"FLIPPING THE SCRIPTS" OF POVERTY AND PANHANDLING:
CRAFTING WORK, DOING DEMOCRACY, AND CREATING CONNECTIONS
THROUGH STREETWISE

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David R. Novak
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CRAFTING WORK, DOING DEMOCRACY, AND CREATING CONNECTIONS
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by

DAVID R. NOVAK

has been approved

for the School of Communication Studies

and the College of Communication by

Lynn M. Harter
Associate Professor, School of Communication Studies

Gregory J. Shepherd
Dean, College of Communication
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"FLIPPING THE SCRIPTS" OF POVERTY AND PANHANDLING: CRAFTING WORK, DOING DEMOCRACY, AND CREATING CONNECTIONS THROUGH STREETWISE (376 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Lynn M. Harter

Homelessness is a complex social issue about which there has been no shortage of scholarly discussion. I enter this discussion through a case study of StreetWise, an organization in Chicago, Illinois. StreetWise produces a newspaper that is sold by people without homes or those at risk for homelessness. In bearing witness to the lived experiences of individuals traditionally excluded from public discourses, I provide an interpretation of how human action occurs in recurrent institutional patterns of symbolizing that are developed and reinforced by the conditions of living. I work to understand how those discourses are shaped by extra-symbolic forces. Using the theoretical frameworks of American Pragmatism(s) and feminism(s), I utilized four methodologies to collect discourse related to StreetWise, poverty, and homelessness: participatory photography, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

The results are encompassed in nine themes which include discussion of issues related to what constitutes “real” work, the importance and drawbacks of historical narratives, and corporeal and material impacts on communication. Also discussed are issues of the construction and disruption of public and private space, the connection and separation of diverse peoples, and organizational hierarchies as they occur within StreetWise and in public space. Finally, issues of journalistic agendas, definitions of
success and failure, and the importance of daily acts of participatory democracy are presented.

The results of the data collection and interpretation are presented in light of four research questions. I argue that the organizational-environment interface for vendors’ participation in public life is revealed through attempts by the organization to “flip the scripts” that guide commercial and social relationships between vendors and the broader public. It is within the complex interplay of organizational and environmental forces that StreetWise crafts viable employment and vendors do democracy. I also suggest that small acts of daily participation (e.g., simple recognition, striking up a conversation, taking and reading a street newspaper) are significant ways by which ordinary citizens can co-construct a more inclusive ethnos. Ultimately, I argue that StreetWise fosters democracy by enabling vendors to participate in public space. Practical implications for StreetWise, limitations, and directions for future research are also discussed.

Approved:

Lynn M. Harter

Associate Professor, School of Communication Studies
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"[A]ny text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37)

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Most importantly, thank you to all of the people of StreetWise. I hope this work, in some small way, offers new and interesting insights on the portions of your lives that you so graciously allowed me to glimpse.
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Chapter One

Problem Statement

The “American Dream”: even as we weave unique threads in the fabric of our futures, we do so by combining and adapting dominant narrative scripts available in our society (Burke, 1935/1984). The “American Dream”: we (Americans) generally strive to live on a pristine tree-lined street in a respectable town with a two-car garage, a fenced-in backyard for our children to play in and a cared-for home that our neighbors respect. Indeed, one of the primary symbols of having made it in America is when you are no longer renting a living space, but when you own your home. Certainly, renting an apartment is a far cry from being without a home, but wealth, generally and home ownership, more specifically, remains an anchor in the mythic narrative of the “American Dream” (DeSantis, 1998). Most Americans dream about and work towards home ownership – a place where no one can tell you what to do, where you can paint the walls any color you choose, create as many nail holes as you like, and mow the lawn when the spirit moves you.

The “American Dream” is both medium and outcome of the patterned and constitutive character of social structures (Giddens, 1979), and often is invoked to symbolize individual achievement and encourage a strong work ethic. The narrative of the “American Dream” is one that is readily available for public consumption. In 2003, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had the American Dream Downpayment Initiative (ADDI) signed into law by Congress. This legislation strives to “increase the homeownership rate, especially among lower income and
minority households, and to revitalize and stabilize communities. ADDI will help first-time homebuyers with the biggest hurdle to homeownership: down payment and closing costs” (HUD, 2005a, n.p.). Similarly, Fannie Mae, a private company who “provides financial products and services that make it possible for low-, moderate- and middle-income families to buy homes” uses the slogan “Our business is the American dream” (Fannie Mae, 2005, n.p.). This figure of speech has materialized in many patterns and practices that seek to include more people in the “American Dream.” HUD has a “Blueprint for the American Dream” plan to stimulate home ownership among minorities. The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) sponsors an American Dream down payment program. And in Oahu, Hawaii, the American Dream Realty Company sells homes to prospective island state purchasers.

Like any trope or figure of speech, the “American Dream” functions to describe and discover reality (Burke, 1945/1969). “They [tropes] are sensemaking imagery used to describe, prescribe, and circumscribe social reality. In the process, they also project, constitute, and theorize particular constructions of those realities” (Oswick, Putnam & Keenoy, 2004, p. 106). In this case, a metonymic relationship exists between the “American Dream” and home ownership. For Burke, metonymy is a form of reduction. The basic strategy of metonymy is to “convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible” (p. 506). The “American Dream” (i.e., the incorporeal) is reduced metonymically to home ownership (i.e., the corporeal). If, as Burke reminded us, reductions of any kind are partial, then what is at stake in the metonymic relationship between the “American Dream” and home ownership?
The experience of homelessness is hard for many people to imagine. The discourses that we encounter (and participate in) across our life spans – interpersonal interactions, institutional discourses, public dialogues – construct hegemonic portraits of reality that naturalize the interests of the domiciled population (Giddens, 1979). Most Americans identify with those who live or seek to live the “American Dream.” Consequently, “being without home transports a person, often violently and unwillingly from mainstream to margin” (Campbell & Reeves, 1989, p. 21). Burke (1935/1984) called these our “occupational psychoses” or “trained incapacities” (p. 4). Burke argued that “a society’s ways of life affect its modes of thinking by giving rise to partial perspectives” (p. 4). In other words, the homed world that most of us live in, combined with how we make and unmake that world symbolically, orients us to talk and act in certain ways even as it gives rise to blind spots and biases.

Identification with the circumstances of people without homes is difficult for those of us who have homes. Likewise, identification with (or participation in) community life as embodied in the “American Dream” may be difficult for people living on the streets, in homeless shelters, or living in temporary locations. This is not surprising given that societies of any sort are characterized by a search for order–structures that delegate responsibility and authority and establish differentiations (Burke, 1935/1984; Giddens, 1979). Burke drew our attention to how orders become weighted in which some individuals become more important or essential than others (see also Bakhtin, 1981). Weighted orders (e.g., hierarchy) separate individuals from one another. Burke argued that distance between individuals emerges through separation, and results in mystery.
Mystery maintains distinctions even as it induces guilt or embarrassment among individuals (e.g., us and them). Thus, individuals and collectives both seek to congregate through processes of identification and segregate through processes of differentiation. For many domiciled individuals, a sense of mystery surrounds the myriad forces that relate to the experience of homelessness, with little consubstantiality or identification between people with and without homes (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005). If Americans were to draw their knowledge of homelessness primarily from mediated news outlets, for example, we might infer that homelessness is a problem of middle-aged men with drinking or drug problems (see Campbell & Reeves, 1989). In fact, the population of people without homes is as diverse as the population of people with homes (Dail, 2001; Miller, Scott, Stage, & Birkholt, 1995).

Homelessness is a complex social issue about which there has been no shortage of scholarly discussion, especially among psychologists and sociologists. Yet, I leave most scholarly publications about homelessness desiring deeper discussions of how symbolic forces intersect with the material, physiological, political, and institutional conditions that relate to how people experience homelessness, (dis)empowerment, and social change. As an organizational communication scholar and practitioner, I am interested in understanding how human action occurs in recurrent institutional patterns of symbolizing that are developed and reinforced by the conditions of living. Symbols of any kind construct relationships among events, objects, persons, status groups, classes, and institutions, and in so doing influence how we symbol-making, using, and mis-using creatures organize to reach individual and collective goals. In particular, I am committed
to identifying symbolic and extra-symbolic forces that coalesce in ways that allow individuals to be resilient in the face of inhospitable conditions and to participate democratically in the full and free interplay of ideas—a process of participation that remains at the heart of community life and is a key value of the practice of democracy (Dewey, 1927).

Through a case study of StreetWise\textsuperscript{1}, an organization in Chicago, Illinois, that publishes a newspaper by the same name, this dissertation was my attempt to bring homelessness specifically, and social justice more generally, to the forefront of the communication discipline. Likewise, I sought to bear witness to the lived experiences of individuals traditionally excluded from public discourses, including scholarly dialogues. Specifically, I explored how StreetWise vendors, staff and board members \textit{democratically} mobilize material and symbolic resources for those living in poverty even as they seek to engage their audience as citizens, enhance civic discourse, and promote greater public participation in political processes—hallmarks of democratic ways of life. \textit{StreetWise}\textsuperscript{2}, in existence since 1992, was originally inspired by Street News, a street journal founded in New York in late 1989 (Howley, 2003; www.streetwise.org).

Currently, \textit{StreetWise} is one of approximately 50 street newspapers that exist in North America. The number of StreetWise vendors ranges depending on the date and the source, and definite numbers are difficult to find. StreetWise’s most current number of total vendors helped is 3,600, a figure from 1998 (StreetWise Home Page, 2005a, n.p). A press release from Western Illinois University places that number at more than 5,000 in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} When referencing StreetWise, the organization, the text appears sans italics. If instances reference both the organization and the newspaper, text sans italics appears.
\item \textsuperscript{2} When referencing \textit{StreetWise}, the newspaper, the text appears with italics.
\end{itemize}
2002 (Shinberger, 2002). Additionally, StreetWise started a Work Empowerment Center, offering vendors the opportunity to learn and develop various work related skills. StreetWise is published weekly and vendors sell the newspaper throughout the city at various places for the price of $1.00. Circulation numbers generally have ranged from 25,000 per issue in 1998 to 60,000 per issue in 1999. Vendors can be seen in many areas of downtown Chicago and around popular attractions where there are large numbers of people such as stadiums, nightspots, and museums.

Recognized as one of the most fiscally viable street newspapers in the United States, StreetWise simultaneously provides employment opportunities for men and women without homes or otherwise at risk and raises societal awareness about poverty-related issues (Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, & Carson-Stern, 2004). On its website, StreetWise articulates its mission: "to empower men and women who are homeless or at risk of being so, as they work towards gainful employment and self-sufficiency" (StreetWise Home Page, 2005a, n.p.). Dodge (1999) pointed out that editorially StreetWise “contains items for both poor people and privileged (or middle-class) people concerned about poverty” (p. 61). Tyson (1996) reported that in addition to issues concerning poverty, StreetWise carries news about related issues such as public housing, holiday bargain shopping as well as art reviews, event listings, poetry and short stories. StreetWise, as well as other street newspapers, are not just gimmicky vehicles for outdated news. These types of publications can serve as “a forum for the voices of the poor” (Howley, 2003, p. 283). Ideally, journalism ought to be about fostering free speech and voice, encouraging an engaged citizenry, enhancing civic discourse, and promoting
greater public participation in political processes. In alternative journalist publications in particular, practices are democratized by “recognizing the value and acknowledging the authority of the poor and by making these voices public” (Howley, 2003, p. 284).

Personally and professionally, I find myself interested in democratic values and organizing in intersecting and overlapping communities. Like Mumby and Stohl (1996), I recognize that organizational boundaries are permeable and in flux – the borders between organizations and societies cannot be easily drawn. “Most organizational disciplines assume that organizations are embedded in a cultural/societal context that affects and is affected by internal organizational action,” argued Mumby and Stohl, “but see organizations as separate and distinct from society” (p. 65). Mumby and Stohl urged organizational communication scholars to problematize the organization-society relationship. At the same time, Cheney et al. (1998) and Stohl and Cheney (2001) urged scholars to explore the boundary-spanning dimensions of democratic values and organizing. Cheney et al. issued the following call:

We deliberately urge organizational communication scholars to look beyond the boundaries of an organization to understand fully such organizational practices as participation. This “boundary crossing” makes sense, given the array of practical and theoretical reasons for considering in a fluid manner the organization-environment interface. (p. 38)

Cheney and colleagues point us toward looking simultaneously inside and outside particular organizations to understand practices and patterns that reproduce and resist democratic values (see also Harter, 2004; Harter & Krone, 2001). The context of
StreetWise afforded a unique opportunity to explore how society, culture, organizations, democracy and communication are inextricably and reciprocally bound. StreetWise, by the nature of its organizational structure and mission as a journalistic outlet, provides scholars and practitioners with a glimpse of the reflexive relationships between intersecting and overlapping communities that strive to support a democratic way of life (e.g., StreetWise as community, Chicago as community). Like the mythic narrative of the “American Dream,” discourses of democracy interpenetrate and are informed by autobiographical, institutional, and societal narratives.

I sought to reveal if and how vendors, staff, and board members embody democratic subjectivities even as they work to foster a democratic way of life as they interact with various elements of the broader Chicago community. I explored if and how StreetWise – both the organization and the newspaper – expand the full and free interplay of ideas in the public sphere (Dewey, 1927), as well as if and how StreetWise’s actions enable and/or constrain democratic communicative practices. The ability for marginalized populations to successfully access and participate in dominant systems of resources and decision-making remained as a central focus of this project.

In the remainder of this chapter, I synthesize literature on the scope and nature of homelessness in the United States. I then provide specific information about homelessness in Chicago, IL, and the Chicago Continuum of Care (CCC), a consortium of organizations committed to ending homelessness. Chicago and the CCC serve as the primary settings for StreetWise performances. Finally, I articulate my standpoint as a
feminist and pragmatist, and how that standpoint provided a theoretically sensible place from which to make sense of these discourses.

The Scope of Homelessness in the United States

“Even to speak of ‘the’ homeless is to imply a unity of experience, a commonality of need that does not exist” (Wright, 2005, p. 926).

Homelessness is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it a uniquely Western experience. However, visibility is one of the most identifiable attributes of contemporary homelessness in America when considered in light of historical conditions that often removed people without homes from the public sphere (e.g., tougher enforcement of vagrancy laws, mental institutions) (Snow & Mulcahy, 2001; Harter et al., 2005). “Since its emergence as a social problem in the 1980s, homelessness has not abated,” argued Wakin (2005), “One result is that visible homelessness is prevalent in cities and nationwide” (p. 1013). Subsequently, the issue of homelessness has garnered a great deal of attention across the various disciplines in the social sciences. Jencks (1994) noted the burgeoning attention that homelessness received in the 1980s and into the 1990s. Scholars, in one sense, have struggled with the issue of homelessness because of the complexity and fluidity of the problem as lived by individuals and families (Fitzgerald, Shelley, & Dail, 2001; Wright, 2005). Individuals move into and out of homeless states episodically and sometimes frequently. Thus, delineating the scope of the problem has proven difficult. More than 20 years after issues of homelessness gained prominence with academicians and prominence in the public consciousness, the complexity of the issues
remain baffling (Dail, 2001). In this section, I synthesize work that sought to define and describe the scope of homelessness in the United States.

Descriptive studies about homelessness take on many forms including those that try to define homelessness, quantify or describe homelessness, or describe a specific subpopulation of people without homes. Schiappa (2003) directed our attention to the importance of definitions, and argued, “definitions put into practice a special sort of social knowledge – a shared understanding among people about themselves, the objects of their world, and how they ought to use language” (p. 3). In the act of defining, we participate in the construction of a socially understood reality that specifies “competent audiences, types of knowledge sought, and appropriate modes of analysis” (p. 156). Clair (1993) also argued for a critical understanding of the framing of issues. Whether it is an instance of sexual harassment or of what it means to be without a home, “framing strategies can serve a range of behaviors from contributing to or challenging dominant ideologies” (p. 131). Definitions of the “American Dream,” for example, emerge from and frame our understanding of the world and influence our involvement in particular performances and social routines.

Jencks (1994) noted the difficulty of defining homelessness, an issue that continues to challenge scholars and governmental officials (see also Markos & Allen, 2001). Jencks noted that different elements of the social world alter the definition of what it means to be “homeless.” Whether or not “doubled-up” families or individuals in substance abuse centers, shelters, jails or mental hospitals count as homeless functions to alter the nature of the problem. Through processes of inclusion and exclusion, definitions
act as forms of social control. Definitions call into being political and social priorities and subject positions for various individuals. Dail (2001) argued that the “debate over the definition continues” (p. 6). The definition of homelessness is important for at least two reasons. First, it is crucial to understand the nature of the problem. Second, how homelessness is defined affects the extent to which it is perceived as a problem and subsequent resource allocation (e.g., fiscal resources, human resources, etc.).

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (and subsequent amendments in 1990 and 1994) defined people without homes as “those who lack a regular and adequate night-time residence that is a supervised public/private shelter, people who sleep in an institution that provides temporary residence, or people who sleep in a public/private place not intended as sleeping accommodations for humans” (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2005b, n.p.). Like the Chicago Continuum of Care (CCC) (2002), I adopted a broader definition of homelessness that (1) encompasses individuals and families precariously doubled up with relatives or friends; and, (2) acknowledges different patterns of homelessness including chronic, episodic, and transitional homelessness. Chronic homelessness generally refers to an extended experience of homelessness (two or more years), episodic homelessness generally refers to recurrent periods of homelessness, and transitional homelessness generally refers to a single episode of homelessness that is relatively short in duration (CCC, 2002). A broader definition necessarily acknowledges the diverse nature of how people experience homelessness. Amidst the heterogeneity, people without homes have at least two things
in common – the experience of abject poverty (chronic, episodic, or transitional) and lack of access to safe and affordable housing.

Definitional issues are important because those terms lead to decisions about who is included when counting and describing people without homes. Enumeration studies represent a primary subset of descriptive research about homelessness and remain fraught with difficulties. Counting people without homes is important for various reasons, particularly to raise awareness and to argue for funding. Blasi (1990) noted that enumeration of people without homes is a key question because “both the public and politicians have been fascinated with the question, ‘How many homeless are there?’” (p. 209). Since formal attempts to quantify the number of homeless began appearing in the early 1980s, estimates of the number of people without homes range from 250,000 to roughly 2 million depending on the source of the information (Bogard, 2001). The number of homeless is significant enough that discussions of how to capture the magnitude of the population have occurred among scholars (Burt, 1995; Fitzgerald et al., 2001).

As the 3rd largest city in the United States, Chicago, a city of nearly 3 million people, has a notable number of people without homes among its population. The CCC published a strategic plan in 2002 which provided a detailed picture of the state of homelessness in Chicago. The CCC plan (2002) noted the notorious difficulty in pinpointing the exact number of people without homes as does much of the literature on homelessness. A 2001 study conducted at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) estimated that each day, approximately 6,100 people utilize some resource, public or
private, available to people without homes. But this attempt at capturing a snapshot of Chicago’s population of people without homes is itself flawed. The CCC estimated that more than 6,500 shelter beds are available in Chicago on any given night. But who is filling these beds? The UIC Committee and the CCC approximated that 20% of the population experiences repeated or episodic homelessness. This UIC study only measured people who accessed some aspect of the shelter system. This study did not take into account people in temporary housing, people living exclusively on the street or in their car, illegal squatters, or families who are doubled-up with friends or relatives. The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, a local umbrella organization, estimated that over the course of a year, up to 80,000 people in Chicago experience homelessness.

Homelessness generally, and within Chicago specifically, emerges as a complex and significant web of social issues that defies simple solutions. Yet, the CCC and StreetWise strive to address the multi-dimensional nature of homelessness by building community (see Chapter Two for a review of literature about the causes and consequences of homelessness). The CCC plan (2002) noted:

Ultimately, our ability to end homelessness rests upon the degree to which we are able to wed the efforts of the homeless service delivery system to those of other mainstream programs and systems of care – programs and systems whose failures have contributed to its growth. Only through comprehensive, cross systems strategies will we be able to fully assist people to access and sustain affordable housing and achieve community integration and economic stability. (p. 1, emphasis added)
In stark contrast to discursive and material forces that seek to erase people without homes from the public scene or what Goffman (1959) termed “frontstage” regions (see Harter et al., 2005; Snow & Mulcahy, 2001; von Mahs, 2005), StreetWise works to integrate vendors in broader community life. Far from “backstage,” vendors connect with diverse others as they sell papers, share their personal stories in “Vendor Voices” columns, and work toward economic self-sufficiency. Moreover, through its newspaper, StreetWise works to develop a full and free interplay of ideas necessary for democratic communities to thrive (Dewey, 1927).

StreetWise and the CCC work to establish inter-organizational and interpersonal connections with and for people without homes, and in so doing provide a glimpse of how organizational practices can function to bond and bridge communities by encouraging coalition and solidarity among diverse peoples including those who remain marginalized. Based on my initial meetings and observations at StreetWise, I was convinced that members, in their finest moments, facilitate what John Dewey (1927) identified as the hallmark of a democratic way of life – “associated living.” After collecting and analyzing data, I now have a deeper understanding of how that is accomplished. My journey as a co-constructor of meaning about how StreetWise fosters democratic living demanded scholarly entry points. The following section renders visible these entry points by articulating my standpoint that serves as the theoretical and philosophical backdrop for this dissertation.
My Feminist and Pragmatist Standpoint

“We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we still instinctively think of as “they” rather than “us” . . . to create a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have” (Rorty, 1989, p. 196).

I grew up in Chicago. My family moved into our home on the Southwest side of Chicago on my first birthday and I called that house my home until I moved away to college 18 years later. During my time at college and in graduate school, that house remained the place where I would go on breaks from school. My parents still live in that house, so in many ways, my home is still in Chicago. If you spend any amount of time exploring the largest cities in the country, including Chicago, homelessness is simply a fact of life. Or so you’re told when you are a kid. Or so you assume. When you leave the bus or the train downtown, seeing “bums” beg for change is a fact of life. They are just there. That’s what they are when you unconsciously walk past them, “bums.”

Bruce Springsteen wrote in his song Atlantic City, “Down here it’s just winners and losers and don’t get caught on the wrong side of that line.” I wasn’t on their side of the line. Most people aren’t. You get used to seeing “them” when you traverse Lower Wacker Drive. You get used to “them” standing or sitting near busy intersections intercepting lunchtime pedestrian traffic or sitting near the bus stop on State Street or huddled near building exhaust vents trying to absorb a few precious degrees of warmth. In the summertime, many people walk by with little sympathy even as an occasional person flips a quarter or maybe a buck their way. In the winter time, sympathy seems to increase slightly and people seem to be more willing to give a buck or two. At least, I did. Somehow, I guess,
people without homes seem more like people when it is cold outside. I am relatively sure that I never purposefully denigrated any person without a home, whether publicly or privately, while I was living in Chicago. But I certainly attributed their homeless status to their individual actions or mental status and not to hard luck or systemic issues of capitalism such as a lack of low-income housing or deinstitutionalization. Winners and losers. The ignorance of my youth.

Homelessness is a condition that city dwellers confront on a daily basis. The residue of a few memories still remains with me today. I can remember one night when I was probably 13 or 14 and my dad came home from work talking about a man without a home that he walked past on the way from his laboratory at Cook County Hospital to the parking lot where he left his car for the day. I remember him being frustrated. He had given this person 3 or 4 dollars, but he recognized the temporary nature of his gift. “I can’t do that everyday,” I remember him saying, “I want to help, but if I give him 3-4 dollars every day, that is a thousand dollars a year. And that is only one of the 6-7 homeless people I see on the 5 block walk to my car.” I remember him wanting to help, and helping when he could, but the limitations on what he could accomplish alone were all too real and quite harsh.

I also very distinctly remember having lunch during the summer of 1997 at First National Bank Plaza in Chicago, just a few blocks away from City Hall, where I was working that summer in between my sophomore and junior years of college. I was sitting near the stairs at the west side of the plaza and had just begun to eat the brown bag lunch that I had brought from home. The co-worker that I was eating with had stopped to
purchase soup and bread from a local cafe. Soon after we sat down and began eating, a man began rummaging through the garbage can that was only a few feet from us. We saw him open a few bags in search of food that had been discarded, but he left just a minute or two later with nothing in hand. To this day, I can remember the spot where I was sitting, the brightness of the sun, most of the contents of my lunch and the look of despair on my co-worker’s face as we returned to our lunches after witnessing this event. I likely had a similar look on my face. My appetite had quickly disappeared. Not because somebody was picking their lunch out of the remains of many other discarded lunches but because I recalled my breakfast from that morning and knew that I would partake in a full family dinner that night and that there would be a refrigerator full of food for me to choose from when I got home. Not to mention I had enough money in my pocket to buy food to sustain me for a few days.

It took only a few seconds for me to decide that this man needed my lunch more than I did. Because I had already eaten some of my sandwich and opened the can of soda, I kept those, but packed up the rest of my lunch, some chips, a piece of fruit, a bag with some carrots and raisins, and a few cookies. My friend quickly packed up the remainder of her soup and bread and put it back in the bag from which it came I took both bags and I chased the man about ½ of a block north up Clark street and gave him the food. I probably mumbled something to him about the food being for him and I think I remember him saying “thanks,” but that is largely unimportant. I returned to my friend sitting at the plaza and she asked if I had found him. I said that I had and because both of
us had lost our appetites, we walked around downtown for the remainder of our lunch hour.

Almost 10 years after that lunchtime incident in downtown Chicago, I wrote this dissertation claiming the monikers of a feminist and pragmatist. Ten years ago, I know that I did not know what a feminist or a pragmatist was, and I certainly would not have called myself either. Very few 18 year old males do, I suppose. However, I now find my intellectual identity evolving at the intersection of these lines of theory and practice. Following each of these trails has resulted in moments of confusion, enlightenment, satisfaction, and frustration. Next, I outline key features of these traditions that resonate with me: a young, white, able-bodied, middle/upper middle-class, heterosexual male, and then articulate five intersections between feminist and pragmatist theory and practice.

