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Tracing the Evolution of Welfare Discourse from 1990 to 2016

by Jenifer A. Norton

2022

Submitted to the Faculty of Bryn Mawr College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Social Work

Doctoral Committee:

Jim Baumohl, Chair
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Abstract

In August 1996, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as the primary cash welfare program for single mothers and children. A political debate during the early to mid-1990s that was particularly hard on welfare recipients culminated in a block grant to states tied to mandatory work requirements and time-limited lifetime benefits for recipients. Media coverage during this period closely tracked the unfolding political discourse around welfare reform and recipients. Following TANF's implementation, though, coverage dwindled to near nonexistent levels. At this writing in early 2022, TANF remains part of the social safety net, though it provides far weaker support than its predecessor for women and children living in poverty. Yet TANF recipients are rarely subjects of media discourse.

How did we arrive at this point? What impact did TANF's enactment have on welfare recipient representation in the media? Particularly in light of work's prominence in welfare reform debate, how did coverage change, if at all, during periods of economic recession? And perhaps most important, due to the historical and contemporary racialization of welfare reform debate and welfare dependency rhetoric, what role did recipient racial/ethnic identity have in media discourse?

Using qualitative content analysis, I sought to uncover how media coverage of welfare recipients changed between 1990 and 2016 across 3,360 articles published by *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. As would be expected, pre-TANF coverage was marked by themes concerning dependency, illegitimacy, and

teen parenthood. Articles during this period were more likely to incorporate a threatening frame and less likely to portray suffering than post-TANF enactment coverage. Considering racial/ethnic identity, African American recipients were strongly overrepresented, and coverage was rife with the dependent single mother controlling image.

Representation matters. How and which groups are included in media discourse can have both positive and negative ramifications for those groups. Findings presented in this dissertation and limitations of the study design suggest the importance of continued research into the role of media on the substance and arc of welfare reform.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who struggled and continue to struggle to put food on their tables, earn living wages, find safe housing, and break free of the stereotypes that define what it means to be a welfare recipient in this country. This work is also dedicated to those who made sure that I grew up to become more than a former welfare recipient, especially my late grandfather, Fred Lichtenberger.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
Impact of Media Discourse on the General Public	9
Origins of Mass Opinion	9
Changing Public Opinion	10
Racial Themes	11
Media Representation of Poverty and Welfare	12
Research Question and Sub-Questions	15
Conceptual Framework	16
The Power of Media Discourse	16
The Power of Frames	17
The Power of Stereotypes	18
Chapter 3: Methodology	21
Data Sources & Data Collection	22
Data Analysis	26
Qualitative Content Analysis	26
Coding	27
Codes	34

Analysis Tools	38
Quantitative Content Analysis	38
Summary	39
Chapter 4: The End of Welfare News Coverage as We Know It	40
Overview of Key Events	42
Pre-TANF	42
Post-TANF	47
Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF	49
Location – Front-Page vs. Other Page	52
Focus – State/Local vs. National	53
Episodic vs. Thematic	54
Threat vs. Suffering	57
Target Groups – Undeserving vs. Deserving	64
Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Themes Related to Unworthiness	67
Dependency-Associated Pathologies	67
Pathology Buzzwords	81
Summary	84
Chapter 5: Shifting Discourse during Economic Recession and Expansion	86
Overview of Key Events	87
Comparing Article Attributes during Recessions and Expansions	91
Comparing Themes Related to Unworthiness during Recessions and Expansions	105
Dependency-Associated Pathologies	106
Pathology Buzzwords	114
Summary	115
Chapter 6: The End of the Welfare Queen?	117
Overview of Key Events	117
Pre-TANF	117
Post-TANF	121
Comparing Article Attributes	124
Pre- and Post-TANF	124

During Recessions and Expansions	135
Comparing Themes Related to Unworthiness Within Racial/Ethnic Subsets	136
Dependency-Associated Pathologies – Pre- and Post-TANF	136
Dependency-Associated Pathologies – During Recessions and Expansions	149
Summary	152
Chapter 7: Conclusion	155
Limitations	156
Contributions to Knowledge and Recommendations for Future Research	159
Appendix A: Top Five U.S. Newspapers by Weekday Circulation	163
Appendix B: Full Results for Article Totals Per Year	166
Appendix C: Preliminary Codebook	168
Appendix D: Axial Codes	170
Appendix E: Coding Rules	173
Appendix F: Additional Recipient Race/Ethnicity Subset Findings	181
Comparing Article Attributes	181
Pre- and Post-TANF	181
Comparing Themes Related to Unworthiness Within Racial/Ethnic Subsets	182
Dependency-Associated Pathologies – Pre- and Post-TANF	182
Summary	192
References	193

List of Figures

Figure 1: Yearly AFDC/TANF Caseload and Article Count	41
Figure 2: Comparing Yearly Article Counts between Newspapers	51
Figure 3: Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence	68
Figure 4: Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence	70
Figure 5: Comparing Yearly African American, Hispanic, and White Article Counts	127
Figure 6: Comparing Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence – African American and No Race/Ethnicity	138
Figure 7: Comparing Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – African American and No Race/Ethnicity	140
Figure 8: Comparing Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity	142
Figure 9: Comparing Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity	144
Figure 10: Comparing Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence – White, Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity	146
Figure 11: Comparing Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – White, Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity	148
Figure 12: Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Puerto Rican Subset	183
Figure 13: Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Native American Subset	185

Figure 14: Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Asian Subset 188

Figure 15: Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Latinx Subset 190

List of Tables

Table 1: Attribute Codes	35
Table 2: Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	50
Table 3: Front-Page Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	53
Table 4: State/Local Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	54
Table 5: Episodic Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	57
Table 6: Threat-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	58
Table 7: Suffering-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	60
Table 8: Both Threat and Suffering Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	62
Table 9: Neither Threat nor Suffering Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	63
Table 10: Deserving-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	65
Table 11: Undeserving-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	66
Table 12: Both Undeserving and Deserving Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	67
Table 13: Prevalence of Crime Pre- and Post-TANF	73
Table 14: Prevalence of Dependency Theme Pre- and Post-TANF	76
Table 15: Pathology Buzzword Prevalence Pre- and Post-TANF	82
Table 16: Article Counts during Recessions and Expansions	91
Table 17: Front-Page Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions	94
Table 18: Episodic Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions	95
Table 19: Suffering-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions	98
Table 20: Threat-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions	100
Table 21: Undeserving-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions	103

Table 22: Deserving-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions	104
Table 23: Article Counts and Percentages by Racial and Ethnic Categories	123
Table 24: Racial and Ethnic Category Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF	125
Table 25: Comparing 1994 African American, Hispanic, and White Prevalence	128
Table 26: Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF – African American Subset	130
Table 27: Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF – Hispanic Subset	132
Table 28: Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF – White Subset	134

Chapter 1: Introduction

I know journalists hate hearing this, but if the way we report on events doesn't affect public perceptions, what is the point of what we're doing? (Krugman, 2022)

How the media represent or neglect an issue has repercussions for public policy and those affected by it. As Altheide (2002) observed, “[a]lthough they are not the sole factors in the creation of a social problem, the media play a pivotal and strong role in defining and legitimizing the problem as well as promoting official interventions, policies, and programs” (p. 146). In the early 1990s, a barrage of negative media messages about the welfare system and its beneficiaries called for substantial reform. In 1996, riding a wave of political and public support for major reform throughout the political spectrum, the far more restrictive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced the longstanding Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program (Handler, 1995; Piven, 2002; Gilman, 2014).

Media coverage of welfare declined after the implementation of TANF (Dyck & Hussey, 2008), and the issue of welfare was no longer prominent on the political agenda (Schneider & Jacoby, 2005). This has resulted in a troubling lack of attention in the media to welfare reform's well-documented inadequacies and the continuing struggles of

welfare recipients and others living in poverty. This dissertation analyzes the evolution of media discourse about welfare and welfare recipients¹ from 1990 through 2016.

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) changed the United States' approach to assisting impoverished families at the federal level.² Instead of a system of aid that expanded automatically based on need, PRWORA provided a cash assistance block grant to states and capped spending. Unless exempted, TANF recipients were limited to a maximum lifetime benefit of 60 months, although states could set even shorter lifetime limits. As in peripheral programs such as the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, mandatory work requirements were embedded in TANF.

In the spirit of administrative devolution, TANF gave states more flexibility to design and administer cash assistance:

Subject to a few restrictions, TANF funds may be used in any way that supports one of the four statutory purposes of TANF: to provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for at home; to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, n.d.)

¹ Welfare encompasses a wide array of means-tested public assistance programs. For feasibility and specificity purposes, I focus on cash welfare – namely TANF, AFDC, and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) – with the exclusion of disability or age-specific programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The rationale for this inclusion criterion is detailed further in Chapter 3.

² As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, efforts to modify the existing welfare system began at the state level prior to 1996. Beginning in 1962, but increasingly from 1987 up to the PRWORA's signing, federally approved state waivers allowed some experimentation in welfare reform at the state level, including the imposition of time limits, education and work requirements, and stricter sanctions.

Sanctions became an important administrative tool in ensuring compliance with program requirements and in deterring long term receipt or any receipt at all. Under AFDC, any recipients found to be noncompliant with program requirements could be removed from a family's need calculation, thus reducing the family's total benefit level (Falk, 2021).

TANF tied sanctions to required work activities set by the state but generally required by the federal level in order to receive TANF funds. States employed one of three types of sanction policies: "full family sanctioning, graduated sanctioning, and partial sanctioning" (New, 2008, p. 521). The most severe type of the three, full sanctions meant a family being removed from the rolls entirely after a single instance of noncompliance.³

Policy analysts, academics, and others predicted dire consequences for families living in poverty under the new program rules. Tying aid to work requirements might be logical in an economy where full employment at decent wages is possible, they argued, but when employment is unavailable or wages are too low, TANF's work requirements would do little more than punish recipients for economic conditions beyond their control (Handler, 1995; Halter, 1996; Mills, 1996). Even when decent work is available, many single, low-income household heads receiving public assistance face multiple barriers to employment: limited education and/or work skills, health issues, lack of transportation, child/family caregiving responsibilities, to name a few (Halter, 1996). The lifetime federal eligibility limit for TANF receipt and the freedom of states to adopt shorter limits were particular cause for alarm. Duncan et al. (2000) predicted that a full 40% of the

³ A graduated sanction entailed a partial decrease of TANF benefits after the first noncompliance instance and a total drop from the TANF rolls after multiple violations. Partial sanctions were the least punitive, with states removing only the adult(s) from a family's benefit calculations even after multiple noncompliance instances (New, 2008).

TANF caseload would reach the five-year lifetime limit within eight years of TANF's enactment.

Although more welfare recipients – specifically, single mothers – transitioned to work after enactment of TANF, many available jobs were not “mother-ready” (Albeda, 2001, p. 66). Albeda (2001) highlighted the inflexibility of full-time, low-wage work as well as the inadequacy of single-earner wages to support a family. A 2001 study by Garcia and Harris examined the prevalence of common barriers to workforce participation among varying ethnic/racial groups, focusing on job preparedness, family structure, and transportation (p. 26). Across all eight variables used to operationalize these categories, “at least one ethnic minority group had a significantly higher percentage of individuals facing the particular barrier to employment than White/Non-Hispanic recipients” (p. 38). Additionally, members of each ethnic group in Garcia and Harris' (2001) sample experienced at least three of the workforce barrier variables. Not only did non-white groups experience employment barriers more often than white/non-Hispanic individuals, but they faced multiple barriers at once.

Comparing TANF implementation from 1994-1998 to Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program (JOBS) implementation from 1989-1994, Mead (2003) noted TANF's greater use of sanctions. New (2008) found that stronger state sanctioning policies produced lower welfare caseloads under TANF. Bentele and Nicoli (2012) extended Mead's (2003) and New's (2008) work, finding that “declines in coverage are strongly associated with the strength of sanctions (including loss of all benefits) in a state and more severe TANF policies (shorter time limits, stricter work participation policies, or family caps)” (p. 258). In addition, Bentele and Nicoli (2012) found support for Soss et

al.'s (2011) finding that the racial composition of a state's caseload influenced decreasing coverage levels. Bentele and Nicoli (2012) add to racial composition's effect on coverage levels the additional negative effects of "states with conservative governments and states with lower average earnings in low-wage occupations in the 2000s" (p. 260).

Brown (2013) explained the relationship between welfare policies and race through racialized conflict theory. He maintained that politicians use racialized conceptions of impoverished individuals to enact more punitive welfare policies. In fact, in the presence of racialized conflicts, politicians may be rewarded for enacting punitive welfare policies (Brown, 2013). Brown's explanation is consistent with the political rhetoric around welfare since the time of mothers pensions.⁴

Cheng (2009) examined the impact of racial inequality on TANF recipients regarding the provision of transitional support services such as childcare, transportation, and Medicaid. While no single racial/ethnic group was less likely to receive transitional support services across all service types,⁵ recipients from non-white groups – Hispanic, African American, or other ethnic minorities – were less likely than white recipients to receive these services. The findings also showed that African American recipients were more likely than white recipients to be sanctioned (Cheng, 2009), a finding that was replicated in other studies of welfare sanctioning patterns (Schram et al., 2008; Schram et al., 2009; Monnat, 2010a; Soss et al., 2011; Lee & Yoon, 2012).

⁴ See Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) for an extensive historical overview of racialized welfare practices.

⁵ African American individuals were less likely than white individuals to receive transitional Medicaid, Hispanic individuals were less likely than white individuals to receive transportation or rent assistance when exiting TANF, and no race or ethnicity predicted childcare subsidy receipt (Cheng, 2009).

Parisi et al. (2006) found a different balance of inequality when studying racial differences in TANF exits in Mississippi. Black individuals were less likely to exit TANF when compared to white individuals. Adverse local conditions, such as high unemployment rates and geographic settings, were more likely to reduce Black TANF exits than white exits. In addition, personal characteristics, such as age and number of young children, had a differential effect on the rate of TANF exits for Black individuals when compared to white recipients. Looking at race in relation to TANF benefit levels, Gooden (2004) found that white clients received higher levels of benefits than Black and Hispanic clients. Taken as a whole, TANF policies and outcomes reflect the more punitive, less beneficial assistance given to non-white families – when assistance was given at all.

On the public-facing side, TANF initially appeared successful. Its rolls dropped and employment rates rose (Burtless, 2000). The media routinely publicized the success of the program and individual success stories (Berlin, 2000; Schram & Soss, 2002; Bloom et al., 2003). More cautious experts attributed much of the early success to a period of prosperity, expressing concern about how the program would perform during downturns (Caraley, 2001; Handler, 2001; Anderson et al., 2002; Lens, 2002). These warnings seemed warranted when, following the 2001 recession, poverty increased but welfare caseloads continued to decline (O’Neill Murray & Primus, 2005). The Great Recession that occurred between 2007 and 2009 revealed a continuing decline in aggregate coverage rates⁶ and mixed responsiveness at the state level. Permissible

⁶ Coverage rates, as opposed to caseload levels, provide a ratio of welfare recipients to individuals living in poverty. For this reason, examining coverage rates can reveal more than caseload numbers alone about the cash assistance system’s responsiveness to need (Bentele, & Nicoli, 2012).

discretion in the use of TANF block grants led some states to divert TANF funds to other budget areas during the economic boom of the late 1990s. During the Great Recession, states were not always able or willing to shift those funds back to welfare services (Schott et al., 2015). Higher need levels drained the TANF contingency fund; Congress authorized additional funds at times following the Great Recession, but those were also depleted (Moffitt, 2013).

Nationally, poverty grew significantly during the Great Recession while coverage rates declined slightly and unevenly. Coverage rates “fell in roughly half of all states, remained stable in around a quarter, and increased in one-quarter” (Bentele & Nicoli, 2012, p. 258). In many states, TANF could not absorb the larger numbers of individuals seeking aid (Sheely, 2012; Cancian et al., 2014; Schott et al., 2015). Among those living in poverty, there was a rise in the number of “disconnected” families: low-income, single mothers neither employed nor receiving TANF (Loprest & Nichols, 2011). Reasons for disconnection ranged from losing a job and not applying for TANF benefits to reaching a TANF time limit or losing TANF for not meeting work requirements (Seefeldt & Sandstrom, 2015).

A preliminary search of Lexis Nexis, ProQuest, and newspaper archive databases showed that even during the economic crisis of 2007-2009, the media did not direct as much attention to welfare and welfare recipients as it had in the 1990s (see Appendix B). The implementation of Clinton’s campaign promise to “end welfare as we know it” (Transcript, 1992) brought an apparent end to welfare discourse as a major media topic. While the decrease in media *coverage* of welfare is quantifiably apparent, the evolution of media *discourse* about welfare, welfare reform, and welfare recipients is a further

question. To better understand the evolution of this media discourse, I applied qualitative content analysis to newspaper coverage of welfare from 1990 through 2016.

We should care about media discourse on welfare topics because it plays a major role in shaping public and political support for policies (Zaller, 1992; Bartels, 1993; Avery & Peffley, 2003). Media portrayals of welfare and welfare recipients serve an important function in the relationship between public opinion and political action. While the public is not necessarily against helping the poor (Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 1999; Shaw, 2010), people do have negative attitudes about welfare specifically. Gilens' analyses of American attitudes toward welfare and welfare recipients in *Why Americans Hate Welfare* (1999) highlighted the negative attitudes toward welfare recipients and welfare policy held by a large majority of the public. Constituents are a valued source of information for state legislators (Jackson-Elmoore, 2005), and elected officials generally shape policies in response to tides of public support and/or disapproval (Page & Shapiro, 1983; Bartels, 1991). Studying effects of opinion on public policy at the state level, Pacheco (2010) found a causal relationship between public opinion of welfare spending and AFDC policy changes. Thus, in shaping public opinion, media play an indirect role in affecting public policy outcomes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Impact of Media Discourse on the General Public

Origins of Mass Opinion

As Zaller (1992) discussed at length, basic opinions about an issue arise from messages that are received and internalized, then recalled. Multiple factors affect the formation of opinions and changes in them: familiarity with an issue, its salience, and an individual's pre-considerations about the issue, i.e., the combination of their belief and their evaluation of that belief. Messages delivered through the media affect these conditions and have historically coincided with changes in public opinion. Additionally, people rely on cues to arrive at a given attitude or belief. As Zaller (1992) explained, "most people are to some degree ambivalent about the political issues they confront" (p. 62), and "the public's feelings are, in their unobserved state, unfocused and frequently contradictory" (p. 95). When individuals receive cues, they are better able to articulate their own stance.

Malka and Lelkes (2010) provided more recent evidence to support Zaller's (1992) position that "ideology-identification cues" play a role in attitude change. Specifically, they found that conservative and liberal identifying cues influenced attitude and belief adoption among study participants in ways consistent with their ideological identity, essentially a form of confirmation bias. Participants were more likely to believe

statements cued as coming from a matching ideological source; they were more likely to disbelieve information cued as originating from an opposing ideological source (Malka & Lelkes, 2010).

Studying shifts in public opinion about U.S. welfare spending, Schneider and Jacoby (2005) argued that elite political discourse influenced sharp decreases in public support for welfare spending between 1992 and 1996. Attention from academics, politicians, interest groups, and the media on welfare reform increased dramatically in the mid 1990s from early 1990s levels, but by 2000 returned to the levels of the early 1990s. Public support for welfare spending experienced an opposite trajectory, sharply decreasing from the early 1990s to the mid 1990s, but then rising by 2000. Examining factors influencing welfare spending attitudes in 1996, Schneider and Jacoby (2005) found that politically less-informed citizens held attitudes about welfare spending that were driven by party identification but not conservative-liberal ideology. More-informed citizens expressed welfare spending attitudes that were more strongly influenced by conservative-liberal ideology, not party identification. The 1996 welfare spending attitudes of less-informed citizens showed no statistically significant relationship with 1992 welfare spending attitudes, while there was a statistically significant relationship among more-informed citizens. Less politically informed individuals tended to form ephemeral attitudes based on current party identification cues. The more politically informed persisted in their ideologically cued attitudes.

Changing Public Opinion

Hetling and McDermott (2008) examined public opinion data to determine whether public perceptions of welfare reform effectiveness influence opposition to or

support for government spending on welfare. Individuals who believed TANF to be ineffective because the reforms cut too many people from the rolls were more likely to support increased spending. Individuals who believed that TANF was ineffective because the program did not cut enough people from the rolls were more likely to believe that spending levels were too high. Hetling and McDermott (2008) discussed their findings in terms of how individuals conclude that a policy is effective or not and in what ways. They speculated that politicians, advocates, and the media all play important roles in the general public's conclusions about major policy changes. In particular, and unsurprisingly, they suggest that people without direct or indirect contact with a government policy or program form their opinions based on messages they receive in the media and from elites.

Racial Themes

Prejudice among white individuals toward non-white groups is affected by a similar availability bias. When the groups are more closely integrated, levels of prejudice are lower (Kinder & Mendelberg, 1995). Media play an especially important role in more segregated areas. If white individuals do not interact with non-white individuals on a consistent basis, they rely more heavily on the images of non-white subjects delivered by the media. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) studied stories involving crime in local television news reports. They described a "crime script" whereby news coverage focused on violent crime and a particular suspect. The race of the suspect in the crime script was an important cue for viewers. Exposure to Black perpetrators in the news led to increased percentages of individuals supporting punitive crime policies and viewing crime as a result of individual failure.

Media Representation of Poverty and Welfare

Iyengar (1990) analyzed attributions of the causes and treatment of poverty⁷ based on how poverty is framed in the media. Iyengar differentiated between thematic frames where “the news might consist of information bearing on general trends [...] or matters of public policy” and episodic frames where “the viewer is provided with a particular instance of an individual or family living under economic duress” (p. 22). When television news reports that aired between 1981 and 1986 framed poverty thematically, individuals viewing the reports were more likely to feel that poverty was society’s responsibility. When television news reports portrayed poverty in an illustrative, specific episode or situation, individuals watching were more likely to believe that poverty was an individual’s responsibility. The *type* of individual featured in the story mattered, though. Comparing children, unemployed workers, elderly widows, adult mothers, and single mothers, Iyengar found that single mother frames drew the strongest individual attribution of responsibility. Conversely, and as would be expected, unemployed workers and children were more likely to elicit views invoking societal responsibility for poverty.

Adding race to the episodic frame, Iyengar (1990) found that viewers were more likely to choose individual instead of societal responsibility for the *treatment* of poverty when the subject was Black instead of white, particularly in the single mother condition. *Causal* attribution did not achieve significance when comparing responses to Black versus white subjects. Essentially, viewers may or may not attribute individual

⁷ “Causes” pertain to who or what is responsible for *generating* poverty while “treatment” refers to who or what is responsible for *reducing* poverty.

responsibility to the Black subjects for *causing* their poverty, but they hold the Black subjects responsible for *alleviating* their poverty.

Gilens (1996) examined poverty stories and the pictures/photographs accompanying them in *U.S. News and World Report*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* from 1988 to 1992. He found that 62% of the individuals appearing in the accompanying pictures were African American, a distortion of the actual percentage of African American individuals impoverished at the time (29%). Clawson and Trice (2000) extended these findings by examining photographic portrayals of impoverished subjects in magazines between 1993 and 1998. They also found poor Black individuals to be overrepresented. Further, the overrepresentation was greater in stories with negative tones and/or stereotypes. These findings are in line with previous research on negative Black stereotypes appearing in local television news reports (Entman, 1992). The findings also make sense in the context of Iyengar's (1990) research on viewer attributions of responsibility, if television news reporting aligns with print news. That viewers are more likely to attribute responsibility for reducing poverty to the Black subject could be related to a more negative tone and/or presence of stereotypes in stories where Black individuals are already overrepresented. In this way, the tone and stereotypes could cue the undeserving Black single mother trope.

Interested in post-Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) enactment media framing of welfare reform and welfare recipients, Bullock et al. (2001) analyzed newspaper articles published from April 1 to July 1, 1999. News stories tended to fall into one of two categories: "stories that focused on state/local welfare trends and those that focused on broad, national issues related to welfare 'reform'" (p. 238). Articles tended to focus on eliminating welfare and/or welfare

dependency rather than eliminating poverty. Even discussion of structural barriers, such as poor job skills or inadequate education, pertained to how barriers impacted welfare usage versus how they contributed to poverty. These articles tended to favor PRWORA but lacked the negative imagery of welfare recipients found in pre-reform messages. The researchers believed that this trend was attributable to efforts to highlight the success of welfare reform at the time the articles were written. This research reinforces the value of conducting analyses of media messages and frames over time. Analyzing media messages from 1990 through 2016 allows me to trace changes in focus and framing leading up to and following TANF's enactment.

Erler (2012) studied media representations of poverty just before and during the Great Recession, hypothesizing that representations of individuals living in poverty would shift from undeserving to deserving portrayals. For the period from 2006 through 2009, Erler performed content analyses of news articles from *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, assessing them for tone and major themes. After the Great Recession, individuals living in poverty were described in generally middle-class and downwardly mobile terms (they were observed to be neatly attired, previous homeowners, previously employed in professional jobs, etc.) and as newly poor (they were recently laid off, newly homeless based on their inability to pay a mortgage, and so forth). Before the Great Recession, individuals living in poverty were more often described as culturally different from the general population in ways related to class differences. After the Great Recession, articles were more likely to present a more humanized image of poverty, conveying the stigmatization, humiliation, passivity, and helplessness felt by those living in poverty. The post-recession descriptions could be

more likely to elicit empathy or sympathy from readers, while the pre-recession images could reinforce existing tropes and stereotypes. As well, the racialization of poverty stories shifted after the Great Recession. Stories profiled specific individuals who were white and middle-class or previously middle-class, constituting a break from the pre-recession profiles of Latino or African American individuals without middle-class markers.

Taken together, these studies suggest that portrayals of individuals living in poverty change over time and have consequences. They respond to major events such as recessions and are implicated in the promotion and evaluation of related policy changes.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

This study aims to better understand how media discourse about welfare evolved preceding and following the enactment of TANF. I used qualitative and quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles to study the following questions:

1. How did media discourse about welfare recipients change from 1990 through 2016?
 - a. What themes appeared in media discourse about welfare recipients during this period?
 - i. How did these themes change during these years?
 1. How did these themes change in relation to periods of recession and prosperity?
 2. How did these themes change in relation to the consideration and enactment of TANF?

- ii. Where and how did race appear in media discourse about welfare recipients during this time?
 1. How did racial representations change during periods of recession and prosperity?
 2. How did racial representations change in relation to the consideration and enactment of TANF?

Conceptual Framework

The Power of Media Discourse

As Zaller (1992) asserts, “[t]he information that reaches the public is never a full record of important events and developments in the world. It is, rather, a highly selective and stereotyped view of what has taken place” (p. 7). Media discourse can reinforce and occasionally sway public opinion on policy (Zaller, 1992; de Goede, 1996; Avery & Peffley, 2003). De Goede (1996) emphasizes that “the media have the power of agenda-setting, which implies that regular focus on a specific topic in the media will put this topic on the agenda of social concern” (p. 323). Media representations of welfare policies may help keep the issue on the national agenda and are important to how attitudes form in the public, attitudes that appear to inform policymaking. Schneider and Ingram (1993) describe the social construction of target populations – groups that a policy aims to affect – that plays a role in the considerations of elected officials. Given their goal to enact policies that affect change and win reelection, public officials must “anticipate the reaction of the target population itself to the policy and also anticipate the reaction of others to whether the target group *should* be the beneficiary (or loser) for a particular policy proposal” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 335). The attitudes, beliefs, and

perceptions of the public matter to policymakers. Without sympathetic media portrayals, it is unlikely that negative attitudes toward welfare and its beneficiaries will become less prevalent. Determining the effects of media representation on public opinion is beyond the scope of the present study. However, tracing the evolution of welfare recipient portrayals in the media over time provides valuable knowledge for future studies of such effects. I approached the present study with that goal in mind: to generate a complete picture of welfare recipient representation, contextualized in political and economic events, from 1990 through 2016.

The Power of Frames

Media consumers construct the meaning of social and political issues at least in some part from the media images and messages they receive (Gamson et al., 1992; Zaller, 1992; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). Often, the media offer conflicting or shifting frames and meaning (Gamson et al., 1992). In the present study, I followed Gamson et al.'s (1992) observation that "a frame is ... a storyline or unfolding narrative about an issue" (p. 386). To understand the narrative and its causal attributions, one must assess the content, sentiment, and context of media messages. Frames also organize stories with implicit causal attributions, and causal stories are inevitably about responsibility. Much of the analysis in the present study centers on factors related to responsibility: deservingness, dependency, and dependency-associated pathologies.

Schram and Soss (2001) linked the reframing of welfare in the 1980s and 1990s to the welfare reform movement that led to TANF. This movement joined the idea of dependency with racialized ideas about lower-class pathology to recast aiding the poor as promoting dependency and discouraging personal responsibility. As discussed

previously, the racial portrayal of poverty significantly affects whether it is attributed to mainly societal or individual factors (Iyengar, 1990). Attribution of individual responsibility for poverty is evident in the main tenets of PRWORA. Rather than targeting macro-level conditions – such as a federal minimum wage below living wage levels – that lead to and sustain poverty, PRWORA and TANF seek to change the behaviors of impoverished individuals through sanctions, time limits, work requirements, and the like (Lindhorst & Mancoske, 2003). Contextualizing media messages about welfare recipients within the unfolding welfare reform events of the 1990s adds to the story of how responsibility was framed and reframed. Examining these messages following enactment of TANF reveals the persistence of dependency-related pathologies over time.

The Power of Stereotypes

Frames and stereotypes “determine what the public thinks it is becoming informed about, which in turn often determines how people take sides on political issues” (Zaller, 1992, p. 8). According to Hilton and von Hippel (1996), “priming plays a dramatic role in the perception and evaluation of out-group members” (p. 249). Individuals are quicker to attribute a minoritized individual’s behavior to a stereotype than the behavior of majority group members. Interpretation of a behavior has also been shown to have long-lasting effects on an individual (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). A person may witness a minoritized individual’s behavior that they understand as confirming a stereotype. When they are primed to the same behavior in the future, they will likely assume the relevance of the same generalization (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996).

Jost and Banaji (1994) define a specific role of stereotyping – system-justification – that may help explain outcomes of stereotyping in the media. System-justification is “the psychological process whereby an individual perceives, understands, and explains an existing situation or arrangement with the result that the situation or arrangement is maintained” (p. 10). Stereotypes “justify the exploitation of certain groups over others,” explaining “the poverty or powerlessness of some groups and the success of others in ways that make these differences seem legitimate and even natural” (p. 10). Messages about welfare and welfare recipients delivered through the media may function this way. An individual who receives the message that a welfare recipient is lazy, irresponsible, and/or unmotivated may internalize that conclusion and believe that it justifies time limits, sanctions, decreased benefits, and the work requirements that characterize TANF. In this way, negative stereotypes delivered by the media frame ideas of who deserves assistance in our society and on what terms. Valentino et al. (2002) examined the power of cuing and priming of racial stereotypes in political ads through a series of survey experiments. They found strong effects when the ad narrator’s commentary on undeserving groups was linked to African American individuals through the ad imagery. In this scenario, the undeserving Black subjects cue primed opinions about welfare and other redistributive policies.

Racism and racial stereotyping of Black individuals have been shown to figure prominently in public discourse about U.S. welfare policy throughout the 20th century and into the 21st (Gilens, 1996; Brown, 1999; Gilens, 1999; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Monnat, 2010b; Soss et al., 2011; Erler, 2012). As race-targeted policies enjoy less support overall than income-targeted policies (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993), when portrayals

of welfare recipients become racialized, generous welfare policy may lose support. Indeed, race has been found to play a role in public perceptions of the welfare system and welfare recipients that persist over time (Dyck & Hussey, 2008). As an extreme example of racialized discourse, Thomas (1998) and Pierson-Balik (2003) highlight welfare reform rhetoric about out-of-wedlock births and teen mothers as a revival of eugenics language. In general, according to Gilens (1996), “Whites who think the poor are mostly Black are more likely to blame welfare recipients for their situation and less likely to support welfare than are those with more accurate perceptions of poverty” (p. 517). Therefore, racial frames and stereotypes embedded in media discourse can influence public perceptions of welfare, which cycle back to inform policymakers and, ultimately, shape policy choices. While the present study’s scope does not involve measuring the influence of media messages, examining the existence and persistence of racialized dependency-associated pathologies contributes to the body of knowledge about welfare recipient stereotyping in public discourse.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As Altheide (2002) observes, tracking mass media discourse over time allows us “to gain a perspective on our present by exploring our past, as represented in news reports and many aspects of popular culture” (p. 29). When tracking discourse, the researcher “looks for key words and follows them across time and various topics in order to see how they emerge as powerful symbols” (p. 29). The researcher takes note of how discourse changes, as these changes may signal shifts in orientation and perspectives on the issue in question. The present study tracks discourse over time in media representation, framing, and messaging.

Before addressing the methodological specifics of the study, a disclaimer is necessary. The following sections are comprised of perhaps too lengthy a discussion of the study’s technical aspects. However, providing a comprehensive picture of the context and details of the study seems important. I hope that a full accounting of my methods allows others interested in extensive longitudinal media discourse analysis to avoid the pitfalls I encountered. If nothing else, it offers clear warning to those who might consider trying something like this themselves.

The study’s dataset is enormous. All told, I analyzed 3,390 articles over roughly five years. Because even completing a first pass at every article took over a year, the shape of coding shifted at points for necessary reasons explained below. Unlike other content analyses of this magnitude, I was the sole coder, albeit with the able guidance of

my dissertation committee. Providing a full description of coding methods, codes, and decision making throughout makes the process transparent.

I could find no other welfare policy researchers who completed a media analysis as extensive or exhaustive as this one. Martin Gilens' study of media portrayals of poverty (1999) comes closest. In his study, though, Gilens analyzed 1,256 articles, choosing to include only those in which poverty was a main theme. I believed that even small references to welfare were important to include, as those remarks, too, can cue and shape perceptions and beliefs about welfare recipients. For example, a politician's offhand comment linking the Rodney King riots to permissive welfare policies sends a powerful message about recipients (Pear, 1992).

Data Sources & Data Collection

For reasons of feasibility and sample consistency, to achieve my aims I included only print newspaper articles for analysis. Television news programs are a major source of news for the public, of course, but based on the span of time covered in the present study, the size of the dataset of television news stories would have been unmanageable.⁸ Since the late 1990s, print newspapers have undergone severe infrastructure cuts (Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013). At the same time, social media such as blogs have emerged as generators and disseminators of news (Meraz, 2009). Studying the agenda-setting power of traditional news sources in relation to political blogs, Meraz (2009) found that

⁸ Golan (2006) found evidence that the morning edition of The New York Times tended to set the agenda for NBC, ABC, and CBS evening news television programs. He randomly constructed a year – 365 front pages of The Times – between 1995 and 2000. Coding each front page for identified nations in news stories, he found significant correlations between international news coverage in The Times and the evening news programs. The generalizability of the finding is limited because of Golan's focus on international news and, for the more recent past, the exclusion of influential news programs like those on the Fox News network.

traditional media – defined as “newspapers, television, radio, newsmagazines” (p. 687) – maintain some influence in political blogs but that this is tempered by the presence of citizen media such as other blogs, social media, partisan organizations, etc. The study of messages framed and delivered through social media is important to understanding their influence; but given the time frame of the present study, the inclusion of these rising sources would have created unmanageable complexities of data collection and analysis.

In addition, while citizen media played a role in redistributing the agenda-setting power of traditional media, citizen media had not usurped traditional media at the time of Meraz’s (2009) study. Groshek and Groshek (2013) came to a similar conclusion when studying the agenda-setting power of traditional media (*The New York Times* and CNN) on social media (Twitter and Facebook) and vice versa. Both *The Times* and CNN more consistently influenced political and cultural coverage on Twitter and Facebook. Su and Borah (2019) found similar evidence to support the agenda-setting power of major newspapers – including *The Times* – on Twitter, though with one exception: while newspapers appeared to influence Twitter during non-breaking news periods, Twitter was more likely to influence newspapers right after breaking news appeared. However, Twitter’s influence was fleeting, and the directional relationship reversed shortly thereafter. Although social media’s presence has certainly grown over the last decade or so, evidence suggests that traditional media continue to consistently influence social media.

