played a key role in the increase [in the number of those on the wait list for subsidized housing]. “People come here because they want job opportunities. Who can blame them for trying to make their lives better?” (Pierson 2003, December 3, p. 12).

Articles appearing in the *Calgary Herald* followed much of the same pattern. “Calgary’s growing economic prosperity and exploding population have been cited for boosting housing costs” (Zickefoose 2003, p. S1). The simple act of unpacking this statement reveals some interesting issues. The quote uses the words “growing economic prosperity” to describe something that might also be described as “increasing market pressures,” for example. This demonstrates that the discourse is embedded with pro-market, neo-liberal ideology. The statement suggests to the readers that, in fact, increasing market performance is ideal, and that this reality should be embraced. When the article claims that housing costs are “boosted” does this mean it is a good thing for home owners and investors in the real estate market? Why not suggest that home costs are “rising sharply,” or are “outpacing inflation,” for example? Again “boost” implies something positive, as in to give someone, or some thing, a “boost.” Readers will recognize this language as something that is meant to reassure them; the “boost” represents an improvement. The effect of this language works to prioritize the needs (and fears) of middle and upper income earners, and ignores those who have difficulty keeping up with the growth.

### *Deserving poor*

Throughout the discourse, stories are told of people who are struggling. While storytelling is an effective medium of communication, the description of the characters in the story is often the most revealing feature of the story itself. The *Calgary Herald*, the *Calgary Sun*, and *FFWD* all told stories of individuals who struggle in the city of Calgary. Through these tales, rich descriptions of living with poverty are told, and these stories are often designed to illicit a strong emotional response from the reader:

Mirza Baig arrived in Calgary in 2001, a landed immigrant from Pakistan without a job who had a wife and six-month old daughter. Today, his smile is as big as his face, his eyes are twinkling and he's very emotional. The 35 year-old and his family, which now includes another young daughter, will be moving into their own home in April. "The first thing we will do when we move in is have a celebration," says Baig. "I never dreamed that I'd ever be a homeowner in three years since moving here." ...Baig manages a local convenience store. Employment is a criteria of Habitat for Humanity families (Hope 2002a, p. HS1).

Not everyone in need fits the frayed-beard-and-shoeless image that Hollywood portrays. ...At one home, a teenager answered the door in a velvet t-shirt similar to one in my own wardrobe. In another home, dance music was playing in the background – a song I often have blaring in my car. We saw a beaming, grateful and even surprised faces of people, who excitedly directed us to stake the boxes of food, gifts, and household goods in their spotlessly-kept but small and sparsely furnished living rooms, many of which were in social housing (Holden 2001, p. 6).

Additionally, many seniors who are classified as 'non poor' are 'nearly poor,' therefore, even minor reductions in income result in increased poverty. This picture does not fit with the conventional notion that seniors are generally well off. Nor does it mesh with visions of retirement peddled by the financial trade. Still, these perceptions remain, and continue to inform both public discourse and social policy development. Pitts tell of seniors who take only half a pill instead of a full pill in order to save money. He also recounts a tale of a senior selling sedatives on the street strictly to make ends meet. These anecdotes may be exceptions, but Pitts argues they are suggestive of the plight of many seniors. "Some times it's eat or heat," he says (Wild 2004, n.p.).

While these tales work to personalize the issues around poverty and those deemed to be poor, or nearly poor, they also create dualistic categories of the “deserving” versus “undeserving poor.” This is problematic because people, their circumstances, their choices, their socio-economic status, and their history are categorized and are ascribed a status by others. As it reported in one article in *FFWD*, former premier Ralph Klein quipped ““If you can afford to drink, I guess you’re really not that poor”” (Laird 2002, n.p.). The judgment and categorization is reflected in the newspaper discourse, and in policy (to be discussed later).

This discourse, and the process of interviewing people who are low income earners only shores up the public assumption that people who earn less money have failed in some manner. Food, clothing and shelter are assumed to be the three basic necessities of life, and the way the discourse is framed is from a perspective that these people are unable to provide the basic necessities for their families, or are unable to exhibit that sense of independence, or self-reliance, that characterizes the Alberta way. After the failure is identified, the media discourse then typically details some form of charitable program that will provide those low income earners with a “fresh start.”

### *Fresh start*

Throughout the newspaper discourse in the two daily papers, there were several references made about giving poor people a chance to start over. For example:

“It’s not hand-out housing, it’s hand-up,” said Stephanie Felesky, director of the Canada Land’s Company’s board of directors. “People need a chance to make a fresh start” (Seskus 2004, p. A9).

“There is certainly a stigma associated with affordable housing that is not necessarily deserved,” says Stamm. “The myth is that somehow people in social housing want to stay there. In fact, most are looking for a chance to get their life in order and to get into ownership rather than staying there forever,” he says, adding 85% of those applying through the program have a job. “They are just like everyone else. They all dream of having a home of their own” (Holden 2001, p. 6).

For other Calgary families living paycheque to paycheque, Brown says Habitat is a dream come true. “I never thought I would qualify. The process is so simple. There are a lot of families like us who are hesitant, but it just happens to everyday people. That’s important to me because I know there are lots of families out there who struggle” (Hope 2003a, p. HS9 ).

These quotes suggest that those people who need the “fresh start” did something wrong and, in effect, need to be blessed with a second chance – one afforded by the general public. The language implies that poverty is associated with series of mistakes, or poor choices. The discourse also implies that anyone, and everyone, should be able to avoid a life of poverty, if only they do the right things. Such logic fails to acknowledge problems and difficulties that fall outside of an individual’s control, ignoring such things as discrimination or health concerns.

### *Taxpayers’ money*

Discussions about the merits of federal, provincial and municipal housing plans and programs were often accompanied by comments about the use of taxpayer’s money. The discourse published in the *Calgary Sun* was, by far, the most critical of additional taxation and was particularly concerned with the potential “wasting” of taxpayer dollars. When residents of Lynnview Terrace were evicted from their subsidized units, after the

City sold the units back to Imperial Oil due to soil contamination, they were given \$5,000 (up from \$4,000 that was originally proposed) by the City to help pay for relocation costs, utility set up, and for the inconvenience. “Not everyone agreed with the \$1,000 grant hike – Ald. Ric McIvor argued the tax payer has been forgotten. ‘Most people would consider that (\$4,000) a generous and fair offer,’ said McIvor” (Kaufmann 2002, December 12, p. 12).

The *Calgary Herald* included quotes from those who evaluated housing plans and programs according to their efficiency. One article, in particular, was very telling. The key statement was as follows, “He applauds the federal initiative as a smart way to use taxpayers’ money, rather than building new affordable housing” (McCormick 2005c, p. J5). The speaker in question believes that there are many ways to use taxpayers’ money that would not be so smart, at least from his perspective. Efficiency, however, is subjective, and is a measure that is dependent upon factors that are at the discretion of the evaluator. The factors that are considered important by the evaluator will always be influenced by their perspective and own personal biases. To suggest that one can conduct evaluations without bias is naïve, and the *Calgary Herald’s* failure to include the opinions of others in this particular article was also revealing. In effect, this afforded authority to the position that held that building new affordable housing would be wasteful an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars, and the *Calgary Herald* discretely endorsed this position without discussing the merits of building new units.

When discussing the costs associated with developing new communities and subdivision, the *Calgary Sun* reported that City Hall was in favour of developers paying for the construction of streets, sewers, and water infrastructure. The comments in the Sun reflected a concern with rising costs. “If the city hikes rates paid by developers, the costs of new homes must also rise. ...It would mean more cash coming out of homeowners’ pockets – in effect, a tax grab” (Nogier 2002b, p. H2). When discussing the same issue, *FFWD* chose to include comments from city planners looking to implement these development charges:

Paul Cochrane, section head of new community planning in the city’s land use planning section, says it’s difficult to put a price tag on the infrastructure required when new development occurs. He explains that costs are typically split between the city and the developer. The developer pays for the costs of the local services, such as community roads, lanes, pipes, street signs, lights, local pathways and other expenses, and contributes towards the cost of regional transportation needs. The city pays for services which benefit the entire city population, including larger roads, freeways interchanges and transit. These costs are eventually passed on to the taxpayers and the home buyer, but Cochrane says allocating those costs is a challenge, and the revenue generated by the new taxpayer isn’t enough to pay for all new infrastructure, such as LRT extensions. (McNamee 2001, n.p.)

Taxation was clearly a hot-button issue for the Sun, while this was not the case for *FFWD*, as *FFWD* gave the city much more space to explain their rationale behind the increase in charges.

Not only was *FFWD* not as strongly opposed to tax increases as the *Calgary Sun* was, this paper actually included comments about the potential benefits that could be reaped by raising taxes in the city of Calgary. When discussing homelessness, the idea of raising taxes was touted as a possible solution to many of the problems that contribute to

the homeless crisis. “He says the city should take the lead in dealing with homelessness instead of simply waiting for more money from higher levels of government. For example, Perras says the city could raise taxes by 1/10 of a per cent and give that money to shelters. Even that relatively small move ‘would make a huge difference in taking care of people’” (Klaszuz 2004, n.p.).

One of the assumptions built into the discussion about taxpayers and their money, was the assumption that low income earners are not considered taxpayers, or at least not on the same level as those who earn higher wages. There is no acknowledgement in the conservative discourse that property taxes are built into rental costs, or that those who are considered to be “low income” by the city still pay a percentage of personal income tax and the GST as not all low income earners will qualify GST cheques. Those who struggle are framed in such a way that their needs do not matter as much because they are not really taxpayers, and this assumption is clearly false one. The more income one earns, the more their opinions and needs are considered to be paramount.

#### *Housing “conveniences” and “expectations”*

As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, the mainstream media has a tendency to celebrate charitable programs that benefit the lucky few. In several stories that highlight the “good news” character of the Habitat for Humanity programs, new homeowners are quoted as being thrilled with their new accommodations, and thankful for their new space. The authors of the articles, however, typically comment on the sparse, or simplicity, of the accommodation:

Each unit is just under 1,000 square feet on two levels, with an undeveloped basement. In keeping with the Habitat mandate, the homes are simple, decent and affordable, with three modestly sized bedrooms, one bathroom, great room and basic kitchen. Conveniences such as dishwashers, microwaves or second bathrooms are noticeably lacking, but Reid explains Habitat's desire to keep costs down. Even without these "extras," the townhomes are very appealing (McDowell 2005, p. N1).

There is still the reminder that the housing that is donated, or afforded, to the low income family, and that the unit is not necessarily on par with what a middle income earner would come to expect; the economic hierarchy is subtly built into the story. In effect, this ensures that those who did not receive an interest free mortgage through Habitat for Humanity do not feel threatened by the benefit that was provided. The article contains several suggestions that the program is not simply about handouts, and it is a distinctly political dance. These articles are embedded with subtle messages, ensuring that low income earners are not given too much, and not lead to believe that they are suddenly members of the middle class, a class complete with microwaves and dishwashers and those other "extras."

The *Calgary Sun* ran a story about rising housing prices, and discussed the impact of mortgage rate hikes and increasing housing costs on those looking to purchase a home in Calgary. "In Calgary, the average price of a new home has been forecast to hit \$307,000. In this case an increase of 25 basis point – on a five-year mortgage with a 25 percent down payment – would only add another \$40 to monthly carrying costs. It never fails, though, that any time there is a rate hike, a few buyers are taken out of the market or have to adjust their housing expectations" (Hope 2005, September 10, p. J10). This statement suggests that the reality is that there will be those who will not be able to own

(or, possibly even afford to rent) their own home in the city, end of discussion. The suggestion that one might need to adjust one's housing expectations is somewhat of a "too bad so sad" approach to the reality of sharply rising housing costs. Is it not worth discussing the possibility that an individual or family with an income of \$60,000 will be unable to purchase a home in the city of Calgary? \$60,000 is not considered to be a low income by any stretch and yet, today, it is enough to purchase property. Do those earning \$60,000 really need to adjust their expectations, or is it time to have a meaningful discussion about the meaning, and the value, of owning the roof that is over one's head?

To be fair, the discussion of the impact of the rising costs was really quite limited in the article. As costs increase, it is not really just about a \$40 adjustment in carrying costs; the impact upon the city is actually quite significant and this was not unpacked in any meaningful way. For example, the author might have chosen to discuss the impact of rising prices in Calgary on the growth of bedroom communities that lie outside the city. These cities have seen their populations rise, and the numbers of commuters into Calgary has increased. There is increased wear on city roads by those commuters who do not pay city property taxes, for example. Given the earlier discussion about the *Calgary Sun's* discussion about taxes, one would think that the maintenance costs for roads in Calgary that are borne by city taxpayers might be an issue that the *Calgary Sun* might be concerned with. This is just one small example about the impact of using lackadaisical language about house price increases. There are many implications for individuals and for the city in which they live. Simply adjusting expectations might not be the best approach to handling rising costs.

## *Research and Funding*

### *Expert Opinion and Business Interests*

The *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun* heavily relied upon the analysis of market pressures provided by those employed with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) in their stories about affordability in the city. In fact, the opinions of Richard Corriveau, senior market analyst for Calgary from the CMHC, were cited more often than the opinions of any other professional involved in any aspect of housing, including academics, city planners, and builders. In fact, he was cited in nine articles in the data set; his opinion appeared far more often than any other organization, agency, or expert.

Corriveau's comments were heavily relied upon when stories written to reassure people about affordability in the city. In 2002, when it was believed that housing prices were beginning to increase at rates faster than inflation, Corriveau corrected this assumption and claimed that after adjusting for inflation, housing prices were actually the same as they were in 1985:

It's true – housing affordability is alive and well in Calgary, so it's no wonder people are buying. ... While the real average price has been on an upward trend since 1985, monthly mortgage payments have remained stable, says the Calgary market analyst. ... "So, housing is affordable now as it was 16 years ago," says Corriveau. And while we're on the subject of affordability, payments, etc., Corriveau also reports that Calgarians are the most leveraged home buyers in the province. "No surprise there," he says, "seeing as how we have the highest housing prices of any city in Alberta" (Hope 2003b, p. HS3).

The above series of statements seems rather counter-intuitive, and leads one to question what comments one should consider as the most important in deciding whether or not

Calgary truly is affordable. Essentially, readers are told that while homebuyers in Calgary have the most debt, but that housing is still affordable, and nothing has changed in sixteen years.

What is interesting is that no other expert is brought in to question nor clarify any of the statements that he makes. Corriveau is the expert in Calgary, and this status frequently affirmed in the discourse. This is dangerous for public discourse, because the mainstream media has not given credence to any other organization, and academics will agree that there are many ways to interpret data, run numbers, and evaluate particular measures of affordability. In fact, one might question the relationship between the CMHC and business groups after one comment was reported in the *Calgary Herald*:

“We have a great partner in (the federal) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp” he says. “They are actively providing direction and reviewing issues that affect housing affordability.” One such study now underway will examine the effects of municipal development charges on housing affordability – an issue that is a priority with the Canadian Home Builders’ Association (McCormick 2005b, p. J11).

To rely upon the opinions of one individual, from one federal agency, with all the embedded interests and motivations from a single department, is dangerous. This reliance on one commentator reveals a failure on the part of both mainstream newspapers to challenge particular sets of assumptions about affordability, debt, and the ability of some Calgarians to fully participate in the Calgary housing market.

#### *Funding for Housing Initiatives*

There was no discussion about public funding for housing initiatives whatsoever in any of the data collected from the *Calgary Sun*. Interestingly, the *Calgary Herald*

included one telling figure in a 2005 story about homelessness research. “The Calgary Homeless Foundation survey also revealed Calgarians have an explicit concern about the lack of affordable housing, and 83 per cent want to see more government funding for homeless initiatives” (Myers 2005, p. B5). Though the Calgary Homeless Foundation’s survey data (sample size, household income, et cetera) was not available in the article for public scrutiny, it is interesting that it was reported that such a high proportion of residents reported additional government funding, while hardly any calls for additional funding were discussed in either daily newspaper. The focus of these newspapers was on charitable foundations, such as land trust development, Habitat for Humanity programs, and websites that advertised low cost rental units for free (Zickefoose 2003; McCormick 2005a; Gray 2003).

The daily newspapers did report on announced plans and partnerships, such as the federal government’s Affordable Housing Partnerships Initiative, and calls from city politicians for more federal and provincial monetary support. However, there was not a cry for help or an acknowledgement of the crisis in the daily papers as there was in

*FFWD:*

Dufresne argues that nobody tells the public the real truth about poverty in Alberta – and that is one of the major goals of ACAP. “The federal government is the main problem when they bailed out of housing in the 1990s. Klein’s cutbacks are also a main cause. And there’s not rent control which is a large part of why there is such a mess,” he contends (Wild 2002, n.p.).

The City of Calgary has been conducting homeless counts every two years since 1992. The statistics are used to plan an adequate response to the city’s homeless problem. McDowell-Hood says agencies working with the homeless are collaborating much more than they used to and there’s better planning to meet the needs of the homeless. However, she says, until

governments spend more money addressing the problem, it will continue to escalate (Steele 2004, n.p.).

*FFWD* does not mince words, while the stories and assessments printed in the daily newspapers are far more forgiving, if not completely uncritical of the programs and investment levels.

### *Research*

Research conducted by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Calgary Homeless Foundation was given precedence in the daily newspaper discourse. These two organizations, one a federal agency, the other a non-profit founded by two prominent business leaders in Calgary, were given a level of authority that was unmatched in the literature. While the City of Calgary has a relatively large body of research related to housing, it was rarely mentioned. Given that the City has lobbied both provincial and federal government for money to invest in housing programs, one might assume that their research might be worth reporting on. However, this was not the case. I am not sure what the motivations behind this decision were, but the reality is that this research received minimal coverage.

### *Political Issues*

Some argue that everything is political, and this certainly is true when it comes to housing issues. This section is broken up into three distinct discussions. One concerns the role of the mayor, one discusses the role of other elected officials, and lastly, it ends with a discussion about the struggle over which level of government is responsible for funding housing programs.

*Politicians: The Mayor*

The mayor of Calgary has claimed that he is committed to affordable housing issues in the city of Calgary. He is considered to be “one of the city’s longest advocates for affordable housing,” and has made a concerted effort to engage multiple stakeholders in the problem solving process (Babin 2003a, n.p.). In November of 2003, the Mayor hosted a Roundtable on Affordable Housing in Calgary. Fifty representatives from the development, building, finance, non-profit and government sectors attended this roundtable. The scale of this roundtable was significant, and given the wide range of participants, it was surprising that there were no comments about the roundtable in the *Calgary Sun*, and only two comments found in the *Calgary Herald*:

In light of Mayor Dave Bronconnier’s recent round-table on affordable housing, the city is discussing with non-profit organizations and business leaders how to implement building plans during the next four years. Another round-table will be held in February (Bracegirdle 2003, p. N1).

Because it has been nearly a decade since significant funding had been made available for affordable housing there is now a shortage of experience in organizing such complex projects. Mayor Dave Bronconnier held two roundtable meeting in recent months to discuss how all local interest – including non-profit and industry players – could work together to address the problem. As a result, all sides are looking at coordinating efforts, with a number of industry interests willing to donate the needed expertise. Still, there’s been a limited response from the non-profit and private sectors to initiate projects (Seskus 2004, p. A9).

Given that this information reveals that there was relatively little funding made available for nearly ten years, and this was the first time a roundtable of this magnitude was held, it was surprising to see how limited the coverage of such an event was.

There was far more coverage of the Mayor's attendance at grand openings of housing units and groundbreaking ceremonies than there was of coverage of this non-ceremonial event. It was as if the media downplayed the Mayor's role as an activist and, instead, chose to focus on his ceremonial role as city ambassador. For example, the Mayor's "two percent" solution was widely criticized by the *Calgary Sun*. "Ever-increasing demand is pushing affordable housing out of reach – yet at the same time Mayor Dave Bronconnier wishes to increase the levies to develop new home lots," and yet the Sun failed to provide any coverage or comment on the Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing (Holden 2004, n.p.). Instead, comments that were relatively unimportant got press:

After spending time last week officially opening Cyprus Greens, Bronconnier presented Johnson with a Welcome Wagon basket. "Welcome to your new home and your new community," he said to her (Hope 2002, October 26, p. HS1).

Despite the fact that the Mayor is a political figure that has the potential to create and foster debate, the media is selective about which role they choose to give him. While *FFWD* claims that he is a long time activist, the *Calgary Herald* chose to write about the Welcome Wagon basket he presented to a new resident. In effect, both daily newspapers minimized the mayor's activism, and failed to give much press to those who looked for change outside of reliance upon charities and non-profit organizations.

*Politicians: Aldermen, MLAs and MPs*

Aldermen were frequently cited in stories about the developing crisis with housing affordability in the city of Calgary. Quotes about the problems of NIMBYism, condominium development, and shelters were frequently solicited from aldermen, while

not a single comment was included in any of the papers from local members of parliament about the lack of federal investment in housing. While it is widely known that problems with affordable housing escalated after the federal government withdrew its involvement in social housing in 1993, there were no reports in any of the newspapers in regards to direct lobbying with local Members of Parliament (MPs) for additional housing dollars.

Aldermen were the first stop for a comment about housing, and media reports give the impression that housing is strictly a municipal concern. Given that the responsibility for housing was downloaded from the federal government to the provincial government, which in turn placed the responsibility onto municipalities, the newspaper discourse effectively shored up the impression that housing is strictly a municipal issue. One exception to this statement is the comments from Jon Lord, MLA about the debate over illegal basement suites in the province. However, the two articles concerning Mr. Lord's opinions about illegal basement suites in the province could hardly be seen as suggestive that the province is committed to problem solving when it comes to dealing with the affordable housing crisis.

#### *Responsibility for Funding*

The newspaper discourse provided some evidence of the struggle to obtain funding for housing initiatives. There is often uncertainty over which level of government responsibility for funding affordable housing projects, given that public spending announcements come from all three levels of government. There was evidence in the

discourse that the discord over funding between various levels of government is an ongoing political issue, as is the appeasement of funders in order to ensure the success of future funding agreements:

The second phase of the Canada-Alberta Affordable Housing Program Agreement consists of a commitment of 31.5 million from each of the federal and provincial governments. While Fontana hailed the deal as a cost-effective investment in people, Bronconnier wants the Feds and Alberta to provide municipalities with block funding for more timely aid (Saelhof 2005, p. 10).

Layton says the federal government scrapped long-standing affordable housing initiatives in the mid '90s, but didn't provide any resources to the provinces to pick up the slack (Babin 2002a, n.p.).

Calgary Ald. Ric McIvor, a member of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, says that the local government must also be accountable. "Senior levels of government need to appreciate that the need is there, so when we get future infrastructure money we need to spend it on the infrastructure side to illustrate that," says McIvor (McCormick 2005, May 14, p. A11).

While the comments are often subtle, there is a general acknowledgement that the municipality must be careful not to bite the hand that feeds them, all the while lobbying for more money to dedicate to housing issues. "A few million dollars might seem like a lot of money but Paquette said it will barely scratch the surface of the issue. 'This is a very small band-aid covering open heart surgery,' said Paquette" (Bracegirdle 2003, p. N1). The undertone is that there is nowhere near enough funding to make legitimate headway into adequately attacking the problem, but those who are receiving funding are careful not to compromise what little they do have.

*Generally Speaking...*

The economic reality of the working poor in Calgary was emphasized by all three newspapers, but those struggling with illnesses, language barriers, permanent disabilities, discrimination and other factors that contribute to housing insecurity were infrequently addressed. If anything, the recognition of the additional barriers that people face, and the reasons why poverty is often inescapable for many low income earners, was glazed over, at best, by the two major daily papers.

*FFWD* provided a critical discussion about the issues that contribute to housing insecurity, but they failed to integrate many comments from other community members involved in housing development that were so frequently celebrated in the Herald and in the Sun.