First, pragmatist philosophies ultimately boil down to two key values: community and hope. Hope, for James, is a central tenet of pragmatism. He argued,

Part of wisdom clearly is to believe what one desires; for the belief is one of the indispensable preliminary conditions of the realization of its object. *There are then cases where faith creates its own verification.* Believe, and you shall be right, for you shall save yourself; doubt, and you shall again be right, for you shall perish. The only difference is that to believe is greatly to your advantage. *(James, 1977a, p. 337)*

Pragmatists argue that believing in what you want the world to be is the first step in making it so (e.g., Rorty, 1989; Simonson, 2001). If one wants racism to end one has to believe first that a world without racism can exist. If one wants sexism to end, then one
has to believe that a world can exist where men and women exist on equal terms. If one wants a world without homelessness, then one has to believe that such a world can exist. It is greatly to our advantage to believe. This element of pragmatist philosophy, which captures its spirit, gives me purpose. Pragmatists offer me the hopeful foundation to work towards making the world a better place. As argued by Rorty, pragmatist philosophy, “is one of the techniques of reweaving our vocabulary of moral deliberation in order to accommodate new beliefs (e.g., that women and blacks are capable of more than white males had thought, that property is not sacred, that sexual matters are of merely private concern)” (p. 196).

Pragmatists also are concerned with the creation of community. By creating localized discourses of overlapping meaning, people can connect and identify with others even as they maintain their individuality. Depew and Peters (2001) articulated the method and purpose of Chicago School sociology as “the creation of a democratically integrated, but socially heterogeneous and fully differentiated society” (p. 16). Indeed, simultaneous desires for individualism and solidarity with others represent a fundamental condition of community life in liberal-pluralistic societies (deTocqueville, 1835/1956; Locke, 1690/1975; Rorty, 1989). Community, for pragmatists, is not discovered. Community is created as members symbolically and materially negotiate independence and connection with others. As argued by Shepherd and Rothenbuhler (2001), “communication is conceived as the necessary symbolic base of community” (p. x). As such, communication also can serve as the means by which community and democracy can be subverted and/or dismissed. In The Public and its Problems, Dewey (1927) argued:
The same forces which have brought about the forms of democratic government, general suffrage, executives and legislators chosen by majority vote, have also brought about conditions which halt the social and humane ideals that demand the utilization of government as the genuine instrumentality of an inclusive and fraternally associated public. (p. 109)

A case in point: Putnam’s (2000) bestseller *Bowling Alone* documented the decline of social capital (i.e., social networks of trust and reciprocity) and a diminished sense of commitment among Americans to a robust and diverse civic life. In sum, communication can foster and stifle the democratic impulse and the creation of social capital that bonds and bridges diverse individuals.

Community has been a central construct of pragmatist theory and practice since its early thinkers. John Dewey, one of the most influential American pragmatists, posed two criteria for judging the goodness of a given community: “How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared?” and “How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association” (1916/1966, p. 83). These criteria are as relevant today as they were nearly a century ago when Dewey articulated them. Rorty (1989), for example, argued that having a “larger life-world” ought to be central to the creation and maintenance of community. In other words, having more people with whose views we can compare our own is crucial for creating a world where more people are welcome to participate, people feel free to disagree with one another, and discursive spaces characterized by what Bakhtin (1981) termed “heteroglossia” can flourish (i.e., the presence of competing ideologies and voices). Rorty urged us to extend our sense of
“we” to individuals we otherwise might consider as “they” and to do so in a way that maintains difference. I, like Dewey and Rorty, believe that people’s experiences are diminished when the free interchange of varying life experiences is subdued.

Feminisms traditionally emerged in response to gendered inequities. But feminist theory, for me, is broader in scope to fight all forms of oppression: gendered, raced, economic, educational, sexual, aged. Wood (1988) argued that focusing on oppression in all its instantiations enhances efforts to produce social change. Condit (1988), too, argued that “we repeatedly find that the best solutions are complex, multi-faceted ones which take in multiple principles and theories because important problems are always complex ones” (p. 7). Complex solutions to disenfranchisement have to include diverse community members, including men, as part of the solutions. Certainly, changing the ideologies, practices, and attitudes of the “oppressors” must be part of social change. Men ultimately ought to play some role in the alleviation of disparate gendered power relationships and other forms of marginalization.

Weed (1987), in response to three essays regarding men’s roles in feminism, argued

the point is not to set up a polarity that can somehow be resolved, but rather to continue working with sometimes unresolvable, and always interlocking problems. That is something that I think both women and men can do from our different positions. (p. 77)

Men will no doubt engage feminisms and/or social justice issues from different standpoints than women; yet, I believe men can be active agents working for social
change. At the same time, we must recognize that men and women alike perform engendered roles – roles that also are influenced by discourses of race, ethnicity, and class (Mumby, 1998). Too often, scholars assume that men represent the “genderless” norm; gender only becomes relevant to women and in isolation from other sources of oppression (see critiques by Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Buzzanell, 1994; Mumby, 1998). I embrace a feminist standpoint that works to identify multiple and local forms of domination and resistance – features of collective human action.

Feminist thought, particularly postmodern strands of feminist theory and practice, resonates with me because it emphasizes difference, diversity, and variety (Farganis, 1994) and links knowledge with power (Fraser, 1989). Postmodern feminisms represent ways to “dethrone old epistemology and those who held power through it and make a case for inserting the heretofore unarticulated voices of women [as well as those who desire to struggle along with them for equality] in new scripts, new texts and new discourses” (Farganis, 1994, p. 110). My feminist standpoint has postmodern tendencies because I seek to recognize instability and indeterminacy in meanings and knowledge and create space for self-reflexivity and constantly evolving frameworks for understanding the world. Campbell (1988) argued that “good research vigorously examines presuppositions, particularly when they are embodied in society’s most cherished myths” (p. 4). Likewise, Mumby (1997) argued that postmodernism, particularly as it relates to communication studies, challenges modernity in three key ways. First, the all-knowing subject is decentered. “The postmodern intellectual has given up the ‘authority game’ as a uniquely positioned arbiter of knowledge claims” (p. 14). Second, postmodern thought
questions the modernist separation of truth and power. Third, postmodernists resist the bifurcation of the signifier and the signified. Postmodernists approached the world as a fragmented place where meanings are individual but may overlap, and as a place in need of the constant recognition of the inability of our own explanations to explain the worlds of others.

However, postmodern incarnations of feminist theory are not without their contradictions. Hekman (1990) and others (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Nicholson, 1990; Tong, 1989) outline several potential incompatibilities of postmodern and feminist thought. First, Hekman (1990) argued that postmodernists remain uneasy with the modernist roots of feminism. Hekman stated, “Modernist values are very much a part of contemporary feminist positions” (p. 2). A second point of contention between feminisms and postmodernism is postmodernists’ rejection of absolute values. Without absolute values, “the viable political program” of the feminist movement becomes seemingly impossible (p. 6).

The tenuous relationship between postmodernisms and feminisms, and the residual discourses of modernity, can be addressed by turning to Ashcraft and Mumby’s (2004) communicology of organization. Ashcraft and Mumby proposed that feminism is not reducible to either (modernism or postmodernism); rather, we see feminism as existing in productive tension with these two discourses, which generates possibilities for innovative theorizing. Our perspective thus attempts to avoid the pitfalls of the endlessly deferred, textualized, and decentered subject of
postmodernism and of the essentialism and monadic autonomy of Cartesian modernism. (pp. 117-118)

This movement of feminist theory and practice to the intersection point of modernism and postmodernism allows scholars to “overcome the ‘subjectless’ character of many postmodern analyses, while avoiding the agency-structure dualism” (p. 118).

Ashcraft and Mumby’s feminist communicology also encourages scholars to accomplish three main goals at the intersection of modern and postmodern discourses. First, Ashcraft and Mumby’s communicology resists bifurcating power and resistance. Instead, they view “relations of power as simultaneous processes of resistance, reproduction, and transformation. Social actors are neither completely subject to power formations nor occupying pristine spaces of resistance that are free from power” (p. 120). Secondly, their mode of analysis urges scholars to consider the historical conditions that can “bring to light the ways that current organizational realities reflect the hegemony of particular, historically emergent discourses” (p. 121). Lastly, and quite importantly, when considering an impoverished population such as people without homes, is communicology’s attention to both discourse and materiality. Although recognizing the need for discursive understandings of institutional and community life, this framework does not diminish the importance of the lived material and corporeal conditions of life.

Ashcraft and Mumby argued that “the symbolic/material dialectic is important in that it allows us to explore how the material world itself is subject to and defined by human discursive possibilities” (p. 124). I, like Ashcraft and Mumby, recognize that material conditions gives rise to and serve as impetus for communication even as
communication practices generate material conditions and embodied subjectivities. Through an ethnographic case study of StreetWise, I worked to move beyond the tendency of communication scholars to engage in “symbol worship” (Cheney, 2000, p. 44) by adopting a feminist standpoint that foregrounds (1) how discourses render the material world meaningful; and, (2) how material parameters shape participants’ symbolic interactions.

The Relationships Between Feminisms and Pragmatisms

Feminist and pragmatist philosophies worked in tandem to provide me with a standpoint from which to recognize the multiplicity of ways in which inequality is experienced by StreetWise stakeholders as well as work with them in various fluid ways to advocate for change, empowerment, and human resiliency in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. A leading feminist and pragmatist scholar, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, noted that:

Pragmatist philosophy…is therefore continued, deepened, and expanded by those feminist theorists who link knowledge with action, who take the goal of thinking to be emancipation, who recognize the multiple conditions that affect understanding, who demonstrate how a disembodied rationality distorts rather than reveals the world in which we find ourselves, who recognize the interpretive character of experience and who therefore deflate claims about the nature of reality as such and develop instead morally responsible intellectual criteria for adjudicating specific claims about particular realities. (Seigfried, 2002, p. 50)
Shuler and Tate (2001) noted that, “at this juncture, pragmatism most naturally fits with feminist theory” (p. 209).

In the next sections, I explore five associations of feminist and pragmatist work that were pertinent to this project: experience, social change, community, integrative thinking, and theory/practice. The intersections of these broad and diverse bodies of work transcend single theorists or even lineages within a perspective. In other words, I identify each juncture as connecting multiple strands of diverse theoretical perspectives. I engaged these points of convergence between feminist and pragmatist work as I synthesized existing literature about democracy in overlapping and intersecting communities, engaged in participant observations and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, and co-constructed a web of stories about Streetwise, homelessness, and Chicago.

**Experience**

Experience is a foundational construct for feminisms and pragmatisms. The subordination of women’s experiences remains central to feminist work across theoretical standpoints (Ferguson, 1984; Fletcher, 1999; Foss & Foss, 1988; Harding, 1991). Likewise, experience, broadly conceived, is central to pragmatist philosophy. Dewey noted,

experience…includes what men [sic] do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also how men [sic] act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine—in short, processes of experiencing. (Dewey, 1958, p. 8, emphasis in original)
Seigfried (1996) revealed this intersection in arguing “for pragmatists, philosophical reflection begins and ends with experience, as it does for many feminists. For both feminists and pragmatists, experience is inextricably personal and social” (p. 37). Individual experiences lead those observing or living them to new comprehensions of their existence. William James wrote “The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events” (James, 1977, p. 430). Knowledge emanates from experience for pragmatists. For James and Dewey, knowledge cannot exist outside of experience; learning is a reflexive and constructive process of making sense of experiences.

At the time of James’ work, this philosophical shift flew in the face of positivist scientific traditions. Siegfried (1996) noted, “James announced a new dawn for philosophy, one which turns away from philosophizing as the development of merely technical expertise to a recognition that each person already senses, however inarticulately, the meaning of life” (p. 12). In other words, James, and subsequently much pragmatist work, values the everyday experiences of individuals as well as the ways in which they make sense out of them. Dewey (1934/1980) in *Art and Experience* called into being a finely-tuned ability of individuals to be responsive in their encounters with others and the environment:

Experience in the degree in which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events. Instead of
signifying surrender to caprice and disorder, it affords our sole demonstration of a stability that is not stagnation but is rhythmic and developing. Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ. (p. 19, emphasis in original)

The fabric of community life, for pragmatists, is (re)woven as people learn through the experience of associated living. Thus, pragmatists’ flexibility, fluidity, and pluralistic tendencies privilege the ongoing lived experiences of people. Dewey (1916/1966) ultimately urged educators to help individuals learn through experience, “The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling” (p. 51).

Feminist theories of knowledge, too, arose in part because prior regimes of knowledge production often did not recognize the experiences of women, minorities and other marginalized populations (Donovan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 1991; Smith, 1990). As with pragmatisms, experience, particularly women’s experiences, are central to feminisms. Because of the marginalization of women’s experiences within dominant, patriarchal, hegemonic discourses, feminists have carved out space for the discussion of women’s experiences. Multiple scholars (e.g., Acker, 1990; Ashcraft 2000, 2001; Buzzanell, 2000, Ferguson, 1984, Ferree & Martin, 1995; Fletcher, 1999; Mumby, 1996; Parker, 2003) all note how feminist perspectives of organizing have developed out of the recognition that women’s perspectives often are silenced in the mainstream discourses of organizational life.
Feminists value everyday lived experiences as resources for social change. From those everyday lived experiences, feminist scholars seek to root out and disrupt oppression, domination, and hierarchy. Importantly, contemporary organizational communication scholars have shifted their feminist focus to unpacking the multifaceted intersections among race, class, sexuality, gender and communication (Allen, 2004; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Parker, 2003). Allen, in particular, has urged feminists to explore the experience of social class and oppression and identify “how class-power dynamics unfold in macrosocietal structures as individuals engage in everyday micropractices” (p. 96). Class differences and class struggles embody powerful and persistent predictors of accessibility to resources, potential for success in leading the American Dream, and likelihood of participation in civic life (Putnam, 2000).

My goal in this dissertation was to co-construct an account of how participants experience homelessness, (dis)empowerment, StreetWise, and community life. I approached experience as symbolic, material, and corporeal (see also Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Cloud, 1994; McKerrow, 1998). Cloud urged communication scholars to recognize that symbols are not the only thing that matters. Of course, discourses do matter – they have material effects and serve material interests in the world. Communication scholars possess a repertoire of tools for understanding how political and economic power is symbolically reproduced and resisted. Yet, material practices of exploitation and oppression and environmental conditions intertwine with (and take on meaning through) discursive formations. Cloud (1994) poignantly argued:
We ought not sacrifice the notions of practical truth, bodily reality, and material oppression to the tendency to render all of the experience discursive, as if no one went hungry or died in war. To say that hunger and war are rhetorical is to state the obvious; to suggest that rhetoric is all they are is to leave critique behind. (p. 159)

Experience is symbolic; yet, it cannot be reduced solely to the symbolic. I sought to consider corporeal, material, and symbolic experiences as they mutually inform one another.

**Social Change**

The second intersection that I highlight between feminist and pragmatist work is that of social change. Social change has been engrained in pragmatist philosophies since the writings of James. He argued

> There can be no difference anywhere that doesn’t make a difference elsewhere - no difference in abstract truth that doesn’t express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on by somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen [sic]. (1977c, p. 379)

Mead (1934), too, argued that by demonstrating particular attitudes that people become “closer together, creating the mechanism by which a deeper communication with participation is possible” (p. 297). Pragmatists care about social change. James and Dewey, for example, are noted for their efforts to integrate women into the world of higher education. Despite their lack of recognition of how women influenced their early writings, the early Pragmatists wanted women in higher education (Schuler & Tate, 2001;
Seigfried, 1996). Jane Addams, who worked closely with John Dewey in Chicago in the early 1900’s, established Hull House, a center that catered to women’s needs and interests including everything from cultural needs (arts, libraries) to services (child care, employment agency). Addams was dedicated to improving social conditions, as well as writing and thinking from a pragmatist standpoint. As West (1999) movingly argued in his essay entitled Why Pragmatism? “In this world-weary period of pervasive cynicisms, nihilisms, terrorisms, and possible extermination, there is a longing for norms and values that can make a difference, a yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plights” (p. 144, emphasis added). It is clear that pragmatist thought, in many instances, transformed into practice hope for better social situations.

Ferree and Martin’s (1995) groundbreaking edited volume Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women’s Movement serves, in part, as a documentary of the importance of social change to feminist movements. In highlighting cases of rape crisis centers, Ms. Magazine, and the anti-violence against women movement, Ferree and Martin and other authors clearly demonstrate how feminists enact social change. In fact, if there is one underlying premise that all strains of feminist theory and practice embrace, it is a desire for social change – changes in oppressive norms, values, and structures of community, institutional, and familial life. Ferguson (1984) clearly argued that “feminist restructuring…requires creating a situation in which we can both develop ourselves and transform the external world” (p. 205). Feminism requires creating a situation, albeit different forms of feminism focus on different sources of oppression and different paths to empowerment. Social change for most feminists, irrespective of philosophical
standpoint, is not something that occurs as a byproduct of research, study, and thought. Activism is engrained in the process. Ferguson proceeded down a pragmatist path in arguing that, “Real social change comes about when people think and live differently” (p. 212). Social change is not an option for feminism and pragmatism, it is a requirement. This is, in part, what should make these discourses so appealing to communication scholars. As Craig (1999) argued, the discipline of communication should have much to say about daily practical problems that people face.

However, social change for those interested in postmodernity, as well as pragmatists proves to be a tricky argumentative endeavor. As Shepherd (2001) reasoned, there are a number of commonalities in postmodernist and pragmatist traditions. The difference is that when the Nietzschean postmodernist gazes into the pit of tragedy, fragmentation and disconnectedness, the struggle is lost. Whereas when a “happy postmodernist,” a pragmatist, stares into that same pit, the result is not despair, but rather “hope in the unfixed nature of it all” (Shepherd, 2001, p. 246). Recognizing the contingency and instability of my knowledge claims, social change remains a central but complicated element of this project. For if one can make no knowledge claims outside of fragmented, contextualized, situated moments, how can one claim to know what is/should be desirable for social change? What gives a researcher the authority to make any such claims?

These are difficult questions to answer, but I believe that various rhetorical and philosophical tools can allow us to engage this conundrum. By drawing on the philosophical tool of liberal irony, the rhetorical tool of critical rhetoric, and by moving
towards an affirmative conception of postmodernism rather than a purely skeptical one, we can still make knowledge claims for social change. Liberal irony (Rorty, 1989), a principle that continually questions final vocabularies, beliefs, and values of both oneself and others is “ironic” because we can claim to make momentary claims about knowledge, values, etc., but at the same time know that we will likely have to reconvene those thoughts and beliefs in a different manner based on ever-shifting exigencies and circumstances. Sowards and Renegar (2003) noted that a liberal ironic perspective “seems to have much in common with feminist demands for the reordering and transformation of systems, institutions, beliefs and language” (p. 341). This constant self-reflexivity also allows us to utilize McKerrow’s (1989) critical rhetoric. Critical rhetoric, which calls for constant critiques and recritiques of both domination and freedom, “celebrates its reliance on contingency, on doxa as the basis for knowledge…and critique viewed as performance” (p. 110). Additionally, an affirmative rather than purely skeptical postmodernism “celebrates wonder and amazement” at the world and favors “an affirmative and activist social science that embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, and history” (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997, p. 456).

By using a more affirmative postmodern position and employing the philosophical and rhetorical tools I discussed previously, I make contingent and partial claims for social change and remain willing to recognize the necessity to always rethink those claims and react to new information, standpoints, and contexts. Affirmative forms of postmodernism remain consistent with Ashcraft and Mumby’s communicology because each allows for researchers to form arguments about what is better at any given
moment in the social world as long as those positions are recognized as partial and indeterminate. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) and affirmative postmodern thought separate from the nihilistic history of postmodernism and allow scholars and practitioners to stand tentatively, on firm theoretical ground.

Community

The third intersection of feminist and pragmatist theory and practice is that of community. The process of community-creation and open-minded communities themselves are central foci of feminists and pragmatists. Shepherd and Rothenbuhler (2001) based their text on the premise that “concerns about the community, the balancing of individual rights with social responsibilities, and the weighing of freedom and equality permeate nearly every aspect of American life” (p. ix). It should come as no surprise, then, that these two movements, one of which is largely an American phenomenon (pragmatisms) and one that is not entirely American but has developed significantly because of the freedoms that America allows (feminisms), are concerned with the nature of community.

Community has long been a central concern of pragmatism. Dewey (1958) aptly argued that community is shared or associated living, “It is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership” (p. 179). Community construction remains a cornerstone of more modern pragmatist thought. The work of Rorty, for example, focuses on community. Rorty (1989) argued,
What takes the curse off this ethnocentrism is not that the largest such group is “humanity” or “all rational beings” – no one…can make that identification – but rather, that it is ethnocentrism of a “we” (“we liberals”) which is dedicated to enlarging itself, to creating an ever larger and more variegated *ethnos*. (p. 198)

The ethnos equals one’s life-world and in Rorty’s philosophy, having a larger life-world that people identify with is a central principle.

In their edited compilation entitled *Communication and Community*, Shepherd and Rothenbuhler (2001) centrally situated the communication discipline in pragmatist discussions about community. Throughout the volume, authors spoke to how community is an interpersonal accomplishment of communication (e.g., Shepherd, 2001), the symbolic creation of “alternative” communities characterized by egalitarian and cooperative values (e.g., Ashcraft, 2001; Cheney, 2001), and the use of newspapers to encourage civic participation (e.g., Martin, 2001; Stamm, 2001). Across chapters, authors wrestled with tensions between individualism and solidarity with others, and provided glimpses of what Shepherd (2001) described as a community of individuals in which “fellow citizens…can connect with others, be known and understood by others, without sacrificing their individuality” (p. 34). However, concern for community-formation is not limited to pragmatism. Feminist thinkers and practitioners have championed causes of community as well.

Ferguson (1984) argued that women are feminized within dominant bureaucratic discourses and that “a community that recognizes the dialectical need for connectedness within freedom and for diversity within solidarity would strive to nurture the capacity for
reflexive redefinition of self” (p. 197). Community, in one sense, serves as an arena in which each of the various intersections of pragmatism and feminism that I have previously mentioned exist. Seigfried (1996) stated that “social reform was not supposed to be imposed on passive, needy communities by intellectual, economic, and political elites, but to arise out of the community’s own experiences” (p. 57). In this passage, experience, social change and community are highlighted. Communities emerge through experience and remain sites for social change. Feminists, in a broad sense, strive to reconceptualize the very construct of community. Mumby (1996) designated these sites of resistance as “alternative discourse communities” (p. 281) (see also Ashcraft, 2000; 2001; Harter, 2004; Harter et al., 2004). Since the inception of the feminist movement, women have sought to create communities that speak to their issues and problems both in the broad societal communities and in the localized contingent communities of specific organizations. Women’s violence shelters, rape crisis centers, women’s studies programs and various women-owned and operated restaurants, banks, bookstores and non-profit organizations are the result of these “alternative” communities (Ferree & Martin, 1995). In fact, many feminist theorists have struggled with how to create a community that included men in it or whether that should be done at all. Tong (1989) and Donovan (1992) both highlighted the tension that exists between different types of feminists. Liberal, radical, Marxist, postmodern and lesbian feminists (among the numerous strands of feminism) struggle with the question of how “alternative” their particular community should be and who is welcome.
At this juncture, I must recognize the tricky step that the fluidity and indeterminacy of postmodernism and pragmatism set before me. Pragmatists and postmodernists envision experience as partial, fragmented, in flux, and momentary, so how can postmodernist thinking lead to community formation? Based on many criticisms (Bostrom & Donohew, 1992; Ellis, 1991a), postmodernisms ought to just lead to relativistic solipsism, which is a place quite far from communitas. I believe the theoretical ground that I established in the previous tension that utilizes affirmative postmodernism, liberal irony, and critical rhetoric serves the purpose here as well. Shepherd (2001) argued precisely that community has increasingly seemed an impossible achievement to us because we increasingly disbelieve the presence of the one condition required for its realization: the possibility of communication. If we are to believe that communication is impossible in this world of uncommon individuals and indeterminate truth, then so too is community. (p. 33)

In the spirit of William James, believing, in this case in communication, is greatly to everyone’s advantage. Moreover, Ashcraft and Mumby’s (2004) proposed communicology provides scholars with the theoretical foundation to claim the value of particular claims over others as long as the fluid, shifting nature of those claims is recognized. Like critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989) and liberal irony (Rorty, 1989), Ashcraft and Mumby’s communicology is “concerned with dereifying and critiquing the discursive and material mechanisms that create stable structures and hierarchies of value – men over women, white over black, reason over emotion, and so forth – that become
sedimented over time” (p. 185). But the purpose of their communicology “is not to render a definitive judgment about the morality of such discourses” but rather to interrogate “how such discourses become contested in various and often contradictory ways to create different forms of communication community” (p. 185).