With the proliferation of electronic media formats, the differences between print and digital versions of news publications must be considered when choosing news formats. Although the digital news industry continues to grow, print versions of

newspapers still draw the majority of readers (Watson, 2021). As well, digital versions of newspapers were not available throughout the current study's time frame. Including only print articles maintained the consistency of sample sources.

Since I am most interested in the way messages are packaged and delivered to the public through media discourse, I homed in on a small number of major U.S. newspapers – a form of theoretical sampling. In this context, major U.S. newspapers are those with the highest rates of circulation between 1990 and 2013 (see Appendix A). Date ranges for circulation values during this period vary due to limited publicly available circulation figures. From the circulation data I could assemble, I chose to use *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *The Times*. Permaloff and Grafton (2006) identified *The Times* as generally liberal and *The Journal* as generally conservative when comparing their editorial positions on domestic policy to those of Americans for Democratic Action. Including ideologically different publications with high readership rates should provide an ideological balance to the study. An article on press in the United States also named *The Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Journal* as the three most influential newspapers (Press Reference, n.d.), while multiple studies have documented the intermedia agenda-setting power of *The Times* (Boyle, 2001; Groshek & Groshek, 2013; Denham, 2014).

My next concern was to determine the feasibility of using these newspapers. I wanted to make sure that I had enough data from each newspaper to meet theoretical saturation in my coding. Therefore, I conducted a search in the Lexis Nexis database and ProQuest database for each year of the data collection period. Specific sources used for each search depended on the availability of news stories for a particular publication and are detailed in Appendix B. Boolean search terms used in the Lexis Nexis database

search were “HEADLINE(TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance") OR HLEAD(TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance")” to search within the headline and lead paragraph to ensure a sufficient focus on the topic of interest. For publications found in the ProQuest database, the publication was added to the Boolean search terms, e.g., “puball.Exact("Wall Street Journal") AND (TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance")”. I chose “TANF” as a search term as that was the most logical way to gather articles focused on TANF policies and recipients. Since TANF was only signed into law in August of 1996, I extended my search terms to include the “AFDC”, “welfare”, and “public assistance” components. The date range for each of the three newspapers was restricted to January 1st through December 31st for each year from 1990 to 2016. The initial number of articles found using these search terms for each of the newspapers for each year covered appears in Appendix B.

By using general search terms, I could capture as many articles as would serve the purposes of the study, but I did encounter a number of irrelevant “hits” in each publication. The next step in preparing the data sources involved removing articles not pertinent to welfare. Welfare in the United States includes numerous means-tested programs that provide cash or cash-like assistance. The term “welfare” itself carries multiple connotations but is most often associated with cash assistance and dependency among the public (Gilens, 1999). To track welfare-specific discourse while considering feasibility, I removed articles that did not specifically reference “welfare” or “public assistance” in the context of policies or practices related to these programs. That is, articles that used the term “welfare” but made no further references to aid, assistance, or programs for individuals living in poverty. An inexhaustive list of other welfare contexts

not relevant to this study included animal welfare, international welfare, child welfare, farm subsidies, student loans, alimony, and corporate welfare. I also removed articles referencing social welfare or welfare state when not specific to impoverished individuals or the programs and practices designed to help them. The articles left after the refining process comprised the initial data set for content analysis. As I explain below, the data set was refined further during the first and second cycle coding processes.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis

For the purposes of this study, I was drawn to Altheide and Schneider's concept of "ethnographic content analysis" (2013). They define ethnographic content analysis (ECA) as a blend of "objective content analysis" and "participant observation," or "how a researcher interacts with documentary materials so that specific statements can be placed in the proper context for analysis" (p. 20). They assume that we are constantly interpreting and constructing symbols in the social world. A researcher, even when striving for objectivity, is not immune to the social construction of meaning and interpretation in analyzing documents. The fusion of "ethnographic" with "content analysis" makes plain the role of researcher as ethnographer. Therefore, reflexivity and transparency in my processes for constructing meaning and interpreting news discourse became a critical part of the findings and interpretations to report.

In ECA, the researcher is engaged in "constant discovery" (p. 43) and maintains a nonlinear, reflexive stance towards the research process. Analysis consists of "constant comparison, contrasts, and theoretical sampling or striving to find cases that are similar in certain respects but not in others" (p. 44). Themes and frames present in each news story

were key points of focus. While frames, in general, refer to the focus or perspective of the story, themes may be thought of as more general meanings or theses present within and across news stories. I built off this general analytic strategy by applying the specific coding methods detailed below.

Coding

There are numerous coding methods in qualitative analysis, many with idiosyncratic terminology. To achieve my aims and avoid expository confusion, I relied heavily on Saldaña's *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2016). Saldaña begins by stating that his adaptations and terminology were created to preserve clarity and consistency. He also does not ascribe preferences or allegiances to one method over another. I approached coding method choices in a similar pragmatic manner, particularly as I chose a list of methods prior to attempting any coding of the dataset. My main goal was to maintain the integrity and transparency of coding decisions and implementation. Throughout the pre-coding and coding processes, I engaged in analytic memo writing to maintain a continuous record of reflections, thoughts, and ideas that emerged during the analyses.

First Cycle Coding. Before employing any one coding method across the entire dataset, I performed a coding pilot study with multiple methods on a full year (2007) of each newspaper's articles. As Altheide and Schneider (2013) explain, "[t]he test of a good protocol is whether your conceptual problem is adequately covered by your categories" (p. 63). From that initial test of method viability, I selected a subset of strategies for coding the entire dataset. My overall approach to selecting codes and coding methods can be described as eclectic coding, a "select and compatible

combination of two or more first cycle coding methods” (Saldaña, 2016 p. 213). I chose coding methods – detailed below – that aligned with my intentions to describe welfare discourse in the news and how it changed over time. I thus revised the preliminary codebook as needed.

Provisional Coding. Following Saldaña, I did provisional coding to create a preliminary list of codes prior to engaging in actual coding of the dataset. The tentative codes were compiled from previous, relevant research; the preliminary codebook may be found in Appendix C.

Structural Coding. Saldaña describes structural coding as a method that “both codes and initially categorizes the data corpus to examine comparable segments’ commonalities, differences, and relationships” (2016, p. 98). I employed structural coding as a higher-level indexing strategy to assign categories to overall news stories or large chunks of each story. The most important task accomplished through this coding method was breaking down the articles to pull out content specific to welfare recipients. In the process, I filtered out coverage of welfare reform, policies, and politics unless recipients were also featured. This coding strategy was a secondary form of first cycle coding, not a primary or sole coding method.

Concept Coding. Saldaña describes concept coding as a method to “assign meso or macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress” and a concept as “a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action – a ‘bigger picture’ beyond the tangible and apparent” (2016, p. 119). This coding technique fit the aim of the present study, as I examined the concepts and themes that arose from the data. Examples include “dependency”, “childcare

subsidies”, and “homeless”. By coding for concepts in each news story or portion of a news story centered on welfare recipients, I was able to compare those concepts across stories, years, and news sources.

First Cycle Coding Reflections. One of the first things I learned after the first pass at coding 2007 as a subset was the insufficiency of that exercise to determine the feasibility of coding methods. I chose 2007 because it had a relatively small number of articles, at least compared to the yearly totals during the mid-1990s. I went into 2007 with the idea that I was going to keep a wider focus on welfare recipients, policies, etc. versus my later decision to focus solely on welfare recipients. A full year and a few thousand articles into the coding process, I realized that even filtering out a long list of unrelated types of welfare that had been picked up in my article search still left an insurmountable task for one human being with a computer. I needed to sharpen my unit of analysis. Everything I had written for my proposal stemmed from an interest and motivation to learn about the human element of welfare changes and media representation. Thus, focusing on content specific to welfare recipients allowed me to focus on what was most important to me, to draw meaningful comparisons and conclusions from the data, and to complete the analysis more efficiently.

I also started with a broad definition of welfare, namely welfare as AFDC and TANF; welfare-to-work programs; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program; housing assistance; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Medicaid; Earned Income Credit (EIC) or Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); etc. It took me about three years of coding to discover the

impracticality of that broad definition and, closely related, that my initial article search terms did not sufficiently capture full representation of all the programs listed above.

The impracticality of my original approach was apparent given the massive number of articles I turned up that I cavalierly convinced myself and my skeptical committee would be no trouble at all to code and compare. Once immersed in coding, I realized my folly. I had to find a way to organize the units of analysis to ensure coding was feasible. If I was going to use the full population of articles during my time period, as opposed to a sample, I needed a way to, again, sharpen my focus. Being able to compare how coverage entailing different types of welfare (e.g., AFDC references versus Medicaid references) framed recipients would yield interesting and noteworthy findings. However, the volume of articles and amount of time such an endeavor would entail ensured that such comparisons would be superficial. Narrowing my attention to cash welfare⁹ recipients allowed for a deeper analysis of the more focused dataset.

Another related issue was the comparability of recipients from the above programs based on my article search methods. Boolean search terms used in the Lexis Nexis database search were “HEADLINE(TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance") OR HLEAD(TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance")”. For

⁹ Cash welfare encompasses multiple programs – ADC, AFDC, TANF, state or local general assistance, and SSI. Based on my search terms, I did not adequately sample the full range of SSI or general assistance recipient news coverage. Framing of SSI versus general assistance versus ADC/AFDC/TANF differs based on the eligibility criteria and funding source. For instance, SSI is a federal program targeting low-income individuals with disabilities or who meet certain age criteria. As such, its beneficiaries enjoy greater assumptions of deservingness than recipients of other public assistance programs. Much of the debate that led up to TANF focused on welfare dependency among single mothers, who were primarily involved in ADC/AFDC. Therefore, I focused my analysis on coverage that referenced ADC, AFDC, or TANF recipients; or cash welfare recipients *that did not* specifically state they were solely SSI or general assistance recipients. For example, articles that referenced welfare recipients without specifying one of these programs were included in the analysis. An article that clearly covered only SSI recipients without mention of ADC/AFDC/TANF was excluded from the analysis.

publications found in the ProQuest database, the publication was added to the Boolean search terms, e.g., “puball.Exact("Wall Street Journal") AND (TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance)". Without including search terms more specific to the non-cash assistance types of welfare, I had failed to distinguish an analytically useful category specific to non-cash programs. I had as close to the full population of cash recipient articles as possible, but non-cash recipients were included merely by chance. Any comparisons of how those programs’ recipients were represented or discussed over time would be methodologically unsound. The logical solution was to focus solely on cash welfare recipients.

Second Cycle Coding. As part of second cycle coding, I engaged in “code mapping” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 218) to examine and refine the codes that arose during the first cycle. Code mapping creates the foundation for second cycle coding by developing “categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). A list of specific second cycle coding methods follows.

Focused Coding. Saldaña describes focused coding as aiming “to develop categories without distracted attention at this time to their properties and dimensions” (2016, p. 240). Focused coding aligns with the purpose of code mapping; I engaged in both organizing methods simultaneously. The focused codes consisted of more obvious categories. For example, “race” served as an appropriate category for specific races (e.g., white, African American, etc.).

Axial Coding. Saldaña (2016) considers axial coding as a next step, in some cases, after focused coding. This coding strategy moves beyond initial codes developed during first cycle coding, furthers the development of categories of codes, and leads to a

collection of dominant categories. Dominant categories consist of broader, more general ways of grouping codes that were not as obvious as those determined by focused coding. For example, “pathology buzzwords” became a dominant category under which the following codes were grouped: verbatim illegitimacy, lower class, underclass, undeserving, welfare queen, verbatim dependency, and verbatim welfare dependent (see Appendix D for the full set of axial codes). This coding method was useful as a next step after code mapping and focused coding.

Longitudinal Coding. Saldaña defines longitudinal coding as “the attribution of selected change processes to qualitative data collected and compared across time” (2016, p. 260). This coding strategy is particularly relevant to the present study based on both the research question and nature of the data set. I periodized my approach to time, organizing the data within primary temporal categories. I utilized longitudinal coding to compare my first cycle codes across the full span of time and across selected timespans (e.g., prior to TANF implementation, prior to and after recessionary periods).

Second Cycle Coding Reflections. When coding several thousand articles, I did not have the luxury of rereading and recoding four, five, six times per article. To maintain the integrity of my coding, I needed to stick to a coding method and see it through to the end. Even with that understanding, I knew that by the time I finished my first pass, my coding was slightly altered – as I describe below – mainly based on the time that elapsed between starting to code 1990 and completing the coding of 2016. My second pass needed to combine first and second cycle coding methods, as I knew that I would likely not have time to complete further full passes.

In my sample coding of 2007, I worked in the spirit and practice of someone who had maybe several hundred total articles to code. Namely, I coded every concept I could think of. As I began to move through my first full pass, I realized that for the sake of time and feasibility, I needed to focus on a smaller number of concept codes. Those codes were used to clean the data in a way, as they became the blocks of text that were meaningful units of analysis based on the focus of my study. In particular, the structural code “welfare recipients” was the most useful code for determining the actual units of analysis. When I finished the first pass, I had broader categories of themes, which one might see at the end of second cycle coding (e.g., race, economics).

When I began my second pass, my approach was almost reversed. The broader themes had been identified and I had a sense of important, smaller themes and concepts that arose while I was in the first pass. Now, I was coding for those smaller themes (e.g., specific racial/ethnic categories; layoffs and recession) while simultaneously ensuring my coding strategy aligned between the later years and the earlier years. In the end, I had a set of codes and themes that one would expect after first and second cycle coding. Rather than arising from a linear process, though, these came from a process that included overlapping and reversing first and second cycle coding methods.

I developed ways to “keep myself honest” as a solo coder. The most important was to utilize the text search tool in NVivo to double-check that I had indeed coded all instances of a given code. I also double-checked my codes for “threat vs. suffering” against the criteria I followed as I read and coded. I knew that I was following a definition of threat that included crime, violence, drug/alcohol use, etc. I opened each of those codes in NVivo and made sure that the file numbers matched the article numbers in

the spreadsheet I used to note which category a given article fell within for the “threat vs. suffering” code. This was very useful, as I discovered in my first pass at this code a clear tendency to under-code “threat”. I recognize that as neutral as I attempted to be while reading each article, my empathy with recipients likely clouded my intuition about whether a threat was defined in a given story.

Codes

Structural Code. A single structural code was used – welfare recipient – to pull out content that focused on welfare recipients specifically. I engaged in concept coding while completing structural coding during first cycle coding. The excerpts coded as “welfare recipient” comprised my unit of analysis.

Concept Codes. The full table of codes encompassing concept codes can be found in Appendix E.

In Vivo Codes. As I read through the articles, I was struck by quotes from individuals connected to welfare, whether recipients themselves, politicians, or service providers. I began to code what I termed “powerful quotes”. Many of these serve as poignant commentaries on themes that arose through concept coding.

Attribute Codes. The attribute codes in the table below were adapted from the initial codebook I developed during provisional coding in the first coding cycle. Coding of the latter four codes occurred during the second cycle coding process. I chose to wait until structural coding was complete and I was certain which articles would be included in the second coding cycle. This proved to be a wise decision as I refined my unit of analysis and definition of welfare approximately halfway through the first coding cycle.

Table 1*Attribute Codes*

Codes	Description
Case number	Unique numerical identifier for each article
Medium	1) <i>The New York Times</i> 2) <i>USA Today</i> 3) <i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
Date	Date of publication listed on article
Length	Word count – only available for <i>USA Today</i> and <i>The Times</i>
Title	Article title
Type	Unless specifically identified in the article information, the type was determined to be “news” or “column”; news included <i>The Times</i> ’s brief; column included <i>The Times</i> biography, <i>USA Today</i> cover story, <i>USA Today</i> debate, <i>The Journal</i> feature, all three news analysis, <i>The Times</i> series, all three special report, <i>The Times</i> summary
Page	Page identifier copied from article
Author	Author identified in article
Episodic vs. thematic	1) episodic framing 2) thematic framing
Threat vs. suffering	1) threat 2) suffering 3) both 4) neutral
Focus	1) national level 2) state/local level 3) both
Target groups	1) deserving poor 2) undeserving poor 3) both 4) neutral

Episodic vs. Thematic. Bullock et al. (2001) define episodic framing as a news account detailing the experience of an individual or family. Thematic framing essentially encompasses all other news accounts that lack focus on a specific individual or family. In applying this code to overall articles, I identified an article as “episodic” if it contained at least one reference to an individual or family. If the article did not contain any such references, the article was noted as “thematic”.

Threat vs. Suffering. Entman (1995) provides a distinction between a focus on behaviors that threaten non-poor and poor individuals and a focus on the suffering of poor individuals. In practice, I expanded the definition of threat beyond the overt threats (e.g., gangs, crime – including welfare fraud, domestic violence and any other forms of violence, and illegal drugs) to include moral threats and social ills (e.g., illegitimacy, truancy, laziness/dependency, abortion, drug/alcohol use, underclass, welfare queen). When immigrants were discussed, I noted illegal immigrants as a threat and legal immigrants as a threat if the tone focused on dependency (e.g., coming to the U.S. for a “handout”). I included economic threats as well in my definition of “threat” (e.g., union worker displacement, welfare magnet, and the negative economic consequence of rising caseloads).

I expanded the idea of suffering to include instances where the term “force” was used when describing mandated activity in workfare arrangements. The language used to frame workfare is important. Describing work as “forcing” an individual to behave in a certain way may elicit sympathy in the reader, at least among those who believe in the importance of human autonomy. When workfare is described in more neutral and/or neoliberal terms [e.g., cash assistance as compensation for meeting work requirements, or workfare as a “leg up, not a handout” (Albanese, 1984, p. 26)], the reader may be less likely to view workfare as a restriction of the recipient’s basic rights. This can also be read as two forms of coercion; one based on punishment and the other on incentive. They can amount to the same thing (an incentive withdrawn is a form of punishment), but they have vastly different connotations.

I also expanded the dichotomous nature of Entman's (1995) categories to include "both" and "neutral". A number of articles referenced ideas and themes that clearly fall under threat and suffering. I also found articles which did not contain elements of threat or suffering (e.g., an article describing a tax credit for businesses to encourage hiring of welfare recipients). In those instances, a neutral designation seemed appropriate.

Focus. The dichotomous categories for focus – state/local versus national – are defined by Bullock et al. (2001) in a straightforward manner. Articles deemed to have a state/local focus discussed state-level welfare practices and programs. Articles with a national focus attended to "broad-scale, general trends" (p. 238). Particularly when discussing the devolution of federal cash assistance management from the federal to the state level, a category for "both" became necessary.

Target Groups. Erler (2012) defines deserving welfare recipients as those not held entirely responsible for their poverty condition. They contrast this idea with undeserving recipients, the able-bodied who choose not to work. The definitions combine morality with economic behaviors, and the levels of each determine whether assistance should be provided. Those who are deemed deserving may be "unable to work (i.e., the disabled) or they have already spent a lifetime participating in the labor market (i.e., the elderly)" (p. 186). The undeserving poor demonstrate behaviors that violate social norms (e.g., having children out of wedlock, not completing school, engaging in drug or criminal activity). Aiding this group is considered "counterproductive and dangerous, breeding dependency, helplessness, and passivity" (p. 186).

I followed Erler's (2012) definition with two additional clarifications. First, while individuals bearing children out of wedlock are considered undeserving, their children

should technically be considered deserving, as they fit the definition of a helpless, dependent individual. I narrowed my labeling of deserving and undeserving to only include deserving if the language specified benefits going to the child (e.g., benefits for children born out of wedlock to mothers on welfare). I labeled an article as concerned with the undeserving if the mother was referenced as the recipient (e.g., mother would not see a benefit increase after birth of additional children).

The second clarification pertained to unwed teen parenthood. While the parents who bear children out of wedlock should be labeled as undeserving according to the definition above, they are also technically dependents as non-adults. In these instances, I chose to label the article as both deserving and undeserving.

Analysis Tools

To assist in organizing and analyzing the data set, I used NVivo 11. It is particularly useful for coding, categorizing, and creating coding queries. All newspaper articles were uploaded into NVivo, and codes were applied within the program.

Quantitative Content Analysis

As the size of the data file in NVivo grew, I began to experience severe limitations in processing speed. I was able to apply codes to individual articles, but as I moved beyond coding and into attempts to create coding matrices, the program began to freeze, shut down, and/or process changes too slowly for a reasonable working cadence. At that point, I created a coding matrix in NVivo that included every article by every code and attribute. This matrix enabled me to build a spreadsheet database with each row representing one article and each column encompassing the codes and attributes. I added

more attributes to the database – pre-/post-TANF¹⁰, economic cycles, election years – as the framework crystallized for how I would specifically organize the coded themes and concepts to answer my research questions.

Once the database had been finalized in Microsoft Excel, I uploaded the file to SPSS. I was able to filter various criteria and run crosstabulations in SPSS to uncover patterns within the coding. Using both the SPSS output for quantitative trends and NVivo for specific coded examples and qualitative patterns within codes enabled a robust analysis of the articles.

Summary

The methodology detailed above – as comprehensive as it may be – constitutes a five-year coding journey that spanned a final count of 3,390 articles. I was the sole researcher engaged in coding, which means that as specific and uniform as I attempted to be in applying coding schemes, a degree of bias and socially constructed meaning remains inherent in my choices. The methodological decisions described in detail above ideally provide sufficient transparency to maintain the study’s integrity. This was a massive undertaking, but one that I did not find paralleled in other research studies, at least in scope. My sincere hope is that others choosing to engage in similar content analyses of media discourse over time will benefit from the detail and discussion of methodological missteps.

¹⁰ Post-TANF is defined as the period of time following TANF’s enactment (i.e., August 23, 1996 and onward), not a period of time following TANF’s end. Wherever “post-TANF” appears, the reader may consider the phrase as identical to “post-TANF’s enactment”. The same logic holds true when the term “post-reform” appears. In this case, “reform” refers to TANF’s enactment as well.

Chapter 4: The End of Welfare News Coverage as We Know It

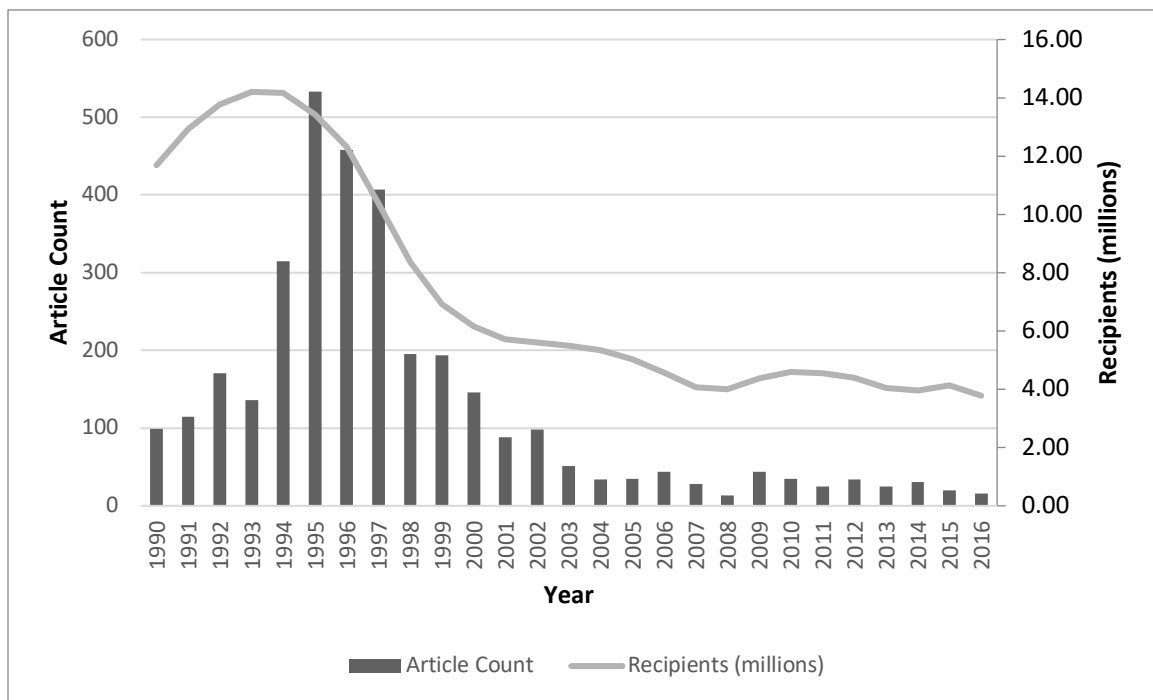
To oversimplify what others have written volumes about, the early 1990s saw the culmination of decades of paternalistic, heteronormative, racist, sexist, and classist views of cash welfare recipients.¹¹ Welfare *receipt* became conflated with welfare *dependency*, the latter constituting prolonged public assistance use.¹² Critics of welfare dependency decried a system that they believed sapped motivation to work and support oneself. They also tied dependency to a host of social ills, including crime, violence, and drug abuse. Ignoring structural conditions contributing to high poverty levels, state actors leaned on individual behaviors to explain rising welfare rolls and economic inequality. Figure 1 shows the upward trajectory of AFDC rolls, peaking in 1993 with 14.21 million total recipients.

¹¹ For illuminating analyses of anti-welfare sentiment in the decades leading up to TANF, see Handler's *The Poverty of Welfare Reform* (1995) and Mink's *Welfare's End* (1998).

¹² The Department of Health and Human Services in a 1997 Indicators of Welfare Dependence report defined welfare dependence as follows: "A family is dependent on welfare if more than 50 percent of its total income in a one-year period comes from AFDC/TANF, Food Stamps and/or SSI, and this welfare income is not associated with work activities. Welfare dependence is the proportion of all families who are dependent on welfare" (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation).

Figure 1

Yearly AFDC/TANF Caseload and Article Count



Note. AFDC/TANF caseload data come from the Congressional Research Service (2021). Values represent total recipients in a given year by million. For example, 11.70 in 1990 equates to 11.70 million total recipients in 1990.

Economic changes, deepening inequality, changing welfare recipient demographics, and resentment by the working poor combined to drive a legislative push for welfare reform. In the early to mid-1990s, as debate intensified in the political sphere, newspapers responded to the excitement by rapidly increasing coverage of welfare recipients. Figure 1 displays the leap in total yearly article counts from 136 in 1993 to a peak of 533 articles only two years later. Did this pre-TANF coverage reflect the tone of the political debates? Which voices and messages were loudest? How were welfare

recipients represented? Did the media present one-dimensional or more nuanced images of welfare recipients?

After passage of TANF in 1996, yearly article counts declined steadily; but in the early 2000s they fell precipitously, tracing the drop in TANF caseloads. Arguably, when recipients receive far less coverage, their representation – albeit limited – becomes even more critical to the public’s formation of beliefs. This study cannot assess decision-making in the newsroom, but we can see the messages that made the news. Were post-TANF representations different from earlier ones? What issues were salient or newsworthy?

Overview of Key Events

Pre-TANF

Political and economic events in the early 1990s led to the demise of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Since mid-1989, welfare rolls had been rising (Falk, 2021). With a recession from July 1990 to March 1991 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021), the increasing rolls contributed to severe pressure on state budgets.¹³ A “new consensus” existed across party lines that welfare dependency had grown beyond reasonable limits and welfare reform was necessary (Schram, 1995, p. 131). The 1988 Family Support Act’s Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program was in full swing – at least in theory – with the goal to provide education and training to AFDC recipients. By October 1990, all states were to have begun phasing in

¹³ State budgets are often constrained by constitutional limits on public debt and requirements to maintain balanced budgets. For an analysis of factors contributing to states’ fiscal problems and strategies for balancing their budgets during the 1990-1991 recession, see Hansen (1991).

the JOBS program (Schram, 1995). In November's midterm election, Democrats maintained their control of both houses, but bipartisan calls for policy changes targeting welfare dependency continued to gain traction, especially as the 1992 presidential election drew closer.

In 1991, states began introducing bills to incentivize welfare recipients' use of Norplant, a long-term contraceptive, signaling an increasingly paternalistic approach to changing behaviors (Lewin, 1991). On October 23, 1991, then-presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, first promised "to put an end welfare as we know it" (DeParle, 1994, p. A10). This soundbite-worthy campaign promise followed Clinton through the enactment of federal welfare reform legislation. The following year saw a continuation of efforts from both parties to curb welfare dependency. On January 21, 1992, New Jersey's governor, a Democrat, signed the first state family cap legislation (King, 1992). Welfare recipients who had additional children while on public assistance would no longer get an increase in benefits. Just over a week later, on January 29th in his State of the Union Address, then-President George H. W. Bush encouraged the use of state waivers and promised to make the waiver process easier for states addressing welfare dependency (Handler, 1995).

Waivers allowed states to forgo some federal AFDC requirements. They were meant to encourage state experimentation in projects that would aid recipients' transition to work, lower welfare rolls, and/or otherwise support the objectives of AFDC (Harvey et al., 2000). The waiver practice had been in existence since 1962 under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act but saw a surge of activity starting in 1987 during the Reagan and Bush administrations. During the Reagan administration, state demonstration projects

focused on work requirements. With the Bush administration, state waivers began to focus more on regulating non-economic behaviors. Importantly, waiver applications required evaluation plans assessing the effectiveness of waiver projects, but not every waiver program was fully evaluated or evaluated at all.¹⁴

Party control of the White House shifted in January 1993 when Bill Clinton became president; Democrats maintained control of both houses. Throughout that year, the Clinton administration focused its domestic agenda on health care reform. The working poor did score some economic relief when the 1993 tax bill expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The EITC provided a refundable tax credit to low-income workers. Its expansion reflected the growing bipartisan preference for work-related support rather than cash welfare for non-workers. The administration also continued to encourage and approve state waivers for state welfare reform experiments; 43 states were granted waivers by the time TANF was enacted (Falk, 2021). Waivers included projects that allowed recipients to keep more earned income before their AFDC benefits were lowered; ended the policy of increasing benefits when additional children were born to mothers already receiving welfare; required school attendance of children and adolescents in AFDC households; mandated work activities; instituted time limits on benefit receipt; and extended Medicaid and childcare benefits beyond the one-year federal requirement (Harvey et al., 2000).¹⁵

¹⁴ When AFDC was replaced by TANF, states were allowed to continue Section 1115 waivers – under specific conditions – that were already in place at the time the new law was signed. However, they were not required to continue or implement evaluations of waiver projects. As would be expected when evaluations entailed extensive administrative resources and the chance of politically unhelpful results, most states did not continue evaluation efforts once TANF began. See Harvey et al. (2000) for a comprehensive review of Section 1115 waivers under the Bush and Clinton administrations.

¹⁵ Aspects of many state waiver projects appeared in the 1996 PRWORA legislation.

In May 1994, Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan – for decades a staunch critic of welfare dependency – introduced the Welfare Indicators Act (Schram, 2000). Signed into law, the act required an annual report from the Secretary of Health and Human Services on welfare dependency indicators and risk factors. The report tracks and predicts dependence on cash assistance (then AFDC; later TANF), the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This piece of legislation highlighted the entrenchment of bipartisan fears of welfare dependency.¹⁶

In June 1994, the Clinton administration introduced the Work and Responsibility Act. This proposed a two-year lifetime limit on AFDC eligibility for recipients not working; it would expand training and impose a mandatory work requirement after two years of AFDC receipt (Falk, 2021). Directly attacking out-of-wedlock births, the proposed legislation would have withdrawn benefits from unwed teen mothers not residing with parental guardians or in another state-approved living arrangement (Work and Responsibility Act of 1994).

With an eye on the November congressional election, Republicans presented their own anti-welfare dependency legislative agenda through the Contract with America (Handler, 2005).¹⁷ This followed the Clinton proposal's inclusion of a work requirement after two years of AFDC receipt, but it would have instituted a five-year lifetime limit on

¹⁶ The first annual Indicators of Welfare Dependence report was sent to Congress in 1997. Since then, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) has produced twenty reports, the latest of which was published on July 15, 2021. Notably, the most recent report only included indicators through 2019 and did not cover the economic recession stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁷ The Contract with America was a fairly comprehensive agenda that covered a number of policy areas aside from welfare and welfare dependency. The Personal Responsibility Act was the specific area of the Contract focused on welfare reform.

assistance. It also proposed a family benefit cap and barred teenage mothers from AFDC. As a sign of what was to come, the Republican proposal would have capped AFDC and childcare funding while giving states the option to receive a block grant of AFDC (Falk, 2021).¹⁸

The November 1994 election put Republicans in control of both houses. This emboldened Republican efforts to reform welfare. The Personal Responsibility Act (PRA), based on the Contract with America, passed the House in March 1995. Containing the measures from the Contract noted above, the PRA also would have outright replaced AFDC and its work and training programs with a block grant to the states. A bill from the Senate Finance Committee in May 1995 removed the family cap and exclusion of unwed teenage parent provisions. After compromise along party lines, a Senate version was passed in September 1995. This provided that unwed teenage parents could receive assistance if they lived in an adult supervised home. The welfare reform legislation was added to a budget reconciliation bill that was vetoed by Clinton in December 1995. Clinton expressed support for welfare reform but opposed the bill's provisions to cut other programs benefiting low-income people. A stand-alone welfare reform bill that included the option for states to implement family caps passed both houses and was also vetoed by Clinton in January 1996. This time, he faulted insufficient childcare provisions and health care coverage, few rewards and requirements for states to

¹⁸ AFDC provided unlimited federal funding for the reimbursement of state benefit payments using a matching rate system tied to a state's per capita income. Such a system allowed federal assistance to expand during periods of recession. Capping federal AFDC and shifting to a block grant system meant limiting federal expenditures on AFDC to a specific amount each year. Under this model, federal funding would not be responsive to adverse economic conditions.

help recipients transition to work, and no mechanism to prevent block grants from running out of money during economic downturns.

With pressure from the National Governor's Association, the House and Senate developed bills that included increased childcare funding, a contingency fund in case of recession, and bonus payments for states meeting employment goals. Faced with a looming presidential election and the chance that his 1992 campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it" would go unfulfilled, on August 22, 1996, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The act officially replaced AFDC with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Falk, 2021).

Post-TANF

To contextualize the rapid decrease in welfare recipient news coverage beginning in the early 2000s, it is important to consider political and economic changes that followed TANF's enactment. Clinton won re-election in November 1996, but Republicans maintained control of both houses. With welfare policy now reformed and a five-year clock ticking for many recipients, the legislative focus turned to support for the working poor and those transitioning from welfare to work. During 1996 and 1997, the minimum hourly wage was raised twice, reaching \$5.15. August 1997's Balanced Budget Act created a Welfare-To-Work Grant program that provided more funding for work activities and allowed a higher percentage of recipients to count education and training as meeting work requirements (Falk, 2021).

In November 1998, Republicans held on to both houses, and in November 2000 Republican George W. Bush was elected president; the Senate was split 50-50; and Republicans retained only a three-vote advantage in the House. A recession hit in March

2001, lasting until November (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021). During the recession, the September 11th terrorist attacks rocked the country and further exacerbated the effects of the economic downturn on low-wage workers (DeParle, 2001, p. A12). At the same time, the first groups of TANF recipients hit the five-year lifetime benefit limit unless they qualified under the 20% of a state's caseload that could be exempted from the limit.¹⁹

TANF came up for reauthorization in 2002, but debate over definitions of work participation activities and requirements led to short-term extensions until 2006. Republicans were able to regain control of the Senate in November 2002, controlling both houses again until November 2006. President Bush was reelected in November 2004. In February 2006 TANF was reauthorized through the Deficit Reduction Act. Funding for TANF was extended through 2010, and childcare funding was increased. Work activities that counted under TANF rules were more narrowly defined, and states were required to verify participants' work activities. The legislation also promoted heterosexual marriages through funding for research grants about responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage initiatives (Falk, 2021).

Political power shifted in November 2006 with Democrats gaining control of both houses and maintaining their control until 2010. Democratic President Barack Obama was elected in November 2008, during the Great Recession that began in December

¹⁹ Federal law required that states limit lifetime TANF aid to 60 months but allowed states to set lower limits. The law also gave states room to define time limit exemptions. TANF participants who have experienced domestic violence or hardship may be exempt from lifetime limits (Schott, 1998). Those who may be exempt from both lifetime limits and work requirements include children whose adult caregivers are not TANF recipients (e.g., immigrants who are not eligible for TANF benefits, nonparent relative caretakers, and disabled parents receiving SSI) (Falk, 2016). Work exempt TANF participants may include mothers caring for a newborn or individuals with a qualifying disability (Ybarra & Noyes, 2019).