The *Calgary Herald* maintained an uncritical, pro-business and development approach to the housing debate, favouring comments made by business leaders and professional associations over talking to people who were in need of adequate and affordable housing.

The *Calgary Sun* had a plethora of stories related to the number of new housing starts, condominium sales, and affordability statistics. Many of the articles were so heavily embedded with the interests of developers, mortgage brokers, and real estate investors that there was little else outside of this specific kind of reporting. It was designed to make Calgarians feel good about the growth in the local economy, and often

used language that attempted to convince the reader that there was actually little to worry about in terms of affordability.

The following chapter will unpack the discourse found in policy documents produced by the City of Calgary, and a comparison of the two data sets can be found in Chapter 7.

## **Chapter 6: Policy Findings**

This chapter is concerned with the results from the analysis of the policy documents selected for this project, and sets out accomplish three things. First, it addresses the issues that were unique to the document collection process and analysis of the policy-related components of the project. Next, a discussion of the results of the data analysis addresses issues such as gender in policy, bureaucratic barriers, and the lost voices of low-income earners. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of the housing-related policy produced by the City.

### **Engaging in Policy Analysis**

Unlike the search for examples of media discourse relating to housing issues, the process of finding policy documents to include in this project was a challenging one. While it was relatively easy to locate newspaper coverage, the same cannot be said for municipal policy. In fact, there were multiple barriers to overcome before it was possible to determine whether or not there was a comprehensive and representative sample of policy documents in place prior to beginning the critical discourse analysis component of the project.

#### *Access to information*

Difficulties arose with my initial attempts to locate municipal policy publications, and these problems became evident in a number of ways. First, the City of Calgary website was frequently reorganized, and there was some difficulty identifying where

certain documents could be found from one week to the next. This also made it difficult to determine whether or not the documents that were found were relevant, up-to-date, or even still considered to be part of the City's overall policy strategy. In fact, a phone interview with a city of Calgary employee (anonymous) revealed that even city employees had difficulty finding documents because of the differences between documents that are available to the public, and those available on the employee-only intranet.

Second, there was a noticeable lack of a centralized location in which one might find information about housing policy in the city of Calgary. Documents related to housing issues were published by several different departments and, at the time of data collection, these documents were not available on one central webpage. This made it difficult to identify whether or not all the available information concerning housing policy was retrieved.

Third, contact made with city employees was often uncomfortable and generally fruitless. Phone calls and emails typically garnered hesitant responses that were usually inadequate. Given their answers, it appeared that the City employees felt pressured to protect information, and release only what might be appropriate. There also seemed to be an uncertainty about what "appropriate" included; the criteria that were used, or might have been, used to define "appropriate" were left undefined. On more than one occasion I was asked why I wanted to know about housing policy, and who I was affiliated with. These discussions were also awkward for me, as it felt like I was being interrogated. I

found myself expecting to be told that my research was inappropriate. In fact, I was told by one upper-level city manager that there was very little worthy of study, as mentioned earlier.

These barriers presented an awkward beginning to the project. The numerous obstacles to finding data early on in the research process gave the impression that the city did, in fact, have something to hide. Information about housing policy was not available at the City Archives; nor were copies of documents made available at the public library. Thus, it was difficult to locate relevant information. I developed concerns about gatekeepers early on in the research process. While municipalities in Alberta are required to integrate the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation into their practices, there continued to be multiple barriers to overcome in order to access information about housing policy in the city. The dissemination of information is often a political act. Concerns about transparency, along with program and policy accountability were there from the very beginning of the project, and these barriers were a noteworthy challenge to this project.

### *Defining Policy & Engaging in Policy Analysis*

Brooks and Miljan (2003) suggest that policy involves “conscious choice that leads to deliberate action – the passage of law, the spending of money, an official speech or gesture, or some other observable act – or inaction” (p. 4). What constitutes a policy document, are textual materials that might be associated with either those observable acts, or with perceived “inaction.” For the purposes of this project, policy refers to textual

documents that have the potential to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes in the policy process, and which are produced for that purpose. These documents could include published research papers, study findings, calculations, lists of goals, proceedings from discussion groups and procedural forms reflecting organizational priorities, to name a few. Policy is often perceived to be a method by which people's needs are met by the welfare state. Given this underlying assumption, Fraser's discussions of 'needs talk,' and the way in which it is constructed within, and projected by policy documents, is highly relevant for this particular piece of the project.

As discussed in a previous chapter, the process of unpacking and evaluating policy data requires the researcher to be cognizant of several key issues. It is imperative that the researcher is aware of word choice, tone, emphasis and authorial voice, and the way in which the authority of statements made in textual materials is designated or indicated. This can be accomplished by directing attention to the specific words that are used and how they are used. Are specific, value-laden terms used instead of other neutral or inoffensive ones? For example, references could be made in official documents concerning those who are transient and without a fixed address as "homeless," or in a letter to the editor of a newspaper, members of this population might also be referred to as "bums." The latter is a value-laden, and politically incorrect (if not insensitive, at the very least). From this example, one can see that the language used to describe something can be just as telling as what is being described. The following paragraphs will unpack the organization and presentation of information that appears frequently throughout the policy discourse in order to demonstrate how the parameters of what is "discussable"

within policy are set, and how the politics of word choice, tone, and authority operate within the construction of these discussable, or appropriate, parameters.

*Example: Constructing the Problems of the Primary Household Maintainer*

The City of Calgary produced policy that contained statistical information concerning the features of the *primary household maintainer*, and addressed such categories as [the presence of a] disability, those over the age of 65, single parent status, and aboriginal descent. While the hard numbers are entered into tables and fact sheets, it is up to the reader to make decisions about why certain categories of people are struggling and why, in many cases, the City has refrained from discussing the results of their research. For example, in *Research Brief #14: Research Brief #14: Housing Affordability in Calgary, by Age, for Households with the Presence of Disability in the Household*, the City presents a series of tables that outline the percentage of primary household maintainers with the presence of a disability in the house who are overspending on shelter. The document contains a myriad of statements that, while factual, still leave the reader with unanswered questions. It notes:

As Table 1 shows, 42 percent of all renter households in Calgary with the Presence of Disability in the Household are in need of affordable housing because they have low income and they spend more than 30 percent of gross household income on shelter (Calgary 2004n, p. 4).

The quotation above has an authoritative tone and it sounds as if there is little left to discuss or to question. However, this statement fails to provide insight as to the cause of the stated low income and there is no further speculation as to these causes in any other part of the document. In fact, this statement provides no suggestion whatsoever as to why a disability might lead to low income. Is it due to discrimination on the part of employers?

Is it because the social welfare system provides inadequate benefits? Is it because workplaces have been unable to accommodate those with physical impairments? Or is it because there is a lack of housing that is suited to the needs of an individual with a disability? Without adequate answers to these questions, the City's claim that these research briefs function as a comprehensive body of research that will help inform interested parties about the need for affordable housing in the city is questionable (Calgary, 2006a). Consideration of these kinds of additional questions leaves the reader to wonder what kind of organizational constraints might have been at play to create this discursive effect. Could it have been a result of time limitations during the production of the text? Were there limited resources dedicated to statistical analyses or additional research? Was the research team unable, or unwilling, to make determinations about what constitutes or qualifies as a 'disability,' and therefore decided to leave the questions unanswered? The text itself does not provide the reader with any indication of the process involved with constructing the text. Dorothy Smith would argue that the process behind "producing, authorizing, accumulating, reading and forwarding texts" is what provides the reader with telling information about institutional action, and the institutional regime of which it is a part (Smith 2005, p. 173). Thus, while it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct an institutional ethnography of the actual production of the text, one might suggest that the text itself signals (1) that the identification of households headed by persons with disabilities was organizationally important, but that (2) identification of specific causal and consequential factors affecting those with disabilities in need of housing was defined as 'out of scope' for reasons that may have had to do with time, budget, resources, or politics.

The reader might justly assume that the purpose of the City-produced research briefs is to inform policy makers and citizens about housing-related problems and to bring about suggestions for change. Without making direct claims about the problem-solving capabilities of these briefs, these pieces of policy can work to shore up assumptions about people who are struggling. If you are disabled, old, a single parent, or aboriginal, you are poor because you are overspending on shelter. The word choice here is critical; specific groups of people are *overspending*, as opposed to simply being *unable to afford market rents*. This is not just a case of simple semantics. Word choice, and the power that language has, works to construct the reader's impressions of the housing difficulties in the city. When the wording of policy documents suggests that people are overspending, it implies that this problem is the fault of the individual, that they have failed to budget, and that they have not done their part to find affordable housing in a flexible and accommodating market place. This word choice works to solidify the assertion that the housing market actually does cater to a variety of income brackets.

The practice of labeling and categorization (such as *the disabled*, *people of aboriginal descent*), on the part of the City does little to change the fact that someone "overspends" on shelter, and this research is limited to identifying the prevalence of struggle. This kind of research, particularly the series of Research Briefs on Housing Need, emphasizes the specific category characteristics of individuals who are spending too much money in the private housing market, as opposed to drawing attention to the reality that the private market is unable to respond to a variety of economic needs. The

*Research Brief Series*, a series of seventeen documents at the time of collection, did not provide an explanation of the reasons behind the inclusion, or exclusion in the research briefs, of particular categories of people. For example, immigrants to the city were not included in the research brief series, despite the fact that much literature suggests that immigrants face a difficult time finding and security affordable housing (Graham 2005; Hulchanski, 1997). The language suggests to the reader that individuals have failed, and that particular groups of people are more prone to fail, or face difficulties. Given that no attention is paid to *why* particular groups tend to overspend, this practice of labeling and categorization works to allow readers to create identities for those who struggle with housing costs. Categorizing individuals, and labeling their inability to find affordable housing as “overspending,” can be as troublesome as the act of overspending itself.

When the City labels groups of people who are struggling with housing affordability as people unable to meet their needs (and the needs of their families), there are consequences attached to the label. Labeling contributes to development, and reinforcement, of social stigma (Goffman, 1963). G.H. Mead was concerned with the process by which individuals are categorized and described by others in society, and the consequences of how individuals internalize these external judgments (Jary and Jary, 2000). He suggested that labeling plays a role in regulation of the self, and of behaviours that will ultimately be viewed, and judged, by others. This has a connection with the research process at the City of Calgary, as labels ascribed by the City to various types of the primary household maintainers, could have costs that extend beyond the resulting graphs and charts that the City produces. For example, the single parent who is able to

pay the rent, even though it exceeds 30 or 50 percent of their income, is effectively (and publicly) being told that they are unable to adequately provide for themselves and their families, despite their own assessment of their financial situation. If such parents view themselves as successfully getting by under extremely difficult circumstances, or consider themselves to be a hard worker, or a fighter, it can become problematic when their own views are contrasted with public policy that defines them as achieving unsatisfactory budgetary results. There are social consequences associated with this labeling in research. For example, if a parent is labeled as one who is unable to provide a safe home for their children, the possibility exists that child welfare could become involved, and this could have a serious impact upon the family unit. The reality that results from this kind of labeling cannot be dismissed as inconsequential.

## Data Results

### *Construction of “The City”*

Throughout this project, I use the term “the City” to refer to the municipal government of Calgary and to the source and authorship of policy documents published by the City of Calgary. This word choice was influenced by two factors. First, many of these documents do not have authorship attributed to individuals. Instead, the “City of Calgary,” with the appropriate department title, holds the primary author position. Second, the policy documents themselves consistently refer to the actions, policies, and goals of the municipal government as those that belong to “the City.” For example, one document contains this reference:

The overall strategy for the creation of affordable housing in Calgary will be a sum of the efforts and resources from all these agencies and organization, including The City. As The City must in large part react to initiatives taken by other bodies, it cannot develop an exclusive statement of its strategies and long term objectives except in very general terms (Calgary 2002, p. 7).

“The City,” then, is discursively constructed as author and policy agent. The municipality affords itself its own title and, through language, constructs its own agency. It is afforded its own voice, and this exercised through the discussion about “its” goals, abilities, and responsibilities. The voice of “the City” is created through the production of facts about “it.” Smith (1974) has addressed how the production of texts shapes the understanding of a formal organization, or institution. She writes:

Where factual documents are concerned, their production and contexts of reading present a more complex picture. Moreover the socially organized production of records, accounts, statistics, etc., is seldom a purely specialized activity as it is. For example, in the relatively rare instance of the census, or the registration of births, deaths and marriages. In many if not in most cases the production of factual accounts is done as part of the operation of formal organization and is an intrinsic aspect of its regulatory procedures (p. 257).

The process of constructing “the City” is done, in part, by taking the work produced by individuals who work for the municipality and grouping their contributions together under the umbrella of the organization, and ascribing it an animate status. In this case, it is the production of policy that is accounted for in textual documents that helps to construct the City as an active entity with its own voice.

An individual’s understanding of “the City” is influenced by these practices of the production of facts. Smith draws attention to the ways in which relationships can be mediated by facts:

The practice of fact and the social organization contexts which construct it (as commodities are constructed in the social organization of production for exchange) creates not an intersubjective world known tacitly among those sharing a here and now of co-presence, but a world in which subjectivities are constituted as discrete and in opposition to the objectively known (Smith 1974, p. 259).

Smith is arguing that the construction of the anonymous, universal “voice” of an organization is accomplished through the creation of a documentary reality of the organization in question and this “voice” in turn works to create objects of knowledge or “targets” of policy who are individualized rather than being recognized as members of communities, social networks or shared intersubjective worlds of experience. This organizational construction of an institutional voice works to assign authority, and additional power, to an institution that individuals have daily experiences and interactions with. The creation of an institutional voice also works to solidify ideas about accountability, authority, and responsibility (Smith, 2005). If the institution has mechanisms built within it to offer consequences to potential actions (or inactions) it makes sense, organizationally, to create a voice for the body that has this kind of power. This voice, and the mechanisms it articulates, serves to individualize and categorize “clients” or “persons in need.” Policy documents frequently refer to the City as if it is something that has the ability to exercise its own agency. Jary and Jary (2000) describe agency as:

The power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure. The term is intended to convey the volitional, purposive nature of human activity as opposed to its constrained, determined aspects (p. 9).

Note that this definition describes the role of human activity, not the role of institutions or organizations. Therefore, one might believe that it is not the organization that has agency, but those individuals who act on its behalf. However, as Smith (2005) explains:

The ruling relations are a complex and massive coordinating of people's work. Intentions, desires, opportunities, impediments, blockage, and powerlessness arise within them. The texts that constitute and regulate (D.E. Smith 2001a) establish agency, that is, textually specified capacities to control and mobilize the work of others. Textually sanctioned agency produced as power that is generated by the concerting and mobilization of people's work (p. 183).

Given that the idea of the City as agent is so heavily embedded within the discourse, I have adopted the use of this term and thereby acknowledge the effective discursive power that "the City" has as a text-mediated institutional agent.

### *Identifying the Audience*

The City talks about affordable housing development in ways that appeal to income earners, taxpayers, and those with a fiscal bottom line in mind. In the City's *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy* there are five stated goals in regards to planning and regulation. These are:

To encourage competition and choice in the housing marketplace,

To support and provide implementation tools for affordable housing initiatives,

To facilitate research and experimentation to reduce housing costs through innovation in housing types and construction methods,

To explore ways to expedite the development process for affordable housing projects; and

To actively pursue changes to statutory regulations and the building code to facilitate affordable housing (Calgary 2002, p. 13).

From this statement, it is apparent that these strategies were developed with particular audiences in mind, and it appears as if the values of taxpayers, business people, and auditors are represented. These goals are framed in a business-driven language, with an acknowledgement of and emphasis on market forces (“competition and choice in the housing marketplace”) and business strategies (“implementation tools”). These goals reflect the attitudes of fiscal conservatism, and do not account for the values those who struggle with housing costs. If the *Affordable Housing Strategy* was geared to those with affordability burdens, the goals might have included such things as “facilitate the transition into affordable housing in a timely fashion,” or “determine what is important to those in housing need,” or “to facilitate the provision of housing as a basic human right.” A people-focused set of goals might have emphasized the needs of those with problems, rather than the needs of those who are concerned with development issues.

In a document entitled *Affordable Housing*, in which the City addresses civic responsibility and inclusion, an opening paragraph reads:

We all have a responsibility to ensure our communities have a range of housing options. By educating yourself on the issues and by supporting affordable housing development in your community, you will contribute to the Vision of Calgary as a vibrant, healthy, healthy safe and caring community (Calgary 2005g, n.p.).

This statement speaks to those who are not in need of adequate housing, and this is apparent for several reasons. First, the opening statement “We have a responsibility to ensure our communities have a range of housing options” is a telling clue. Someone who is struggling with housing would be likely be pleased just to secure housing that meets

most of their needs, let alone a “range” that they could choose from. Secondly, the phrase “by educating yourself on the issues” suggests that the individual reading the document is unaware of the struggles that people in need of housing face. The document subtly addresses people who might be concerned about the introduction of affordable housing units into their communities, or in other words, those who could be labeled as NIMBYs, but does not speak to those who are in need of affordable housing. People in need of housing are framed in a language that elicits sympathy; those who do not have problems with housing affordability should “educate themselves” and be responsible for others who do struggle. This comment reflects a tendency for those in need of housing programs and services to be talked *about*, in a language that employs paternalistic undertones. This is reinforced by highlighting the benefits of social inclusion, as the document includes a passage that reads:

Affordable housing makes sense:

...**SOCIALLY** – provides stability for families and individuals, and builds strong, healthy communities with a sense of place and belongings. Studies show that children who live in safe and stable housing do better in school. People who live in stable housing use health and social services, and the criminal justice system significantly less than those living in unstable housing (Calgary 2005a, n.p.).

This passage reflects the City’s attempt to target a particular audience which, in this case, is its “stakeholders,” a term discussed in further detail below. The passage draws attention to the economic costs of people who access various kinds of social services, both willingly (such as the health system) and possibly unwillingly (the courts, or jail). The suggestion that “people who live in stable housing use health and social services, and the criminal justice system significantly less” implies that those who have a low income and are in need of affordable housing will “cost” the social system at some point. While

the paragraph opens with the term “socially” to identify the social benefits of affordable housing, it is apparent that economic issues are not easily isolated from the discussion.

### *Difficulties with Terminology*

This section is dedicated to drawing attention to elements of policy couched in language that, on examination, appears to be packed with norms and assumptions embedded in the terms used. Or, to put it differently, which appears, by virtue of word choice and organization of words and statements, to recommend to readers particular ways of “completing” the meaning.

#### *“Stakeholders”*

The term *stakeholder* frequently appears throughout the policy discourse. Typically, the term is used in reference to agencies and developers that are involved in some kind of business relationship with the City. For example:

On November 12, 2003 fifty (50) representatives from the development, building, finance, non-profit and government sectors attended a half-day workshop hosted by Mayor Bronconnier to consider ways in which housing stakeholders could take action to create more affordable housing (Calgary 2003, p. 1).

The statement was found in the document entitled the “Mayor’s Roundtable on Affordable Housing.” This Roundtable was touted as significant meeting of the minds, and an important event that Mayor Bronconnier claimed was reflective of his concern about housing affordability in the city. While there were participants from the non-profit housing sector present, no one self-identified as being in need of adequate or affordable housing. This begs the question, are those who face housing insecurity not stakeholders?

Why are they left out to be referred to as “low income Calgarians”? Why then were these people talked about, instead of consulted with? An internet search did not produce any results relating to an association of low income earners, or to those who rent homes.

Others have been able to organize and represent their interests. The Calgary Apartment Association, an organization that represents landlords, claims:

We are the sole credible voice for the residential rental industry in Calgary. We maintain strong relationships with government and other industry associations throughout the province and Canada (Calgary Apartment Association 2007, n.p.).

I was unable to identify any other group that claimed to represent the “voice” of the home renter, nor the low income earner, in policy documents or anywhere else in the public sphere such as in newspapers, internet listings, and nonprofit resources. The lack of an official, organized group of people who are able to ‘voice’ their claims about their housing needs enables the City to make claims on their behalf with relatively little discussion about the accuracy of such interpretations. Those who are able to organize are viewed in such a way that their interests are seen as represented to the exclusion of the interests of those whose voices cannot be heard.

This was not an isolated incident. The term “stakeholder” was continually used throughout the discourse to describe those who hold some kind of political, financial, or intellectual clout. This is an example of an apparent tendency of those in the policy process to favour the input of those who are defined as “contributors,” as opposed to those who are ‘takers’ from the system. This strategy works to disguise the influence that those with resources have, and works to distract the reader from recognizing that this version of problem solving fails to include the opinions of those who are having

difficulties in the first place. This language reveals an embedded sense of paternalism, as if it would make little sense to survey those with difficulties because they got themselves into trouble in the first place. This is a perfect example of what Fraser (1989b) describes as the “politics over needs.” People who are thought to be experts in determining housing needs were invited to the roundtable, while those in housing need were not given the space to voice what these needs actually were.

### *“Leadership Role”*

The term “leadership role” was found throughout the policy documents included in this project. Interestingly, the term was not used in the same fashion in each circumstance. This resulted in some confused interpretations as to what “leadership role” encompasses. For example, in the *Affordable Housing Action Plan* the City claims that its “primary role is to provide leadership and to develop new opportunities for new initiatives through partnerships” (Calgary, 2005e). In the *Mayor’s Follow-Up Roundtable on Affordable Housing*, the City also iterates that it is “dedicated to providing leadership” (Calgary, 2004w). However, the *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy* sent mixed messages about what this so-called “leadership role” entails:

The overall strategy for the creation of affordable housing in Calgary will be a sum of the efforts and resources from all these agencies and organizations, including The City. As The City must in large part react to initiatives taken by other bodies, it cannot develop an exclusive statement of its strategies and long term objectives except in very general terms. ...The City will take leadership in some areas at some times, and may react, support and respond to the lead of other organizations in the same areas at other times (Calgary 2002, p.7).

This statement reveals the City’s reluctance to engage in leadership that is continuous and consistent and, ultimately, to be accountable for the direction of investments, programs

and services that are involved with housing projects. There could be a number of reasons for this reluctance. One reason could be attributed to the political climate in Alberta, especially in Calgary, where big business has influence over many areas. In this pro-business environment, one that is often pro-business at the expense of the individual, neo-conservative business interests and citizen groups often push an agenda that emphasizes the need for market-based solutions for social problems. Government intervention, regardless of the level, is sometimes targeted in media and political campaigns as wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars. It is easy to see how the municipality would want to tread lightly in this area, as housing developers and those who have an interest in high real estate values might challenge any City involvement in this area. The less involved the municipality is, the less pressure from those who believe in minimal government involvement.

As mentioned above, in addition to the discussion about the need for the City to conduct its programs in a fiscally responsible manner, references were also made in regards to municipal leadership. The comments made about leadership by the City are constructed in such a way that they imply that the City has some control over the complex issues associated with social housing programs. In the *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy* it states:

Terms of Reference for the Affordable Housing Team of Council is: To advocate for The City's interests in the intergovernmental arena; To assume a leadership role both at Council and in the community; To advocate and support the development of innovative public private partnerships and joint ventures with the Administration (Calgary 2002, p. 27).

Information obtained from the City's website makes similar claims, stating that "our primary roles in affordable housing are to provide leadership and to develop opportunities for new initiatives through partnerships with the community, industry and other levels of government" (Calgary 2005g, n.p.). But despite these public dedications to leadership, the City ensures that the reader knows how, in reality, the City is unequipped to handle that level of responsibility:

The overall strategy for the creation of affordable housing in Calgary will be a sum of the efforts and resources from all these agencies and organization, including The City. As The City must in large part react to initiatives taken by other bodies, it cannot develop an exclusive statement of its strategies and long term objectives except in very general terms (Calgary 2002, p. 7).