**Integrative Thinking**

Another intersection between pragmatist and feminist theory and practice is the encouragement of integrative thinking that transcends the deeply entrenched binaries of modern life. Dualisms imply a hegemonic rationality that many feminists and pragmatists strive to transcend. Mumby (1996) argued, “many feminists, however, critique the androcentrism of Western Enlightenment thought, founded in the dualisms of rational/irrational, subject/object, and culture/nature” (p. 261). Most feminists and pragmatists strive to overcome dualistic thinking, opting instead for integrative thinking (Buzzanell, 1994). Feminism strives to overcome the either/or nature of dualisms of all types: body/mind, public/private, subject/object, reason/emotion, experience/nature. These dualisms are rejected by many feminists because they are rooted in the fundamental dualism of male/female (Hekman, 1990). Dualisms and binary thinking invariably privilege one element of the dichotomy over the other one. As argued by Tong (1989) “man has unnecessarily segmented reality by coupling concepts and terms in pairs of polar opposites, one of which is always privileged over the other” (p. 224). Unfortunately, for women and other non-dominant groups, they are the ones traditionally marginalized in dualistic thinking and acting.
Over the past few years, feminist communication scholars have worked to reveal discourses that resist and/or reify dualistic tendencies in communal and institutional life (e.g., Ashcraft, 2000; 2001; Trethewey, 1997; 1999; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2005). These scholars and others have worked to recognize the ways that individuals communicatively accomplish tensions—sometimes in ways that firmly entrench dichotomies, sometimes in ironic ways that usefully reposition tensions and contradictions as paradoxes. For instance, Harter et al. (2004) explored the presence of an overarching dialectic of organizing for survival and organizing for social change in the discourses of StreetWise. This dialectic guides, in many ways, all the organizational practices. Harter and colleagues revealed how the text of the paper itself served as an arena for “moral deliberation” about the competing desires for survival and social change.

Of particular interest for communication scholars is the accomplishment of dualistic and/or integrative thinking. As Mumby (2000) reminded us, “public” and “private,” “reason” and “emotion,” “disempowerment” and “emancipation,” are, in part, discursive articulations that necessarily serve the interests of some individuals more than others. In reference to the traditional binary relationship between public and private spheres, Mumby noted:

The central issues from a critical feminist perspective are: How does the relationship between the public and private spheres get discursively articulated, and how does this articulation process function to produce and reproduce extant power relations and/or create possibilities for resistance and transformation? (p. 6, emphasis in original)
Feminists have been at the forefront of a shift in our discipline toward the recognition that lived tensions and contradictions ought to represent (1) a resource for theory development about organizational life, and (2) a resource for social change.

Pragmatists, too, have valued integrative thinking. Dewey (1958) argued that hierarchical dualisms have systematically distorted experience. The reduction of “richness and complexity in the interest of logical neatness…distorts the truth” (p. 147). Additionally, uncriticized dichotomies often reinforce patriarchy and sustain power differences between different groups. Dewey continued “the objection to dualism is not just that it is a dualism, but that it forces upon us antithetical, non-convertible principles of formulation and interpretation” (p. 241). Dewey recognized the false choices that dualisms offer and rejected those false choices. Dewey argued that dualisms generated “non-convertible” principles. In other words, once a person committed to (or was committed to unwillingly) one half of the dualism, it was impossible to escape and execute reflexivity about one’s position. Seigfried (1996), adopting a pragmatist-feminist perspective, summed up the desire of these two philosophies to avoid dualistic thinking in arguing,

Pragmatism, possibly more than any other philosophic movement, defends the legitimacy and irreducibility of multiple perspectives. But it does so generically, as it were, by not committing itself to any one of them. Such privileging of only one perspective would be counterproductive to its defense of everyone’s right to be heard. (pp. 9-10)
The disrupting of dualistic thinking was (and is) a lynchpin of much feminist and pragmatist thought. Dewey (1916/1966) cited the transcendence of dualistic thinking as a key to a pragmatist standpoint in one’s world. Dewey argued that dualistic thinking inevitably isolates the mind from activity, physical conditions, bodily organs, and natural objects. But Dewey argued that pragmatism “recognizes the origin, place, and function of mind in an activity which controls the environment” (p. 323). In other words, pragmatism encourages epistemology that recognizes the interrelatedness of body/mind, nature/environment, reason/emotion, etc. The transcendence of dualistic thinking is “consistent with the philosophy which sees intelligence to be the purposive reorganization, through action, of the material of experience” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 323).

*Theory and Practice*

In the spirit of integrative thinking, pragmatist and feminist standpoints, in their various permutations and disciplinary uptakes, provided me with a standpoint from which to practice theory and theorize practice (see Wood, 1995). In communication, the inclination to approach theory and practice from a reflexive standpoint has resulted in a collection of scholars who identify themselves as applied communication researchers. In their work, these scholars hope to not only make theoretical arguments that advance the body of knowledge of the communication discipline, but engage in work that improves the lives of individuals outside of the academy.

Applied communication research has progressed a great distance since Ellis (1982) claimed that it was “the shame of speech communication…narrow, theoretically
vacuous, without a research base, and, just as an aside, morally degenerate and politically naïve” (p. 1). Nine years later, even Ellis (1991b) himself noted the progression of applied communication research from “trivial prescriptions” (p. 117) to “crucial to the professional and intellectual development of communication” (p. 121). Many scholars understand that scholarship in the field of communication is “practical” (Craig & Tracy, 1995; Frey, 1998) and that the integration of theorizing and practice is central to the advancement of our discipline and those that may benefit from our work. Wood (1995) argued that applied communication research is practicing theory as well as theorizing practice. Many scholars strive for a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice and Frey (1998), in noting the continued debate regarding the politics of research argued “decisions about what to study, which methods to use, and where and how to report research privilege certain values, institutions and practices” (Frey, 1998, p. 156).

Both feminist and pragmatist scholars resist bifurcating theory and practice. The historical roots of feminism are rooted in movements to improve the daily lived conditions of women from voting rights to wage equality to reproductive rights. Donovan (1992) noted multiple forms of feminist practice including consciousness-raising and the development of alternative arrangements and institutions. Pragmatists also have historically been drawn to not only reshaping continental philosophy but participating in the improvements of communities. Siegfried (1991; 1993) noted the multiple progressive social causes that the early pragmatists were involved in, including women’s education, segregation, and poverty. Duran (1993) also emphasized this mutually influential relationship of theory and practice in arguing
If pragmatism is in some sense a way of life – a set of practices embodied in a way of live, not divorced from it – the same may be said of feminism. In other words, what both accounts have to offer is not so much an overview and its constructs but a set of practices that may or may not be articulated. (p. 166)

Foss and Foss (1988) argued that “the ultimate consequence of research informed by a feminist perspective is social change” (p. 10). Feminist analyses, pragmatist analyses, and social justice work represent a comfortable partnership as all strive for change that will result in more equitable lived experiences.

Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz and Murphy (1996) argued that social justice applied communication research “engages with and advocates for those in our society who are economically, politically, socially, and/or culturally underresourced” (p. 110). Concurring with those that argue that research is never politically neutral, I adopted a social justice perspective towards research. Like Frey et al. (1996) I deemed it necessary to consider “whose interests are being served by our research” and serve those who have previously been benefited the least or even oppressed by research (p. 111). Frey (1998) asserted that “we have much to contribute to the struggle to overcome barriers that prevent those individuals and groups from participating more fully in our society” (p. 156). Such an approach can function to do good in society while simultaneously “expanding and transforming the theories, methods, and pedagogical practices of those who theorize, research, and teach” communication (Frey et al, 1996, p. 110).
Conclusion

Journalistic outlets, particularly alternative newspapers, provide an especially rich context for exploring the enactment of democratic values in overlapping and intersecting communities. Dewey (1927) positioned newspapers as social narrators of community life. “Many consequences are felt rather than perceived; they are suffered, but they cannot said to be known,” argued Dewey (p. 131). Newspapers, thus, hold particular importance and promise for building community by making social issues and experiences transparent and visible, increasing the opportunity for interaction among diverse individuals, and in creating an informed citizenry. StreetWise provides space for those who remain on the margins of society to be seen and heard. From a pragmatist and feminist standpoint, I focused attention on how the organizational settings, practices, and textual products of StreetWise (re)produced the symbolic and material conditions that facilitate or impede the enactment of democratic values.

As articulated in this chapter, my standpoint was informed by pragmatist and feminist traditions. As such, I drew particular attention to how discourses bridge gaps and bond diverse individuals and groups to create a full and free interplay of ideas for community life. I worked to privilege the experiences of participants, with the knowledge that I co-constructed meaning in sharing their stories. I worked to reveal if and how the stakeholders of StreetWise perform democratic subjectivities even as they strive to support and enrich a democratic way of life and build community. I embarked on this journey in a way that privileges integrative thinking, yet remained aware of forces operating in the various scenes of StreetWise that reinforce deeply entrenched binaries of
modern life (e.g., rationality/emotionality). I explored how, if at all, StreetWise’s actions enable and/or constrain social change. Certainly, I sought to contribute to organizational communication theory by exploring the boundary-spanning dimensions of democratic ideologies and practices; yet, those theoretical contributions remain inseparable from practice. I hope my work revealed the successes and struggles of the street newspaper movement and its key constituents – people without homes. The ability for people without homes or those otherwise at-risk to connect with others and participate in community life remains a central focus of my work.

In Chapter Two, I explore a limited history of democracy both broadly and as understood by organizational communication scholars. Additionally, I review literature concerning the practice of civic journalism and position civic journalism as a democratic act. I also review scholarly portraits of homelessness and justify my project as an extension of the current body of work that exists regarding this problem. Ultimately, I argue that homelessness represents a particularly pervasive and important social problem that, as of yet, scholars and practitioners have not fully explored from a discursive approach that recognizes the complex interplay between material and symbolic forces that shape and are shaped by community life. In Chapter Three, I outline the methods of ethnographic fieldwork I employed.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

“I have no fear, but that the result of our experiment will be, that men [sic] may be trusted to govern themselves without a master. Could the contrary of this be proved, I should conclude, either that there is no God, or that he [sic] is a malevolent being.” – Thomas Jefferson (Padover, 1939)

Literature related to democracy and organizing is as diverse as it is bountiful and central to the study of communication. Democracy has been a concern of communication scholars since the discussions of the philosophers and rhetoricians of Ancient Greece. Democratic values represent a pillar on which the field of communication was built (Cheney et al., 1998; Deetz, 1992). Cheney et al. (1998) noted that “the roots of communication studies are in classical and neoclassical notions of public discussion” and “how we make decisions in the interest of the wider community” (pp. 36-37). Cheney, Mumby, Stohl, & Harrison (1997) noted that democracy and bureaucracy represent two of “the great ideas [that] have historically shaped the way we think about how to organize collective action” (p. 277) even as they question the extent to which bureaucratic practices stifle the democratic impulse (see also Deetz, 1992; 1995; Cheney, 1995, 2001). Democratic values weave through discourses of domestic politics, foreign policy, mass media (Lambe, 2004), religion (Medhurst, 2002), classrooms (McMillan & Cheney, 1996; McMillan & Harriger, 2002), and even families (Liebes & Ribak, 1991). The political climate of the United States over the last decade, which is nothing if not divisive, leaves many Americans feeling they have little in common with their neighbors
of differing political persuasions. In spite of the present political climate, popular press authors write about the public’s enduring belief in democracy (Cole, 2004; Ferguson, 2004).

What is so enticing about democracy that allows it to permeate nearly every aspect of American society even as it rests in tension with dominant forms of institutional life? Why is democracy elusive or considered “alternative” in the corporate world (see Harrison, 1994; Eisenberg, 1994)? In order to further explore the issue of democracy in the context of overlapping and intersecting communities, including corporate communities, in this section I set up a broad conception of democracy as central to American life, review literature from communication that speaks to the practice of democratic values and organizing, and problematize extant literature for its lack of attention to the boundary-spanning nature of “organizational democracy.” We generally lack empirical understandings of how organizations can seek to influence the democratic values of host communities and how communities influence the enactment of democratic subjectivities in organizational settings. In light of this argument, I explored of how StreetWise organizes and mobilizes resources for those living in poverty in a participatory fashion even as it seeks to engage its audiences as citizens, enhance civic discourse, and promote greater public participation in political processes – trademarks of democratic ways of life. Likewise, I sought to explore how societal discourses and material conditions influence how StreetWise mobilizes resources for its vendors.
History of Democracy

The lineage of democratic thought reaches both far and wide and many treatises that explore both the breadth of democratic thought and particular interests in that thought exist (see Fontana, Nederman, & Remer, 2004; Lakoff, 1996; Woodruff, 2005). The roots of democracy trace back to Ancient Greece in approximately the 4th century B.C. (Lakoff, 1996). Democracy, as it was enacted by the Greeks, translated roughly to “self-government or autonomy of the community or polis” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 37).

Although the roots of democracy are traced back to this time period, Athenian democracy was hardly without its flaws and would not be recognized today as democracy. In Ancient Greece, only men with property were allowed to participate in self-governance. Women, slaves, and those without property were relegated to having their decisions made for them (Ketcham, 2004; Lakoff, 1996).

Despite the incongruities between ancient and modern forms of democracy, democracy spread through Europe and strongly influenced Roman republicanism. Rome was not a democracy in the Greek sense or in the modern sense, and public opinion held a less prominent role in Roman politics than it did with the Greeks. The Romans divided up power among multiple assemblies rather than having decision-making abilities bound up in one deliberative body (Ketcham, 2004). The Romans had a constitution, distributed power, and voting, which contributed to a broad sense of shared power among the major groups of society (Lakoff, 1996). From the times of the Romans, the prominence of representative governments throughout Europe waxed and waned, but all the while traveled with the spread of the Roman Empire.
Lakoff (1996) documented how England became enamored with these classical models of government as a challenge to absolutism. Puritans in England challenged hereditary monarchy and advanced parliamentary approaches to government. Although the Puritan resistance to monarchy was beaten back and democracy served a nearly fatal blow in England, the seeds of ideas were planted and stimulated revolution in places, most notably: America (Lakoff, 1996).

Democracy migrated to America with the travel of the colonists who were influenced by democratic philosophy in Western Europe. Ketcham (2004) noted the direct influence of mainly Bacon, Locke and to a lesser extent Adam Smith, on American revolutionaries including Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson. He argued that the ideologies of the American revolution were clearly “securing the rights of individuals, balancing and limiting the powers of government, and establishing a polity resting on the consent of the governed” (p. 41). This particular incarnation of democracy became the most popular instance of what is known today as “liberal” democracy. This does not mean “liberal” as a political ideology that opposes “conservatism.” Rather liberal in this usage connotes:

a concern with individual freedoms that centres on the need to limit the power and authority of government. Liberals, from this classical viewpoint, are those who think it desirable that the power and authority of the government should be limited, typically by subjecting the government to regulation by such devices as a written constitution and/or a bill of rights. (Holden, 1988, p. 12)
Rorty (1989) argued that “a liberal society is one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, by reform rather than revolution, by the free and open encounters of present linguistic and other practices with suggestions for new practices” (p. 60). Certainly “liberal” democracy is not a monolithic entity; instead it contains many strains of thought as to what extent and by what means central governmental authority should be limited and individual rights should be defended. Holden (1988) noted three key areas of contention in this system of political thought surrounding the relationships of democracy, equality and liberty.

The relationship between equality and democracy can be a tenuous one because equality implies that “in relation to those respects which things are the same, they ought to be treated in the same way” (Holden, 1988, p. 15). Thus, based on the principle of equality, when decisions are made, all involved parties must have an equal say. The notion of “one person, one vote” is a distinctive hallmark of democracy. In practice, of course, decisions are not made by all involved parties. “Decisions are made by a group within – i.e. smaller than – the whole people, namely those individuals with a disproportionately large say” (Holden, 1988, p. 15). DeTocqueville seemed largely unconcerned with this tension when he wrote, “Democratic laws generally tend to promote the welfare of the greatest possible number; for they emanate from the majority of citizens, who are subject to error, but who cannot have an interest opposed to their own advantage” (1956, p. 101). Dewey’s notions of democracy and pragmatism are based on the competition of ideas in the decision-making process. A free and full interplay of ideas helps mitigate these notions of which ideas get to compete. According to Holden, not
everyone can participate, thus violating the “equal say” principle of democracy. Pragmatism, though, allows those engaged in public debate to determine those ideas from the entire range of possibilities could serve as useful to solve a given problem. So, while every idea may not be significant to solve a particular problem, ideally, all solutions that are plausible will be considered.

Secondly, Holden argued, liberty and democracy can come into conflict. If we take “liberty” to mean the freedom of individuals to determine their own actions in their social and political environment, then liberty can be restricted by a government that exists outside of that individual. Liberty can be compromised by governments. The third relationship in this triumvirate is that of equality and liberty. Recognizing that both are of fundamental importance in liberal democratic thought, liberty and equality can, and sometimes do, rest in tension. Liberty can lead to inequality. In other words, when people have freedom to flourish individually, some people can become “more equal” than others. Conversely, equality, in a pure sense, limits liberty. Where there is total equality, people are not free to determine their own actions. Dewey (1927) noted these tensions in arguing that:

the same forces which have brought about the forms of democratic government, general suffrage, executives and legislators chosen by majority vote, have also brought about conditions which halt the social and human ideals that demand the utilization of government as the genuine instrumentality of an inclusive and fraternally associated public. (p. 109)
Dewey’s insights highlight a conundrum of democracy. While democracy ideally consists of decision-making that is based on a free and full interplay of ideas, democracy also results in byproducts that can hinder the implementation of those decisions. Communities can suffocate if the practice of democracy fails to create a decision by which all interested parties can participate.

Many scholars agree that democracy is a vigorously debated and contentious term (Cheney et al., 1998; Deetz, 1992). “Democracy itself is an essentially contested term, in that one person’s idea of a democratic arrangement may be another’s notion of a constraining and oppressive system of governance” (Cheney et al, 1998, p. 36).

Democracy, as we have come to know it in the United States, is full of contradictions and difficult to define, while still permeating nearly every aspect of our lives. One glaring exception is the workplace (Deetz, 1992, 1995; Ferguson, 1984). Deetz and Ferguson carefully document how bureaucratic practices and instrumental rationalities often suffocate the spirit of democracy—participation (see also Cheney, 1995, 2001). Importantly, Deetz (1992) argued that both the corporation and the instrumental rationalities that it spawned have colonized the democratic impulse played out in the public sphere. As a result, over the past ten years, scholars have asked critical questions about how to organize in a participatory fashion, what environmental conditions allow democratic practices to thrive, and what paradoxes and tensions emerge when organizing is guided by democratic values. In the next section, I synthesize literature from communication that is relevant to the understanding of democracy and organizing.
Democracy and Organizing

Democratic beliefs represent important ideologies for human collective action, the yardstick with which most experiences in the American social system are measured including institutional experiences. Deetz (1992) argued that the emergence of the corporate organization as the primary institution in modern society affects emerging conceptions of the individual and participation. Deetz also argued that “the primacy of the organization as an institution can be represented both by an increased intrusion in to the nonwork aspects of life as well as by an eclipse of the state as the primary by which social policy is made” (pp. 109-110). Organizations are the central institution around which identity is constructed. Therefore, I propose that communication scholars have correctly argued that encouraging democratic values ought to be at the center of the study of human communication. It becomes our obligation as scholars of communication to theorize and encourage democratic ways of organizing if we believe in the value of democratic practices and are able to constantly reflect upon both the processes and the products of those democratic activities (see also Deetz, 1992, Eisenberg, 1994). Seigfried (2002) eloquently argued that “philosophizing from democratic principles can be judged as all other philosophical perspectives are, by whether it leads to better institutions of life” (p. 65).

Cheney (1995) and others (Warner, 1984) noted the difficulty in reviewing literature about democracy and organizing as it has a broad, deep and not always well-documented history. Across time and space, communication has remained a central element to understanding many aspects of life, democracy included. As Peters (1999)
argued, “‘Communication’ is one of the characteristic concepts of the twentieth century. It has become central to reflections on democracy, love, and our changing times” (p. 1).

The literature claims different monikers including “workplace democracy” (Cheney, 1995; Cheney et al., 1998; Russell, 1997), “organizational democracy” (Cheney, et al., 1997; Hoffman, 2002) and “participatory practices” (Harter & Krone, 2001; Stohl & Cheney, 2001). To complicate this area of bountiful research even further, multiple frameworks exist to help scholars make sense out of this diverse body of literature. For instance, Stohl and Cheney (2001) organized literature about “participatory practices” around four main paradoxes: structure, agency, identity, and power. Cheney et al. (1998) organized their multi-disciplinary essay about “democracy at work” around seven important issues that emerge in surveying the literature: boundary-spanning, multiple rationalities, structural, microprocesses, voice, adversarial/consensus models, and control. Harrison (1994) placed alternative organizations into one of two categories: those that oppose hierarchy and are committed to more equal distribution of power and those that value productivity and survival over democracy but still occasionally engage in democratic practices.

Likewise, many definitions of “organizational democracy” and related practices exist in communication literature. Cheney (1995) provided communication with one of the first comprehensive reviews of workplace democracy. His article positioned workplace democracy as:

a system of governance which truly values individual goals and feelings (e.g., equitable remuneration, the pursuit of enriching work and the right to express
oneself) as well as typically organizational objectives (e.g., effectiveness and
efficiency, reflectively conceived) and which actively fosters the connection
between those two sets of concerns by encouraging individual contributions to
important organizational choices, and which allows for the ongoing modification
of the organization’s activities and policies by the group. (pp. 170-171)

Cheney provided the discipline with a broad definition that attempts to value equally both
the individual and the organizational goals through a process of constant reflexivity as to
how this balance is maintained. Cheney et al. (1998) characterize “workplace democracy
as referring to those principles and practices designed to engage and “represent” (in the
multiple senses of the term) as many relevant individuals and groups as possible in the
formulation, execution, and modification of work-related activities” (p. 39). This
definition seems to emphasize the organizational choices less than the previous definition
and is less goal-oriented as well. Stohl and Cheney (2001) defined workplace
participation as “organizational structures and processes designed to empower and enable
employees to identify with organizational goals and to collaborate as control agents in
activities that exceed minimum coordination efforts normally expected at work” (p. 357).

Collectively, these definitions are useful yet remain implicitly guided by a
“container” metaphor of organizations—communication and democracy are things that
happen “inside” organizations. Certainly, we ought to foster democratic practices inside
organizations; yet, my work seeks to engage the boundary-spanning dimensions of
democratic values and practices. I embrace Cheney’s (1995) original articulation of
organizational democracy as a shared system of governance that fosters individual
participation in decision-making, the right to express oneself, the opportunity to collaborate with others to reach collective goals, and the ongoing self-reflexivity of the system. To this definition, I would add that in order to understand how we practice organizational democracy at work, we must engage the organization-society problematic (Mumby & Stohl, 1996) and draw attention to how institutional discourses shape and are shaped by broader symbolic and material forces. As such, I call for a move toward thinking about “democracy and organizing” in lieu of “organizational democracy.” Because this project is guided by pragmatist and feminist principles, fluidity in one’s ability to constantly interpret and reinterpret the social world is critical. Pragmatists and to a lesser degree, feminists, suggest that people ought to constantly be redefining the social world in ways that are useful for operating in that world. I entered this project and offered this standpoint about democracy and organizing cognizant of potential trained incapacities that, when revealed, might call for a rearticulation (Burke, 1935/1984). My move echoes the movement for change that Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1991) advanced by arguing “One way of defining democracy would be to call it a political system in which people actively attend to what is significant” (p. 273, emphasis added).

Empirical undertakings of democracy and organizing have taken on many monikers, including the previously mentioned organizational democracy, workplace democracy, and participatory practices. Regardless of the term applied, all studies of this nature inform this review. One useful way to synthesize these studies is based on the metaphors of communication and organization that they employ (implicitly or explicitly).
Putnam, Phillips, and Chapman (1996) provided communication scholars with a picture of the discipline that revealed how seven major metaphors have guided the study of organizational communication: conduit, lens, linkage, performance, symbol, voice, and discourse. These metaphor clusters are not mutually exclusive nor are they exhaustive. Putnam and colleagues positioned metaphor clusters as a heuristic device for identifying different patterns of theory and research about organizational communication. Following Burke’s (1969) lead, Putnam et al. explored how the enactment of particular metaphors for communication and organization by scholars both reveal and conceal, foreground and background, key dimensions of how people experience organizational life. As I suggested earlier, a significant portion of the empirical research related to democracy and organizations has operated from a conduit metaphor, where communication functions as a transmission with senders and receivers and the organization is a “container” that holds communication.

Ryfe’s (2002) article, for example, adopted this view of communication in exploring how deliberative groups go about the process of inclusion and the connections and differences between rational and relational forms of deliberation, and found that multiple types of deliberation can count as “good discourse.” Communication and democracy are practices that happen within the organization which has relatively static borders and fixed boundaries. Ryfe also argued that organizations that are centered on deliberation need to find a minimal common ground of shared values from which deliberation can stem. For Ryfe, in order to have any democracy in an organization, participants must find some value-laded common ground from which to deliberate.
Metzler’s (1997) article moved away, to some extent, from a conduit metaphor of communication and a container metaphor of organization. He argued that organizations that operate (or hope to operate) from a democratic perspective must foster connections with various organizational stakeholders. Metzler moves scholarship toward a linkage metaphor of communication. Additionally, like the previous arguments about the nature of liberal democracy, Metzler noted that democracy, at its essence, is based on choice and the possibility and necessity of dissent. Like Metzler, Harter and Krone’s (2001) study of a cooperative support organization utilized a linkage metaphor to argue that democracy and participation cannot be fully understood by examining what happens inside particular organizations. Rather, the enactment of participation in cooperatives suggests that inter-organizational linkages are keys to understanding the practice of democratic values.

Kassing (1997) highlighted the importance of employee dissent in democratic practices, and provided an example of work guided by a “voice” metaphor. In attempting to provide a model for the complex processes of organizational dissent, Kassing attempted to identify how dissent occurs, who and what triggers dissent, and variations in dissent strategy selection. Though attempting to model what most would consider a dynamic and ongoing process, Kassing’s article foregrounded the contested nature of decision-making in organizations and reminds us that dissent is an essential part of healthy democracy.

Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, and Papa (2000) demonstrated the utility of the performance metaphor and argued that empowerment is embedded in democratic practices. Papa et al. argue that women display empowerment through varied forms of
communication and feminist action. Women perform democratic, empowered subjectivities to various relevant stakeholders such as family or community members. They illustrated how participatory discussion and practices improve the quality of life for people engaged in those discussions and practices. Communicative interaction is a key to the empowerment process and to achieving social change. However, they also argued that democratic practices can disempower people due to concertive control among peers (i.e., colleagues exert control upon one another through peer pressure).

