HOMELESS RHETORIC: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF THE STREET
NEWSPAPER, “THE HOMELESS GRAPEVINE”

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HOMELESS RHETORIC: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF THE STREET NEWSPAPER, "THE HOMELESS GRAPEVINE"

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Street newspapers in whatever form they take, are tangible testaments to the depth and breadth of eyewitness accounts of a time and place in our history when issues of homelessness and poverty were being framed by participants not just politicians. It is important to be reminded of these human beings who are so often marginalized. These publications bear witness to the variety of sentiments—from pathos to bathos to humor—and individual stories of those struggling to be heard. (Green, 1999, para.18)

Sommer (2000) notes that, “In the 1980s, homelessness attracted a great deal of attention from the media, advocates, politicians, and the public. Every level of government responded to the visibly growing problem. Virtually every sector of society intervened” (p. 4). We live in a much different world today, where our streets are filled with those who cannot feed themselves or their families, and the helpful attention given to the homeless is not as bountiful as it once was. Those who live in boxes underneath a bridge, who drink and use drugs as a way to escape their reality, are a common sight in this society. It is easy to ignore them, to sit in our car at the red light and pretend they are just out of our view. It is simple to blame them for the situation they are in and to justify not giving them any help. The homeless population is on the rise with the economy sinking and the unemployment rate sky rocketing.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s annual survey last year found homelessness remained steady at about 1.6 million people, but the percentage of rural or suburban homelessness rose from 23 percent to 32 percent.
The 2009 HUD report, which reflected the 12 months ending Sept. 30, 2008, also found the number of sheltered homeless families grew from about 473,000 to 517,000. (Associated Press, 2010, para. 6)

This rise in homelessness has sparked interest in finding ways to assist those on the brink of becoming homeless and those who are already homeless.

Even as the homeless population has grown since the 2008 economic downturn, the voices of this group remain by and large muted. The issues that they deal with on a daily basis are largely ignored within most communities. The media play a prominent role in shaping popular conceptions of the poor as “bums, lazy” etc. According to Torck, “a growth of violence towards homeless persons can be seen, encouraged by a dominant official position that represents homeless persons as bums, drunks or drug addicts too lazy to work and not worthy of public respect” (2001, p. 373).

This study looks at writings by the homeless in street newspapers because it is important to see how the homeless view themselves and how they want others to view them. While the media send messages about what it means to be homeless, less attention has been paid to how the homeless identify themselves and their own needs. The primary street newspaper examined in this study, The Homeless Grapevine (based in Cleveland Ohio), not only advocates for the opinions of the homeless, but seeks to educate people about homelessness from the point of view of those who experience it daily or have experienced it in the past. It is quite obvious that there is a separation between the homeless and the broader community. Oftentimes this solidified and reiterated in the media, which is where the majority of the broader community goes for their information.
Gerald Daly discusses the idea of dissociation between homeless persons and the broader community:

These individuals are consigned to the periphery of public consciousness because by failing to conform they violate social norms and offend public sensibilities. We deal with them by dissociation, distancing ourselves to minimize or displace feelings of resentment, fear, contempt, guilt, shame, or conflict...We compartmentalize and place barriers between “us” and “them”. Dissociation is a dehumanizing process that manifests itself in the terminology used to describe homeless individuals. (1996, p. 8-9)

Shields (2001) agrees with the idea of dissociation, and argues that “the standard news frames construct the homeless as deviants; fortifying the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 194). Although the media report what is going on in the homeless community, they most often don’t do it from the homeless perspective. Revealing the homeless perspective may help to reduce the uncertainty and doubt with which the broader community views the homeless community. Although it is important to realize that the media have the power to give the homeless a voice (or to keep them from having a voice), the focus of this study is the voice of the homeless within the newspaper The Homeless Grapevine.

The voice of homeless individuals is not uniform. Many subcultures rest underneath the much larger culture of homelessness. There is a variation within and among homeless individuals and their experiences, beliefs, values, and attitudes. Homeless people are often seen as having one voice that only revolves around their hardships in life. The act of stereotyping leads to the broader community to distance themselves from the homeless community. It is important to note then, that each
homeless individual provides a unique voice, and although there may be common themes found among those voices, they should be looked at individually first and foremost.

Street Newspapers

Street newspapers have been around for a relatively long period of time, and were especially prevalent in the 1990’s within the United States. “Variations on the homeless paper have been around for a century - a newsletter called the ‘Hobo News’ was popular in the early 1900s. But the first of the modern-day street papers was started in 1989 in New York City and called the Street News” (Harman, 2003, p. 2). In the very early years these newspapers often had a religious tone to them, and left out the political aspect (Green, 1999). Many street newspapers have struggled to stay afloat and have closed due to problems with vendors (although there may be other reasons such as a lack of grants and donations). There is also the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) which allows for communication among the multiple street newspapers across the United States. Chicago has the largest circulation in the United States with its street newspaper StreetWise, which will be discussed in depth in the literature review.

The Homeless Grapevine is Northeast Ohio’s street newspaper which started in 1993. The newspaper is written mainly by those who are homeless or were homeless at
one time. The newspaper sells the papers to vendors at 25 cents and the vendors are allowed to sell their newspapers for a dollar. The profit then goes to the vendors, who are homeless. Most of the former issues are archived on the website for viewing (NEOCH, 2009). The website gives a generalized mission statement of the organization behind the newspaper:

Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless believes homeless people are too often excluded from expressing their views and concerns on matters that will personally and directly affect their lives. All articles in *The Grapevine* are about homelessness and many are written by homeless and formerly homeless people. The articles are not intended to reflect the views of NEOCH, the NEOCH Board of Directors or our member agencies, but to help homeless people and advocates express their opinions. (NEOCH, 2009, para. 2)

The NEOCH was founded in 1988 by Catharine Lowe, years before the start of their street newspaper. The NEOCH now has connections with Facebook, where they have constant updates for their 92 fans. This page allows for people to see what the organization is about, how to donate, and also provides photographs from events that they have had. Updates on events are prevalent on their “wall.” There is also a blog dedicated to keeping people informed about things going on within the homeless community. “This blog features information on shelters, affordable housing, profiles, statistics, trends, and upcoming events relating to homelessness” (Clevehomeless, 2010, p. 1). The NEOCH website is constantly updated; it even provides a list of updates it has made to its page (NEOCH, 2010).

Although many street newspapers are not able to survive, roughly 20 people or organizations inquire with the NASNA per month on how to start their own street
newspaper. According to its website, NASNA says there are multiple ways to start a newspaper; however, unless one is lucky enough to have a sponsor with enough money to cover start up costs, it is likely that volunteers will be necessary for the first 2 years or so (NASNA, 2010). The website also addresses the factor of covering publishing costs. Since the vendors buy the newspapers at a particular price, that price should cover the publishing costs (i.e. twenty-five cents a copy sold to the vendor). The vendor then sells the newspaper for a profit, usually at one dollar a copy.

Street newspapers have different ways of recruiting vendors. Sometimes people within the organization, such as the NEOCH, will go to homeless shelters and advocate for people to become part of the organization. Word of mouth is something that is also useful in this type of setting. Vendors talk to other potential vendors and then they are told where to go. Flyers are also made and posted around the community to increase awareness. The NEOCH in particular gives vendors a temporary vendor’s badge, and only after selling 300 copies, can they achieve a permanent vendor’s badge. Along with the badge comes 1 hour of training and signing a “Vendor’s Contract” (Appendix A). This contract is quite extensive and lays out the ground rules for the vendor. Many of the rules are not unlike those of a regular organization. Vendors are required to come to monthly meetings, not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and must wear the badge visibly at all times while vending. There is also a code of conduct in each of the issues that *The Homeless Grapevine* publishes. Although the organization currently
publishes *The Homeless Grapevine*, it is the goal of the organization to, some day, have the newspaper completely run by those who are or were formerly homeless.

The literature review begins with an overview in the most covered areas of homeless studies including the media and ethnographies. The main focus will be on studies that have been done on street newspapers. Finally, a section on vernacular discourse that discusses how to look at artifacts by grassroots groups will be addressed.
Many of the studies done on homeless individuals either focus on one individual, or on how the media portray the homeless as a group. There seems to be a lack of studies done on the writings of homeless persons, especially within media such as newspapers. However, there are plenty of studies done on how the media portray the homeless community, which are an integral part of understanding why the broader community often has a dominant negative belief about the homeless.