One is left wondering if the City is, in fact, a leader or if it is simply responding and reacting to the initiatives espoused by others. This begs the question: whose interests does the City represent if it is simply responding to the initiatives of others? Whose needs are taken into consideration?

The potential for problems, arising particularly from any affiliation with endeavours that may not be financially sustainable, is a significant issue for the City. In fact, the City advocates the "pursuit of public/private/non-profit partnerships/joint ventures" so that the "City's risk [will be] minimized" (Calgary 2002, p.12). While the City claims that it desires to have a leadership role in the quest for affordable housing, this intention is questionable when taken into context with statements made about risk avoidance. The suggestion that the City should attempt to mitigate risk does not, at first, appear to be unreasonable. However, the risk management discourse works to take away from the power of the City's repeated claims that it is dedicated to assuming a leadership

position in such an important area. This raises the question of *why* the “leadership” language is used in the first place. By using the terms leadership and leadership role, the City appears to be doing something about a problem that is beginning to affect more Calgarians. The housing crisis is no longer limited to a particular impoverished group that consistently has difficulty meeting their needs. As more people who were once, or continue to be thought of as, ‘middle-income’ earners have problems, the City has little choice but to intervene, or at the least, appear to be addressing the issue. It is the need to maintain an appropriate appearance – one that leads the average Calgarian who struggles to meet their needs to believe that the City is engaging in serious policy change, all the while ensuring that those with business interests, such as landlords and property developers, do not feel like their bottom line is affected by the decisions made by Mayor and Council. Thus the City is caught in a bind: not to appear to be ‘wasting taxpayers’ money,’ and not to appear to be ‘doing nothing.’

*“Taxpayers’ Money”*

The City produced a large document entitled *Affordable Housing Options: Rent and Income Supplements*, the first part of which consisted of an extensive literature review of Canadian housing policy, while the second part focused on ways that senior government funding could be used for various housing options. There were two specific sections in this document that made veiled references about the use of public money, in effect, taxpayer dollars, and the need to ensure that such money is put to good use. One such passage reads:

Concerns are also expressed that the provision of income supplements does not guarantee use of the supplement for housing purposes. Identified

segments of the population (such as people with mental illness, drug or alcohol addicted people, and adolescents) may be unable to make responsible choices about how to use the supplement (Calgary 2005h, p. 13).

The passage has a paternalistic undertone that suggests that something “wrong” is at work by way of the statement “concerns are expressed.” These concerns, however, are left undefined. While it might not be unreasonable to suggest that there could be those in need of housing who might not use any direct subsidy for housing purposes, it effectively implies that those who are in need of assistance constitute a risk, in that they may do something wrong, and that any help that might be distributed therefore needs to be managed by service providers. Another passage in the same document notes:

Priemus (2000) affirms that this is justified by the government’s desire to increase housing supply through subsequent increased housing demand and by the preferences of government and taxpayers to monitor public spending and ensure that it is going towards addressing housing problems, rather than being spend on other goods or services (Calgary 2005, p. 14).

This mention of “preferences of taxpayers” pegs the *needs* of one group of people (those in housing need) against the *preferences* of other, more economically powerful people.

A significant portion of the *Affordable Housing Options* document was dedicated to reviewing other housing literature. Literature reviews are an effective way for the City to indirectly address the concerns, and sometimes stereotypes, of city residents, particularly those issues that are politically charged, in such a way that the City does not come off as unsympathetic or paternalistic to most readers. This way, the City is able to avert criticism by stating that the information in question was merely part of a literature review, and not a recommendation. However, literature reviews are flexible documents that include only what the author chooses to put in them. This strategy of publishing

literature reviews which include paternalistic statements about those in need and both direct and indirect, references to *taxpayer money*, in effect, favours the position of those who have money and influence, and demeans those who require financial assistance and are dependent on the government. Politicians have the power to direct policy makers, and they are keenly aware of the opinions of their constituents, especially those who have the financial abilities to contribute to political campaigns. It is no surprise then, how the needs and concerns of the “taxpayer,” and in fact, a select subcategory of taxpayer, that of the high-value property owner, can often become paramount in the policy process, even in social welfare schemes where the primary concern is thought to be those who require assistance.

### *The “Target” Market*

In the *Mayor’s Roundtable on Affordable Housing*, those who are in need of subsidized housing are consistently referred to as the “target market” or the “target population” (Calgary, 2003). This is an example of what Fraser (1989b) refers to as specific vocabulary; it is an economic one. This is a language that treats individuals as if they are something which can be ‘managed’ and ‘manipulated’ in order to achieve a desired outcome. This kind of language gives the reader the impression that policy makers and housing developers perceive this issue as something that can be managed from a top-down approach, rather than including the people they are trying to ‘help’ in the policy-formation process. This reveals that ‘help’ comes in the form of controlled and calculated decisions by those who are not in need, but who have influence in the housing policy arena by virtue of “stakeholder” status or ‘expert’ knowledge. This economic

language was not just a semantic slip up. Other references in the same document express concerns about time management and productivity, two functions of economic efficiency; a desire for the City's to lower its mill rate, which is an indirect taxpayer reference; and the need to speed up the permit process, a bureaucratic requirement that often frustrates housing developers and homeowners who are looking to build or renovate properties. Low income Calgarians who are in need of support housing are thus represented as part of an economic process.

### *Policy Discourse and Gender*

Empirical political scientists have, traditionally, argued that policy outcomes are “primarily determined by interests and power” (Majone 1996, p. 610). Examining the actual policy documents themselves by way of discourse analysis can test such an hypothesis, helping to determine whose interests are represented in policy and to identify indicators of whether or not they do assert some form of power. As this study is not intended to evaluate the efficacy of particular programs or policies, my analysis of documents will not be able to differentiate between actual power and represented power. However, this project is able to examine indicators of power, primarily by way of identifying what Majone identifies as those “emerging ideas” that have the potential to influence the policy process. Majone (1996) describes “emerging ideas” as those ideas that step outside of the traditional assumption that narrowly-defined political interests alone guide the policy process. Instead, he argues that concerns about efficiency, policy credibility, and the increasingly commonplace tendency to delegate policy responsibility to independent administrative bodies have, to some extent, changed the ways public

policy is understood (p. 612). Simple assumptions about the power of single interests are, according to Majone, not as commonplace as they once were. The ways in which policy is constructed and implemented have shifted from a state-centered, top-down view to one in which multiple policy actors have “contracts” with other parties in the policy process.

Majone (1996) writes:

A reputation for fairness and effectiveness cannot be established by legislative or executive fiat. It has to be based on a record of accomplishments and on the general perception that the solutions advanced by the experts are not only conceptually sound but also aimed at increasing the welfare of all parties rather than that of a particular group (p. 625).

Fraser’s (1989b) discussion of needs talk has raised a sensitivity to the impact of policy upon the lives of women. She argues that “feminist scholars have demonstrated again and again that authoritative views purporting to be neutral and disinterested actually express the partial and interested perspectives of dominant social groups” (Fraser 1989b, p. 181). And as Smith (1974) points out, this is commonly done through the production of texts and “documentary reality.” What Majone adds to this discussion is the point that ‘dominant social groups’ and their interests cannot be reduced to the interests of elected politicians, but must include a range of interested and powerful groups and organizations that negotiate policy agendas among themselves.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, policies, particularly social and economic ones, often have the potential to influence the lives of women in a much more dramatic sense than men. Given that we have a basic understanding that women’s experiences are different than those of men, it would seem reasonable for municipal policy to take into consideration some of these issues in their policies and strategies. Others have

demonstrated that this has not been the case in other Canadian cities (Reitsma-Street, 2001; McCracken, 2004; Wekerle, 1997). I was interested in whether or not the same reality applied in Calgary. I used content analysis, a process of checking for the presence or absence of particular terms, in order to develop a preliminary evaluation of what kind of language the city of Calgary relied upon in their publications. The words woman, child, and man (and their plural forms) do not appear in these documents at all. Instead, alternatives such as *community*, *Calgarians*, *stakeholders*, *households*, *people*, *seniors*, and *individuals* are used when any mention is made of those in need of affordable housing. The City also relies upon gender neutral phrases such as *two person families*, *lone parent families*, and *single person households* which, consequently, creates policy that is gender blind.

It was telling to note that I was only able to find three documents amongst all of the policy documents that were collected that made any attempt to include, or acknowledge, gender and gender-sensitive issues. These three documents were research briefs that measured “housing affordability in Calgary, by sex” of the primary household maintainer (Calgary, 2004o). The first research brief addressed the general category (men and women), while the second brief amalgamated these statistics with information about “aboriginal primary household maintainer[s]”, and the third brief combined these statistics with information about the “presence of disability in the household.” These quantitative documents provided statistical breakdowns of those in need of housing according to their income levels and did not include any descriptive information about any special needs of, or accommodations required for, these statistical categories of

people. Given that these documents only address real numbers of individuals and offer little information concerning the policy implications of this information, it would be a stretch to suggest that they should be interpreted as being proof of any sort of specific sensitivity to gender on the part of the City.

The City of Calgary has, however, identified that there is a greater number of low income women than low income men who are in need of affordable housing. When it comes to the sex of the primary household maintainer, the City has found that there are more women than who are part of the “primary needs group” (those who earn less than \$38,000 per year and spend more than 50% of their income on shelter) than there are men (Calgary, 2004o). However, there is no discussion offered about these statistics or how they might impact housing policy in the city’s analysis, despite the evidence that there are different realities for men and women in the housing market. For example, there were over 8,100 single women in the primary needs group, compared to approximately 6,900 single men (Calgary 2004o, p. 19). This is approximately a 20% difference. Statistics provided by the City reveal that women are consistently in greater need of affordable housing than are their male counterparts. 27% of all low income women in need of affordable housing are single mothers, while only 3% of low income men are single fathers (Calgary 2004o, p. 5). Despite the significant gap between the number of men and women who are single parents, not a single mention of this disparity is made, let alone further developed, in this document. There has been no discussion to date about the relationship between gender and “lone parent families” in the literature produced by the City of Calgary.

With the exception of a research paper in the form of a literature review published by the city in December 2005 entitled *Thresholds for Locating Affordable Housing: Applying the Literature to the Local Context*,<sup>1</sup> limited information about the specific needs of low income individuals and families (apart from affordability) has been brought forward. This literature review claimed that the “proximity to services and amenities, and access to employment opportunities, should be considered as part of a ‘viability checklist’ when examining potential sites for the location of affordable housing developments, now and into the future” (Calgary 2005a, p. 6). This is one of the few instances in which the City has drawn attention to factors, apart from affordability, that might be considered in determining where new affordable housing projects are developed. Housing affordability in the city of Calgary is a gendered problem, but this is hidden by the use of neutral language. Despite having made a commitment to “housing needs research,” and given that affordable housing is a “city priority” (Calgary, 2005c), the City of Calgary has provided the community with relatively little information about the actual housing needs of Calgarians, let alone what some of the gender-sensitive needs are.

An analysis of policy discourse thus reveals that City policy documents are not immune to a feminist critique. The City of Calgary has stated that it is greatly concerned with housing affordability in the city. The City’s housing department reflects this priority in its name, “Affordable Housing Calgary.” However, using affordability as the main

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<sup>1</sup> This document notes that it was “designed to explore three questions on identifying the ‘ideal’ concentration of affordable housing: 1. What is the ideal proportion of non-market housing in a given geographic area? 2. What is the ideal built form for non-market housing? 3. Which other criteria may be used as proxies for determining the suitability of various built forms and locations for non-market housing?” (Calgary 2005a, p. i)

criterion for developing housing policy is not enough. It should not come as a surprise that housing affordability is a problem, and that more women are applying for subsidized housing than are men. But gender blind policy persists, in part as a misplaced strategy to avoid accusations of sexism, making it almost impossible to address gendered inequalities in housing. When gender-neutral language is translated into policy, the problem shifts from *feeling* left out to actually *being* excluded. The effects of this exclusion can have a real sting when it comes to child care, health, housing, or tax policy, and recent policy research has revealed that these ‘neutral’ strategies actually represent a dangerous ignorance of the relationship between gender and policy (Elson, 1998; Saulnier et al., 1999; Dodson, 2001; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001). Calling single mothers “lone parents” does not change the fact that many of these women earn less than their male counterparts and struggle to adequately house their families. Neutral language does little to help those who continue to face barriers and remain marginalized in society. The City of Calgary claims that it is concerned with the housing needs of “seniors” when, in most cases, they are really talking about widowed women who often have limited access to resources. A disservice is being done to those women it purports to respect through the use of neutral language. Of the Canadian metropolitan centers that have had their housing policies scrutinized, research indicates that most cities continue to see themselves as gender neutral spaces, without adequate consideration of women’s housing needs (Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; Rude and Thompson, 2001). The City of Calgary cannot escape this reality either, as its use of language makes invisible its lack of accommodation for the gender specific aspects of housing needs.

*Constructing “Need”: The role of experts*

Fraser holds that there are a “plurality of competing ways of talking about needs,” one of which is the “‘expert’ needs discourses of, for example, social workers and therapists, on the one hand, and welfare administrators, planners, and policy makers, on the other” (Fraser 1989b, p. 157). The City-produced documents contain their own collection of ‘expert’ discourses. These needs discourses are the “vehicles for translating sufficiently politicized runaway needs into objects of potential state intervention” (ibid, p. 173). This does not appear to be a strategy by which these needs can be de-politicized, as much as it is method through which to manage them. It is important to consider what kinds of needs discourses have been adopted in, and celebrated within, policy.

Analysis of policy documents, as already noted, revealed that the economic concerns of housing builders and developers were a consideration for those guiding policy development and implementation. In the *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy* (2002) it states that “Council of The City of Calgary will be requested to reduce/waive/relax development fees and standards, subject to Affordable Housing Team recommendation, where it clearly enhances the viability and affordability of the project” (p. 21). The Corporate Steering Committee on Affordable Housing has a mandate to “support the Affordable Housing Team of Council. To plan and implement actions to address affordable housing needs, involve relevant City departments and identify partnerships with the private and community sectors and other levels of government” (Calgary 2002, p. 30). Nowhere in the stated mandate does it speak to any requirement to serve those who cannot afford market rents, or those who have difficulty obtaining or

maintaining stable housing, for example. The dedication to the needs of the private business sector is evident throughout the collection of policy documents, while the commitment to those with housing difficulties is assumed, but not spelled out. Without any direct mention of the responsibility to those in housing need, the document confirms its support for the private sector, but the language used leaves the needs of individuals unspecified.

These results are unsurprising, given that the steering committee is comprised of upper-level managers of City departments. There is a demonstrated lack of individuals claiming to represent the interests of the inadequately or unsuitably housed; an examination of the committee membership reveals the absence of a voice that represents those in housing need. It is not unreasonable to suggest that those at the table are speculating as to what people with housing problems actually need. It is important to remain cognizant of the values that are represented within these kinds of committees and in the documents that they produce. The steering committee is comprised of general managers, planners, consultants and coordinators, according to published committee lists (Calgary, 2002). Given the high ranking positions of these individuals (and their corresponding salaries) it is not unreasonable to assume that most, if not all, of the participants would not qualify for assistance, or require access to the services which their committee oversees.

In addition to the difference in economic status between the committee members and the client population they are attempting to serve, there are also issues around

professional relationships. City planners, for example, do not work in isolation. Their positions require them to form relationships with housing developers, and individuals who are willing to invest in new communities. There is a fine line between asking these individuals who finance new development to integrate affordable housing units into their community plans, and telling them to do so. The act of building relationships between the private sector and the City is not inconsequential and must not be overlooked. Those involved with private housing developments have, in all likelihood, more access to those individuals who can shape city development than do those who cannot manage to meet all of their housing needs. These relationships between individuals in the private sector and those in the public management have meaning, as individuals in the private sector have the ability to influence outcomes in ways that are often hidden from public view. This is not to suggest that this is an unscrupulous practice, but the nature of development, by way of politics and policy making, is one that includes lobbying. We know that one's ability to successfully lobby for change is impacted, to some extent, by their financial status. All of these issues beg the question, how are interests represented when those engaged in policy development do not directly benefit from these policies? I am not suggesting that the committee membership is unsympathetic to the issue, nor am I suggesting that none of the committee members understand what struggle looks like. However, there is a demonstrated lack of representation on the committee that reflects the voices of those who struggle.

The *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy*, with the needs of housing developers embedded within it, is not the only policy document to prioritize the interests

of various stakeholders. The *Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing*, and the *Mayor's Follow-up Roundtable on Affordable Housing*, also revealed whose opinions on the issue of affordable housing were considered to be more credible than others. Dave Bronconnier, the Mayor of Calgary since 2001, stated that affordable housing was one of his priorities, and the Roundtables he hosted were an attempt to solicit information from those with an interest in the housing sector as to what they felt were some of the barriers to development of additional affordable housing units in the city. Fifty people took part in the first Roundtable, over seventy in the second Follow-up Roundtable, and the participants were labeled as representing the following sectors: non-profit, government, developers and builders, financiers and funders, and "others" (including an architect, a landlord, and two land consultants). While this kind of representation from these various sectors appears to be comprehensive it is, again, important to note whose voices were not heard. Like the membership of the team that shaped the Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy, the Roundtables failed to represent the voices of those in housing need, and the presence of members from the non-profit sector should not be seen as an adequate, or necessarily appropriate, replacement. For example, two of the representatives from the non-profit sector were from the Calgary Homeless Foundation (Calgary, 2004w). The Foundation was established by two past presidents of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, and one of the founders was present at the Roundtable (ibid.). One could argue that, as a business leader, his knowledge of, and experiences with, those who are in housing need will likely be quite different from the experiences of a social worker or frontline staff member who accepts housing applications from low income Calgarians. While one could easily argue that it is important to take into consideration the knowledge of these

particular individuals, the absence of those with housing problems at the Roundtable is a telling feature about who is seen as a credible source of information about struggle.

My concern with the Roundtables lies with the impact they have in limiting particular kinds of voices, and how these Roundtables might have shaped other statements produced by the City. There are practical consequences for the discourse that gets produced when only certain voices are invited to provide input. I believe the limitation of voices dedicated to those that represent particular interests will impact what is produced by the City. Allen (1990, p. 270) has written that the absence of a particular feature is just as significant as the presence of another; this idea can be applied to these meetings. Funders and developers were invited to participate in meetings designed to influence housing practices, while those who could directly benefit were not invited. Non-profit groups were expected to speak on behalf of those in need. Need is left to interpretation, and this is what Fraser (1989a, 1989b, 1990) and Fraser and Gordon (1994) were particularly concerned with. Those who will derive secondary benefits from the development of affordable housing spaces, such as homebuilders, or those who live (as both property-owners and renters) and work in areas of the city with a high homeless population, do not have to fight for a seat at the discussion table. This is evidenced by the list of participants in the *Mayor's Follow-up Roundtable on Affordable Housing* (Calgary, 2004w). While it is important to note that the objective of this roundtable was to identify barriers to construction of affordable units, it is equally important to highlight that this roundtable was the only consultative project on housing need conducted by the City, or at the very least, the only one that was made public.

### *Problems with Definitions*

In *Research Brief #05: Housing Affordability in Calgary for Households with the Presence of Disability in the Household*, the City studies the impact of the “presence of a disability in the household.” The Brief offers a definition of “affordable” but does not define “disability” or give any indication of what is included in this category. The definition of disability used in the Brief has the potential to impact program development and delivery, and could affect who has access to affordable housing units. Ellwood explains that disability definitions have implications for social welfare programs:

Danzinger et al. (1999) and many others have shown that many welfare families have multiple barriers to work, ranging from drug or alcohol addiction to previous physical abuse, that will make work difficult even in strong economic times. ...Some might be able to qualify for disability programs, but in recent years drug and alcohol addiction has been excluded as a basis for disability, and recent growth in disability roles have led to efforts to tighten eligibility further (Ellwood 2000, p. 194).

Given that much of the literature related to homelessness discusses the realities of addiction and mental health issues, it is not unreasonable to expect the City to take a position on this issue. Instead, the City indirectly addresses the issue by providing a generic description of disability, but without providing any indication as to whether someone with drug or alcohol addiction could qualify for subsidized housing based on such a disability, or talking about how addiction has impacted other stakeholders in the housing arena, such as landlords, lenders, neighbours, or children of addicted parents. By generally addressing disability and acknowledging that those with a disability have a

more difficult time securing adequate and affordable housing than do those without a disability, I was left to wonder if addiction falls under the City's definition of disability, and what can be done to address and assist those with needs unique to substance abuse.

The City cites data from five operators of homeless shelters in Calgary who tracked shelter utilization across the shelter system. Without directly addressing drug or alcohol addiction, or mental health issues, the City acknowledges the unique barriers operative in these situations. *Fast Facts #04: Affordable Housing and Homelessness* notes that though a "large proportion of this population was in residence only a short time, 6,000 individuals who were sheltered in 2002 were also housed in 2000, which 'indicates the population's vulnerability to setbacks,' especially among those 'whose chronic and complex conditions will require long-term support'" (Calgary 2004t, p. 3). Essentially, the reader is told that there are unique circumstances at play for many who have difficulty securing housing and with the tenure of their housing, but little other information is provided. One is left to make assumptions about the causes of these "setbacks" or what kind of support would enable meaningful change.

#### *Bureaucratic Barriers: The Application for Community Housing*

One of the most informative examples of housing discourse is the community housing application form itself. The CHC housing application form is the primary document that links low income earners with the municipality and its language and structure reveals a great deal of information. There are several aspects of this application form that are worthy of discussion. First, access to this document is limited and the form is not widely available. In order to get the form, one has to come into the CHC office

(located in a part of town, though not isolated, is not centrally located, either) or have the form mailed directly to you. It is not available on the internet, not even for download. This barrier to access poses interesting questions. Why is the form not available at community resource centres, or shelters? However, the problems with this application form are not limited to access.

The application form contains spaces for income information required from any person living in the home who is “15 years of age or older.” This leaves one with the impression that the City expects minor children to contribute financially to the household if they earn an income, regardless of what that income might be. This condition also has significant implications for single mothers given that, in Canada, women earn only 62% of that of men (Status of Women Canada, 2005). Requiring income information from minor children takes away from the autonomy of a female-headed householder, and this requirement contributes to what Novac (1990) describes as a woman’s “inevitable dependency” (p. 56) This requirement confirms Novac’s assertion that “a family or household basis for subsidy creates this dependence, and women are most likely to be negatively affected” (ibid). This form uses ambiguous and gender neutral language, but the implications of this section of the application are in no way gender neutral, given the disproportion between the number of families headed by single women versus the number headed by single men. There could be a number of families that, without the income of their working children, would likely fall below the stated income thresholds and would qualify for subsidized housing, but because of the income of their minor children fail to meet the criteria for subsidized units. This leaves the primary household

maintainer in a difficult position of deciding whether or not to disclose this kind of information.

There is little room on the form for the applicant to provide any information about non-financial concerns. For example, there is no place on the form to list the names of schools, or the location of childcare facilities one's children attend, and discussion concerning community preferences is limited. There is a single question that asks applicants if they are willing to live anywhere in the city. This is accompanied with two boxes for the applicant to check, one for "yes" the other for "no." Should the answer be "no" the applicants are asked to explain why not in a small section (two lines) of space. Directly underneath these lines is a statement that reads (in full capitals):

PLEASE NOTE: LIMITING YOUR CHOICES OF AREAS OF THE CITY MAY INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF TIME YOUR (sic) WAIT FOR HOUSING" (Calgary 2005f, p. 3).

This statement is a coercive one, given that the Calgary Housing Company website notes that the average number of applicants on the waiting list was anywhere between 2300 and 2500 families in 2003 (Calgary, 2005b). Research suggests that community preferences are not always about convenience, and there is a significant body of gender-based analysis that has made several revelations about this issue (McCracken, 2004; Novac, 1990; Reitsma-Street, 2001). Women, more often than men, tend to be concerned with the safety of specific neighbourhoods, and may need a central location due to reliance on public transportation, or wish to keep their children in the same school. They are faced with a difficult decision to make: increase their wait times for housing, or be willing to accept whatever is offered.