The work of Buzzanell et al. (1997) serves as one example of work that mixes metaphors of communicating and organizing. For example, they discussed democratic leadership practices as taking place “within” corporate and alternative organizations (p. 304). Yet, they simultaneously noted the dialectical enactment of tensions in democratic leadership practices which suggests an ongoing communicative element or discursive metaphor. Putnam et al. (1996) argued that the discourse metaphor positions communication as “conversation, in that it focuses on both the process and structure, on collective action as joint accomplishment” (p. 391). The examples of Buzzanell et al. point out the tensions of the individual-collective, neophyte-expert, power over-power with, and autonomy interdependence in alternative organizational leadership as enacted in a food cooperative and a quilting guild.

Cheney (1995, 2001) and Harter (2004) engaged democracy on a discursive level. Cheney argued that “values such as democracy, solidarity, and equality are realized to a great extent through talk” (1995, p. 192). For Cheney, “democracy itself must be discussed, assessed, and modified in an ongoing manner if it is to be effectively
maintained” (p. 192). Harter (2004) followed suit by recognizing the complex ways in which the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes of democratic organizing are (re)created by socio-historical conditions and gendered scripts. Harter’s essay highlighted the tenuous relationship between individualism and solidarity as they are simultaneously enacted by members of a cooperative support organization.

Though the empirical research exploring the intricacies of organizational democracy is bountiful, much work remains to be done as many aspects of the discursive enactments of democracy have gone unstudied by communication scholars. In the next section, I position alternative newspapers as a rich context in which to explore democracy and organizing. By the very nature of their product, alternative newspapers strive to generate public discourse between otherwise disconnected individuals and groups and serve as a medium for democracy in the public sphere.

Civic Journalism

Writers interchangeably use the terms civic journalism, public journalism, and citizen-based journalism (e.g., Grimes, 1997); collectively, the terms are used in reference to journalistic practices that rest in stark contrast with mainstream, corporate journalism. Mainstream journalism is guided by many “objective” normative beliefs. Hindman (1998) pointed out that “distance from subjects,” information from “official places,” and particular styles of presentation are all hallmarks of mainstream journalism (p. 177). Moreover, mainstream journalism traditionally is crafted to generate revenue and maximize profit by selling audiences to advertisers. Subsequently, mainstream media organizations are generally controlled by and controlling of other major social
institutions. As Rosen (1994) noted, a substantial weakness of conventional journalism is that it is “a public practice housed within a media industry devoted to private gain,” often leaving established structures of economic interest and political power unexamined (p. 372). By comparison, an alternative media institution:

to the extent possible given its circumstances, doesn’t try to maximize profits, doesn’t primarily sell audience to advertisers for revenues (and so seeks broad and non-elite audiences), is structured to subvert society’s defining hierarchical social relationships, and is structurally profoundly different from and as independent of other major social institutions, particularly corporations, as it can be. An alternative media institution sees itself as part of a project to establish new ways of organizing media and social activity and is committed to furthering these as a whole, and not just its own preservation. (Albert, 1997, p. 53)

In pragmatist spirit, Howley (2003) argued that public journalism exists as a marketplace of ideas. “Public journalism re-conceives the newspaper as a ‘conversational commons’: a public space for the deliberation of issues of importance to the social, economic, and political life of the community” (Howley, p. 276).

Voakes (1999) identified four recurrent themes of civic journalism: enterprise, information for decision making, facilitation of discourse, and attention to citizens’ concerns. Enterprise is ingrained in the belief that journalists are part of a community and have a stake in the condition of that community. Because journalists are part of a community, they actively seek out problems and solutions rather than engage solely in reactionary reporting. Information for decision making guides civic journalists to provide
information that might not be provided by “institutional policymakers” (p. 759).

Independent research serves as a key element of civic journalism. Third, civic journalism strives to create a dialogic relationship with its audience. Rather than readers being passive consumers of information, civic journalists consider themselves engaged in, and required to provide a public forum where issues can be played out. Fourth, civic journalists attend to the concerns of the citizens. In rejecting the agendas that are set forth by “political and economic authorities” (p. 760), civic journalists attempt to discover important issues of a particular community and urge community leaders to focus on those issues.

“Civic journalism” is, much like “democracy,” a contested term. The contributions, goals, and ethics of civic journalists have been (re)considered in multiple forums. Haas (1999) argued that civic journalism is most widely associated with Rosen and Merritt (1994) and “that the primary political responsibility of journalists is to help increase civic commitment to and citizen participation in the democratic process” (Haas, 1999, p. 348). Most theoretical work that exists in the various branches of communication argues in support of civic journalism in various ways. Clark (1997), the editor of *The Charlotte Observer*, argued that his publication’s civic journalism campaign in the 1996 statewide elections was a result of voters that “had grown increasingly disconnected and uninterested in public life and the democratic process” (p. 119). Clark argued that his newspaper’s election coverage focused on citizen concerns and succeeded in focusing on important issues of the 1996 campaign, engaging citizens, and frustrating political strategists by not allowing them to “steer and manipulate coverage” (p. 121). Patterson
and Hall (1998) laude a more public journalism because “moving the values of journalism and the tone of public discussion toward a more communitarian and universalist end is compatible with more mature intellectual and ethical orientations” (p. 111).

Discussions of civic journalism are not without dissent. Most journalists who identify themselves as more civic, rather than traditionally-oriented, would identify this dissent as a sign that civic journalism is a valid approach to reporting. Jackson (1997) argued that civic journalism has a number of flaws, among those is the tendency for discussion to be guided towards topics that may not be worthy of a fully fledged dialogue. Jackson argued that “citizen-oriented campaign coverage is only as good as the vitality of the information available to the voters – in print – as they proceed to choose their representatives” (p. 112). Grimes (1997) cautioned civic journalists in other areas, namely that journalists are educated, upper class, connected citizens that are set quite far apart from those they claim to be creating dialogue with. Additionally, Grimes argued that the increase in civic journalistic practices is correlated, in part, with the decline of newspaper readership and network viewership. Thus, civic journalism, “appeals strongly to our [journalists] survival instincts” (p. 128).

Voakes (1999) argued that general support exists for the principles of civic journalism among journalists. However, the label “civic journalism” was absent from Voakes’ measurement instrument. Therefore, journalists might not align themselves with the practice of civic journalism, but many support the principles of civic journalism and likely enact those in their work. Voakes did find lesser degrees of support for some of the
bolder values of civic journalism such as “conducting town meetings to discover key issues” and “polling the public to determine the most pressing issues” (p. 765). Even among those who advocate for civic journalism, the actual role of the medium is contested. Some advocates argue that simply improving the content of media will draw more people in to participate whereas other civic journalists argue that the media itself must provide the avenues for citizen involvement (Stamm, 2001).

Despite the potential value of civic journalism and its contested nature, democracy and the media have always been inextricably linked. Freedom of the press was seen by America’s founders as an important element of democracy, hence, its prominent placement in America’s Bill of Rights. Democratic practices have crossed media channels and contexts. Hochheimer (1993) argued that many practical issues of enacting democracy arise in community radio such as: Who is served through the medium? Who speaks for whom? What happens when people become entrenched in a radio? How can decisions be made within a democratically-constituted hierarchy? Platon and Deuze (2003) as well as Dahlgren (1996) argued that the internet has an inherent chaotic democratic nature with diffused freedom and an absence of central control. Thus, the internet is “a strong medium for a civil society” (Platon & Deuze, p. 337). Van Aelst and Walgrave (2002) revealed how 17 anti-globalization organizations utilize the internet in a grassroots, participatory, interconnected way to question the “lack of democratic legitimacy of international organizations” such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization (p. 467). These types of grassroots media creations can
create discourses that function to resist people and organizations that dominate the public sphere.

Regardless of the moniker attached to civic journalism, most theorists on the subject believe that this type of journalism, and journalism more generally, is a central element to the enactment of democracy in the public sphere. Schroll (1999) argued that civic journalism can serve to “stimulate citizen interaction and reinvigorate democratic life” (p. 322). Likewise, Ryan, Carragee and Schwerner (1998) posited that “the broadening of news media discourses is essential to the efforts of marginalized communities to promote social change and secure social justice. The news media, then, represent critical arenas of social struggle” (p. 166). The values and enactment of civic journalism feed directly into creating more democratic discourses in society.

Howley (2003) argued that three main principles guide public journalism. Slightly different than the four principles offered by Voakes (1999), Howley’s principles speak more directly to the relationship of journalism and democracy (whereas Voakes’ guiding principles relate more to identifiable traits of one who might be engaging in public journalism). First, Howley argued, “public [civic] journalism rejects the notion that reporters can and must remain ‘detached’ and ‘objective’ observers of public life” (p. 276). This is not to say that rigor, fairness, and accuracy are sacrificed in civic journalism. Rather, this contributes to the communicatively democratic nature of this type of journalism in that reporters are able to accurately represent the “varied, often competing perspectives and opinions with the community” (p. 276). Secondly, “public [civic] journalism re-conceives the newspaper as a ‘conversational commons’: a public
space for the deliberation of issues of importance to the social, economic, and political life of the community” (p. 276). Debate and discussion are central elements to a healthy democracy. The absence of diverse voices discussing the significant issues of the day means the absence of a full and free interplay of ideas that defines democracy (Dewey, 1927). By encouraging a more engaged readership than a traditional newspaper where people receive the positions of the “expert,” newspapers that are more civically-oriented invite readers to engage the issues, the writers, and fellow readers. Third, Howley argued that public journalism “promotes listening skills within and between different cultural groups and political constituencies” (p. 277).

Understanding, or to a lesser extent recognizing, that multiple standpoints exist on any given issue is a key element of democracy, and pragmatists’ visions for a robust community life. Bachrach and Botwinick (1992) underscored this issue as well and argued that “learning to communicate and reflect and engage in dialogue…participants become reliably and realistically aware of what their political interests are” (p. 11). But Howley (2003) ultimately argued that despite the idealistic hopes of public journalism, public journalists still operate as an elite class and “despite a professed commitment to increase public participation in news routines and enhance journalism’s accountability to reading publics…the current practice of public journalism is undemocratic” (p. 278). Howley argued, as did Schudson (1999), that the “democracy” of public journalism does not diffuse or remove power from journalists, or the companies that they work for.

Howley, while providing a thorough presentation of public journalistic outlets, is quick to turn to street newspapers (e.g., StreetWise) as a more pure enactment of
democracy in journalism and a better vehicle for fostering democracy in the public sphere. Although public journalists who do not use their position of power to accurately represent the multiple positions within a community may not be serving the democratic process, I think that public journalists enact democracy from a different standpoint than others engaged in the conversation. That said, I turn, as Howley does, to street newspapers as “unique form[s] of communicative democracy...in their capacity as the voice of the poor, street papers seek to engage reading publics in a critically informed dialogue over fundamental issues of economic, social and political justice (p. 274).”

StreetWise is lauded as one of the most fiscally sound street journals, an agent of social change working to shift the way people understand homelessness, and a viable alternative to panhandling for people without homes or living in poverty (Howley, 2003). In the next section, I briefly review literature about homelessness and situate my work with StreetWise in relation to the work of other scholars.

Research about Homelessness

Scholars in the social sciences have created a vast body of research concerning people without homes. In this section, I synthesize relevant social science research on homeless issues, focusing mainly on work that has come from outside of communication. I propose four main areas of research exist relating to people without homes: definitions and descriptions, antecedents and outcomes, transcendence and escape, and the politics of homelessness.
Descriptive Portraits

Descriptive and definitional studies have occupied a significant amount of scholars’ time regarding issues of homelessness. In Chapter One, I cited a collection of articles that debate the nature of homelessness and the most useful means of defining the problem. Definitional and, as a result, descriptive issues are ones that remain central to the alleviation of homelessness. One other collection of studies that fits this category remains, however. Descriptive studies that focus on particular subgroups is another area of concern for scholars. These types of studies are as varied as the population that finds themselves without homes. Dail (2001) reminded us, “all that the general population of homeless actually have in common is that everyone included in it is without a fixed, regular place to live” (p. 8). In other words, the population of people without homes is permeated with nuanced populations who each have their own special needs.

Studied subpopulations of people without homes ranges from the elderly (Hecht & Coyle, 2001) to youth (Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Johnson, 2003) to those with substance addictions (Booth, Sullivan, Koegel, & Burnam, 2002) and women who have been abused (Sev’er, 2002) in countries from Japan (Aoki, 2003) to Germany (Tompsett, Toro, Guzicki, Schlienz, Blume, & Lombardo, 2003).

Antecedents and Outcomes of Homelessness

A second subgroup of studies about homelessness coalesces around antecedents and outcomes of homelessness. Research conducted in this tradition has proven to be one of the most bountiful. This group of studies moves past the definitional and descriptive issues and focuses on causes and results of homelessness and various aspects of it.
Certainly, studies that attempt to identify causes and particular consequences of homelessness are plentiful. Despite the stereotype of people without homes as drug addicts, alcoholics, and/or mentally unstable, the causes of homelessness and the viciousness of its results are notable and diverse. First, I provide a glimpse of studies that attempt to understand the multiple causes of homelessness.

Sociologists and psychologists have produced a plethora of work that attempts to understand the many causes and intricacies of the antecedents to homelessness. Calsyn and Morse (1991) argued that a lack of human capital, alienations, psychiatric problems and stressful life events “have all been offered as theoretical explanations for chronic homelessness” (p. 155). Winkleby, Rockhill, Jatulis and Fortmann (1992) pointed out that addiction and psychiatric disorders were higher in homeless populations than among domiciled populations, but that significant differences between the populations did not exist. Additionally, Winkleby et al.’s (1992) claim that people without homes are as addicted or as mentally ill as homed people stands in stark contrast with public perceptions of homelessness as an individual problem brought on by personal choices. Shinn and Gillespie (1994) investigated the role that housing plays in causing homelessness. They argue that the decline of affordable housing and the increase of people who can afford low income housing is a main cause of homelessness, but recognize the extent to which unemployment, job type, and single-person households also effect people’s situations. Simons and Whitbeck (1991) pointed to repeated adolescent runaway attempts as a precursor to adult homelessness, but they noted that runaways
usually exist in an atmosphere of abuse and neglect which creates the desire for these youth to leave their homes.

Social scientists are not short of potential explanations regarding the causes of homelessness and it is likely that we can conclude that no one factor explains homelessness; rather, homelessness exists because of a complex interplay of individual factors, economic issues, governmental policies, and inexplicable misfortunes. People without homes also note multiple factors as contributing to their situations. According to a survey conducted by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (2002), 59% of people without homes cited their inability to pay rent as a cause of their situation, 48% noted job loss, 43% claimed alcohol or drug problems, 40% stated family disagreement, 25% cited the termination of public aid, 21% said overcrowding factored into their situation, 19% cited domestic violence, 18% said their residence was being torn down or condemned, 16% claimed a landlord dispute and/or health problems. Myriad factors contribute to homelessness; in fact, it is often the overwhelming nature of multiple problems that cause people to lose their homes.

Scholars also have explored a wide variety of consequences of homelessness. For example, Hall and Maza (1990) broadly explored the “effects” of homelessness on families and children. Among the outcomes are some simple realities of life for homeless families, such as that they are forced to stay in different places every night. Lack of employment is both a major cause and a result of not having a fixed domicile, and friends and relatives play a significant role in the ability to escape homelessness. Yet, the longer that a family is homeless, the less likely they are to have friends or family that they feel
they can turn to. Snow, Baker and Anderson (1989) posited that criminality among the homeless varies in relation to duration of the episode as well as contact with mental health resources. However, they also challenged the societal notion of the majority of homeless as predatory criminals. Weitzman (1989) explored the risk factors contributing to and the likelihood for pregnancy among women without homes. She claimed that though homelessness and pregnancy are related, homelessness does not result in an increased family size. These studies represent just a sampling of a vast body of research that has considered the consequences of homelessness.

Transcendence and Escape

A third subset of studies focuses on individuals’ transcendence and escape from homelessness or the struggle in doing so. The focus of this area has centered especially on social programs and individual strategies for overcoming the temporary condition of living without a home and the documentation of individual or collective strategies taken by people to deal with the problem of homelessness. Dunier (1999) recorded the ways in which men in New York’s Greenwich Village utilize the sidewalk as place of business, rest and social interaction. The men portrayed in his book do not necessarily escape homelessness, but Dunier foregrounded the daily strategies that these men use to deal with their situation. Many studies (Blankertz, Cnaan, White, Fox, & Messinger, 1990; Caton, Wyatt, Grunberg, & Felix, 1990; Ziefert & Brown, 1991) have tackled the issue of what constitutes an “effective” homelessness mediation program. The early 1990s saw a large number of articles that posited solutions to homelessness.
For example, Ziefert and Brown (1991) argued that the length of a period of homelessness is an important factor in determining who needs to receive social services. Blankertz et al. (1990) attempt to understand outreach efforts for people who are “dually diagnosed,” which means that they have severe mental health problems as well as drug and/or alcohol problems. They concluded that outreach programs that threaten individual autonomy rather than develop relationships will be less effective. Blankertz et al. argued, “The outreach worker must be able to meet these individuals on their own terms and within the framework of their multiple problems” (Blankertz, et al., 1990, p.391). Rossi (1989) argued that short term and long term policy changes are what is needed to address the current conditions of homelessness as well as decreasing potential future cases of homelessness. A number of studies explore paths out of homelessness and evaluation of programs designed to assist with this escape or the alleviation of problems associated with homelessness. Ultimately, the research in this area is as broad and diverse as that which strives to explain the causes of homelessness. There are many populations of people without homes with varied life situations, demographics, and problems and the research on the effects is as broad as that which strives to explain the causes.

The Politics of Homelessness

Finally, research about homelessness is concerned with the politics of the problem. Authors across disciplines argue that homelessness is an inherently political process. Public discussions of homelessness are framed in various ways that all have political motives and implications. Discussions including, but not limited to, the scope of the problem, competing solutions for that problem, who “counts” as homeless, and where
the homeless do and do not belong are all politically-motivated. Snow and Mulcahy (2001) argued that the sociospatial skirmishes and contestations relevant to the homeless and their relationships to those with homes are one of the least understood aspects of homelessness. However, as Blasi (1994) argued, most of the population of the United States does not even accept widespread homelessness. Because homelessness is framed as an issue related to personal choice, personal characteristics and personal failings, rather than a systemic issue, issues of homelessness often engage in “victim blaming” (Blasi, 1994; Barak, 1991). Who is blamed for the problem of homelessness is an essential political issue in solving the problem or, at least, making headway. Wagner and Cohen (1991) illustrated how a social movement organized by people without homes and those impoverished created material and non-material gains through an ethnographic study of a tent-city in Maine. Social protests of homelessness and poverty have also been highlighted by Piven and Cloward (1977) who trace the history of social political protests against poverty.

Another small collection of studies related to the political elements of homelessness coalesce around space and the political nature of the uses of public space by those without homes. Mitchell (1995) and Rollinson (1998) represent a group of scholars from multiple disciplines that have written about the politically contested nature of public spaces as they relate to homelessness. Mitchell (1995), in writing about public parks and democracy, showed that various publics are affected by alterations of public space in various ways. Rollinson (1998) wrote about the spatial nature of homeless shelters and how the space of shelters and people’s bodies interact in a relationship that
(re)creates both the physical space where homelessness happens and the downtrodden bodies of those subjected to the conditions.

Communication Studies and Homelessness

In communication scholarship, relatively few articles have been published that have dealt with the problem of homelessness when compared to disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and political science. However, the issue of homelessness has been the subject of a few studies within the discipline of communication. Rather than just simply noting and reviewing relevant articles, I proceed by summarizing the relevant findings of articles pertaining to homelessness as well as the implicit metaphors of communication (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). My contention is that communication scholars, as of yet, have failed to enact a discursive approach to understanding homelessness. Waldron, Lavitt, and McConnaughy (2001) made a strong case for the potential benefits that communication scholars can provide to impoverished populations including the homeless. In arguing for a critical look at the embedded assumptions in programs designed to alleviate poverty, Waldron et al. argued that one assumption about communication with these populations is that they are deficient and in need of fixing if they are to obtain gainful employment. Waldron et al. countered that “this assumption…oversimplifies communication focusing perhaps too exclusively on interpersonal skills and impression management important early in relationships (and during job interviews) while directing attention away from the communication competencies required in long-term relationships” (p. 27). Secondly, Waldron et al. argued that the assumption that those who are impoverished are somehow deficient and
in need of fixing, “locates communication problems in the individual” and “obsures the
collection of systemic factors” that may prevent individuals from reaching personal
goals. Communication scholars have knowledge to offer people without homes and other
impoverished populations that is more comprehensive than communication skills to help
people traverse one employment interview. In order to determine one potential avenue for
future scholarship and this dissertation, I first review extant literature from
communication that has dealt with homelessness.

One of the first articles analyzing a dimension of an issue of homelessness was
Campbell and Reeves’ (1989) case study of Joyce Brown. Coming at the end of the
1980s, a decade that is criticized almost universally across the literature because of the
consequences on homeless and impoverished people as a result of Reagan economic
policies, the authors argued that language across three major news programs (CBS, NBC,
and ABC) and a news magazine (60 Minutes) positioned homelessness as a problem
caused by the individual with little attention directed towards of the effects of the
economic system. Additionally, the narrative of Brown is later positioned by 60 Minutes
as a triumph of individualism in the face of an oppressive governmental elitism.
Campbell and Reeves concluded that the major news network coverage of Joyce Brown
functioned to “other” people without homes and distanced people with homes from those
without. Much like the work that has been undertaken in other disciplines, this article
showed how individuals can transcend their homeless situation. Additionally, this article
positioned communication as a conduit where the transmission of ideas is emphasized.
Information about homelessness is distributed via various channels and is compared on various common factors.

Fiske (1991) examined the culture of a homeless shelter and argued that the interpretation of culture needs to happen at multiple levels and in multiple modes. In doing so, Fiske demonstrated how homelessness exists at micro and macro levels. The men without homes in the shelter resist impositions of “homed” culture in small ways such as cheering against the capitalist power in a movie or by breaking relatively minor rules of the shelter in which they are staying. The culture of these men without homes also exists at a macro level, imposed on them by social organizations, government policy and the attitudes of people towards people without homes. This article engaged homelessness as a political issue involving both oppression and resistance at micro and macro levels. Fiske’s article positions communication and organization as performance where “social interaction is rooted in the sequences, patterns, and meanings that stem from exchanging verbal and nonverbal messages” (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996, p. 384).

Schmitz, Rogers, Phillips, and Paschal (1995) demonstrated the benefits and drawbacks of a public electronic information system. The PEN system, a communication technology that created discursive space for citizens to interact with one another regarding issues of public interest, “bridged communication gaps between very dissimilar persons” (p. 41). Schmitz et al. (1995) made an initial argument for community formation through electronic interaction but warned that abusive users of the electronic system can cause disruption which may result in the need for censorship. The authors argued
ultimately that electronic systems represent a legitimate forum for public discussion, but that these communities must find ways to balance competing values. This article treats homelessness, as many articles from other disciplines have, as something to be overcome. Schmitz, et al. proposed that this particular technological innovation is a community forming tool that can help people interact and solve problems related to homelessness. Schmitz et al. also positioned communication as a conduit. In addition, this article also positions communication as voice as the technology functions as a site where multiple speakers can contribute to a discussion of homelessness and its solutions.

Miller, Scott, Stage, and Birkholt (1995) used a grounded theory approach to provide an understanding of the agencies that provide services for the homeless. In arguing for a social network perspective, Miller et al. (1995) asserted that the complex societal environment must be considered when coordination is the primary goal of multiple organizations. Additionally, strain in the autonomy-dependence dialectic is one that service providers must negotiate, particularly in relation to government assistance. Finally, Miller and colleagues claimed that “in the eyes of agency directors, funding sources and other government officials outside of the urban context had little understanding of the lives of the homeless individuals they were trying to serve” (p. 696). Like many other articles in communication, Miller et al. primarily engage homelessness from a problem-solution perspective. In framing communication as linkage, connection is emphasized as the function. The linkage metaphor “relies on a conduit view of communication in that transmission and amount of communication are the key elements that connect individuals and units together” (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996, p.
Miller et al. argued that theorists and practitioners need to focus on building and maintaining interorganizational connections in order to combat homelessness.

From an ethnomethodological approach, Dollar and Zimmers (1998) examined the strategies that youth without homes use to communicate their social identity and challenge boundaries. The “houseless,” as one respondent chose to define him or herself, used communicative identity strategies that reflect the bounded nature of the uneven playing ground on which they exist. Additionally, the authors argued that we may need to re-envision “the communicative scenes in which we hold democratic discussions” where we “do not inherently privilege the powerful speakers, namely legislators and parents” but rather, where everyone moves toward advanced membership (p. 615). Dollar and Zimmer’s uptake of homelessness emphasizes the political nature of performed subject positions by youth without homes. Dollar and Zimmers’ study seems to represent a mix of communication metaphors including performance and voice. By choosing to define themselves in certain ways, in relation with others, youth without homes perform identity in various ways.

Harter et al. (2004) provided the most recent exploration of homelessness. They argued that StreetWise functions as a subaltern discourse community and fosters perspectives that counter dominant ways of thinking about homelessness and poverty. Through a strictly rhetorical analysis of eighteen months of StreetWise newspapers, Harter et al. argued that StreetWise negotiates tensions between the need to help vendors survive and work toward self-sufficiency and a desire to work toward social change through the venue of a newspaper. In order to survive, StreetWise often relied on the
advertising revenues even as those same resources seemed to “soften” the content and positions advanced through the paper. Harter et al. also mixed metaphors where communication is understood as both conduit as well as discursive. The newspaper serves as a transmission of the ideas but that very medium constitutes an alternative way of thinking about people without homes. The article, however, scratches the surface in terms of understanding the complexities of how *StreetWise* functions to assist those who are without homes or otherwise at risk. The rhetorical methods relied on by Harter and colleagues, although revealing, failed to capture how various stakeholders experience empowerment through the practices and patterns of *StreetWise*.