Media Portrayals of the Homeless

As John Soukup states in his review of the book *Reading the Homeless: The Media’s Image of Homeless Culture*, “Many of us want to do something [about homelessness] but don’t know what. We look for guidance, often to the news media” (2002, p. 318). The article *Covering the Homeless: The Joyce Brown Story*, studies how the news focuses on homelessness as a private dilemma rather than a social issue that should involve the help
of other. “The media lets us see the homeless, identify briefly with their predicament, yet, in the end, it sustains the fragile boundaries that mark off intruders” (Campbell & Reeves, 1989, p. 40). The media are a powerful outlet for voices, but often leave out the voice of groups who are marginalized even when they are covering those groups, such as the homeless. As Campbell and Reeves realized through their study, the media reinforce the broader community’s conceptualization that the homeless are homeless because they chose to be.

Shields (2001) notes that the news coverage of homelessness is more frequent during the cold winter months and the holiday season. Even more interesting is the fact that the news rarely gives a voice to the homeless, reporters spend the majority of their time praising those who try and help the homeless rather than homeless individuals. Media also give a false representation of the homeless, first, by predominantly showing single men instead of women, children, teens, or homeless families. Roughly 44% of media representations show single men as being homeless. This triggers a person to stereotype the homeless as being mostly male, which leads people to a more broad gender stereotype that men should be able to provide and take care of not only themselves, but also their families. Secondly, media often attribute homelessness to those who are veterans or those labeled mentally ill, at 41% of the homeless population which is also incorrect (Shields, 2001). This is not to say that those who are veterans or mentally ill are not homeless, merely that the homeless population exceeds these groups more than people may think. More accurate statistics are closer to one third of the population for
each of the demographics mentioned above (men, veterans, and the mentally ill). It is quite obvious that the media have a huge impact on the homeless population and how their voices are often suppressed and hidden from the broader community.

**Ethnographies**

Ethnographies are also a popular means in which the homeless are studied. Hill and Stamey (1990) used ethnographies to study the survival strategies utilized by the homeless. Hill did another study on homeless women and how the shelter has the ability to act as a home for them, and allows them to perpetuate fantasies about home life (1991). One of the most moving articles titled *Homeless, Hungry! Me and the Dog Need Help: A Study of a Life Misplaced*, is an ethnography about a man named Stewart. Stewart communicates with people of the broader community, some who are receptive and others who are not. His story really becomes heart wrenching when he reveals how he came to be homeless, and how he loses his only best friend, his dog. He became homeless after his wife died; he turned to alcohol and then lost his daughter due to his drinking (Riddell, W. & Fraser, B., 2007). The ethnographies lend to the stories of the homeless by the homeless, which is an important aspect of studying the homeless population. Many of *The Homeless Grapevine’s* articles incorporate stories by the homeless, and it is these stories that tell the broader community how the homeless view
themselves, and, in turn, how they would like to be viewed by the broader community. These stories often rely on pathos, such as the ethnography on Stewart did. The use of pathos by the homeless is prevalent, and will be discussed later within this literature review.

Studies, Street Newspapers, and the Homeless

Street newspapers, such as *The Homeless Grapevine*, have committed themselves to the particular mission of providing marginalized individuals with a voice and a way to participate as an active member of the community. As Janie Lorber (2009) states “the economic downturn has heightened interest in their (street newspapers) offbeat coverage and driven new vendors to their doors” (para. 2). Lorber also says, “In the last six months, the Portland paper, like others around the country, has started to see a new type of vendor — chefs, park rangers and construction workers who have lost stable jobs or crucial part-time work as the economy crumbled” (para. 10). Now that homelessness is something many middle class people can relate to, it seems like the opportune moment to strike with a study on these street newspapers and the vendors who write them.

As mentioned earlier, *StreetWise* is one of the largest street newspapers in the United States. The article “*Flipping the Scripts*” of Poverty and Panhandling:
Organizing Democracy by Creating Connections, by Novak and Harter (2008), is a good example of how important it is to study the homeless and their writings. In this article, the authors look at the non-profit organization StreetWise, which publishes the newspaper *StreetWise* written by homeless individuals. They conducted research by interviewing and observing the organization and the newspaper. The study focused on how the organization and the newspaper mobilize support for those who are homeless. While my study will focus on a similar street newspaper and the writings within the newspaper, this study provides in-depth interviews with the vendors, which are also important to look at.

First, it is important to gain an understanding of how similar StreetWise and *The Homeless Grapevine* are to each other. Like StreetWise (the organization), the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH), is a nonprofit organization. *StreetWise* was started in 1992 and *The Homeless Grapevine* was started just a year later; however, as discussed earlier, both came during a time when many street newspapers were on the rise. Both allow homeless individuals to write articles for the newspaper and/or sell the newspaper for profit, but this profit goes to the vendor not the organization. The organizations both create jobs for the homeless, helping them integrate themselves back into the broader community. *StreetWise* is very similar to *The Homeless Grapevine* in that they both “strive to expand societal awareness of homeless issues” (Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, & Carson-Stern, 2004, p. 407). StreetWise (the organization) and NEOCH “provide a viable alternative to panhandling for people living in or on the edge
of poverty” (p. 410). Ultimately, they try and create a connection between homeless individuals and the broader community through the use of rhetoric.

The connection between the homeless and the broader community is often a difficult connection to make. Within Novak and Harter’s study, they explore the idea of what a real job is. One of the campaigns done by StreetWise involved positioning “vending as a legitimate commercial enterprise” (2008, p. 400). Vendors were expected to act professionally, wearing a badge and extending courtesy toward the public. Zach (one of the vendors for StreetWise) has a hard time understanding why vending is often still thought of as panhandling by customers. Often times the vendors are told to “get a real job” by customers, even though the vendors are legitimately selling the newspapers. Fighting to change the stereotype of homeless individuals wanting something for nothing is a difficult task for the street newspapers. Their lack of ethos with the broader community may be one of the major reasons that people refuse to read the articles by the homeless.

One vendor, which has been with StreetWise for almost 10 years, talks about his previous hardships, convictions, and battle with drugs. “I came to understand that I not only relied on selling the paper for an income, but that selling also allowed me to assess my personality” (Novak & Harter, 2008, p. 392). This particular vendor finds that writing for the newspaper allows him to find himself and change from the stereotypes bestowed on him by the broader community and the media. As noted earlier, studies rarely focus on the “lived experiences of individuals traditionally excluded from viable economic
opportunities and from public discourses, including scholarly studies” (p. 393). The lived experiences of homeless individuals are explored within *The Homeless Grapevine* giving insight not through how others view them, but how they view themselves.

One continuous struggle for StreetWise is striving to keep its mission, versus trying to gain more profit to help its cause. While putting effort into expanding the organization and increasing readership of the newspaper, the organization wound up losing sight of its mission because of profit from advertisers. Many of the writers and vendors quit working for the newspaper because of corporate advertising taking over. The organization allowed articles to be written that were not by homeless individuals, and that took a completely different direction away from homelessness. The newspaper wound up retreating back to its grassroots ways instead of becoming too integrated into mainstream news.

The vendors of *StreetWise* also struggle with their mission, but in a much different way (Novak & Harter, 2008). Often time people want to donate money but refuse to take the product (the newspaper) that they are paying for. This hurts the vendors and the organization in two ways. First, by not taking the newspaper, the vendor is now more of a panhandler and it minimizes his or her job. As discussed earlier, it is difficult to change stereotypes regarding homeless individuals; and by not taking the newspaper, donors marginalize the voices. Not reading the paper is a problem that most street newspapers have, including Seattle’s *Real Change* street newspaper. Timothy Harris is quoted in an article regarding *Real Change* and says that perceptions of the newspaper
being for homeless people, and not for the broader community, is one that he often has to try and change (Green, 2005). Secondly, the person donating the money is not reading the newspaper and is less likely to become a loyal customer. It is also detrimental to the homeless community because the person donating is giving them a hand out rather than a hand up (Novak & Harter, 2008). As discussed by the vendor supervisor of StreetWise, if the customer says keep the paper and you do then “Next week, he gonna walk right past you. You know why? ‘Cause he donated to your charity last week. How often do you think he gonna donate to your charity?” (Novak & Harter, 2008, p. 404). This further allows for people to ignore the homeless and deem them too lazy to get a “real job”.