2007. The Great Recession, which lasted through June 2009 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021), was the first major test of the post-AFDC safety net. In response to the economic crisis, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided additional funding to replenish TANF emergency contingency funding. The existing contingency fund was exhausted by the end of 2009 (Falk, 2021).

Since the Deficit Reduction Act's TANF funding expired in 2010, funding has continued through short-term extensions. The Claims Resolution Act altered funding for the healthy marriage and responsible father programs while also requiring states to submit one-time reports on how funds were spent and on individuals with no work participation hours. In November 2010, Republicans gained control of the House, holding on to it through 2016. The 2012 Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act required states to prevent cash assistance withdrawals at strip club, casino, and liquor store ATMs (Falk, 2021), a largely symbolic comment on the putative moral failings of welfare recipients.

President Obama was reelected in November 2012, but Republicans took control of the Senate in 2014. Finally, as the yearly totals of articles published about welfare recipients slowed to a trickle, in 2016 Republican Donald Trump was elected president while Republicans maintained control of both houses.

Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF

The historical context above helps make sense of the following analysis of the attributes of articles published before and after TANF's enactment. The counts, proportions, and average articles per year of various attributes reveal much about the salience, newsworthiness, and general representation of welfare recipients across both

time spans. Comparing the body of articles published about welfare recipients up to and including August 22, 1996 – the signing of PRWORA – to those published on August 23rd through 2016 (see Table 2), higher total counts appeared in the latter period for *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. This is to be expected, as we are comparing a span of approximately 6.75 years to one of about 19.25 years.

Table 2

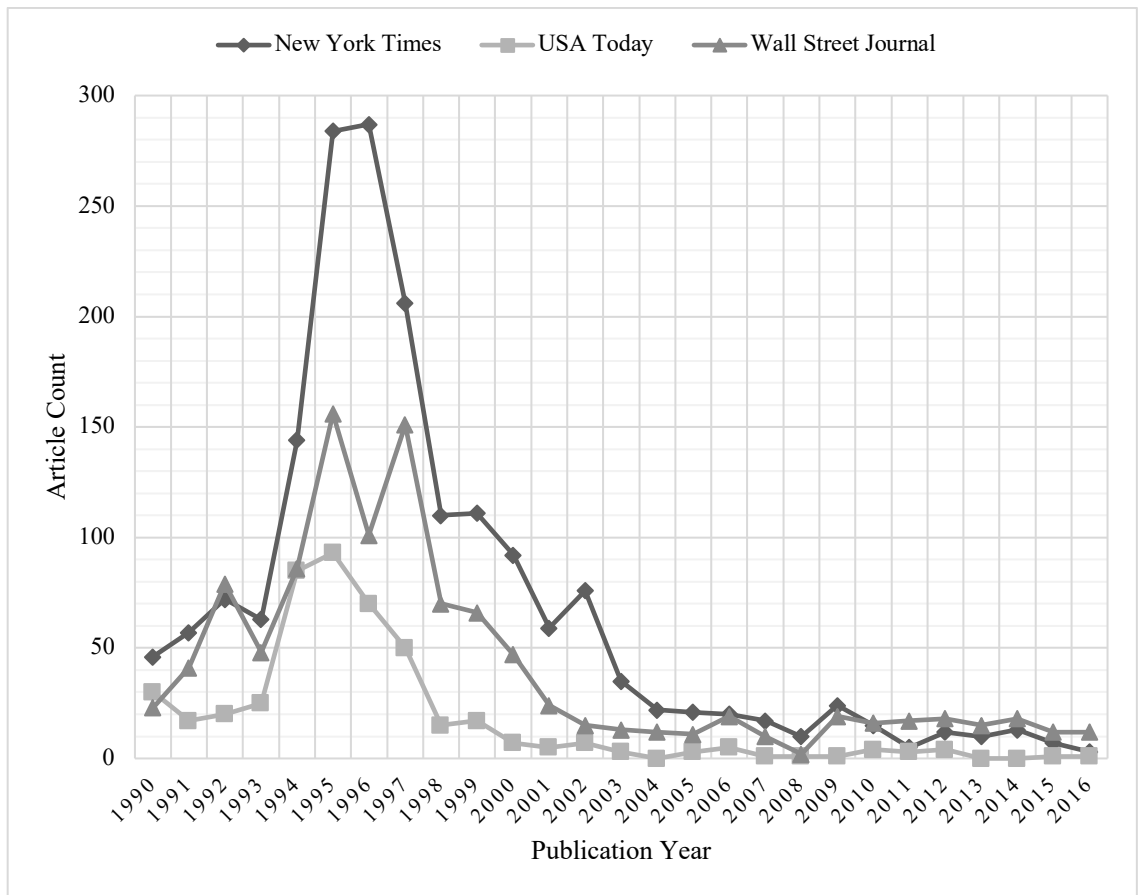
Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF	Total
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	834	987	1821
	Percentage	45.8%	54.2%	100.0%
	Articles Per Year	123.6	51.3	70.0
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	319	149	468
	Percentage	68.2%	31.8%	100.0%
	Articles Per Year	47.3	7.7	18.0
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	494	607	1101
	Percentage	44.9%	55.1%	100.0%
	Articles Per Year	73.2	31.5	42.3

The significance lies in the difference between the average number of articles per year, pre- and post-enactment of TANF. Both *The Times* and *The Journal* published articles that referenced cash welfare recipients far less frequently post-enactment. *USA Today* dropped from an average of 47.3 articles per year pre-TANF to a mere 7.7 articles per year. In fact, after 1999 *USA Today* failed to publish more than 7 articles referencing welfare recipients in any given year (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Comparing Yearly Article Counts between Newspapers



Looking at the body of articles published from 1990 to 1996, we see growing interest in cash welfare recipients. *The Times* published 46 articles in 1990, which grew each year to a total of 287 in 1996. *USA Today* began with 30 articles in 1990, peaked in 1995 with 93, and finished 1996 with 70. *The Journal* followed a similar trend with 23 articles in 1990, a peak of 156 in 1995, and 101 in 1996. The increasing yearly count reflects the deepening debate about welfare dependency and welfare reform at state and national levels. Even the early peak from *USA Today* and *The Journal*, a year before TANF was signed into law, makes sense in view of the proliferation of state waivers, intense political debate, and the flurry of activity surrounding welfare reform legislation

at the federal level, including President Clinton's highly publicized vetoes. The steep decline in coverage following enactment suggests that the politics of the buildup was more newsworthy than governance – the implementation of reform.

Location – Front-Page vs. Other Page

The location of an article within the newspaper also tells us about the newsworthiness of the subject matter. Articles appearing on the front page of the paper are those deemed most important or at least most interesting to the public. Interestingly, all three newspapers showed higher proportions of front-page articles after TANF's enactment (see Table 3). Yet, the average articles per year, which factors in the difference in time spans, shows that fewer front-page articles appeared each year during the post-TANF years. This makes sense as fewer articles in general were published each year post-TANF. However, the percentage tells us that when an article did appear after TANF's enactment – as infrequently as that might have been – there was a higher likelihood that the article would appear on the front page across all three newspapers. The higher post-TANF proportions, though, cluster around the late 1990s/early 2000s. After about 2002 – TANF's reauthorization debate period – such prominent coverage drops sharply. Compared to coverage during the pre-TANF era, cash welfare recipients were no longer newsworthy subject matter.

Table 3

Front-Page Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	106	175
	Percentage	12.7%	17.7%
	Articles Per Year	15.7	9.1
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	7	9
	Percentage	2.2%	6.0%
	Articles Per Year	1.0	0.5
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	56	113
	Percentage	11.3%	18.6%
	Articles Per Year	8.3	5.9

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that appeared on the front page. For example, 12.7% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment appeared on the front page.

Focus – State/Local vs. National

Welfare reform was driven in some part by the idea that state and local governments know better how to care for their constituents than the federal government. TANF’s block grants show a devolution of responsibility for welfare policy and implementation from the federal to state and local levels. With that in mind, the shift in focus among all three newspapers from national news to state and local news²⁰ after TANF’s enactment is not a surprise (see Table 4). Of the three newspapers, *The Times* is the most regionally focused, with a particular interest in the greater New York area. More than half its welfare articles concerned state/local news pre-TANF; but this jumped to 75.6% post-TANF. *USA Today* and *The Journal* both showed an increase of

²⁰ State/local coding covered any state and any locality. For *The Times* this means state/local is not limited solely to the New York region.

approximately 15% in state/local coverage following TANF. Again, though, the increases in proportions are tempered by the overall decrease in welfare news coverage, as shown in the average articles per year change pre- to post-enactment.

Table 4

State/Local Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	508	746
	Percentage	60.9%	75.6%
	Articles Per Year	75.3	38.8
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	119	81
	Percentage	37.3%	54.4%
	Articles Per Year	17.6	4.2
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	196	336
	Percentage	39.7%	55.4%
	Articles Per Year	29.0	17.5

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that focused on the state/local level. For example, 60.9% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment had a state/local focus.

Episodic vs. Thematic

The episodic and thematic categories tell us about the narrative treatment of welfare recipients, particularly the use of human-interest stories. Whether used to ennoble or condemn, such stories are entertaining as well as informative, a quality that has mattered greatly to newspaper editors since at least 1870, when *The New York Herald* sent Stanley to find Livingston (Smythe, 2003). Iyengar (1996) conducted a study on the effects of episodic and thematic framing in television news stories on a viewer’s attribution of responsibility for poverty to the individual or to society (i.e., socioeconomic

or political conditions). The viewers who watched episodic accounts tended to attribute responsibility to the individual, while those watching thematic news stories attributed responsibility to societal conditions. Attribution of responsibility is important because when poverty is framed as a phenomenon for which individuals are responsible, the perception of the poor as undeserving becomes more common (Bullock et al., 2001). However, as I found with most of the codes and attributes I pulled from past research, Iyengar's findings lack nuanced consideration of episodic accounts. The interplay of other attributes – threat versus suffering or undeserving versus deserving traits – appears to muddy the straightforward findings in Iyengar's research.

In the case of welfare reform, episodic articles put faces on the statistics or general descriptions in thematic articles. A story published shortly before Christmas in 1993 is a good example:

In East Los Angeles, Paul Acosta said his world, and that of his five-year-old brother, would be a better place if the refrigerator were full more often. His grandmother, Elizabeth Ramirez, explained that her daughter receives \$600 monthly in public assistance, of which \$495 pays rent. Reached by phone, Paul shyly confided: "I didn't even ask for anything this year except for moneywise for food." How much money was Paul hoping Santa would send? The boy was silent for a moment. "Um . . . \$50 or \$100 a month. That would help us a lot," he said.

(Evans, 1993, p. B1)

I would argue that the above account elicits a more sympathetic reaction than statistics on the prevalence of child hunger. Additionally, the fact that rent consumes most of the

family's extremely low income from welfare points to societal inequities affecting the family's impoverished state.

Still, flip sides to the sympathetic portrayals were episodic accounts of welfare recipients who clearly fit the image of an undeserving, welfare-dependent individual. The interplay of sympathetic and unsympathetic traits can be seen in the following account:

Juquetta Murray, a 19-year-old mother of two who graduated from Oliver last year, attends a community college and plans to be a nurse. The program taught her "responsibility. That it's your child, not anyone else's," she says. But she adds that she is currently on welfare and that she spends \$200 a month on five-year-old Brandi's clothes alone. (Stern, 1993, p. A1)

It seems to me that the last sentence, a journalistic doorknob comment, tarnishes admirable ambition with tax-supported profligacy. Ambition and profligacy may co-exist, of course, and complex episodic accounts warrant future research. If nothing else, the episodic accounts humanize and particularize – for better or worse – published generalizations about welfare recipients found throughout the welfare reform debate.

Table 5 displays the counts, percentages, and average counts per year of articles containing episodic accounts pre- and post-TANF enactment. *The Times'* proportions of episodic articles show a greater tendency to focus on human-interest angles both pre- and post-TANF, but illustrate greater reliance on episodic articles post-reform. The lower average articles per year dilutes this, though: the tendency was greater *when* an article appeared. We see far less focus on human-interest stories in *The Journal* compared to *The Times*. Like *The Times*, *USA Today* relied more on human-interest stories when

covering welfare after the enactment of TANF, but its attention to the issue flagged even more substantially.

Table 5

Episodic Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	209	322
	Percentage	25.1%	32.6%
	Articles Per Year	31.0	16.7
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	45	42
	Percentage	14.1%	28.2%
	Articles Per Year	6.7	2.2
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	90	116
	Percentage	18.2%	19.1%
	Articles Per Year	13.3	6.0

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained episodic accounts. For example, 25.1% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment contained episodic accounts.

Threat vs. Suffering

Changes in coverage across the threat versus suffering categories reveal a good deal about the rhetorical tone during the debate leading up to TANF. Threat-only articles could be considered the most damaging to public perceptions of welfare recipients as they reinforce negative stereotypes. The following example is from an article focused on deteriorating families and social values and echoed the political debate about welfare dependency:

In interviews with individual Americans surveyed in the Journal/NBC poll, many also say they want the welfare system overhauled to reduce the number of

families that remain on the rolls for years at a time. "Welfare reform is something new, they should start on that, get people back to work," says Eugene Hale, a 38-year-old New Yorker. "Revamp the whole system and start over. These people are getting away with murder." (Seib, 1993, p. A12)

Across all three newspapers, the prevalence of threat-only articles was higher pre-TANF (see Table 6). This comes as no surprise given the vitriol hurled in the debate. *The Journal* carried the highest proportion of threat-only articles both pre- and post-TANF. *The Times* showed the most dramatic decrease in the proportion of threat-only articles. *USA Today* actually published the smallest proportions and yearly counts of threat-only articles both pre- and post-enactment.

Table 6

Threat-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	130	71
	Percentage	15.6%	7.2%
	Articles Per Year	19.3	3.7
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	31	8
	Percentage	9.7%	5.4%
	Articles Per Year	4.6	0.4
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	87	63
	Percentage	17.6%	10.4%
	Articles Per Year	12.9	3.3

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured threat-only recipient portrayals. For example, 15.6% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF's enactment had threat-only depictions.

Suffering-only articles elicit sympathy for welfare recipients by highlighting their victimization, a key factor in deservingness. The following excerpt from an article on

Republican presidential candidate Jack Kemp's 1992 campaign season reflects a decidedly different tone than the threat-only article above:

Those compass points include support for enterprise zones "not only in south-central L.A., but in your hometown"; a lower capital gains tax rate, "not to reward rich people but to create capital," and removal of disincentives and legal barriers that he says block efforts by welfare recipients to work and save. "It's not the values of the poor that ought to be called into question," he [Jack Kemp] declares. "It's the values of the welfare system that punish people for trying, punish people for saving, punish people for getting married, punish work." (Noah, 1992, p. A14)

As reported, Kemp provides a sympathetic view of welfare recipients, and unlike the threat-only article quoted above, does not attribute responsibility for poverty to individuals. Table 7 provides suffering-only article counts, percentages, and average articles per year across the three newspapers. Of note, *The Times* showed the lowest proportion of suffering-only articles across the three newspapers pre-TANF but changed their emphasis the most post-TANF.

Table 7

Suffering-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	245	410
	Percentage	29.4%	41.5%
	Articles Per Year	36.3	21.3
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	115	59
	Percentage	36.1%	39.6%
	Articles Per Year	17.0	3.1
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	186	277
	Percentage	37.7%	45.6%
	Articles Per Year	27.6	14.4

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured suffering-only recipient portrayals. For example, 29.4% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF's enactment had suffering-only depictions.

Articles that contained both threat and suffering could be considered more balanced in their portrayal of recipients, or at least as presenting a more complex view of recipients. Such complexity is reflected in the following passage:

Vikki admits that becoming a doctor is unlikely because of the time and the expense involved. She has a plan, but her voice drops with mingled embarrassment and resignation as she talks about it. "I be thinking if I can make enough money once dealing drugs, \$5,000 or \$10,000, I can invest," she said.

(Lee, 1994, A1)

The above excerpt appeared at the end of a lengthy article written as part of a series focused on lived experiences in a deep poverty area of New York City. Vikki was 26 years old and attempting to provide a semblance of familial authority as the legal guardian of three younger cousins ranging in age from 13 to 20. The in-depth portrait

provided by the article highlights the difficulty in ascribing blame for some behaviors that are generally condemned. Bad means to good ends are all the world provides sometimes.

The numbers for articles containing both suffering and threat tell an interesting story (see Table 8). *The Times* showed the highest proportions in this “both” category compared to its proportions across the four categories (threat-only, suffering-only, both threat and suffering, neither threat nor suffering) and to the other newspapers within this category both pre- and post-TANF. *USA Today* also had a high proportion in this category when compared to the other categories both before and after TANF. At first glance, *The Journal* appears the least balanced (or sophisticated) compared to the other newspapers, but the higher proportions of articles in the “neither” category (see Table 9) unique to *The Journal* contribute to the relatively low proportions in the “both” category. However, when looking at the threat-only and suffering-only categories combined, *The Journal* is proportionately more likely to present a one-dimensional article than the other two newspapers both before and after TANF’s enactment. More than 50% of its articles fall in the threat-only or suffering-only categories pre- and post-TANF; both *The Times* and *USA Today* maintain total proportions of less than 50% across both categories and time spans.

Table 8

Both Threat and Suffering Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	388	429
	Percentage	46.5%	43.5%
	Articles Per Year	57.5	22.3
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	130	63
	Percentage	40.8%	42.3%
	Articles Per Year	19.3	3.3
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	151	140
	Percentage	30.6%	23.1%
	Articles Per Year	22.4	7.3

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured both threat and suffering themes in recipient portrayals. For example, 46.5% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment had both threat and suffering-related depictions.

There is relatively high variation among the newspapers in the proportion of articles containing neither threat nor suffering markers (see Table 9). Articles that contained neither threat nor suffering were the least likely to appear in welfare articles published by *The Times* whether pre- or post-TANF. This speaks to *The Times*’ greater tendency to use human-interest accounts to elicit emotional reactions and attend to nuance.

Table 9

Neither Threat nor Suffering Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	71	77
	Percentage	8.5%	7.8%
	Articles Per Year	10.5	4.0
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	43	19
	Percentage	13.5%	12.8%
	Articles Per Year	6.4	1.0
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	70	127
	Percentage	14.2%	20.9%
	Articles Per Year	10.4	6.6

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured neither threat nor suffering themes in recipient portrayals. For example, 8.5% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment had neither threat nor suffering markers.

The Journal’s higher proportions both pre-TANF and post-TANF in the “neither” category demonstrate more of a “just the facts” approach to reporting that involves recipients. The following is an example of this reportorial style:

Burger King Corp., convinced that hiring welfare recipients makes good business sense, says it intends to recruit as many as 10,000 more in the next 18 months, doubling its current total. The nation's second largest hamburger chain says people who come off welfare to work in its restaurants tend to stay much longer than other employees. Turnover of more than 100% a year is systemic in the fast-food business, but Dennis Malamatinas, chief executive officer of Burger King, a unit of Miami-based Diageo PLC, said former welfare recipients have an annual turnover rate of only 45%. Burger King also receives federal tax incentives to participate in the welfare-to-work program. (Business Brief, 1999)

Although welfare recipients are a central part of the article, they are spoken of in a matter-of-fact manner. None of the markers that would define recipients as a threat or as suffering appear.

Target Groups – Undeserving vs. Deserving

A rhetorical shift is also apparent in the changes before and after TANF's enactment in counts and proportions among the attributional categories of undeserving, deserving, both, and neither. As would be expected as public and political support shifted away from cash assistance, deserving-only accounts (see Table 10) became far less common. When *The Journal* published welfare articles before or after TANF's enactment, they were more likely than the other papers to portray recipients only as deserving. Further, while *The Journal* maintained the same proportion of deserving-only coverage over time, *The Times* and *USA Today* showed marked and similar decreases in deserving-only coverage following enactment. The decline was most apparent in *The Times*, making it the newspaper least likely – proportion-wise – to present a purely sympathetic (and perhaps simplistic) depiction of public assistance recipients in its welfare coverage.

Table 10*Deserving-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF*

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	110	66
	Percentage	13.2%	6.7%
	Articles Per Year	16.3	3.4
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	36	12
	Percentage	11.3%	8.1%
	Articles Per Year	5.3	0.6
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	78	95
	Percentage	15.8%	15.7%
	Articles Per Year	11.6	5.0

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured deserving-only recipient portrayals. For example, 13.2% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF's enactment had deserving-only depictions.

Both *The Times* and *The Journal* published a higher proportion of undeserving-only portrayals of recipients following TANF's enactment (see Table 11).

Table 11*Undeserving-Only Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF*

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	217	326
	Percentage	26.0%	33.0%
	Articles Per Year	32.1	17.0
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	100	45
	Percentage	31.3%	30.2%
	Articles Per Year	14.8	2.3
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	170	249
	Percentage	34.4%	41.0%
	Articles Per Year	25.2	12.9

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured undeserving-only recipient portrayals. For example, 26.0% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment had undeserving-only depictions.

The increased proportions of articles in the undeserving-only category are tempered slightly by a small decrease in proportion in both undeserving and deserving categories after TANF’s enactment (see Table 12).²¹ *The Times* and *USA Today* appear more likely to present complex images of welfare recipients. Over fifty percent of their respective articles contained both underserving and deserving markers across both time spans. *The Journal* was not only less likely to do so – less than fifty percent of its articles fit the “both” category – we also see a substantial drop in proportion from pre- to post-TANF. Again, *The Journal* was more likely to present a one-dimensional welfare

²¹ The percentage of articles with both undeserving and deserving themes can be added to the deserving-only article percentage to provide the total percentage of articles that contain *any* undeserving themes. Therefore, a rise in one category coupled with a decrease in the other category where both categories include undeserving themes means that the *total* percentage of articles containing undeserving themes is less likely to change.

recipient than the other newspapers, and recipients were more likely to be portrayed as undeserving.

Table 12

Both Undeserving and Deserving Article Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	490	565
	Percentage	58.8%	57.2%
	Articles Per Year	72.6	29.4
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	172	85
	Percentage	53.9%	57.0%
	Articles Per Year	25.5	4.4
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	225	228
	Percentage	45.5%	37.6%
	Articles Per Year	33.3	11.8

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that featured both undeserving and deserving recipient portrayals. For example, 58.8% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment had both undeserving and deserving depictions.

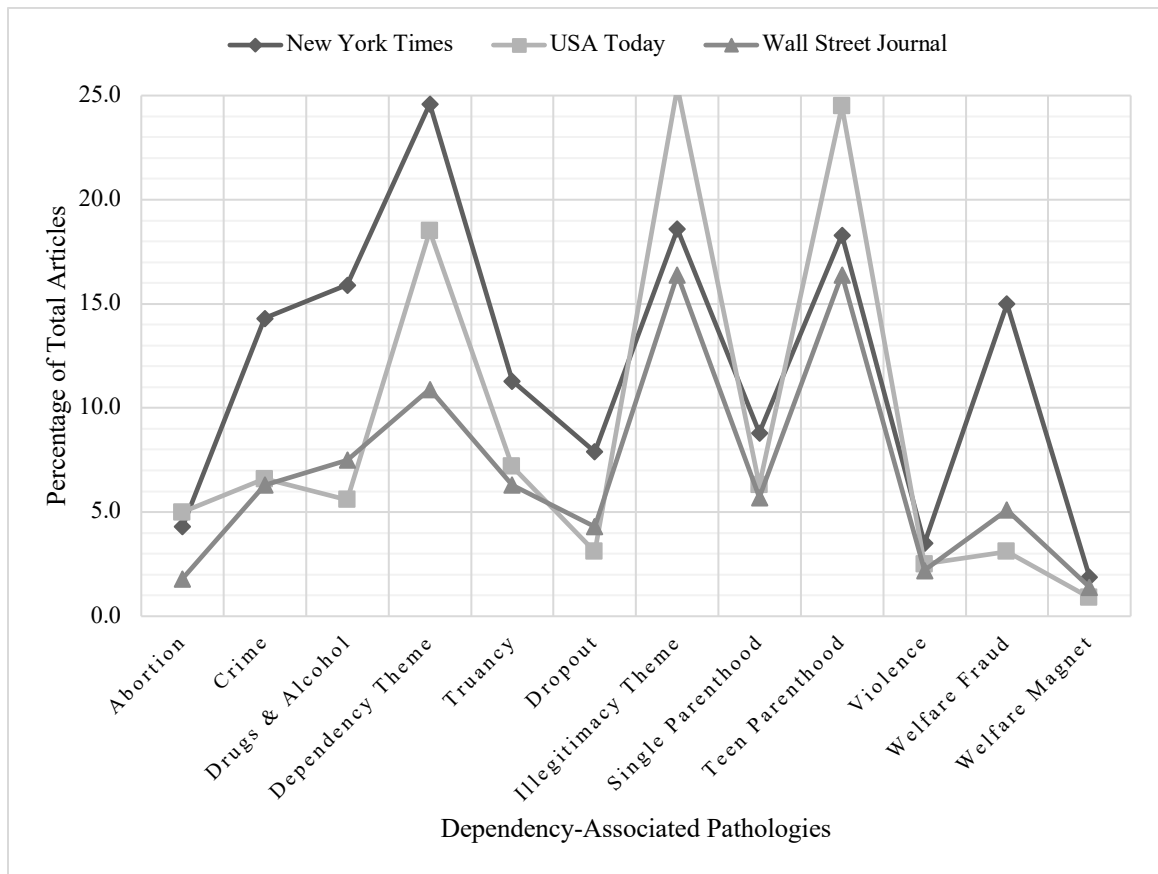
Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Themes Related to Unworthiness

Dependency-Associated Pathologies

In *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, pre-TANF reporting centered on the themes of dependency, out-of-wedlock births, and teen parenthood (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence



These themes reflect the pre-TANF political debate that was dominated by bipartisan conservative perspectives. As Schram (1995) contends, Democrats were pushed “to work within the confines of the conservative-dominated discourse that characterizes poverty and welfare dependency as largely problems of individual failing” (p. 32). This reality is reflected in the counts and proportions for political parties and affiliations. Across all three sources, articles where Republicans were referenced outnumbered articles referencing Democrats, particularly during the pre-TANF era.

Comparing the sources, *The Times* gave far more attention to each party, with a higher prevalence of articles referencing the views of Republicans and/or Democrats,

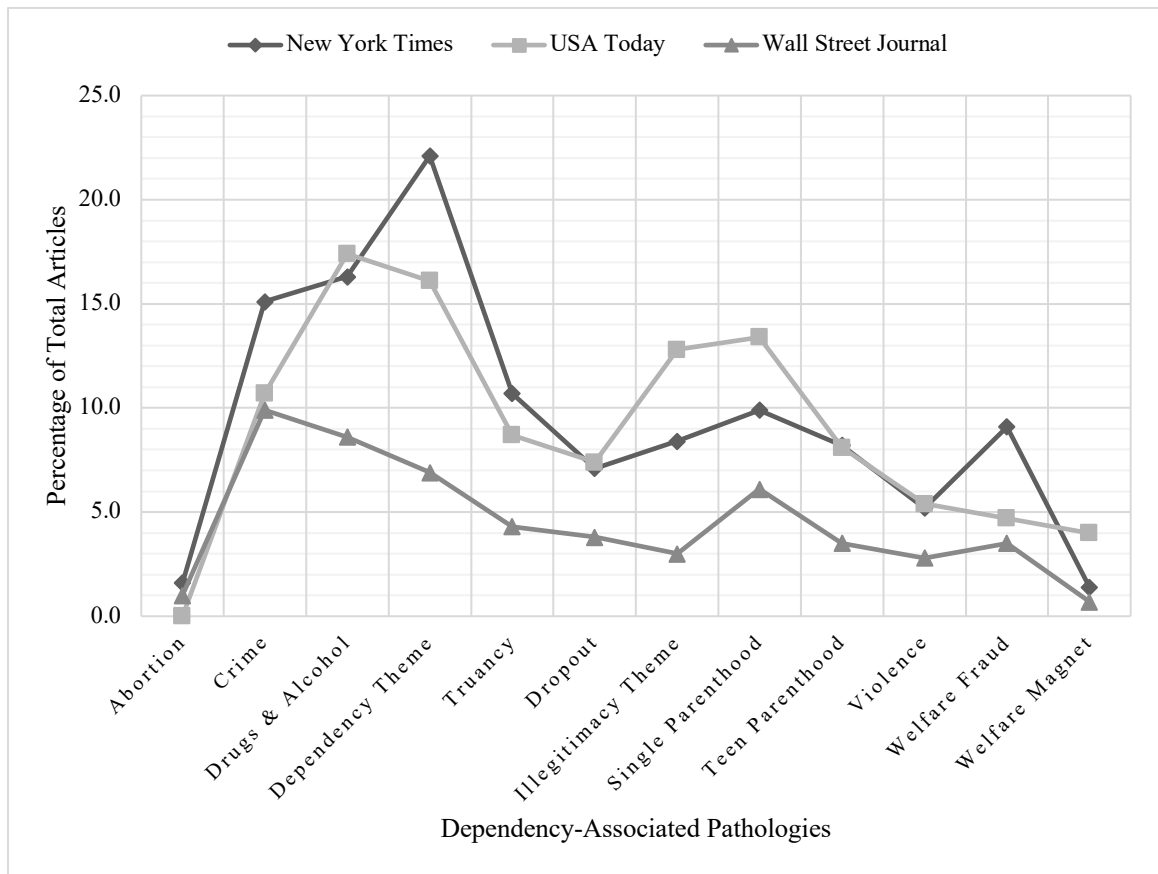
while *The Journal* gave the least. Liberal and conservative references appeared less frequently than references to political parties²², but conservatives outnumbered liberals across all three sources in the pre-TANF time span. Thus, dependency, illegitimacy, and teen parenthood – core concerns of the Contract with America – led pre-TANF news coverage.

Following TANF’s enactment, the most popular themes within the dependency-associated pathologies category shifted across the news sources (see Figure 4). In *The Times*, dependency remained the most prevalent theme post-enactment, while crime and drugs/alcohol ($n = 161$; 16.3%) took the place of illegitimacy and teen parenthood. In *USA Today* drugs/alcohol became the most popular theme in this category ($n = 26$; 17.4%), followed by dependency ($n = 24$; 16.1%) and single parenthood ($n = 20$; 13.4%). *The Journal* is notable for the relatively low proportion of drugs/alcohol articles in the post-TANF period. That said, crime ($n = 60$; 9.9%), drugs/alcohol ($n = 52$; 8.6%), and dependency ($n = 42$; 6.9%) remained its most popular themes of pathology in the post-enactment era.

²² Note: “Republican” and “conservative” – while closely related – were coded separately. The same holds true for “Democrat” and “liberal”.

Figure 4

Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence



Mentions of such markers of pathology notwithstanding, following TANF’s enactment coverage shifted to factors inhibiting employment as welfare agencies scrambled to place clients in jobs before time limits were reached. This shift is reflected in the counts and proportions for the family cap, marriage, self-sufficiency, and work codes. Coverage that included family caps was much higher pre-TANF across all three newspapers. For *The Times* and *The Journal*, articles referencing marriage were more likely to appear pre-TANF as well. For work – though proportions were high both pre- and post-TANF – the values increased following TANF’s enactment across all three news sources. References to work dominated news coverage of welfare recipients at all points

in time, but this became most pronounced after TANF. The proportion of articles using the term “self-sufficiency” also increased after enactment. Rather than focusing on dependency related to morally dubious behaviors requiring reformation, coverage shifted its focus to dependency as related to employment and the goal of self-sufficiency.

Examining individual codes within the dependency-associated pathologies category allows us to trace the changes in rhetoric about welfare recipients prior to TANF and following its enactment.

Abortion.²³ It is not surprising to see higher counts and percentages of articles containing the term “abortion” across all three newspapers in the run-up to TANF. Family cap policies that denied increases in assistance after the birth of additional children came into vogue early in 1992, starting with New Jersey. These controversial attempts to literally curb the number of welfare dependents met backlash from both conservative and liberal groups. While some liberals protested the callousness of denying aid to a newborn, the conservative side focused on the danger that such a policy would encourage abortions. Thus, we see the highest concentration of articles containing “abortion” in 1995 as studies on the effects of family cap policies began to receive public attention, particularly about the effects of the policies on abortion rates.²⁴

²³ The abortion code is defined literally; I used the text search tool to find all instances where “abortion” or “abortions” appeared.

²⁴ Study findings have been mixed. Turturro et al. (1997) evaluated Arkansas’ family cap program and found no effect of the family cap on birth rates among recipients. Using data collected from 1992 through 1997, Camasso (2004) found that pregnancies and births appeared to decline while abortions increased among New Jersey’s short-term welfare recipients following the state’s family cap implementation. Kearney (2004) analyzed vital statistics birth data from 1989 through 1998 and found that the family cap had no effect on fertility rates.

Crime.²⁵ Crime is one of the more complex codes in the dependency-associated pathologies group because of the implicit and explicit associations between crime and welfare recipients. In coding, I made the decision to code for crime in cases where the article might not refer to welfare recipients as criminals but where crime and welfare receipt were mentioned in the same breath. Statements by politicians such as the former Klansman, David Duke, essentially serve as dog whistles to imply threats to the social order associated with criminal welfare recipients. These messages can be amplified by the news when a series of controversial statements are summarized in smaller sound bites. For example, *The Journal* reported in 1991 that David Duke “called America’s urban centers ‘wastelands of crime and drugs and broken families,’ and advocated drug-testing and birth-control counseling for welfare recipients and public housing residents” (Shribman & Harwood, 1991, p. A16). Such statements go uncontested under the banner of balance. Less polarizing, but perhaps equally insidious, were reports on less controversial political figures such as the following news on New York’s former governor: “With the election just over two weeks away, Gov. George E. Pataki, who has largely avoided laying out a detailed agenda for a second term, offered a few more specifics about his goals yesterday, citing a further push to reduce crime and to move welfare recipients off the rolls” (Waldman, 1998, p. A1). Crime and welfare recipients are tandem threats needing to be curtailed.

Looking at the aggregate pre- and post-TANF data, we see across the three newspapers a higher proportion of articles coded for “crime” in the period following

²⁵ The crime code encompasses actions that entail breaking the law (e.g., crimes, felonies, etc.) or individuals labeled as those who would break the law (e.g., criminals, felons, etc.).

TANF’s enactment (see Table 13). *The Times* was particularly likely to include mention of crime, with higher proportions both pre- and post-TANF compared to the other sources. The higher proportions post-TANF occurred in the context of fewer articles per year containing crime references; but when a welfare article *did* appear after TANF’s enactment, it was more likely than previously to include a marker of crime.

Table 13

Prevalence of Crime Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	119	149
	Percentage	14.3%	15.1%
	Articles Per Year	17.6	7.7
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	21	16
	Percentage	6.6%	10.7%
	Articles Per Year	3.1	0.8
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	31	60
	Percentage	6.3%	9.9%
	Articles Per Year	4.6	3.1

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that referenced crime. For example, 14.3% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment contained crime references.

Drugs/Alcohol.²⁶ I included within this code instances where drug or alcohol use were mentioned in the same context with welfare recipients, not only where drug or alcohol use by welfare recipients was mentioned. A guilt-by-association connection can be seen in statements such as “Most of its 5,800 students are hard-core unemployed-

²⁶ Coding for drugs/alcohol includes instances of alcohol use or misuse, prescription medicine misuse, and non-prescribed drug use or misuse (including the use of THC).

welfare mothers, those with little or no work history and people with past substance-abuse or law enforcement problems” (Bleakley, 1994, p. B1). While substance abuse was not explicitly linked to welfare receipt, their association seems clearly implied.

During the pre-TANF debate, the putative moral failings of welfare recipients were fully aired. At a time when support was dwindling for federal cash welfare for mothers and children; state and local cash assistance for childless adults; and Supplemental Security Income benefits for disabled substance misusers (Hunt & Baumohl, 2003), depictions such as this one did recipients no favors: “‘I ain’t gonna tell you no lie,’ said Ronald Gray on the morning of his 43rd birthday, smelling of mouthwash. ‘I still got an alcohol problem.’” (DeParle, 1992, A10).