Even the process of providing proof of family income can be arduous for a family in need. The application form does not leave room for any information about personal debts or required payments (such as student loans, or child support payments) but contains space for one to list all the assets one has. Applicants have the burden of proof (of housing need) upon their own shoulders, and the form is designed to make this process difficult. This is in keeping with what Bane and Ellwood (1996) have noted about the welfare state, that it is an “administrative culture that is more concerned with the enforcement of eligibility rules and with making sure that recipients comply with [AFDC, an American agency] regulations than with helping clients towards self-sufficiency” (p. xi).

As demonstrated in the above paragraphs, the application form is a powerful document. The interaction that the applicant has with the Calgary Housing Company (CHC) in an attempt to access community housing is mediated through the four page form. But once an applicant embarks on the application process, the work does not stop once the application is submitted. The CHC requires a great deal from applicants, even before they are accepted into the program:

In 2003 the waiting list for Community Housing varied from 2,300 to 2,500 applicants. When your name has been placed on the CHC waiting list, you are required to let CHC know immediately if there are any changes to your income, family or housing situation. If your situation has not changed, you are required to renew your application every 6 months to remain on our waiting list (Calgary 2005c, n.p.).

Applicants attempting to access community housing are required to regularly demonstrate their ability to give the CHC what they want by way updating their files and

demonstrating their need on a regular basis. But the City's emphasis on procedure and process varies in tone throughout the textual materials that individuals in need encounter, including the subsidized application form and the information made available on the City's website.

In a document entitled *Accessing Affordable Housing* the City explains:

Calgary Housing Company is the division of The City of Calgary that provides affordable housing options to the citizens of Calgary. We operate and manage both subsidized and market rental units. With over 7,600 housing units, Calgary Housing Company has a variety of housing options for low-income households (Calgary 2005d, n.p.).

While this language sounds promising, supportive and sympathetic to the needs of low income individuals, there is a sharp contrast to the policy that details the process by which people can apply for and hope for a subsidized unit. Scheurich and McKenzie (2005) note that one of Foucault's rules for identifying discursive practices was "to analyze punitive methods not simply as consequence of legislation or as indicators of social structures, but as techniques possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power" (p. 854). From this perspective, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the application form is a "punitive method" that requires applicants to consistently prove that they are in need, that they are deserving, and that they know how to follow the rules that are in place for those that accept help from the state. The CHC's requirement that individuals consistently demonstrate that they are in need creates an infantilizing situation, and applicants are frequently reminded how they have failed to provide for themselves and, often, their families. This is not a simple compliance-based feature of a program and it should not be dismissed as merely a

reasonable expectation from program administrators. The application form itself is a disciplining document.

*Deserving versus Undeserving Poor*

In a City-produced research brief that addresses housing affordability in Calgary, great attention was paid to the numbers of people who struggle. This claim that “18 percent of all Calgary households have low income and spend more than they can afford on housing” was made early on in the brief (Calgary 2004c, p. 25). But despite the great numbers of people who have problems with housing affordability, the paper concludes that these concerns are most troubling in regards to the welfare of children. It concludes that the City’s research suggests that “the need to ensure safe, adequate and affordable housing for families with children is also a critical policy issue” (ibid.). This conclusion presents significant issues for discussion. Certainly, it is important to consider the unique needs of families with children, but this conclusion helps to contribute to the categorization of the poor. In effect, it suggests that intervention in the housing market, through the creation of affordable housing, should be done for the sake of the children as ‘deserving innocents’ and not necessarily because all who struggle are worthy of assistance.

Nowhere does the policy state that only those with children will be eligible to receive help. In fact, the City claims that “by volume alone, the need for affordable housing is especially acute for single individuals living alone, be they renters or owners,” (Calgary 2004d, p. 26). However, when policy documents claim that something is a critical policy issue because of the involvement of children, it creates categories of people

that are more worthy of assistance than are others who have been identified as being in need of assistance. This confirms that the City is not immune from playing the ‘deserving’ versus ‘undeserving’ poor game, constructing categories of those who are unable to work through no fault of their own (such as physically disabled) and those whose ‘choices’ have resulted in their reliance upon the social welfare system (Katz, 1989 as cited in Ellwood, 2000).

Ideas about the deserving versus the undeserving poor also tie in with assumptions about those who remain reliant upon the state for support. Bane and Ellwood (1996) suggest that academic and public debate often makes reference to dependency.

They suggest:

Now the talk is often about lost confidence or distorted values that leave the poor with little sense of what their choices truly are and little desire to take control of their lives. ...The term dependency is used quite loosely in public discussion and in most academic work. It is sometimes nothing more than a synonym for long-term welfare use. But dependency is commonly applied to situations in which people who could conceivably provide for themselves fail to do so, and as a result it often has a pejorative connotation (Bane and Ellwood 1996, pp. 67-68).

In the policy documents produced by the City and analyzed in this project, the word “dependent” was nowhere to be found, but “independence” was. By indirectly addressing “dependency” concerns, the process of identifying programs that emphasized a return to independence enabled the City to use language that was somewhat positive, rather than punitive (Calgary, 2005h; Calgary, 2004s). In a document that addressed the availability of programs for those who are homeless, the document draws attention to the time limits in place for those who are homeless and accessing services, noting “there is no maximum length of stay if clients abide by the rules of the residence and are working towards

independence” (Calgary 2004s, p. 4). Another reference in the same document highlights those key factors that social agencies see as contributing to an individual’s ability to achieve independence:

The *Calgary Family and Sexual Violence Sector Review* identifies the overall lack of shelter capacity as a particular concern in this sector, noting that “short shelter stays, and the lack of second-stage shelter beds and affordable housing, along with serious income problems” were singled out by agencies as key factors “contributing to their clients’ inability to achieve independence from their abusive partners” (Calgary 2004s, pp. 3-4).

The strategy of emphasizing independence, as opposed to using a language which acknowledges that most people will occasionally find themselves in crisis and in need of support, effectively implies that there is a stigma of shame associated with those who access social support programs. Such a strategy also relates to the City’s ability to demonstrate that it is sensitive to the needs of “taxpayers” and is demonstrating a willingness (and ability) to practice fiscal responsibility.

### *Research and Funding*

#### *Funding*

It is interesting to note that City publications continually place responsibility for the crisis associated with the lack of affordable housing on the province of Alberta and, specifically, the provincial government’s funding decisions. The City claims that underfunding of housing programs is the biggest contributor to the problem of limited supply of affordable housing:

Since 1993, the Provincial and Federal governments have substantially reduced the capital funding of new affordable housing (Calgary 2002, p. 6).

We encourage the provincial and federal governments to foster the development and funding of affordable housing and related support services (Calgary 2005g, n.p.).

It was identified that significant contributing factors to the absence of funding applications specifically, and the creation of more affordable housing generally, were:

The fragmentation of affordable housing resources, expertise and information coupled with the lack of capacity within the non-profit sector, which after ten years without public funding, have diminished expertise in the function of direct capital development (Calgary 2003, p. 2).

Affordable housing initiatives must be sustainable in the long term. Of primary importance is the need for sustainable operating funding. While a mixed model of cross subsidizing market rents with affordable rents can respond effectively in a tight rental market, there will remain a critical need for senior government funding if long-term affordability is to be achieved (Calgary 2003, p. 3).

And yet, there are passages within these documents that claim that “The Province of Alberta works closely and collaboratively with the City of Calgary and its Calgary Housing Company” (Calgary 2002, p. 6). It appears that the City is attempting to make the claim that they are not responsible for the enormity of the problem, but also to emphasize how committed they are to the housing issue. In fact, the problem is often framed in a way that it deflects responsibility away from the municipality. For example, one document notes that “this literature review has identified a fundamental role for the federal government to play in defining a national housing policy;” this “role” refers to the various financial contributions that could be made on the part of the federal government (Calgary 2005h, p. 21).

One can appreciate the importance of provincial and federal funding to the operation and continued maintenance of a subsidized housing program; however, these claims were still being made in 2005, three years after the announcement of the Canada-Alberta Affordable Housing Program Agreement was made in 2002. This agreement included \$67 million in federal funds, to be matched by the province or other funders (Canada, 2002). By 2005, an additional \$63 million dollars in funding for affordable housing was announced (Canada, 2005). Both the federal and provincial governments had committed to funding additional affordable housing developments, and the money was made available. Acknowledgement of this funding increase was, however, very minimal in the policy documents that were produced after the funding announcements were made. In fact, with the exception of *Affordable Housing Options: Rent and Income Supplements*, the funding increases were not acknowledged in a significant way. Acknowledgment and discussion of the implications of the initiative (besides those in the aforementioned document) was limited to the following three statements:

Question #6: How do we ensure sustainability beyond the length of the AHPI program? The issue was raised by all teams.

Mayor's Answer: Sustainable operating funding is a critical component of affordable housing initiatives. Operating funding must be the responsibility of senior governments. The City's role needs to be one of facilitator and enabler (Calgary 2003, p. 10).

Recommend to Council an Affordable Housing Land Disposition Strategy to facilitate 200 units annually over the life of AHPI funding (Calgary 2004w, p. 3).

With the announcement of new federal and provincial funding, the Action Plan has identified potential for the creation of 800 to 1000 new affordable housing units over five years (Calgary 2005e, p. 2).

So despite an increase in funding by other levels of government, the municipality hardly addresses the impact of this reinvestment into social housing projects. This is unusual, given its repeated claims that additional funding is essential for continued operation and development of affordable housing programs in the City.

### *Competitive Comparisons*

Discussion in policy documents, at times, involves comparative analysis which comes across as competitive. The City measures its own situation against other cities, presumably to defend itself from criticism. In one document, the City compares its homelessness rates to those of other cities:

Similarly, the estimated prevalence rate for homelessness compares the number of different individuals that used shelters in a given year to the resident population. For 2000 and 2002, the estimated prevalence rates for homelessness in Calgary were 1.3 and 1.6 percent respectively. These findings are comparable to rates reported for Metropolitan Toronto (which had an estimated prevalence rate for homelessness of 1.3 percent in 1998), and for Philadelphia and New York (Calgary 2004t, p. 2).

The comparison, however, is not coupled with an explanation and leaves the reader wondering what this significance is. Does this mean that homelessness is, or is not, a problem if these other cities have identified similar rates of homelessness? Is homelessness something that accompanies strong economic centres? Or, is it inevitable? Is the City trying to suggest that it is not any worse than anywhere else? It is difficult to extract meaning from such comparisons when corresponding analysis is not present. It is worth noting that the City does not compare any actual statistics about people in housing

need, and the research brief series on housing need in the city does not contain any comparative information. One wonders if the waiting list for community housing is comparable to those in Toronto, Philadelphia and New York. The absence of this kind of specific comparative information, given the presence of information about a similar issue, is rather curious. This ‘incompleteness’ appears to be a discursive strategy that involves the presentation of an ‘open text’ for the reader to complete and decide for themselves what the significance of such a comparison is. But clearly, at the same time, there is seen to be some advantage to presenting such comparative info, as opposed to not presenting it.

### *Being “Responsible”*

Coding of all of the documents in the data set made it clear that fiscal responsibility was an important concern for policy makers. Indirect references to responsibility were usually framed with financial concerns in mind, and used terms such as efficiency and efficacy to get the message across. In a literature review entitled *Affordable Housing Options: Rent and Income Supplements*, comments are made about the purpose of the paper:

The first part of the report is a literature review that provides a brief overview of housing policies in Canada during the last decade, a definition of affordable housing, and a description of the alternative policy options available to tackle this issue. It presents a brief discussion of supply measures and continues with the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages to of demand-side measures. The debate regarding the *efficacy* and *efficiency* of existing public policy programs is discussed and recommendations based on the literature are summarized.

The second part of this report provides a financial analysis that examines how senior government funding could be used for different affordable housing options in Calgary and recommendations how these options could be used to *effectively* address housing and affordability problems. The analysis is purely economic and corresponds with the

housing policy direction provided in the literature review. It does not discuss the need or costs for social supports, which are recognized as an integral part of many affordable housing programs [*italics mine*] (Calgary 2005h, p. i).

The reader is given a sense of what is perceived to be important to researchers and policy makers who work for the City. The comment that the analysis is “purely economic” suggests that the economic costs of a particular approach or set of policies is more important than the social costs. However, the City acknowledges that social supports are “recognized as an integral part of many affordable housing programs,” and yet these social supports (what they are, who is responsible for them, who might have access to them) are not addressed in any substantial way in the data set. The emphasis is continually placed on the economic features of particular policies and programs, and these features are stressed by way of employing language that is commonly used in economic arenas. The usage of “*efficacy*” and “*efficiency*,” as I have italicized above, indicate that the usage of terms that are often associated with quantifiable measures, often used with measures of cost-benefit analysis, suggest that the City remains comfortable with this kind of measurement, in an area (social service provision) that is not often easily, nor fairly, measured in these terms.

Throughout the policy data there were repeated mentions of the need for the City to implement strong fiscal management in its search for affordable housing options:

Investing a portion of the annual AHPI funding amount, whether at the provincial or municipal level, is a prudent strategy to build up a pool of funds for use over the long-term for a variety of affordable housing options (Calgary 2005h, p. ii).

The Province will continue to be the primary funder of social housing, but the City of Calgary with the Calgary Housing Company, has a unique opportunity to determine and address local social housing needs through local solutions, allocating resources and assuming the lead role administering social housing in Calgary. In addition, the opportunity may exist to re-profile some of the CHC's existing housing assets to create a model that more effectively responds to changing housing needs and is more financially sustainable (Calgary 2002, p. 6).

Given that Albertans have elected a Conservative government for nearly forty years, and these governments have made funding decisions that impact housing programs, it is unsurprising that much of the language used in the policy data is written from a perspective that emphasizes the need to be fiscally conservative. In fact, the City made a point of drawing attention to policy options that were not (in their opinion) financially responsible or sustainable, such as subsidies (Calgary, 2005h).

### *Creating Standards*

Every two years the City conducts the Biennial Count of Homeless Persons. A document entitled *Research Summary #03, 2004 Count of Homeless Persons: Homeless Families*, notes that “the Biennial Count of Homeless Persons provides a periodic snapshot of the size and characteristics of the ‘visible’ homeless population in Calgary” (Calgary 2004v, p. 1). *Research Summary #02, Homelessness in Calgary*, notes that:

Homeless persons are considered to be those who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose. These people are considered “absolutely homeless.” However, there are many “relatively homeless” people that are “couch surfing” (i.e., staying with friends or family), sleeping in vehicles or abandoned buildings, and living in housing that does not meet basic health and safety standards – including affordability and security of tenure. The City of Calgary only enumerates those people who are “absolutely homeless” (Calgary 2004u, p. 3)

There are questions around the process of making the distinction between those who are “absolutely homeless” and those who are “relatively homeless.” The City notes that “sleeping in vehicles or abandoned buildings” would qualify as “relatively homeless,” and therefore those who do so are not included in the count. But in another document, however, a similar, yet different, definition and explanation of “relatively homeless” is provided. As it is explained in *Fast Facts #02: Homelessness in Calgary*:

Not every homeless person can be enumerated in a census because not everyone who is homeless is “visible.” Since the hidden homeless tend not to be counted, the actual number of homeless persons reported to be living in any community is always underestimated. The Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary does not have a means to identify and include persons who, on the night of the count, do not have a permanent residence to which they can return if they so choose but, instead, may be “couch surfing” (i.e., staying with friends or family), sleeping in vehicles or abandoned buildings where they would not have been enumerated, camping in heavily wooded areas that are difficult to search, or living outside of the observation catchment area (i.e., the zones that are formally surveyed as part of the street count) (Calgary 2004s, p. 3).

The definition switches from a tone that has severe restrictions around what qualifies as “homeless” to one in which the individual is considered as homeless when he or she cannot be found. The individual who does not have a home to live in, but does have a car to sleep in is not, in the first paragraph, considered to be homeless. However, in the second paragraph, taken from a different document, the person living in a car is simply “hidden” and difficult to find, and therefore, is not included in the count. These varying explanations for the “relatively,” “absolutely,” and “hidden homeless” indicate that definitions and standards developed by the City are somewhat flexible and less structured than the texts imply. Different language is used in different circumstances and this, at times, produces meanings that are unclear or misleading. It is important to note that the “Fast Facts” document is designed to educate the reader about programs and initiatives

designed to address a specific problem. The “Research Summary” document is one that unpacks the finding of a particular program of study, or initiative, in order to educate the reader about what has been done, and how the findings were interpreted. While they appear, at first glance, to serve a similar purpose, after a closer analysis one can see they targeted towards different audiences. The “Fast Facts” document is designed for those with an interest in the rates of homelessness, an increasingly problematic social issue, in Calgary. The “Research Summary” provides a quick snapshot of what was found, and almost reads as if it is an extended version of ‘talking points’ used by public relations officers and politicians. The second document also enables the City to provide the rationale as to why certain groups were hidden or ‘un-researchable.’ In effect, the hidden homeless were difficult to find, and this document allows for the City to hide behind the semantics and definitions, when it appears as if this was just a difficult group to find and research. It was demonstrated earlier that the City is deeply concerned with housing affordability; the City has produced an extensive amount of research on the number of people who overspend on shelter, and on the number of people who are absolutely homeless. However, those people who fall into the “relatively homeless” category are not effectively addressed in policy produced by the City. In fact, this segment of the population is largely ignored, especially as the relatively homeless are a difficult group to measure “because there is no sound methodology to do so” (Calgary 2004s, p. 7). The City claims that it is concerned with social cohesion and community participation. However, the tendency for the City to label individuals as homeless, and therefore worthy of support, in some circumstances but not in others conflicts with the promotion of community inclusiveness and social cohesion (Calgary, 2004c). This leaves the reader

with questions about the rigour of specific studies and surveys, and the decisions that have been made around the production of statistics about a politically charged issue come off as somewhat suspect when placed under a stronger analytic lens.

### Final Analysis

The policy documents that were analyzed in this project had a much stronger social justice bent than I suspected they might have. When I began this part of the project, I thought that much of the policy in place would reflect many of the ideas that had been expressed in the newspaper articles that I had collected for this project. I was surprised by the number of references that stepped outside of a ‘blame the victim’ framework and were actively looking for community-based solutions to the problem of the number of people struggling with housing affordability. This was demonstrated by way of discussion about the need for community involvement and an emphasis on social cohesion, coupled with the identification of the problem of NIMBYism in the city (Calgary, 2004c; Calgary, 2003). These examples, discussed earlier on in the chapter, demonstrate that social policy makers are aware of a number of issues that face those who struggle to find secure, adequate, and affordable housing. The relatively recent reinvestment in affordable housing research has likely had some impact upon politicians, policy makers, and municipal employees in terms of informing them about some of the complex issues that have the potential to impact an individual’s ability to secure adequate, suitable, and affordable housing. The housing research produced by the City is, of course, shaped and also limited, by the organizational priorities and practices involved in its

production. This information resulting from these practices should not be understood as uninterested, because it is. However, the actual production of information that pertains to the problems faced by marginalized people reflects the City's understanding of the politics involved with the issue of affordable housing. As the number of households that struggle to pay their bills increases, it becomes harder for the City to 'stay out' of the problem and remain uninterested.

However, the acknowledgement of some of those issues that fall outside of the "affordability" promise, such as adequacy (housing in need of major repair) or suitability (a measure of crowding) realm did not necessarily translate into City policy and program delivery. As outlined earlier, the City of Calgary declared on its website:

Affordable housing is a City priority... We all have a responsibility to ensure our communities have a range of housing choices. ... The City of Calgary is committed to increasing the supply of safe and affordable housing for all Calgarians. Safe and appropriate affordable housing benefits the entire community socially, economically and environmentally (Calgary 2005g, n.p.).

Given that the wait lists for low income earners has not dropped below 1700 families at any time in the last six years, it appears that the City has had limited success in dealing with the housing problem. This is troubling, given that the City declared that it is "committed to increasing the supply of safe and affordable housing." In fact, the most recent statistics on the City of Calgary website indicates that the waitlist is currently sitting at 2200 families, despite the introduction of nearly 1700 new rental units to the existing housing stock (Calgary, 2007). The promise to increase this supply, and thereby decrease the pressure on low income families that are struggling to meet their needs, involves a number options and hope, but the reality is significantly out of sync with this

promise. The average wait time for families to have access to affordable housing is approximately two years, and the option to choose what kind of housing might not be there for those families on the list. The practice, therefore, differs significantly from the promise.

Essentially, policy becomes a promise that is being sold to a specific demographic. It is as much as sales pitch as it is a set of objectives, as the municipal policy is produced in terms of a specific and located set of organizational priorities and constraints. The political reality is that this sales pitch must first be directed to taxpayers, and indirectly to those who contribute financially to political campaigns. Those who are in need, and who do need support and intervention that is meaningful are, in all reality, an afterthought. In the *Affordable Housing Strategy* (2002) it states that the City's "vision of the future includes a range of housing options that exist for all ages, income groups, family types and lifestyles" (Calgary 2002, p. 3). The *Mayor's Follow-up Roundtable on Affordable Housing* notes:

The first Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing in Calgary opened the doors of communication between key housing stakeholders whereupon five key priority areas were identified. Based on this feedback, The City brought forward its commitments to address these priorities during the Follow-up Roundtable. Over 70 participants answered the Call to Action with the identification of specific areas where they could contribute. Representation from all sectors, including senior elected officials, demonstrates the significance of affordable housing in our city and our province. ...Awareness and understanding of affordable housing issues has been heightened to a level where the community can now move forward with the actions identified (Calgary 2004w, p. 4).

As discussed earlier, the claim that there was "representation from all sectors" can be challenged, as a copy of the participant list indicates that there was no formal voice

representing those in housing need, only the social agencies that serve them. As with most advertising, the pitch is geared to those with money to spend and an interest in protecting their investments, like housing developers, “taxpayers,” and the funders of non-profit programs. This is accomplished by employing language that is fiscally conservative and cautious, and sensitive to the concerns of taxpayers and other funding partners. The great influencers in the policy process are those with business connections, and to a lesser extent, those individuals who wish to keep their tax bills low. One can see that the City refers to “stakeholders” as those people with something to offer, be it funding, knowledge, or labour; not necessarily those who have something to gain from the development of housing policy or programs. The reality is that in a City of approximately one million people, the City has identified that eighteen percent of all households overspend on their shelter (Calgary, 2004c) and yet, despite vigorous reinvestment in affordable housing initiatives, there are less than 10,000 subsidized housing units available (Calgary, 2007). The math just does not add up, as nearly 200,000 people are at risk of losing their shelter.

It appears that those who are supposed to receive direct benefits from affordable housing projects, low-income Calgarians, are being left out from the consultation and policy making processes. Those “primary household maintainers” struggling with affordability, suitability, or adequacy, are not asked for input. Instead of talking with them, the City talks about them and much is missing from this dialogue. People are not asked what would make their life better, as these decisions are made by “experts” and “stakeholders” in the field. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, it appears that

the decision makers are those who have been *constructed*, in the politics of journalistic and policy discourse on housing, *as* “experts.” My analysis indicates that the research and policy making process strongly reflects corporate and taxpayer interests. Of the documents that were included in this project, all failed to incorporate the stories of people with first hand knowledge of housing struggle, an issue that will be addressed in further detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7: Media & Policy Analysis**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine and compare some of the themes that emerged from the critical discourse analysis of the two data sets as presented in chapters 5 and 6. The first data set was a collection of eighty-eight articles which had stories about individuals in housing need, and these stories were selected from three newspapers published in Calgary, AB. As explained in Chapter 4, newspaper articles were included in the project in order to compare official perceptions of housing need against claims made by members of the public which are often highlighted in newspaper coverage. The second part of the data set included a cross-section of documents produced by the City of Calgary. Thirty two texts, ranging from the proceedings of meetings, to literature reviews, to an application form, comprised this data set.