In sum, the overlap of communication studies and issues of homelessness is limited, and the research is quite scattered in its approach to communicatively understanding the problem. Rhetorically oriented studies have dominated what little literature exists about homelessness. Clearly an opportunity exists for communication scholars to function as public intellectuals and rely on our theoretical sensibilities to understand a particularly upsetting social problem. Likewise, the lived experiences of people without homes can usefully inform (and perhaps question) the cherished theories of the communication discipline. Sociologists, psychologists, political scientists and many others have weighed in on the issue of homelessness, but communication scholars have largely, thus far, failed to answer the call for theory and practice in this area.

Each of these previously mentioned studies has an implicit or explicit metaphor(s) of communication and organization; however, I propose that scholars need to explore more fully a discursive understanding of the experience of homelessness. A discursive
perspective, in this case regarding homelessness, “centers human communication as the basic, constitutive activity of organizing… it is as people engage in communicative action that identity, action, and structure – individual and collective – become possible and meaningful” (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. xxv; see also, Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). In this dissertation, I sought to shift the locus of observation in communication theory and practice about homelessness by exploring how StreetWise stakeholders engage in communicative action in ways that create and maintain, enable and constrain, democratic values in intersecting and overlapping communities.

Summary and Research Questions

“The news media are fundamentally based on facilitating communication within a community. And active, democratic communities are based on accessible communication that provides a public forum for the people who live there”

(Martin, 2001, p. 248)

As I argued in Chapter One, newspapers hold particular importance and promise for building community by increasing the visibility of and understanding about social issues and experiences, fostering opportunities for interaction among diverse community members, and creating an informed citizenry. StreetWise in particular provides space for those who too often remain on the margins of society to be seen and heard. StreetWise possesses the potential to democratically mobilize resources for those without homes or otherwise at risk. At the same time, through its venue of a street newspaper, StreetWise possesses the potential to foster community integration and civic involvement among diverse peoples. As such, StreetWise serves as a powerful context in which to explore the
boundary-spanning dimensions of democratic ideologies and practices. Through an in-depth ethnographic case study of StreetWise, I explored how vendors, staff, and board members embody or do not embody democratic subjectivities even as they work to foster a democratic way of life in the broader community of Chicago. I worked to understand how the practices of participation at StreetWise shape and are shaped by autobiographical, institutional, and social narratives as well as material and corporeal forces. In so doing, I adopted a discursive orientation for understanding homelessness.

A particularly useful theoretical standpoint from which to explore these discursive actions is at the intersections of feminist and pragmatist perspectives. Feminist theory and practice proved useful because the tools offered therein allow me to explore various modes of oppression and resistance as they relate to social, economic, and physical factors. Pragmatist theory and practice provides a theoretical and practical foundation from which inclusive and open discursive formations can be identified and justified. My feminist and pragmatist standpoint privileged experience as lived by various participants (assuming that experience is symbolic, material, and corporeal) and integrative thinking (including a reflexive relationship between theory and practice). From a pragmatist and feminist standpoint, I focused attention on how the organizational settings, practices, and textual products of StreetWise (re)produce the symbolic and material conditions that facilitate or impede the enactment of democratic values. Based on the various literatures I have reviewed and guided by an overarching feminist and pragmatist philosophy, the following research questions guided this project:

RQ1: How is democracy understood and enacted in the context of StreetWise?
RQ2: How, if at all, is the enactment of democratic values in the context of StreetWise influenced by social, material, and corporeal forces?

RQ3: How, if at all, does StreetWise, both the organization and the newspaper, foster and/or inhibit democracy in the greater Chicago area?

RQ4: What challenges do StreetWise stakeholders face as they organize and implement resources for people without homes or those who are at risk?
Chapter Three
Methodology

"By extending our repertoire of research strategies designed to minimize inequities in the knowledge production process, I believe we will be in a better position to generate knowledge that can support collective action for social, political, and economic justice" (Naples, 2003, p. 202).

In this dissertation, I adopted an interpretive standpoint and utilized various qualitative methodologies to gain a deep understanding of the research settings. I agree with Lindlof and Taylor (2002) who argued that “interpretivists…need to see social action from the actors’ point of view to understand what is happening” (p. 31). However, I recognize that there are multiple ways of telling stories; any interpretive telling, like a postpositivist one, or a critical one, is one narrative (or constellation of narratives) among many that could be told. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) noted that postmodern qualitative researchers “seek alternative methods for evaluating their work including verisimilitude, emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring, political praxis, multivoiced texts, and dialogue with subjects” (p. 10). I sought to capture the participants’ points of view, examine the specifics of cases as they exist in everyday life, and remain reflexive about my role in co-constructing meaning through dialogic interactions. I worked to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the social worlds of StreetWise.

An interpretive standpoint offered me a unique manner of relating with key stakeholders of StreetWise. Using qualitative methods, researchers often function in a social setting alongside participants. I believe that learning about the particular behaviors,
reactions and language of people in the settings of their daily lives offers a particular form of knowledge that other ways of knowing often miss. My epistemological standpoint privileged the ways in which individuals within collectives communicatively navigate their daily symbolic, political, social, and corporeal lives. Freire (1970) eloquently argued against the dichotomization of objectivity and subjectivity by stating the “world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction” (p. 50). In order to understand how people interact within their world, from moment to moment, I adopted an epistemological and methodological position that allowed me to observe and participate in the lives of the people I worked with. These broadly conceived beliefs formed the framework for this research design.

In this chapter, I outline the various components of the research design. First, I discuss my orientation to ethnographic fieldwork. Second, I describe the settings and identify various participants I worked with. Third, I outline the methods of data collection including participant observation, participatory photography, collection of organizational documents, and in-depth interviews. Finally, I discuss how I analyzed the data.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork is a “representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)” that “carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of other inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral” (Van Maannen, 1988, p. 1). Tedlock (2001) proposed that ethnography is both a process and a product and “involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context” (p. 455). The goals of ethnographic fieldwork are idiographic
in nature, meaning that my inquiry sought to understand the particularities of a specific situation or context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This involved going out into the field of study and gathering data. If participants are removed from their natural settings, data collection and analysis can lead to decontextualized findings. Geertz (1973) encouraged authors to weave convincing narratives characterized by *verisimilitude*—a feeling on the part of readers that they were in the setting itself. I worked to accomplish this through *thick descriptions* derived through ethnographic fieldwork, descriptions that privilege the voices of participants. Due to its concern with process and how people make sense of their lives, my ethnographic fieldwork yielded a detailed portrait of StreetWise from an *emic* perspective (i.e., view of the social actors, see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Stewart (1998) offered a useful framework for describing ethnographic fieldwork. By offering five rough criteria, one can broadly grasp the approaches that define ethnography as a method. First, participant observation is a defining characteristic of ethnographic fieldwork. Researchers attempt to get involved on an up-close level with participants. By getting involved in the natural, everyday settings that people in a given social situation operate in, researchers can learn the intimate details of particular insiders. Secondly, Stewart posited that holism is a key characteristic of ethnographic methods. By “holism,” Stewart urged that the “range of attention is comprehensive” and that the breadth of a given culture is grasped. Third, context sensitivity emerges as a defining characteristic of ethnographic methods. By this, Stewart meant that researchers ought to be able to make sense out of one set of observations in terms of other sets of observations, which an outsider to a particular culture or setting would be unable to do.
Fourth, Stewart identified sociocultural description or the “detailed description and analysis of social relations and culture” as a defining element of ethnography and ethnographic methods (p. 7). In this sense, description of a particular culture or setting should attempt to grasp and describe insiders’ points of view. Fifth and finally, Stewart argued that theoretical connections are a central element of this methodology. Stewart, along with Agar (1996), urged researchers to present cultural understandings, questions, and concepts “at the end of the study that didn’t exist in the original research problem” (p. 39). Strong research that utilizes ethnographic methods should open up new avenues for research rather than just simply describing a particular setting. I hoped to explore the enactment of democratic values in overlapping and intersecting communities; yet, I remained open to novel and interesting ideas and issues that arose in the field.

The setting of StreetWise presented me with a unique opportunity to occupy multiple research standpoints that might be difficult for many other researchers. As a former resident of Chicago, IL, I was intimately familiar with the city, the downtown, various neighborhoods, trends, history, and politics. This distinctive insider/outsider position allowed me to understand the discourses within and beyond StreetWise in additional ways. Naples (2003) succinctly described the ways in which ethnographers have advocated for and against insider and outsider positions in relation to fieldwork:

Advocates of ‘insider’ research assert that non-natives may be unable to gain the deeper understandings of cultural practices and beliefs that are available to insiders. Insiders have greater linguistic competence than outsiders, can blend in more easily, and are less likely to affect social settings. Advocates of ‘outsider’
research, on the other hand, insist that non-natives can be more objective in observing and analyzing social contexts and cultural beliefs. (Naples, 2003, p. 46) However, Naples resisted classifying researchers as either inside or outside, between “so-called objective or scientific and indigenous knowledge” (p. 64). Rather Naples, following Smith’s (1992) lead, positioned insider and outsider standpoints as places to begin to explore everyday relations; they are methods of inquiry that are always ongoing and opening up different ways of seeing the world. Thus, my experiences as a former resident of Chicago combined with my unfamiliarity with the inner workings of StreetWise afforded me a fluid position from which I was able to shift from an insider to outsider and back. I had the capacity to see the world from the participants’ points of view easier than most other researchers, but still had an ability and desire to probe deeply as unfamiliarity and newness was widespread in my interactions with people at StreetWise.

Interpretive researchers in general, and ethnographic fieldworkers specifically, must recognize that inquiry is not “value free” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Although ethnographic fieldworkers attempt to “bracket” or suspend their biases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), I recognize that it is not necessary nor is it possible for me to completely purge myself of my biases, values, and assumptions. Moustakas (1994) argued that “research is an interactive process shaped by his or her [researcher] personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting” (p. 4). I concur, and recognize that the narratives I weave are the accounts of participants as well as reflections of my own standpoint (see also West, 1993). Throughout the
process of data collection and analysis, I made every attempt to clarify my own interpretations and frame them as tentative, recognizing that I am not declaring the “right” interpretation but rather what I believe to be a grounded and viable interpretation based on available evidence—evidence that is always partial and indeterminate.

There is no “magic amount” of time to be spent in the field to complete data collection. Generally speaking, Van Maanen (1988) argued that “The more targeted or limited the ethnography is to a particular and well-defined cultural problem, the less time in the field is necessary in order for revelation to strike” (p. 78). As I detail in the sections below, I spent three months completely immersed in the field. Following this three month immersion, for nine months, I had intermittent contact with participants as needed to finish data collection and clarify initial findings. I was committed to ensuring that the arguments I present in the dissertation are grounded in ethnographic data—thus, I ultimately worked towards the goal of “theoretical saturation” (i.e., new findings replicate earlier ones) to guide the amount of time spent in the field (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Settings and Participants

For the purposes of this project, I turned to one street newspaper in particular, StreetWise, located in Chicago, IL. StreetWise is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1992 to “meet a vitally important area of need among the homeless of Chicago” (StreetWise, 2005a, n.p.) StreetWise, through the publication of a street journal by the same name, seeks to “help the homeless of Chicago help themselves through opportunities to earn a living and gain valuable skills” (n.p.). StreetWise is nationally recognized as one of the top street newspapers in the country. Among their numerous
accolades are the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place 2000 Illinois Women’s Press Association awards for news reporting and feature writing, the 1999 Illinois State Labor Press Association award for “Best Labor Story,” the 1998 Excellence Award for features and news from the Chicago Association of Black Journalists and the 1996 North American Street Newspaper Association Award for “The number 1 street newspaper in North America” (StreetWise, 2005a, n.p.)

Currently, StreetWise has an Executive Director as well as four other full-time employees and three part-time employees. StreetWise is overseen by an 11-member Executive Board. Among StreetWise’s board members are a U.S. Representative, an accountant and a publisher. In addition to these members, there is a representative from a national bank, two lawyers, a Chicago realtor and the owner of an internet-related technology firm. StreetWise serves between 400-500 vendors on an annual basis. StreetWise identifies seven major “departments” in their organizational structure (see Appendix A). Interestingly, organizational stakeholders (e.g., vendors) sit atop their organizational chart followed by the Board of Directors and the Executive Director/Publisher. Three other departments serve the needs of these three organizational bodies: the editorial staff, the advertising staff and vendor management. The entire organization is served by an administrative services department.

The exact demographic breakdown of StreetWise’s vendor population is difficult to enumerate in any finite way because of the transient nature of people without homes generally and vendors specifically. Additionally, the number of vendors served on a given day varies because it is each vendor’s choice to decide when they want to sell
StreetWise. StreetWise currently serves a vendor population that is mostly African-American and male. The best estimates from the organization approximate that roughly 15% of vendors have some type of physical disability. Vendors purchase the weekly newspaper for thirty-five cents and vend the newspapers for $1.00. The official StreetWise vendors are bound by a set of rules that are published in every edition of the newspaper. Among these “rules of the street” are: using a legitimate StreetWise ID badge, selling only the current issue of the newspaper for $1.00, using of professional language and courtesy when dealing with all members of the public, refraining from asking for donations, cooperating with other vendors, and selling the newspaper while drug-free and sober (StreetWise, 2005b, p. 2).

To gain access to StreetWise for the purposes of this project, Dr. Harter and I met with the Executive Director and another board member to negotiate the extent of access that they (on behalf of the staff, vendors, and board) felt comfortable granting. Permission was granted (see Appendix B) to collect data through in-depth interviews, participatory photography, document collection, and participant observations. The vendors represent a primary group of StreetWise stakeholders that I worked with. In addition to the vendor population, I interviewed full and part-time staff. Members of the Executive Board also agreed to participate in interviews. Additionally, I worked with the Executive Director to identify other key stakeholders of StreetWise including but not limited to key advertisers, government liaisons, donors, customers and service providers. Extending my research plan outside of StreetWise was a key to exploring the boundary-spanning dimensions of democratic ideologies. StreetWise exists as part of a “net of
collective action” (Czarniawska, 1998) and in order to create a more complete understanding of StreetWise, the organization must be explored as well as the ways in which it intersects with other organizations and citizens in its environment. Czarniawska (1998) argued that “studying action nets means that access secured in one organization does not suffice; several organizations are involved in an action net” (p. 33). For example, the Executive Director invited me to participate with her in the meetings of the Chicago Continuum of Care (CCC), a coalition of organizations in the greater Chicago area dedicated to helping people without homes. Such occasions allowed me to explore how StreetWise participants embody democratic subjectivities even as they work interdependently with others to build community. Once I was in the field, I remained open to such invitations.

Data Collection

Geertz (1973) provided one of the most important treatises on interpretive cultural work. In that essential work, he wrote that the ethnographer’s task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts, the ‘said’ of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are…to provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself. (p. 27)

In order to provide what Geertz called “thick description,” I used four distinct methods of data collection. I describe each one in greater detail in the following sections. I submitted a proposal for approval by the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The
The study and methods were approved by IRB and the approval letter is attached as Appendix D. Once IRB and my dissertation committee approved the research protocols, I began data collection. Per Creswell’s (1997) recommendation, throughout data collection, I kept a log of all research activities including types, times, and spaces of activities and trace artifacts of interactions (see Appendix E).

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation, noted by all ethnographers as a key element to any study that calls itself ethnography or claims to be guided by ethnographic principles, involves getting close to the participants of particular social settings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In essence, participant observation is research by doing. By “looking and listening, watching and asking,” participant observers learn the setting in which they are entrenched (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 19). For this study, I adopted what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) term a “participant-as-observer” (p. 147). This involves openly acknowledging my role as a researcher with an ability to “study a scene from the vantage point of one or more positions within its membership” (p. 147). As a participant observer at StreetWise, I participated in at least three different settings that informed my data collection process. As a volunteer at StreetWise, I spent time observing interactions between staff and vendors at StreetWise’s main office and observing vendors sell newspapers at various locations throughout the city. Additionally, I observed meetings where multiple service
providers engage each other. In the next paragraphs, I describe my approach for each particular setting.

I anticipated volunteering for approximately 30 hours per week at Streetwise beginning in mid-June, 2005, and continuing through the first week of September. My goal was to complete at least 350 observation/volunteer hours during this summer. After the summer, I planned on making periodic trips to Chicago during the fall quarter of 2005 (Sept. – Dec.). In total, I revisited StreetWise twice during this time period. Each time, I spent approximately one-half day at the office. In addition, I have stayed in touch with various organizational members, via email and phone, including two board members and one staff member. As I was observing/volunteering, I worked to gain an insider’s view of the day-to-day workings of StreetWise including triumphs, tragedies and the in-between.

Over the course of my three months at StreetWise last summer, I proposed that approximately one-half of my planned 350 hours would be spent volunteering, working, observing, and participating at StreetWise’s main office in the South Loop of Chicago. Spending this time at StreetWise’s office allowed me to begin to create relationships with the people that work there and gain an understanding of the operation of the organization as a whole. During my time there, I took on various projects, under the direction of the Executive Director, so that my time there added value to the organization.

The other half of my planned 350 hours were to be spent observing vendors interact with their clients and other actors as they sell newspapers in various settings. StreetWise granted me access to their organization on the expectation that something of value for them would emanate from my time spent in their organization. Specifically, in
my initial discussions with the Executive Director and another board member, I learned that they desire to know how to better tell their vendors’ stories of success and challenges. In short, StreetWise wants to better narrate a-day-in-the-life of their vendors. Therefore, I originally proposed to spend approximately one-half of my time at StreetWise observing the daily interactions of vendors in the organization and on the street. In order to orient myself to some of the daily struggles of the vendors, I planned to vend newspapers myself on a street corner (the extent of this was to be determined in conversation with Dr. Harter and based on my initial experiences once I was in the field). I did not vend newspapers myself though I see this as a possibility for a future ethnographic undertaking. The decision as to whether to vend or not proved to be a larger ethical dilemma than I had originally considered. Occupying spaces are significant undertakings for StreetWise vendors. “Being established” and being “consistent” at a space are some of the biggest factors, as identified by vendors, for success. Also, downtown is crowded with vendors to the point that many vendors leave the downtown area to vend. Because I did not want to further contribute to the crowding of downtown and did not feel that it was a good ethical choice to occupy a spot that I knew I would abandon after a few hours in the field, I did not vend papers myself. However, I did go through the vendor training early during my fieldwork.

As is often the case with ethnographic fieldwork, different opportunities emerged and some proved more worthwhile and possible than others as I learned about the organization. Ultimately, I spent 367 hours engaged in participant observations in total. Of those 367 hours, approximately 75 hours, or just over 20 percent were spent in the
field observing vendors. This was less than I had proposed. My observations of
StreetWise vendors in the field were less that my original proposed amount for a few
reasons. First, locating vendors in the downtown area, where I concentrated my
observations was more difficult than I anticipated. I spent many mornings walking up and
down the streets in a particular section of downtown in search of vendors. I often would
only find a handful of vendors up and down the non-major streets of the Chicago Loop.
Second, when I did find vendors, I would claim a spot near enough to the vendor where I
could observe their interactions. I usually set up about 20 feet away. I watched most
vendors for about 30 minutes. I did not witness as many transactions as I would have
expected. Most 30 minute observation periods would yield 2 or 3 vendor/customer
interactions, some of which lasted only seconds. I went out in the field 5 times with
vendors who knew I would be there observing them. Those observations were longer and
yielded more descriptive results as vendors would explain what was going on to me
directly.

Finally, I participated in any meetings and events that arose when I was working
in the field and as I am invited by the Executive Director (e.g., the CCC meetings,
Evanston Police Department meeting). A constant element of all participant observation
for qualitative work was fieldnotes. In each setting, I kept detailed field notes including
daily tasks completed, conversations, interactions, meetings and observations. Glesne
(1999) urged researchers to consciously record the details of field observations. If a thick
and full description of the research setting is recorded while the details are easily
recallable, then the rich details of the research setting will be available later when
analysis takes place. Patton (2002) advised researchers to use specific language and direct quotations of those in the field setting whenever possible. Patton also encouraged the researcher to record feelings, reactions, early analyses and insights in their fieldnotes to begin to make sense out of what is observed. The fieldnotes that I recorded were first recorded in a field notebook and then typed out at a later time. If my computer was readily available, fieldnotes were typed directly into my fieldnotes file. All fieldnotes were typed within 24 hours of observation. In other words, I was never more than 1 day behind on field notes. My participant observation fieldnotes yielded 101 pages of double-spaced, typed fieldnotes.

*Participatory Photography*

Visual rhetoric is garnering increasing attention from scholars in various fields (Finnegan, 2003; Lucaites & Hariman, 2001). Some scholars, such as Finnegan (2003), Lucaites and Harriman (2001), and Prosser (1998) pointed to the privileged place of the spoken word in social research, sometimes at the expense of the powerful possibilities of visual elements. Stanczak (2004) acknowledged that “visual or image-based research is reemerging with significant untapped potential across a broader scope of disciplines” (p. 1471). Visual images have entered scholarly discourses in various forms, “photovoice” (Wang, 1999), “photo-elicitation” (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), “photo novella” (Wang & Burris, 1994), or “visual narratives” (Harper, 1987).

Regardless of the name with which it is identified, photography is an increasingly popular and useful tool from which personal narratives and significant life events can be culled out from broader experiences. Wang (1999) justified the usefulness and power of
photography particularly well. First, Wang argued, as do others (see Finnegan, 2003) that images teach and that they “contribute to how we see ourselves, how we define and relate to the world and what we perceive as significant or different” (p. 186). In short, images influence how we see the world. Secondly, Wang argued that pictures can influence policy. Drawing on her experiences with women in rural China (Wang, 1999; Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996), she argued that pictures can set agendas and show what the media and public do not want to talk about or are unable to talk about. Photography “empowers the interviewees to teach the researcher about aspects of their social world otherwise ignored or taken for granted” (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1524). Third, pictures can allow people to create and define images that help shape policy. With this type of method, people do not only take pictures of important people, places and interactions in their daily lives, but tell the story of those pictures as well. Fourth, photographs can serve as a beginning point for a dialogue among those with a traditionally limited amount of voice and those in positions of power. Fifth, photography emphasizes individual and community action. Participatory photography “integrates a citizen approach to documentary photography, the production of knowledge, and social action” (p. 187).

Participatory photography, in a theoretical and philosophical sense, aligns itself with feminist and pragmatist approaches to research, which are a driving force in this project. Feminist theories collectively argue that certain groups have voice, decide language, (re)create history and make decisions (Donovan, 1992; Hekman, 1990; Nicholson, 1990; Tong, 1989). Participatory photography challenges the notion of the privileged voice of the researcher. “Photovoice prioritizes the knowledge put forth by
people as a vital source of expertise” (Wang, 2003, p. 182). Participatory photography turns the means of data production over to the participants. Additionally, photography gives the researcher access to traditionally unavailable settings and interactions all while incorporating a wide array of perspectives and explanations. Moreover, when participatory photography is coupled with in-depth interviews, the (false) binary between visual and verbal communication is transcended as images and words work in tandem to tell participants’ stories.

I proposed to have 25 vendors involved in the participatory photography component of the research project. I brainstormed with StreetWise representatives how to smoothly execute this element of the research plan and encourage participation. First, they suggested that we should plan on distributing 50 cameras with the goal of having 25 sets of photographs taken. Cameras have “exchange value” on the street, so I was prepared for the fact that some of the cameras might not be returned. Second, through our conversation, we decided that I could talk to vendors during one of the weekly vendor staff meetings (Wednesday afternoons), providing an initial explanation about the goal of the participatory photography: to tell the story of what it means to be a vendor. In order to encourage participation, the staff of StreetWise provided each vendor with 10 free newspapers. Once the vendors who were to take photographs of their daily interactions and experiences were selected, directions were given, the vendors were given a camera and were informed that they would receive 10 complimentary newspapers for them to sell. Once the camera was returned, and the photographs were taken, I took responsibility for getting the photographs developed. The cameras that I identified as ideal for this
process were 27-exposure, 400 speed film with a flash. I received a research grant from the School of Communication Studies to cover the costs of the cameras and film development. I originally proposed to distribute 50 cameras with a possibility of 1350 total pictures.

Distributing and collecting cameras as well as following up with vendors proved more difficult than I anticipated. I originally purchased 50 cameras. At the vendor meetings, I was able to distribute 32 of those 50 cameras. Per Ohio University’s IRB guidelines, vendors signed inform consents indicating their willingness to participate by taking photos to be followed by interviews. Additionally, per IRB approval, if vendors shot photographs that included other people, those other individuals needed to sign informed consents that photographs of them could be used in this dissertation. Vendors were provided multiple copies of informed consents, and when they returned the cameras they were instructed to also return signed informed consents from anyone photographed. I did not use any photographs in this analysis that were not accompanied by signed consents of both vendors and other people included in the photos. I attended 5 consecutive vendor meetings in June and July to distribute cameras. Most of my inability to distribute all 50 cameras was due to the same vendors attending many vendor meetings and some vendors attending none of the meetings. Of those 32 distributed cameras, 19 were returned to me. Of those 19 that were returned, only 9 vendors followed up with me for an interview. The cameras of these 9 vendors resulted in 216 total photographs.