However, as Dennis (another vendor) states, “The biggest problem I face is being ignored” (p. 407).

In a similar article done by Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, and Carson-Stern (2004), an article written by the vendors is described:

The predominant demonstration of the use of personal experiences in the context of everyday life is in StreetWise’s VendorVoice column. The majority of VendorVoice articles are stories told in the words of those who sell the newspapers…. [The articles] present journalism from the position of marginalized groups. In an attempt to dislocate the traditional way of viewing, the discourse recognizes individuals and groups rather than those at the center, thus creating empathy for and identification with the struggles these individuals and groups endure. (p. 415)

The authors go on to explain that the use of first person narratives helps to deconstruct stereotypes of the marginalized groups and opens the door for social change. Likewise,
this thesis contributes to the study of the ways that homeless individuals represent themselves.

Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, and Carson-Stern (2004) focus more on the organization aspect than what the vendors have written in the newspaper. This *StreetWise* study brings light to the American value of self-reliance. Pulling ones self up by one’s own boot straps is the American way, and to ask for help is to seem weak or lazy. “Street journals face novel opportunities to reject the ‘blinders’ that typically prevent Americans from recognizing the full extent of interdependence in our daily lives” (p. 418). The broader community that the homeless vendors seek to sell their newspaper to, have not yet realized how they are connected to those who are homeless. This knowledge of interdependence is key to unlocking the separation between the two groups.

The study *Voices of homeless people in street newspapers: A cross-cultural exploration*, takes a much different approach than the previous studies discussed (Torck, 2001). Torck analyzes four street newspapers, three from Europe and one from the United States. She claims that the street newspapers in Europe “evokes traditional political and media discourse on poor and marginal people, reinforcing the negative social ethos of the homeless” (p. 371). The four street newspapers came from France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Torck brings up a good point about street newspapers, “In none of these countries can it be said that the homelessness issue has been resolved or is close to being resolved, in spite of widespread voluntarism
and government programmes” (p. 373). Although there may be many homeless who benefit from writing for and selling the newspaper, they are still homeless. Torck quotes Daly (1996), “Whose stories are valued or not valued?” (2001, p. 374). This quote rings true to the whole point of this study, the word of the homeless is not valued by the broader community; and, therefore, the homeless remain silenced in the grassroots of society.

It is pointed out by Torck (2001) that the narratives written or given in an interview by the homeless are almost always filtered by journalists. Particularly in the European countries, the articles are written by other journalists, not by the homeless themselves. Only in the American street newspaper (Street Sheet in San Francisco) are the homeless the authors of the articles and featured consistently within each issue. However, without editing the writings of the homeless the articles may lack certain credibility with readers (i.e. spelling errors). According to Torck, “with the possible exception of the American example, the voice’s of HPs (homeless persons) are mostly limited to some writing genres that pen them into a specific kind of discourse, dominated by pathos” (p. 374). Pathos is heavily used within these street newspapers, but Torck argues that too much of an emphasis on pathos reinforces the marginality of the homeless. The lack of ethos and logos may overcome the strength of the pathos present, leaving nothing but a feeling of sympathy from the readers. It might be that the street newspapers in other countries do not focus on any logos or ethos, but even the author begins to realize that the street newspaper in America does focus on politics and social
issues from a homeless person’s perspective. As Torck states, “SS [Street Sheets] is the only one of the four SNPs [street newspapers] to give a wide platform to HPs protests and criticism” (p. 383). It was apparent within this article that the American street newspaper was the only one to have a specific goal of giving a voice to the homeless throughout the newspaper. When it comes to empowerment, Torck suggests that street newspapers often try to give empowerment first by using feelings, art and poetry, and second by argumentative discourse. Again, the American street newspaper was the only one to actually follow through with this plan of empowering its individuals by gradually integrating arguments while the international papers did not.

The broader realm of pathos that will be studied in this thesis is the use of appeals. Appeals are often used in persuasive writing and are mostly recognized under the names of ethos, logos, and pathos. Pathos is particularly used to tap into the feelings of people in order to get them to act in some way. How the homeless utilize appeals is something that may or may not empower them, especially if the predominant appeal used is pathos, and ethos and logos are left undeveloped. The cross-cultural aspect is quite interesting in this piece of literature, but is beyond the scope of this study.

Another interesting point that Torck brings up is the use of first names with the homeless, and rarely their last names.

In the world of homeless people, on the streets, first names are the rule. The use of family names is seen as a breach of privacy. This custom seems to apply also to articles about or by HPs [homeless persons] in SNPs [street newspapers]…So, interestingly, while a common objective of this [sic] press is to help HPs regain a
sense of dignity and self-respect, they maintain a custom that refuses them the instrument that allows an individual to assert him or herself. (p. 382)

This points out the ability of the street newspaper to unknowingly keep its mission from succeeding. At the same time, taking away part of the homeless’ culture in order to fit into mainstream society only reinforces the ideology of conformity and normality. If this is the mission of the street newspaper, then why not give the vendors a suit, tie, and stand to sell the newspapers? This same situation was also caught by the homeless who are interviewed for television news coverage (Shields, 2001):

Contributing to these effective ways of marginalizing the homeless, is the tendency to report on the homeless without permitting the homeless to speak. The few homeless who were permitted to speak on television newscasts were rarely named. City officials or ‘ordinary’ people, however, were referred to by name and given titles such as spokesperson or concerned citizen. (p. 214)

The deaths of the homeless are also rarely discussed, “During the entire 14 years of this study less [than] a dozen deaths of homeless persons made the news” (p. 215). This is important to note because one thing that the NEOCH Facebook page makes note of is the deaths of people within the homeless community. The organization also holds a memorial service for the individuals.

It is obvious that street newspapers take on an entirely different meaning and place in society than any other news outlet. By exploring the words of those who submit to The Homeless Grapevine, it will give insight to those voices that are often unheard. The previous literature review provides some insight as to what a street newspaper is, the organizations behind them, the vendors who sell them, and what the hardships are that
they all face. There has been a lot of research done on the media’s effect on how the broader community conceptualizes the homeless community, but the real voices of the homeless are rarely studied. It is for this reason that it is important to look at vernacular discourse.

Vernacular Discourse

It is often hard to study grassroots groups because of the lack of writings and other preserved artifacts that can be studied. That is why The Homeless Grapevine is a perfect artifact in which to study. It is not people writing about that which they do not know, it is writings from people who live in it day to day or have lived in it enough to talk about it from a first person point of view. Ono and Sloop (1995) in their article The Critique of Vernacular Discourse, write about how scholars in the past have taken a focus on rhetoric of those in power, leaving out marginalized voices. They give the example of Kenneth Burke and his rhetorical criticism on Hitler but note how he left out the Jews’ rhetorical strategies. There is no doubt that there lies a particular fascination with those who do harm with their rhetoric and also those who do great good. Large political forces are fascinating to look at because they reveal how rhetoric works, or doesn’t work, on a large scale. The rhetoric of a much smaller group is often overlooked, but rhetorical efforts can be strong and useful among these grassroots groups.
Vernacular rhetoric focuses on the rhetoric within a community. “Critics of vernacular discourse would look at discourse that resonates within and from historically oppressed communities” (1995, p. 20). Hence, studying the writings of the homeless and formerly homeless has its own place within rhetorical criticism. As I discussed earlier, the voices of the homeless are often left out, even when talking about homelessness. Ono and Sloop also say that “critical rhetoricians would begin to see how rhetors within specific cultural settings create a culture-specific language through which to communicate within those communities” (1995, p. 24). The languages used within the articles of *The Homeless Grapevine* have a distinct purpose, part of which is to bring the homeless community and the broader community together to form one community.