This project was designed with an inductive approach to research; I wanted to see what was in the data before I imposed my own hypothesis about the issues at play in newspaper discourse, though I cannot deny that I had some initial ideas about what might be uncovered. However, the data produced results that I found to be somewhat surprising. In addition to identifying some of the discursive features of the texts, the following paragraphs will address some of the features that I had not anticipated, and will discuss the significance of my findings. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section addresses trends, insertions, and omissions relating to particular statements of ‘facts’ that were identified in the newspaper discourse. The second section employs similar techniques in order to highlight some of the issues unique to the policy discourse. Finally, the third section provides some answers to the questions that were posed in

Chapter 4 about housing policy in Calgary, synthesizing themes that were found in both the newspaper and policy datasets, and draws connections between my findings and other, housing related, research.

### Newspaper Coverage

As discussed in Chapter 4, the impact of newspaper coverage on public perception of social issues has been well documented (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1997; Wahl-Jorgensen and Galperin, 2000). We know that the particular constructions of social problems and possibilities found within newspaper articles can be an exceptionally informative and influential site of discourse analysis. Pascale (2005) has drawn attention to the influence of mainstream newspaper articles in the discursive constructions of homelessness, noting that:

Typically, for people who have housing, knowledge about homelessness and homeless people comes from news media rather than from ongoing personal relationships with people living on the street. As such, newspaper articles about homelessness offer a particularly rich analytic site for understanding homelessness (Pascale 2005, p. 250).

These kinds of stories help to inform the public about situations and experiences that would not likely be experienced by the majority of a given population, and this act of transmitting information about a particular situation or experience through newspaper stories is of value for a society. The impact of newspaper articles upon public perception of specific social issues has been well documented, and research suggests that these discursive locations are a worthwhile site of study due to the way that realities are constructed, represented, and then fixed, in texts (Smith, 2005).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the *Calgary Herald* was selected for analysis because it has the largest circulation in the city of Calgary, and because it is targeted towards those with higher incomes. The *Calgary Sun* was included in the project because I suspected that this paper which appears to target low to middle income earners, would express some sympathy for those who live paycheque to paycheque, and struggle with the issues around housing affordability. *FFWD* was chosen because this paper has a strong social justice bent, and I anticipated that this source of discourse would provide a contrast with some of the opinions and sentiments expressed in the two major daily newspapers.

### *Critical Evaluation and Analysis*

Newspapers tend to place a high value upon the notion of objectivity in reporting. It is seemingly important for multiple perspectives of an issue to be presented, and this is typically done under the auspices of balanced reporting. Despite new challenges from students of the media, Fowler (1991) notes that many news organizations and journalists continue to think of their reporting as objective and bias-free. He explains:

Language is not neutral, but a highly constructive mediator. The journalist takes a different view. He or she collects facts, reports them objectively, and the newspaper presents them fairly and without bias, in language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorting, and agreeable to readers. This professional ethos is common to all the news media (Fowler 1991, p. 1).

The consequences of conceiving good news writing to be a simple reliance on “facts” and the need for news stories to afford equal weight to both sides of an argument has also been addressed. Brown (2007) has noted the difficulties that result from this journalistic requirement:

So long as the mass media give more or less equal weight to fringe experts and experts representing the consensus, the public gets the impression that the issue still hangs in the balance. The way journalists tend to treat disputes makes this trick an easy one. “Objective” journalism requires that roughly equal space be granted to both sides of a disagreement. This is a huge advantage for anyone disputing mainstream science: The public sees a dispute in which each side has interesting things to say. Worse yet, it’s very hard to correct any inaccuracies and distortions in the fringe position within the space allowed: Mainstream scientists often look doctrinaire and defensive in such reports (p. 20).

One can see how “social issues” could be substituted for “science.” And yet, as Brown notes, “both sides” implies that there are only two sides to every issue, at least, two sides that are often deemed to be worth reporting on. Both critical discourse analysis and institutional ethnography both show us that “objectivity” in news reporting is a produced effect, reflecting not only ethical commitments of reporters, but the specific organizational, political and economic circumstances in which they work, and the specific professional techniques that journalists learn in order to negotiate the sometimes conflicting demands of these.

The textual materials analyzed in this project were in keeping with the two-sides tradition, and the emphasis upon binary oppositions was apparent within the discourse in several situations. By revisiting the story of Tammy Caron, highlighted earlier in Chapter 5, we can see how concerns about the development of affordable housing in communities can be funneled into two oppositional sides. The article *Working poor make up 50% of homeless: Report to reveal housing costs too expensive* begins as such:

Tammy Caron did the right thing. She had been in an eight-year relationship with a man who had become progressively more abusive as his addiction to drugs and alcohol took hold. She had been willing to live with the abuse while it remained verbal, but Caron says the first time he touched her she walked out the door. So it was on one cold October night

four years ago the unemployed Caron found herself walking the streets of Calgary with her 11-year-old son in tow and thought: What now? “I was wondering what to do,” says Caron, 44. “I was scared and frightened.” Even after getting into a shelter and finding a job, it took her more than a month to find affordable housing. Moreover, having a job didn’t stop Caron from becoming homeless again less than two years later. She’s not alone.

A study to be released next month has found that 50 per cent of Calgary’s homeless population have jobs. ...According to a count this year conducted by the Homeless Awareness Society of Calgary, 2,000 people are living on the street or accessing shelters and services every night, representing a 34 per cent increase in just two years. “(The increase) is surprising and worrying,” said Ald. Madeleine King. “We have to see shelters as part of a continuum, not a solution. A key will be working with communities to get more rental units in their neighbourhoods and diminishing the not-in-my-backyard attitude” (Myers 2002, p. B1).

Ultimately, the story is about the lack of affordable housing in Calgary, not the personal experiences of a woman who had been abused. However, the story draws upon her experiences and uses them to provide an example of someone in need of access to affordable housing. Essentially, the article reads as if it is a public service announcement, designed to elicit sympathy from middle class homeowners who have been resistant to the idea of developing affordable housing units in their neighbourhoods. The article, at first sight, does not appear to explicitly represent a debate between two ‘sides’ of an argument over housing. However, the article does lend itself to ‘completion’ or interpretive elaboration by the reader in a way that evokes such an opposition. The next section will continue to discuss how the “two sides” approach was used in the above article, and how that leads to a produced impression of “fairness” in the reporting.

*Selling the problem: Using binary oppositions*

The story worked because it was as much of a sales pitch to sell the merits of a particular product – affordable housing – to a group of people who would not use it, as it was intended to discuss the need for, and barriers to, affordable housing development. The lack of affordable housing development is a serious concern, at least according to the newspaper story, and yet only one comment about neighbourhood resistance to development was made, and this was via a quote from a municipal politician. There could be a variety of reasons behind this decision, but ultimately, I think that few people would be willing to step out and admit their reluctance to accept low income housing development in their neighbourhoods. It is unlikely that many people would want to go on the record and admit feelings that encourage economic segregation, and ultimately, discrimination. According to the article, there was a demonstrable need for development, and yet the story failed to provide information about the barriers to development, and it did not put the issue into a greater community context. For example, had Calgary's population growth taken city planners off guard? Could the number of people on the waitlist simply outpaced the ability to build or purchase additional spaces to dedicate to subsidized housing?

The story constructed two (and only two) interests: the needy and the NIMBYS, with an emphasis on the 'needy' and a bare hint of the problem of NIMBYism. The lack of explanation of the barriers to the provision of affordable housing encourages the reader to 'fill in' an explanation of the barriers. In this particular case, the lack of affordable housing was constructed from a moral position, as the emphasis was placed upon the

personal, and undoubtedly unfortunate, life circumstances of an abused woman in need. It does not tell readers why development has not occurred, give insight as to who (or what) is putting up these barriers, nor address the economic implications associated with affordable housing development. These might have been some of the issues that might have been included in a story about the lack of affordable housing in the city of Calgary. Instead, space is dedicated to discussing the commissioned study, emphasizing the authors (and implicit credibility of the study), and the study findings. Attention was drawn to the fact that 50 per cent of the homeless population was employed, touching upon the notions of “deserving poor,” an idea discussed earlier, in Chapter 5. One can speculate that this strategy was likely used to address the stigma of lazy, transient individual who just do not want to work. And yet, the act of emphasizing the employment status of an individual in the story works to shore up assumptions about those who are not working, implying that these individuals are less deserving of social support.

One simple sentence identifies one of the roadblocks in developing affordable housing units: neighbourhood resistance to low-income housing units. The implication of the article is that if you, the reader, do not sympathize with the woman in the article, then you must fall into the NIMBY category. The reference made to “diminishing the not-in-my-backyard attitude” implies that it is the NIMBYs that lie in opposition to the woman in need. When journalists write a story about a woman in need of stable shelter, it is imperative that the reasons for her difficulties are presented, too. However, by pegging NIMBYs against vulnerable, abused women, the story appears to be pegging one interest (the vulnerable and economically disadvantaged) against another (residents with the

ability to welcome development in their neighbourhood). This “two sides” construction is a journalistic strategy for constructing “objectivity,” as the story of the vulnerable woman cannot be told without talking about the forces working against her (the NIMBYs). The newspaper appears to be “objective” by including comments from a credible, elected, public figure who made statements that supported Tammy Caron’s claims that life is difficult and that something needs to change, and that Ms. Caron’s situation did not simply pull at the heartstrings of the journalist, but that her struggle was also verifiable by university researchers. The inclusion of these supporting comments works to construct both objectivity and the legitimacy of ‘expertise’, and yet, it also hides the actual lopsidedness and incompleteness of the article. This is a factual result of the organizational processes of the construction of the article, not only of politics, but also of on-the-ground journalistic and editorial choices concerning what will “sell,” what looks objective, what will fit the space on the page, and also the resources available, such as time, budgetary considerations and accessible resources available to both the journalist and to the paper.

A story about the working homeless will quite easily fly under the radar of readers, but a story of a battered woman who lived on the street with her child, is far more likely to capture the attention of readers, and elicit a strong response from most readers who are parents, if not from all readers, in general. And to borrow from a crude idiom associated with the media, “if it bleeds, it leads,” suggesting that stories of physical pain and suffering capture an audience in a way that other stories cannot. While this is an oversimplification of the processes involved, connecting the lived experiences of a

battered woman with a statistic – that of the rates of the working homeless – and then contrasting these experiences against the purported views of residents who do not wish for development (without any explanation or investigation of this resistance), oversimplifies a complex issue that impacts multiple parties. A basic, binary conflict is far easier for journalists to package and explain to readers, than is a multi-faceted and complex issue, which I now believe the lack of affordable housing is.

*Constructing stories without voices*

Pascale (2005) has noted that “newspapers, well known for producing firsthand news stories, very seldom include the points of view of people who cannot afford housing in articles about homelessness” (p. 260). At first glance, such an assessment does not seem to fit in this particular circumstance, as this particular story begins with the personal trauma of a battered woman, and the fear and instability that she had to cope with. It looks like Tammy Caron is being heard. However, upon closer examination, one can see how this woman’s personal circumstances were discussed in a way that appears to demonstrate her familiarity with the problems associated with finding, securing, and maintaining adequate and affordable housing, while constructing and treating her as an *object* of discussion, rather than as an active participant.

For all intents and purposes, Tammy Caron is an expert when it comes to affordable housing. And yet, she was not solicited for her own opinions or recommendations. The process of emphasizing her struggles, without inquiring as to what might have helped her, reinforced her ‘victim’ status, and demonstrates how little value is

ascribed to her voice. Instead of constructing her as an expert on the problem of unaffordable housing in her own right, she was treated as a passive actor on the housing stage. This is in keeping with Fraser's (1989b) assessment that there is, typically, a tendency for "the politics of needs interpretation to devolve into the politics of need satisfaction" (p. 177).

The lack of critical evaluation in the article describing Tammy Caron's situation is not unique. Throughout the media coverage, there is a general lack of in-depth reporting on the issues associated with the housing challenges in Calgary. I was unable to find any information about the impact of the natural resource revenues on the housing market. A reference was made to economic success of Calgary, on the whole:

"We're victims of our own success," said Ald. Ric McIvor, a member of the CHC board, who believes the city's growth has played a key role in the increase. "People come here because they want job opportunities... Who can blame them for trying to make their lives better?" (Pierson 2003, December 3, p. 12).

Most would agree that Calgary's economic growth has largely been attributed to the oil and gas revenues, and yet very little information was provided about the impact of the resource revenues upon the City. It is widely understood that many are benefiting from what some have described as 'the boom,' though little attention has been paid to those who have not experienced the rewards (TD Economics, 2003). This lack of awareness regarding those who have not benefited ties in to the quotation above: what about those who already lived in Calgary prior to the boom, and have always been trying to "make their lives better," while trying to keep up with the overheated economy? If one struggled to make ends meet prior to the housing crisis, how serious must it be now? These

questions, concerns, and realities are not reflected in newspaper stories, and this contributes to a lack of political awareness around the complexities of the housing situation in the city.

### Policy Documents

Many of my findings that concern policy documents are addressed in relation to things that I found in relation to newspaper stories, and thus will be unpacked in the last section of this chapter. However, there is one particular issue unique to the policy dataset that I feel is important to note.

#### *Data Rigour and Follow-up*

My collection of policy documents appeared, at first, to be overwhelming and also very comprehensive. But upon the completion of my analysis, I realized how much of the information in one policy document was simply repeated from one document to the next. Information posted on one particular portion of the City's website was often reproduced, word for word, on another page. My initial impression was that there was a significant amount of information 'out there,' when in fact, this was not the case. The *Research Brief Series* of documents is also a good example. From their sheer size, it appeared that the series of documents were content-rich but, in fact, was essentially the same document with new numbers plugged into tables. And as mentioned in Chapter 6, I was looking for more when I read the rationale behind the decisions to include some groups in the research and not others, such as the decision to include information about rates of 'lone

parents' who have challenges with affordability, but not data on 'new immigrants.' Few hypotheses were provided as to why certain groups had more problems with affordability than others did. In that sense, it was not so much a research brief series as it was a series of statistics. I was also looking for information that was generated as a result of these seventeen briefs, but was unable to locate anything that discussed the implications resulting from the findings. I found it particularly of concern that I was unable to find a document that addressed the findings that 18 percent of all households in Calgary had problems with affordability (Calgary, 2004c). I thought that this number was staggering, and yet I was unable to find a document that addressed this figure.

Part of my surprise resulted from my understanding that these briefs were produced by a social research unit, and I had some expectations about the types of information, the quality of this data, and volume of data available. Clearly, my expectations were off base, and yet I think that my expectations resulted from a strategy on the part of the City to appear that it produced information about housing statistics comparable to its counterparts in other major Canadian cities, such as Edmonton and Toronto. As noted in Chapter 6, the City did make comparisons between its data and that of other cities in North America, so I suspect that there is some need to appear as if it is paying as much to these issues as other cities are. Also, I suspect that the City has attempted to make it seem like it is doing its due diligence in data collection and information management in order to better lobby the Province and the federal government for additional resources. While these are just speculations, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the City appears to be collating a significant amount of data

about housing issues in Calgary when, in fact, the comprehensiveness of the information can be challenged.

### Answering Questions

In Chapter 4, I explained that texts were examined, by way of critical discourse analysis, in order to answer five questions about housing policy in Calgary. These questions were as follows: First, whose housing needs are being addressed, and specifically, what are the needs that have been identified and addressed by municipal housing policies? Second, which housing requirements have been highlighted (or given importance to) within public discourse? Third, what affinities between policy and media discourse can be seen? Are there, for example, shared embedded stereotypes of those deemed to be in housing need? Fourth, are housing requirements, as identified by both the municipal policies and in public discourse, adequate and encompassing? Is there a difference in interpretation between the newspaper coverage and policy documents over what housing needs encompass? Fifth, are housing decisions made by low-income individuals limited by, or represented in, particular ways by textual documents? For example, does the paperwork associated with the application for community housing create barriers to accessing community housing? This section will address these questions, and provide evidence of my findings.

*Whose needs are addressed in policy?*

For the purposes of this project, “policy documents” encompassed a number of textual materials including, but not limited to, research briefs, the published proceedings from Roundtables, an application form, and web pages. I wanted to know whose needs were addressed in policy, and how these needs were talked about within the documents.

The City commonly used the term “stakeholder,” throughout the data set. The *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy* notes:

The provision of affordable housing is broad and complex. It is a responsibility shared by all levels of government, the private sector, and the citizens of Calgary. By working in collaboration with senior governments, the private and non-profit sectors and with communities themselves, the City of Calgary can more effectively respond to the housing needs of its citizens.

Previously, The City of Calgary has responded to the need for affordable housing through a variety of policies and initiatives that evolved over time. The purpose of this Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy is to focus The City’s future efforts in a consistent manner, to both capitalize on its own unique strengths, and to support other stakeholders to capitalize on theirs. When this strategy is approved it will become a tool for community dialogue, as well as guiding future municipal activities in the field (Calgary 2002, p. 3).

It is interesting to see that the City makes a distinction between the “housing needs of its citizens” and “other stakeholders.” This distinction is an important one, and this led me to wonder how “stakeholder” was defined in the policy, if the term “stakeholder” is not thought to include the “citizens” of Calgary. The City elaborates on the role of the “stakeholder” in a later page:

Although this Strategy is designed to guide the City of Calgary in its efforts to ensure that Calgarians in need have affordable housing, it would be neither possible nor appropriate for the City to establish its direction in isolation, when there are so many other organizations involved in affordable housing. For example, The City is a primary developer and operator of housing but the money it spends comes in large part from senior

governments with their own program objectives and stipulations for expenditure.

In addition there are many agencies and organizations involved in advocacy, research, fundraising, development and operation of various types of affordable and special needs housing...

The City of Calgary is a significant stakeholder in affordable housing, along with senior levels of government, the private and the non-profit sector. The purpose of this Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy is to identify The City's areas of unique strength, so that it can focus its own future efforts as well as supporting other stakeholders to focus on theirs (Calgary 2002, pp. 7-8).

Note the above reference to the City as a "significant stakeholder in affordable housing, along with senior levels of government, the private and the non-profit sector." This explanation does not construct Calgarians as stakeholders, and most interestingly, those Calgarians who are in need of affordable housing are not included either. One might think that the individual who stands to directly benefit from a housing program might indeed be considered to be a stakeholder. The decision not to describe those who are in housing need as a "stakeholder" suggests that, in this particular circumstance, the value is placed upon the shoulders of those larger organizations who can contribute to the solution, financially or otherwise, as opposed to those in need who, theoretically, will only act as recipients of a benefit. This is in keeping with the participant list at the Mayor's Roundtables on Affordable Housing, an issue discussed in Chapter 6. Again, representatives from those agencies or associations which were trying to "fix" the problem participated, while those in need were not there to speak of their own accord, without the filter of a non-profit agency. It is evident that the City does not consider those struggling with housing as "stakeholders," and that the opinions of those in need were not represented in the same fashion as others who have an interest in the administration and

development of affordable housing. But, in spite of their absence, are their needs addressed in policy?

First, it is necessary to draw attention to how the City discusses needs. A City-produced definition of “affordable housing” explains that:

Affordable Housing adequately suits the needs of low- and moderate-income households at costs below those generally found in the Calgary market. It may take a number of forms that exist along a continuum – from emergency shelters, to transitional housing, to non-market rental (also known as social or subsidized housing), to formal and informal rental, and ending with affordable home ownership (Calgary 2004r, p. 1).

It is clear that this continuum is extremely broad, and encompasses a number of options. However, it can be argued that not all of the options will suit the needs of all in need. The emphasis is placed upon the need for the individual to move along the continuum, and eventually not to require subsidized accommodation. The City does not provide any information about who might require what kind of shelter and when. For example, it might not be appropriate to refer to a shelter stay for a family unable to afford market rents as “affordable housing.” Some might challenge the decision to include emergency shelters as “housing,” as it would likely fail the tests outlined by CMHC - Is it affordable? Is it adequate? Is it suitable? While likely affordable, it is unlikely to be considered adequate or suitable. This suggests that “affordable housing,” as defined by the City of Calgary, will not necessarily be able to meet all, most or, in some cases, even many of the needs of those who are struggling, and the development of more “affordable housing” might not be a panacea in and of itself. The specific plans would need to be evaluated to determine what kinds of needs are met within each development.

The Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy does not, in and of itself, make any kind of specific reference or commitment to striving for development that meets the needs of a variety of individuals (families, single people, seniors, people with disabilities) with a variety of needs (housing that is close to schools, employment, and local services such as grocery stores). But there are some, more generic mentions of the needs of the client population that they are trying to serve. The *Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing* notes:

Land was identified as the cornerstone of all affordable housing initiatives. Through feedback from participants and results of the case study it was determined that the target market in greatest need is the least able to be accommodated in suburban locations. Low-income households need to be close to transit, schools, shopping and a range of amenities that are not normally available in new communities (Calgary 2003, p. 3).

While not an exhaustive list, it does indicate that location is an issue for some low income households. However, it appears that concerns about location are also thought to be somewhat flexible. A later paragraph<sup>1</sup> notes:

- New communities are often too isolated for those most in need of affordable housing
- Need land close to downtown or established communities
- Outlying communities might be ok for affordable homeownership like Habitat or others with vehicles
- Some people with disabilities can live in new communities as the services come to them such as handi-bus (Calgary 2003, p. 7)

The quotation above was selected from the summary of proceedings from the Mayor's Round Table, and does not represent official City positions, however, I chose to draw attention to these comments because, although they reflect the discussion held on one particular day and are not official policy, this is the *only* additional mention of the needs

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<sup>1</sup> "This summary captures the main points identified in the Roundtable plenary as reported by the team leaders for each of the five participating teams. The findings do not represent a consensus of all participants or the position of The City of Calgary" (Calgary 2003, p. 5).

of the individuals who need to access affordable housing. Note how the disabled individual is given special status in the above quotation. The idea that “services can come to them” implies a special permission to exclude disabled people from the ‘community’ that is so important to other low-income earners. Will all services come to the person with disabilities? Will schools be close by for their children? Or, is the implication that disabled individuals will not have the same sort of life circumstances as any other low-income earner? This comment works to effectively separate low income earners, and ascribe statuses to them: first, you are disabled, then you are low-income. This creates another special distinction for people with disabilities, and this kind of categorization builds in assumptions about the needs of disabled individuals, like access to schools, that are taken for granted. This is a good example of what Fraser (1989a) describes as the “interpretation of people’s needs as simply given and unproblematic” (p. 164). Granted, the above comments are limited to this particular document and one cannot accuse the City of Calgary of *always* interpreting needs as unproblematic. But these are direct comments from the very “stakeholders” that the City has committed to consulting with, and there is little opportunity for those in housing need to correct these kinds of assumptions.

A reading of a variety of policy documents suggests that the City is primarily concerned with affordability (Calgary, 2002; Calgary, 2004c; Calgary, 2005g) and then is concerned with housing adequacy (a measure of housing in need of major repairs) and suitability (a measure of housing that is overcrowded). This suggests that the City approaches its housing problems from a perspective that seeks to measure the basics. Is

there is a roof over one's head? Is it affordable? Is it falling down? Are there too many people under that roof? These are questions and concerns about the very basics, and this ties in to a comment reportedly made by Ric McIvor, a City Alderman, who noted that "Nobody deserves to sleep outside in the winter," (Pierson 2003, December 3, p. 12). It is not necessarily a problem that the City concerns itself with the basics. However, the language the City uses to describe the problem as simply a question of meeting the basics, does not accurately reflect the stress and struggle faced by a low income earner. Research tells us that it is not just about the roof over the head. If this "roof" is not close to social support systems, near schools, in safe neighbourhoods, with easy access to childcare or employment, life gets considerably harder for those in need. The problem is far more complex than basic provision, and this is where one of the 'fault lines' can be found. 'Stakeholders' are continuously relied upon to help find solutions to this problem, and the problem is described as being fairly basic: shelter needs to be affordable, suitable, and adequate. And yet, if these were the only requirements, large-scale housing projects would have already been developed. However, the City is cognizant of the social factors at play because there is an acknowledgement within the discourse that 'ghettoization' must be avoided:

Wherever possible affordable housing shall be provided on a "mixed income" basis where some residents receive a rental subsidy while the remainders pay a "low end" of market rent. This kind of affordable housing creates healthy communities, reduces the concentration of low income households and contributes to affordable housing opportunities for both non-market and market renters (Calgary 2002, p. 14).