I originally proposed, in order to reduce the number of visual artifacts, having vendors select the 10-12 most representative photographs from their roll of film. I hoped
these would be photographs that captured the various dimensions of vending, including successes and challenges. Because I was able to convince more vendors to participate in the photography aspect of the project, I only asked vendors to eliminate photographs from their set that were unexpected (ex. a picture of the sidewalk), unexplainable (ex. severely out of focus) or duplicate (ex. remove one picture if two were taken of the same artifact). After photo development, the photos served as a starting point for vendors to talk about their daily experiences during in-depth interviews. In the next section, I discuss the in-depth interview portion of the data collection process.

**In-Depth Interviews**

Underscoring my research design is a fundamental belief that participants are authorities regarding their own life experiences. Participant interviews are a logical mechanism through which to allow participants to account for their experiences. Simply put, “interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 3). In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that allows people to describe the ways in which they understand their world, the ways in which they make sense out of their world, and allows them to account for their experiences. For some vendor participants, the in-depth interview portion of my methodology builds off of the participatory photography element of the data collection. I proposed interviews with approximately 25 vendors, staff, board members and other stakeholders recommended by the Executive Director. I was able to conduct 35 interviews. 18 interviews were with vendors, 8 were with board members, 5 staff members and 4 were with stakeholders outside of the organization.
Interviews ranged in length from 24 minutes to 101 minutes. Interviews vary in their structure and format from ordered and structured to more emergent styles that are guided by a broad set of topics. The interview format that I used in this dissertation leaned more towards the latter. I adopted a more emergent, free-flowing, “co-authored” approach towards interviewing (Tripp, 1983). This approach towards interviews benefited me in this project in three distinct ways.

First, after my initial meetings at StreetWise where I had several conversations with vendors, staff, and board members, I learned that the environment at StreetWise is quite chaotic. Board members come and go from meetings without warning, staff members are constantly busy and vendors congregate in the building and come and go frequently. StreetWise is not a typical organizational environment where a researcher would be able to sit down and have an uninterrupted conversation. This was the case especially with vendors. Secondly, over the course of this project, I wanted to honor the stories of individuals. Importantly, the ability to tell vendors stories more effectively and eloquently is one of the project outcomes desired by the staff and board of StreetWise. From my initial conversations with a few vendors at StreetWise, attempting to impose a rigorous interview protocol with vendors in particular could stifle the emergent, co-constructed element of the interview process. Third, and related to the second point, is that a completely structured interview could function to paint the experience of homelessness with a monolithic, reductionistic brush that is neither ideal nor ethical. Lastly, an emergent approach to the interview process coincides with my views on epistemology and the role of the “researcher” and “participants.” In order to fully value
the various positions that the participants bring to bear in their lived organizational experiences, I could not overly prescribe the interview content. Quite to the contrary, I worked to allow participants to talk about their experiences in a relatively unrestricted fashion (Fontana, 2003). I developed interview protocols for (a) vendors, (b) staff members, (c) board members, and (d) those outside of StreetWise based on the research questions guiding this dissertation (see Appendices F, G, H, and I).

Once informed consent procedures have been followed, interviews were guided by the tentative protocols; I allowed, however, sufficient space for the unique stories of individuals to emerge and revised the protocol while I was in the field and as unintended issues emerged that merited attention. All interviews, with participants’ permission, were audio recorded digitally. If the participant agreed to have his or her interview recorded it was transcribed in its entirety. Of the 35 interviews, 33 were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcription resulted in 793 pages of interview text. If the participant did not agree to be recorded, then notes were taken both during and after the interview.

Again, the Executive Director encouraged recruiting participants during the weekly staff meetings. Each participant received a $15.00 stipend for participating in an interview. For those vendors who also participated in the photography project, they were not able to receive the $15.00 stipend and participate in the interview unless the camera was returned. The School of Communication Studies awarded me a research grant to cover these financial expenditures.
Document Analysis

Document analysis is another method, like interviews, that is strongly connected to participant observation. Documents are artifacts that are critical to the functioning of organizations, groups and individuals and can provide historical context, corroborate observations and interview data, evoke new questions or ideas and provide data that is not available in any other format (Glesne, 1999; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Documents by themselves can have limited significance (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). However, when related to other types of evidence, document analysis can prove to be an enlightening method of data collection. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) as well as Hodder (2000) argued that this connection between document analysis and other forms of data collection is fostered in three main ways. First, document analysis can be linked to, and thus confirm, “the talk and social action contexts that the researcher is studying” (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 117). Second, documents can help to recreate past events that the researcher is unable to observe. Documents “endure and thus give historical insight” (Hodder, p. 704). Third, documents “reflect certain kinds of organizational rationality…they often embody social rules…that govern how members of a social collective should behave” (p. 117).

Documents that were considered artifacts for analysis for this study included, but were not limited to, the newspaper itself, memos, previous research studies funded by StreetWise, training materials, organizational policy handbooks, published articles about Streetwise and the organization’s website. Now that I have outlined the four methodologies that I used to execute my ethnographically oriented fieldwork with
StreetWise, I will outline the data analysis procedures that I used to use to make sense out of the various types of data.

**Data Analysis**

The previously described data collection procedures produced a large amount of data consisting of fieldnotes, interviews, photographs and documents. First, I used NVivo to manage the transcripts and fieldnotes. I did not import the photographs into NVivo, although stories about the photographs were included in the transcripts. As Richards and Richards (1998) suggested, using computer-assisted software, such as NVivo, for data management increased the efficiency with which I managed the code-and-retrieval parts of the analytic process. With the help of NVivo, I was able to create a root directory to keep track of actual products of coding, including conceptual labels and data segments. I want to stress that the success of computer-aided analysis still rested with my theoretical sensitivity when creating and using codes. I did not use NVivo to identify themes throughout the analysis; I only used it as a tool to help me manage the large volume of textual data.

In order to inform, extend or challenge current understandings of democratic values and organizing, I engaged in a constant comparative method of data analysis. Constant comparison is one aspect of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Constant comparison is an active, ongoing (re)consideration of data as it is collected. Boje (2001) proposed that the purpose of constant comparison “is to do the ethnographic data collection, coding and analysis as you go, rather than to collect a lot of observations, interviews or surveys then code it once and for all to prove or disprove a
deductive hypothesis” (p. 51). Constant comparative analysis allows the researcher the freedom to constantly rethink old data in light of newer data and vice versa. Rather than interpreting all of the collected research at one point after the researcher has left the research setting, the constant comparative method affords researchers flexibility and creativity while engaged in the research process. Constant comparison allows researchers to note interesting occurrences and focus on those in the analysis as well as explore those previously unseen issues that might emerge from performing ethnographically-oriented fieldwork.

Data collection, as well as constant comparison, continued until “theoretical saturation” was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 110). I believe I reached theoretical saturation with this project, though new questions for future projects emerged. Because incidents continually appeared in the observation or interview process, I feel confident that arguments are grounded in the data. Because saturation was reached, I feel relatively confident that I was able to leave the field and reinterpret the collected data and begin to write analyses. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted, “In-the-field analysis also plays a role in researchers’ deciding when to leave field settings” (p. 223). If the researcher is not forced to leave the field, “indicators of data quality, redundancy, and abundance – become important factors in deciding when to leave” (pp. 223-224).

Once all interviews were transcribed, I began the formal data analysis aimed at theme development. As I stated, 793 pages of interview text (35 total interviews, 33 transcribed interviews) was the result of the transcription. I also had 101 pages of fieldnotes and 216 photographs along with organizational documents including their
mission statement, strategic plan, and website material. I read all of the discourses 2
times for familiarity. On the third read, I began to take notes of patterned regularities and
possible themes, and began marking text on the interview transcripts and fieldnotes
(highlighting, underlining, etc). I compared and contrasted how various participants
talked about issues, looking for both commonalities and differences (see also Miles &
Huberman, 1994). On the fourth read, I began to put key interview quotes and fieldnote
fragments under possible theme titles, further expanding my notes. On the fifth read, I
recorded each interview excerpt (by interview participant and page number or fieldnote
page number) on individual pages dedicated to each theme. During each reading of the
discourses, I analyzed images as well as texts, interview transcripts as well as fieldnotes.

At this point, I started to solidify themes, and I could see which themes had
extensive data to support them and which ones did not. Originally, I had identified 14
themes. I then proceeded to code data with NVivo. The discourses were read for a sixth
time as I coded in NVivo. After coding all discourses with the software (and making
separate notes about the visual images), I printed all of the data that was assigned to a
theme and set aside discourses that did not correspond to a theme. This resulted in 430
pages of data. I then read these 430 pages, organized by theme, and highlighted the most
representative data and poignant photo- narratives to give me a workable set of data for
each theme. This set of data was also read by Dr. Harter. A final subset of data resulted in
140 pages of text. This was a workable set of data from which the themes in this
manuscript, as well as Appendix J were culled. Dr. Harter also read this next distillation
of the data. Having Dr. Harter participate in the reading of the data sets helped me to
reflect upon my thoughts on thematizing the data as well as allow her to offer suggestions as to how the data might be seen differently, data collapsed into larger themes or new themes created. Through the constant comparative process and in consultation with Dr. Harter, some themes were eliminated or subsumed into other, related themes. The portrait I construct in Chapter Four is based on nine broad themes. In Chapter Five, I use these themes to answer the research questions.

Importantly, I analyzed the discourses with pragmatist and postmodern feminist sensibilities. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, I entered the field with an interest in how community life was understood and enacted, how (if at all) StreetWise worked to build social capital, the material and corporeal nature of experience, the extent to which StreetWise crafted space for participation among traditionally marginalized populations, and the boundary-spanning nature of democratic subjectivities. Certainly, the research questions on page 86 cued me to pay attention to these particular issues while collecting and analyzing data. Yet, throughout the process I remained open to other issues that seemed salient in the discourses—issues that took me by surprise but were revealing in understanding the lives of participants. Although pragmatist and postmodern feminist theories provided a sensible framework for how to approach the setting and make sense of patterned regularities, the themes presented in Chapter Four emerged from and remain firmly grounded in the discourses collected and analyzed.

Member Checking

Member checking or member validation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) is a process in which qualitative field researchers verify their interpretation of a social setting with
selected members of that setting. The underlying belief of member checking is that social actors are capable of making sense out of their own world. Lindlof and Taylor stated that member checking “means taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participants recognized them as true or accurate” (p. 242). Member checks generally involve asking participants questions such as: “What did I get wrong?” “Have I been fair?” “Do you recognize anyone?” By asking these types of questions, researchers are able to gauge to what extent the scholarly interpretation of the setting rings true with those who actually experience it. Member checks do not solely function to make sure that the researcher’s interpretation falls in line with that of the participants. The researcher is still entitled to his or her particular interpretation of a given setting. But the member check process exists to make sure that the researcher’s interpretation overlaps to some extent with how social actors view their world. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also noted that the member check sessions often can result in additional information that can help the researcher continue to analyze a setting or pick up on something that might have been missed initially.

Many of the ideas embodied in the themes presented in Chapter Four have been member checked by various participants. I plan to take this member checking even further as I write articles based on the dissertation. For the purposes of this dissertation, I engaged in member checking in three ways. First, while I was in the field during the summer of 2005, I engaged in numerous “playback conversations” (see Tompkins, 1994) with participants, particularly vendors. I talked to vendors, and some staff, about what I was observing and how I was interpreting these observations. These informal
conversations were invaluable as they cued me to pay attention to other patterns and helped to clarify my thinking. Second, upon returning to StreetWise in mid-December 2005, I had initial conversations about the data and themes with the Executive Director and three staff members. During the data analysis process, I sent two narratives to one staff member. Unfortunately, they did not reply to my request for them to read the narratives and give feedback. Soliciting even more feedback from StreetWise members is something that will be done as I move forward and parts of this dissertation take different forms.

Conceptualizing Rigor

At the beginning of this chapter I agreed with Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who argued that postmodern qualitative researchers, among whom I consider myself, reject traditional notions of reliability and validity for alternative quality evaluation methods such as “verisimilitude, emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring, political praxis, multivoiced texts, and dialogue with subjects” (p. 10). In this section, I will cover five ways to assess the quality and rigor of an interpretive project, including this dissertation: multivocality, intimate connection, dialogism, thick description and reflexivity. Before explaining how I am conceptualizing the standards of rigor on which I am assessing this project, I will briefly discuss my thoughts on truth and how those impact my data analysis as well as the implications of this project.

My conceptualization of “truth” draws from numerous philosophical traditions including American pragmatism(s), feminism(s), and postmodernism(s). Thinkers such as Dewey, James, Rorty, Berger and Luckman, Harding, Nicholson, Foucault, and Bakhtin
have impacted my ideas about truth to varying degrees. For me, truth is very rarely, if ever, something that could be considered Truth (with a capital “T”). I believe this to be particularly true in contexts concerning the social interaction (political, relational, communicative, etc) of human beings. In contexts such as these, I think truth to be contextual, fluctuating, multi-faceted, partial and indeterminate. I think claims of “ultimate truth” to be dangerous as they relate to the interactions of humans as that “Truth” invariably serves some and subjugates others. As a result, it is more useful to view truth in the terms I have described above. When truth is considered partial, complicated and in flux, truth becomes momentary revelations of the social world as it is constructed by persons. In situations involving the political, relational and communicative interactions of humans, there is no singular truth. Standpoint, time, space, available information and perspective determine provisional “truths,” not “Truth.”

Based on this conception of truth, I offer the following standards for assessing the rigor of qualitative work. First, interpretive research ought to be assessed in terms of the multi-vocal nature of the cultural portrait (see Denzin, 2001; Fitch, 1994; Flannery, 2001; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Tompkins, 1994; Richardson, 2000). Likewise, in pragmatist and feminist spirit, my presentation of data regarding StreetWise incorporates many different voices in telling this story of the organization, voices that sometimes rest in tension with one another. Part of the strength of my analysis rests with the degree of its multivocality. A portion of text from each interviewee in the study was used at some point in Chapter Four. In other words, to some extent, all the voices gathered for this dissertation are represented in the succeeding chapter. Secondly, a concerted effort was
taken to talk to people who performed different roles during data collection. In doing so, seven out of ten board members, all six staff members, four out of eight suggested outside stakeholders and 17 vendors were interviewed. Other than customers, no other relevant populations exist in relation to this organization. Meanwhile, in both data analysis and the presentation of results, I challenged myself to include multiple perspectives about a particular issue (e.g., the role of the paper), identifying both patterned regularities as well as counter-evidence from people whose ideas did not cluster around otherwise commonly shared meanings. The narrative portrait of the results is complimented by Appendix J, a table of significant statements. This table provides additional data excerpts related to each theme.

Secondly, as Patton (2002) argued, closeness to an object studied does not mean loss of perspective. Rather, an intimate connection to a situation unveils possibility for great discovery. Being close to the places, people and processes allows for intimate understanding of the situation. Qualitative researchers obviously value intimacy with the setting and I believe I have achieved an in-depth, detailed understanding of StreetWise that would be impossible through any other method. By engaging in participant observations, I have an understanding of how roles are performed that complements understandings generated when people retrospectively account for their experiences – a key strength of in-depth interviews. Meanwhile, things I observed in the field prompted me to discuss particular things with vendors even as interviews prompted me to pay attention to how participants interacted with one another. The coupling of observational methods along with interviews, photographs, and documents offered a richly nuanced and
A detailed understanding of StreetWise. My deep connection to the settings and participants allowed me to produce a portrait that reveals participants’ subjective meanings and actions.

A third, and related, measure of rigor of interpretive work is that of thick description. Thick description, according to Denzin (2001), goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that joins persons to one another. It enacts what it describes. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience or sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard and made visible. (p. 100)

In taking fieldnotes, I sought to both describe and understand the people and contexts at hand. In writing the results chapter, I aimed to provide richly textured accounts that draw heavily on the voices of participants as well as my fieldnotes. Meanwhile, I strove to advance reasonable claims based on the thick descriptions. It is my responsibility as a co-constructor of meaning to move from a description of the data (including quotations and examples) to an analysis and interpretation of meaning and the significance of events and ideas. Meanwhile, I sought to connect my interpretations and participants’ voices to dominant scholarly discourses. As a result, Chapter Four takes the reader on a journey that privileges the voices of participants but also recognizes my position and power in selecting, organizing, and interpreting their voices. I believe this study achieves
extremely thick description of the persons, situations, organizations, and contexts in question.

Fourth, through the course of my work, I engaged in an acceptable degree of dialogism with participants. For example, this project already reflects the consideration and the reconsideration of participant voices. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the dialogic aspect of this study is gained primarily through the interview methods used. In attempting to be a very engaged listener/question asker, I was sure to give participants, particularly vendors, multiple chances to answer questions. I often asked follow up questions such as “So, what I hear you saying is this? Correct?” “Oh, I had not thought of that before, could you tell me a little more about that?” and “Is there anything else you would like to say about that issue?” I believe questions such as these provided interview participants ample space to restate, add to and subtract from their thoughts during the interview process. Meanwhile, I recognize myself as an active participant in the dialogic construction of meaning. Woven throughout the voices of participants included in Chapter Four are philosophical arguments written by myself and based on my theoretical sensitivity both in the field and when analyzing and writing the results. I claim and own these philosophical fragments as just that – my interpretation of the discourses at hand based on my encounters with participants and the stories, or theories, of my academic discipline. In short, in both method and presentation, I sought to embody a dialogic spirit that recognizes that meaning is co-constructed by multiple parties including myself.

Relatedly, the last marker of strong qualitative research covered here is reflexivity. Lincoln and Guba (2000) argued that reflexivity “forces us to come to terms
not only with our choice of research problem and with those whom we engage the research process but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting” (p. 183). Fitch (1994), too, argued that not only are close relationships with data admissible as evidence in postmodern qualitative approaches, but “candor about the researcher’s identity and role in the scene studied are highly valued kinds of evidence” (p. 34). I believe I engaged reflexivity in this study in three main ways. First, I believe throughout this project, I have been upfront about my research choices from methods to setting to analysis. Secondly, I know in my heart I gave any and all participants in the project sufficient chances to voice concerns, issues, and successes that might have influenced my perception of a given topic. Third, the stories contained within this dissertation are not mine alone. During my time in the field, I was in constant contact with participants, always reconsidering old data in light of new data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Likewise, I have remained in thought about these issues, always reconsidering other perspectives since I left the field in late August of 2005. Since then, my chairperson and other people have heard various incarnations of the data presented in Chapter Four. Some analysis has remained as it was originally. Other analysis was changed when more viable explanations became clear. And still other data were placed in contradiction with what might have been a dominant read on a certain text at a given time.

Chapter Four proceeds with a presentation of the data collected throughout this dissertation. The results of the data collection are organized by theme and accompanied by my interpretation of that data. Chapter Five follows wherein those themes are
positioned in relation to the four research questions presented at the end of Chapter Two. In Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of those results on theory and practice. I also talk about limitations of this project and directions for future research.
Chapter Four

Results

In this chapter, I move between stories about StreetWise, as shared by stakeholders during interviews or witnessed by me in the field, and the dominant narrative scripts of StreetWise—institutionalized narratives that are both medium and outcome of individuals’ autobiographical accounts. Meanwhile, I work to connect the personal (and institutional) with the political by exploring the ideological work accomplished by storytelling, including my own. Some of these stories work individually and others work in tandem with other narratives to convey the complex, and in some cases contradictory, terrain that participants encounter on a daily basis.

My hope is that this chapter offers new emotional experiences, opens new intellectual terrain, connects with theoretical insights, and paints a portrait (my portrait) of StreetWise—a portrait that is partial and that will shift across time and space. Some narratives are specific to individual vendors yet are so unique or moving they merit interpretation. Other narratives highlight common experiences of multiple stakeholders and retread broader societal issues such as racism, work, public space, and democracy. The thematized narratives, though presented in linear fashion here, intersect with one another, and in fact, like all good stories, draw meaning in part from their relations with other texts/themes.

I begin with the theme of “Flipping the Script:” Crafting a “Real Job” which embodies participants’ efforts to define and legitimize their work and offer viable narratives about StreetWise. The following two themes, “Strength from the Pain:”
address immensely divergent issues but collectively speak to critical elements of Ashcraft and Mumby’s (2004) communicology, a guiding framework for this project. The following three themes join up with two of the major theoretical interests of this project: democracy and community. The themes of “Upstairs/Downstairs & Maintaining Public Spaces,” “Like Fish Need Water:” Human Connections, and “Read the Paper. Take the Paper.:” Small Acts of Participation collectively interrogate issues of space, connection, and participation as backgrounds and foregrounds for democracy and community in daily life. The final three themes Hierarchy of the streets: “Cupshakers,” “One-Paper Bandits,” and Vendors, “Where can this paper live? The content of StreetWise” and “The Brink of Existence and Nonexistence: StreetWise and Success” tackle more emergent but interconnected issues. An interesting, ongoing discussion emerged about the journalistic role of StreetWise, the newspaper. This issue is intertwined with the success of the organization and concomitantly, the successes and social position of its vendors.

The results presented in this chapter were collected from conducting in-depth interviews, participatory photography, participant-observation and document analysis with StreetWise vendors, board, staff, and outside stakeholders. These themes developed from careful, multiple readings of and distillations of discourses. As detailed in the Chapter Three, interview participants included StreetWise vendors, staff members, board members and outside stakeholders. To protect the identities of individuals, I use pseudonyms throughout the chapter. I also identify the role they play at StreetWise (e.g., board member, vendor). Wherever possible, I have used “in vivo codes” (Cresswell,
In vivo codes constitute using the actual language of participants in practice or during an interview. In vivo codes work to shift some of the ownership of the themes to the participants.

“Flipping the Script:” Crafting a “Real Job”

Towards the end of the meeting, Mark talked about the vendor code of conduct and the “This is My Job” campaign. He passed out buttons to all of the vendors, each advertising the campaign slogan, “This is My Job.” “You could be begging or robbing or selling drugs. You should be proud that you sell StreetWise,” stressed Mark. He told them if people on the street said to “get a real job,” they should respond, “this is my job!” As the meeting came to a close, Mark asked the vendors, “This is my what?” Multiple voices speaking in unison responded, “My Job. My Job. My Job.” (Fieldnotes)

In the United States, subjectivity and agency are crafted in large part through work (i.e., production) and, relatedly, consumption (du Gay, 1996). If and how we earn our livelihood, if and how we financially support ourselves and our families, remain deeply woven in the construction of our identities. People without homes are among the most impoverished of populations whose material conditions remain inextricably linked with work (or lack thereof). StreetWise provides employment opportunities that complement, and in some cases, take the place of, public assistance programs. Yet, throughout the duration of my fieldwork, discourses about the ontology of work were reflected in participants’ searches for both work and respect. I encountered numerous vendors who seemed to be seeking meaning in their work that went well beyond the
financial rewards of a paycheck, and well-intentioned staff and board members who sought to provide it.

StreetWise enacted the “This is My Job” campaign in part to help vendors differentiate themselves from panhandlers when selling the paper. A StreetWise staff member and former vendor, Mark, suggested that the power of the campaign rests with its ability to “flip the scripts” that consumers and vendors alike take for granted when performing their roles:

I think it’s [the campaign] good. We should be seen as people who are working. Not charity, not donations, but as a job. You’re out there every day. You’re investing in that product. You know what I’m saying? You’re working. This is your income. This is how you make money. This is how you make money to pay for that rent; put food on your table, clothes on your kid’s back. It’s a job, not a hustle. You have to flip the script on it because so many people were looking at it as a hustle, and a, “You owe me something ‘cause I’m homeless.” Charity. No, this is our job. It’s just one more step of trying to get some respect. That’s all we want is respect. We’re out here just like the Sun Times and Tribune guy. You understand what I’m saying? It’s just another step where I’m trying to flip the script of StreetWise history. StreetWise was based and founded on helping people who are homeless. But do they expect them to stay homeless when you buy the paper for thirty-five cents, sell it for a dollar? If you out here selling this paper more than six months and you still homeless, you doing something wrong. And a lotta times, it’s drugs and alcohol.
Flipping the script is an intertextual endeavor that asks vendors and customers to resist deeply entrenched understandings of a “real job,” homelessness, panhandling, and the socio-historical institutional scripts of StreetWise. As my analysis will demonstrate, flipping the script sometimes requires vendors to change their auto-biographical story and own their labor as “real work,” a legitimate alternative to panhandling. At other times, it demands that vendors resist comments from others (i.e., family members, friends, and strangers) that work to minimize or misrepresent their labor. Meanwhile, flipping the script can mean that consumers need to change the way they participate in their commercial exchanges with StreetWise vendors. In each case, flipping the script seeks to negate forces that otherwise work to diminish the symbolic and material worth of vending.

Social orders are reflected and created in and through everyday discourses (Burke, 1935/1984). The discursive construction of what constitutes labor (i.e., the ontology of labor) is of particular importance to communication scholars—in other words, what counts as “real work” is symbolically constructed, reified, and resisted (Clair, 1996; Clair & Thompson, 1996). StreetWise’s “This is My Job” campaign sought to position vending as real work—separate from and, in some people’s minds, in opposition to panhandling. A board member, Ed, shared:

Well that was part of the marketing program we launched, “This is my job. I’m not a panhandler.” We had buttons prepared. There were 2 sets, “This is my job,” and, “This is my job, I’m not panhandling.” Also, featuring vendors in the back of the newspaper to reinforce that this is a job. I think we need to continue to do that
to remind people that this is not panhandling, this really is a job for this individual. And we may never break down all of the barriers but at least we’d start by reminding people this is a job.

This campaign arose from complicated historical and political circumstances that, in broader social contexts, also work to “disappear” or marginalize work that does not easily fit the mold of a “real job.”