Vernacular discourse, however, does not always mean that the artifacts studied represent the marginalized groups positively. Also, the rules that apply to institutions such as churches or political arenas, do not apply to those who represent vernacular speech. These rules include such things as correct grammar and technical terms (Trinh, 1989). One important thing to note about vernacular discourse is the fact that it should not be used to keep those who are marginalized in their subordinate position. This means not reinforcing stereotypes and remembering that vernacular discourse is ever changing (Ono & Sloop, 1995). The mention of vernacular discourse is discussed to help clarify the criticism of *The Homeless Grapevine* by looking at rhetoric from a different perspective.
Research Questions

In light of the previous literature review, this study will try to answer the following research questions: How do writers of *The Homeless Grapevine* utilize rhetoric in order to raise awareness within the broader community about their own disempowerment? Also, what appeals do homeless writers use as they express their needs and concerns? Finally, how do the homeless frame themselves for those in the broader community and how do they view people within the broader community?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A sampling of various artifacts from The Homeless Grapevine over a period of six years from 2003 through 2009 will be rhetorically critiqued. Rhetoric is in and of itself a complex term. According to Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991):

In one sense, rhetoric is an action humans perform, and in a second sense, it is a perspective humans take. As an action humans perform, rhetoric involves humans' use of symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another. As a perspective humans take, rhetoric involves focusing on symbolic processes. (p. 14)

A rhetorical critic takes a thorough look at the artifacts that he or she is critiquing, diving beneath the surface of words on a page. Although it is questionable that a rhetorical critic can be unbiased, it is important that the critic be open minded and have flexible thinking while looking at the artifacts. According to Stoner and Perkins (2005), a rhetorical critic looks at how a message works. The process of criticism deals broadly with description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. While looking through the articles written by the homeless, it is important not to have a favorable or unfavorable attitude that may cloud the rhetorical criticism. Although each article from The Homeless Grapevine is unique in its own way, themes will arise out of the articles that are analyzed.
As noted earlier, most of the newspaper issues are archived on the website for the North East Ohio Coalition for the Homeless. Starting with the first issue in spring 2003, and running through July 2009, the articles are arranged in chronological order (NEOCH, 2009). The number of issues published per year varies from one issue in volume 17, to 8 issues in volumes 6 and 7. Because of the sheer number of articles that will be available, this study uses specific criteria to select the articles. First and foremost, the article must be written by a homeless individual. Secondly, poems will not be analyzed in order to keep the study concise. Finally, only the issues within a 10 year span between 1999-2009 will be examined. Some of the issues (although rarely) do not have any articles clearly written by the homeless and so those particular issues will not be utilized within the study. Given these criteria, this study includes 29 issues (see Appendix B for a list of the issues analyzed), resulting in a sample of 53 articles.

The selection of articles is based on the authorship. This study focuses on the voices of the homeless as expressed in their writing. Any article written by an intern, non-homeless person such as a political figure, is not a part of this study. Approximately two to three articles in each issue are written by a homeless individual, although some issues do not clearly contain any articles written by the homeless. It is sometimes difficult to tell if the writer of the article is homeless or not. Some of the writers were at one time homeless and have continued to write for the newspaper after they pulled themselves out of homelessness. Many of the articles in *The Homeless Grapevine* are written about the issues that concern the homeless, but it is unclear as to who wrote the article. If it was
unclear who wrote the article, it was not analyzed. Many of the articles included interviews with political figures regarding homelessness in the community and although these articles are important to how the broader community views the homeless, it does not represent the voice of the homeless and thus it was not included in the analysis.

Thematic Analysis

After all the articles are read, the appeals that are used produced identifiable themes. Themes are defined by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) as units derived from patterns such as “conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs” (p. 131). When the artifacts are studied alone the themes will not be visible, but when combined the artifacts reveal certain commonalities among each other. Even though themes may seem like they are prevalent just from reading a few articles, it is important for the researcher to suspend making this assumption until all the articles are read.

To reiterate, this study is a rhetorical criticism of the street newspaper, The Homeless Grapevine. I will critique the specified articles in light of my objective to see how the homeless use The Homeless Grapevine to raise awareness within the broader community about their own disempowerment. I will also look at how they utilize appeals,
how these individuals frame themselves for the broader community, and how they view people within the broader community.
CHAPTER IV

A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF HOMELESS WRITINGS IN THE STREET
NEWSPAPER THE HOMELESS GRAPEVINE

The homeless utilize The Homeless Grapevine to raise awareness of their disempowerment by giving readers an opportunity to see the dark side of treatment in the homeless culture. As one might expect, the homeless are often given hand outs (donations) rather than a hand up (decent paying jobs), which can keep them in their marginalized positions. In the writings of the homeless, four major themes arose regarding their disempowerment and/or how the homeless seek to reverse their disempowerment: Sources of Oppression, Establishing Identification, Perceptions of Self, and Perceptions of the Broader Community. It is important to note here that The Homeless Grapevine is a unique paper, unlike other corporate newspapers which utilize research and numbers. As discussed with vernacular discourse, the homeless voice is marginalized systematically, and the homeless often address this marginalization as they write about their experiences within the Grapevine. The extent to which the themes were repeated over a period of 10 years is a testament to how the homeless experience is strong and unwavering.
Sources of Oppression

The homeless identify many sources of oppression. In their writing, homeless individuals target four major groups as contributing to their disempowerment: shelters, the temp agencies, the Salvation Army and the government/authoritative agencies. The primary strategies that the homeless use in their writings regarding sources of oppression are: 1. Vilifying authority figures; 2. Dispelling common myths; 3. Establishing themselves as experts.

Shelters

The shelters are portrayed by the homeless as a major problem within the homeless community. This seemed unlikely at first because the overall idea of a shelter is to provide the homeless with a place to sleep, a meal, and other basic necessities. The shelters are framed by the homeless to be a big money maker for those who run the shelter, but rarely do the homeless feel they see the benefit of this money. Peter Domanovic, a writer for The Homeless Grapevine, has been to more than 100 shelters across the country, and gives his accounts as to the conditions of the best and worst shelters. Domanovic states, “Homeless people are really looked down upon when they ask where the money goes, but the answer is always, out of the country” (2002, para. 5). By giving the homeless a vague answer and not allowing them to gain access to see how
funds are distributed, the shelters are framed by the homeless as keeping them in a marginalized position.

In the shelters the homeless often work for their room and board doing things like cooking, cleaning, and getting donations for the shelter. As noted by homeless individuals, this money is rarely being spent on the homeless; but when that is questioned, the homeless are often put out of the shelter. This reinforces the disempowered behavior to not question authority, especially when authority figures have the power to take away a person’s home. In the article *Cleveland Shelters Need Retooling*, Pete Domanovic tells of his awareness as to how much money comes into the shelter (through donations) because he writes receipts for the people donating. Instead of using the money donated to provide helpful programs for the homeless, the money is said by Domanovic to be pocketed by the shelter authorities:

For whatever reason, money, self-glory, or just not giving a damn about what is right or wrong, the shelters ignore the reasons for people’s downfall…Rather than designing programs that help the individual person, they make negative groups of people, and then just cash in on people’s sympathy…the actual cost of operating this mission was less than ten percent of what came in, including salaries. (One annual bonus check was over $290,000). (2002-2003, para. 1)

Domanovic is providing an unexpected frame for understanding shelters. By framing the shelters as profiteering off the homeless, the homeless dispel a common myth that shelters help the homeless. Domanovic frames the shelters negatively by claiming that the donations being made by the broader community to help the homeless go to those who exploit the homeless by padding their paychecks and giving themselves hefty
bonuses. Shelter residents also frame the shelters negatively by saying that the shelters exploit the homeless as being drug and alcohol addicts in need of help that only the shelters can provide, the shelters rake in money little of which goes to helping the homeless. The shelter is said by the homeless to do this because if they actually help the homeless then they wind up losing money for they will have fewer people to exploit. According to Domanovic, instead of pushing people out on the streets for questioning where money goes, the shelters should be required to keep record and prove where the money is going. Those who have the power should be held accountable for their actions, whether they are good or bad. Here, the homeless also challenge the credibility of the shelters, something that is often not challenged by the broader community. By asking those who run the shelters to account for where the money goes, the homeless bolster their own credibility, and minimize that of the shelters.