Examining the trends for articles referencing drugs/alcohol, we see strong similarities across all three sources. The highest proportions and counts for this code appear after TANF’s enactment.²⁷ In fact, we also see the highest counts of articles referencing drugs/alcohol appear in 1997 across all three newspapers. The heavy concentration of drugs/alcohol themes in 1997 articles makes sense as the discussion shifted post-TANF to the likelihood of finding work for welfare recipients. Alcohol and drug use were often listed as one of the challenges facing caseworkers as they implemented the new TANF rules – “Depressed, disdainful or addicted to drugs, some

²⁷ TANF included several provisions explicitly targeting drug use. Those with felony drug convictions after August 22, 1996 were barred from TANF aid, although by 2002 twenty-eight states had modified or revoked the ban (Pollack et al., 2002). States were authorized, though not required, to employ drug testing as a condition of eligibility. Beginning with Arizona, between 2009 and 2015, fifteen states passed legislation related to drug testing welfare recipients (Bjorklund et al., 2018). Most states opted for legislation allowing drug testing if official suspected drug use. Florida implemented mandatory drug testing for all TANF recipients for four months in 2011 before a constitutional challenge shut down the policy. Ultimately, few recipients tested positive, no decrease in caseloads was detected, and the endeavor cost the state \$45,780 more than it would have spent on benefits to those who did test positive (Alvarez, 2012).

recipients knowingly violate the rules” (DeParle, 1997b, p. A1). As we saw reflected in the prevalence of crime references, *The Times* demonstrated a particular preoccupation with the drugs/alcohol theme compared to the other newspapers. In *The Times*, the proportion of articles containing the drugs/alcohol theme pre-TANF ($n = 133$; 15.9%) was more than twice as high than the pre-TANF values for *USA Today* ($n = 18$; 5.6%) and *The Journal* ($n = 37$; 7.5%). While the tone for drugs/alcohol references varied from sympathetic to alarming, drugs/alcohol served to mark erratic behavior that would hinder employment.

Dependency Theme.²⁸ Not surprisingly, the dependency theme was most prevalent during the pre-TANF period across all three newspapers (see Table 14). Again, though, *The Times* posted the highest counts per year and proportions of welfare articles when compared to the other papers.

²⁸ The dependency theme is defined as an over-reliance on governmental aid where the term “dependency” or “dependent” is commonly used, but not always. I coded for a dependency theme when the *idea* of dependency was described (e.g., characterizing public assistance as a crutch). I also expanded the definition to include mentions of self-sufficiency (i.e., the opposite of dependency) during the second coding pass. A verbatim dependency code – used where only instances of “dependency” or “dependent” appeared – appears under the pathology buzzwords coding category.

Table 14

Prevalence of Dependency Theme Pre- and Post-TANF

Newspaper		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
<i>The New York Times</i>	Count	205	218
	Percentage	24.6%	22.1%
	Articles Per Year	30.3	11.3
<i>USA Today</i>	Count	59	24
	Percentage	18.5%	16.1%
	Articles Per Year	8.7	1.2
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Count	54	42
	Percentage	10.9%	6.9%
	Articles Per Year	8.0	2.2

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that referenced dependency themes. For example, 24.6% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF's enactment contained dependency theme references.

Welfare dependency was a central focus of the reform debate, and newspaper reporting reflected the political rhetoric:

Rose Wallace, who adapted the New Chance model to the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, where she is now assistant principal, said the program's goal is to "take young people and move them from public assistance -- the crutch that they've been using -- to economic independence." (Roberts, 1993, B3)

The Times also dominated coverage containing dependency themes during the period following TANF's enactment. While interest in dependency waned in *USA Today* and *The Journal* following TANF, *The Times* ran by far more dependency-themed articles per year than the other papers, although their proportion of welfare articles dropped slightly.

Truancy.²⁹ Compared to other themes in the dependency-associated pathologies category, truancy was of only mild interest to all three papers. It was more likely to come up in the pre-TANF period as “learnfare” was a major reform experiment at the state level and was discussed as a potential feature of federal welfare reform. Neither *USA Today* nor *The Journal* posted truancy proportions above 10%, though, before or after TANF’s enactment. *The Times* emphasized truancy to a greater extent than the other sources ($n = 94$; 11.3% pre-TANF; $n = 106$; 10.7% post-TANF).

Dropout.³⁰ Although not an area of interest compared to other dependency-associated pathologies, the dropout counts were little different pre- and post-TANF across all three sources. While lacking a degree is consistently found to be a barrier to employment and a risk factor for welfare dependency, it was much less often in the news than illegitimacy and teen parenthood. Here is an example of its appearance in *The Times* in 1992 as the welfare reform debate was heating up:

"Being on welfare is kind of like thinking you can't do anything," she was saying. "You see women who've been on it for years. It makes them lazy. All they do is stay home watching the soaps." The harsh judgment came not from a conservative politician but from a 16-year-old unmarried mother of a 2-year-old girl, a school dropout, welfare recipient and prime candidate for years if not decades on the dole. (Eckholm, 1992, p. A12)

²⁹ The truancy code is defined as inconsistent attendance in formal schooling or as incomplete education (e.g., dropped out in the 10th grade, mention of attaining a GED, etc.).

³⁰ Dropout is defined literally as incomplete education, usually at the secondary level (grade 7-12) but also at the post-secondary level (e.g., dropped out after one semester of college). In hindsight, college dropouts should have been excluded from this theme’s coding criteria as the welfare debate focused on those who dropped out at the secondary level.

In this case, the dropout frame is used to underscore the threat of welfare dependency. The description of the recipient aligns with the rhetoric one would expect from a conservative or even liberal politician during this period but achieves greater impact by the irony of its utterance by a firsthand observer in similar straits.

The following, carefully objective description of welfare recipients remaining on the rolls is from *USA Today* in 2002, when TANF's reauthorization was on the table:

Many of those who are out-of-work welfare recipients have mental or health problems, lack a high school education, are caring for an infant or disabled child, or do not speak English, said Sheila Zedlewski, a researcher for the Urban Institute, a think tank. (Brogan, 2002, p. A4)

Here, a failure to complete high school is one of numerous, arguably no-fault conditions that impeded employment. This was implicit criticism of welfare reform's emphasis on "work first" as opposed to human capital enhancement. Prior to and following TANF, welfare dependency's less fervent believers voiced concerns about the ability of welfare reform to decrease poverty levels through unskilled work and emphasized the potential for poverty to increase as the result of time limits and other punitive features of the law. After TANF was enacted, replacing welfare with work – even work that did not lift a family out of poverty – became a principal test of TANF's success along with a decline in the rolls. News articles were more likely to reference work after TANF and coverage referencing poverty decreased. Poverty itself was "no longer considered a public problem that must be attacked" (Schram, 2000, p. 59).

Illegitimacy³¹ and Teen Parenthood.³² Over time, the illegitimacy and teen parenthood references rose and fell in near lockstep across *The Times* and *The Journal*, and the reference counts were extremely close pre-TANF in *USA Today*. However, teen parenthood references dropped more than illegitimacy in other sources following TANF's enactment. In all three sources for both themes, though, the counts and proportions showed a major decrease in the post-TANF period. The decline reflects the shift in priorities noted above. Pre-TANF debate centered on factors believed to contribute to welfare dependency, and dependency drove the arguments for welfare reform. Following TANF's enactment, the focus became barriers to employment, including more frequent coverage referencing less blameworthy circumstances. We see the change in rhetoric underscored in counts for verbatim use of "illegitimacy" and single parenthood. The morally loaded word "illegitimacy" all but disappeared from newspaper coverage following TANF's enactment while references to single parenthood increased. The pre-TANF debate centered on the moral danger associated with welfare dependency and framed under-demanding welfare policy as a moral hazard. Once the new dispensation was in place and the debate turned almost exclusively to matters of employability, the moralization of unemployment declined.

Violence.³³ Compared to other themes in this category, violence was infrequently referenced. While the proportions for violence increase post-TANF, *domestic violence* explains the increase. Domestic violence coverage was almost nonexistent pre-TANF, but

³¹ Illegitimacy is defined literally as a child born out of wedlock.

³² Teen parenthood is defined literally as an individual under the age of 20 producing a child.

³³ Violence was coded when the term "violence" or "violent" appeared.

a moderate increase appeared after TANF's enactment. Indeed, all eight articles referencing violence post-TANF in *USA Today* concerned domestic violence.

Rather than casting welfare recipients as threats, references to domestic violence portray recipients as victims and elicit sympathy. Few direct references were made to welfare recipients as perpetrators of violence. Of episodic articles that contained references to violence but *not* domestic violence, not one described the recipient(s) at the center of the human-interest story as violent. Violence was noted as a threat to social order along with welfare dependency, or reference was made to violent inner-city neighborhoods. The following passage is an example of the latter: "It is a typical Saturday morning for the Pierce family, who say they live in a perpetual state of fear in Chicago's notoriously violent Cabrini Green high-rise housing project" (Freedman, 1990, p. A1).

Welfare Fraud.³⁴ Welfare fraud coverage was inconsistent across the three sources, although all the counts were higher pre-TANF for all three newspapers.³⁵ This aligns with age-old fulminations about welfare recipients as ungrateful "takers," to employ Mitt Romney's more recent characterization of the undeserving poor. The case of Vanessa fits just such an image: "At 39, Vanessa has been on welfare most of her adult life, and she said she did not think it would be 'any big deal' to collect two checks for a while" (Ferretting out false claims, 1993, p. B7).

³⁴ Welfare fraud is defined as any dishonest action or omission related to the procurement of cash assistance benefits.

³⁵ Finger-imaging emerged in the 1990s as a politically popular effort to reduce welfare fraud. In reality, the practice served to humiliate and deter applicants rather than ferret out actual cases of fraud (Rank et al., 2021). In the mid-2000s, a handful of Inspector General reports found high levels of improper TANF payments, evidence that was used by conservatives as fodder for claims of rampant welfare fraud (Tanner & DeHaven, 2010). Upon closer inspection, though, the improper payments stemmed from bureaucratic errors, not recipient fraud (Schnurer, 2013).

State waiver experiments prior to TANF tightened eligibility rules and requirements to ferret out cases of fraud; this was how Vanessa was caught. *The Times'* coverage, reporting most heavily on state and local news, attended to initiatives that uncovered welfare fraud in the mid-1990s.³⁶ For *USA Today* and *The Journal*, though, coverage of welfare fraud was limited before and after TANF's enactment.

Pathology Buzzwords

One of the most fascinating sets of codes consists of pathology buzzwords. The articles I compiled consist of the *population* of cash welfare recipient news coverage in three major newspapers over a 26-year period that included the six years preceding TANF's enactment. When coding for the buzzwords, I ensured that no words were missed while coding manually by utilizing NVivo's text search feature. The counts for each buzzword are the actual number of articles in which each word was used. Having the full spectrum of usage in newspaper coverage allowed me to compare the popularity of the terms in the media with their popularity among policy analysts and researchers.

Table 15 presents article counts and percentages for the eight pathology buzzwords across the three newspapers. Unsurprisingly, of the terms included in this category, dependency was usually the most prevalent across the sources and over both time spans. Among the three sources, *The New York Times* was most likely to include dependency verbatim in an article; *The Wall Street Journal* was least likely. The

³⁶ Examples include accounts of welfare fraud involving New York City Human Resources Administration employees that appeared in the early 1990s (Dugger, 1992; Social Worker Arrested, 1993). 1994 was a big year for welfare fraud news, as investigators discovered that hundreds of New Jersey residents were illegally collecting benefits in New York City (Faison, 1994a). Two salacious welfare fraud accounts appeared in the same year (Faison, 1994b; McFadden, 1994).

proportions for all news sources were highest pre-TANF, which reflected the concentration on welfare dependency between 1990 and 1996.

Table 15

Pathology Buzzword Prevalence Pre- and Post-TANF

Pathology Buzzword	Medium					
	New York Times Pre-TANF (n = 834)	New York Times Post-TANF (n = 987)	USA Today Pre-TANF (n = 319)	USA Today Post-TANF (n = 149)	Wall Street Journal Pre-TANF (n = 494)	Wall Street Journal Post-TANF (n = 607)
Verbatim	42	4	27	1	13	1
Illegitimacy	5.0%	0.4%	8.5%	0.7%	2.6%	0.2%
Lower Class	0 0.0%	1 0.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Underclass	14 1.7%	8 0.8%	1 0.3%	2 1.3%	7 1.4%	1 0.2%
Undeserving	6 0.7%	3 0.3%	1 0.3%	0 0.0%	1 0.2%	0 0.0%
Welfare Queen	4 0.5%	2 0.2%	2 0.6%	2 1.3%	1 0.2%	5 0.8%
Verbatim	91	86	23	8	21	11
Dependency	10.9%	8.7%	7.2%	5.4%	4.3%	1.8%
Verbatim Welfare	1	6	1	0	5	2
Dependent	0.1%	0.6%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.3%
Self-Sufficiency	37 4.4%	83 8.4%	17 5.3%	8 5.4%	9 1.8%	17 2.8%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that included a given pathology buzzword. For example, 5.0% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment mentioned illegitimacy.

Comparing the prevalence of dependency to its antonym of self-sufficiency, we see increased proportions of articles containing the term “self-sufficiency” in all three

newspapers after TANF. The replacement of the term dependency with self-sufficiency reflects the same brake on moralizing characterizations discussed above. The new policy regime in place, self-sufficiency was a powerful aspirational term that pointed to the future rather than the past.

Of the remaining terms – excluding verbatim instances of illegitimacy detailed earlier – the counts are remarkable for the infrequency of usage they indicate. The limited to non-existent usage of most terms in the pathology buzzwords category raises two possibilities. First, there may be a disconnect between the language utilized by social policy analysts and the media. Although assessing the decision-making of newspaper writers and editors is beyond the scope of my study, perhaps the specific terms are considered too “academic” for the general audience newspapers target. The *concepts* underlying each term were covered in the dependency-associated pathologies category. The terms themselves may have been used infrequently, but there was relatively strong coverage of the ideas behind them.

The second possibility requires further study. As supported by the fact that more than half of the news articles published in the pre-TANF period referenced some form of political affiliation, news coverage appeared to focus on the political events surrounding welfare reform. If news coverage was a reflection of political changes taking place, a study of the prevalence of pathology buzzwords throughout verbatim political debate could reveal how closely specific political discourse follows social policy analysts’ discourse as well as the discourse of news coverage.

Summary

The law has largely neutralized welfare as a political issue. Welfare mothers are seen in a more favorable light now that most are required to work. Welfare has become “more supportable and acceptable, more defensible,” said Professor Nathan, a moderate Republican who served as a welfare official in the Nixon administration. (Pear & Eckholm, 2006, p. A1)

The passage above is an apt description of the evolution of the welfare recipient image in the political realm but also in newspaper coverage. As rhetoric lambasting welfare recipients for perceived welfare dependency and related social ills ratcheted up among politicians leading up to 1996’s welfare reform, news discourse followed suit. The prevalence of themes such as dependency, illegitimacy, and teen parenthood in the news mirrored preoccupation with the same issues in the political system as well as prevailing stereotypes largely accepted by the public. The stereotypes also played out in the levels of threat and suffering across news coverage. Prior to TANF, articles were more likely to focus solely on threat and less likely to concentrate exclusively on suffering. Coverage was also less likely to include an episodic (i.e., human-interest) angle. The vilification and depersonalization of welfare recipients is apparent in trends across news sources.

After TANF’s enactment, there was a general but far from complete softening of attitudes about welfare recipients. Work requirements and time limits pushed caseworkers and politicians to confront the fact that the level of human need and suffering would not yield to the mere remoralization of policy and characterological reformation of welfare recipients. Themes of domestic violence and mental health problems became more prevalent in news coverage following TANF. Dependency was

still a common enough theme, but it was significantly reframed. Welfare dependency no longer expressed simply a deficiency of virtue, but the result of impersonal factors that included forms of victimization and suffering. Articles were less likely to focus solely on welfare recipients as threats, and more likely to highlight their suffering. This was achieved using episodic accounts of life on welfare, the human-interest stories that personalized welfare recipients through nuanced portrayals of their experiences that both entertained and informed while still occasionally individualizing responsibility.

This more sympathetic perspective eventually dissolved into a lack of coverage. The neutralization of welfare in politics became a nullification of welfare recipients in the news. After TANF's reauthorization in 2002, they were rarely seen or heard.

Chapter 5: Shifting Discourse during Economic Recession and Expansion

Promoting work over welfare has a long history. The principle of less eligibility, which first appeared in legislative form with England's Poor Law of 1834, posited that conditions associated with public aid should be worse (a "less eligible choice") than the lowliest conditions of labor, thus to deter the poor from seeking assistance. Attempts to increase work participation among welfare recipients have appeared throughout the history of social welfare in the United States as well. Describing how work requirements have always been tied to public aid for single mothers, Handler states: "poor, single mothers and their children, with rare exceptions, were considered part of the 'unworthy' or 'undeserving' poor in that they were never excused from the paid labor market" (1995, p. 5). Work has consistently been seen as an antidote to welfare dependency (once called "pauperism"); its absence being the diagnostic marker. By the early 1990s, a consensus formed across the political aisle that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) discouraged work, and that work would need to be a centerpiece of its reform.

Of course, for people to work, there need to be jobs. An economic recession can handicap even the most ardent job seekers. How does the media respond to welfare recipients during such periods? Does coverage increase? Does its tone change? More specifically, did the sustained focus on the moral failings of welfare recipients during the pre-TANF debate prevail following its enactment, or were recipients more sympathetically portrayed in view of high unemployment?

Overview of Key Events

After the transition to TANF, state funding for the program steadily decreased (Rodgers, 2005), as well as funding for other social service programs (Aratani et al., 2014). While caseload numbers declined, poverty did not decrease because of TANF (Rodgers, 2005; Gilman, 2014). The picture varied across the states, but many recipients left the TANF rolls to take low-wage jobs that didn't take their family out of poverty; they were sanctioned off by caseworkers for failure to comply with program rules; or they exhausted their eligibility. Diversionary tactics employed by some TANF programs ensured that many poor families never made it onto the rolls.

At first, many states used TANF funds to bolster supports for the working poor: childcare, transportation, work training, and so forth. But during the robust economy of the late 1990s, permissible discretion in the use of TANF block grants led some states to apply TANF funds to other budget areas (Schott et al., 2015). Especially during the Great Recession, this included replacing existing state spending to cover budget deficits.³⁷ In sum, TANF was not responsive to increased need during the Great Recession (Bitler & Hoynes, 2016).

³⁷ States have diverted TANF funds to child welfare, early education, substance abuse treatment, and state Earned Income Tax Credits, among other programs. These are important and worthy areas to invest in, particularly in the context of preventing and raising families out of poverty, but the diversion of funds meant less investment in both cash and non-cash assistance programs. See Schott et al. (2015) for a comprehensive review of how federal and state funds have been used under TANF's block grant.

During the full period of analysis in this study – January 1990 through December 2016 – the United States went through three periods of recession.³⁸ One of the three recessions took place prior to TANF’s enactment, from July 1990 to March 1991 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021). As would be expected, welfare caseloads rose during the recession and continued to increase through 1992 as the economy slowly recovered. Welfare caseloads generally operate as a lagging indicator. They typically do not rise noticeably until some time into a period of recession. The funding structure of AFDC enabled federal funds to increase with higher caseloads (Pavetti & Schott, 2011). Beginning in 1994, with an expanding economy and the proliferation of state welfare policy experimentation, caseloads began to fall (Zedlewski, 2008).

The second recession occurred from March to November 2001 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021). This timing was unfortunate given the maximum five-year lifetime benefit restriction of the new welfare legislation coupled with the diversion of TANF funds from cash assistance during the preceding period of prosperity (Pavetti & Schott, 2011). Rather than an increase in welfare caseloads, as would be expected in a struggling economy, caseload numbers continued to fall. The declining welfare rolls in the face of economic contraction were due to a combination of work requirements, sanctions, time limits, diversion strategies, and benefit levels long unresponsive to inflation (Zedlewski, 2008). As critics of TANF were quick to point out during its drafting, federal funding in the block grant structure did not increase during economic

³⁸ Recessions are measured by the National Bureau of Economic Research (2021) from the peak of a business cycle to its trough. Thus, the real effects of an economic contraction may not be felt immediately at the start of a recessionary period, nor does the official end of a recession signal relief for all economic sectors. Unemployment rates may remain high even as the economy expands.

downturns, thus leaving large numbers of families without access to benefits unless states made up the difference (Pavetti & Schott, 2011).

The most severe of the three recessions – the Great Recession – ran from December 2007 to June 2009 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021). To reimburse states for increased public assistance needs during the Great Recession, the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) added a temporary \$5 billion Emergency Contingency Fund (Falk, 2021). In addition, the ARRA expanded the acceptable use of TANF reserve funds to include benefits and services beyond cash assistance and allowed states to freeze their caseload reduction credits at levels prior to the recession (Falk, 2021). Caseload reduction credits cut the required work participation rate of a state based on caseload decreases in prior years. Without the ARRA’s concession, increased caseloads during the Great Recession would have cut the caseload reduction credits at a time when caseworkers were already struggling to place recipients in a job-strapped economy.

Whether the social safety net responded adequately during recessions following TANF’s enactment depends on who you ask and what they measure.³⁹ There is much more to the safety net than TANF, of course, and different elements performed differently during recessionary periods. Prior to TANF, cash welfare caseloads rose during recessions in response to increased need. As noted above, during the 2001 recession, caseloads decreased. The Great Recession triggered mixed responsiveness based on TANF recipient counts, a critical concern based on the severity and length of

³⁹ For a generally optimistic view of the social safety net’s responsiveness to increased need, see Haskins, Albert, and Howard (2014). For a more tempered, methodologically robust analysis of the safety net’s responsiveness in recessions prior to and following TANF’s enactment, see Bitler and Hoynes (2016).

the economic downturn. Although TANF caseloads overall increased by 13 percent, Pavetti and Schott (2011) discuss how the responsiveness of each state varied greatly. From December 2007 through December 2009, six states experienced *falling* TANF caseloads, while caseloads increased by less than 10 percent in 16 states. At the same time, 15 states had caseload increases of more than 20 percent, and 13 showed an 11 to 20 percent increase. Changes in caseload were not found to be closely related to state unemployment levels or increases in the number of unemployed people.⁴⁰ At the same time – and as would be expected from a non-block grant traditional entitlement program during a period of greater economic hardship – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients increased by 45 percent (Pavetti & Schott, 2011).

Of those states with increased caseloads during the recession, state budget pressures and the inflexible TANF block grant structure led to TANF cuts while levels of need were still high. In a study of 30 states that included telephone interviews with TANF administrators, Brown and Derr (2015) found that states took measures to reduce administrative and program staffing, cut cash grant amounts, reduced work-related personal supports (e.g., childcare, transportation), revised service provider contracts, and improved program performance and efficiency.⁴¹ In essence, many of the work-related

⁴⁰ Rhode Island provides an illuminating example of the disconnect between unemployment rates and caseload changes. During the Great Recession, Rhode Island's unemployment rate reached a high of 12.7% but its caseload decline (29%) was greater than any other state. Prior to the Great Recession, between July 2008 and July 2009, the state cut its TANF time limit and began removing whole families, not just parents, when they reached the time limit. The TANF restrictions and general unresponsiveness of the program to unemployment in Rhode Island are likely connected (Pavetti & Schott, 2011).

⁴¹ Examples of efforts to improve program performance and efficiency include using data to better publicize progress and performance; triaging recipients and funneling them to service tracks that match needs, skills, and abilities; and creating a web-based portal for recipients to report participation hours and changes in their case (Brown & Derr, 2015).

supports touted by TANF’s proponents in the period immediately following its enactment were washed away by the Great Recession.

Comparing Article Attributes during Recessions and Expansions

Because the three recessions were short considering the study’s span from 1990 through 2016, comparisons will primarily focus on proportions across variables rather than frequencies. As detailed in Table 16, the total article counts varied widely between periods of economic expansion and contraction. To assist in comparisons, I also provide the average number of articles published per month during each period.

Table 16

Article Counts during Recessions and Expansions

Time Period		News Source		
		<i>The New York Times</i> (n = 1821)	<i>USA Today</i> (n = 468)	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (n = 1101)
1/1/1990-	Total Article Count	26	14	9
6/30/1990 ^a	Articles Per Month	4.3	2.3	1.5
7/1/1990-	Total Article Count	43	18	19
3/31/1991 ^b	Articles Per Month	5.4	2.25	2.4
4/1/1991-	Total Article Count	1409	398	846
2/28/2001 ^a	Articles Per Month	11.8	3.3	7.1
3/1/2001-	Total Article Count	48	4	16
11/30/2001 ^b	Articles Per Month	6.0	0.5	2.0
12/1/2001-	Total Article Count	195	19	81
11/30/2007 ^a	Articles Per Month	2.7	0.3	1.1
12/1/2007-	Total Article Count	23	1	15
6/30/2009 ^b	Articles Per Month	1.3	0.1	0.8
7/1/2009-	Total Article Count	77	14	115
12/31/2016 ^a	Articles Per Month	0.9	0.2	1.3

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

It is noteworthy that so few articles referencing welfare recipients were published during the Great Recession compared to the previous two. The first two recessions were each eight months long, while The Great Recession lasted for 18 months. Both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* had average monthly article counts that did not differ much between the first two recessions. During the Great Recession, *The Journal's* monthly rate dropped by 60 percent from the second recession. *The Times* published just over one article per month during the Great Recession, an even more dramatic decline of 79 percent from the second recession. *USA Today* was entirely disinterested in welfare recipients during periods of recession: As Table 16 shows, its recession-era counts were consistently low, but during the whole of the Great Recession, it published one article on the subject.

The decreased counts and rates could reflect a number of different phenomena. In general, yearly article counts across all three newspapers dipped by the late 1990s to early 2000s. Welfare reform effectively gutted the previous cash welfare system through tightened rules, time limits, increased sanctions, and stronger deterrents to seeking cash assistance. The strong economy for the first years following TANF's enactment coupled with the changes noted above led to much decreased cash welfare rolls by the first post-TANF recession. By then, news outlets had already pronounced TANF a success and lost interest.

Periods of recession also center on work. While welfare reform meant a cash welfare system more closely tied to work requirements, the immediate system of relief for those who suffered layoffs and furloughs during the recession periods would have been unemployment insurance. While TANF proved to be unresponsive to those in need

during recessions, unemployment insurance, as well as food stamps, remained responsive during downturns (Bitler & Hoynes, 2016). News attention likely followed programs that were growing as they helped families suffering economically during recessions. Growth, or change more generally, is more interesting and newsworthy than relative stasis.⁴²

Another likely explanation is based on information time lag. In the best of times, TANF data were scarce due to lax state reporting requirements. This scarcity was coupled with a time lag between events and independent monitoring reports by groups like the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Pavetti et al., 2011), Brookings Institution (Haskins et al., 2014), and Urban Institute (McKernan et al., 2014). A spike in article counts in *The Times* and *The Journal* in 2009 supports this hypothesis, at least in regard to the Great Recession (2007-2009). *The Times* went from 10 articles in 2008 to 24 articles in 2009; *The Journal* experienced an even larger jump, moving from two in 2008 to 19 in 2009. Coverage of TANF may have responded slowly to the recession's impact due to the delay in stimulating source material.

An article's location in a newspaper reflects its newsworthiness. Articles on the front page of the newspaper or on the front page of later sections are more salient. As observed earlier in Table 16, the coverage of welfare recipients in *The Times* and *The Journal* dropped precipitously during the Great Recession compared to the two prior downturns. As Table 17 shows, the same was true of front-page stories. However, although *The Times*' coverage declined a great deal, front-page placement declined far

⁴² I focused solely on AFDC/TANF-type cash welfare in the present study as inclusion criteria for a given article. Articles that focused solely on a more responsive welfare program, such as food stamps, without mentioning AFDC/TANF would have been excluded. Thus, the decreased article counts during recessions reflect decreased interest in AFDC/TANF, not necessarily other welfare programs. Measuring levels of food stamp or unemployment insurance coverage are beyond the scope of the present study.

less. *USA Today* published one front-page article in each recession, no matter the overall count.

Table 17

Front-Page Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions

Time Period	News Source		
	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
1/1/1990-	13	0	5
6/30/1990 ^a	50.0%	0.0%	55.6%
7/1/1990-	14	1	8
3/31/1991 ^b	32.6%	5.6%	42.1%
4/1/1991-	533	51	357
2/28/2001 ^a	37.9%	12.8%	42.2%
3/1/2001-	16	1	11
11/30/2001 ^b	33.4%	25.0%	68.8%
12/1/2001-	67	5	39
11/30/2007 ^a	34.4%	26.3%	48.1%
12/1/2007-	6	1	3
6/30/2009 ^b	26.0%	100.0%	20.0%
7/1/2009-	24	4	17
12/31/2016 ^a	31.2%	28.6%	14.8%

Note. The percentages in the table above display the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time that appeared on the front page of the respective news source. For example, fifty percent of all welfare articles published by *The Times* between January 1, 1990 and June 30, 1990 appeared on the front page.

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

Table 18 displays the prevalence of episodic and thematic articles across periods of recession and expansion. Compared to the immediately prior period of prosperity, *The Times* consistently published a higher percentage of human-interest stories during the following period of recession. In *The Journal*, episodic accounts decreased during the

first recession, then increased during the second and third recessions, though the article counts are very small.

Table 18

Episodic Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions

Time Period	News Source		
	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
1/1/1990-	12	2	5
6/30/1990 ^a	46.2%	14.3%	55.6%
7/1/1990-	23	3	4
3/31/1991 ^b	53.5%	16.7%	21.1%
4/1/1991-	365	68	144
2/28/2001 ^a	25.9%	17.1%	17.0%
3/1/2001-	17	3	3
11/30/2001 ^b	35.4%	75.0%	18.8%
12/1/2001-	63	6	21
11/30/2007 ^a	32.3%	31.6%	25.9%
12/1/2007-	15	0	6
6/30/2009 ^b	65.2%	0.0%	40.0%
7/1/2009-	36	5	23
12/31/2016 ^a	46.8%	35.7%	20.0%

Note. The table above displays the percentages of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that included episodic accounts. For example, 46.2% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* between January 1, 1990 and June 30, 1990 contained episodic accounts.

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

Although Iyengar's (1996) work on poverty representation demonstrated that television news viewers who witnessed episodic accounts tended to attribute responsibility to the individual, I believe that a rise in human-interest stories during

periods of recession may elicit a different response.⁴³ Compared to more detached thematic stories, episodic accounts put a human face on poverty. We see this humanization in an article highlighting the fact that many individuals who turned to welfare during the first recession were first-time recipients:

[M]any of these newly impoverished families find themselves feeling lost in a labyrinth of regulations, intended to prevent fraud, that force them to document every aspect of their lives. At the same time, they are torn between their need for financial help and the perceived stain of being on the public dole. "I felt like I was begging," said Shahidah Graham, 51, who was laid off from her job as a receptionist last June and who exhausted her unemployment benefits in January. "It was weird. It took me awhile just to get enough motivation to go down and apply." (Holmes, 1991, p. A12)

Arguably, the above account not only elicits sympathy for the recipient but also makes the case for a welfare system that is less stigmatizing.

Criticism of an unresponsive welfare system can also be seen in the next account, which appeared during the second recession:

⁴³ Measuring and/or predicting reader responses is beyond the scope of the present study. The hypothesis posed here represents my reactions to the episodic news stories. Further research is required to gauge the actual effects on readers of episodic versus thematic stories during periods of recession versus expansion. The research that Iyengar (1996) presents encompasses nine experiments that took place between June 1985 and September 1987, a period of economic expansion (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021). Participants watched a series of news video clips, including a manipulated episodic or thematic clip. They were then asked to answer attribution questions that specified who or what was responsible for causing and treating various issues, one of which was poverty. Unemployment was also one of the issues, and its causes and remediation were widely perceived to be socioeconomic. Poverty drew more balanced responses, with nearly equal attributions of individual and societal causes and treatments. Responses leaned more heavily individualistic when poverty issues were shown in episodic coverage. Different categories of poor people were used in one of the experiments, and viewers were most likely to attribute causes and treatments for poverty to individuals when episodic accounts focused on single mothers. Elderly widows, children, and unemployed males were viewed more kindly, eliciting more societal attributions for their conditions among viewer responses.

Mr. Martinez said he worked all the overtime he could, but he could not give his children money for even a snack. "Somehow I've got to find a way to skimp on the food to pay the light bill," he said. "None of those welfare bureaucrats' kids is going to go hungry and cry themselves to sleep. My kids are." (Bernstein, 2001, p. A1)

This story illustrates both suffering and deservingness. The adult subject was doing what society required: working as much as possible to support himself and his family. Not only do we bear witness to his suffering, but also that of his children, and in stark terms. A sympathetic response is likely elicited by the humanization of the family and its struggle against an uncaring bureaucracy. While episodic articles may reinforce negative views of welfare recipients if the accounts highlight *undeserving* characteristics of their subjects, the human-interest angle can elicit greater sympathy from readers when the subjects are portrayed as deserving victims. To test such an idea, we can look at the prevalence of suffering and deservingness.

In *The Times* and *The Journal*, the proportion of stories containing only suffering increased dramatically from the prior prosperous period during all three recessions (see Table 19).

Table 19*Suffering-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions*

Time Period	News Source		
	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
1/1/1990-	5	6	2
6/30/1990 ^a	19.2%	42.9%	22.2%
7/1/1990-	18	7	9
3/31/1991 ^b	41.9%	38.9%	47.4%
4/1/1991-	492	148	339
2/28/2001 ^a	34.9%	37.2%	40.1%
3/1/2001-	29	2	11
11/30/2001 ^b	60.4%	50.0%	68.8%
12/1/2001-	72	7	41
11/30/2007 ^a	36.9%	36.8%	50.6%
12/1/2007-	11	1	10
6/30/2009 ^b	47.8%	100.0%	66.7%
7/1/2009-	28	3	51
12/31/2016 ^a	36.4%	21.4%	44.3%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained only themes of suffering. For example, 19.2% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* between January 1, 1990 and June 30, 1990 contained only themes of suffering.

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

When economic conditions affected the possibility of employment, newspapers turned a greater focus on the suffering of recipients. The following account comes from the recession of 1990-91:

Doris B. prefers mopping floors, doing the laundry and operating a cash register to waiting in long lines at the welfare office. But despite her willingness to work a 40-hour week, she is one of thousands of New Yorkers who are having a hard time making ends meet. For the last two years, she has been struggling to keep up

with bills that keep growing and to keep a roof over her head. (Rabinovitz, 1990, p. B10)

That the subject of the story would rather work than receive welfare is a cardinal marker of respectability. Her poverty despite her labor points to the humanity of liberal welfare policy aiming to “make work pay,” by enhancement of human capital, higher wages, and sometimes public job creation.

Nineteen years after the above account was published, a similar story appeared during the Great Recession:

Ms. Mateo, 28, decided to enlist the help of the New Heights Neighborhood Center, a nonprofit organization that had helped her find work seven years earlier. In regular meetings, a caseworker there began to assess Ms. Mateo's work experience and her performance at job interviews, as well as her eligibility for public assistance. "But I don't need welfare," Ms. Mateo recalled saying. Her mother relied on public assistance while raising her, her brother and her sister in Washington Heights. "I just need a decent job." (Aguirre, 2009, p. A25)

Both stories provided sympathetic portrayals of respectable individuals who simply wanted to earn a living.

The prevalence of threat-only articles generally aligns with what we would expect to see: decreases in their occurrence during economic recessions (see Table 20). Prior to the Great Recession, threat-only articles were less prevalent during periods of recession in *The Times*. The threat-only proportion increased slightly during the Great Recession, but with an article count of only two. Of the two threat-only articles, one provided an episodic account of an individual engaging in welfare fraud, the epitome of both threat

and an undeserving recipient (Eligon, 2008, p. B5), while the other referenced the past political furor against “welfare cheats” (Harwood, 2009, p. A10). In *The Journal*, we see an even starker contrast between economic conditions and the proportion of threat-only articles. The percentage dropped during the first recession, but then not a single threat-only article appeared during the second and third recessions.