This puts the City in a rather difficult situation. The textual materials produced by the City suggest that they are primarily concerned with basic provision, and yet, there is a fear of going about this improperly and creating more social problems. In this sense, the

City appears to be somewhat unclear in their direction. My analysis suggests that the needs of ‘stakeholders’ are relatively prioritized in this process of need satisfaction, as the stakeholders are invited to the discussion table, appear to have influence over things such as the City’s mill rate, and are relied upon by the City to provide their expertise. Low-income individuals, on the other hand, are dependent upon the outcomes of these stakeholder-City consultations. They are not invited to participate in policy development, nor is their experience trying to access City-run housing an interactive experience. They are given the application form and are otherwise limited in what they can share, or request, in terms of their own unique circumstances. They are not given the opportunity to explain their needs in the same way that other, outside and arms-length, stakeholders are. This has policy consequences and this is in keeping with what researchers, who have focused their studies on the stories of those in need, have articulated (Reitsma-Street et al, 2001; Bell and Clarke, 2000; Fraser and Gordon, 1994; Novac, 1990).

*The housing requirements emphasized in newspaper discourse*

My analysis suggests that newspaper stories are typically not so different from the City policy in that many stories are concerned with issues of basic provision. After revisiting my dataset, I noted that the “Housing – unaffordable” code was the most frequently used of all 219 codes. Money and household budgets are tangible things that can be measured, and are issues that all readers understand. We all need money to get by, and it is no surprise that this is an issue newspapers would report on because all readers would be able to relate to these kinds of pressures. An example of this concern with housing affordability was in a 2005 *Calgary Herald* article:

The title of being the most affordable major city in which to buy a home has unceremoniously been yanked away from Calgary. ... “For the first time in a long time, Alberta stood out – on account of bad news,” says the report. “Despite leading the country in annual income growth, Alberta house prices accelerated sharply in the second quarter and offset the positive effects of lower interest rates, making it the only province to suffer an across-the-board deterioration in affordability” (Hope 2005, September 10, p. J10).

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many elements to housing. Access to schools and services, neighbourhood safety, and proximity to employment opportunities are often reported to be as important as housing affordability. Yet the quote above is taken from a story that likely would appeal to a greater number of readers. Stories about economic issues are more broadly readable than a story about communities that do not have enough childcare facilities might be, because not all readers have children and of those who do have children, not all will have trouble finding childcare. In addition to affordability being one of the easiest dimensions of housing to measure and understand, it is also part of a journalistic strategy to write stories that will capture as large an audience as possible, which both meets the needs of advertisers and the newspaper’s source of revenues, and also makes the content as relevant to as large an audience as is possible. The professional criteria of objectivity that journalists must follow also emphasize the importance of the appearance of ‘factuality’, and economic facts, by virtue of their measurability, are thus privileged. This strategy is understandable, given the mandate and scope of newspapers, yet is also problematic because it fails to draw attention to some of the realities of those who struggle to meet their housing needs. Focusing primarily on affordability fails to acknowledge the work that low-income earners have done when trying to meet the needs of their families. If stories only reflect affordability concerns, it fails to provide a complete picture of what ‘struggle’ entails. And as Pascale (2005) notes, the newspaper

stories are where many people obtain information about situations that they are unfamiliar with. If the opinions of ‘stakeholders’ are partially informed by these kind of stories – ones that focus primarily on affordability – and the City relies on stakeholders for input, it is not hard to see what affordability concerns are prioritized in policy.

The newspaper stories collected from the *Calgary Sun* were frequently located in the “Homes” section of the paper. This section is shared with a significant number of advertisements for new home developments, mortgage brokers, and real estate agents. There is value assigned to a heated market within the stories, as advertisers stand to benefit from a hot housing market. This might explain why the consequences associated with a hot market are rarely discussed, and the benefits are highlighted. In a story published in the *Calgary Sun* in 2005, attention was drawn to a local realty company’s forecast for 2006 which estimated that the overall average house price would rise:

Supply is “the only limiting factor” to Calgary’s housing market in 2006, says a spokesman for Royal LePage. “Labour shortages and infrastructure shortfalls will limit the number of new constructions,” said Ted Zaharki, of Royal LePage Real Estate Services. “(That) in turn will increase the pressure on the existing home market, which is already experiencing a shortage of supply.”

The realty company yesterday released its 2006 market survey forecast and Calgary’s overall average house price is expected to rise 9% to \$283,400. Of nine markets surveyed, Calgary is projected to be the third most expensive city to buy real estate in, behind Vancouver and Toronto.

The three most affordable cities will be Regina, Winnipeg and Halifax.

Not even anticipated interest rate hikes are expected to dampen Calgary’s robust housing sector, said Zaharko. “(It) will not be substantial enough to affect the market as rates are still extremely low from a historical perspective,” he said.

The average home price across Canada, meanwhile, is forecast to jump 6% to \$271,800 in 2006.

Royal LePage Real Estate Services president and CEO Phil Soper said high oil and gas prices will have a major impact on realty in the new year. “The Canadian energy industry is enjoying a renaissance, with much higher commodity prices making previously uneconomical oil and gas reserves attractive to produce,” said Soper. “The spill-over effect of increased capital spending, rising personal earning and the subsequent increase in population through migration will allow real estate markets in Western Canada to outpace the rest of the country” (Wilson 2005, December 2, p. B5).

Here, the emphasis is on rising house prices, but this is tied in to the “renaissance” of the energy industry and the “rising personal earning” implies that the increase will be of minimal consequence. This article appeared in the business section of the newspaper and it is unsurprising that no mention is made of the social implications of this nearly ten percent increase. This would not as problematic if there were other articles in the paper that did unpack the social consequences of rising costs, such as the trickle-down effects onto the rental market and this impact of rising costs on available rental supply. The more people who are priced out of the market and are forced to rent a home, the lower the vacancy rates are, enabling landlords to increase their rents. This increase has consequences, particularly for those who have not seen a significant rise in their personal earning, such as those on government supports. More often than not, the *Sun* focused on housing affordability from the perspective of a middle-income earner in the city, thus drawing attention to the issues facing an audience that was likely to access the services of the advertisers that appeal alongside the stories about housing “affordability,” as opposed to “unaffordability.”

*FFWD:Weekly* was the paper that regularly drew attention to the problems facing marginalized people. Stories appearing in this paper focused on the social implications of housing developments (or lack thereof), and particularly on the needs of those with fixed incomes, and those living in poverty. Housing, more often than not, is constructed as one aspect of the health continuum:

Public health really embodies the prevention of disease, not treatments or cures. At its core, the major factor that determines how healthy a population will be is poverty. The poorer an individual, the less healthy that individual will be; the poorer a society, the lower the average health of that society will be. Other determining factors for health are level of education, job satisfaction, housing, social/family support network, and an individual's ability to balance work and family responsibilities ("Health," 2006, July 26, n.p.).

This quotation demonstrates *FFWD's* tendency to put issues affecting Calgarians into a broad spectrum, and focus on the long-term outcomes. The use of the term "prevention" implies a long-term problem solving approach. This is not in keeping with similar practices at work in the *Herald* and the *Sun*.

*FFWD* also tends to rely on stories to demonstrate structural difficulties at work in the provision of housing, and the 'needs' of individuals are not limited to affordability, suitability, or adequacy. Instead, individual needs are constructed as complex and multi-faceted. An article about the development in a run-down part of the City demonstrates the different social forces at work in the situation:

Mayor Dave Bronconnier's plans for a new committee to oversee the management of the city in the wake of the East Village debacle aren't enough to solve the problems inherent in plans to redevelop the area, say some critics. Bronconnier says the East Village controversy shows council needs to keep closer tabs on the work being done by city administrators, and vowed on November 5 to look into creating an executive oversight committee to do just that.

His comments come in the wake of the sudden scrapping of the public-private partnership created to facilitate the \$1.5-billion redevelopment of the land between city hall and Fort Calgary. An inquiry into the partnership revealed serious flaws in the way it was set up, and led to the dismissal of three senior city executives. But economist Harvey Cohen says he thinks problems remain the city's philosophy towards the East Village, and it should rethink the way it approaches the area.

“Not only was it a bad partnership, it was a bad plan,” Cohen says. “They think they haven't solved, and I haven't heard anything about this yet, is what about the people who live there?”

Cohen says the city's plans never took into account the mix of thousands of low-income seniors and homeless people with the upscale condo dwellers who will live in the gentrified community. “To think that they can co-exist is pie-in-the-sky. I think it will lead to violence,” Cohen says. “It's never been done in a peaceful way in the world that I know of” (Babin 2002, November 7, n.p.).

This excerpt from an article about development is a strong representation of the way stories appearing in *FFWD* discuss the social implications of housing decisions made in Calgary. The sympathies, or interests, appear to lie with the low-income residents living in this part of the city. The image of a low-income senior citizen being forgotten, or not taken in “account” in development decisions reflects a concern with decision making that fails to take a complete picture of the needs and demographics of a particular community. The story emphasizes certain ideals such as community inclusion, as opposed to focusing on the economics associated with this kind of delay in development. Instead, the story emphasizes the connection to the most socially and economically vulnerable citizens. However, again we have a construction of a moralized binary opposition between housing needs and the presence of NIMBYism.

While such a strategy might, in fact, be a more realistic reflection of life for low-income Calgarians, the strategy of exhaustive reporting of social struggles does not

necessary offer up realistic, prescriptive or easy solutions. Many of the stories focus on what is wrong, who is suffering, and where the social injustices lie. The reader does get a strong sense of the needs of the low-income earner from reading articles in this paper. This is in stark contrast to stories published in the *Herald* or the *Sun*, where the emphasis is placed on the needs of individuals with incomes that are high enough to afford individual properties of choice in the marketplace, as if they are simply housing ‘consumers,’ faced with choices about what and when to buy, and not people who need an affordable, safe, and adequate home for their families.

My analysis of the newspaper data set suggests that there are two discrete ways of speaking about and constructing people who live in Calgary, as it pertains to addressing housing issues in the city. Residents are either struggling and fighting against the system, or doing well enough (financially) to be able to make some (albeit, occasionally difficult) choices in the housing marketplace. Most stories failed to capitalize on the notions of resiliency and agency of those who did have problems finding housing that met most of the needs of their families. This is unsurprising, as the news media thrive on stories that demonstrate some kind of conflict. When mainstream daily newspapers ran a housing-related story with a ‘good news’ aspect they often failed to capture some of the other, over-arching issues at play. Recall the story about Lela Johnson receiving a Welcome Wagon basket, and the last spot in an affordable housing complex (Hope 2002, October 26, p. HS1). Where was the discussion about the need for additional units, for example? One of the only stories that appeared in a daily newspaper that did capitalize on the notion of resiliency through difficult times was a story about a single mother who “was

short of funds to maintain her living expenses” and opted to find a boarder to help pay the bills (Gray 2003, July 24, p. S1). Only one story out of nearly sixty took this approach. Instead, low income earners are often constructed as only ‘needy,’ as opposed to ‘in need,’ a subtle, yet significant, distinction.

### *The affinities between policy and newspaper discourse*

While there were distinctions between whose needs were considered as paramount in policy documents and amongst articles in the three newspapers, there were noteworthy similarities between the two data sets. First, both data sets reflected a tendency to rely on the opinions of ‘experts’ to provide context, or justification, for particular policies or practicalities. In a story about urban sprawl, an architect is solicited for his opinions about the forces shaping the housing market:

One of the reasons people flock to the suburbs, according to Calgary architect and realtor John Brown, is that they’re set up to make it easy and affordable to buy a home. The lots are mapped out, the designs are in place and financing is available. “it’s a very sophisticated marketing strategy to make that happen... What’s wrong with it is that it’s too easy to thoughtlessly buy something,” Brown says.

Brown compares the way houses are churned out and sold in the suburbs to the way the Gap manufactures and sells clothes. He explains that there’s an entire industry focused on the suburbs – developers, builders, the Homes section of the daily newspapers, open houses, etc. – and it’s a profitable one (McNamee 2001, November 29, “City 1,” n.p.)

*FFWD* had a wide variety of housing related ‘experts’ whose opinions were solicited for inclusion in stories about housing related issues, like the architect mentioned above, an urban design expert from the University of Calgary, local housing activists, a health professional, directors of the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the Calgary Drop-In Centre, a housing consultant, a social worker, an expert on social determinants of health,

the president of the Coalition of Seniors Advocates, to name a few. *FFWD* is unique in this regard, given the variety of voices that are constructed as ‘experts.’ This paper stands in contrast to both the *Herald* and the *Sun*.

The inclusion of expert opinion works to educate and inform lay citizens about the intricacies of particular issues, and helps to correct what are represented as ‘false’ assumptions or ideas about social problems. This expert opinion becomes problematic, however, when the same opinion is solicited and repeated at the exclusion of others. An example of this is the inclusion of comments from a CMHC economist, Richard Corriveau, in stories appearing in the *Herald* and the *Sun*. Comments about the housing market from Mr. Corriveau were present in 10 out of 59 stories about housing from these two newspapers. His opinions were present in 17% of all stories about housing in Calgary in the city’s two daily papers. This is what some might describe as significant market share. Mr. Corriveau’s position with the CMHC is one that emphasizes quantitative data about housing statistics, and often speaks to prices and affordability. A comment appearing in one *Herald* story reads:

Richard Corriveau of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. puts it out there in black and white (adjusted for inflation and placed in terms of 2001 dollars): While the real average price has been on an upward trend since 1985, monthly mortgage payments have remained stable, says the Calgary senior market analyst.

Despite rising house prices, the affordability of home ownership has been relatively unchanged since 1985, the sole exception being 1990, says Corriveau.

Then comes this statement: “In real terms, the average price of an existing home in Calgary increased 45 per cent between 1985 and 2001. Over the same period though, the average monthly payment, including

principal and interest, has risen only two percent” (Hope 2002, May 4, p. HS7).

This quotation is representative of the tone of other stories that include a comment from this economist. Note, for example, the ‘black and white’ reference privileging ‘hard’ economic data. Interestingly, Mr. Corriveau was heavily relied on for comments in the *Herald* and the *Sun*, while his opinions were not included, not even once, in any *FFWD* articles. In fact, the *Herald* and the *Sun* solicited different kinds of ‘expert’ opinion than did *FFWD*. The *Herald* included quotes from the regional mortgage sales manager for the Royal Bank, the manager of strategic initiatives for the City, the president of the Canadian Home Builders’ Association, the executive director of the Calgary Apartment Association, an RBC economist, a university professor concerned with affordable housing development, the chairman of the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, and a resettlement counselor for the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. A majority of these experts commented on the economic issues affecting Calgary’s housing markets. There were no comments made about safety, access to schools, recreational facilities, or employment, for example. These ‘experts’ were primarily concerned with the financial or business-side of housing, such as mortgage rates, real costs of homes, the cost of land in the city, and vacancy rates.

In the two daily newspapers, the emphasis is often placed on affordability, and this, I believe comes at the exclusion of other housing issues and even concerns about the rising cost of living apart from housing, such as the increases in utility costs as the result of electricity deregulation (see Wild 2003, September 18). The ‘expert’ deals with statistics concerning supply and demand, and affordability, not information about stated

needs and wants. The heavy reliance upon one source has the potential to paint a limited picture for readers, and this dependency actually fails to provide readers with the opinions of other ‘experts.’

An analysis of policy documents also indicates concerns about affordability. The City has cited CMHC data that notes that adequacy and suitability are not serious concerns in the city, but affordability difficulties are (Calgary 2004t, p. 2). In a literature review, the City distinguishes between two separate affordability concerns:

There are two dimensions to the affordability issue. The income dimension means that housing may be relatively inexpensive but people may not have the income to afford it. The rent dimension means that there is a decline in the supply of available rental units, either because the stock fails to keep pace with population growth or household growth would but an upward pressure on rents. This problem is especially apparent in lower-rent rental properties, where low-income households seek accommodation [Pomeroy, 2001] (Calgary 2005h, p. 6).

Both the newspaper articles and the policy documents suggest that affordability is constructed as the most important housing-related issue in Calgary. I have little doubt that affordability concerns are serious issues for Calgarians, but based on my own understanding about the complexities of housing needs as a result of my participation with another research project, I know that affordability is just one of several housing-related issues that pose problems for low-income earners. However, it is difficult to discern what other issues pose problems for low-income Calgarians by way of a critical discourse analysis of the newspaper articles. One might suggest that lack of attention to other issues could become a vicious circle: if they are not studied, then they ‘disappear’ from awareness, and this lack of awareness means they are deemed not worthy of further research.

The second similarity between the two data sets can be found in the construction of appropriate roles and responsibilities of non-profit agencies. In a City-produced literature review, it is suggested that funding be funneled to non-profits in terms of specific criteria, as follows:

Based on these findings, both demand and supply measures are appropriate in different circumstances, depending on the aim of the policy goal, as follows:

...Increasing Housing Supply – To increase the supply of affordable housing units, the literature recommends providing capital grants to non-profit organizations for the creation of new or refurbished stock (Calgary 2005e, p. 2).

Sixteen different agencies and foundations were mentioned throughout the newspaper articles. These ranged from the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, to the Calgary Homeless Foundation, to Habitat for Humanity (Zickefoose 2003, February 27; Gray 2003; McGinnis, 2001). The frequent mention of these types of organizations and the heavy reliance on comments from non-profit groups (in both newspaper articles and in policy documents) suggests that city officials acting on the behalf of city residents, rely on non-profit and charitable organizations to manage the problems of those in housing need.

This reliance is not limited to housing provision, but also to the role of non-profit agencies in providing expertise about housing needs while in partnership with the City. A *Calgary Herald* story touches upon this interconnectedness and the need for collaboration between different groups:

The multi-family project on Hubalta Road in the city's southeast is a first in many ways – and a model for the future of affordable housing in Calgary, say supporters. “This project is the model of partnerships which put this together,” says Ald. Barry Erskine, who recently represented the city at the housewarming celebrations for Sun Court's first families. “it a sharing of the workload that, all of a sudden, became not a workload at all, but a passion.” Sun Court was a collaboration between public and private groups as well as volunteers and families, says Brian O'Leary, senior partner with Burnet Duckworth and Palmer. Volunteers from the law firm have built four homes with Habitat. “We don't talk about it, we get it done,” says O'Leary (McCormick 2005, March 19, p. K1).

Non-profits are not only seen as ‘experts,’ but are also constructed as frontline agencies that are ‘responsible’ for those with housing difficulties. My analysis of the data suggests that there is an expectation within the newspaper and policy documents that non-profit organizations assume some responsibility for addressing problems associated with housing difficulties. The participation of the non-profit sector at the *Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing*, coupled with the references to the role of non-profit agencies in city-produced literature reviews and, as outlined in the *Affordable Housing Action Plan*, the City's goal of encouraging the “private and non-profit sectors to work together to develop affordable housing” implies that non-profit organizations are responsible for providing solutions to address affordable housing problems (Calgary 2005e, n.p.). The frequency with which references to non-profit providers are made implies that there is a level of dependence placed on non-profits by the City, and also by members of the public, given the frequency with which articles appearing in newspapers talked about the connection between non-profit agencies and housing provision. This raises questions about community responsibility for providing access to affordable, adequate housing, and also who is ultimately responsible for managing the problem of supplying housing to those in need. Ultimately, there is a requirement for someone to be accountable and

responsible for ensuring that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing available. As the waiting list for housing supplied by the City of Calgary has not been reduced significantly in recent years, despite an increase in supply, it appears that housing problems continue to be an issue.

Many of the non-profit agencies discussed in newspaper stories and in policy documents are equipped to support those who are homeless, but are not equipped to help those who are 'one-paycheque-away' from losing their homes. The discourse around partnerships in both the newspaper stories and in policy documents implies that there is, ultimately, no one 'in charge' of the problem. Blurred lines between responsibility for, and management of, the housing problem suggests that it is unlikely that one group (be it the City, or someone else) would take control of planning and provision in order to establish a comprehensive plan for Calgary. From the policy documents and newspaper stories, it appears that the current approach to provision depends heavily upon the fluctuating abilities of a variety of other parties. This makes it difficult to assess whether or not there is an inclusive plan in place that strives to meet the needs of all Calgarians. My data suggests that currently, those non-profits that are getting much of the attention, like the Calgary Dream Centre and Habitat for Humanity, attend to the needs of the [single] homeless individual, or to those families with children that are overspending on shelter. This leaves many other groups of people in need of assistance, and without a centralized and inclusive plan to address the needs of these individuals, it will likely be difficult to see a marked decrease in the numbers of those in need.

A third commonality to be found in both media stories and policy documents is a tendency for the concerns of ‘community leaders’ to be emphasized over the concerns of others. Wekerle (2006) has noted that the voices of community leaders are often given an authority that is not easily afforded to other individuals. Often, the voices of these leaders are taken to be representative of those of the entire community, even though they are unelected and are not accountable to the community for the ideas and opinions that they express. The influence of the business community in regards to housing issues is also apparent in other newspaper articles in which business leaders are celebrated because they have been constructed as having ‘bought-in’ to community participation:

And there’s at least one private firm that believes AHPI [Affordable Housing Partnership Initiative] can work in Calgary. Venstar Developments – the same company that builds, develops and owns Super 8 hotels across Canada – believes that it has a business model and long-term approach that can be profitable.

The firm, which also builds condos and apartments, has two Calgary projects being considered for the AHPI program by the provincial government. “The system that is available here in Alberta is very capable of delivering the solution,” said Charles Cochrane, Venstar’s president. “By and large, most of the needs can be attended to given the right kind of approach. But if you’re still using an imperial spanner on a metric nut, it won’t work.

But challenges Calgary faces also go beyond dollars. Mayor Dave Bronconnier held two roundtable meetings in recent months to discuss how all local interests – including non-profit and industry players – could work together to address the problem (Seskus 2004, July 25, p. A9).

The Mayor’s Roundtables are an example of what Wekerle (2006) refers to as the democratic deficit in policy development. The democratic deficit refers to the privatization of city policy making. Given that the Roundtables appeared to be the only opportunities for public input into the housing policy development process and, as discussed in Chapter 6, there was a demonstrable lack of input from those who struggle

with housing present at those discussions, it does appear that some groups are given a voice at the exclusion of others. The above quote's reference to "all local interests" also ignores the fact that those in need were not invited to participate.

The fact that those in the private and non-profit sectors participated in the Roundtables, while low-income earners did not, is only one example of situations where private sector interests were valued at the exclusion of others. The value of private-sector involvement is also emphasized in newspaper articles that describe the consultation and policy development process:

Bronconnier says he's been seeking input from the private sector on ways to make even more units available, and has plans for a forum on the issue later this year. "I do believe it's an opportunity for us, collectively as a council, to bring together other stakeholders – maybe ones who haven't been involved in affordable housing before," Bronconnier says. "With the number of condos being built right now... maybe there's an opportunity to acquire some of those at the planning stage. These are just some of ideas coming out of the private sector" (Babin 2003, June 12, n.p.).