The homeless also refer to being treated worse than animals within the shelters. “In all 50 states, there is a Standard of Care for animal shelters but not for humans,” says Elihu Hernadez (2008, p. 7). The conditions in the shelters are often made out to be unbearable, according to a resident of a shelter, Joseph Smith:

On the average day I have witnessed them [shelter staff] dry out food until it reaches the consistency of beef jerky, almost as bad as those dried skins you buy for dogs…I learned to anticipate and even enjoy vomiting because I was forced to eat this stuff…I have observed and have heard about people putting snot on the spout and in the cups. (2006, p. 4)

Writers of the Grapevine also point to shelter staff as a common problem for the homeless. As Anthony Ball states in his article Take a Minute to Look at the Voice of the
"Homeless, “They [shelter staff] often treat people real bad and the Project Heat shelters are always dirty with feces in the urinal” and “They never wash the blankets and never clean the mats” (1999, para. 7). Ball claims that he has been to a lot of shelters, so he knows what is a good and a bad shelter. He also claims that if the Health Department saw the conditions that the homeless are subjected to, the shelter would likely be shut down. Portraying the shelters as having poor living conditions, and comparing them as being less than that of an animal shelter, the homeless generate sympathy from the broader community for their situation. Domanovic also comments on the shelter staff saying that they are not nice people unless they are in front of their employer (2002). He goes on to say that if a homeless person feels wronged by staff that they are “allowed” to file a grievance but “definitely watch your back from there. People are sometimes awakened in the middle of the night and told they have to leave with no recourse whatsoever” (para. 2).

In order to combat the problem of shelters exploiting the issue of homelessness, the homeless have turned to political figures for help. A common case that came up within The Homeless Grapevine was the 2100 Lakeside Shelter for men. Articles about this shelter and its awful conditions arise frequently throughout the issues. In one particular article titled Shelter Residents Never Got to Ask the Mayor, some homeless men that reside at the shelter came up with a list of concerns for two people running for mayor. Although the meeting between these people never happened, the list of concerns were published in The Homeless Grapevine (2002). Many of the concerns deal with
making programs, job interests, and affordable housing more accessible. Many other concerns are about increasing the quality of the shelters such as training staff and reducing the amount of people residing in the shelters. Unfortunately, reducing numbers of people who reside in shelters is often done by pushing people out on the streets rather than helping those people get out of homelessness. This will be discussed along with the Salvation Army. By challenging those in political positions to take responsibility, the homeless writers in the *Grapevine* craft themselves as citizens who deserve respect from authority figures. According to the homeless, those who will be in charge of the community, such as the Mayor, should be willing to sit down and talk with the homeless about what should be done to reduce the problem. Only the homeless can give voice their situation because it is unique to them. Also, making logical suggestions as to what simple things can be done to help the homeless community, the homeless are advocating for ways to help the broader community end homelessness.

By targeting shelters as part of the problem, the homeless individuals appeal to readers’ sense of anger and indignation. People within the broader community may start to question the authorities that have an influential role in how people perceive the homeless. Perceptions of the homeless and how they can change will be discussed further in the theme of self-representation.
Similar to the portrayals of the shelters, homeless writers portray the temp agencies as a cause of their marginalized position. In particular the temp agencies are supposed to help the homeless find jobs, sometimes for just the day but other times for a week or so at a time. In articles referencing work at temp agencies, writers appeal to the widely held belief in the American work ethic by framing themselves as willing workers. One homeless man, George (last name not provided), gives an account of why the work given by the temp agencies is unfair to the homeless:

I go to the temp agency and wait to be selected. Sometimes if the agency knows you and if you have had a problem, they will pass you over and give the higher paying work to someone who just walked in and hasn’t waited at all…you might spend 11-12 hours in total and only get paid $27…I think it is demeaning and not too motivational to be working as a temp and getting paid $5.00 an hour when you might be standing next to someone making $15 or $16 an hour. (2003-2004, para. 2-4)

George goes on to say that the temp agencies are extremely helpful when the welfare checks are issued because they are in need of workers. At all other points in the month the homeless are treated unfairly and are left making less money for doing more work. Peter Domanovic says similar things as George because he too realizes that the agencies get half of the wages earned by the homeless just because they hired someone who receives food stamps (2007, p. 5). Michael Stephens, another homeless writer, agrees with George and makes a case that the homeless are supposed to be compensated for four hours if they are sent to a job that no longer needs them, but this money is never seen by the homeless (Bittner, 2004). Delores Manely says that the temp agencies should be put
out of business, the businesses should pay the homeless $12 an hour, and then the
homeless would have enough money to survive and enough motivation to continue
working (2006). The homeless frame the temp agencies negatively due to taking half of a
homeless person’s wages, and treat them unfairly when it comes to distributing jobs. By
dispelling the myth that temp agencies assist homeless individuals who are out of work,
Grapevine writers also debunk the common stereotype that the homeless do not want to
work.

From a homeless woman’s perspective the temp agencies are a way for sexual
abuse to arise. Alexandra recounts her experience:

Men at the temp agencies and at the companies I’ve gone to say that if I go to bed
with them or perform sexual favors, I’ll have a guaranteed “return” ticket,
meaning I can come back to the job. If I can find other women to do these things
too, that’s an extra plus for me. I see ex-prostitutes and women on drugs and
alcohol who are the main targets of sexual harassment. It upsets me because they
are already hurting in their life and then they are being hurt by some more by the
employment agency. (Bittner, 2004, para. 7)

People may assume that all one would have to do to stop this kind of behavior would be
to speak up and make a complaint, but in the homeless community this is not the case.
The homeless write that when they make complaints they are then left without a job, and
so their disempowerment continues to grow. Alexandra does not reveal her true identity
to The Homeless Grapevine in fear that she will no longer get hired for jobs at the temp
agency. The Homeless Grapevine, therefore, allows for the homeless to reveal the
unethical treatment that is going on behind closed doors without losing their possible
ticket out of homelessness, their job.
Writers garner sympathy from readers who can relate to bad working environments, although possibly not as unethical as the ones the homeless deal with. The broader community can also empathize with the homeless because they too work, and might know how it feels to be sexually harassed, or paid less money for doing more work.

*The Salvation Army*

The Salvation Army is portrayed by the homeless as an organization that reinforces the stereotypes of the homeless being drug and alcohol addicts. Even though the Salvation Army often provides shelter, they were placed in a separate category because of how they are singled out by the homeless in multiple articles. Also, the Salvation Army claims to provide more than just shelter, they have programs to treat issues that the homeless may or may not have.

In order to get help from the Salvation Army the homeless are required to have a drug or alcohol addiction. According to Peter Domanovic:

> The very first thing you will have to deal with would be your alcoholism or drug addiction. What’s that you say, you’re not addicted to anything. Well sorry; come back when you are…Being poor and homeless is not enough to get you in… (2002, para. 1)

Domanovic says the homeless are given two options at this point, neither of which empowers them. The first option is to leave and try and go somewhere else or live on the streets. The second option is to fake or actually develop an addiction so that the shelter
will take the person in. The Salvation Army is keeping the homeless disempowered by forcing them into becoming, or at least act, as though they are the stereotypical homeless person. This reinforces the stereotype for the broader community, increasing the chances that the broader community will continue to ignore what the homeless have to say, due to the stereotypes forced upon them. Domanovic frames the Salvation Army as an organization that requires homeless individuals to be addicts, therefore, an organization that does not want to help homeless individuals who are not addicts due to the lack of funding they will receive if they do.

As noted earlier, reducing numbers in shelters is not always a positive thing, according to homeless individuals. The 2100 Lakeside Shelter (run by the Salvation Army) said that they were going to reduce numbers by 20 people so that the shelter would become less crowded. By reducing the number of occupants and by recording on paper that they are reducing homelessness, the shelter is then rewarded with funding. In his article *Mayor Campbell: Where Do You Go From Here?* Pete Domanovic states:

> Eliminating people is relatively easy, when you consider how it’s being done. If staying true to their part, they (the Salvation Army) will just tell the shelter staff that 20 people per month can not come back, and that will be it. It’s really easy to show numbers that claim success. This is usually done when seeking funds…Of course you don’t mention they are not allowed to come back. (2002, para. 2-3)

Domanovic is dispelling another myth by telling the broader community that when shelters claim success, it is not always true. Domanovic reduces the credibility of the Salvation Army by showing how the organization blocks homeless individuals’ access to the shelter. Further, Domanovic points out how the Salvation Army creates the
appearance that homelessness has been reduced when in actuality homeless persons have been denied a space at the Salvation Army shelter.

Domanovic vilifies administrators of the Salvation Army. The administrators are portrayed as taking funds and using them to benefit themselves. Domanovic talks about the headquarters building for the Salvation Army. He comments on how staff members drive newer luxury cars and have nice homes to go to. Domanovic then criticizes these people because the people who are paying for those cars are the people who make donations. He said that people who work for the Salvation Army call these “administrative costs” (2004). Also, by looking out for the homeless’ best interest in how the money is spent, and alerting those of those of the broader community who make donations, Domanovic sets himself up to be a credible source. The writer dispels myths about supposed do-gooders like the Salvation Army. By utilizing The Homeless Grapevine, the homeless are able to share information and debunk some of the common stereotypes placed on the homeless.