Table 20

Threat-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions

Time Period	News Source		
	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
1/1/1990-6/30/1990 ^a	5 19.2%	0 0.0%	2 22.2%
7/1/1990-3/31/1991 ^b	6 14.0%	1 5.6%	3 15.8%
4/1/1991-2/28/2001 ^a	164 11.6%	34 8.5%	122 14.4%
3/1/2001-11/30/2001 ^b	2 4.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
12/1/2001-11/30/2007 ^a	13 6.7%	2 10.5%	6 7.4%
12/1/2007-6/30/2009 ^b	2 8.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
7/1/2009-12/31/2016 ^a	9 11.7%	2 14.3%	17 14.8%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained only themes of threat. For example, 19.2% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* between January 1, 1990 and June 30, 1990 contained only themes of threat.

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

Across newspapers, articles containing themes of both threat and suffering were less prevalent during periods of recession (data not shown). On balance, then, suffering

was more commonly portrayed than threat during economic contractions. This is consistent with an increase in sympathetic human-interest stories during recessions.

An article's depiction of deservingness can also elicit sympathy. Although other character traits factor into the definition, deservingness is typically marked by the willingness to work. As Handler bluntly observed, "[a]dults who can work but do not are deviant" (1995, p. 3). Economic recessions that constrain opportunity modify perceptions of willingness to work. The following episodic account highlighted economic conditions directly pushing an individual to the welfare system:

Cecelia D. Fernandes and her husband moved to New Hampshire 10 months ago, seeking a better place to raise their two children. They left a second-floor apartment in Lowell, Mass., looking for a backyard and lower rents. Ms. Fernandes found the backyard, but she found something else she was not looking for: New Hampshire's economy had declined so much that she was unable to keep her family above the poverty line after she and her husband separated in January. She is just one of many New Hampshire residents who have entered the halls of welfare offices for the first time in the past year. (Special to *The New York Times*, 1990, p. A22)

In this example, husband and wife relocate to provide a better life for their children, an act of exemplary ambition. Once Ms. Fernandes separated from her husband, the damning single-mother label could have come into play, but the author directly related her financial desperation to the poor economic conditions in the area and puts her in the company of other respectable victims entering welfare offices "for the first time".

Single motherhood is also treated sympathetically in the next example, though within a story of more extreme relocation:

After escaping violence in Burma and spending 27 years in the bamboo huts of a United Nations camp in Thailand, Nyaw Paw, 33, arrived in the United States last August to face the traumatic adjustment and cultural vertigo known to every refugee. But with high rents, lagging federal aid and now a recession that is drying up entry-level work, the transition has become harder than ever, refugee workers say. Overwhelming housing costs are its starkest symptom. Many new arrivals spend 90 percent or more of their income on rent and utilities, leaving them virtually no disposable income and creating enormous hardships. Ms. Nyaw Paw, who was placed in Salt Lake City with her two sons, ages 6 and 13, has scraped together the \$600 rent on their one-bedroom apartment from federal payments that ended in December. Now, her only income is a welfare grant of about \$500 a month; a private aid agency fills the gap. Ms. Nyaw Paw has tried for traditional starter jobs, like motel housekeeping, but no one is hiring here. Her life demands such frugality that she washes the family clothes in the bathtub rather than feeding quarters to the machine down the hall. (Eckholm, 2009, p.

A16)

Again, economic conditions are cited as the underlying cause of need for public support. This deserving single mother was doing her part: seeking employment and assiduously attempting to save money in every possible way; but she could not overcome forces beyond her control.

The prevalence of undeserving-only articles tended to follow patterns we would expect during economic contractions (see Table 21). The proportion of articles in *The Times* and *The Journal* with only undeserving themes decreased during recessions. Absent the first recession, the same pattern holds for *USA Today*, where no undeserving-only articles appeared in the second or third recessions.

Table 21

Undeserving-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions

Time Period	News Source		
	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
1/1/1990- 6/30/1990 ^a	6 23.1%	2 14.3%	4 44.4%
7/1/1990- 3/31/1991 ^b	6 14.0%	4 22.2%	8 42.1%
4/1/1991- 2/28/2001 ^a	451 32.0%	130 32.7%	343 40.5%
3/1/2001- 11/30/2001 ^b	11 22.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
12/1/2001- 11/30/2007 ^a	46 23.6%	7 36.8%	24 29.6%
12/1/2007- 6/30/2009 ^b	2 8.7%	0 0.0%	3 20.0%
7/1/2009- 12/31/2016 ^a	21 27.3%	2 14.3%	37 32.2%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained only undeserving themes. For example, 23.1% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* between January 1, 1990 and June 30, 1990 contained only undeserving themes.

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

The reverse is true for articles referencing deserving-only recipients during economic contractions, and consistent with this, the proportion of such articles almost always rose compared to the preceding prosperous period (see Table 22).

Table 22

Deserving-Only Article Prevalence during Recessions and Expansions

Time Period	News Source		
	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
1/1/1990-	4	3	3
6/30/1990 ^a	15.4%	21.4%	33.3%
7/1/1990-	18	9	5
3/31/1991 ^b	41.9%	50.0%	26.3%
4/1/1991-	113	32	115
2/28/2001 ^a	8.0%	8.0%	13.6%
3/1/2001-	9	1	2
11/30/2001 ^b	18.8%	25.0%	12.5%
12/1/2001-	17	3	20
11/30/2007 ^a	8.7%	15.8%	24.7%
12/1/2007-	5	0	5
6/30/2009 ^b	21.7%	0.0%	33.3%
7/1/2009-	10	0	23
12/31/2016 ^a	13.0%	0.0%	20.0%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained only deserving themes. For example, 15.4% of all welfare articles published by *The Times* between January 1, 1990 and June 30, 1990 contained only deserving themes.

^aPeriod of economic expansion.

^bPeriod of economic recession.

In sum, in contrast to their depiction during good times, when welfare recipients appeared in newspaper articles during periods of economic contraction, they were more likely to be the subjects of sympathetic human-interest stories that focused on their suffering and deservingness.

Comparing Themes Related to Unworthiness during Recessions and Expansions

The first recession in the study period was brief, occurring over the nine months from July 1990 to March 1991. This was during the heyday of state waivers (see Chapter 4) and not long into the serious clamoring for welfare reform across the political spectrum. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was still in place, however, and because of its elastic funding, was much more responsive than its successor to increased levels of poverty. Both the second and third recessions occurred after Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) replaced AFDC. The second was also short (from March 2001 to November 2001) and followed five years of strong economic growth that created ideal conditions for TANF's success. However, with the sharp slump, caseloads continued to fall. Welfare rolls lag the onset of rising hardship, and the recession was brief, but the continuing decline in TANF recipients was concerning.

The third recession was the longest and deepest of the three, occurring from December 2007 to June 2009. The Great Recession began just about ten years after TANF became law, and by then TANF's time limits and strict rules had been disqualifying and diverting people for several years; states had been putting excess TANF block grant funds to other purposes. But the rolls were falling, claims of success were generally taken at face value by legislators, and newspapers had lost interest in TANF recipients. The Great Recession would be the first rigorous test of TANF's promises, however, and there would be a lot to criticize.

With these conditions in mind, I will analyze each period of economic contraction separately.

Dependency-Associated Pathologies

First Recession. Comparing proportions of each dependency-associated pathology between the period of economic expansion preceding the first recession to those during the recession, an overall decrease in the more polarizing pathologies was clear in *The New York Times*. The most dramatic decrease in prevalence occurred among some of the harshest markers of moral failings – dependency, truancy, dropout, and teen parenthood. The only pathology that increased in prevalence during the recession was single parenthood. Identification of a recipient as a single parent is one of the more innocuous of the pathology codes, though not without negative connotations in the welfare debate context. That more condemnatory language decreased during the recession as the debate was heating up demonstrates the ameliorating effect of poor economic conditions on negative welfare recipient tropes. The following example from the first recession described the link between single motherhood, welfare dependency, and the drive for welfare reform:

A different group of experts believes that any antipoverty strategy is doomed without an accompanying overhaul, or a complete replacement, of the nation's welfare system. "If you change welfare you will change the material basis for the culture of poverty," said Mickey Kaus, a senior editor at *The New Republic* magazine and the author of an influential article on welfare reform who is writing a book about antipoverty strategies. "Everything else is tinkering. It's good tinkering, but it's tinkering." The current system, he and others argue, allows generations of single mothers to view unemployment as a way of life. (DeParle & Applebome, 1991, p. A1)

Compared to more incendiary language that decried the proliferation of “welfare queens,” the above account was quite tame. While the language and portrayals used might be more sympathetic – or at least less overtly hostile – during a period of economic recession, the debate driving welfare reform would not stop. In fact, increasing welfare rolls, in part due to the weak economy, helped fuel the notion that welfare reform was necessary. Also critical here is Kaus’ use of the term “culture of poverty.” This is a conservative buzzword for what Victorians called “demoralization,” the critical element of which was the loss of a work ethic.

Pathologies were also less likely to appear in both *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. In *USA Today* references to pathologies were few or did not appear at all in both the preceding period or during the first recession. In *The Journal* the only increase in prevalence occurred for the code “violence”. This increase, though, means that *no* articles coded with violence became *one* article containing the code during the first recession. In fact, the reference to violence depicted the welfare recipients as victims. The subjects of a human-interest story, the Pierce family, “say they live in a perpetual state of fear in Chicago’s notoriously violent Cabrini Green high-rise housing project” (Freedman, 1990, p. A1). Overall, at least during the first recession, the focus moved away from pathologies linking recipients directly to the undeserving welfare recipient trope.

Second Recession. The period of economic expansion after the first recession lasted from April 1991 through February 2001, nearly a full decade. The beginning of the expansion period was marked by ongoing political debate about welfare reform, culminating in TANF’s enactment in the middle of this period. The media’s focus on

welfare recipients remained strong immediately following TANF's enactment but began to wane early in the 2000s.

Meaningful comparisons between the long prosperous period and the nine-month second recession are hard to make for at least *The Journal* and *USA Today*, but a look at the dependency-associated pathologies present in *The Times* during the second recession proves worthwhile. Arguably, when only a handful of articles reference welfare recipients, their portrayal becomes even more important. The theme of dependency appeared in a substantial proportion of articles in *The Times* during the recession ($n = 10$; 20.8%), though the words “dependency” or “dependent” were only used in relation to welfare recipients’ overreliance on public assistance in four of the 10 articles. The remaining pieces employed less direct language to touch on the concept of dependency, particularly by using “self-sufficiency” or “self-sufficient”. Here is one example from *The Times*: “In Ms. Mosher’s story lies the tale of what it is to be poor in rural America, where the usual hurdles to self-sufficiency are complicated by the difficulty of finding work and the difficulty of getting to work” (Sengupta, 2001, p. A1). In this context, “hurdles” to achieving the aspirational state of self-sufficiency allude to the possibility of undesirable “dependence” without using the word or assigning personal responsibility for it.

References to single parenthood, drugs and/or alcohol, crime, and truancy appeared in more than 10% (n ranged from 5 to 8) of *The Times*’ 48 total articles during the second recession. However, only one article of the group portrayed welfare recipients in a solely unsympathetic light. Discussing the looming five-year lifetime limit on welfare benefits in the context of an economic recession, here is one reference to single

parenthood: “Most of the 32,800 who face the December deadline are single mothers. Some may not be suitable for available jobs because of health problems, or because of family responsibilities like caring for a disabled relative, Mr. Madden said” (Bernstein, 2001, p. D1). Here, the criterion of suitability for employment is used to exculpate non-workers.

Overall, most of the dependency-associated pathologies were less likely to appear in *The Times* during the second recession compared to the preceding period of expansion. The only pathologies mentioned more often during the recession were drugs and alcohol, single parenthood, and violence. Again, though, the increase in proportions needs to be considered against the counts. For example, drugs and/or alcohol appeared in 16.7% of all articles during the second recession, but this is an article count of 8 compared to 224 articles (15.9%) containing this theme in the preceding period of expansion. All but one of the 8 articles, though, spoke of drugs and/or alcohol in destigmatizing ways, whether through neutral references to drug treatment programs associated with welfare reform or through highlighting “success stories” of individuals who were able to overcome their addiction. Single parenthood featured in 12.5% ($n = 6$) of articles in the second recession. All six articles focused on the suffering of recipients, a divergence from more stigmatizing accounts associated with illegitimacy. Violence appeared in 6.3% of articles during the second recession, but that accounts for three of 48 total articles. In all three articles, welfare recipients were described as *victims* of domestic violence: “Ms. Nay, who had fled domestic violence when her two daughters were little, knew what it was like to be in a city shelter” (Bernstein, 2001, p. A1). In that context, violence buttressed suffering and deservingness.

USA Today published only four apposite articles during the second recession. The paper was not especially interested in welfare recipients as subjects of the news, but it was not unsympathetic. One article provided a human-interest story focused on welfare-recipient grandparents assuming primary caregiving responsibilities for their grandchildren: “Laboring with love, responding to dire need, they are raising their grandchildren long after they thought they were done with parenting the young” (Peterson, 2001, p. 1D). There are multiple markers of deservingness and suffering in this case: the age of the recipients and the new burden placed on them, and their benevolent response to the needs of children. The other three articles focused on broader issues related to welfare reform and the sluggish economy. All three included criticism of the post-reform safety net’s failure to prevent suffering during the recession:

Michael Orlando oversees welfare in Fairfield County, Ohio, where the rolls have grown about 35% in 2 years. He cringes at the tough choices ahead. “It’s kind of an awful time to be a welfare director, because you know the potential that’s out there,” Orlando says. “We are preparing for a train wreck, and no one is listening.” (De Lollis, 2001, p. 5B)

The Journal’s low article count ($n = 16$) during the second recession is further evidence of declining newspaper interest in welfare recipients during post-TANF recessions and their sympathetic depictions in the rare instances they took notice. Here is an example from a thematic article in *The Journal* referencing both crime and D&A: “[a] 1996 federal law prohibits people convicted of drug felonies from ever receiving welfare or food stamps. Since then, 27 states have modified or eliminated that ban” (Golden,

2001, p. A1).⁴⁴ While the article touched on two dependency-associated pathologies, the passage above suggests that the law is counterproductive. Another article that included D&A recounted factors that hindered caseworkers' attempts to find jobs for recipients before their benefits timed out: "[a] U.S. General Accounting Office report released last week says many [welfare recipients] suffer from poor health, disabilities, substance abuse or other problems making them harder to employ" (Tejada, 2001, p. A1).

Three of the six total articles that contained references to any dependency-associated pathologies included human-interest stories. All three depicted former welfare recipients who worked their way off welfare but continued to struggle due to systemic conditions: being laid off due to the recession; having to take time off work to meet with welfare officials in order to obtain work support benefits; and struggling to stay off welfare when earning close to the minimum wage. All three participants were described as single parents, but the sympathetic framing of the full portrayals made that characteristic exist as more of a reason to admire their grit and denounce conditions that increased their suffering. Even when violence appeared in one of the stories, the recipient⁴⁵ was heroic, hard-working, and victimized:

Violence touched her just last year. Ms. Williams's boyfriend snapped and, according to police records, came at two of her kids with a knife. Ms. Williams shot him with her .25-caliber pistol. He staggered into traffic and was run over and died. The authorities ruled the shooting "justifiable," and Ms. Williams was

⁴⁴ The ban was instituted under 1996's PRWORA and states were given the authority to opt out or modify. Early drafts of the legislation extended the ban to misdemeanants.

⁴⁵ The excerpt comes from a lengthy profile of Ms. Williams. In other parts of the story, she was identified as a welfare recipient.

never charged. The incident, she says, left a void in her heart. It also left one in her pocketbook. The boyfriend used to chip in on the bills, and his absence has been the main reason that Ms. Williams has had to find a second job -- even in Shreveport, where it's relatively cheap to live. (Wartzman, 2001, p. A1)

Third Recession. During the Great Recession, mentions of dependency-associated pathologies virtually disappeared in *USA Today* and *The Journal*. Although only one article referenced welfare recipients in *USA Today*, not a single pathology was included. *The Journal* posted a similar article count as during the second recession (15 versus 16); but the few pathology references that appeared were drugs and/or alcohol, welfare fraud, and welfare magnets. The article including D&A was a human-interest story centered on the predatory mortgage lending practices that helped fuel the Great Recession (Phillips, 2009, p. A1). The D&A reference was a small detail in a lengthy front-page story. While the welfare recipient was not without flaws, the story cast the lender as villain and the subject as an exploited victim. The articles that included references to welfare fraud and welfare magnets downplayed each pathology's severity and/or existence. The story that included reference to a welfare magnet detailed the Supreme Court's overturning of a California law legalizing lower benefits for recent migrants to the state (Bravin, 2009). The article that referenced welfare fraud described how "[w]hile running for president in the late 1970s and pushing for stricter regulation of welfare disbursements, [Ronald Reagan] repeatedly mentioned a 'welfare queen' who had fraudulently received more than \$150,000 worth of benefits" (Chung, 2008, p. W3). The author then corrected the story by clarifying that the recipient in question was

convicted of welfare fraud after collecting \$8,000 using two aliases, thus correcting the infamous story and implying (correctly) that welfare fraud is greatly exaggerated.

This sympathetic normalization of welfare recipients was not as apparent in *The Times*. Dependency remained a dominant theme during the Great Recession ($n = 9$; 39.1%), while single parenthood featured in more than 20% of 23 total articles. The references to dependency varied. One of the more unsympathetic usages can be seen in the following passage:

Mrs. Clinton expressed no misgivings about the 1996 legislation, saying that it was a needed -- and enormously successful -- first step toward making poor families self-sufficient. "Welfare should have been a temporary way station for people who needed immediate assistance," she said. "It should not be considered an anti-poverty program. It simply did not work." (Goodman, 2008, p. A1)

Here, a major political figure both during the welfare reform period and at the time of the article's publication justified the 1996 welfare overhaul based on the welfare dependency trope. By contrast, another article shifted the focus from welfare dependency to systemic economic conditions:

Insisting that the poor should work and agreeing that work should pay, policy makers spent the 1990s cutting welfare rolls while pouring billions of dollars into programs like wage and childcare subsidies aimed at the working poor. But joblessness, not welfare dependency, is now the national scourge. (DeParle, 2009c, p. A10).

Welfare fraud, crime, and drugs and/or alcohol each appeared in more than 10% of *Times* articles during this time. Looking at the three articles that referenced welfare

fraud, one presented an episodic account of two individuals who managed to fraudulently obtain \$360,000 in welfare benefits between 2002 and 2007 (Eligon, 2008, p. B5). The other two contained references to the welfare queen trope (DeParle, 2009b; Harwood, 2009). Interestingly, while neither article explicitly endorsed the truth behind the image, they also failed to go as far as *The Journal's* article from the same period that stated the actual facts behind the trope (Chung, 2008).⁴⁶

The articles containing references to crime or D&A tended to skew toward neutral or even sympathetic recipient portrayals. The following excerpt referenced D&A: “[b]ut progress had stalled even before the recession began, and two sets of problems had emerged. One is that the neediest people -- the addicted, disabled or mentally ill -- often fell through the cracks, finding neither welfare nor work” (DeParle, 2009c, p. A10). Employing the category of “neediest people” lumps “addicts” together with deserving groups, something that Congress pointedly disavowed in 1994 when removing addiction as a qualifying impairment in Social Security’s disability programs (Hunt & Baumohl, 2003). Fifteen years later, the passage from *The Times* treated substance misuse as one of multiple health-related conditions that served as barriers to employment.

Pathology Buzzwords

As we would expect given the above discussion, all three newspapers resorted to very limited use of anti-welfare buzzwords outside of the period of economic expansion between the first and second recessions (April 1991 through February 2001), which

⁴⁶ Examining motive or intent of article authors is beyond the scope of the present study. It’s entirely likely that neither DeParle nor Harwood intended to use the caricature to impugn. However, their references differed from Chung’s, who took pains to explain the myth behind the stereotype.

featured the most interest in welfare recipients and reflected the contentious discourse that accompanied the successful welfare reform campaign of those years.

The Times was the most likely to run a recession-period story that included a pathology buzzword. Even so, in no recession did a given pathology buzzword appear in more than five articles in *The Times*. “Underclass” and “welfare queen” appeared during both the first and third recessions, while “undeserving” was used during the second and third recessions. “Dependency” and “self-sufficiency” were the most prevalent of the buzzwords to appear in *The Times* during a recession, with the highest proportion during the Great Recession ($n = 3$; 13.0%). Two of the three references presented the idea of dependency as a still-current issue (DeParle, 2009a; Santos, 2008), while the third suggested that concern about dependency had been supplanted by concern about joblessness (DeParle, 2009c).

USA Today did not include any buzzwords during the third recession and buzzwords were nearly nonexistent in the first and second recessions. In the first recession, “illegitimacy” appeared in one article; in the second recession, only “self-sufficiency” appeared in a single article. *The Journal* was equally unlikely to use pathology buzzwords during economic contractions.

Summary

Welfare dependency was at the center of the welfare reform debate and one of the main targets of TANF legislation. The idea of dependency was closely tied to work, with work signifying independence and self-sufficiency. The uproar over TANF’s predecessor centered on growing welfare rolls and a belief that recipients had grown comfortably reliant on public aid. Much of the debate about dependency emphasized that caseloads

grew because of the traits and characteristics of welfare recipients rather than systemic conditions that trapped them in poverty.

This position is more plausible during periods of economic expansion, and newspapers dutifully report it. But in harder times, the trait-based argument loses much of its persuasive power and newspapers report that, too. With little exception, this pattern prevailed across accounts published by *The Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Journal* during the three recessionary periods between 1990 and 2016. Human-interest stories became more common during recessions, and these usually focused on suffering and deservingness instead of threat and unworthiness, and on social contexts and structures like neighborhoods and dynamics of the economy.

Chapter 6: The End of the Welfare Queen?

The analyses presented thus far include welfare recipients as an undifferentiated group. However, we cannot examine the representation of recipients without also considering the role of racial/ethnic identity. Welfare racism – the exclusion and/or differential treatment of non-white families in public assistance policy – has been present in the United States for as long as public assistance has existed (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). Historical and contemporary welfare policies, practices, and outcomes show a clear pattern of welfare racism that negatively impacts non-white families. References to the cultural inferiority of non-white families have served to catalyze reform efforts throughout the history of U.S. welfare policy. Before examining how race appeared in newspaper coverage of welfare recipients from 1990 through 2016, I briefly examine the treatment of race in the policies and practices of U.S. public assistance. Both overtly and subtly, welfare racism has affected the creation, implementation, revision, and outcomes of welfare policy.

Overview of Key Events

Pre-TANF

A darkening of the welfare rolls has long catalyzed restrictive policies. States with higher proportions of non-white families on the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls were more likely to provide less aid (Orr, 1976). The 1939 exodus

of many “worthy” white widows from Aid to Dependent Children (ADC);⁴⁷ the effective advocacy of the National Welfare Rights Organization in the mid-1960s and early 1970s; and a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions⁴⁸ that overturned the more draconian criteria for initial and continuing eligibility for AFDC⁴⁹ contributed to the greater proportional representation of non-white families on the rolls.

As local, state, and federal officials saw or imagined the welfare rolls shifting from a majority white composition, rhetoric and policies took a more punitive turn. For example, an influential episode in Newburgh, NY in 1961 was explicitly driven by fears of Black migration into a city in economic decline as local manufacturers moved or shut down operations in the 1950s (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). City manager Joseph McDowell Mitchell issued a “thirteen-point program” of measures designed to limit aid to non-white welfare recipients. While Mitchell’s program was quickly rescinded due to successful legal challenges, the events in Newburgh catalyzed a national-level conversation regarding welfare reform and the necessity of work requirements (Nadasen, 2007). Much of Nadasen’s (2007) analysis of race as a factor in welfare reform efforts during the 1960s could be applied to similar events in the early to mid-1990s. The

⁴⁷ The Social Security Amendments of 1939 renamed old age benefits Old Age and Survivors Insurance and created a benefits program for surviving spouses and children of specific categories of workers (The Temporary Assistance, 2021). Workers in agriculture and domestic service sectors were *not* covered under this insurance (Schmitter & Goldwasser, 1939). Families headed by single mothers or widows whose spouses worked in an exempted employment category were forced to rely on less socially acceptable and generous programs such as ADC.

⁴⁸ For a comprehensive discussion and analysis of a collaboration between the NWRO and legal aid lawyers that culminated in Supreme Court victories for welfare recipients, particularly people of color see Martha F. Davis’ *Brutal Need: Lawyers and the Welfare Rights Movement, 1960-1973* (1993). *King v. Smith* (1968) effectively challenged the “substitute father” rule; *Shapiro v. Thompson* (1969) struck down state residency requirements; and *Goldberg v. Kelly* (1970) established the right to a fair hearing prior to benefit termination.

⁴⁹ ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) was renamed AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and restructured in 1962 to reflect growing emphasis on family units (DiNitto, 1991).

rhetoric invoking racist stereotypes and controlling images that Newburgh generated up to the national level were apparent in the 1990s welfare reform debate. Indeed, points from Mitchell's 1961 policies were echoed in many aspects of AFDC state waivers during the G.H. Bush and Clinton administrations, the Republicans' 1994 Contract with America, early drafts of the PRWORA (such as 1995's Personal Responsibility Act), and the version of PRWORA signed into law in August 1996. Although Newburgh was a clear example of racist welfare policy, it was not an exceptional case. In general, "concern about illegitimacy, female-headed [B]lack families, and the explosive growth of non-white populations in the poorest areas of large cities guaranteed that people would think of poor [B]lacks and welfare together" (Patterson, 2000, p. 107).

Until 1967's federal Work Incentive Program (WIN), work requirements were a state and local matter, but as Handler (1995) observed, "[t]he year of the program is no accident; by this time ADC [sic] recipients had become increasingly [B]lack and never married. And that's when welfare became a 'crisis.'" (p. 57). Work and work-related programs proliferated under the Reagan administration as welfare state actors continued to stoke race-based fear and anger. Reagan's depiction of a "welfare queen" in his 1976 campaign for the Republican presidential nomination epitomized the mobilizing power of racist stereotyping to both gain political support and roll back the social safety net. The "welfare queen" image along with other implicitly racial, explicitly misogynistic, controlling images of welfare mothers as lazy, sexually promiscuous, and given to bearing children to increase their welfare benefits, drove the shift toward paternalistic policy that culminated in TANF.

Race and allusions to racist stereotypes featured in the vitriolic welfare reform debates leading to TANF's enactment. Claims that the U.S. welfare system served as a magnet for immigrants looking to exploit U.S. beneficence resulted in severe limitations to aid for new and recent immigrants in the 1996 PRWORA. Fears of illegitimacy drove efforts to control the reproductive activities of non-white mothers. Beliefs in a culture of dependency and the laziness of non-white recipients shaped ideas for workfare and time-limited benefits. Putatively dependent welfare recipients were regularly described in derogatory terms. Animal imagery provided an extreme example of insulting depictions of welfare recipients: one congressional representative compared recipients to alligators and another likened them to wolves (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). Responding to broad public support for welfare reform, such derogation was a bipartisan affair.

Media representations of welfare recipients were not immune to local, state, and national trends toward vilification of non-white recipients. Analyzing television news coverage between December 1989 and May 1990, Entman (1992) described the subtlety of racial stereotypes employed by the media:

Because old-fashioned racist images are socially undesirable, stereotypes are now more subtle, and stereotyped thinking is reinforced at levels likely to remain below conscious awareness. Rather than the grossly demeaning distortions of yesterday, stereotyping of blacks now allows abstraction from and denial of the racial component. Examples of stereotyped news subjects that might trigger stored information processing categories and associated negative affective responses would be "threatening young black male" or "demanding black

activist”; the (unjustified) threat and the (unfair) demand would be the conscious stimuli of the negative affect rather than the racial identity. (p. 345)

Such subtlety can be seen by comparing the actual proportion of Black individuals living in poverty to racial representation in photographs and pictures accompanying news stories about poverty. Gilens (1996) found that the proportion of African American subjects appearing in such pictures distorted the actual percentage of impoverished Black families. Clawson and Trice (2000) found the same overrepresentation of Black subjects in photographs accompanying stories about the poor between 1993 and 1998.

Furthermore, overrepresentation appeared more often in news containing more negative stereotypes and/or tones. The news media, whether consciously or subconsciously, has been reinforcing the narrative of poverty as a Black issue. As Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) asserted, “[t]he media have thus contributed to a national political environment in which hostility toward welfare and its recipients could be easily exploited by racial state actors and others riding the legacy of the 1960s white political backlash” (p. 117).

Post-TANF

Differential news coverage related to race has been identified since PRWORA’s signing. Brown (2013) analyzed the interplay of media and policy discourse following the 1996 TANF enactment in four racially diverse states: Alabama, Arizona, California, and Georgia. Findings revealed the complexity and nuance of welfare racism when looking beyond a Black and white dichotomy. Brown (2013) described how welfare stereotyping was employed more often in media discourse involving non-white groups but in different ways depending on the race of recipients. Morality stereotypes that

centered on family structure and work ethic appeared more often in discourse related to Black recipients in Alabama and Georgia. Morality discourse was closely linked to welfare policy efforts to modify recipient behavior such as family caps and stricter time limits. In Arizona, when the focus was on Hispanic welfare recipients, the discourse and policy shifted from morality to law and order, e.g., immigration enforcement. California, where attention focused on Asian groups, showed a similar law and order discourse, but blame was placed on sponsors in extended families for not fully supporting their relatives. The above stereotypes are linked to unworthiness, but Arizona's Native American welfare recipients featured in discourse that centered on limited economic opportunities, one of the key requirements for welfare worthiness. Such discourse was tied to economic development rather than behavior modification or immigration reform.

Additional research has revealed a lightening of images and rhetoric accompanying news articles about welfare recipients. A media monitoring project by We Interrupt This Message (WITM) found that "in the wake of the PRWORA, the dominant controlling image of welfare recipients was no longer the highly racialized 'welfare queen.' Newer, more positive images had appeared, including the 'hardworking, happy, former recipient'" (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001, p. 224). These images tended to be of white women. WITM also found that stories focused on recipients who struggled with scant success to get off welfare were more likely to include images of people of color. Erler (2012) traced a similar shift in recipient portrayals related to economic conditions. Prior to the Great Recession, depictions featured more undeserving markers and stories tended to feature Latino or African American individuals. After the Great Recession, stories included more white individuals, who were described in more deserving terms.

Comparing Racial and Ethnic Presence in the Media

Upon initial examination of the data, the most striking finding is the disparity in article counts across the racial and ethnic categories that were defined. Table 23 presents the counts and percentages out of the total sum (3,390) of articles across all three news sources for each category. Articles that explicitly identified African American recipients far outnumbered those that referenced recipients from any other racial/ethnic category. That African American recipients were identified nearly 3.5 times more often than white recipients is consistent with findings on the overrepresentation of African American individuals in media welfare discourse (Gilens, 1996; Clawson & Trice, 2000), which has historically exacerbated racist approaches to public assistance.

Table 23: Article Counts and Percentages by Racial and Ethnic Categories

Recipient Racial/ Ethnic Category	Article Count ^a	Percentage of Total
African American	190	5.6%
Asian	16	0.5%
Hispanic	78	2.3%
Latinx	15	0.4%
Native American	19	0.6%
Puerto Rican	22	0.6%
White	55	1.6%
No Race/Ethnicity ^b	3119	92.0%

^aThe article counts include those where a particular category appeared in the absence of other races/ethnicities and where it was one of multiple races/ethnicities that were identified. For example, the 190 articles in the African American subset include articles where only African Americans were referenced as well as articles where other races/ethnicities were identified in addition to African American recipients.

^b“No race/ethnicity” covers articles where recipient race or ethnicity was not identified.

Comparing Article Attributes

Pre- and Post-TANF

Comparing article frequencies between the pre- and post-TANF periods reveals patterns that differ by racial or ethnic category of welfare recipients (see Table 24). The three largest recipient categories – African American, Hispanic, and white – showed higher percentages in the pre-TANF era, but with still significant presences following TANF’s enactment. Asian welfare recipient representation in the news decreased sharply after TANF, while the Latinx and Puerto Rican recipient subsets saw dramatic increases in the post-TANF period. The Native American recipient subset remained stable across time with a slight decrease following TANF’s enactment.

Table 24*Racial and Ethnic Category Prevalence by Pre- and Post-TANF*

Recipient Racial/ Ethnic Category		Pre-TANF	Post-TANF
African American	Count	101	89
	Percentage	53.2%	46.8%
	Articles Per Year	15.0	4.6
Asian	Count	12	4
	Percentage	75.0%	25.0%
	Articles Per Year	1.8	0.2
Hispanic	Count	44	34
	Percentage	56.4%	43.6%
	Articles Per Year	6.5	1.8
Latinx	Count	1	14
	Percentage	6.7%	93.3%
	Articles Per Year	0.1	0.7
Native American	Count	10	9
	Percentage	52.6%	47.4%
	Articles Per Year	1.5	0.5
Puerto Rican	Count	9	15
	Percentage	31.8%	68.2%
	Articles Per Year	1.3	0.8
White	Count	32	23
	Percentage	58.2%	41.8%
	Articles Per Year	4.7	1.2
No Race/Ethnicity	Count	1507	1612
	Percentage	48.3%	51.7%
	Articles Per Year	223.3	83.7

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles within the stated recipient racial/ethnic category, including articles where no recipient race or ethnicity was identified. For example, 53.2% of articles in the African American subset were published prior to TANF's enactment, while 46.8% of articles in the African American subset appeared after TANF.

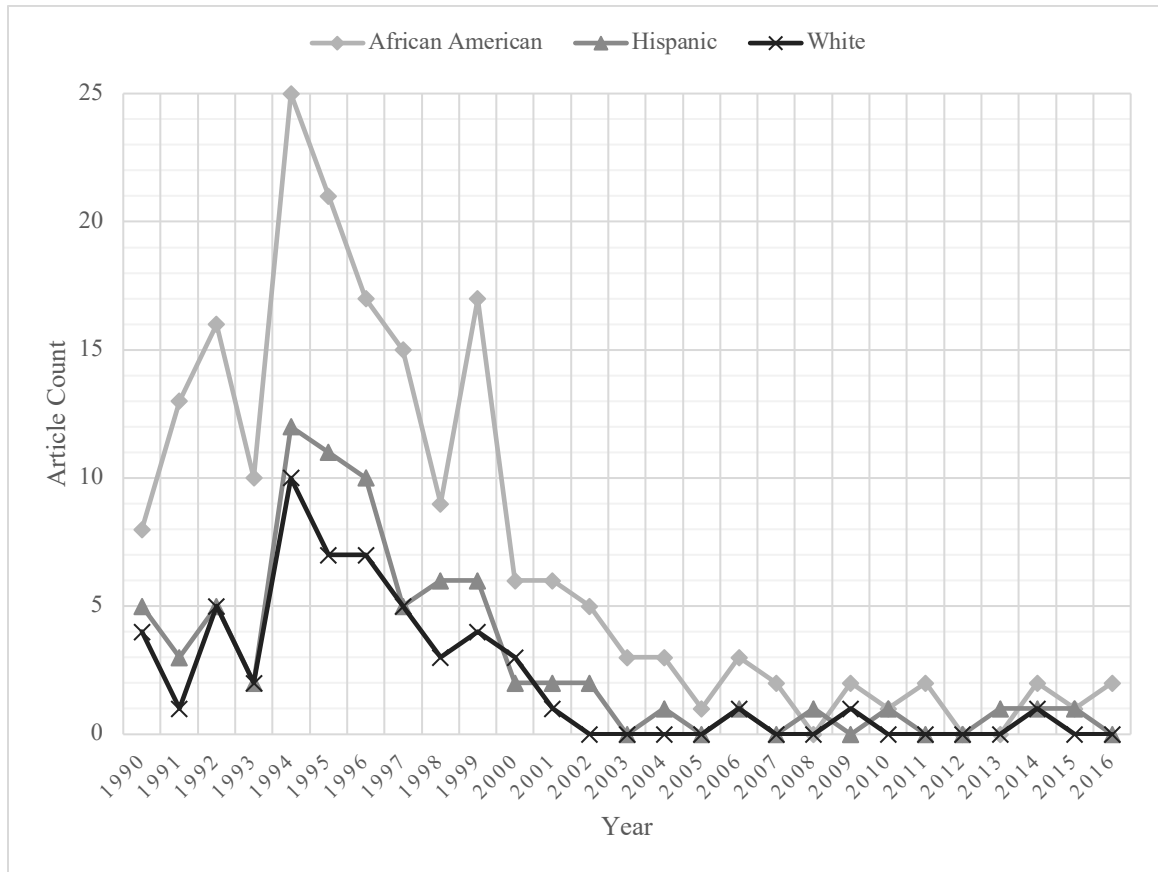
Because the Asian, Latinx, Native American, and Puerto Rican subsets' total article counts are extremely low, analyses in this chapter will focus on the African American, Hispanic, and white subsets. As detailed in Chapter 3, the overall goal of this study focused on mainstream media coverage of cash welfare recipients. Thus,

newspapers were chosen for their high national circulation rates rather than geographic representation. Limited coverage of southern, southwestern, and western regions of the U.S. is an unavoidable tradeoff of this approach. If major publications from those regions had been targeted, as Brown (2013) took pains to do in their study, articles featuring Asian, Latinx, Native American, and Puerto Rican recipients would have likely been more prevalent. For example, news coverage in geographic areas where Asian recipients may be more heavily concentrated, such as that of the *Los Angeles Times*, would likely carry more stories involving Asian recipients. The same could be said of Native American recipient coverage in southwestern and western areas of the United States. Although trends were difficult to discern within the categories containing few articles, some important exceptions were noted. Analyses of the four smallest subsets can be found in Appendix F.