In her analysis of the colloquialism “a real job,” Clair (1996) considers how everyday speech forms reify the metonymic reduction of “real work” to “well paid work” associated with employment in a capitalist socio-economic system of the production of goods. The “This is My Job” campaign positions vending as a legitimate commercial enterprise. An acknowledgement of one’s work as “real” is an acknowledgement of one’s being, one’s significance, in a community. Regrettably, the very necessity of such a campaign serves as evidence of the degree to which phrases such “get a real job” impact StreetWise vendors. What is ultimately at stake regarding public attributions of vendors as panhandlers and StreetWise’s counter-narrative is a definitional debate of what counts as work and what does not. Schiappa (2003) argues early in his book that “definitions put into practice…a shared understanding among people about themselves [and] the objects of their world” (p. 3). Schiappa continues this argument by calling people to “ponder our definitions and descriptions as argumentative claims rather than a revelation of “the real.”” (p. 170). StreetWise draws on dominant definitions of labor (and related professional practices) to legitimize the work of vendors. In doing so, they clearly seek to differentiate vending from panhandling (in the minds of both vendors and consumers).
Vendors are encouraged to perform their roles in an entrepreneurial manner. On a day-to-day basis, vendors are expected by management to adopt a professional code of conduct to guide transactions with customers, scripts that seek to resist the stereotype of vendors as panhandlers and define vending as a “job.” The key elements of the vendor code of conduct consist of the display of a current vendor badge, selling only the current issue of the paper or other StreetWise-approved products (e.g. poetry book), use of professional language and attitude, displaying courtesy toward the public, not obstructing public walkways, cooperating with other vendors, refraining from asking for donations, and selling while sober. The entrepreneurial and professional nature of their jobs was embodied in many photos taken by vendors. For example, multiple vendors took pictures of customers holding the paper just after they purchased a copy of the newspaper. Other photos captured the customer/vendor interaction taking place. Through this exchange process vendors participate in a micro-capitalistic enterprise that functions to legitimize their position as salespeople. In one photograph (see Image 1), we can see a vendor, Jessica (on the right), engaged in a paper sale. You can see the customer (left) taking the paper and Jessica holding the money that was given as payment for the paper as well as her supply of papers which vendors usually hold up to entice sales. Jessica is wearing the StreetWise badge (required by the code of conduct) which is her license to sell StreetWise. Jessica is also wearing a button on her lanyard which is from the “This is My Job” campaign.
Participants I observed by and large demonstrated a sense of professionalism in the work they do. Vendors generally treated StreetWise as a job and used language to match the respectability society confers to those who earn a paycheck. Vendors’ speech patterns reflect what most individuals would consider a “real job.” Vendors referenced shifts of work, “I read the paper on yesterday’s shift,” breaks or down time, “I went and took a bathroom break,” paychecks, “Out of this paycheck, I’m gonna take some money, and I’m gonna go to the police headquarters and get my rap sheet.” Most vendors talked about “tips.” The paper is advertised as costing $1 per copy and any money that is given to the vendors above and beyond the cover price is considered a “tip.” Language such as that of “tips,” “shifts,” “breaks,” and “paychecks” likely serves multiple functions for
vendors. To begin, many vendors treat selling *StreetWise* just as a factory worker treats a shift or as a university professor treats teaching a class. As such, these linguistic moves reflect and solidify vendors’ identification with their “jobs” and their employer. Moreover, these linguistic choices rationalize and legitimize (consciously or unconsciously) the work that vendors are performing when selling the newspaper.

A key target audience, then, of the “This is My Job” campaign are vendors themselves. During my fieldwork, material manifestations of the campaign were ever-present in the office of StreetWise. Buttons and posters boasted the slogans even as staff meetings were dedicated to rehearsing the script. Meanwhile, StreetWise provides resources that enable vendors to perform their role in a professional manner (e.g., clothes, a place to clean up, a place to make food, etc.). Likewise, StreetWise’s Quality Assessment Team (QAT) helps to maintain a professional and entrepreneurial environment by greeting vendors when they enter the building, running errands for office staff, and consulting vendors about locations and/or selling strategies.

Even as StreetWise positions vending as legitimate work, vendors often face criticisms from others who call into question the worth of their jobs. Consider my dialogue with Kimberly who, in addition to vending *StreetWise*, works as a school bus driver in Chicago.

Kimberly: I want to get some type of career going. Something that’s more lucrative I could say. I mean, I like driving a school bus, but it’s like that’s something I’d rather do later on down the road, when I’m old and retired, just to
have something to do. A lot of my coworkers are older people who are retired, and they’re just doing that to have something to do.

David: You mentioned that you went back to school so you could get a career. How do you view StreetWise’s role? Do you see StreetWise as a career? Do you see it as something you just do in the time being, but it’s not a career?

Kimberly: Basically I look at it as a job, just like working at Burger King, McDonald’s. To me, it’s a job. It’s a job, just like driving a bus is a job…You gotta discipline yourself. You gotta sometimes, what I gotta do personally is ignore the outside world. People outside of StreetWise trying to tell me, “Get a real job.” I don’t even pay them no mind, but I’m talking about people that supposedly, you know, that are part of my life, or whatever, might say that.

David: But you have a real job; you drive a bus, right? And you sell StreetWise.

Kimberly: Two real jobs, to me.

David: Two real jobs.

Kimberly: Even though StreetWise might not be the traditional “McDonald’s” paycheck every two weeks, but still it’s working. Actually, I make more money doing StreetWise than I’d do if I worked minimum wage, ‘cause I do make over minimum wage, with the exception of yesterday. For the most part I do, though.

Sadly, despite Kimberly’s insistence that she holds two real jobs, other people in her life discount her occupational choice as a vendor. Interestingly, Kimberly took a number of pictures related to her job as a school bus driver (see Image 2).
On a regular basis, vendors receive negative comments, insults, and the like from detractors when they are selling *StreetWise*, as revealed in the following two interview excerpts. Zach experiences frustration when other people, including some vendors, discursively minimize the effort and energy he puts forth as a StreetWise vendor:

But it seems like a lot of the vendors have other things in mind, like a so-called real job. I don’t understand why this is not a job. People look at a lot of the StreetWise vendors and think we’re bums, that’s this just organized panhandling… It is a job. It’s like people really need to get money.
Krista, also a vendor, agreed, and differentiated StreetWise from “public aid” and “those” individuals just looking for a handout. In doing so, she emphasized the energy that vendors must put forth to work for StreetWise.

Krista: Some people come in, they’re jaded and oh, StreetWise sucks. They hate StreetWise. But, to me the door opens both ways, if they don't want to sell the papers, they can leave any time, you know. To me, I mean they're always looking for a handout. This isn't public aid. They can go get help anywhere else. They don't have to come here.

In chapter one, I quoted philosopher Richard Rorty as stating “We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we still instinctively think of as “they” rather than “us” . . . to create a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have” (1989, p. 196). Speaking from a privileged position (white, male, educated, heterosexual) addressing a population as “they,” I potentially perpetuate oppression and limits my ethnos. However, what is the role of linguistic differentiation when used by an oppressed population? Recognizing that there might be multiple ways in which the non-StreetWise homeless population is even more oppressed than StreetWise vendors, how might StreetWise vendors be served by separating themselves from others in the street who are competing for money? Zach and Krista’s comments, along with those of many other vendors, support the idea that StreetWise vendors believe that their job is real work. For many, it might be a first step back from earlier trials and tribulations, and for others it might represent a long-term commitment. Generally, though, vendors believe that selling StreetWise is a job and express discomfort about those who do not
recognize their work as legitimate or “real.” Flipping the script, then, sometimes involves shifting the expectations and worldviews of customers, and other vendors or people living without homes, who reduce vending to panhandling.

Participants disagree about the extent to which the general public views vendors as panhandlers. Based on her experiences as a vendor, Jamie believes that the public does see a difference between vending *StreetWise* and panhandling.

David: Do you think that people, the public in general see a difference between *StreetWise* and panhandlers? If so, what are those differences?

Jamie: Oh most definitely, most definitely. The difference is that the person that is selling *StreetWise* is working. The person that’s panhandling they’re just standing there begging. No matter what the reason is that you’re standing there begging you are not selling a product. Most panhandlers refuse to come down to *StreetWise*. I have passed out a lot of fliers to let them know where to go. I have given a few panhandlers bus fare; they never come down because they don’t want to sell *StreetWise*. They don’t want to have to come up with the money to buy the papers and then come back and sell them. They just don’t want that responsibility. I am not a panhandler.

Clearly, Jamie sees her vending as different from panhandling. Yet, initially, I asked Jamie about *public perceptions* of *StreetWise*. There is little evidence in Jamie’s comments and experiences about the extent to which the public that she interacts with sees a distinct difference between selling *StreetWise* and panhandling for money.
Fred, who vends around a university in Chicago, offers a tempered approach to the public differentiation between vendors and panhandlers. He appears to deal more directly with public perceptions referencing a specific conversation that he had with a potential customer.

Fred: That's another reason why I go to CAPS meetings because of the panhandlers. If I was to go to another spot, I would want to go because I would I would want the police to help me with the panhandlers.

David: When you go to a CAPS meeting, how do you differentiate yourself from a panhandler? Do people see the difference, do you think, between you selling the newspaper and from a panhandler?

Fred: No.

David: People don't see the difference?

Fred: Some do, some don't. You know? It's like people that have jobs, like this one female came up to me one day and she said “where are all the other panhandlers?” As if she was including me. I said, “I don't know where they are; I hope they don't show up!” You know? Because I don't need the competition or the distractions from my customers. Some people come to me and say, “well, see that guy down there? He's always asking for money. How come he can't get a job like you?” So, you know, some people see the difference and some don't.

Fred refers to panhandlers as “they,” and interestingly, uses this rhetorical strategy when speaking to a potential customer. Fred’s story reveals the potential utility of boundaries or hesitancy on expansion of one’s ethnos. StreetWise vendors generally work to
differentiate themselves from panhandlers in the face of the public’s tendency to lump vendors and panhandlers together. However, it should be noted that granting vendors the linguistic space to label panhandlers as “they” has repercussions on those panhandlers; while legitimizing vendors, panhandlers are dismissed.

Fred’s comments also foreshadow themes to be presented later in this chapter. Fred talks about attending Community Action Policing Strategy (CAPS) meetings which is a program designed to connect communities and the Chicago Police Department. These meetings serve as one venue to connect StreetWise vendors to various other interested stakeholders: police officers, business leaders, community members. By attending CAPS meetings, Fred is able to expand his social network to include those (police officers) who can help him succeed while he is vending by removing panhandlers from the space which he occupies.

Finally, flipping the script sometimes entails shifting the nature of the commercial exchange between vendors and customers. As indicated earlier, most vendors receive “tips,” or any financial contribution above and beyond the retail value of the paper (one dollar). Reflecting on his tips, Zach shared:

On an average good night, $25-30. But I’ve raked in a hell of a lot of cash some nights. You know, $60, 70, 80 just basically on tips. One night on a Saturday, no a Sunday, where I sold four copies but made $34. People would give me 5-dollar bills and stuff like that.

Strategic ambiguity surrounds the notion of “tips,” with the giving and keeping of tips fraught with difficulty. Vendors don’t receive traditional “paychecks” as many other
workers do; rather, they purchase (at wholesale price) the weekly paper and make money as they sell papers at or above retail value. The money that is in their pockets at the end of the day is theirs to keep. “Tips” could easily be understood by a customer, especially those who do not take a copy of the paper, as a “donation” or “extra money” and not as a tip. Many vendors and managerial staff expressed frustration about customers who “donate” money to the vendor without taking the paper in exchange. “You know, sometimes this guy come and about give me a five-dollar tip, and did not get one paper, and he done did it more than one time,” shared Valerie, a vendor, “I say, ‘Here, you want your papers?’ and he say, ‘No,’ and I, ‘Sure, you want your paper,’ and he kept going. I didn’t get a chance to talk to him. He just took off.”

Mark, a staff member and former vendor, perceptively identifies the tenuous sort of relationship that can emerge between vendors and customers when the latter “donate” money rather than “buying” the papers.

Mark: They [vendors] see it as a job. Take the paper. Take the paper. Read the paper. You know what I’m saying? I push this all the time. I say “take the paper, read the paper.” I’m not saying [consumers] don’t give them [vendors] a tip. But we got a hand up, not a hand out. We should have a hand up, not a hand out, you understand what I’m saying? As far as the business is concerned, I don’t tell the vendors give back money. But get a product in their hand, ‘cause you wanna build up a regular customer base. You out there trying to keep the dollar and the paper, and the guy walk past and he gives you a dollar, and he says, “Keep the paper.” And you do it, next week when that guy walks past you, ‘cause he walks past you
every day, ‘cause he walks past the spot every day. 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? Customers pay more attention to the vendors than vendors think. They look at your appearance, your consistency, and they see you out here working. To them, it gives them the appearance of this is that guy’s job.

I should note that in every interaction I observed while in the field, I never witnessed any customer ask for change nor did I witness vendors offer any change. Likewise, I have purchased numerous papers myself and have never asked for change. Universally, people hand a vendor the amount of money they wish to give and do not expect anything other than a copy of the paper in return. Meanwhile, customers who choose not to take the paper may unintentionally undermine the potential for vending to be seen as legitimate work.

By not taking a paper, customers, as least as perceived by staff, reinforce the image and script of “panhandling” (i.e., giving you a handout) rather than the entrepreneurial script of supporting a salesperson (i.e., a hand-up). At the same time, when customers choose not to take a copy of the paper, they limit the potential of StreetWise to foster a full and free interplay of ideas in the public sphere. Subsequently, a significant amount of staff time and conversation among board members is dedicated to strategizing how to get the papers in customers’ hands – flipping the script. In many ways, vendors assume subjectivities that are already inscribed (i.e., panhandling) as they take their place in socially and historically structured environments. Panhandling, and by
extension real work, must be understood as both medium and outcome of discourses (Giddens, 1979). Across time and space, people standing in the street soliciting have come to signify panhandling. Interactions between vendors and customers can reinforce or undermine these deeply entrenched belief systems. Vendor-customers relations, then, can be understood as contested discursive spaces where ideologies about “real work” are lived, reified, and sometimes resisted.

In sum, the “This is My Job” campaign represents an organizational effort, directed at multiple stakeholders, to “flip the scripts” that surround StreetWise and the population it serves. The campaign draws on dominant definitions of labor to help vendors craft meaningful and professional work through entrepreneurial vending, differentiate vending from panhandling, and shift consumer-vendor relations to reflect a commercial exchange of goods.

“Strength from the Pain:” (Re)narrating Histories

_The highlight of the day was going out into the field with Mark. “Going into the field” consisted of driving around with Mark as he checked vendors to make sure people were in their spots, as well as finding illegitimate vendors who might be “hustling” StreetWise. We left from the StreetWise office and headed into the West Loop concentrating on Lake, State, Wells, and Dearborn streets. My perception of the city that I have called home for 28 years was changed by this experience. We drove through the Loop in a manner in which I had never driven through it (primarily with indifference toward traffic laws). I saw buildings I had never seen and traveled streets that I had never been on. Mark can spot a vendor_
(or non-vendor) from what seems like blocks away. He notices panhandlers and for many of them, can tell a story about how he knew them when he was out on the streets. Mark helped me take note of aspects of Chicago: people, neighborhoods, StreetWise, panhandlers and more that I had never noticed.

(Fieldnotes)

Hopefully, these fieldnotes, written during the second week I was at StreetWise, convey a sense of significant personal change that I experienced “going into the field” with Mark (and throughout the duration of my immersion in the worlds of StreetWise). I returned from the field that evening and told my parents how I experienced Chicago with fresh eyes. As Mark and I drove around, he would point out things going on, people moving in certain ways, standing in certain spots, etc. My view of Chicago had rapidly changed. Because I have called that city home for such a long time, in many ways, my understanding of my own history was under constant re-evaluation. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) argue that feminist communicology considers “the historicizing of organizational discourse and the concomitant view of history as discursively constructed” (p. 121). Relatedly, White (1981) contends that historical narratives are particularly rich texts which will allow us to “reflect on the nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself” (p. 5). White argues that historical narratives are “an especially good ground on which to consider that nature of narrations and narrativity because it is here that our desire for the imaginary, the possible, must contest with the imperatives of the real, the actual” (p. 8). My observations of StreetWise as well as conversations with
participants compel me to discuss historical discourses on three levels: auto-biographical narratives, institutional narratives, and societal or meta-narratives.

Individual histories provided some of the most interesting, poignant, and humbling stories shared during my time in the field. Vendors and staff storied their experiences with job loss, drug abuse, alcoholism, incarceration, illiteracy, domestic violence and many other tragedies that were simultaneously comprehensible and foreign to me. From a pragmatist standpoint, understanding the potential consequences of how individuals narrate their lives is of particular importance. The following interview excerpt stems from a conversation about how Mark, a former vendor who now works on staff at StreetWise as a trainer and manager of vendors, draws “strength from the pain” of his past and uses it as a resource in helping other vendors to do the same.

David: I don’t want to sound like I’m joking here, but if I was in your shoes, I think your job could drive me to drink. How do you do all this stuff and stay positive? And, you don’t fall back to any of the problems you might have had before.

Mark: Yeah. A lot of people wonder that too. Well, what stops me is the pain that I put myself through. You know, heroin, crack, no joke. I’ve reached the bottom man. Nothing can ever have me go back, ‘cause I keep that pain up front. The pain of being sick. The pain of wasting my life away. Nothing in the environment of my job could ever bring me back to that point.
David: How do you use your experiences to motivate? Like you were saying, you’re a motivator. How do you keep people going and realize they can help themselves?

Mark: When you go through a lot of pain, and you use that pain to drive you to get yourself together, and then you really look at the tools that you use. And StreetWise is definitely a tool that I use, and a lot of components within StreetWise. It doesn’t leave you. I draw from the pain, I draw from what I’ve accomplished, and I don’t come at it in a conceited type way.

David: I’m amazed that you stay so positive. That you can take all this bad stuff that you’ve seen and you’ve been through, and you channel it all.

Mark: And you know, and people of the streets, they can feel that. They’re very sensitive. They can tell when somebody’s phony. If somebody like that was to try to come work for StreetWise doing what I do, it wouldn’t go over. They’d brush it off. They can sense those things. They can sense who’s real. Like when you say, “Keep it real.” Then they can sense a phony. I always remember the days when I first came in to StreetWise and there were people in the position that I’m in. They didn’t care about the vendors. They were power tripping, controlling, and it never got through to me or the other vendors. So that’s something I drew off of too was to do the opposite of that. When people have a hard time, and then they come back up, then they start treating people like they are nothing. I don’t like that. Never have. So and when I first started, I always, I think I made it a point to really do the opposite of that.
Traditionally, the role of staff in social service occupations is to help clients correct the mistakes of their past and *move forward* (Ferguson, 1984; Trethewey, 1997), and StreetWise is no exception. Interestingly, what Mark attempts to do with vendors is help them *move forward* by drawing from the pain of the *past* (i.e., keeping the past alive).

Mark’s comments also reveal how we come to terms with events of our past (or fail to) in and through narrative activity. Paralleling the linguistic turn in the social scientists, increasing attention among scholars and practitioners has focused on *narrative means to therapeutic ends* (see White and Epston, 1990). At the heart of narrative theory and practice is what Kenneth Burke (1950/1969) called Trouble with a Capital T. We make stories to understand and reconcile disruptions or the chaos of our lives (see Bruner, 2002; 1996, 1991; Carabas & Harter, 2005). Importantly, the meanings that individuals attribute to events shape their actions and choices. As argued by White & Epston, “persons organize their lives around specific meanings,” and depending on how they narrate their experiences, they can contribute to the “survival of, as well as the “career” of, the problem” (p. 3). Histories, although possibly difficult to overcome, can provide motivation, hope and inspiration to succeed—depending in part on how they are storied (White & Epston, 1990). Narratives, through retelling and remembrance, can help “keep the pain up front” for individuals like Mark, allowing them to survive on a daily basis.

Arthur Frank (1995, 2004) positioned illness, trauma, and tragedy as a *call* for stories. Most vendors have compelling stories to explain why or how they ended up working at StreetWise—retrospective accounts of poverty and homelessness that run the
gamut from substance abuse to unemployment. Individual narratives cut across issues. There was no one type of event or life situation that vendors pointed to as the cause of homelessness. One former vendor told a heart-wrenching story of overdosing on heroin in the bathroom of a club in downtown Chicago. When paramedics arrived on the scene, and gave him drugs to counteract the heroin, his first thought was, “No, don’t wake me up, you are going to ruin my high.” Rather than presenting an all-inclusive list of vendors’ individual narratives, I offer just a few to give a flavor of the lived realities of vendors. Scott tells his story of how and why he became a StreetWise vendor:

David: Can you tell me when and why you started working at StreetWise?
Scott: I started StreetWise in 1993. I’d say around August or September. One of them two months because I had got laid off from my job.
David: What was your job?
Scott: Working at Dominick’s [a grocery store]. And they closed the job down to rebuild it and they never called me back. So I became homeless and I was shaking a cup on Michigan Avenue. So, a vendor, I forgot his name, told me, “You don’t have to do this. Go down to StreetWise.” And I became a vendor.
David: And you’ve been vending ever since.
Scott: Yeah.
David: Did that Dominick’s, did they reopen?
Scott: Yes.
David: Did they ever call you back?
Scott: No.
David: Did you ever find out what happened?

Scott: They got all new employees and stuff like that.

Scott has been employed by StreetWise for a lengthy amount of time. His narrative centers around a job loss. I spent a good deal of time with Scott this summer as he was a vendor that was frequently around the StreetWise office. Scott has had problems with alcohol in the past. A staff member told me how occasionally he had to ask Scott to go home to clean up. Scott was forced to leave his apartment during my time at StreetWise because a relative that was subletting the space to him wanted to move back to Chicago and would not allow him to stay there. During our interview, Scott worked to make historical sense out of his employment life, and those narratives that affect employment. He stated to me at another point in his interview that, “This [vending StreetWise] is what I like to do. I meet a lot of people and because I get to see the events here. I have a lot of different spots, locations, stuff like that. And I say, I don’t mind working in a office, but I like to get paid for being here.”

Reconciliation of one’s past mistakes can be a difficult process for vendors for both personal and social reasons. Mark reflects on his role as a trainer at StreetWise, and the difficulties he confronts in getting vendors to concentrate on the task of selling papers and moving towards self-sufficiency.

Mark: One other thing is you have to do is raise their self-esteem. See, a lot of them…their self-esteem drags, especially when they first walk through the door. That’s the first step, helping their self-esteem. Get it back. Because I’ve seen a lot of people come to StreetWise about ready to just give up. Yeah, they made wrong
choices. They continue to have made wrong choices. But no one gave ‘em a chance either. So that doesn’t help the self-esteem. So they feel they’re digging a deeper, deeper hole. But when they come to StreetWise and they see that, “Hey, it’s on me now. I can make as much money as I want.” And it’s not always about the money. Sometimes it’s about the inner peace in oneself. You can’t bullshit yourself. And a lot of us try real hard, but we never succeed.

History is a confluence of individual choices and the impact of external forces. Mark’s insights recognize both. Vendors are partially responsible for the decisions of their past. Many, as Mark recognizes, have made bad choices. Mark also recognizes the power and hope in giving vendors a chance to succeed in the present and future. Success, and overcoming painful historical circumstances, is about gaining the material power to sustain an existence that is healthier than homelessness. But, as Mark points out, central to being satisfied with one’s work and gaining the “inner peace” that comes from having a roof over your head and a decent-paying job.

Although narrative remains a primary resource for individuals as they attempt to craft new identities (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001), the symbolic nature of narrating cannot be separated from the material and social circumstances of vendors’ lives. Vendors themselves may have come to terms with their personal histories, and in some cases draw strength from the “pain of their past,” while other individuals or organizations may not accept vendors’ stories of redemption. Numerous vendors cited others’ (including employers) unwillingness or inability to accept vendors’ histories as difficult to overcome, if not insurmountable. Consider, for example, my conversation with Vincent.
David: I’ve heard this from a few vendors and I’d like to hear your take on it. You can come in here and it doesn’t matter what your background is you just said that. I would assume, but I want you to tell me if I’m right or wrong, in trying to find other jobs, that maybe your background makes is it tough for you to get a job?

Vincent: Well, to be honest with you, I when I got arrested. Like I said before, it was my first felony and my last felony. And the type of felony it was, which was a fourteen ten, which is expungeable. So, I can get it expunged off my record and it’s not gonna affect me far as getting employed. But a lot of guys out here, yeah, they do have a background and they can’t get their record expunged and it definitely gonna effect them far as they future. Because that’s the way the system is set up.

Reconciliation with one’s past can be a difficult process for vendors for numerous reasons. To begin, many vendors lack the material resources to “eliminate” or “expunge” such things as criminal records or outstanding debt. With multiple factors feeding the sometimes oppressive and stifling nature of history (material, psychological, biological), vendors often find it difficult to redress the remainders of past transgressions. Both Vincent and Scott required material resources in order to get past their past to an extent that is deemed acceptable by society. Moreover, vendors live their lives drawing on, and in some cases trying to resist, signifying systems from their environments (Gergen, 1991). A case in point: people with criminal backgrounds are often perceived as “dangerous” and “untrustworthy.” Even as the label “homeless” carries a burden of stigma (i.e., dysfunctional, unproductive) that is difficult to overcome (McKerrow, 1999).
Meanwhile, “Not in My Backyard” (NIMBY) discourses make it difficult to provide services to people without homes or otherwise at risk (Harter et al., 2005).

One of the reasons why vendors come to (and remain with) StreetWise is its acceptance of vendors irrespective of their previous indiscretions. Alan, a board member, praises StreetWise’s ability to be largely indifferent towards people’s pasts.

Alan: The organization offers a tremendous service to people. If you just think about it, here’s an organization where you don’t have to have a resume, you don’t have to have a telephone and address. You don’t have to have anything, and they’ll give you a job right there. Just give you a job. It’s the kind of organization, I think, is crucial for any major city.

