

## Regulating marginality: how the media characterises a maligned housing option

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### ABSTRACT

Communities often stigmatise forms of housing targeting low-income tenants. This paper examines how media sources characterise one such form: rooming houses that provide multiple, low-cost, single-room accommodations in structures with shared bathrooms and/or kitchens. By analysing newspaper and online media coverage in Halifax, Canada, we illustrate the way the media describe the rooming house as a risky structure and its occupants as dangerous and marginalised persons requiring surveillance and regulation. Media coverage can play an important role in creating the social context within which local government fashions planning and housing policy interventions to control the size, location, and operation of unpopular housing options. In cities where market pressures drive gentrification, negative media coverage can contribute to the on-going loss of such affordable housing opportunities.

**KEYWORDS** Rooming house; marginality; regulation; media; planning

In growing cities, housing near the centre has become increasingly expensive, often displacing lower income households and individuals, and putting pressure on public housing stock in convenient locations (Abu-Lughod, 1994; Atkinson, 2004; Goetz, 2013). Neighbourhood change linked to such growth contributes to increasing levels of social and spatial polarisation (Newman & Ashton, 2004; Wei & Knox, 2014). It also leads to what Wacquant (2016, p. 1077) has called ‘advanced marginality’, wherein severely disadvantaged persons are relegated to increasingly marginal areas in the city. Although the loss of some affordable housing forms, such as public housing, has been well documented (Goetz, 2013), and scholars have written about evidence of the relocation of poverty to the suburban fringe (Kneebone & Berube, 2013), some equally marginalised but less-common forms of affordable housing targeting low-income single persons have received little scholarly attention. Through a study of news coverage in one community – Halifax, Nova Scotia,

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caveats to those who hope that regulation can resolve lingering challenges, such as ensuring suitable housing for the poorest among us.

## Notes

1. Depending on time and place, the rooming house may be known as a lodging house, boarding house, residential hotel, house in multiple occupation, or single-room occupancy.
2. The list of articles analysed is available in Derksen (2016). Duplicate textual content appeared under other titles in various editions of a media source in 11 instances.
3. Media stories identified as evidence sources are not included in the reference list, but the full titles are available in Derksen (2016).

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