The Government and Authoritative Agencies

Like the other sources of oppression, the homeless express through their writings that they are bothered by how the nation’s government spends the resources given to it by the people. In the early 2000s, a new development started that criminalized homelessness. It was actually made illegal in some places to be homeless. In 2003, Angelo Anderson, a
homeless writer, targeted the government for why the issue of homelessness had not yet been resolved.

Living in the richest nation on earth, I find it appalling that so many men, women, and children are homeless. Our nation finds billions of dollars each year to fund major businesses, support space exploration, fight wars, and rebuild foreign governments, while meanwhile, back on the farm, laws are being passed that criminalize homelessness. (para. 2)

As Anderson points out, “Enabling, now a catchword used by many social service and government agencies, is bandied about like a new wonder drug, providing an easy way to withdraw services under the guise of not coddling the individual” (para. 3). Like the Salvation Army did with claiming success by reducing numbers of occupants in their shelter, the government frames assistance as “enabling,” a word that implies that the government helps the homeless, but the government is perpetuating rather than alleviating issues of homelessness. Again, by dispelling the myth that the government is trying to help the homeless, and vilifying the figures of authority, the homeless establish themselves as more credible than the so-called experts.

The police are portrayed as another authoritative source that creates unnecessary problems for the homeless. In his article *Homeless People Struggle to Keep Their Dignity in Face of Injustices*, homeless man who calls himself Jungle Lips recalls how homeless people are harassed by the police for flicking their cigarette butts on the street. Even though the police are there to enforce the law of not littering, the business people are left alone, according to Jungle (2005). Another account of unfair treatment comes from Nathaniel Hamm. Hamm uses the public sidewalks near a popular entertainment spot to
sell the *Grapevine*. The first time he encountered a police officer, Hamm was threatened with arrest if he didn’t move. The second time the police officer arrested him for panhandling despite the fact that he had the newspapers and his vendor badge on him. Then Hamm went to the editor of *The Homeless Grapevine* and was told that City Hall had informed the local entertainment facility that the sidewalks are public property. When the police officer came around again, Hamm informed the officer he had the okay from City Hall. Even though Hamm fought back, he still feels that he is harassed by the local authorities despite the fact that he is just trying to legitimately sell the newspapers (2007). The police are vilified here because they are inhibiting Hamm from performing his job of selling newspapers. Hamm points out that the more he is oppressed, the longer he will stay homeless. From his perspective, the police are not helpful but rather a hindrance when it comes to his work productivity.

Another authority figure who is often criticized by the homeless is former Mayor Jane Campbell. The mayor is often accused of not working to make the city of Cleveland better, especially not helping the homeless.

I think that Mayor Jane Campbell needs to get to know what is needed to be done here in Cleveland to reduce the number of homeless people. I don’t think our Mayor of Cleveland is aware what is going on here on the streets. (Swanson, 2002, para. 5)

Since Peter Domanovic has traveled the country, he shed some light on the issue of the Mayor in Cleveland compared to other states and cities. In one of his articles, Domanovic gets angry with the Mayor saying:
Even our new Mayor seems to be looking for her pot of gold...Did it every occur to you, Mayor Jane, to give something back to the people. I know that the status quo here means to give nothing back...I ask that you stand on Public Square...open your eyes and nose. This is what people see and smell when they arrive at Tower City an want to see what Cleveland is about. You can’t blame the dirt on the people, when things are just never cleaned. (2003, para. 10)

Domanovic appeals to the readers’ sense of anger, especially since the majority of those readers’ reside in the same city and can relate to similar frustrations. Also, Domanovic takes an unexpected approach to the dirtiness of the city. Since people of the broader community often associate homeless people with being dirty, and Domanovic blames the dirtiness on the Mayor, the problem of homelessness comes back to the Mayor.

Swanson says in another article that the government is corrupt, they lie to all citizens, and we as people (unifying the homeless and the broader community) need to stop putting them in office (2004). Linda (last name not provided), another vendor, says in her article *Time Are Tough: Turn to Potato Soup*, that she would rather see the homeless run the country than the politicians (2009).

With this appeal there is an “us” versus “them” approach taken in the writings of the homeless, the “us” being the general public including the homeless who vote for the politicians, and the “them” being the politicians and those who support them. Although this creates dissociation among two groups, it turns the negative stereotypes away from the homeless and focuses on negative experiences with politicians. The broader community should then be able to relate to the homeless because they too can see the corruption that goes on within politics. The people within the community of Cleveland
can also relate to wanting to make Cleveland a better place. By creating this unifying
stance, the people within the broader community have more reasons to side with the
homeless in creating a better community.

The first theme focused in on the sources of oppression that the homeless largely
agree on as the reason they have not been able to achieve a non-homeless status. The
second theme that was prevalent in homeless writings is threatening the broader
community with the thought that they too could become homeless at a drop of a dime.
This creates a mindset that people should treat others as if they were in that person’s
position.

Establishing Identification

One of the main things repeated throughout the articles written by the homeless is
the “this could easily be you” phrase, or similar phrases. The homeless are making a
connection between themselves and those who may not be homeless, by bringing up the
reality that they could easily become homeless within a short period of time. Marguerite
Perdue writes in her article Women’s Shelter Had Serious Problems:

People should truly realize and understand that they could be in the same situation
as any homeless individual, that they’re only a paycheck away from homelessness
themselves, but in all reality they don’t believe, or suspect that is [sic] could
happen. (2004, para. 3)
In order to establish identification between homeless individuals and individuals of the broader community, the homeless often ask their readers to put themselves in a homeless person’s shoes. In an attempt to describe her emotional plights Felicia (last name not provided) says “I want to end it all just so the emptiness and pain will go away. Yet, no one cares about what a homeless individual goes through. If only society would place themselves in our shoes” (2004, para. 3). Sam Y. Brown, while commenting on how a homeless person was attacked with a stun gun, says:

It is a mistake to judge the down trodden, the outcast, the keepers of the park benches at night, the night dwellers, and the simple ‘no place to go’ individuals. We must not dare to judge these people, for we may just find ourselves with ‘no place to go’ and living on a park bench. (2003-2004, para. 3)

It is through the experiences of the homeless that the broader community can learn what it is like to be disempowered by the groups that claim to help them. Also, by putting themselves in homeless individuals’ shoes, the readers of *The Homeless Grapevine* can start to empathize with the situations that the homeless endure. Media, shelters, and authority figures perpetuate stereotypes of homeless people as lazy, drug/alcohol addicts, etc. These stereotypes contribute to the silencing of homeless individuals’ voices within society. It is because of this negative stereotype that the homeless have a hard time getting people to buy and read *The Homeless Grapevine*. The homeless are then in a Catch 22. *The Homeless Grapevine* does a good job of debunking the common stereotypes about homelessness, but the stereotypes keep people from reading the
newspaper. Other homeless who live on the streets panhandling or scamming perpetuate this stereotype which leaves a large problem in trying to reverse the stereotype.

Most people, rich or poor, can identify with going through an extremely rough time in their own life in which they feel like no one really cares about them. In order for the broader community to begin to understand the hardships that are placed on the homeless, they must first be willing to hear what the homeless have to say. By creating a mindset of being in a homeless person’s situation, the people of the broader community may be more likely to listen to the issues that the homeless deal with on a daily basis without placing judgment.