Wekerle notes that problems are created when the city elite (in this situation, the business elite) becomes involved in policy formation, as they are often interpreted as speaking on behalf of their peers. Their peers are often assumed to be all city residents, and not their fellow elite members. The effect of such an activity is to push marginalized communities out even further from the discussions about the needs of the community.

One article that appeared in the *Calgary Sun* has drawn attention to the activities of two local men who have taken an interest in housing issues in Calgary:

I'm over at the Calgary Petroleum Club chatting with Arthur Smith and John Currie, who, by any measure, are two of our community's most distinguished citizens. Both are former Calgary Chamber of Commerce

presidents – which surely puts them in an elite class – and over many a long year have put just about as much effort and energy into charitable projects as they have into business endeavours. Even though Smith is now in his 80s, and Currie in his 70s, they are still indefatigable on both fronts. Four years ago, shaken by the homeless he saw on our streets, Smith started the Calgary Homeless Foundation ([www.calgaryhomeless.com](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com)), and three years ago persuaded Currie to take over as president. But despite moving into his 80s, Smith – naturally – found he couldn't give up on the venture and still pops into the office and works away every day.

Smith actually began his campaign to put a roof over the heads and bodies of the homeless having hearing a radio report about their plight (Jackson 2002, p. 15).

This passage describes these two men as “distinguished citizens” who are part of an “elite class.” The article constructs these two men as informal experts in housing issues, not because of a past history and experiences with solving housing problems, but because of their prior involvement in “business endeavours.” The article constructs and emphasizes the credibility of these two men by way of describing them as “distinguished citizens” with business backgrounds who “[work] away every day.” The implication is that they have a greater authority to speak about housing problems than does the individual who has experienced housing insecurity; it is their contribution that is recognized, after all, and not, for example, the actions of the founder of the Alberta Coalition Against Poverty. The discursive construction of housing issues in terms of an economics-based language of affordability, supply, and demand also works to reinforce the representation of the business community, and business leaders, as particularly qualified to deal with housing issues.

A quote in *FFWD* from a City Alderman makes note of her concern about the influence of some over others:

We are still creating Calgary's political culture, and Danielson says the city is at a crossroads. "Sometimes the thrust seems to come from business, from a very, very strong financial-fiscal focus," she says. "This is basically coming from some people who have a voice and they are being heard by the government." Danielson's sense of the crossroads comes from increasingly hearing, "the voice of the people who are really at a disadvantage, who are vulnerable, who need that extra help" (Smith-Windsor 2003, n.p.).

The private sector's, or business community's, participation in the policy process is not the problem. It is their inclusion at the expense, or exclusion, of those who are truly in housing need (and are most impacted by the decisions that are made at these types of forums) that is problematic. Excluding the *subjects* of the discussion from these kinds of forums and processes is unacceptable, given that decisions made about a particular set of circumstances will only reflect the assumptions and positions of those invited to speak and be heard, thus reflecting an incomplete picture of the problem.

One reference found in City policy notes "by volume alone, the need for affordable housing is especially acute for single individuals living alone, be they renters or owners" (Calgary 2004d, p. 27). But despite the City's acknowledgement that there is a severe need for single individuals to have access to affordable housing, it is families that are often referred to:

As many research studies have shown, however, proportional need is not the only factor to be considered. The provision of "safe, stable, and secure housing is vital to all aspects of children's health and development. ...Housing intersects with other factors that bear on good child outcomes. The quality, cost, tenure, and stability of housing, along with the neighbourhoods and communities in which children reside, all play a role in the achievement of desired outcomes in the areas of health, safety, education, and social engagement" (Cooper, 2001: ii). Thus, the need to ensure safe, adequate, and affordable housing for families with children is also a critical policy issue (*ibid.*).

The City repeatedly acknowledges throughout its research briefs that children need safe, affordable housing. Most newspaper stories chronicled the needs of low income individuals with children. Those with children who had difficulties with housing were constructed as a member of the “deserving” group. As mentioned earlier, Lela Johnson, the last tenant of a new affordable housing project, was identified as being a mother of three. A representative from Habitat for Humanity, a well-known agency that provides affordable housing for low-income families that qualify for homes, makes the point well:

“We really consider ourselves a children’s agency,” says Reid. To be considered for a Habitat-Calgary home, a family must have children, be willing to pay a mortgage, and be employed, but earning below the Canada Low-Income Level. ... The couple’s young children are also excited about the move, laying dibs on bedrooms and planning trips to the playground right across the street. “We hope that owning our own home will give the kids more stability,” says Lynnelle (McDowell 2005, p. N1).

This policy reflects the commitment to the well-being of children that is apparent in other articles that make up the newspaper data set. This dedication to providing families with housing and excluding single individuals appears to be discriminatory in and of itself, but is perplexing, given that City-produced research indicates that the group most in need of housing is that of single individuals, not single parents, nor families (Calgary, 2004d).

But non-profits are not required to serve one particular population or another; these decisions are made by their own governing bodies and need not be in line with any particular set of needs. And yet the decision made by Habitat for Humanity to provide for this particular population is unsurprising, as the emphasis on the need to provide for children is in keeping with the earlier discussions in Chapter 5 about the features assigned to those who are constructed as being part of the ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ poor. Children, by virtue of their dependency on others, are members of the ‘deserving poor’

and thus are thought of as ‘worthy’ recipients of assistance. On the other hand, single individuals who do not make enough of an income to make ends meet do not automatically qualify as ‘deserving’ and will thus have to wait for housing subsidized by the City. The potential to impact the life of a child is ascribed more value than the potential to influence the life of an adult. We live in a culture in which the older generation hopes to improve the lot of the next generation, and it is not surprising that these ideals are put into practice.

### *Measuring the adequacy of housing requirements*

One of the questions I had about housing policy in Calgary was concerned with the ways in which housing requirements were constructed in newspaper stories and in policy. As discussed in Chapter 2, my review of housing-related literature suggested that often, individuals need more than simply a roof over their head to claim that their housing was, indeed adequate. Numerous studies have indicated that safe housing is very important to women (Novac, 1990; Bell and Clarke, 2000; McCracken, 2004; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; Worts, 2005). These ideas about safety encompass not only neighbourhood safety, but also building safety such as the location of the apartment in a building (such as living in the basement versus the second floor), and the maintenance of the residence. My analysis revealed that concerns about housing safety were rarely discussed. I used the code “safety” only seven times within my complete dataset. The media stories hardly used the term “safety” at all, except when unsafe situations had been remedied. One *Herald* article briefly comes close to a renter’s perspective on safety as a general issue in the following excerpt:

Without the help of Habitat [for Humanity], Brown says she would be stuck in a low-income renter's nightmare. And she'd like to see some changes for landlords, starting with regulated rent and maintenance. "There's nobody you can turn to to say, 'my house is a hell hole'" (Zickefoose 2003, March 6, p. S1).

Another article about a completed Habitat for Humanity project notes, "A window on the landing on the second floor is oriented to the backyard so that parents can see their children at play and neighbourhood safety is promoted" (McCormick 2005, March 19, p. K1). And yet another article draws attention to yard safety, as "each unit has a deck and fenced yard, providing essential outdoor play space for young children" (McDowell 2005, March 10, p. N1). References to "safety" in policy documents was limited to two specific mentions. In the *Affordable Housing Strategy* it noted that:

THE CITY OF CALGARY WILL:

Develop regulatory incentives to encourage the private sector to provide and protect lower cost housing;

Encourage the development of new rental housing and the protection and enhancement of existing rental stock.;

Support actions to encourage competition and choice in the housing marketplace by implementing the policies of the Calgary Plan;

Enforce building and fire safety standards to regulate older, multiple unit rental housing and the demolition of that housing, if required (Calgary 2002, p. 13).

On a City website, the City wrote that "Affordable housing makes sense. The City of Calgary is committed to increasing the supply of safe and affordable housing for all Calgarians. Safe and appropriate housing benefits the whole community" (Calgary 2005g, n.p.).

There was an acknowledgement, both in policy and in some *Herald* articles that the location of residence is often a concern for low-income earners looking for housing.

A sampling of quotations from the *Herald* includes the following:

Some areas might also lack sufficient access to public transportation, leaving residents who can't afford vehicles stranded, said Ferguson (Hope 2002, October 26, p. HS1).

Construction has begun on a major affordable housing initiative called the Manchester project. The complex is being built a few blocks north of the Chinook LRT station and strives to meet the city's goal of increasing inner-city density (Bracegirdle 2003, December 31, p. N1).

Dragicevik often has just four business days to locate an apartment or suite, pay a damage deposit, arrange water, heat, electricity and phone, and purchase furniture and other basic needs for clients. Housing must be close to public transportation, schools and language classes, since owning a car is usually impossible (McGinnis 2001, June 11, p. B4).

The acknowledgement on the part of City about the importance of location of residence could be found in the proceedings from the *Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing*, and some of these references were highlighted earlier in the chapter. Apart from occasional mentions of safety and the importance of the location of residence, few other issues were highlighted as important factors in housing decisions. As mentioned throughout Chapters 5 and 6, and earlier on in this chapter, affordability is the primary issue associated with housing problems in Calgary.

Newspaper stories and policy documents emphasized the need for more development. Both data sets suggested that the supply of housing in Calgary is too low, as in-migration and the pressures on the housing market as a result of a booming

economy and newcomers to the city is preventing the market from correcting itself. The City is dedicated to increasing the supply of housing, and this is where the emphasis was placed. Land trusts were discussed in newspaper stories and in policy (Zickefoose 2003, February 27; McCormick 2005, March 19; Hope 2001, November 3; Jackson 2002, November 5; Myshrall 2001, August 26; Calgary 2002; Calgary 2003), as was redevelopment of run-down, low density areas (Babin 2002, February 14; Babin 2002, February 21; Laird, 2002). The emphasis then lies on the development of the physical structure itself, rather than on the features of the community that the development will find itself in. Such an approach will result in few changes to the structural problems at work if the idea is to catch up and build more, without investigating other contributing factors to the affordability problem, such as the traps associated with falling into poverty, the rising cost of living in Alberta, or inadequate social support payments, as these affect specific populations. These issues are not about supply, and yet supply is often constructed as the sole culprit behind the affordable housing problem.

*'Choice' and the limiting nature of textual materials*

As discussed in Chapter 6, there are many problems with the application form used by the Calgary Housing Company. Undoubtedly there is a delicate balance that needs to be struck between the City's need to ensure housing applicants are legitimately in need (and therefore not setting out to abuse the system) and the applicant's need to turn for help, without the process of accessing help being as burdensome as the problem itself. The City's Affordable Housing Strategy states that one of the City's goals is to "encourage competition and choice in the housing marketplace" (Calgary 2002, p. 13).

However, the waitlist continues to be an issue for the City. One understands that there is not much “choice” in the marketplace for low income earners if the current “number of applicants for affordable housing far exceeds the number of available housing units” (Calgary 2005b, n.p.). Notice that the quote refers not just to “choice,” but also to “competition.” One can speculate that the use of the term “competition” is done, in part, to appease landlords. If the City provides housing at rates that are far lower than rents available in the market (and, is able to do this with a minimal waiting list), this might have an impact on the bottom line of landlords. Use of the term “competition” implies that there is some tension between property owners who rent out units and the City, as if the interests of those who are unable to meet their basic needs are secondary to the business interests at work in the housing market.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, there are some stigmas and stereotypes that continue to prevail when it comes to low-income earners. The ‘pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps’ mentality is still thought to exist, and sometimes creates problems in the policy process. An article about former premier Ralph Klein’s connection to the Calgary Homeless Foundation draws attention to one of his infamous quips:

Even at a benefit to support the good work of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, Ralph Klein still knows is that a good defence is launch a great offence. Asked if his government’s cutbacks betrayed the denizens of the St. Louis Hotel, the premier bares his teeth. “If you can afford to drink, I guess you’re really not that poor,” he quips to the assembled media. Of course, Klein and his advisors know better, thanks to the research work of the foundation and other Alberta agencies. Surveys indicate that roughly half of Alberta’s core homeless population struggle with substance abuse, not to mention a lesser percentage who regularly consider suicide. And, according to a 2002 study, half of Calgary’s homeless already have jobs – answering Klien’s taunts about welfare

bums in the early days of his political career (Laird 2002, November 7, n.p.).

This passage leads one to wonder who, then, was the premier talking to? The above quote was the only example that I could find that provided a direct quote that was based on a stigma or stereotype. Other stories acknowledged NIMBYism, but failed to provide quotes from individuals who actually made the ‘not in my backyard’ claim. A silent stereotype, however, was demonstrated in both newspapers and in policy by references, implicit or explicit, to NIMBYism as a problem, or to the ‘deserving’ poor.

Overall, there was a failure to acknowledge and commend the resilience and agency of those who struggle in the face of forbidding obstacles. Of the newspaper stories that discussed the life circumstances of marginalized individuals, very few mentioned the strengths, or the personal agency of the person, or group, in question. From the data set, I was able to gather that there are a number of barriers that people can face. One story in the *Herald* discussed the challenges that face new immigrants:

However, apartment vacancy rates are a tight 1.5 per cent in the city – for every one thousand rental apartments, just 15 are vacant and available for rent. And a limited budget, the absence of letters from past employers, a large family, no Canadian credit history, no interim place to stay, as well as negative stereotypes and ethnocentrism, put some people at a disadvantage finding rental housing (McGinnis 2001, p. B4).

Another story in *FFWD* describes the details of one woman’s struggle to get by on social assistance:

According to the federal government’s newly released Market Basket Measure, based on the actual average costs for food, shelter, clothing, and transportation in Calgary, a family of four needs an income of at least \$24,180 per year to be at the poverty line. In contrast, Pompeo, in receipt of government assistance, received just over \$700 per month, which would total \$8,400 in a year. “Could you live on that?” asks Pompeo rhetorically.

She suggests that the general public does not have a good understanding of poverty in the city. “(People) think because we have social assistance that everything’s taken care of – that people don’t have to struggle. (But) doors close right in people’s faces. And when you are struggling, those doors are hard to open. They take a lot of energy and a lot of courage, and lots of stuff that people don’t have” (Wild 2003, September 18, n.p.).

This story, while it provides the reader with a strong idea of some of the challenges faced by the woman in question and makes an attempt to clarify some of the supposed public misconceptions about social assistance, also works to portray her as a victim. Despite the implication that she has managed to open those “doors [that] close right in people’s faces,” the story still positions her in passive opposition to the government, or against others who are unaware of the fact that living on social assistance does not mean that “everything’s taken care of.” By emphasizing the barriers that she, as a low-income earner, has to face, the story strips away some of her agency by highlighting the power that others, be it community members or bureaucrats who represent the government, have over her life. If part of the problem of NIMBYism (discussed earlier) is a lack of public awareness about the barriers faced by low-income earners, then it seems somewhat problematic to construct these low income earners as passive recipients who have to accept a life filled stereotypes and stigmas. This can only be addressed by talking about low-income earners in the same language that is used to describe those who wield influence in the community. It might help to start talking about low-income earners just like the two past presidents of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce who were described as “indefatigable.” If Calgarians in need were constructed as and putting “just as much just as much effort and energy” (a phrase borrowed from the article about the businessmen) into their own lives, as opposed to simply “struggling” then it is possible that public perceptions about ‘need’ might change.

*A noteworthy distinction...*

In a final note, there were very few newspaper articles that discussed the role of the Province in the housing crisis in Calgary, while the City focuses heavily on the lack of provincial funding. The media has neither confirmed, nor denied, the City's arguments that the Province has created the problem. While there is no crystal ball to see why this is the case, I have discussed the content of the two daily newspapers as being exceptionally concerned with the ability of the average individual to get in to the housing market and, if they are lucky enough, to make some money, too. In-depth explorations of the inter-governmental aspect of the problem are rare. The daily newspapers seem to be concerned with keeping their content limited to stories that not only support the needs of their advertisers, but that are also in keeping with popular opinion. Even in a story about the decline of housing affordability in the city, the article still managed to emphasize alternatives:

“[An inner-city house] was way too expensive,” said Dion, adding they couldn't find anything comparable near Calgary's core. Instead, they opted for McKenzie Lake, a southeast community they love but which forces Dion to commute up to 45 minutes one way to her job as a travel agent downtown (Ferguson 2005, December 21, p. B1).

The article works to reassure readers that they can still get in to a market that is, on one hand “way too expensive,” and yet still find something in a new suburb to “love.” I can only speculate that the competing interests at work in the construction of the documentary reality do not allow for a careful deconstruction of the role of the Provincial government, or inter-governmental co-operation, in the housing problem. As it stands, advertisers continue to place ads in the “Homes” section, and readers continue to feel reassured that all is well, and that they too will be able to get by in the market. One might

suggest that advertisers are not concerned with providing housing for those who cannot afford it; that is not their mission. Dedicating space in the newspaper to this question would do little to add fuel to what might be casually known as the local 'housing industrial complex.' There is no need to talk about it if it does not serve the needs of the advertisers. While this is only speculation, it points to an interesting anomaly, and one that might be worthy of future study through other methods.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions**

This project developed as a result of my desire to understand why individuals living in Calgary, Alberta experienced difficulties with securing housing, despite living in a vibrant city with a booming economy. Initial investigations into the City of Calgary's housing policy, as represented in City-produced policy documents and in news coverage, revealed relatively frequent funding announcements such as "City commits another \$10 million to affordable housing" (Calgary, 2005a). After encountering repeated press releases about new provincial-federal partnerships dedicated to the creation of new affordable housing spaces, I expected to hear less about those struggling, and that increased funding dollars would inevitably trickle down to benefit those who needed it most. However, I continued to hear stories both in the media and anecdotally, through those involved in with non-profit agencies, that life was not improving for the majority of Calgarians who were trying to make ends meet. I wanted to know where the 'fault lines' were, and why the funding increases had not transformed into a significant drop in the numbers on the waiting list for affordable housing in the city.

After an intensive study of local newspaper articles and municipal policy documents published over a five year time span, I reached several conclusions about what is and is not evident within the texts and how it was produced. As the process of discourse analysis is not about 'uncovering truth' or identifying 'hidden agendas,' I am not qualified to make statements about what I believe are the inner motivations of policy makers and editors. What I can do, however, is talk about what I found in the documents,

what was missing from them, how agents, issues and problems are constructed in them, what issues were prioritized, and what sources and perspectives were legitimated as “truth” in particular ways. The following pages will draw attention to some of the apparent, and not so obvious, issues at play in the housing policy arena in Calgary, as they relate to the documentary coverage of housing issues investigated in this thesis.

*Affluence and the impact of economic success on the community*

Mallick (2007) has expressed concerns about the increasingly affluent Canadian society, addressing the impact of rising Canadian real estate values, and how the desire for wealth has changed the meaning of “home”:

The agony of affluenza is that wanting – and even getting – doesn’t lead to happiness and security; it leads to more wanting. ...Real estate: Think of how often you have heard a friend in Calgary or Vancouver discuss house prices, thereby subtly boasting about the rising price of their own as though they had actually earned it. Since when did a home become an investment, rather than a place where the children felt safe? (Mallick 2007, p. 47).

This quote helps us to understand some of the issues at play when reporters or columnists write articles about the housing crisis in Calgary. It is safe to assume that, for the most part, those who write about the housing market (and perhaps more importantly, those who set editorial or research policies) do not have serious difficulty securing housing themselves, and this characteristic has implications for how they formulate housing as an issue. Additionally, the reality is that real estate agents and housing developers provide newspapers with a significant source of revenue through their advertising contracts. Though the relationship between advertisements and contents was not the focus of this project the relationship, in and of itself, is one that should not be ignored. However, it is

safe to assume that rising real estate values have created new pressures for renters, homeowners, and policy makers alike.

While the creation of safe, caring, and inclusive communities (Kuiken, 2004) is, unarguably, an admirable goal for policy makers, one cannot ignore the financial concerns at work. The acquisition of a suitable, adequate, and affordable home is no longer as attainable as it once was, and housing is subject to other priorities as well. Homes in the city of Calgary have become commodities that need to be protected, because they have come to be viewed as not simply a collection of nails and boards, nor even just a place to raise a family. Instead, they are now, more than before, seen as investments, and are treated as items of considerable value. Existing homeowners want to ensure that their communities continue to improve so that they can maximize the return upon their investment. While NIMBYism is not a new idea, it has become an even stronger force to be reckoned with, given current anxieties over house prices and affordability. The analysis of both media and policy discourse suggests that there is still a concern amongst those members of the public who do not struggle to meet their housing needs that the development of affordable housing options will bring down the value of homes in a neighbourhood. People will fight to protect their investments, and this is a significant issue that policy makers need to contend with. Regardless of whether or not the fear ‘makes sense,’ the reality is that there is only so much that can be done on the part of the City administrators to get approval from elected representatives to do more to address the supply problem.

*Selling the problem: Addressing resentment*

A regular feature that I found within the newspaper and policy data sets was the repeated practice of telling the reader why affordable housing options were a positive and necessary feature of a healthy community. Newspaper stories often appeared to “sell” the problems and the difficulties of those who are struggling to readers, as if the “pull up your bootstraps” value was a tangible force to be reckoned with. Stories were likely to emphasize the benefits of affordable housing, but would give relatively little space to discuss the reasons behind the supposed resistance to development. In fact, I was unable to find an article that gave an in-depth, let alone exhaustive, explanation of why some neighbourhoods were unwilling to welcome new community housing in their neighbourhood. The newspaper stories often took the concept of NIMBYism for granted, as if most communities struggled with this issue, without giving specifics about which neighbourhoods were resistant, and for what reasons. In most cases, an expert or elected official would claim that NIMBYism was an issue and then, in almost all cases, the reader is left to draw their own conclusions about why proposed developments were not welcome. Issues around race, class, property values, cultural differences, health status, and income, all issues known to be associated with NIMBYism, were left unaddressed and ignored. This omission seemed to imply that the reader would understand the resistance and that there was no need to explain it.

Without further research into the everyday workings of a newspaper, I cannot make authoritative claims as to the reasons behind this motivation to ‘sell’ the value of community inclusion. I can speculate that the plethora of social science research that is

concerned with community inclusion has found its way on to the desks of reporters and editors. One could assume that the message that inclusion has social and economic benefits for the greater community is getting across to someone. And yet, the language found in both the newspaper articles and in policy assumes that the reader is not necessarily sympathetic to the struggle of others, though potentially so. While there might be a multitude of reasons for this, one idea that seems to fit the mold is a theory espoused by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman (2000a) has identified that people who are low-income earners are treated differently now than they once were:

They are not needed as the would-be producers; but in the society in which the consumers, not the producers, are cast as the driving force of economic prosperity (it is the 'consumer-led' recovery that we expect to take us out of economic troubles) the poor are also worthless as consumers: they will not be tempted by market blandishments, they carry no credit cards nor can they count on bank overdrafts, and the commodities they most need bring little or no profit to the traders (p. 7).

Bauman argues that the poor have fallen into an even lower status than they once held as a distinct social class. The poor are no longer viewed as bodies that can be relied upon whenever the need for manual labour arises. Instead, the potential held by the poor is dismissed, and those who collect welfare cheques are viewed as individuals who, at the very least, have some security in the meager cheque they receive, whereas others in the free market face employment uncertainties never seen before:

We all, to a greater or lesser degree, experience the world we inhabit as full of risks, uncertain and insecure. Our social standing, our skills, our partnerships, our neighbourhoods and the networks of friends we can rely on, are all unstable and vulnerable – unsafe harbours for anchoring our trust (Bauman 2000a, p. 8).

Therefore, those on “the dole” are no longer viewed as “the objects of pity and compassion [but are now] the objects of resentment and anger” (ibid.). Bauman (2000a)

suggests that, on some level, there is a general sense of frustration amongst those who see themselves as their “brother’s keeper” and resent this responsibility. He argues that some who have managed to get by on their own in society without the charity of others find it difficult to support others out of a resentment directed at those who receive help. I suspect that the newspaper editors in charge of the City section of the news have made an attempt to address these underlying feelings of resentment, particularly those sentiments that elected officials report that they are hearing from their constituents.