Figure 5 displays yearly counts within the African American, Hispanic, and white recipient categories. Measured by article count, welfare recipient representation in the African American subset was at its height in 1994 and 1995, which coincides with the welfare reform debate in full swing. In those two years alone, 46 articles were published that referenced African American recipients, or 24.2% of all articles in this subset. In the same span of two years, the Hispanic and white subsets also peaked. Hispanic recipients appeared in 23 articles, or 29.4% of all articles referencing Hispanic individuals. The white subset included 17 articles over those two years, or 30.9% of all articles referencing white recipients.

Figure 5

Comparing Yearly African American, Hispanic, and White Article Counts



Subset sizes for all three groups reached their highest point in 1994. Comparing the presence of each group in news coverage to their representation among adult AFDC recipients in that year reveals two major disconnects between the real world and its media-generated version (see Table 25).

Table 25*Comparing 1994 African American, Hispanic, and White Representation*

	Recipient Racial/Ethnic Category		
	African American	Hispanic	White
Article Count	25	12	10
Percentage of Total 1994 Articles (<i>n</i> = 315) ^a	7.9%	3.3%	3.2%
Percentage of Adult AFDC Recipients in 1994 ^b	33.8%	18.7%	40.6%

^a This row displays the percentage of all 1994 articles that contained the respective

recipient racial/ethnic code. For example, 7.9% of the 315 total articles in 1994 identified recipients as African American or Black.

^b This row displays the percentage of all 1994 adult AFDC recipients that identified as members of the respective racial/ethnic group. For example, 33.8% of adult AFDC recipients in 1994 identified as African American or Black (Falk, 2016).

Although fewer African American adults – the primary focus of state actors calling for reform – were receiving AFDC at the time, news attention involving welfare recipients was more than twice as likely to reference African American individuals than white individuals. Hispanic media representation versus AFDC roll representation further highlights the disparity between white coverage and their proportion of program rolls. Comparing the difference between Hispanic and African American recipient coverage to their actual contribution to the AFDC rolls shows that Hispanic recipients were slightly less than half as likely to appear in the news in 1994 than African American recipients (3.2% versus 7.9%), and slightly more than half as likely to appear on the adult AFDC rolls that year (18.7% versus 33.8%). The proportional difference between Hispanic and white adult AFDC recipients is even greater (18.7% versus 40.6%), yet Hispanic recipients were slightly more likely to appear in 1994’s news coverage.

Turning attention to the characteristics of articles in the African American subset, representation was harsher overall during the pre-TANF era (see Table 26), a predictable finding given the tone of the debate leading up to TANF. Prior to TANF, across all three news sources, articles that referenced African American recipients tended to be thematic. After enactment, only *The Wall Street Journal* persisted in mainly thematic coverage, forgoing the human-interest accounts that often humanize their subjects.

Table 26*Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF – African American Subset*

Attribute	Medium					
	New York Times Pre-TANF (n = 56)	New York Times Post-TANF (n = 59)	USA Today Pre-TANF (n = 15)	USA Today Post-TANF (n = 10)	Wall Street Journal Pre-TANF (n = 30)	Wall Street Journal Post-TANF (n = 20)
Episodic vs. Thematic						
Episodic	19 33.9%	34 57.6%	7 46.7%	6 60.0%	12 40.0%	4 20.0%
Thematic	37 66.1%	25 42.4%	8 53.3%	4 40.0%	18 60.0%	16 80.0%
Threat vs. Suffering						
Threat	9 16.1%	2 3.4%	1 6.7%	1 10.0%	7 23.3%	1 5.0%
Suffering	7 12.5%	13 22.0%	3 20.0%	4 40.0%	8 26.7%	9 45.0%
Both	37 66.1%	43 72.9%	11 73.3%	4 40.0%	14 46.7%	8 40.0%
Neither	3 5.4%	1 1.7%	0 0.0%	1 10.0%	1 3.3%	2 10.0%
Target Groups						
Undeserving	14 25.0%	6 10.2%	3 20.0%	1 10.0%	9 30.0%	4 20.0%
Deserving	4 7.1%	5 8.5%	1 6.7%	2 20.0%	4 13.3%	0 0.0%
Both	37 66.1%	45 76.3%	11 73.3%	5 50.0%	14 46.7%	14 70.0%
Neither	1 1.8%	3 5.1%	0 0.0%	2 20.0%	3 10.0%	2 10.0%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles in the African American recipient subset within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained a given attribute. For example, 33.9% of all welfare articles in the African American subset published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment contained episodic accounts.

In both *The Times* and *The Journal*, pre-TANF articles were more likely to contain threat-only references; such articles were rare across the board after enactment. All three papers were less likely to run suffering-only pieces pre-TANF. Adding to the generally negative picture, pre-TANF stories were also more likely to include only markers of unworthiness. The prevalence of deserving-only articles was lower pre-TANF in both *The Times* and *USA Today*.

Aligning with previous research on overrepresentation and the tone of racial representation (Clawson & Trice, 2000; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001), African American recipients were not only overrepresented in the news in the pre-TANF era, but more often portrayed negatively. This is consistent with the political discourse about impoverishment and welfare dependency during the years preceding enactment, and with the legislative outcome of the debate: a weaker, more paternalistic social safety net.

The Hispanic subset followed patterns similar to the African American subset, though with less consistency across news sources (see Table 27). In both *The Times* and *USA Today*, articles prior to TANF referencing Hispanic recipients were more likely to be thematic. In *The Times* and *The Journal*, they were more likely to contain threat-only themes pre-TANF; but in *USA Today* and *The Journal*, they were far more likely than *The Times* to contain suffering-only themes. Pre-TANF articles published in *The Times* were more likely to be classified as undeserving- and deserving-only. Across all three papers, undeserving-only articles were much more prevalent than deserving-only articles in the pre-TANF era, particularly in *The Journal*. This inconsistency is likely attributable to low article counts, especially in *USA Today* and *The Journal*.

Table 27*Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF – Hispanic Subset*

Attribute	Medium					
	New York Times Pre-Reform (n = 26)	New York Times Post-Reform (n = 24)	USA Today Pre-Reform (n = 7)	USA Today Post-Reform (n = 5)	Wall Street Journal Pre-Reform (n = 11)	Wall Street Journal Post-Reform (n = 5)
Episodic vs. Thematic						
Episodic	9 34.6%	10 41.7%	3 42.9%	3 60.0%	2 18.2%	0 0.0%
Thematic	17 65.4%	14 58.3%	4 57.1%	2 40.0%	9 81.8%	5 100.0%
Threat vs. Suffering						
Threat	1 3.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	3 27.3%	1 20.0%
Suffering	4 15.4%	8 33.3%	2 28.6%	1 20.0%	4 36.4%	2 40.0%
Both	18 69.2%	16 66.7%	5 71.4%	2 40.0%	4 36.4%	1 20.0%
Neither	3 11.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 40.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%
Target Groups						
Undeserving	7 26.9%	3 12.5%	1 14.3%	1 20.0%	5 45.5%	2 40.0%
Deserving	3 11.5%	2 8.3%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%	1 9.1%	1 20.0%
Both	16 61.5%	17 70.8%	6 85.7%	3 60.0%	3 27.3%	1 20.0%
Neither	0 0.0%	2 8.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 18.2%	1 20.0%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles in the Hispanic recipient subset within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained a given attribute. For example, 34.6% of all welfare articles in the Hispanic subset published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment contained episodic accounts.

Inconsistency among the papers was amplified in the white recipient subset. As in the African American and Hispanic subsets, pre-TANF stories referencing white

recipients tended to be thematic, but that is where most similarities ended (see Table 28). Based on previously documented trends that more negative media stereotypes and imagery are associated with darker recipients (Gilens, 1996; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Neubeck & Cazenave 2001; Brown, 2013), we would expect articles that included white recipients to be more sympathetic portrayals. This trend can clearly be seen in *USA Today* and *The Journal*. At no point in time did either of the two publications run a story that contained threat-only or undeserving-only recipient portrayals when white recipients were identified. However, the low article counts for both news sources should be kept in mind.

Table 28*Comparing Article Attributes Pre- and Post-TANF – White Subset*

Attribute	Medium					
	New York Times Pre-TANF (n = 20)	New York Times Post-TANF (n = 17)	USA Today Pre-TANF (n = 5)	USA Today Post-TANF (n = 3)	Wall Street Journal Pre-TANF (n = 7)	Wall Street Journal Post-TANF (n = 3)
Episodic vs. Thematic						
Episodic	7 35.0%	11 64.7%	2 40.0%	1 33.3%	2 28.6%	2 66.7%
Thematic	13 65.0%	6 35.3%	3 60.0%	2 66.7%	5 71.4%	1 33.3%
Threat vs. Suffering						
Threat	3 15.0%	1 5.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Suffering	4 20.0%	4 23.5%	0 0.0%	1 33.3%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%
Both	13 65.0%	12 70.6%	5 100.0%	1 33.3%	6 85.7%	3 100.0%
Neither	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 33.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Target Groups						
Undeserving	3 15.0%	1 5.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Deserving	1 5.0%	1 5.9%	1 20.0%	1 33.3%	2 28.6%	0 0.0%
Both	16 80.0%	15 88.2%	4 80.0%	2 66.7%	5 71.4%	3 100.0%
Neither	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

Note. The table above displays the percentage of total articles in the white recipient subset within the stated period of time by the respective news source that contained a given attribute. For example, 35% of all welfare articles in the white subset published by *The Times* prior to TANF’s enactment contained episodic accounts.

I will focus briefly on articles published in *The Times*, as it had the highest article counts across all three racial/ethnic categories. In *The Times*, the negative aspects of

articles referencing white recipients followed similar patterns as articles referencing African American recipients. Both subsets contained a nearly identical prevalence of threat-only articles, while the white subset was more likely to include suffering-only articles prior to TANF. Welfare recipients in the white subset fared better when considering undeserving-only portrayals, but in the African American subset articles more likely included deserving-only markers. Articles referring to Hispanic recipients were least likely to be threat-only and most likely to contain suffering-only characteristics. They were also most likely to be classified as deserving-only or undeserving-only in the pre-TANF era, suggesting a dichotomous view of deservingness in media portrayals. Interestingly, articles with African American references were the most likely to be categorized as deserving-only following TANF's enactment.

In sum, the newspaper representation of welfare recipients in the run-up to TANF was not kind to African Americans, whites, or Hispanics. Legislative discussion emphasized the deficiencies of welfare recipients and the welfare system. In a sense, then, welfare dependency rhetoric was color-blind, at least as far as the larger newspapers were concerned.

During Recessions and Expansions

Neither the race nor ethnicity of welfare recipients appear to be newsworthy subjects during recessions. The powerful racial over- and undertones of the welfare reform debate cluster in the 10-year economic expansion from April 1991 to February 2001. Even so, and as we have seen, data from the three short recessionary periods covered in this study show that recipient representation grows more sympathetic as

measured by article attributes in harder times. This was true across all racial/ethnic groups, although small numbers preclude meaningful, detailed discussion.

The most interesting finding here is that in recessionary periods articles referencing groups other than African Americans virtually disappear. For other non-white groups, the baseline was so low that the difference cannot be confidently interpreted, but the invisibility of white recipients during recessions is notable. *The Times* published three articles that referenced white welfare recipients during recessions. *USA Today* and *The Journal* did not publish a single article that specifically mentioned white recipients during any of the three periods of recession.

Comparing Themes Related to Unworthiness Within Racial/Ethnic Subsets

Dependency-Associated Pathologies – Pre- and Post-TANF

African American Subset. In this racial category, which appeared most often in the dataset, there was a strong association with most of the dependency-associated pathologies. The three main pathologies that epitomized the welfare reform debate – dependency, illegitimacy, and teen parenthood – were the most prevalent in the pre-TANF era, with illegitimacy slightly more common.

Throughout this period, illegitimacy was consistently referenced in articles on poverty, welfare dependence, and welfare reform that highlighted high rates of single motherhood among African American individuals. Many of these references were in reports on political events and discourse. Few welfare reform measures were more pointed in addressing illegitimacy – and dependency – than the family cap. The following commentary illustrates the association of illegitimacy with Blackness:

A recent convert to the cap is Judi Whitney, deputy director for Camden's program. "Being a minority myself, I know the strength of poor people has been a strong work ethic," said Ms. Whitney, who is black. "But in our efforts to help, we've taken away from them what had been their inherent strength, which is to believe they can take care of their family." (Henneberger, 1995, p. A1)

This is an interesting departure from the usual detailing of statistics on Black single motherhood. It appeared in a lengthy special report on how the New Jersey family cap, implemented in August 1993, affected pregnancies and births among welfare recipients. Many individuals were interviewed, including multiple mothers on welfare in addition to welfare officials. The detail about Ms. Whitney's race is the only reference to Black individuals, but that detail and the quote's reference to minorities are the only information about race or ethnicity of any sort in the article. Yet with those relatively minor details, the framing of the discussion darkens. The author identifies Whitney as a convert to the cap; Whitney identifies herself as a minority in such a way as to suggest that she is qualified to speak for them. The author then identifies her as Black; ergo, a Black woman – an official authority – speaking for and about other Black women. With two out of 2,352 words – Black and minorities – illegitimacy has been linked to Black individuals. None of this is surprising. Black welfare receipt has long been associated with dependency-associated pathologies, particularly Black single motherhood.

Comparing the percentages in the African American subset to those articles lacking any recipient race/ethnicity references revealed a stark, race-based contrast in the prevalence of pathologies (see Figure 6). Every pathology was far more prominent in the African American subset except welfare fraud and welfare magnet. Indeed, the two most

common pathologies in the subset – dependency and illegitimacy – were more than 15% more likely to appear in an article when the article also referenced African American recipients.

Figure 6

Comparing Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence – African American and No Race/Ethnicity

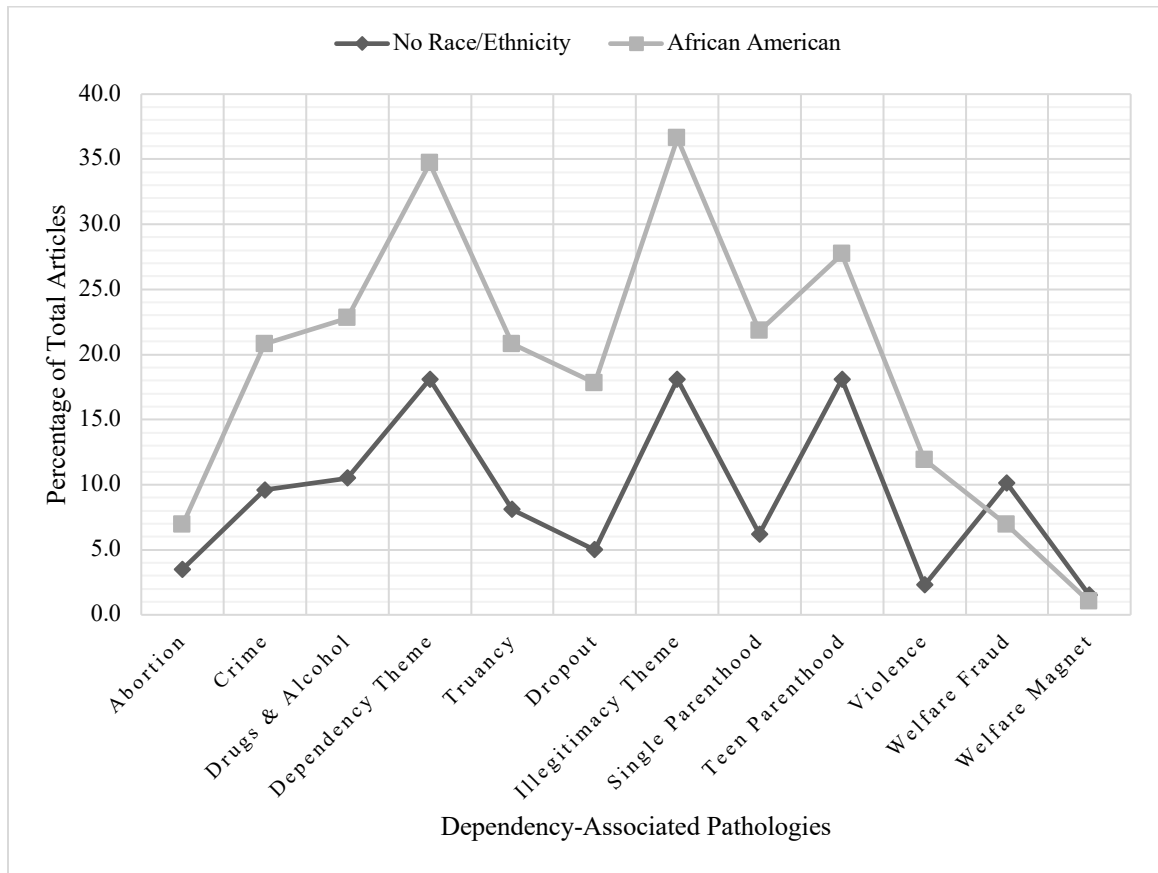


Figure 6 displays the proportions of pathology themes for all articles in the African American subset, combining all three news sources. Within the news sources, high prevalence was driven by *The Times*. Prior to TANF, both the dependency and illegitimacy themes were coded in nearly half ($n = 24$, 42.9% for dependency; $n = 25$, 44.6% for illegitimacy) of *The Times* articles that included references to African

American recipients. This is nearly 10% higher than the aggregate proportions shown in Figure 6. *USA Today*'s coverage was similar, with more pathologizing coverage in articles containing African American references compared to the full group of articles it published, excepting the welfare magnet code. Compared to *The Times*, truancy, dropout, single parenthood, teen parenthood, violence, and welfare fraud were more prevalent in *USA Today* in the African American subset; but *The Times* had higher article counts in all categories. Compared to *The Times* and *USA Today*, *The Journal*'s pre-TANF coverage that included African American recipients was mild. None of the pathologies appeared in more than 20% of the articles. Still, every pathology other than welfare magnet was more likely to appear in *Journal* articles that included African American recipients.

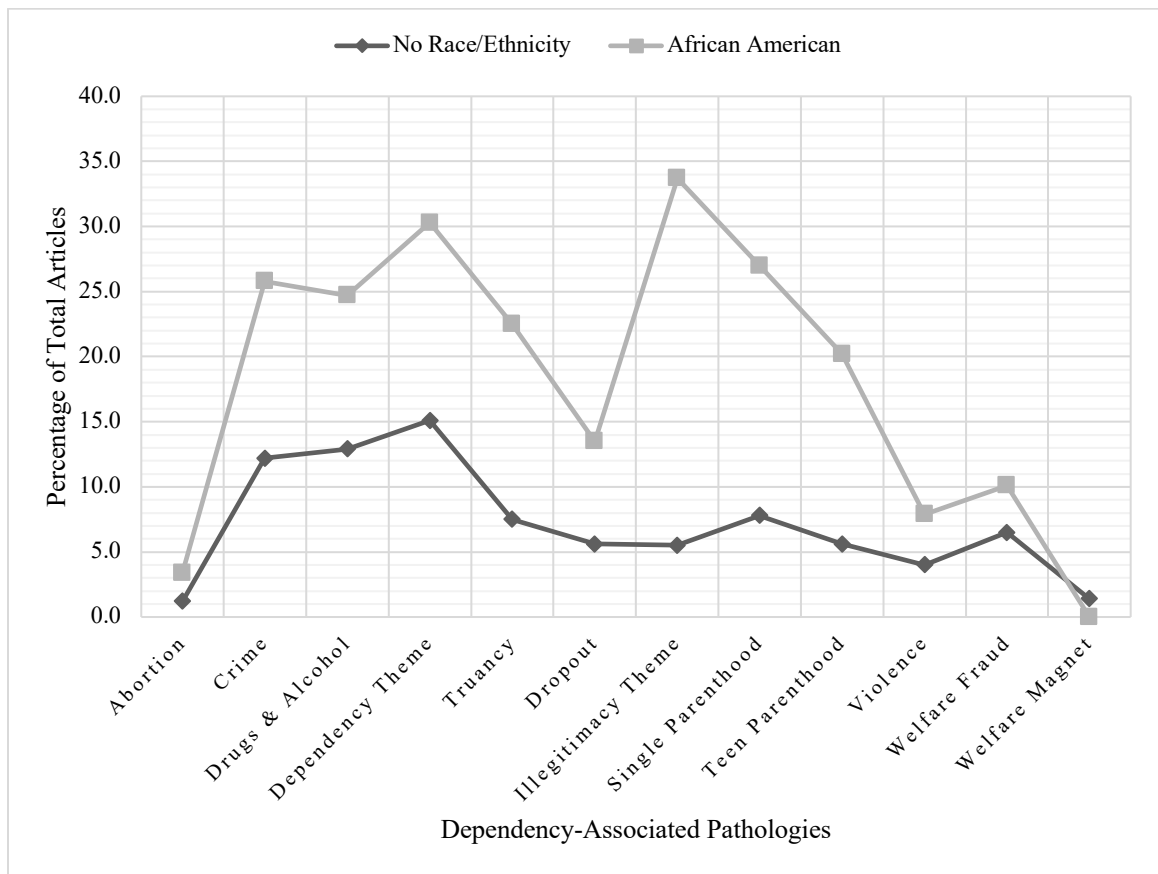
The dominant image of pathological African American recipients remained strong even after welfare reform. Dependency and illegitimacy themes remained the most prevalent after TANF's enactment, albeit with a slight dip in percentage. Post-TANF, two pathologies often described as consequences of welfare dependency – crime and drugs/alcohol – became more likely to appear in the African American subset. Single parenthood and teen parenthood switched positions, with single parenthood more likely to be referenced following TANF's enactment. With work requirements and time limits instituted through welfare reform, the next initiatives to gain traction focused on child support and encouraging marriage. More attention to single parenthood would be expected as news coverage turned to these proposals.

Overrepresentation of pathologies in articles referencing African American recipients continued (see Figure 7). While the gap between pathology prevalence in the subset lacking recipient race/ethnicity references and the African American subset shrank

for half the pathologies after TANF’s enactment, illegitimacy shifted from nearly 20% to an almost 30% difference in prevalence. Although the illegitimacy theme’s prevalence dropped substantially among articles that did not identify recipient races/ethnicities post-TANF, it remained a prominent theme in the African American subset. Preoccupation with the reproductive practices of African American welfare recipients continued.

Figure 7

Comparing Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – African American and No Race/Ethnicity



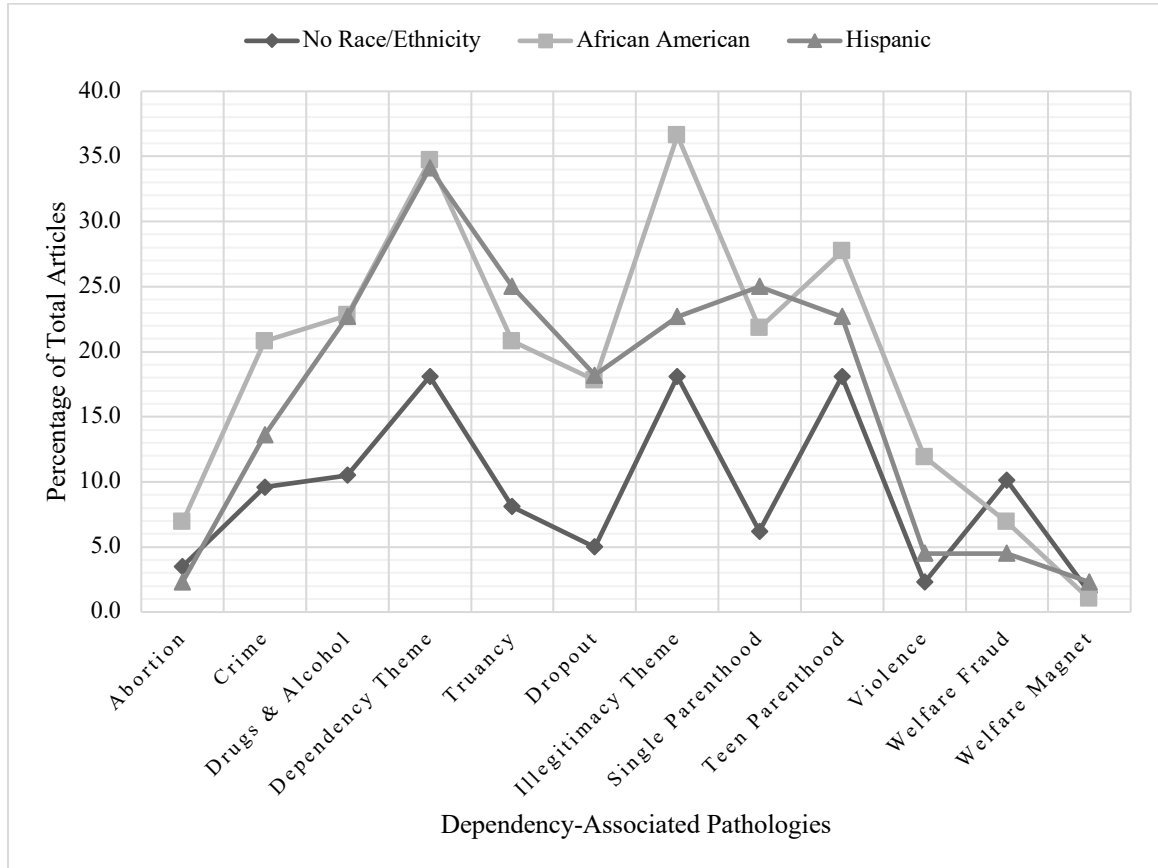
The Times continued to drive the high prevalence of most pathologies post-TANF. Compared to *The Times*’ post-enactment coverage in the African American subset, *USA Today* was less likely to include pathologies other than dropouts and single parenthood.

The Journal's post-TANF coverage within the African American subset was less likely to include most of the pathologies of interest to *The Times* and *USA Today*. Yet a close look at *The Journal's* full set of post-TANF articles in comparison to this publication's African American subset reveals that in the full set of *The Journal's* post-TANF articles, the illegitimacy theme and teen parenthood prevalence dropped drastically from 16.4% of articles pre-TANF to 3.0-3.5%. Within the African American subset, though, the illegitimacy theme's prevalence rose to 25% post-TANF from 20% earlier. Teen parenthood prevalence dropped slightly but remained high at 15%. Even in the publication that generally skewed toward a lower likelihood of pathologies compared to the other news sources, we still see the strength of associations between African American individuals and illegitimacy and teen motherhood.

Hispanic Subset. Like the African American subset, in the Hispanic subset most pathologies were likely to appear prior to TANF compared to the subset of recipients without racial/ethnic identifiers (see Figure 8). As in the African American subset, dependency was the most prevalent pathology. Illegitimacy was not nearly as common. Four pathologies were slightly more common in the Hispanic subset, but these (truancy, dropout, single parenthood, and welfare magnet) would not be as stigmatizing as others.

Figure 8

Comparing Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity



Most Hispanic references within this subset appeared in statistics comparing rates of welfare- or poverty-related characteristics among different racial/ethnic categories, as in this excerpt: “‘It’s cradle-to-grave protection from responsibility,’ he says as he noses a big Lincoln through the mean streets of Camden, the state’s poorest city, where 70 percent of the 87,000 residents, mostly black and Hispanic, receive some form of public assistance” (King, 1991, p. B1). Often, as seen above, references linked Black and Hispanic individuals in some fashion (e.g., “Black or Hispanic” or “Black and Hispanic”). While the African American subset was more likely to include pathologies,

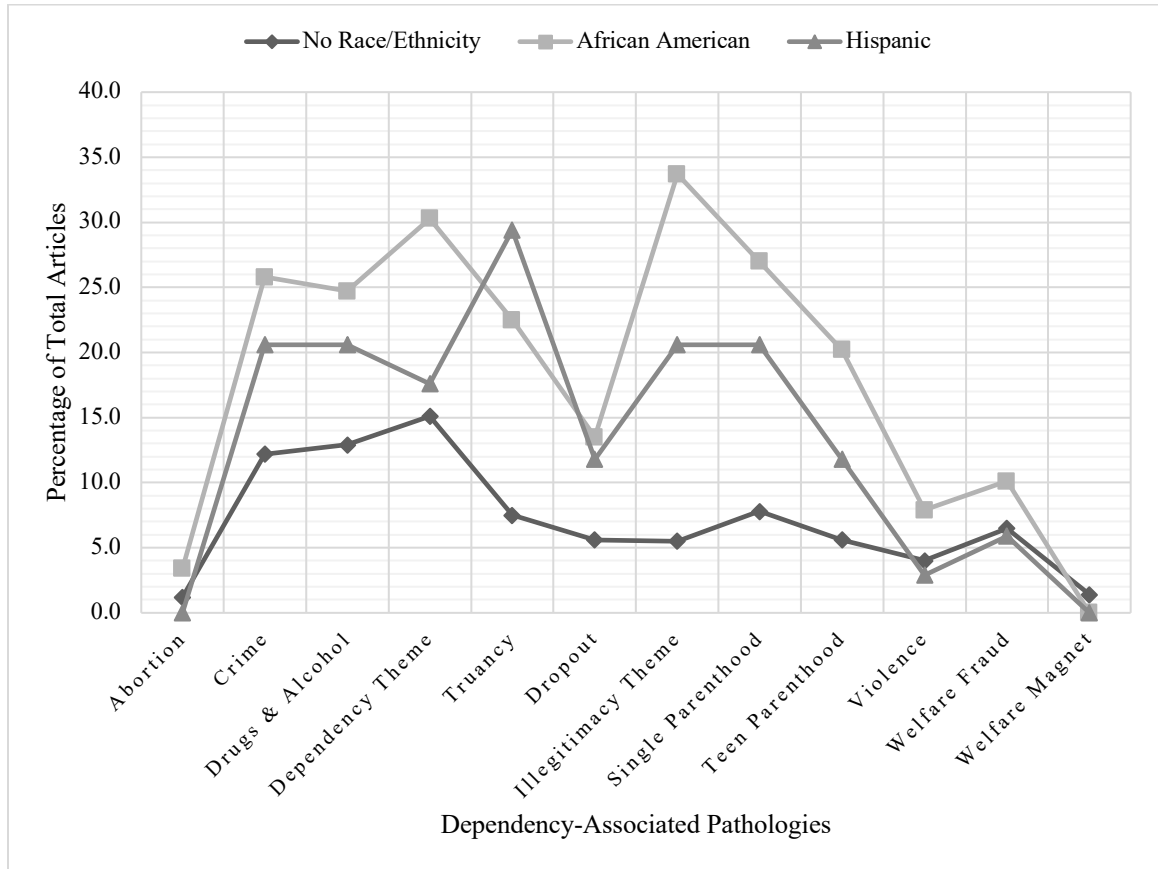
African American and Hispanic references often appeared together in the Hispanic subset. Despite this, the Hispanic subset was less likely to include pathologies.

Low article counts, particularly in *USA Today* and *The Journal*, make comparisons among news sources difficult. Unlike its effect in the African American subset, *The Times* does not play a clear role in driving up the prevalence of most pathologies within the Hispanic subset. While dependency's prevalence in *The Times* surpassed that of *USA Today*, illegitimacy, single parenthood, and teen parenthood were more likely to appear in *USA Today*. In *The Journal*, most of the pathologies were not nearly as prevalent as in the other publications, with one major exception. Crime was the most prominent pathology ($n = 3, 27.3\%$) in the Hispanic subset and far more likely to be found in that subset than either the African American subset or the full set of pre-TANF articles by *The Journal*. Other than crime's overrepresentation in this group, the major pathologies that make up the welfare dependent trope – illegitimacy and teen parenthood – were not nearly as common as they were in other publications' Hispanic subsets or in *The Journal*'s other racial subsets.

Post-enactment, the divergence between the Hispanic and African American subsets increased across multiple pathologies (see Figure 9). While crime, truancy, dropout, and welfare fraud increased in prevalence from pre-TANF proportions, the dependency theme dropped by more than 15%. Illegitimacy's prevalence dipped slightly and the sizeable gap between the Hispanic and African American subsets persisted. Although welfare recipient representation in the Hispanic subset was less pathologizing overall than in the African American subset, articles with Hispanic references were still more prone to include pathologies than those lacking racial/ethnic recipient references.

Figure 9

Comparing Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity



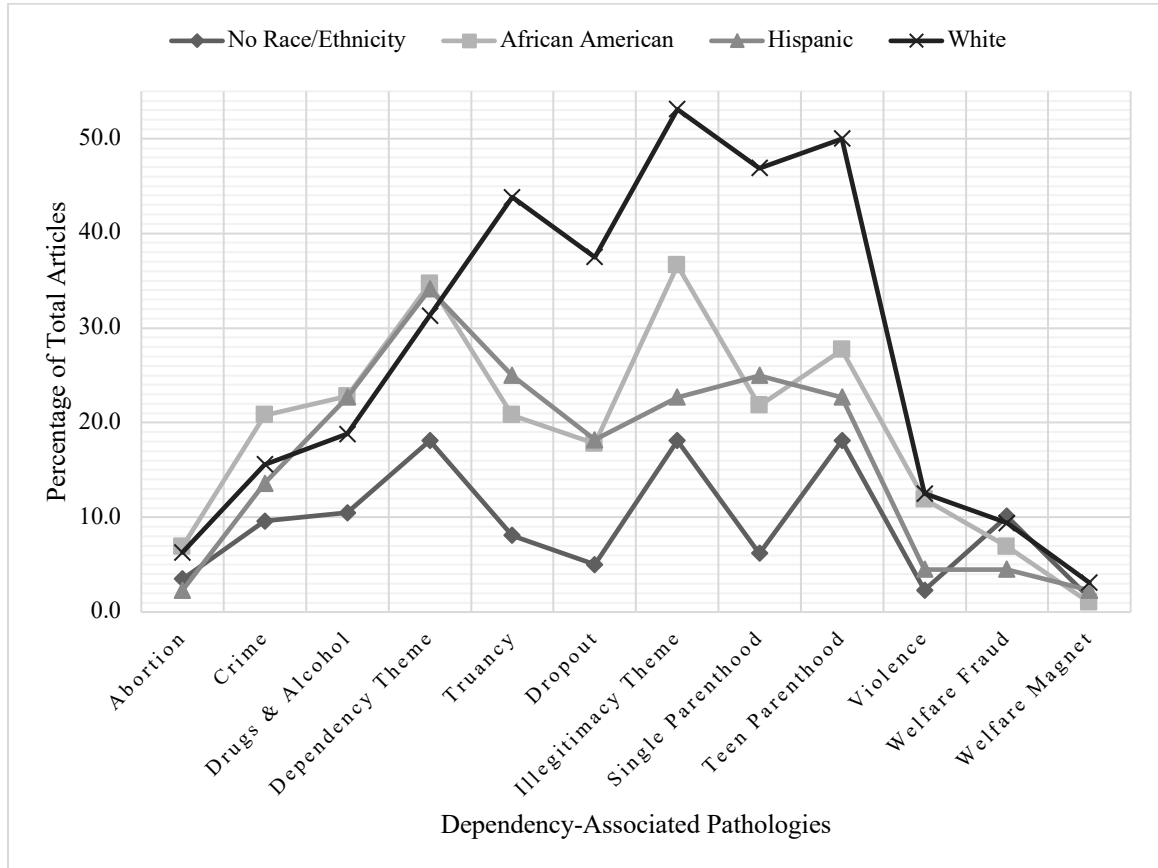
Following TANF’s enactment, *The Times’* coverage invoked pathology less often with the major exception of crime, references to which increased from 7.7% to 25% of the Hispanic subset articles. Aside from truancy, post-TANF, *The Times* was far less likely to refer to pathologies in the Hispanic subset of articles than those in the African American subset. *USA Today* and *The Journal* published so few post-TANF articles referring to Hispanic recipients ($n = 5$ for each) that any discussion of them invites misleading error.