Although it is important for the homeless community to create identification with people of the broader community, it is also important for the homeless to show individuality and differences among homeless individuals. By voicing how the homeless perceive themselves, the broader community gains access to a perception that is rarely revealed by other sources that oppress these individuals. The Homeless Grapevine provides a venue for homeless persons to tell their own stories and to provide representations of themselves.
Perceptions of Self

“While 40% of homeless are working people, the ones showing their face everyday are what we are judged by” (Domanovic, 2003, para. 6). The homeless know the stereotypes placed upon them, and realize that the general public thinks poorly of them in part because of the disempowering groups mentioned previously, but also because of other homeless who perpetuate these stereotypes. The homeless individuals who write for The Homeless Grapevine acknowledge that there are homeless who do not want a part in the working world. “The truth be told, many people are poverty-stricken or homeless by the fruits of their own efforts” (Jungle Lips, 2005, para. 7). However, these same individuals argue that many who are part of the homeless community do work, but don’t make enough to secure their own place of living. Also, many of the writers of The Homeless Grapevine speak about how they once had a good paying, respectable job, but had lost it due to unfortunate events. A man who abruptly became homeless because his wife threw him out of their home writes about his realization of who the homeless really are:

I came to a gentle realization; these folks with me were not drinking, or using drugs, and had no major mental problems. They were broken and beaten down spiritually. They were young mothers with little children. They were men who had skills in plumbing, carpentry, etc., hard-working men who had become displaced workers for one reason or the other. (Hartsock, 1999, para. 3)

Hartsock went from working man with a family to homeless man with a new perspective. As he reveals his new perspective on homeless people he talks about how once he got out
of being homeless he dedicated a new part-time job to being a community organizer building more shelters for the homeless.

Hartsock’s story gives a great amount of credibility to the homeless community. Even though the homeless are often the most credible source to go to in order to find out what it is like to be homeless, they are still dissociated from the broader community. Since the stereotype of the homeless is already negative, people of the broader community could easily think that the homeless are lying to get more charity or sympathy. *The Homeless Grapevine* is then used to explore perspectives from different types of homeless people. Some have been homeless since they were children or teens, others when they were already adults. Some of the homeless are single individuals, some are single parents, and still others are families. As people of the broader community are made aware that the homeless come from all different types of backgrounds, they may be more willing to shift their perceptions of who homeless people really are.

Within this theme, writers emphasize their own stories of struggle in order to garner sympathy. It is necessary for the homeless to tell the broader community about how they became homeless in order to gain credibility with their audience. Those who became homeless through bad choices often own up to those bad choices such as Jungle Lips. Jungle Lips has been running away from home or homeless since the young age of 3. According to Jungle, “I always wanted to be homeless, until I actually had to be homeless” (2005, para. 1). Many other homeless individuals end up homeless due to a series of events portrayed by the homeless to be out of their control. In the article
Homelessness Strikes Suddenly, Felicia (no last name provided) tells her story of having a good job, a college degree, and due to health reasons, she is not unemployable (2004). Although this closely relates to the previous theme of warning the broader community that they too can become homeless, it is also a way for the homeless to express to the broader community that they have a will to work and be a part of the broader community.

Creating individuality helps to reduce stereotyping among homeless people as a whole. The homeless who write for The Homeless Grapevine make a clear distinction between themselves and what they refer to as panhandlers. A collection of vendors wrote an article in support to pass a local legislation regulating panhandling. Even though the NEOCH (the organization who publishes The Homeless Grapevine) was in opposition to this legislation, they published the vendors’ article which in part says:

While attempting to sell a legitimate product, we are often bypassed by potential customers who then give money to panhandlers, or in the adverse we are unjustly mistaken for such disreputable panhandlers and suffer discrimination and the loss of revenue accordingly. (2005, para. 3)

Negatively discussing panhandlers shows that the homeless do not always consider themselves part of the same sub-community. In this particular instance the homeless vendors try to distance themselves from being associated with the panhandlers through their writings. Defining differences among homeless individuals, people of the broader community create individual perceptions of the homeless. It is important to note here that not all of the homeless who write for The Homeless Grapevine feel negatively about panhandlers; mainly this only applies to those who sell the newspaper. In some of the
other articles the homeless sympathize with those who panhandle because it is likely that they are not able to make enough going through a day labor agency. Even though it is important for the broader community to realize differences within communities, the homeless who are advocating for the removal of panhandlers are reinforcing marginalizing those within their own community. Although the homeless often ask for the broader community to suspend judgment until they get the homeless person’s story, they do not allow panhandlers the same courtesy. The panhandlers are then left with no voice just as many other homeless individuals are.

Homeless Perceptions of the Broader Community

The homeless also use The Homeless Grapevine to address how they feel the people of the broader community treat them. This portion applies to the people who are not part of the sources of oppression that have been mentioned previously (i.e. shelter staff, politicians, etc.). Even though the homeless address some of the people of the broader community negatively, they also write a great deal about all the positive encounters they have had with people. A lot of the vendors of The Homeless Grapevine praise the individuals who buy the paper and read it. The homeless also give credit to those who help them out:
The real heroes in my opinion are the people that pull to the side of the road when they know a homeless person is in trouble and ask what they can do. The school girls at St. Patrick’s who volunteer their own time to feed homeless people are the people who I admire. The donors who are giving from the heart, and not because of taxes. (Domanovic, 2002, para. 7)

As Domanovic traveled across the country visiting different shelters, he came across a man who bought him a bus ticket and gave him $150.00 to go to New Orleans. This same man offered Domanovic a job after he got his license to drive. “There are some really beautiful people in that part of the country,” said Domanovic (2007, p. 5). In this case, the man was offering Domanovic a hand up, and when he wasn’t able to give him a job, he gave him the means to get to where he could find a hand up. These are the type of people that the homeless admire in their writings, not the people who just give donations for a mere tax break.

Even though the homeless give positive reviews about people, they also give negative reviews. Cathy Brown, a vendor for *The Homeless Grapevine*, says in an interview that people need to quit judging the homeless because they don’t know how or why that particular person is homeless to begin with (Schwab, 2002). Marsha Rizzo Swanson also talks about negative experiences of people saying “Some don’t have an idea what is happening or don’t want to know the world that we live in…America is living with homelessness it accepts” (2004, para. 1-14).

Some of the harshest reviews come from the homeless who experience people who look at vendors and panhandlers as the same type of people. As discussed in the previous theme, vendors of the *Grapevine* view panhandlers negatively. In the article
describes her displeasure with being compared to panhandlers:

We are not panhandling – we’re selling a real product…I have seen people give money to horn players and violin players on the streets. No one calls them bums and tells them to ‘get a job’, so why do people have to put us down? (2005, para. 4)

Manley goes on to criticize those who buy sports jerseys over buying a street newspaper. She speaks poorly of people who buy overpriced, useless stuff that provides no real solution to an overwhelming problem. Manely argues that “This paper keeps me from going on welfare and from living off of your taxes” (2005, para. 6). A man who goes by the alias John Q. Squatter agrees with Manely when he asks:

Are sports are [sic] more important then [sic] people in this town? Those sleeping in tents can make the case that they keep getting pushed around because our society values sports over people. There are three giant monuments to sports teams, while our public housing and affordable housing in our community deteriorates. (2007, p. 6)

Squatter is critiquing the values of the broader community, which tend to emphasize individualism and competition at the expense of group welfare. The homeless use the Grapevine to question these social values, and ask the broader community to focus on bettering the community rather than spending their money on items the homeless view as frivolous.

Yet another issue that the homeless people have with the broader community is excuses. Delores Manely, a Grapevine vendor, says that people often give excuses such as “I paid the other vendor” or even worse “Get a job” (2009, p. 7). Manely works all the
shifts at the Westside Market (a popular place for the vendors to sell the paper) and has noticed that those who often buy the paper, and possibly give a little extra donation, are those with families who give what they can. The people who drive expensive cars, wear expensive clothes, with bags upon bags of groceries pass by the people offering the newspaper, and ignore them. The problem here is getting people who ignore the vendors to read *The Homeless Grapevine*. In order for the homeless’ rhetoric to be effective it first needs to be heard (or read).