### *Constructing ‘normal’ and ‘deserving’*

As discussed in chapter 6, G.H. Mead was concerned with the process by which individuals are categorized and described by others in society, and the consequences of how individuals internalize these external judgments (Jary and Jary, 2000). He suggested that labeling plays a role in regulation of the self, and of behaviours that will ultimately be viewed, and judged, by others. Goffman, in a similar project, was concerned with social stigmas. He wrote that “society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories” (Goffman 1963, p. 2). There are particular characteristics that are ascribed to these categories. These are “transformed into normative expectations” for members of a society, and these expectations help to create one’s social identity (ibid.).

My analysis revealed that housing policy in Calgary relied upon labels and categories whenever it was convenient, but not always where it might have been appropriate. For example, there were times when the City failed to acknowledge that

certain groups of people are burdened with a greater disadvantage in the housing market than others due to discrimination. This became apparent to me when I realized that those in need were often categorized and labeled according to physical and socio-economic demographics. The research brief series categorized and drew attention to those who were lone parents, those who were of an aboriginal background, and those who had a disability. In effect, the policy constructed a 'normal' family as one that has two parents (arguably heterosexual), where all members are able-bodied, English-speaking, and Caucasian. However, the City rarely drew attention to the immigrants who experienced difficulty securing affordable, suitable, and adequate housing in the City, or to women, as women, with their own unique problems. This was surprising, given the plethora of research that suggests that immigrants have more difficulty securing appropriate housing than do Canadian-born residents (Hulchanski, 1997; CMHC, 2002; Graham and Thurston, 2005).

### *The 'other' needs help*

My examination of the newspaper coverage of housing issues indicated that there was a tendency to report on the problems of "the other," the single mother, the immigrant, the person with an illness, but to do so in an individualized, 'personal-interest' way. The use of these kinds of anecdotes helped to paint a picture of a community where people were thought to have, more or less, a very similar set of life circumstances. The effect of this personalized and 'anecdotal' coverage was to depoliticize issues facing the 'other.' For example, issues of racism and ablism were of little consequence in almost all of the newspaper coverage. This was problematic for me,

given my understanding from work on an earlier project that racism and ablism continue to be problematic for non-Caucasian, and disabled, women in Calgary. These ideas are also supported by recent research publications that have surveyed the housing circumstances in other Canadian cities and report that discrimination is a considerable barrier for those who rent (Bell and Clark, 2000; McCracken, 2004; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; Rude and Thompson, 2001).

A majority of the newspaper articles portrayed Calgary as having a homogeneous population – typically experiencing some kind of benefit from the strong, oil-driven economy – composed of people who generally wanted a similar kind of life. One of the ways this was made evident was through discussions about homeownership. The act of purchasing a home was normalized, and the very ability to purchase something (regardless of whether it was what one wanted or not) was considered to be paramount. Discussion about “adjusting housing expectations” was present in the discourse, as the ability to purchase might be often limited to a refurbished condominium where a mortgage was twice what the rent was prior to development, or to a single family home out in the suburbs where housing was still “affordable” (Nogier, 2002c). The drawbacks of purchasing something, regardless of its features, suitability, or proximity to one’s work, were not discussed.

The newspaper dataset revealed that newspaper stories often employed tactics which constructed individuals as ‘deserving’ of support. In some respects, the ‘moralizing’ of the issue also worked to depoliticize it. But, in effect, the strategy

suggested that one was not deserving unless proven otherwise, and there was a heavy reliance upon the need to ‘prove’ that the individual in question had exhausted all other resources, had done their ‘best’ to get by on their own, and that they would work towards their independence, should they receive any kind of public (or private) support. The stories had an assumption embedded within them that an individual or family should normally not have found themselves in this position of need. The articles, despite their emphasis on the ‘deserving family,’ sent a message that this support was a privilege, or a gift, and that families ought not to expect this kind of ‘special’ treatment. And yet despite this, the struggles faced by people with disabilities, mental or physical, while acknowledged in policy produced by the City, were almost nowhere to be found in newspaper discourse except in occasional stories of overcoming personal hardship.

*Prioritizing independence and emphasizing personal responsibility*

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Gurstein and Small (2005) suggest that the troublesome individual is held responsible for their housing difficulties. My analysis suggests that the emphasis on independence and personal responsibility was not limited to those deemed “hard to house.” Anyone who struggled to find affordable housing and applied for subsidized housing was constructed as someone who was just simply unable to do things on their own. Most newspaper articles frequently emphasized the charitable actions of others, such as the volunteers who worked on Habitat for Humanity homes, or the worthiness of certain public housing programs. These tactics worked to ensure that the readers, and the individuals receiving services, knew that they were, in fact, receiving ‘help’ and this was not an entitlement. Stories about the help were quick to point out that

this was modest, and that the recipient is expected to forgo certain “extras” (McDowell, 2005). Help can no be allowed to be too comfortable, as there is some level of shame attached to the act of receiving it.

The effect of stories about Habitat for Humanity projects, or the work of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, is to generate an emotional response from readers. This emotional response is what makes news stories interesting, what draws readers to them, and then also to see the advertisements scattered amongst the stories. These ads are the newspaper’s main source of revenue, an issue that should not be overlooked, because advertising is geared to particular kinds of readers – readers who are also consumers. A typical response, on the part of the reader, to these types of stories might be an increased willingness to donate to charities, or to reflect upon whether he or she might be a NIMBY themselves, while at the same time the stories confirm a certain moral stance relating to individual self-responsibility. However, these kinds of narratives in newspapers do not always mirror what is being done in the municipal policy arena, particularly when new policies or program changes are slowly implemented over time. Slow and steady is less ‘sellable’ because it is generally not exciting. We know that stories of struggle, and particularly stories about conflict, are what interest readers. Imagine movie-goers paying to see a film without some kind of struggle, be it emotional or physical. The conflict is, in many cases, what individuals want to read. One newspaper editor has summed up the dilemma as such:

The most common complaint newspaper editors hear is: “You guys always focus on the negative.” And, along with that: “Bad news sells newspapers.”

The complaints are usually said with sneer and an inference that we newspaper editors are the scum of the earth. Maybe some of us are. Our response to these complaints is usually the same: “We report the good with the bad.” It’s a good argument because it’s true. Newspapers have to report the good with the bad. Not everything that happens in a community is a “positive news story.” Another argument can now be added to our defence by stating we are giving people what they want to read. It’s true.

One of the features of the revamped Black Press Web sites is that you can view the ‘most read’ stories in the region and across British Columbia. Internet technology tracks the hundreds of stories posted on Black Press Web sites and shows the most read stories.

So what were the ‘most read’ stories on Black Press Web sites in British Columbia this morning? “Sombre start to school year (Abbotsford),” “Two girls killed in accident (Aldergrove),” “Local woman killed in accident,” (Campbell River); “Accident victim named,” (Terrace); “Girls killed in car crash,” (Abbotsford); “Well-known man unsuccessful in two thefts,” Terrace; “Vernon family mourns loss of son,” Vernon; “Aliens, Keanu coming,” White Rock; “Slide caught on video,” Quesnel; “Tragedy mars ski resort opening,” Revelstoke: and “Avalanche tragedy shocks South Cariboo,” 100 Mile House.

With the exception, perhaps, of Keanu Reeves shooting a movie in White Rock and the slide in Quesnel, all the stories can be construed as “negative.”

They all probably ran on the front pages of the newspapers in their community. However, when they hit their respective Web sites they are all thrown into the mix. It’s the Web site readers who chose which stories they most want to read. And, the most read stories, at least this week, are about tragedies.

It’s not because we’re ghoulish or have some sort of morbid fascination with death and destruction. Through the wonderful technology of the Internet, you the reader are reinforcing what newspaper editors have been saying for years: These stories are important to you ... the reader. They are important to the communities in which they happen. It’s because they are important that then end up on the front page (Phillips 2008, n.p.).

This kind of defensive justification of decisions about the stories that are prioritized by newspaper readers makes it difficult to make arguments about the social responsibilities that journalists have, or to have discussions about the impact that news stories have upon

a community's understanding of problems in their neighbourhoods. This is especially the case given that the economic interest of newspapers is to 'sell' readers to advertisers, which in turn means generating stories that are easily 'sold', on an emotive or intuitive level, to readers; that is, in particular, 'personal-interest', scandal or bad-news stories. This project has addressed how the discursive constructions of news stories about housing can relay, or prioritize, certain ideas over others. The insistence that it is readers who drive the content of newspapers will likely be a significant barrier to change, just as those unnamed "NIMBYs" block affordable housing development in the city.

*No one talks to poor people: The Lost Voices*

No one who self-identified as being in housing need was invited to the City's *Roundtable on Affordable Housing*. The *City Research Brief Series* identified some of the characteristics of those who had trouble with housing affordability, and yet, these briefs did not propose any solutions that would be more appropriate for, or sensitive to, the needs of these particular groups of people who struggle to find affordable housing that is suitable and adequate. This process of identification did not come with suggestions for changes to existing policies or practices, nor has this identification translated into sweeping changes to existing practices. There are consequences to the construction of categories of people that struggle: if it is suggested that some people are stuck in the trap of poverty and are worthy of assistance, by definition there will be those who are not worthy. Dualisms work against people, particularly against those who do not have a touching story that elicits a heartfelt response.

My examination of the newspaper coverage revealed that the opinions of those who are truly in need do not matter. Generally, comments were solicited from low-income earners only if they have received something like a Habitat for Humanity home, or the last unit in a new affordable housing complex. Then, the low-income earners provide a ‘thank you’ kind of quote, saying something along the lines of “I never would have been able to do this on my own without this help,” or “I am going to be able to be successful now.” Ultimately, these kind of stories are generally appear because a business or organization has done a good thing, and a recipient needs to make a comment to enable the self-congratulation. For example, when a single mother was thanking the Mayor of Calgary, and he gave her a Welcome Wagon basket, the attention was focused on her successful applicant status, and on the City as a provider of a service. However, no mention is made of all of the others on the list who were not given the opportunity. The Mayor did not make a public statement saying “We need to do better as a community” or “Our goal is to eliminate the waiting list for subsidized housing.” Instead, he offered a simple welcome and everyone who reads the article, and those involved in that particular project, gets to feel like life in Calgary is good.

To be clear, this is not simply cynicism. Instead, my comments reflect a personal frustration that the so-called ‘difficult questions,’ the critical questions about those in need, are not given a public forum in either the media nor in the policy. However, this tendency to minimize the opinions of those in need is in keeping with what Doran (1993) suggests happens to those who are excluded, noting that those who write about “the social” might consider some alternatives to speaking on behalf of the excluded voice:

Allow excluded voices to speak for themselves without textual interpretation waiting in the wings to frame them. Such voices would be 'situated knowledges' whose authority would be definitely located in time and space. But for such voices, this writing would be an experiment in empowerment with a built-in limit to itself (p. 46).

Calgary needs a forum through which those excluded voices can speak and be afforded some authority, though establishing this forum will not be an easy task.

### *Ignoring realities*

Despite attempts to take into consideration some of the characteristics that can shape access to housing, the City policy documents failed to incorporate policies that were sensitive to both gender and to race. The municipality's use of gender-neutral language functions as a smokescreen to make invisible its lack of accommodation for the gender specific aspects of housing needs. Much of the same can be said about the newspaper stories; however, the difficulties faced by new immigrants to the City, or individuals who are not newcomers, but who are members of a visible minority were discussed in the media more often than they were in the policy documents, partly because the news articles focused more on individuals with an emotional pull, and therefore more 'sellable' stories. But given that issues of race were not prioritized, meaning that concerns about race were not contextualized for the 'average reader,' as discussed in Chapter 7, it is assumed that the reader is most likely a white, heterosexual, and a middle-class male.

Again, many newspaper stories discussed rising real estate values in a positive light. This is not surprising, as once someone is already in the housing market, why

would they not want to see their property values rise? However, the voice of the renter was often left unheard. The readers are not told about the difficulties that aboriginal renters face trying to find a landlord who will rent to them. This decision to focus on positive successes, on stories of personal triumph in the face of adversity, might explain why the discourse was permeated with the language of those who hold a white, middle class perspective on the issues surrounding the current housing market. Concerns about racism and community inclusion appeared to be afterthoughts in most situations as, typically, these issues were not addressed in meaningful ways, nor were they treated as widespread structural concerns, in either the news stories, nor in the policy documents.

#### Lost Voices: Constructing and ignoring the needy

Individuals who are in housing need are not treated with much respect in the processes of policy formulation and application. First, the application form, the point at which the individual interacts with the municipality, is punitive. The act of applying for subsidized housing is not just about meeting bureaucratic requirements. The City ensures that the application form for community housing is complex and time consuming for the applicant. This is a punitive tactic of power used by the municipality that makes the process unnecessarily difficult for those who apply. Foucault (1995) wrote that one should “analyse punitive methods not simply as consequences of legislation or as indicators of social structures, but as techniques possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power” (p. 23). The onerous process ensures that applicants understand that they are a burden on others. The process also

ensures that those who are unable, or unwilling, to provide the required information in the form have their applications rejected, or discourages them from applying in the first place.

Secondly, those who are in housing need have not been granted the same opportunities as others in the community to discuss the current housing crisis in Calgary. This was evidenced in the Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing, and the Mayor's Followup Roundtable on Affordable Housing. This exclusionary practice erased the voices of those in need, except as filtered through advocacy organizations. According to City estimates, nearly 18% of all families in the city overspend on shelter (Calgary, 2004c). This is not a small number, and this entire group was excluded from the discussion. This is not an insignificant event. It speaks to the City's commitment to solving the problems of those in need. If the opinions of those who struggle are not solicited, there is a significant possibility that the problem solving is more about ensuring that those who feel threatened by the homeless or by low-income housing developments, are comfortable in their communities, rather than meeting the needs of those who are truly vulnerable.

Thirdly, people in housing need are often portrayed in the media in a way that sees them as thankful recipients of assistance, or as helpless victims of policies and programs, rather than as active participants in the problem-solving process. Very little value is ascribed to these kinds of voices, those that have lived with housing insecurity and know what it is like to struggle, and instead of drawing from this kind of first hand

knowledge, the advice of “experts,” coupled with the social construction of what constitutes “expertise,” is respected and heeded in an unparalleled way. According to Clawson and Trice (2000), public opinion has an impact on public policy, and media portrayals of poverty, and those who have housing struggles, are important because they have an impact upon public opinion. It is important to examine how the media constructs the poor, and those who speak about the poor, as these portrayals inform public opinion which, in turn, informs public policy.

Until we, as a society, learn to give value to the opinions and ideas of those who have first hand experience with housing insecurity and struggle, it will be difficult to propose and deliver meaningful housing solutions. House (2005) maintains that social justice concerns have long been excluded from social science research because it has been politically risky. I believe that my research demonstrates that the status quo has to change, and the exclusionary practices at work in City-produced policy are dangerous for policy formulators and elected officials. As the numbers of Calgarians who struggle with housing grows, there will be an increasing demand for intervention and support. These voices, as they grow in number and include more individuals who once might have been thought of as belonging to the ‘middle-class,’ will be louder and will demand policies that have principles of social justice embedded within them. It is important to integrate these excluded voices, and hear these stories, despite the fact that soliciting these kinds of opinions might be more difficult to do than putting in a call to an expert. If the City wants to determine how many people are in severe need of housing, and what kind of housing they need, the City has to capture a more accurate picture of the problem in order to

determine what people need, and, in turn, work towards developing policy that addresses these stated concerns. As the middle class increasingly feels the pinch of a tight housing market, those excluded voices will become louder as more people join the ranks of “the vulnerable.” I hope that it is only a matter of time before more inclusive practices are developed, as traditional approaches to the housing problems, such as temporary shelters and a limited number of “affordable” housing units, will be unable to support the number of people in need.

### *Providing affordable housing – The physical space*

When we talk about the politics of space (Smith) we can see that her ideas mix well with Fraser’s. As Fraser states, the politics of needs interpretation that goes on in the housing arena is not composed of neutral, unbiased, or objective practices. Assumptions about people’s needs are rampant in both the policy arena and in the media, and few attempts have been made to ask those in need what it is that would improve their personal or collective situations. Providing an affordable place to live that is over an hour away from a secured day care space, or in a community without an elementary school, might not be much of a hand-up. However, these kinds of contextual considerations about the physical spaces that individuals occupy are rarely considered. Even if a space would meet the needs of an applicant for subsidized housing, there will be the politics associated with the particular space itself. The subsidized housing spaces provided by the City of Calgary are not neutral zones, either. Given that spaces are seen as fixed, there seems to be an underlying fear, evidenced in both newspaper articles that expressed concerns from unnamed NIMBYs and in a number of policy documents, that once community housing

spaces are established, there will be little, or no, movement of these individuals out of the subsidized units, and hence, the so-called ‘welfare-trap.’

We also know that certain aspects of housing are prioritized over others. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the department in charge of housing concerns is named “Affordable Housing Calgary,” a name which reflects the importance of affordability to policy makers. However, research suggests that affordability is only one of many features that is important to those who struggle with housing. This is unsurprising for a number of reasons. First, the financial costs of housing are one of the most tangible aspects of housing that can be measured, and increasing concerns about affordability have begun to affect those who might not need have worried about housing affordability in the past. Secondly, affordability concerns have the ability to influence or determine the extents of other housing issues, such as suitability, adequacy, neighbourhood location, proximity to services, and so on. Thirdly, the act of prioritizing one housing concern - which in this case is affordability - over another, is an artifact of a specific organizational and political production process. The interests of those who have the ability to influence the policy process, both formally and informally, are represented by this prioritizing of one issue over another. In many circumstances, those who have the ability to influence the policy process, such as housing developers and the NIMBYs discussed in earlier chapters, are likely not experiencing housing insecurity themselves. Affordability continues to be cited as an issue in policy documents because there is a demonstrated need for new affordable housing development in established neighbourhoods. The strong NIMBY lobby has meant that the City must use policy to address affordability issues by highlighting that

nearly twenty percent of all Calgarians have problems finding housing that is affordable. Even with a strong NIMBY lobby, twenty percent is a very hard number to ignore.

Throughout the data, there were a number of moments where municipal politicians claimed (or were reported to have claimed) that many of the problems associated with housing in-affordability have resulted from provincial cutbacks or general lack of funding. Provincial politicians, however, disagreed with these assessments, and instead suggested that it was other, city-controlled elements, such as basement suite safety codes, that are stifling affordability (“Rooms for rent,” 2003, August 29). We see that two sides, the Province and the City, are fighting about who is responsible, and by continuing to fight, as opposed to settling, it allows both the Province and the City to avoid major expenditures, at least in the interim. Meanwhile many associations, foundations, and non-profit groups are formed to try and tackle the problem. Yet in the end, the needs of those affected continue to be ignored in many ways. Not only is this morally problematic, but in many cases, the efforts that have been put forward are ineffective as they do not produce structural changes. Instead, many of these non-profit programs only provide short-term solutions, or offer benefits on a case-by-case basis, rather than enabling widespread, structural change.

## Concluding the Project

*Personal costs & resulting decisions*

This project impacted my life in various ways. I, too, would have qualified for subsidized housing, for a significant portion of the time that I spent conducting my research. When I was coding the data, at times, I found it difficult to keep the stories in perspective, as my own anxieties about income made me particularly empathetic towards those who had affordability difficulties. When I read about families that had their electricity cut off, or were living in temporary shelters, I wondered where I would be if my very status as ‘student’ had not enabled me to secure credit, as I too, certainly was not earning enough income to meet all of my own obligations. And while this project contributed to some of my own anxieties about money, and the uncertainties with life, such as unforeseen expenses or illnesses, it also inspired me to become involved at a grassroots level. I joined a local nonprofit board, and participated in decision making as it related to antipoverty and social justice issues in my community.

#### *Future directions*

My initial idea for this venture was to conduct an institutional ethnography of the Calgary Housing Company in an attempt to discern whether or not policy intersects with practice. Had permission been granted, it would have been interesting to investigate the social processes through which the Calgary Housing Company policy was produced in the first place. However, this access was denied, as there was said to be “nothing to study,” and I was left to collect information on my own. This research about the discursive construction of housing concerns in Calgary, Alberta resulted in a number of ideas for a larger project that needs to be done. As the affordability crisis has not been alleviated in Calgary in the past three years, it is clear that additional work needs to be

done. If the problem of a lack of affordable, safe and suitable homes could be resolved by way of changes to building codes, or simply building additional spaces, this would have been announced and supported by policy makers, community activists, and funders, alike. However, it is clear that simple solutions will not be enough to adequately address a complex social problem.

I believe that it would be worthwhile to consider investigating the ways in which data is collected and interpreted by researchers and policy makers in specific organizational settings. This would enable me to investigate what kinds of data sources and types of information inform the research and policy formulation process, what issues constitute a significant concern, and how these concerns are prioritized and addressed. This work would focus on the practices involved in research and policy development, as opposed to a study of those who administer the policies, which in this case is the Calgary Housing Company. Also, designing a research program that addresses the wellbeing and ability to speak of individuals and groups across all sectors of society would likely be better received by those who have the ability to grant or to deny access to information, and this too would fit well with my political commitments. Korpi and Palme (1998) have drawn attention to research that suggests that the most successful social policies that are designed to alleviate the problems of the poor are those that also target the working and middle classes as well, as this “emphasizes integrative programs that promote the social and economic improvement of all groups in society” (p. 683). Ultimately, my goal is to produce research that emphasizes the possibility of those integrative programs that benefit a wide range of individuals, because as a social researcher I want to make an

academic contribution that has the potential to improve the lives of all members of society. A secondary, but equally important goal is to engage in research that alleviates the negative perceptions associated with those who live in poverty. Lastly, it has become clear to me that a participatory action research project which involves low-income Calgarians themselves in doing their own research on issues that they themselves define, in relation to housing, is in order. As this thesis makes claims about both the City's and the newspapers' failures to draw attention to, or address, the needs and voices of low-income Calgarians, it is important to acknowledge that these lost voices were not afforded space to make claims about their needs here, in this thesis, either. A project that solicits information about the nature of these needs, as defined by those in need themselves, and which respects them as agents with a right to define their own issues is the next logical step in making strides towards a more inclusive community.

### *Final thoughts*

As a result of my analysis, I am concerned with the ways in which the needs of struggling individuals have been talked about in both newspaper articles and in policy documents. The discursive construction of these issues in both the policy documents and the newspaper stories informs the way community members perceive social issues, and there are undeniable consequences that result from these perceptions. Clearly, the way in which issues are talked about, and the language used to describe the features of these issues can impact community involvement and acceptance of new developments or changes in neighbourhoods. The way housing is talked about in the news media will impact the way those who are not struggling will think about proposed solutions to

housing problems, as NIMBYism and taxpayer concerns were consistently flagged as a roadblock to change in both newspaper stories and in policy documents.

Additionally, the way those in need are constructed within media and policy reflects a number of assumptions about those who struggle. I believe that it would be worthwhile for both city reporters and policy developers to reconsider the way in which they write *about* people, and consider asking those people to speak about what would improve their life so that more can be learned about the barriers at work in their lives. While temporary and personalized solutions to problems are a start, they are not enough. It is important to work towards creating workable solutions for all Calgarians who need help, not just those whose lucky number comes up for a charitable foundation, or the last available spot. It is imperative that additional research be conducted in order to ensure that the reinvestment into social programs translates into meaningful benefits for all community members. Though this is not an easy task, it is a necessary endeavour that must be undertaken. It is my hope that those whose voices have been drowned out, or ignored all together, will be enabled to participate in the process of finding a solution, and have their own expertise recognized and appreciated.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all of the lost voices in our communities.  
May we move forward to ensure that we become better listeners.

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