White Subset. Pre-TANF trends in the white subset were similar to those in the African American and Hispanic subsets for a number of pathologies, but with large jumps in prevalence for five of the 12 (see Figure 10). Recall, though, that articles in the white subset are not confined to only white references. The majority of articles containing white recipients also referenced other groups, often African American and/or Hispanic. Indeed, only 14 of the 32 total pre-TANF articles in the white recipient subset did not contain other racial/ethnic references. As in the Hispanic subset, for comparative purposes many listed welfare statistics related to multiple races. Where this occurred, white recipients tended to fare better than other racial groups: “The delay in marriage is greatest among blacks, with 22 percent of black women aged 40 to 44 never having been married, compared with 7 percent of white women and 9 percent of Hispanic women” (Holmes, 1994, p. A1).

Every pathology other than welfare fraud was more likely to appear in the white subset of articles than in articles without recipient racial/ethnic identifiers. Illegitimacy, teen parenthood, and single parenthood were the most prominent pathologies in the white subset and far more likely to appear in this subset than any other. Illegitimacy appeared in more than half of the white subset articles, even in 10 of the 14 pieces that did not reference any recipient race/ethnicity except white. Dependency – another major theme of the welfare debate – was slightly more prevalent in the African American and Hispanic subsets but appeared in nearly a third of articles in the white subset.

Figure 10

Comparing Pre-TANF Pathology Prevalence – White, Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity



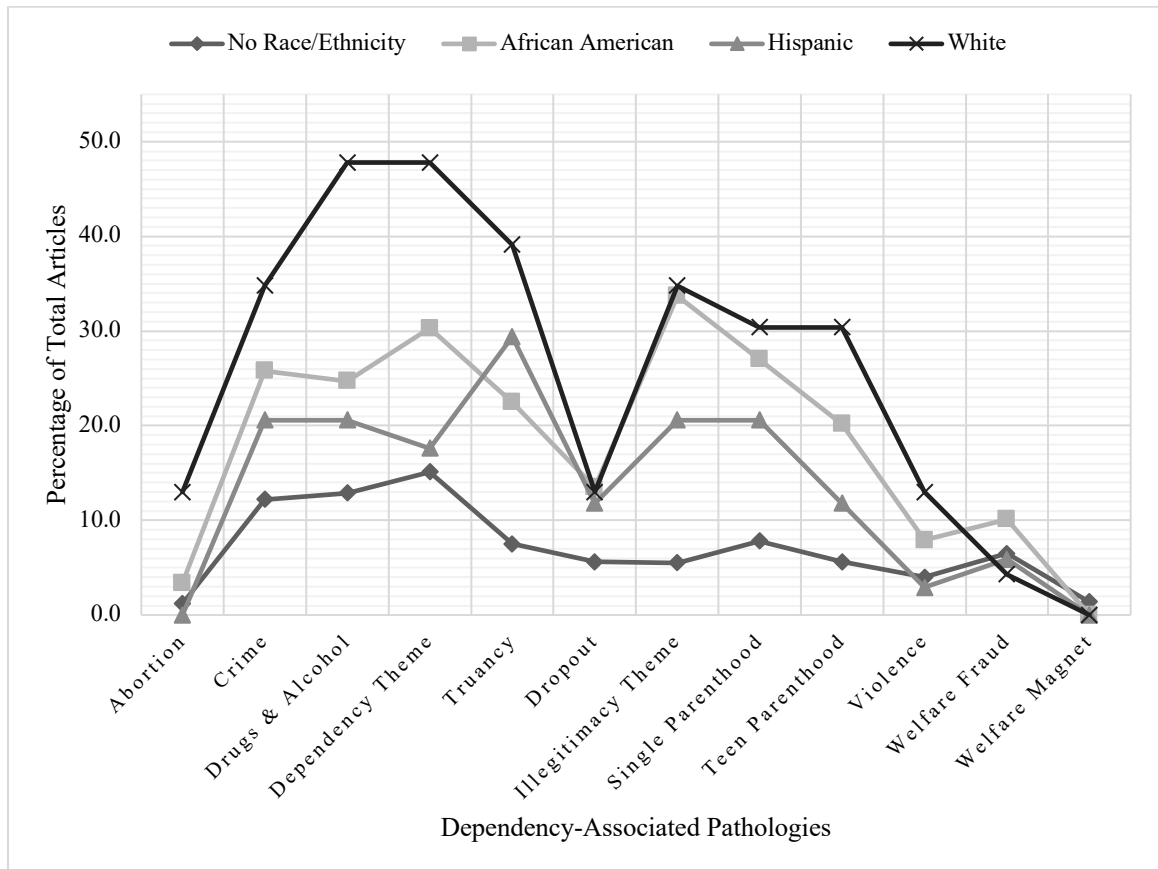
Comparing the prevalence of pathologies within each publication, *The Times* showed the most consistency of the three publications with all pathologies except abortion, welfare fraud, and welfare magnet appearing in at least 20% of the 20 total articles. Illegitimacy, single parenthood, teen parenthood, and dependency were *The Times*' most common themes. Low article counts in *USA Today* and *The Journal* make valid comparisons impossible, but a dichotomous pattern can be seen in both publications: they either did not include any reference to pathology or showed a high proportion of articles, usually the five most prevalent as shown in Figure 10: truancy,

dropout, illegitimacy, single parenthood, and teen parenthood. The low white subset article counts in *USA Today* and *The Journal* preclude further analysis, but the relative lack of white recipient coverage in these papers is notable, particularly preceding TANF when white individuals made up the majority of adult AFDC recipients.

Post-TANF articles in the white subset showed a major shift in focus, although, again, low article counts could account for the inconsistency in trends (see Figure 11). Pathologies in the white subset that had sharply diverged in prevalence from the African American and Hispanic subsets prior to TANF more closely hewed to them following welfare reform. The opposite was true for pathologies that showed similar prevalence across the three subsets pre-TANF enactment: crime, drugs/alcohol, and dependency had relatively similar proportions across all three subsets pre-TANF but spiked in the white subset post-enactment. The white subset was more likely to include pathologies than any other subset.

Figure 11

Comparing Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – White, Hispanic, African American, and No Race/Ethnicity



Even lower article counts in the post-TANF era limit the usefulness of comparisons among publications. *The Times* continued to show the most consistency in pathology coverage with all but one of the 12 appearing at least once. Dependency, drugs/alcohol, and truancy were the most popular pathology themes in *The Times*, which is unsurprising. After TANF's enactment, focus shifted to how to remove recipients from the rolls and what factors were preventing that. Substance misuse and lack of education can compromise self-support.

Dependency-Associated Pathologies During Recessions and Expansions

News coverage was concentrated within the 10-year period of expansion from April 1991 to February 2001. This holds true across racial/ethnic categories and reflects the intense debate leading up to TANF's enactment in August 1996 and the years immediately following the welfare system's overhaul. During this period, welfare's critics and advocates were focused on individual factors impacting welfare usage and dependency. Race and/or ethnicity were central to these discussions. However, the periods of recession during the study period were characterized by a dearth of coverage. Even the racial dimensions of welfare did not rise to newsworthiness when employment opportunities were adversely affected by widespread economic conditions and hardship.

While the low article counts appearing during recessions align with trends in the other subsets, the African American subset diverges sharply from the others in the common attribution of pathologies even when the economy is struggling. Such attributions about African American recipients are quite durable, largely unaffected by economic conditions. Even with only one article in this subset during the Great Recession, the pathologies present during the worst economic crisis of the period under study encompass some of the most stigmatizing: crime, dependency, illegitimacy, and welfare fraud. Again, though, while the continued presence of pathologies bears noting, the extremely low article count is a major qualifying factor.

As true for the nearly all other groups, most articles and attributions of pathology within the Hispanic subset appeared during the 10-year period of economic expansion, but with a sufficient spread across all but the last two economic periods to permit comparison of attributions during economic expansions and recessions. The pathologies

attributed during the first and second recessions cast less stigma than those applied during the preceding and following periods of expansion. Crime, illegitimacy, and welfare fraud appeared only when the economy was expanding. Pathologies carrying fewer negative connotations were more prevalent during recessions: dependency, truancy, dropouts, and single parenthood.

Attributions of pathology were quite common in the white subset during the first three periods of economic expansion, including periods when the article count was extremely low. As observed earlier, articles within the white subset were nearly nonexistent during recessions – none in the first recession, one in the second, and none in the Great Recession. This pattern occurs across other racial/ethnic subsets but is amplified in the white subset because this is the third largest of the subsets. Thus, economic contractions appeared to play a mitigating role in white references. Though published immediately following the Great Recession, the following excerpt illustrates the disconnect between white individuals and the welfare system, especially in adverse economic conditions:

At the Division of Family and Children Services, Keasha Taylor, 36 and black, helped explain the system recently to a white mother. Ms. Taylor, who was there because her family had been evicted, told the mother, who was in line for food stamps, that a child with acute asthma might be eligible for Social Security. “Right now, a lot of white people are in this situation,” Ms. Taylor said, recalling the conversation later. “We’re already used to poverty; they’re really not.” (Dewan, 2009, p. A14)

The above example does a number of things implicitly and explicitly. It contains multiple devices that signal deservingness on the part of the white family – a child with a serious medical condition, newness to public assistance, and the widespread, difficult economic conditions when this article was written. At the same time, we see indicators linking Black individuals to the race-based welfare dependency trope: a savviness about available benefits and a direct statement from a Black subject about Black individuals being accustomed and adapted to poverty. The fact that Ms. Taylor is seeking assistance due to homelessness softens her individual representation, but her observations and the (presumed) experiential basis for her helpfulness can be read as evidence of Black welfare dependence by those inclined to do so.

Focusing on the single article to appear during a recession, the pathology referenced during the second economic contraction diverges from patterns seen in other subsets. With teen parenthood the sole pathology, the article presented an overall sympathetic portrayal of welfare recipients with a focus on a California community's limited economic opportunities. Multiple human-interest stories appeared in the article, each one demonstrating strong work ethic in the face of adverse conditions. The following excerpt focuses on the recipient identified as a teen mother later in the article:

After decades of trying to cobble together a living in the Central Valley -- cleaning budget motel rooms, picking vegetables in the boiling hot summer, emptying bedpans for homebound elderly people and, lately, scraping by on a \$616-a-month welfare check -- Lorrie Gedert decided enough was enough. She was broke, and three months behind in the \$300 rent on her apartment, but leaving turned out to be a cakewalk. Tulare County, as Ms. Gedert, 36, learned from a

flier that arrived in the mail with her assistance check, offers welfare recipients an extraordinary option: It pays them to move away. Over the last three years, Tulare County has paid more than 750 welfare recipients like Ms. Gedert an average of \$1,600 a family to move almost anywhere in the country. For Tulare, one of the poorest counties in the country, giving welfare recipients a one-way ticket out is one solution to an unemployment rate that wavers between 15 and 20 percent.

(Nieves, 2001, p. A1)

Although this subject carried the stigma of having been a teen mother, every other piece of the story presented an image of a welfare recipient upholding their part of the social contract, suffering from circumstances beyond their control. The dearth of white recipient references during times of economic distress is notable.

Summary

The above analyses reveal a clear difference in coverage related to race/ethnicity. Trends in the white subset were especially interesting. Notably, the article count was incongruous with the AFDC caseload composition in the years leading to TANF's enactment. Although white adults made up the largest portion of AFDC recipients in 1994 (Falk, 2016), news coverage in the same year was more than twice as likely to focus on African American recipients. A prescient quote on the topic appeared in *USA Today* in 1992: “‘Obviously, everybody looks at the newspapers, and the articles on poor people automatically put black people in the frame,’ agrees Howard University political scientist Ron Walters. ‘White poverty is somehow overlooked’” (Udinsky, p. 3A).

Welfare recipient portrayals in this subset, though, appeared overwhelmingly negative, much like those in the African American subset. This is not as straightforward

as it seems, however. White recipients usually appeared alongside other racial/ethnic groups, particularly Hispanic and African American recipients. In those instances, white recipients were often described or listed alongside the other groups when detailing differences in characteristics associated with welfare dependency (e.g., out of wedlock pregnancy). When positioned against other groups, white recipients were generally the least likely to have the characteristic in question. In this way, whiteness was often linked to fewer instances of the less desirable traits cited. However, as discussed earlier, when no other racial/ethnic groups appeared in an article in the white subset, some pathologies were still prevalent (e.g., illegitimacy). In a sense, then, having non-white recipients present shielded white recipients from pathologizing traits that would otherwise apply when they appeared alone.

Coverage that included Hispanic references was more extensive than attention to other groups, though not as common as references to African Americans. In general, Hispanic welfare recipients were framed in less pathologizing ways, a divergence that increased following TANF's enactment as Hispanic references became increasingly associated with more sympathetic portrayals.

On article counts alone, African American individuals were overrepresented in news involving welfare recipients. However, this trend could be more closely tied to the *underrepresentation* of white recipients. The proportion of African American articles to Hispanic articles aligned with the same relative proportions of each group in the 1994 adult AFDC caseload (Falk, 2016). If media coverage proportions aligned with caseload proportions, we would expect to see roughly the same number of articles in both the African American and white subsets. Instead, the white subset contained nearly 3.5 times

fewer articles than the African American subset. A dearth of white recipient coverage may have been driving the evident overload of African American coverage.

As we would expect based on the history of welfare racism in the U.S., the pathologizing of welfare recipients in articles with African American references continued across time and regardless of economic conditions. Coverage was harsher in the pre-TANF era, which is not surprising considering the racist under- and overtones of much of the vitriolic welfare reform debate. However, the strong presence of illegitimacy and dependency themes continued following TANF's enactment. During periods of recession, when coverage of welfare recipients softened across other racial/ethnic categories, recipients in articles containing African American references continued to be associated with the more damning pathologies. No matter the conditions or time period, Blackness continued to be associated with the dependent single mother.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The most important purpose of the newspaper is to inform the public of current events, but what is the responsibility of news sources for the effects of their reporting on the public's values and beliefs? Determining such effects are beyond the scope of the present study, as is any assessment of the *intended* effects of coverage; but the study demonstrates that as the early 1990s saw a spike in political vitriol toward AFDC and the putative dependency of its recipients, media discourse followed suit. Following policy considerations apparent throughout welfare reform debate, dependency, illegitimacy, and teen parenthood featured prominently in pre-TANF news coverage. News articles that included cash welfare recipients were more likely to present a threatening frame and less likely to feature suffering compared to post-TANF coverage.

Reflecting the racialized stereotypes driving the push for welfare reform, references to African American recipients were overrepresented in news coverage, particularly of a negative bent. Articles that included African American markers were far more likely to include nearly every pathology, but most important, dependency and illegitimacy. Even as coverage following TANF's enactment began to present more sympathetic portrayals of recipients, attributions of dependency and illegitimacy to African Americans remained common. Not even adverse economic conditions could fully temper the controlling images of African American recipients as dependent single mothers.

Over time, though, interest in cash welfare recipients of any type waned. Coverage peaked in the years leading up to TANF and immediately following TANF. By the Great Recession of 2007-2009, a major test of the social safety net, TANF recipients had lost their newsworthiness. While food stamp and unemployment insurance use rose to meet increased need, TANF was generally unresponsive to the needs of the nonworking poor (Bitler & Hoynes, 2016). This unresponsiveness was reflected in news coverage, as articles referencing recipients declined even further during the Great Recession. Pre-application diversionary tactics, a decline in real benefits, strict sanctions, time limits, and stringent work requirements have left us with a cash welfare system in which the conditions of receipt do indeed appear to be worse than those of the most miserable work, a desideratum of relief since the British Poor Law of 1834. But this is conjecture. Just as most states did not track what happened to recipients who left the rolls for any reason, the media have generally left us to wonder about the fate of TANF recipients.

Limitations

As with any large qualitative study performed by a single researcher, limitations are not insignificant. I discussed a number of them in Chapter 3, including the exclusive use of print newspapers, an issue because the time period studied coincides with the rise of the internet and subsequent digitization in methods of information dissemination. At the same time, newspapers lost staff, readers, and ad revenue (Adgate, 2021), forcing difficult decisions about how to deploy more limited resources. Delving into the decision-making process behind which topics would be covered was beyond the scope of the present study. The lack of TANF recipient coverage in recent years may have more to do

with the decline of the print newspaper industry rather than the biases of editors pushed to make topic choices with scant resources. Additionally, the dearth of recipient coverage in *print* media may not signal the overall decline in their representation. Perhaps some of the coverage may have been taken up by televised or digital news coverage, or social media.

An additional limitation is the small number of newspapers studied. Three national newspapers may not adequately represent the diversity of news sources across the US, especially in different geographic regions of the country. The findings of my study may not be generalizable to media discourse in general. For example, certain racial/ethnic recipient categories were unlikely to appear in the dataset. West Coast publications such as the *Los Angeles Times* may have included far more coverage of Asian recipients than *The New York Times*. Native American recipients may have featured more prominently in southwestern and western United States newspapers. Even with their overrepresentation in the present dataset, African American recipients may have been portrayed differently by southern newspapers than by those based elsewhere.

For reasons of feasibility, these limitations were unavoidable. To ensure that the volume of articles was manageable, I limited the number of sources, choosing to use all relevant articles from fewer sources instead of sampling relevant articles from more. Even so, this created an enormous dataset of 3,390 articles. Although I included only three sources, those chosen provided a solid basis for the sample because of their consistently high circulation rates over the time frame, the agenda-setting influence of at least *The New York Times*, and the ideological differences between *The Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

There were other limitations as well. With qualitative content analysis, researchers must be conscious of their own implicit and explicit biases. My interpretation of a given passage may differ significantly from another person's. To limit potential biases, I engaged in careful reflexivity throughout the study. Additionally, I documented decisions related to coding and data organization as the study progressed. In defining codes, I took pains to ensure uniformity, logic, and a grounding in existing literature.

Ultimately, though, my experiences color my interpretation of the data. Born in the same year as the 1988 Family Support Act, I am the second child of parents who wed after discovering they would be teen parents to my older sister. They divorced shortly after my third birthday, and my childhood was one of food stamps, reduced lunch tickets at school, "latchkey child" status, and second-hand everything. Even under adverse circumstances, I was incredibly lucky. As my education in social policy and social welfare have informed me, the color of my skin, the ability at a very young age to move out of a failing center city school district, and the financial assistance of extended family members ensured that I would not be defined by my early poverty. Indeed, childhood memories of need did not reappear until I was perhaps halfway through the first round of coding, as I realized I was reading the media's representation of *me* and my family. By that point, though, I had carefully defined my coding strategy. Even as I experienced a number of personal epiphanies, I made sure that my own connection to the articles did not alter my approach to coding. If anything, the realization of my personal connection to the subjects of the articles reinvigorated my commitment to this study. As most others who have undertaken a massive research study can likely attest, we need to find motivation wherever it may lie when we hit the proverbial wall.

Contributions to Knowledge and Recommendations for Future Research

I view both the contributions and recommendations of this study as highly interconnected. The main contribution to knowledge I can impart is a large, carefully constructed dataset that is ready for further and deeper analyses. To my knowledge, no other *complete* dataset of welfare recipient media coverage exists for the entire span of time covered. The studies I did find generally used theoretical sampling methods and covered small spans of time within this study's timespan. I hope that the methodology detailed in Chapter 3 serves future researchers looking to undertake a similar longitudinal media content analysis.

While I hope that my initial findings presented here provide further clarity around the direction of welfare recipient representation in media coverage leading up to and since TANF, there is still much to be discovered. I grounded my approach in qualitative content analysis, with some descriptive statistics employed to compare the prevalence of various attributes and codes. The size of the dataset and the fact that it represents a full population of news coverage across three newspapers beg for future inferential statistical analyses.

For the sake of time and brevity, I chose to focus primarily on only three of nine axial codes. My interest in welfare recipient representation mainly concerned the pathologizing of recipients, but the systems and services around those on public assistance that are included in this database warrant closer scrutiny. Welfare departments are one such system that could be analyzed more fully, especially in the context of their shifting role from basic providers of assistance if eligibility criteria are met to work-ready, welfare-deterrent centers designed to discourage dependency and encourage work

of any sort. An almost myopic focus on work as the answer to all problems during the welfare reform debate period highlights the importance of work and workfare as additional areas for future research, in conjunction with anti-poverty and work supports. The fierce political debates that culminated in TANF and ongoing politicization of poverty call for additional analyses focused on the interplay of political parties and affiliations with media representation of welfare recipients.

I believe much more work needs to be done in the racial/ethnic subsets to trace divergence and convergence among the other axial codes. With the racial/ethnic subsets, I attended to attributions of dependency-associated pathologies. Further analyses could explore related areas such as anti-dependency initiatives and ideals, individual suffering/victimization, and poor supports. While most racial/ethnic subsets were relatively small, the African American, Hispanic, and white subsets are potentially large enough to engage in meaningful inferential analyses. Additionally, the analyses presented earlier represented all of a given racial/ethnic subset. Many of those articles containing a racial/ethnic reference included other categories as well. Future research could explore the differences in coverage when only one racial/ethnic category appeared in an article and when multiple categories were referenced. Additionally, where multiple races/ethnicities are identified, more careful analyses should tease out how representation of recipients differed *within* the article.

The attribute codes also leave room for additional analyses, including a deeper look at front-page articles, the epitome of what would be considered newsworthiness. The “both” categories for attributes such as threat versus suffering or deserving versus undeserving present an opportunity for future research. I conjecture that those articles

straddling attributes provide a more nuanced, complex view of recipients. Whether that holds true, and how it affects readers would require further analyses. As many of these ideas require depth over breadth of coverage, future studies can also employ different sampling methods within the present dataset.

Of all the areas for further investigation, though, the episodic frames are most interesting to me. The human-interest stories I read in episodic articles are the ones that will stay with me. I appreciate Iyengar's (1990) work on episodic and thematic frames. However, I am unconvinced that episodic frames as a whole lead media viewers to attribute poverty responsibility to individuals. I plan to pursue deeper content analysis of episodic stories and experimental work in how others respond to the stories that moved me.

Beyond the existing dataset, this work calls for updated media analyses involving different types of sources and additional topics related to poverty. Coverage of cash welfare recipients may have declined to near nonexistent levels, but has coverage of those at the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder declined as well? As our social welfare system shifted to non-cash benefits, perhaps the real story at this point lies in coverage of food stamp and Medicaid recipients. Future studies could explore additional sources of public assistance beyond cash. Additionally, future analyses should expand news sources to include more nontraditional types. The advent of social media in recent years means that traditional sources of information such as newspapers are not the only way citizens become informed. Although traditional media may still have agenda-setting effects on social media, the relationship is not as consistent as it once was (Meraz, 2009; Groshek & Groshek, 2013; Su & Borah, 2019). As we continue to find that messages and framing,

particularly in the media, have real-world political, social, societal, and economic consequences, media analyses must become more prolific. In social work, specifically, our traditional methods of understanding the person in environment need to include the messages individuals are receiving about themselves, their communities, and others.

Appendix A: Top Five U.S. Newspapers by Weekday Circulation

Time Period	Weekday Circulation				
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/1990 ^b	Wall Street Journal 1,857,131	USA Today 1,427,604	Los Angeles Times 1,196,323	New York Times 1,108,447	New York Daily News 1,097,693
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/1999 ^a	Wall Street Journal 1,792,452	USA Today 1,739,294	New York Times 1,134,974	Los Angeles Times 1,098,347	Washington Post 809,059
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/1999 ^a	Wall Street Journal 1,752,693	USA Today 1,671,539	New York Times 1,086,293	Los Angeles Times 1,078,186	Washington Post 763,305
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2000 ^a	Wall Street Journal 1,812,590	USA Today 1,757,699	Los Angeles Times 1,153,706	New York Times 1,149,576	Washington Post 812,559
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2000 ^a	Wall Street Journal 1,762,751	USA Today 1,692,666	New York Times 1,097,180	Los Angeles Times 1,033,399	Washington Post 762,009
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2001 ^a	Wall Street Journal 1,819,528	USA Today 1,769,650	New York Times 1,159,954	Los Angeles Times 1,058,494	Washington Post 802,594
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2001 ^a	USA Today 2,149,933	Wall Street Journal 1,780,605	New York Times 1,109,371	Los Angeles Times 944,303	Washington Post 759,864
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2002 ^a	USA Today 2,120,000	Wall Street Journal 1,821,000	New York Times 1,194,000	Los Angeles Times 986,000	Washington Post 812,000
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2002 ^a	USA Today 2,136,068	Wall Street Journal 1,800,607	New York Times 1,113,000	Los Angeles Times	Washington Post 746,724

For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2003 ^a	USA Today 2,162,454	Wall Street Journal 1,820,600	New York Times 1,130,740	965,633 Los Angeles Times 979,549	Washington Post 796,367
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2003 ^a	USA Today 2,154,539	Wall Street Journal 2,091,062	New York Times 1,118,565	Los Angeles Times 955,211	Washington Post 732,872
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2004 ^a	USA Today 2,192,098	Wall Street Journal 2,101,017	New York Times 1,133,763	Los Angeles Times 983,727	Washington Post 772,553
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2004 ^a	USA Today 2,220,863	Wall Street Journal 2,106,774	New York Times 1,121,057	Los Angeles Times 902,164	New York Daily News 715,052
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2005 ^a	USA Today 2,199,052	Wall Street Journal 2,070,498	New York Times 1,136,433	Los Angeles Times 907,997	Washington Post 751,871
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2006 ^a	USA Today 2,203,354	Wall Street Journal 2,049,786	New York Times 1,142,464	Los Angeles Times 851,832	Washington Post 724,242
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2006 ^a	USA Today 2,269,509	Wall Street Journal 2,043,235	New York Times 1,086,798	Los Angeles Times 775,766	New York Post 704,011
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2007 ^a	USA Today 2,293,137	Wall Street Journal 2,011,882	New York Times 1,037,828	Los Angeles Times 779,682	New York Daily News 681,415
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2008 ^a	USA Today 2,284,219	Wall Street Journal 2,069,463	New York Times 1,077,256	Los Angeles Times 773,884	New York Daily News 703,137
For 6 Mos. Ended 9/30/2008 ^b	USA Today 2,293,310	Wall Street Journal 2,011,999	New York Times 1,000,665	Los Angeles Times 739,147	New York Daily News 632,595
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2012 ^c	Wall Street Journal 2,118,315	USA Today 1,817,446	New York Times 1,586,757	Los Angeles Times 616,575	New York Daily News 579,636

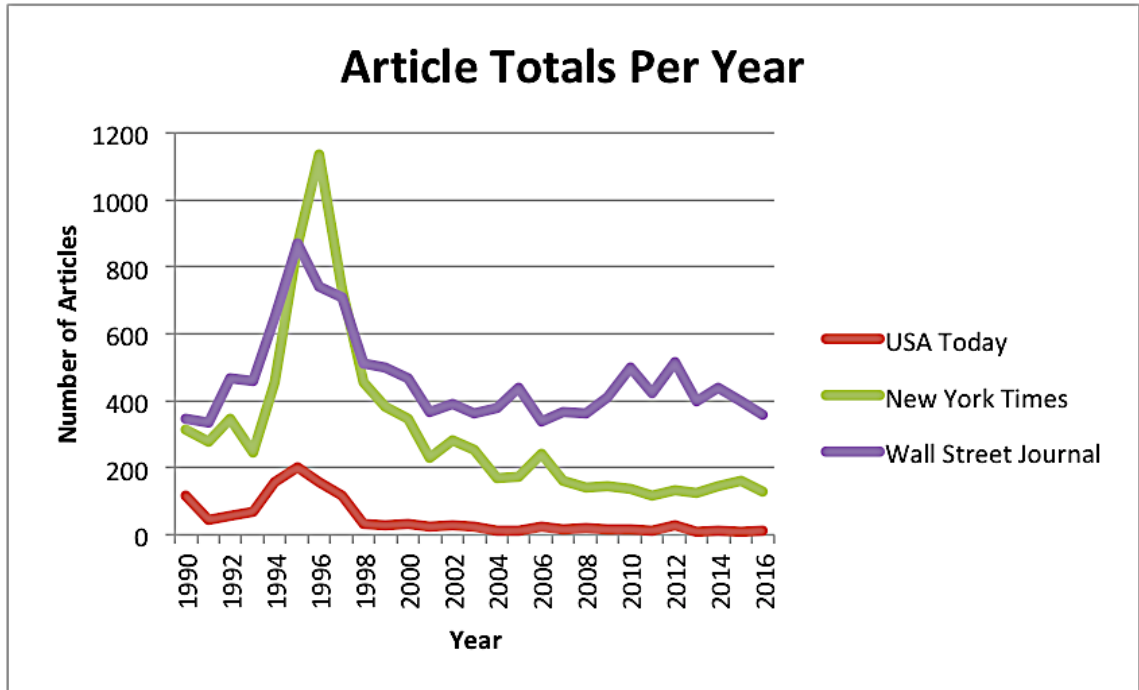
For 6 Mos. Ended 3/31/2013 ^c	Wall Street Journal 2,378,827	New York Times 1,865,318	USA Today 1,674,306	Los Angeles Times 653,868	New York Daily News 516,165
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^a Source: <http://adage.com/article/datacenter-media/newspaper-circulation-ranking-index/106788/>

^b Source: <http://adage.com/article/media/1990-s-top-papers/135094/>

^c Source: <http://auditedmedia.com/news/research-and-data/top-25-us-newspapers-for-march-2013.aspx>

Appendix B: Full Results for Article Totals Per Year



Year	<i>USA Today</i> ^a # articles (% change)	<i>New York Times</i> ^a # articles (% change)	<i>Wall Street Journal</i> ^b # articles (% change)
1990	116	315	348
1991	46 (-60.3%)	278 (-11.7%)	335 (-3.7%)
1992	58 (26.1%)	346 (24.5%)	467 (39.4%)
1993	70 (20.7%)	245 (-29.2%)	459 (-1.7%)
1994	157 (124.3%)	456 (86.1%)	648 (41.2%)
1995	203 (29.3%)	864 (89.5%)	869 (34.1%)
1996	158 (-22.2%)	1134 (31.3%)	741 (-14.7%)
1997	116 (-26.6%)	731 (-35.5%)	707 (-4.6%)
1998	33 (-71.6%)	456 (-37.6%)	513 (-27.4%)
1999	30 (-9.1%)	381 (-16.4%)	501 (-2.3%)
2000	31 (3.3%)	345 (-9.4%)	466 (-7.0%)
2001	23 (-25.8%)	228 (-33.9%)	365 (-21.7%)
2002	30 (30.4%)	281 (23.2%)	390 (6.8%)
2003	26 (-13.3%)	254 (-9.6%)	362 (-7.2%)
2004	14 (-46.2%)	169 (-33.5%)	379 (4.7%)

2005	13 (-7.1%)	172 (1.8%)	438 (15.6%)
2006	25 (92.3%)	241 (40.1%)	337 (-23.1%)
2007	15 (-40.0%)	160 (-33.6%)	367 (8.9%)
2008	19 (26.7%)	142 (-11.3%)	361 (-1.6%)
2009	15 (-21.1%)	146 (2.8%)	411 (13.9%)
2010	15 (0.0%)	136 (-6.8%)	499 (21.4%)
2011	13 (-13.3%)	117 (-14.0%)	423 (-15.2%)
2012	27 (107.7%)	134 (14.5%)	514 (21.5%)
2013	9 (-66.7%)	125 (-6.7%)	400 (-22.2%)
2014	12 (33.3%)	144 (15.2%)	441 (10.3%)
2015	10 (-16.7%)	162 (12.5%)	398 (-9.8%)
2016	11 (10.0%)	128 (-21.0%)	358 (-10.1%)
Total	1295	8290	12497

^a Lexis Nexis database used with Boolean search terms “HEADLINE(TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance") OR HLEAD(TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR "public assistance)”.

^b ProQuest database used with Boolean search terms “puball.Exact("Wall Street Journal") AND (TANF OR AFDC OR welfare OR “public assistance”)”.

Appendix C: Preliminary Codebook

Codes	Sub-Codes	Source
Case number	To be determined	Altheide & Schneider, 2013
Medium	1) <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> 2) <i>USA Today</i> 3) <i>The New York Times</i>	Altheide & Schneider, 2013
Date	To be determined	Altheide & Schneider, 2013
Length	Word count	Altheide & Schneider, 2013
Title	To be determined	Altheide & Schneider, 2013
Main topic	To be determined	Altheide & Schneider, 2013
Narrative type	1) traditional conservative narrative 2) structural/contextual counter-narrative 3) agency/resistance counter-narrative 4) voice and action counter-narrative	Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010
Episodic vs. thematic	1) episodic framing 2) thematic framing	Iyengar, 1990; Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001
Threat vs. suffering	1) threat 2) suffering	Entman, 1995
Tone toward welfare policy/reform	To be determined	Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001
Tone toward welfare recipients	To be determined	Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001
Inclusion of facts	To be determined	Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001
Sources of facts	1) academic (university, think tank, other) 2) organization (local, state, national) 3) political (individual, agency, other)	
Sources of opinions	1) academic (university, think tank, other)	

	2) organization (local, state, national) 3) political (individual, agency, other)	
Focus	1) national level 2) state/local level	Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001
Racial references	To be determined	Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Erler, 2012
Target groups	To be determined	Erler, 2012

Appendix D: Axial Codes

1. Dependency-Associated Pathologies
 - a. Abortion
 - b. Crime
 - c. Drugs & Alcohol
 - d. Dependency Theme
 - e. Truancy
 - f. Dropout
 - g. Illegitimacy Theme
 - h. Single Parenthood
 - i. Teen Parenthood
 - j. Violence
 - k. Welfare Fraud
 - l. Welfare Magnet
2. Pathology Buzzwords
 - a. Verbatim Illegitimacy
 - b. Lower Class
 - c. Self-Sufficiency
 - d. Underclass
 - e. Undeserving
 - f. Welfare Queen
 - g. Verbatim Dependency
 - h. Verbatim Welfare Dependent
3. Anti-Dependency Initiatives and Ideals
 - a. Abstinence
 - b. Family Cap
 - c. Marriage
 - d. Welfare Reform
 - e. Work
 - f. Workfare
4. Individual Suffering/Victimization
 - a. Deserving
 - b. Domestic Violence
 - c. Homelessness
 - d. Mental Health
 - e. Poverty
 - f. Sexual Abuse
5. Anti-Poverty and Work Supports

- a. Childcare Subsidies
 - b. Child Support
 - c. Education
 - d. GED
 - e. Head Start
 - f. EITC
 - g. Food Stamps
 - h. Medicaid
 - i. SSI
 - j. WIC
6. Poor Supports
- a. Charity
 - b. Legal Services
 - c. Public Assistance
 - d. Public Housing
 - e. Welfare Hotel
 - f. Welfare Office
7. Economic and Market-Related Conditions
- a. Economics
 - b. Layoffs
 - c. Recession
8. Political Parties & Affiliations
- a. Democrat
 - b. Republican
 - c. Liberal
 - d. Conservative
9. Race and Ethnicity⁵⁰
- a. Immigrants
 - b. Race
 - c. African American
 - d. Asian
 - e. Hispanic
 - f. Latinx
 - g. Native American
 - h. Puerto Rican
 - i. White
10. Recipient Race and Ethnicity⁵¹
- a. African American Recipient
 - b. Asian Recipient
 - c. Hispanic Recipient
 - d. Latinx Recipient

⁵⁰ These codes were applied to any reference to race or ethnicity within a passage discussing welfare recipients. For example, “White” was coded when a politician discussing welfare reform was identified as a white individual or when a welfare recipient was noted as a white individual.