To recap, this study sought to find out how the homeless use the Grapevine to raise awareness about their disempowerment, what appeals the homeless use to express their needs and concerns, how the homeless frame themselves for the broader community, and how they view the broader community. The homeless are disempowered by many groups and to voice their opinion on these groups results in negative outcomes. The homeless talk about changing the shelters and what needs to be done to have a successful facility in which the goal is to help the homeless gain meaningful employment and making enough money to sustain living as a member of the broader community. The homeless also point out obvious things that those trying to help the homeless should do, such as taking vacant buildings close by and using them for housing. Also, the authorities need to allow for inspection of where donations are going in order to ensure funds are going to the most beneficial areas. The homeless use *The Homeless Grapevine* to voice these opinions to the broader community in hopes that the more knowledge there is regarding all the red tape the homeless must go through, that more people will begin to
voice their own displeasure with how the homeless are treated. The homeless also start
distinguishing different groups within the homeless community. In the literature review
the demographics of the homeless create a picture of those who are homeless being men,
mentally ill, or veterans. In The Homeless Grapevine many of the writers are women, or
people that have been homeless since a very young age. As the homeless gain a voice
within the broader community the diversity of homelessness will be clearer. Also, the
homeless who sell the Grapevine are negative towards panhandlers and scam artists who
take away potential clients. Even though the homeless acknowledge that some do not
want to work or cannot work due to health reasons, they focus on the group of homeless
people who want to work. By giving the broader community the knowledge that there are
a great deal of homeless who want to be employed, the broader community may be
willing to give the homeless a hand up rather than a hand out.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Homelessness is something that no country or state has been able to overcome. It is a problem that will persist if dissociation between the homeless community and the broader community continues. Although there have been some misconceptions about the homeless due to the media and other authorities, street newspapers have risen greatly to produce a voice for the homeless. Street newspapers give a way for the homeless community to connect with the broader community in hopes that the broader community will listen to what really goes on in the world of homeless individuals.

This study conducted a rhetorical analysis looking at several articles written by homeless individuals within the street newspaper, *The Homeless Grapevine*. The analysis was done to find out how the homeless are disempowered, what appeals the homeless use, how the homeless perceive themselves and how they view the broader community. The analysis found four main themes including: sources of oppression, establishing identification, perceptions of self, and perceptions of the broader community.
The homeless target specific sources of oppression including: shelters, temp agencies, the Salvation Army, and the government/police. These groups make it difficult, if not nearly impossible for the homeless to find good paying jobs, a sanitary and safe place to live, and remove them when they try to speak up for themselves. By making logical suggestions and justified complaints about certain groups, the homeless who write for the *Grapevine* have found not only a voice but a strong political voice. The homeless create credibility for themselves by voicing their personal experiences. Also, the more the homeless expose the groups that disempower them, the more the broader community can justify changing their stereotypes from negative to positive. Changing stereotypes is key to the homeless gaining more readers of *The Homeless Grapevine*; however, reading the *Grapevine* is the key to changing stereotypes.

The homeless also try to get the broader community to realize that they too could become homeless, and ask for the broader community to treat them as they would like to be treated if they were in a homeless person’s position. The homeless, therefore, create empathy among readers and establish identification.

Although the homeless share many things in common, they do distinguish differences among homeless individuals. The three main subgroups within the homeless community were those who want to work, those who are mentally ill and can’t work, and those who don’t want to work. The homeless who write for the *Grapevine* focus mainly
on those homeless individuals who want to work creating a positive view of the homeless. Throughout the themes it was noted that the homeless often use the *Grapevine* to dispel myths and debunk stereotypes by giving examples of experiences they have.

Finally, the homeless view people of the general public both positively and negatively (just like they view fellow homeless positively and negatively). Despite many negative experiences with people in the broader community, the homeless reflect that there are many people out there who want to help and who give what they can. The homeless don’t respect individuals who use the homeless as a way to get a tax write off or merely ignore them for no good reason. The homeless challenge those individuals who they view negatively to stop trying to get ahead and start thinking about the well being of the community as a whole.

This study was limited by the fact that only one street newspaper was used for the study. Other street newspapers should be analyzed to see whether or not the topics and/or viewpoints from the homeless perspective change or are similar to the findings within this study. Also, poems were excluded from this study for conciseness. Future research should focus in on poems written by the homeless. Even though they were not used for this study, some of them I did read and they do provide different material than the articles. It is also suggested that more interviews are done with the homeless vendors of street newspapers regarding their personal thoughts in order to achieve a more in depth look at their rhetorical goals. Scholars can benefit from uncovering the voices of the homeless.
The homeless perspective is something that is rarely studied within the field of communication studies. By not studying the homeless perspective the academic community loses out on a very important aspect. This study adds to the body of literature regarding the homeless perspective in that it looks closely at the voices of the homeless community. Studying those in marginalized positions is often a difficult task because artifacts are hard to find, but if they are never analyzed the voices are left in the grassroots of society. Street newspapers are just one way to tap into the voice of the homeless. As Ball asserts:

The purpose of the paper *[The Homeless Grapevine]* is to amplify the voice of those on the street so they can be heard. If people would come to read the paper they would be able to get into the mind of the homeless people and break some of the myths. Readers may find out why people are on the streets and that most are eager to get off the street, and that most do want to work. (1999, para. 10)
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1. Every vendor of the *Homeless Grapevine* registers with the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless and affirms the values of the paper by signing this contract.
2. I understand that I am an independent contractor of the *Homeless Grapevine*. As an independent contractor, vendors are not employees of the *Grapevine* or of NEOCH.
3. Every vendor must go through 1 hour of training before receiving a temporary license. At which time the vendor is on a 30 day trial/probation period.
4. Every vendor must display his or her ID badge while selling the paper.
5. After selling 300 *Grapevine* within the first 30 days the vendor can receive a permanent badge. The badges are property of the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless. If you do not sell 300 papers you must be retrained to be issued a new temporary badge.
6. The *Homeless Grapevine* will be distributed for a $1 voluntary fee. I as a vendor agree not to ask for more than $1. Also, I understand that I will be able to keep 75 cents of each dollar collected. The *Grapevine* is purchased from NEOCH for 25 cents each.
7. Those who sell over 300 papers per month will get their picture in the next published *Grapevine*.
8. I will never distribute the *Grapevine* while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
9. I will not vend the paper after 12 midnight.
10. I will treat others with respect. I will not use abusive language or force someone to buy a paper. I will not give a "hard sell" or make someone feel threatened.
11. I will not supply copies of the *Homeless Grapevine* to persons who are not registered distributors.
12. I will not sell the paper near (within 10 feet) of an ATM machine, telephone, crosswalks, bus stops or in the doorway of a building.
13. I will not deceive the public by saying that I am collecting for a not-for-profit charity or that I am collecting for the "homeless" in general. I will be honest in stating that all the profits from the sale of the *Grapevine* go to each vendor who distributes the paper. Avoid using the word "donation."
14. I will not use the paper as a front for panhandling. Customers that give more than the cost of the paper *will* receive a paper.
15. I will not sell the paper while selling any other items including but not limited to flowers, beads, candy, etc.
16. I will not contest territories with other distributors. When a vendor begins selling, it is common courtesy to give that vendor the space. First come first serve for most territory in Cleveland.

17. As of 7/19/99, the vendors adopted a policy that they could request to control certain territories in the community at certain times of the days. These locations are under the exclusive control of the vendor for the time period that they stated. If a vendor does not show up without calling on three consecutive days they lose this territory.

18. There are special rules for selling at the West Side Market, which have been established by the vendors. Those who do not sell a minimum number of papers at the West Side Market are not eligible for bidding on the West Side Market for the next two weeks.

19. The paper can only be sold on the public sidewalks (15 feet from public streets). This does not include parking lots, shopping centers, and other private property areas of Greater Cleveland. Suburban locations that have public sidewalks with some foot traffic are good places to sell.

20. I understand that the Grapevine strives to be a self-supporting paper created by people who are homeless or formerly homeless. To help in this effort I agree to volunteer to assist in the production of each paper.

21. I will attend monthly vendor meetings.

22. Education in newspaper writing, production, and typing is available through NEOCH.

23. Papers become the property of the vendor, and cannot be exchanged if they are damaged or are old.

24. It is the responsibility of each vendor to police fellow vendors or former vendors. Report violators of the rules to NEOCH. The value of the paper depends on keeping it credible.

25. At this time, the paper is constitutionally protected on the streets. Please report all negative encounters with the police to NEOCH immediately, and always get badge numbers of the police officers.

26. I understand that any infraction of the above rules will result in suspension of my privilege to sell Grapevines, and possible termination from the program.

27. An editorial board will govern the paper made up of vendors and volunteers. Any appeal of a suspension will be made to the vendors at the monthly vendor meeting. Any further appeal will be made to a special committee of the NEOCH Board.

28. This paper belongs to the homeless/low income in Cleveland. The purpose is to get the voices of the disenfranchised into the media. We encourage every vendor to write for the paper.

Signature________________________________
Print Name_______________________________
Date____________________
Telephone/Voice Mail_________________________
Temporary Badge #_______________________
Permanent Badge #_______________________
APPENDIX B

HOMELESS GRAPEVINE ISSUES ANALYZED