⁵¹ This category of codes applied only to racial/ethnic references specific to welfare recipients.

- e. Native American Recipient
- f. Puerto Rican Recipient
- g. White Recipient

Appendix E: Coding Rules

The table below was exported from NVivo. Codes that arose during the first coding pass appear unitalicized. Codes that were determined during the second coding pass appear italicized.

Codes and Coding Rules

Category	Code	Coding Rule	Files	References
N/A – overarching code	welfare recipients	Defined as recipients of cash assistance through ADC, AFDC, TANF, or a state’s general assistance program.	3390	5383
Anti-Dependency Initiatives and Ideals	<i>abstinence</i>	Defined literally where the term “abstinence” was used.	18	33
	<i>family cap</i>	Defined as an informal reluctance to provide additional cash assistance (e.g., often discussed in debating issues of morality of welfare recipients) as well as formal policies enacted to maintain the level of cash assistance to an individual regardless of a new birth.	188	265
	<i>marriage</i>	Defined literally where the terms “marriage(s)” or “married” were used.	193	489
	welfare reform	Defined broadly as actions and ideas intended to change the status quo of the cash assistance system.	2369	3895
	work	Defined broadly as activity engaged in for monetary gain. I included workfare in this definition.	2424	4021
	workfare	Defined fairly broadly as any	1196	1826

		program requiring work or work-related activity (e.g., job searches, training, etc.) in order to receive cash assistance.		
Anti-Poverty and Work Supports	childcare subsidies	Defined as vouchers or other aid given to low-income individuals to be used towards childcare.	595	916
	child support	Defined as the formal government-involved child support system and as informal cash or non-cash provisions towards a child's care by the non-custodial parent.	237	323
	education	Defined fairly broadly – mention of classes or similar forms of education (e.g., parent education classes), formal K-12 and beyond schooling (including mention of GED), or where the term “education” itself appeared.	954	1660
	EITC	Defined literally where labeled as the Earned Income Tax Credit.	93	117
	food stamps	Defined literally as the federal program providing food assistance to low-income individuals.	651	996
	<i>GED</i>	Defined literally where the term GED or variations of the term were used.	90	125
	Head Start	Defined literally as the federal program termed “Head Start”.	38	48
	Medicaid	Defined literally as the federal/state program providing health coverage to low-income individuals.	474	659
	SSI	Defined literally as the federal Supplemental Security Income program, including SSI was not explicitly named but there was mention of a federal assistance program for low-income disabled individuals.	163	203
	WIC	Defined literally as the federal	17	26

		nutritional assistance program for pregnant/breastfeeding women, infants, and children under the age of six.		
Dependency-Associated Pathologies	<i>abortion</i>	Literally defined – I used the text search tool to find all instances where “abortion” or “abortions” appeared.	83	267
	<i>crime</i>	Defined as actions that entail breaking the law (e.g., crimes, felonies, etc.) or individuals labeled as those who would break the law (e.g., criminals, felons, etc.).	396	554
	D&A	Defined as alcohol use or misuse, prescription medicine misuse, and non-prescribed drug use or misuse (including the use of THC).	427	629
	dependency theme	Defined as an over-reliance on governmental aid where the term “dependency” or “dependent” is commonly used. Expanded definition to include mentions of self-sufficiency (i.e. the opposite of dependency) during the second coding pass.	602	820
	<i>dropout</i>	Defined literally as incomplete education, usually at the secondary level (grade 7-12) but also at the post-secondary level (e.g., dropped out after one semester).	201	312
	<i>illegitimacy</i>	Defined literally as a child born out of wedlock.	437	788
	<i>single parenthood</i>	Defined literally where the terms “single parent(s)”, “single mom(s)”, “single mother(s)”, or “single father(s)” were used.	276	407
	<i>teen parenthood</i>	Defined literally as an individual under the age of 20 producing a child.	426	638
	<i>truancy</i>	Defined as inconsistent attendance in formal schooling	293	449

		or as incomplete education (e.g., dropped out in the 10 th grade, mention of attaining a GED, etc.).		
	<i>violence</i>	Defined literally as instances where the term “violence” or “violent” was stated.	124	179
	welfare fraud	Defined as any dishonest action or omission related to the procurement of cash assistance benefits.	278	359
	<i>welfare magnet</i>	Defined both literally – whenever “welfare magnet” was stated – and where the idea of a welfare magnet was described (e.g., individuals choosing a geographic location based on the higher level of cash assistance benefits offered at that location).	50	69
Economic and Market-Related Conditions	economics	Defined broadly as encompassing macroeconomics (e.g., the state of the economy, changes or discussion of changes to the minimum wage, etc.) and microeconomics (e.g., business behavior and decisions regarding hiring and pay, individual actions regarding decisions and behavior around the accumulation of wealth, etc.). Note that the decisions and behavior of individuals or groups of individuals was labeled as “economics” when such decisions or behavior were described as economic-related.	1124	1690
	<i>layoffs</i>	Defined literally – where the term “layoffs”, “laid off”, or variations of such terms were specifically used.	103	182
	<i>recession</i>	Defined formally (e.g., Great Depression, recession, depressed economy, etc.) and in build up to a formal recession (e.g., slowing down of the	301	425

		economy).		
Individual Suffering/ Victimization	<i>deserving</i>	Defined literally where the term “deserving” was used.	11	13
	<i>domestic violence</i>	Defined as violent acts towards a partner or member of the household by an individual. In most instances, the term “domestic violence” was used to label the violent act.	82	128
	homeless	Defined as lacking a home or apartment of one’s own. Coded both when the terms “homelessness” or “shelter” were used as well as when individuals were evicted or were living with friends or relatives.	423	602
	<i>mental health</i>	Defined fairly broadly as formal diagnostic categories (e.g., depression, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, etc.) and less formal descriptions of negative feelings (e.g., feeling depressed, feeling anxious, having low self esteem, etc.).	201	301
	<i>poverty</i>	Defined literally where the term “poverty” was used.	630	1266
	<i>sexual abuse</i>	Defined literally as any form of unwanted sexual contact, including sexual harassment.	28	36
Pathology Buzzwords	<i>lower class</i>	Defined literally where the term “lower class” was used.	1	1
	<i>self-sufficiency</i>	Defined literally where the terms “self-sufficiency” or “self-sufficient” were used.	171	214
	<i>underclass</i>	Defined literally as instances where the term “underclass” was stated.	33	37
	<i>undeserving</i>	Defined literally where the terms “undeserving” or “less deserving” were used.	11	14
	<i>verbatim dependency</i>	Defined literally where the terms “dependency” or “dependent” were used.	240	293
	<i>verbatim illegitimacy</i>	Defined literally where the terms “illegitimacy” or	88	142

		“illegitimate” were used.		
	<i>verbatim welfare dependent</i>	Defined literally as instances where the term “welfare dependent” was stated.	15	18
	<i>welfare queen</i>	Defined literally where the term “welfare queen(s)” was used.	16	17
Political Parties and Affiliations	<i>conservative</i>	Defined literally where the term “conservative(s)” was used.	324	508
	<i>Democrat</i>	Defined literally where the term “Democrat(s)” was used.	808	1920
	<i>liberal</i>	Defined literally where the term “liberal(s)” was used.	283	401
	<i>political affiliation</i>	Defined as conservative, liberal, Democrat, Republican, or unspecified political affiliations.	1751	2847
	<i>Republican</i>	Defined literally where the term “Republican(s)” was used.	1011	2800
Poor Supports	charity	Defined both literally – where the term “charity” or “charities” is used – and as the idea of non-governmental aid freely given to those in need (e.g., soup kitchen or food pantry).	211	285
	legal services	Defined both literally as the formal federal Legal Aid program and as non-Legal Aid legal services provided to or on behalf of low-income individuals.	179	225
	public assistance	Defined literally where the term “public assistance” was used.	643	927
	public housing	Defined broadly as any form of subsidized housing.	253	358
	welfare hotel	Defined literally when the term “welfare hotel” or “motel” was used.	27	42
	welfare office	Defined literally in terms of the physical space where cash assistance benefits are obtained as well as the individuals who work at such locations and the administrators overseeing and making decisions that affect welfare offices.	719	1142
Race and	<i>African</i>	Defined literally – wherever	231	469

Ethnicity	<i>American</i>	“African American” or “Black” were identified.		
	<i>Asian</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Asian” was identified.	17	19
	<i>Hispanic</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Hispanic” was identified.	92	194
	immigrants	Defined literally as individuals not born in the U.S. Note – I included individuals from Puerto Rico as part of the U.S. although there is a tendency and misconception to view them as “less than” U.S. citizens.	542	746
	<i>Latinx</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Latino”, “Latina”, or “Latinx” was identified.	17	29
	<i>Native American</i>	Defined literally – wherever identification of Native American heritage or tribal system or tribal land occurred.	24	109
	<i>Puerto Rican</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Puerto Rican” was identified.	29	52
	race	Defined as wherever race was explicitly stated or racial matters were discussed.	357	557
	<i>white</i>	Defined literally – wherever “white” as a racial classification was identified.	128	239
Recipient Race and Ethnicity	<i>African American Recipients</i>	Defined literally – wherever “African American” or “Black” were identified in connection to welfare recipient identity.	190	252
	<i>Asian Recipients</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Asian” was identified in connection to welfare recipient identity.	16	16
	<i>Hispanic Recipients</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Hispanic” was identified in connection to welfare recipient identity.	78	105
	<i>Latinx Recipients</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Latino”, “Latina”, or “Latinx” was identified in connection to welfare recipient identity.	15	21
	<i>Native</i>	Defined literally – wherever	19	25

	<i>American Recipients</i>	identification of Native American heritage or tribal system or tribal land occurred in connection to welfare recipient identity.		
	<i>Puerto Rican Recipients</i>	Defined literally – wherever “Puerto Rican” was identified in connection to welfare recipient identity.	22	30
	<i>White Recipients</i>	Defined literally – wherever “white” as a racial classification was identified in connection to welfare recipient identity.	55	78

^aGans (1995) describes the threshold of 18 or 19 as “young adulthood in the chronological world of the poor” (p. 3). I agree with his rationale and concerns around how grouping 19 year old parents with 15 year old parents under the label of “teen parents” feeds into stereotypes by inflating teen parenthood statistics. However, the generally accepted definition of a teenager remains an individual aged 13-19. To maintain consistency in coding, I coded all instances where the term “teen parent” was used as well as cases where the specified age of a parent and their child meant the parent was 19 years old or younger at the birth of their child.

Appendix F: Additional Recipient Race/Ethnicity Subset Findings

Comparing Article Attributes

Pre- and Post-TANF

Articles that included references to Native American recipients were generally most sympathetic. Not a single article – either pre- or post-TANF – across all three news sources was threat-only. Suffering-only articles in aggregate were more prevalent post-TANF (77.8% of total articles in the post-TANF subset), but they also were common before enactment (60% of total articles in the pre-TANF subset). Only a single article – published in *USA Today* post-TANF – was undeserving-only, and pre-TANF articles in aggregate were more likely to contain deserving-only markers.

The Puerto Rican recipient subset⁵² was larger following TANF’s enactment, but article counts were extremely low in the dichotomous category labels of threat- or suffering-only and undeserving- or deserving-only. The concentration of articles within the “both” category for threat vs. suffering and undeserving vs. deserving might reflect more nuanced representation of Puerto Rican recipients, but the low article counts preclude any confident claims.

⁵² Hispanic, Puerto Rican, and Latinx references were coded separately in order to trace any differences in representation depending on the specific marker used. Codes for these three subsets were defined literally – “Hispanic” was coded when the word “Hispanic” appeared in the article text, and so on. See Appendix D for the full set of concept codes and descriptions.

Asian references appeared more often in the pre-TANF era, with only four of 16 total articles published following enactment. Across the full span of time studied, coverage of Asian recipients was generally sympathetic in terms of threat versus suffering. Only one article published prior to TANF was threat-only while three were suffering-only. One of four articles published post-TANF was threat-only, while two were suffering-only. Interestingly, though, the portrayals flipped to less sympathetic or at least more ambiguous in the deservingness attribute. Not a single article across time or sources was noted as deserving-only. Pre-TANF, articles were concentrated in the “both” deserving and undeserving category, while following TANF, the four articles were split evenly between undeserving-only and “both” deserving and undeserving.

Latinx references were nearly nonexistent in the news prior to TANF ($n = 1$) but grew to a modest 14 articles total post-TANF. The single pre-TANF article was categorized as threat- and undeserving-only. Post-TANF, coverage was more robust and nuanced. None of the articles were noted as threat-only but three of the 14 were identified as undeserving-only. The majority straddled attributes, containing both threat and suffering as well as both deserving and undeserving markers.

Comparing Themes Related to Unworthiness Within Racial/Ethnic Subsets

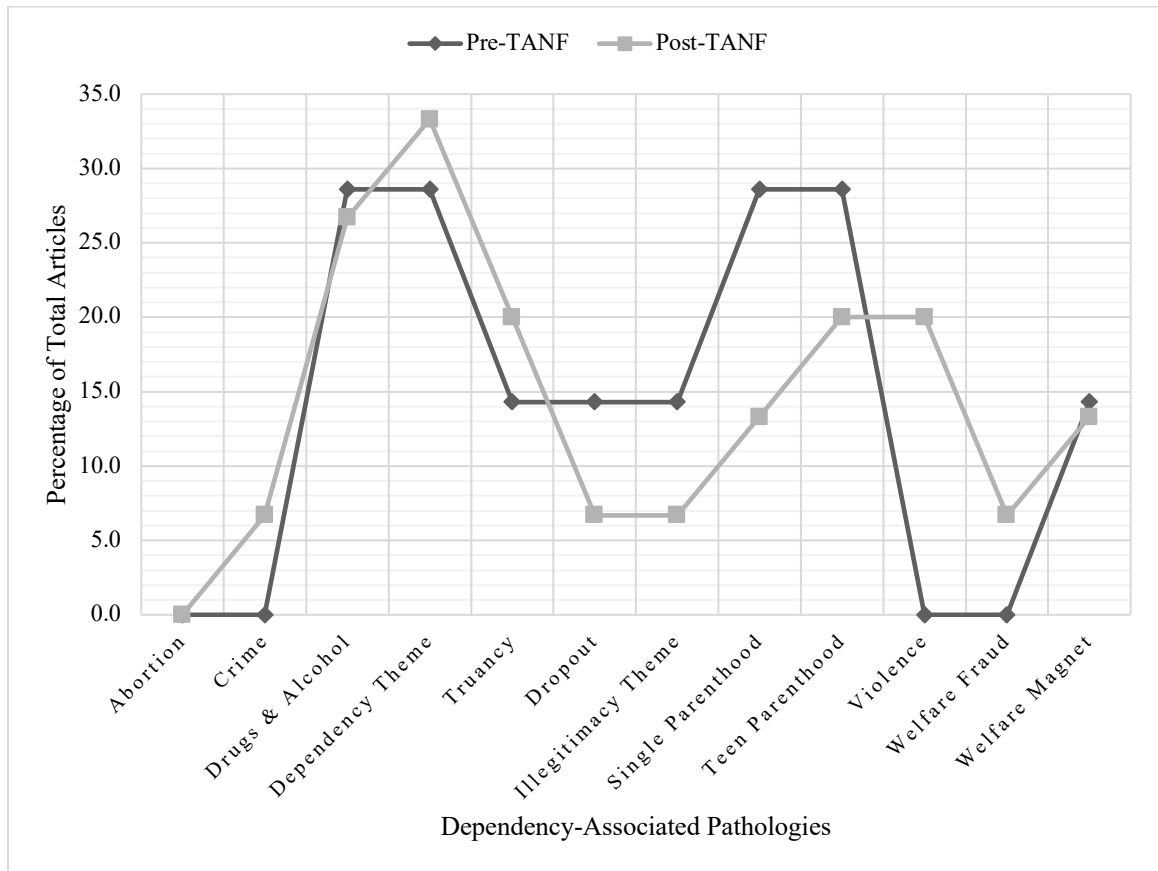
Dependency-Associated Pathologies – Pre- and Post-TANF

Puerto Rican Subset. The Puerto Rican subset is the first of the smaller subsets to follow. A lower total article count ($n = 22$) can appear to inflate the prevalence of pathologies, but the higher prevalence is still an important consideration (see Figure 12). Fewer total articles mean that news consumers are less likely to come into contact with references to Puerto Rican recipients in relation to cash welfare. If certain pathologies are

amplified in the scant news coverage, the controlling image can lead to a one-sided or skewed portrayal of the group.

Figure 12

Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Puerto Rican Subset



Prior to TANF’s enactment, the most prominent themes in the Puerto Rican subset included ones we would expect in the welfare reform debate era – dependency, single parenthood, and teen parenthood ($n = 2$, 28.6%). The articles that included pathologies in this period linked Puerto Rican recipients to either calls for welfare reform

or actual reform efforts aimed at decreasing welfare dependency. The following excerpt demonstrates this connection:

In the past, the mothers who are now in Moms on the Move saw the Department of Social Services primarily as unhelpful and unfriendly. But now they are effusive with praise for the county, and seem to share its goals. ‘‘I’m here because my mother was on welfare, and I didn’t want the cycle to continue,’’ said Joyce Torres of Yonkers, a 25-year-old mother of two who at 14 was married in Puerto Rico. She is studying to be a nurse. (Foderaro, 1990, p. A38).

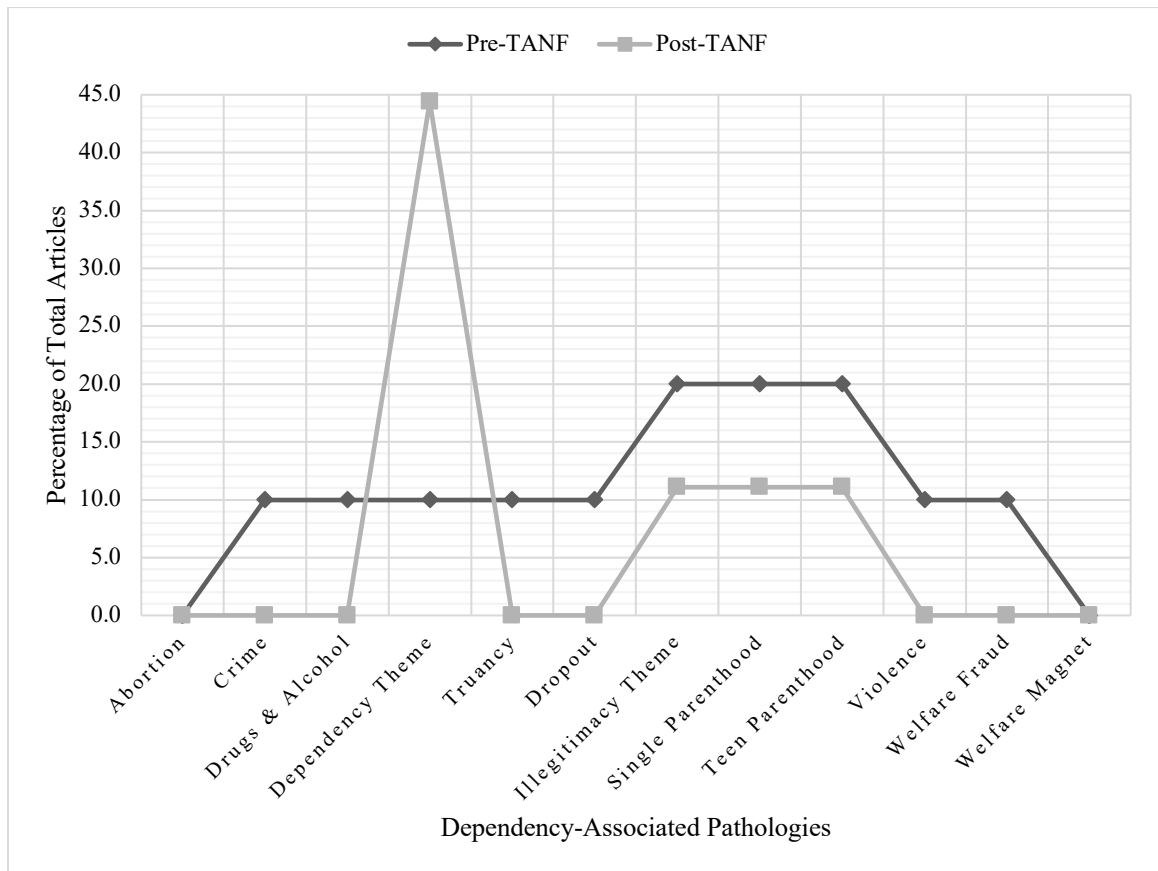
The post-TANF era saw interesting shifts in focus. Dependency became the most prevalent theme post-TANF (28.6% pre-TANF to 33.3% post-TANF), while drugs/alcohol remained a prominent theme (28.6% pre-TANF to 26.7% post-TANF). Violence became far more prevalent post-TANF (0.0% pre-TANF to 20% post-TANF). Those articles containing pathologies generally painted a picture of welfare dependency linked to suffering and despair, particularly when the theme of workfare arose. Pathologies, when not directly tied to Puerto Rican recipients, existed as part of the environment or context in which the human-interest stories of Puerto Rican subjects were shared. These types of stories typify the ‘‘both’’ category for suffering versus threat and deserving versus undeserving. There is a complexity to the dependency that prevents us from fully blaming the individual for their condition but also does not exonerate them.

Native American Subset. The Native American subset is also characterized by a relatively low total article count ($n = 19$). Unlike the other racial/ethnic subsets, though, the Native American subset is defined by a generally low prevalence of pathologies (see Figure 13). Most of the articles focused on limited economic opportunities and/or efforts

to increase economic development on tribal lands. Rather than placing blame for Native American recipients' welfare dependency on individual flaws, the fault was directed at the adverse economic conditions in which they tried to survive.

Figure 13

Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Native American Subset



Comparing pre- to post-TANF representation, the pre-TANF period had a higher likelihood of most pathologies appearing in the Native American subset. Illegitimacy, single parenthood, and teen parenthood were most likely to appear ($n = 2$, 20%). These pathologies align closely with the welfare reform debate and its intense focus on

individual behaviors contributing to welfare dependency. Even when pathologies appeared, though, they were not always directly linked to Native American recipients. For example, of the two articles that included teen parenthood references, only one specifically identified a Native American recipient as a teen parent:

Melissa Venegas is a Native American who, as a single, 18-year-old mother on welfare in Arizona in 1980, enrolled at the Los Angeles center. After two years there, she got a job in a prefabricated-house factory. Eight months later, a Corps instructor helped her find maintenance work at the Angeles Plaza apartments in Los Angeles. Today, she is maintenance and housekeeping director for buildings and grounds at the complex, with a staff of 21. "The Job Corps got me where I am today," she says. (Karr, 1992, p. A14).

Even in this example, the overall image is that of a welfare recipient meeting society's expectations by moving out of welfare through work. The other article listed statistics describing actual characteristics of welfare recipients in an attempt to bridge the gap between perceived traits and reality (Usdansky, 1994, p. 9A). Native American individuals were listed among the percentages of welfare recipients made up by specific racial/ethnic groups. A statistic on the percentage of recipients made up of teenage mothers was provided further down in the list. Again, Native American recipients appeared in an article with single mothers, though they were not directly linked to single motherhood.

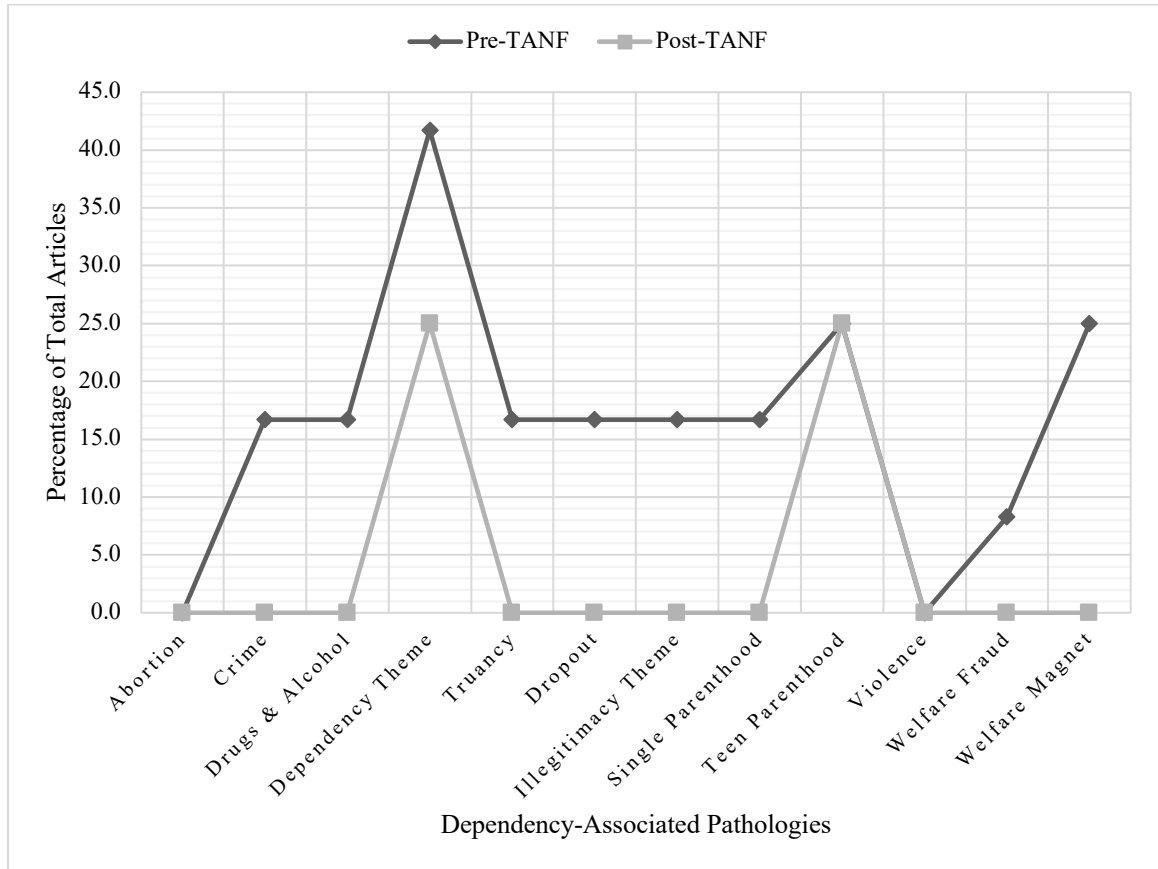
Following TANF's enactment, the prevalence of pathologies dropped substantially with one exception. The likelihood of the dependency theme appearing rose dramatically (10% pre-TANF to 44.4% post-TANF). Overall, these post-TANF findings

are not surprising. Native American individuals have typically been characterized as a highly dependent but deserving group of welfare recipients. Unlike most other racial/ethnic groups, the structural reasons for overwhelmingly high poverty levels among Native American individuals receive broad public and political acknowledgment. The pathologies related to individual social and moral flaws were not as significant for this group compared to other racial/ethnic groups, but welfare dependency in general became the main point of focus.

Asian Subset. Another racial/ethnic category with few total articles in the subset ($n = 16$), articles containing references to Asian recipients were both more likely to appear and more likely to contain dependency-associated pathologies in the pre-TANF era (see Figure 14). The dominant themes aligned with welfare reform debate rhetoric – the dependency theme ($n = 5$, 41.7%), teen parenthood, and welfare magnet ($n = 3$, 25.0%). Most other pathologies were coded in at least one and at most two articles.

Figure 14

Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Asian Subset



Even with the presence of pathologies, though, portrayals were generally sympathetic. A human-interest story provides a complex portrait of welfare dependency among Asian refugees:

While California's typical welfare family collects benefits for 39 months, Southeast Asian refugees remain on the rolls for an average of 53 months, state officials say. This protracted welfare dependency is often a result of the trauma the refugees suffered in their homelands, according to people providing social services in Stockton, which is thought to have the highest concentration of

Southeast Asian refugees in the nation. Mr. Vann's ailing wife, for instance, rarely leaves the house and "thinks too much," he said, about the death of so many relatives, including a son, at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. But Mr. Vann offers another argument for the extended dependency of his family and others: the prohibitive cost of health insurance once they join the ranks of the working poor. (Gross, 1991, p. A1)

The impact of trauma garners sympathy and generates support for the idea of Asian recipients as deserving. The factor identified as contributing to dependency by the article's subject – the cost of health insurance for the working poor – adds to the image of Asian welfare receipt as an unfortunate but necessary condition. The latter premise could also be used as a political argument for structural solutions to Asian poverty.

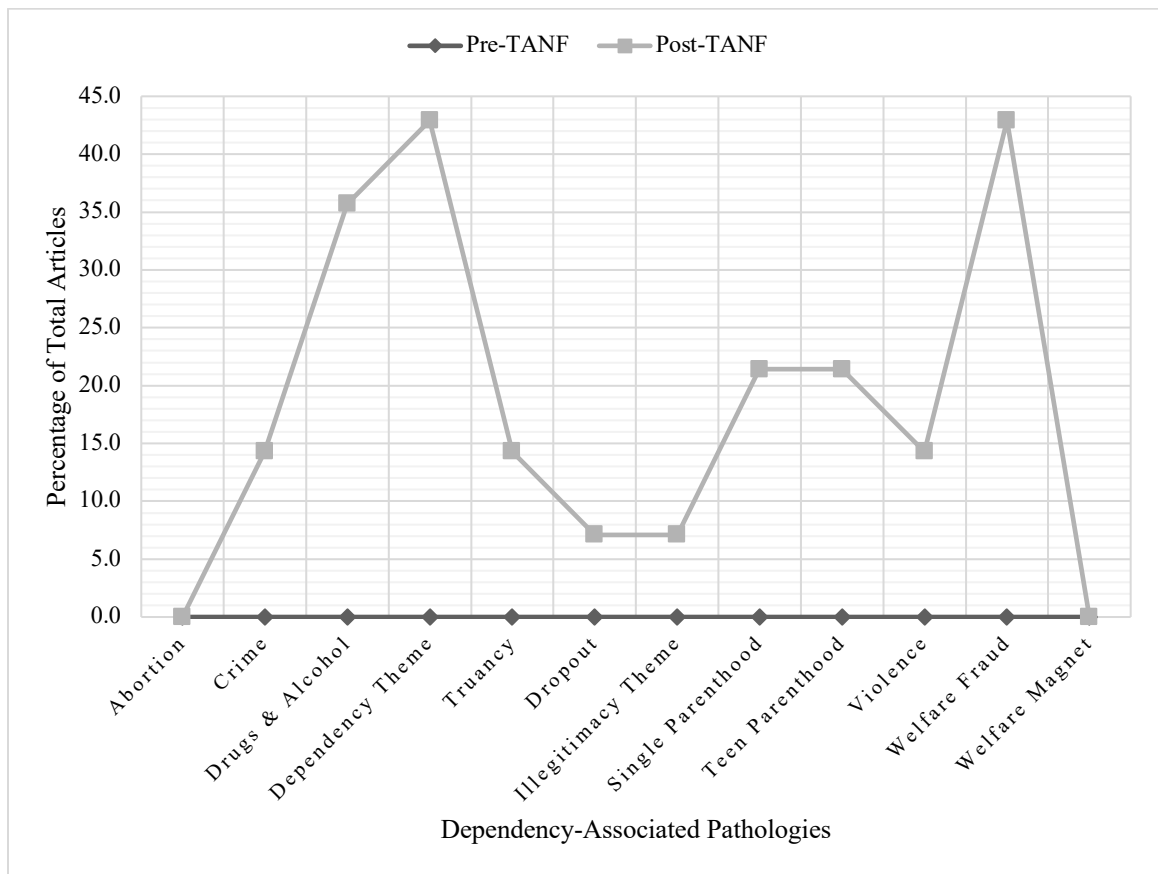
After TANF's enactment, the dependency theme and teen parenthood ($n = 1$, 25%) were the only pathologies to appear. The lack of most pathologies in news coverage that included Asian references shows a further softening of recipient portrayals related to this racial category following TANF. The following example demonstrates the generally positive view of Asian individuals in the post-TANF period: "Many of those on welfare are recent Hispanic and Asian immigrants who find work fast, even with language barriers" (Wolf, 1997, p. 2A). The excerpt directly links Asian welfare recipients to a motivation to work, aligning with welfare reform's goals and objectives.

Latinx Subset. The Latinx subset ($n = 15$) contained nearly the same total number of articles as the Asian subset ($n = 16$) but with a complete reversal in pre- and post-TANF trends (see Figure 15). Only a single article in the Latinx subset was published prior to TANF's enactment, and the article did not contain any pathologies.

After TANF, though, most of the pathologies appeared with a handful that were far more prevalent than in the Asian subset prior to TANF. Dependency, drugs/alcohol, single parenthood, and teen parenthood were dominant themes (42.9%, 35.7%, 21.4%, and 21.4%, respectively).

Figure 15

Comparing Pre- and Post-TANF Pathology Prevalence – Latinx Subset



A defining pathology is one that was nowhere near as prevalent in any other racial/ethnic subset – welfare fraud. No other subset had even 20% of articles coded with welfare fraud, while this topic appeared in 42.9% of the Latinx subset’s post-TANF

articles ($n = 6$). While not every instance directly linked Latinx individuals to welfare fraud, the proximity of coverage that identified Latinx individuals as welfare recipients while also raising the issue of welfare fraud potentially feeds into a guilt by association phenomenon. The majority of the references did, in fact, name Latinx individuals as perpetrators of fraud. An article published as part of a series on the Southside, Brooklyn neighborhood is actually titled “Using and abusing the system; In Southside, tales of welfare fraud are nothing new” (Sexton, 1997, p. B1). For 1,833 words, the different ways welfare fraud and dependency run rampant in the heavily Latinx neighborhood are described in vivid detail:

Around Southside, tales of fraud are offered with a clear-eyed nonchalance, from thievery to the stitching together of enough unreported income to survive. Store owners on Havemeyer Street say they know bodega owners with property in the Dominican Republic whose wives receive welfare checks. Tenth graders at a 90th Precinct youth meeting say women in their buildings collect government checks while working on the side and living illegally with boyfriends or husbands. Teen-age mothers at UCAN, a local high school, say other young mothers tell children to answer exam questions incorrectly to be classified as disabled and receive government assistance. (Sexton, 1997, p. B1)

With welfare fraud as an even greater sin than welfare dependency, the controlling image of Latinx recipients as either directly engaged in or connected in some fashion to welfare fraud epitomizes undeservingness. The potential for this theme to damage public support for Latinx welfare recipients is amplified by the low article count. A lower likelihood of

encountering sympathetic portrayals could skew the public's perception of Latinx individuals as undeserving of economic assistance.

Summary

Native American and Asian references were linked to generally sympathetic accounts of welfare recipients, though less so for Asian recipients than those of Native American descent. While dependency was a prominent theme for both, the context of articles and reasons for dependency were more likely to frame the recipients as deserving of assistance. Both groups were not covered extensively in the news within the sources and time period studied, though. Asian coverage, in particular, dropped sharply following TANF's enactment. This trend could be detrimental to ensuring the needs of impoverished Asian families are considered in public and political discourse about poverty solutions.⁵³

Puerto Rican and Latinx references were rarely found in news coverage of welfare recipients prior to TANF's enactment. Even after TANF came into being, article counts involving these two categories were fairly low in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups. The more stigmatizing dependency-related pathologies were far more common in both of these subsets, with welfare fraud being particularly linked to the Latinx group. News consumers would have fewer opportunities to read about each group in reference to welfare recipients, but those opportunities did not appear to paint either group in a particularly sympathetic light.

⁵³ As noted in Chapter 6, the limited coverage of Asian welfare recipients – among the other groups included in this appendix – is likely due to the newspapers included in the study.

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