Alan notes an often cited strength of StreetWise as an organization: Relative to other organizations, StreetWise offers almost unconditional acceptance of vendors irrespective of their past. Circumstances that would likely stop vendors from gaining employment at other organizations are considered far less important by StreetWise’s management, staff, and fellow vendors.

The history of StreetWise itself also proves worthy of reflection. Ironically, even as many vendors struggle to live with the lingering effects of their past, StreetWise as an organization was trying to come to grips with its own history throughout the duration of my fieldwork. Prior to my arrival, the previous Executive Director had been fired for personal use of organizational resources, failure to follow-through with obligations to granting agencies, and a general lack of accountability in terms of how fiscal resources were managed. In the wake of these events, the Executive Director and Board members
faced an image restoration dilemma. Travis, a board member, talks about StreetWise’s inability to account for certain aspects of its history and how those problems currently impact the organization.

Travis: We were, and are currently, in a problem with some of the funders of trying to get back on track. That’s probably our biggest challenge with fundraising now. We really, also, don’t have the infrastructure in place for being able to do that kind of follow up and being able to track the accounting necessary for where the money with. With new funders, some of them ask, “We’d like to see your progress. Give us the list of the funders you’ve had.” Give them a list of the funders and they say, “We’d like to see the paperwork for these three and show us the reports you’ve given to them over the last two years. Show us the report.” And we can’t produce it. It’s a little harder to get the next donation from somebody else. So we’ve been in a mode for about two years now where it’s hard to go forward given our past. We’re digging our way out of that. Some funders have been very, very gracious and said, “Well the past is the past and rather than have you recreate what’s going to be impossible to do, let’s just move forward and do it with a little bit more monitoring.” That’s been wonderful, those that have had that kind of trust.

Just like individuals, an organization must be able to tell a convincing story about itself— one that is deemed acceptable by both internal and external stakeholders. The historical narratives of organizations “can bring back into focus precise moments of political,
economic, and/or cultural crisis, in which opportunities for change and transformation open up” (Ashcraft & Mumby, p. 122).

The Executive Director, Stacey, talks about the process of recouping the organization’s past in order to redirect the organization for future successes.

Stacey: And so I went back to the very beginning. And this is going through boxes. I spent two and half months just going through boxes trying to figure out what the hell is the organization here for? And when I talked to different board members, every last one of them gave me a different mission and purpose and vision and this and that. This isn’t good. I felt like just all I had was bad news. And so the priority was to go back to the beginning. What were we created for? What was our purpose and function in the very beginning? And that purpose was to empower men and women to self-sufficiency. So when I look at the word empower, when I look at self-sufficiency, I’m like selling 30 papers ain’t going to help you be self-sufficient. When I look at to empower somebody, somebody has to want to be empowered. You have to have a goal. You have to want to move somewhere. Just being able to identify deficiencies are things that we can solve. Let’s solve what we can solve. If you need hygiene products for today, we can solve that problem. If you need to warm up and you need something to eat today, we can solve that problem. The basic things that we can solve, let’s get that done.

This interview excerpt from the Executive Director, and vendor narratives shared earlier, disrupt the illusion of a linear temporality often reified by narrative scholars (see critiques by Clair, 2001). Instead, their stories mirror the sort of narrative temporality advanced by
Ricoeur (1984). “The ordinary representation of time as a linear series of ‘nows’ hides the true constitution of time,” argued Ricoeur (p. 170). In contrast, time unfolds in narrative plots in a dialectical fashion—endings beg a return to beginnings, individuals simultaneously claim a sense of now and a position in history, etc. StreetWise, and the vendors it serves, are simultaneously focused on the past (going back to the very beginning and accounting for mistakes), present (we can solve that problem today) and future (you have to have a goal). Staff and vendors alike transverse between the past, present, and future as they work toward sustainability at both individual and organizational levels.

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) argue that when considering historical aspects of organizing, history should be construed broadly and take into account “institutions, groups, social movements and so forth” (p. 122). StreetWise, for example, remains entwined in complicated historical discourses about homelessness, particularly those arising in Chicago (e.g., the meta-narrative that the solution to homelessness is more shelters). In order to understand the history of StreetWise, we need to pay attention to these discourses. Martha, a leader of an umbrella organization that coordinates services among over 70 homeless-oriented organizations, provides historical insight about homelessness within Chicago.

David: Some of the people that I’ve talked with, like you, have said [addressing homelessness in Chicago] has been an evolution. But you sound like it has progressed and that government involvement, particularly in Chicago, has gotten
better. Others haven’t said very glowing things about Chicago’s relationship with homeless populations.

Martha: Well, there are other sides to this too.

David: Sure.

Martha: Part of, I believe, the city government’s desire to become involved in this issue is because of the CHA (Chicago Housing Authority) plan for transformation. Which I think was creating homeless people. And while this has never been said to me, I think there was recognition that one system could feed into the other sort of, and that therefore we’d better address both systems. So, I mean it’s easy to spin a cynical view of this too. That one system’s failures became another system’s urgency. This is very common with homelessness in general. We get the people that fall through the cracks in the other systems. There’s a lot of valid criticism for what he’s done with CHA and this specter hangs over this work every day. So, we are very careful that the ending homeless initiative is not something that’s entirely run by the public sector. But another thing that we’re aware of is that, like the CHA transformation, we’re trying to do a systems change with extremely limited resources. You’re going to have a lot of failures by that alone. But what I do is I look at it from an advocate’s perspective, which is that it was a system that was unnoticed, under-resourced, and had no very few real champions. All of that has changed but it’s still under-resourced. I think what we’re doing is updating our thinking about how best to address homelessness. And what we are all saying universally is shelter cannot be the
answer. And so just to get government to say that alone can be to some extent a victory. Are there resources to back it? Not nearly what we need. We need the federal government behind us and it’s a lousy time to be looking to the federal government for that kind of stuff.

The board, staff and vendors of StreetWise work and struggle in the midst of a complex web of narratives and histories. StreetWise vendors are impacted by other organizational discourses. The symbolic and material choices of City Hall, the Chicago Housing Authority, funding organizations, and other service providers in the Chicago area disrupt any sense of a clean, simple, singular narrative of organizational life at StreetWise. As vendors work on Chicago’s city street corners, they simultaneously impact and are impacted by powerful histories and narratives. Histories such as the ongoing razing of CHA highrises, city ordinances that dictate where vendors are allowed to sell the newspaper, where people who are out on the street can and cannot sleep or sit, and funding organizations’ decisions to support StreetWise work in both enabling and constraining ways as vendors go about their daily business of working to make ends meet.

*The Cadillac and the Cold: Corporeality and Materiality*

> I helped unload (and then reload) papers when the delivery truck arrived today.

> Once the cart was loaded down with papers and ready to be transported up to the front of the building, Mark quipped, “Let’s move the Cadillac.” When I asked him what he was referring to, he replied that the cart with all the papers on it was “the Cadillac.” As I reflect on this turn of phrase, I think “Cadillac” is an apt
metaphor for the cart—the papers it houses are worth a few thousand dollars. The label, “the Cadillac,” is quite creative and reveals, partially, the degree to which vendors’ lives are guided by the desire/need for money. I milled around for a bit after we were done and then went to the back to see if there was anything else I could do to help Mark. Down the back hallway, I saw him walk across the doorway and pump his fist once, clap his hands and say “Yes!!” It appeared to me that he was celebrating a job well done. I was moved by the experience of seeing him celebrate a seemingly mundane, everyday task. I don’t know how much or what to read into this small glimpse as of yet, but it was interesting, thought-provoking, and moving. (Fieldnotes)

When you’ve never been out there on the street and stayed out there all night for months and winters and summers and over and over and over…you don’t know what it’s like to be out there. You ain’t got no money. You ain’t got nowhere to stay. Nobody gonna feed you. You got nothing. And it’s cold as hell out there. Thirty-two degrees. A big storm. Where you gonna go? Can’t go back to momma. Can’t go to you're girlfriend. My partner, I just stayed with him last week. He don’t want me back. I’m homeless. I’m cold. And I don’t want to go to no shelter. You’re so cold you could scream. (Timothy, Vendor, Interview Transcript)

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) along with Cloud (1994) and Cheney (2000) have argued that communication scholars have privileged the symbolic interpretations over material realities. And without considering material realities, the discipline of
communication does not actualize its potential to contribute to both academic disciplines and people’s lived realities. In order to move communication scholars toward an increased consideration of the materiality of discourse, Ashcraft & Mumby offered:

a communicological approach that examines the reciprocal, dialectical, and mutually defining character of the symbolic/discursive and material conditions of organizing. By “material” we refer not only to “macro” economic and political arrangements but also to “micro” practices, including those relative to the body and sexuality. (p. 123)

Many parts of my account take into consideration the symbolic/discursive nature of experience. This theme, in particular, will provide the material and corporeal due diligence. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) consider materiality and corporeality as a sub-dialectic of sorts in the broader dialectic of the symbolic/material. Therefore, this theme is divided into two sections: corporeality and materiality. Despite this separation, materiality and corporeality should be seen as intertwined, mutually produced, and equally significant. I will treat corporeality first followed by materiality.

I begin my discussion of the corporeal nature of participants’ experiences with two extended narratives, both of which reveal the importance of considering the body in discursive analyses as well as when engaging social problems.

David: Timothy, you said it’s the little things about being homeless. Can you tell me about what you mean?

Timothy: Jesus. Once you’ve been homeless, it’s easy to explain being homeless. It’s easy. But when you’ve never been...you’ve never been out there on the street
and stayed out there all night for months and winters and summers and over and over and over...you don’t know what it’s like to be out there. You ain’t got no money. You ain’t got nowhere to stay. Nobody gonna feed you. You got nothing. And it’s cold as hell out there. Thirty-two degrees. A big storm. Where you gonna go? Can’t go back to momma. Can’t go to you’re girlfriend. My partner, I just stayed with him last week. He don’t want me back. I’m homeless. I’m cold. And I don’t want to go to no shelter. You’re so cold you could scream. I walked up and down Roosevelt Blvd. scared because I’d never been out there that late...or that long. The first thing you learn is shelter. If you’re outside somewhere, you get frostbite. Get you something to eat. Get you a weapon. You know you don’t want to be homeless with no knife or something on you. Because you ain’t the only one out there homeless and the homeless feed off the homeless. You got a nice coat and you go to sleep? You wake up and I got your coat. You drink too much? I got your boots. If you got any money in your pocket, I’m going to take that. That’s how they do it on the street. I’ve seen it happen. I saw a guy damn near killed for his coat. They took the coat and then they just started stabbing him. I say “Damn you got the coat. Why you stabbing the dude?” They left him for dead. It’s not nice out. It’s not nice being homeless. I got to move up, I was lucky.

Fear, hunger, shelter, and even survival are embodied experiences for Timothy—they are lived and narrated in and through the body. Gary, too, poignantly captures the corporeal experience of living in a Single Room Occupancy hotel in downtown Chicago (i.e.,
SROs are much like hotels in that rooms can be rented at daily, weekly, and monthly rates.

Gary: I was staying in the Ritz they call it the new Ritz. Well, I got another name for it but it’s ridden. It’s got so many violations it’s ridiculous, but they had over a hundred and fifty-seven violations, and those weren’t even fire code violations. These were drug busts and drug violations. They got rats in there as big as the super rats you’ve seen in the alleys. I’m serious! They come in your room. The reason I left was because I kept getting eaten up. When you turned the lights out, the bedbugs would just come out. Parasites…they just suck on you. You had to spray but it didn’t matter ‘cause the place was infested with them. Anyway, I’d hit ‘em and kill ‘em, and then you’d see the blood. There’s a pool of blood. That’d be your blood they sucked! Then a big spider bit me on my hip. It’s just now healing. I started to put some peroxide on it but it was poison. I said, “I got to get out of here.” So I went and told the owner, “You know you got a serious rodent problem, and bedbugs and roaches in your hotel?” He said, “You don’t like it, move.” So I moved out.

Timothy’s and Gary’s haunting accounts of two different make-shift and/or temporary living arrangements (i.e., life on the street; life in an SRO) speak to the importance of considering how poverty, homelessness, and perhaps marginalization more broadly, are inscribed on the body through humans’ encounters with the material world (and, of course, through their retrospective storytelling-sensemaking). The body serves, in many ways, as the foundation for all other experiences. Many vendors spoke of ever-
present threats to their physical being. In turn, if speaking (and participating democratically in community life) can be understood as a bodily act, and I agree with Butler (1997) that it can be, to what extent is it reasonable (on my part) to assume that vendors, or others living impoverished lives, are prepared and able to perform the embodied role of citizen as called for and privileged in extant literature? To what extent can we (myself included) expect people to co-construct democratic workplaces and public spheres when their basic living conditions are so deprived? I humbly left the field wondering if the communication discipline’s fascination with “democratic” organizing is, at best, deeply shaped by the rather privileged standpoints of scholars, and, at worst, arrogant. People’s bodies must be taken care of in order to get past the basic needs so that higher-order needs can be attended to.

The body is also important, in this instance, regarding health issues. Board and staff members often talked about being able to provide vendors with services such as blood pressure testing, blood sugar testing, vision tests, eyeglasses, dental work, haircuts, etc. Consider the following story from Scott:

Scott: I had to take some antibiotics because of this abscess I had. I did everything the doctor told me. But I was at my location one Sunday, and I sold a lot of papers. I started getting hot flashes and cold flashes. I was like, “Oh no. No, no, no. Don’t let this happen to me.” And then I was sweating and the side of my face was like the ball of somebody’s fist. I was standing on the El platform and I heard a guy say, “Oh shit.” He was like, “What’s wrong?” I was like, “I don’t know. I don’t know.” I showed him the medication that I was taking for this abscess and
showed him my StreetWise ID. Then they took me to the emergency room. They said they were going to call the people from the dentist that drained this abscess. They never came. The person that was in charge of the ER was like, “Guess what? We’re gonna have to admit you to the hospital.” I didn’t argue. That was the best two or three days of my life.

David: Why is that?

Scott: Because I needed to rest anyway. Two, I got the abscess taken care of. And three, I got three teeth pulled. Two up here, one down here. They put me on a diet. I had to eat plenty of fruits and drink orange juice, water, milk. Very cool.

Because most vendors are so impoverished, some just one or two days’ worth of income away from living in the streets, vendors generally do not have access to any type of steady healthcare. Although I did not ask any questions about healthcare, a safe assumption (based on my time in the field) would be that vendors have access to emergency care that is afforded all citizens and none to very few vendors have any type of stable health care. Power and community exist in taking care of the most basic needs of citizens. Vendors and other persons without homes cannot be expected to contribute to society on a level deemed appropriate when a vendor considers a trip to the hospital to combat an allergic reaction to medicine “the best two or three days” of his life.

The corporeal nature of participants’ experiences was foregrounded in their stories about the places they call “home” (such as pest-infested hotels and frozen nights out in the street). Meanwhile, vendors spoke of the physically demanding nature of the work itself—vending StreetWise papers.
Pamela: You will get a sufficient income, but after awhile that wear and tear, standing out in the cold. I’ve been a vendor like three years, and I can see the downside of standing outside. Your feet get bad. Carrying these papers; nobody knows what’s the ergonomically correct way to carry the papers. What kind of bag should you have? What type of shoes should you wear? I started to get back trouble and arm trouble. My feet are always tired or always bothering me. Standing out in the cold, the elements, and your skin. After a while, it affects you. I don’t know if the money is worth all that, you know. And there are no health services or anything. You’re just on your own.

When considering the entire process of selling newspapers, corporeal concerns become significant. Vendors have to travel to the StreetWise offices, purchase papers which they have to carry to their spot where they stand out in the elements for multiple hours at a time. Many vendors will go to a different spot for the afternoon rush, again standing outside.

Importantly, it is not just the physical nature of the work that makes selling newspapers interesting in terms of corporeality, but how corporality can be used and manipulated to affect sales. Mark, vendor manager, talks about vendors who employ the sales strategy of “The bummerlier I look, the more papers I will sell.”

David: I know you talk about this in training but can you talk about when you discuss the vendors’ idea that “the more homeless you look, the better your sales will be?” You try to combat that, right?
Mark: Right. And those days are gone: the bummier I look, the more money I’ll make. That’s not true. The ones who make consistent money are the ones that keep their appearance together, their hygiene together, the have the respect of the customers and they treat it like a job. My sales reports show it.

Corporeality comes into play in interpersonal interactions. Consider Frank:

Frank: I was out working and a person dropped a dollar. He bent down and picked it up and he walked over to me. I went to grab it, and as soon as my hand came out, like he didn’t even want to touch me ‘cause that’s how dirty I was. But he started to say hello to me. He thought I’m not going to strong-arm him, I’m not going to beat on him or anything. I don’t know what his problem was, but he has a serious issue with StreetWise vendors.

Everyday normal urban happenings become patterns that vendors have to be cognizant of in order to successfully perform their job and maintain their health.

David: What are some of the typical problems that you face when you vend?

Zach: Well, I feel a little worried about traffic. Standing near the street, I’m worried about getting hit by a car or something. That’s the worry if you’re standing on any corner I guess. I know one night back in November, there was a shooting outside there. I was working. But once you take the time, people know you and it doesn’t really become a problem anymore. It’s like the only gripe I have is when people get drunk and it gets get hectic.

Corporeality manifests itself in many ways that have impacts on individuals and overall perceptions of StreetWise vendors and people without homes more generally. Traffic,
handshakes, clothing and accessories become symbolic expressions that (re)create interpersonal relationships and discursive realities. Public spaces and social networks can be altered for positive change but the corporeal must be considered in the process of change. Likewise, vendors must make efforts to present themselves in such way that leaves open the possibility of fostering connections.

I began this dissertation journey with the argument that the “American Dream,” is generally reduced metonymically to home ownership specifically and material possessions generally. I realized the power and prevalence of this metonymic reduction while listening to participants’ stories. All but one vendor interview responded to the question “What is the American Dream to you?” with a response that incorporated materialism, in part. The following are three extended excerpts from vendors.

David: What is the American Dream to you?

Gary: Well the American Dream, that’s easy. Get filthy rich, have a house, a white picket fence, you know, white kids, and a dog. And live happily ever after, that’s the American Dream. (Laughter)

David: Why did you laugh?

Gary: Because that’s what it is; a dream. (Laughter) No, I mean, it’s a good thing if it happens. I think the American Dream’s for everybody that it’s just to be happy, have a house. You know, a car, a nice car. Family. That’s the American Dream, but it doesn’t happen for everybody. It comes down to work, you know, you got to work for it, unless you were born with that silver spoon in your mouth and not too many people are. But that’s the American Dream, you know, that you
get the wife, the kids, nice job, house, and just live your life to your fullest, and be comfortable. That’s what every American wants. It’s not necessarily what happens with every American, but that’s what every American wants.

Another vendor got a little bit defensive when asked how he understood “the American Dream.” Cautiously encouraging him to continue led to interesting insights.

David: How would you define the American Dream?

Vincent: Do you really want me to define American Dream? That’s another one I would not answer. But I’m gonna answer that one. How do I define American Dream? I want to say a lot more about the American Dream, but you asked me a precise question, which was how do I define American Dream? Well, most people look at the American Dream as being a homeowner and having a corporate job. That’s the American Dream. But I’m gonna leave it at that.

David: I want you to say whatever you want to say. I’m not looking for a particular answer.

Vincent: Personally, the American Dream means nothing to me. Because I look around the globe, and I’m familiar with the CIA, I’m familiar with the covert operations, I’m familiar with genocide, I’m familiar with it all. And I’m familiar with America and I’m familiar with the price that had to be paid for us to live the American Dream. I’m familiar with the sweatshops they got going on, little kids working for pennies and dimes so we can have the Gap. A lot of innocent kids lose their lives for us to be in the situation that we’re in. I don’t think it’s fair. I want to live a nice life and I want to live a peaceful life and I want to enjoy my
life. But I want the same for everybody all over the world. So that’s my American Dream.

Only one vendor, Zach, did not discuss houses, cars and/or other material possessions when invited to discuss “the American Dream.” He stated:

Zach: I think the American Dream should be not only look inward but to look outward. First you have to look inward, clean up our backyard, fix the homeless problem, fix all these diseases, do something regarding stem cell research and all that. To be honest with you, I never thought of it as an American Dream. I thought more of it as an individual dream and an Earth thing, we’re all in this together. To me, countries look at it as us vs. them. And, of course, the problem is everybody has the American Dream. Throughout the world, you always hear about people wanting to come here in America. And it seems like the word America is a universal word now for freedom and money. A lot of people come here thinking they can have money and stuff. I don’t mean to be dodging your question but I think it’s kind of complex.

The responses of vendors generally condense “the American Dream” to material possessions and home ownership. However, the comments of some vendors resist and disrupt dominant views of the American Dream by stating it is more of an “Earth thing,” that the American Dream “means nothing to me” and that it does not happen for “every American.” These disruptions in the mythic narratives of our culture allow space to interrogate subjugated positions, muted voices and the fringes of powerful cultural
mechanisms that are easily dismissed by those who manufacture and reify dominant ideologies.

Meanwhile, material forces such as legal limitations, socio-economic factors, housing issues, employment trends, and financial (in)stability all impact StreetWise and its vendors in significant ways. Housing and inflation are two factors that Bradley, a director for a Chicago-based advocacy organization, talks about:

Bradley: I’ve been doing community work forever and we never worked on homelessness. There were some people that were living in the shelters and by and large there were no numbers to begin with, there were no women and children, now in 25 years that’s all changed. So, that means that something, now something has caused that change. And if you think it’s all mentally ill, illness, that’s not true. If you think it’s all drugs and alcohol that’s not true. It has a lot to do with the economy and jobs. It has a lot to do with the fact that the jobs left. Federal programs of support are diminished. Housing costs practically escalated, so where before there were people that were able to get some jobs and afford lower income housing, that housing isn’t there and the numbers there use to be and those jobs aren’t there. So then you get people working a lot not making enough and not being able to find a place to live. You know when you have that with families so that the society it means it’s a structural problem that requires structural changes and requires money and resources.

Scott, a vendor who has been at StreetWise since its early days talks about one of the material impacts on his life and his ability to gain employment other than StreetWise.
David: Would you like to go back to your job at the supermarket?

Scott: Yeah.

David: What’s stopping you from doing that? Or maybe nothing’s stopping you. Maybe you just don’t want to do that right now.

Scott: Yeah, something’s stopping me big time. Criminal background. I got into trouble with the law. I could get it expunged from my record. But I got to come up with the money to do that. I can go down here on 35th Street and they’ll take fingerprints and within an hour I can get my record. Then I gotta go over here to the Davis Center with like $265, something like that, to have it expunged. And like when I do go to apply for a job, my criminal background won’t show up.

David: How come you don’t do that?

Scott: I can’t come up with the money. By the time I pay my rent, $320, I’m broke. And then I got to eat. Laundry. I’m broke, I’m busted. And then bus fare. I’m busted.

Criminal backgrounds and the unavailability of affordable housing are just two of the broad ways in which materiality manifests itself in relation to vendor’s lives. Cloud (1994) argued that “attention to the ways in which some truths (e.g., about sexuality, drug addiction, mental illness, and other formations) are constructs that function persuasively and even coercively is an important extension of the task of ideology criticism” (p. 159). Material realities such as affordable housing and the persistence of criminal records shape discourses and perceptions of those who at the receiving end of the power of those
particular ideologies. The excerpts from these StreetWise vendors lend credence and concreteness to what is still only largely theorized about in communication studies.

Alan, a board member, poignantly reflects on how StreetWise’s lack of material resources shapes in critical ways what can be discursively accomplished with the paper.

Alan: So I think that we should strive to improve content, but to do that I think we need more resources than we have. I think that’s what it comes down to at the end of the day, is we just don’t have enough money to hire the personnel. The people that are putting this together, man, are doing everything they can to keep the newspaper running. You know, that’s a skeleton crew you’ve got up there running the newspaper like this. Skeleton crew! So for us to expect Chicago Tribune each week, is ludicrous. For us to fix that is to give these people the resources they need to do the job right. How do you get the resources to do the job right? You improve your image, both on the street with the vendors and with the people on the Board and our funders. Then you increase the money, and then that’s where it goes. But it all starts at the head. It all starts at the head. If the head is healthy, so shall the body.

Alan’s arguments highlight two main issues relevant to StreetWise. First, StreetWise is a non-profit organization working for social change. As such, their resources are extremely limited. They operate with a small staff and meager budget and rely on donations, monetary and otherwise, to function on a day-to-day basis. Secondly, Alan’s comments point to the materiality of discourse. The material: “How do we get the resources?” goes hand in hand with the symbolic: “Improve your image.” Yet, improving one’s image
demands material resources that StreetWise often lacks. Symbolism/Materialism is not just a theoretical dialectic. It is lived and understanding the intersections of symbolism and materialism can help organizations such as StreetWise succeed as well as give communication scholars more to say to those organizations.

**Upstairs/Downstairs & Maintaining Public Spaces**

*Just prior to the vendor meeting, I heard two vendors, Dennis and Paul talking about the sale of the StreetWise building. Paul was wondering if the vendors own the building. Why don’t they know what is going on with the sale? Who is buying the building? Where they are moving? Dennis said they didn’t know what was going on because there is no vendor representative. Paul asked why there wasn’t. Dennis responded that it is because (as he pointed to the upstairs) “they are moving like turtles up there.” (Fieldnotes)*

*I was out in the field with Frank today. The very first thing he told me regarding selling was that there were “blockers” present that day. The “blockers” consisted of a group of people passing out free breakfast bar samples. This seemed like an interesting juxtaposition of capitalistic and social change forces competing for the same public space. The 4 “blockers” were quite active, walking up and down Michigan Avenue. Jack ended up getting about 8 breakfast bars. We were laughing about it by time we left because every time a blocker would walk past us they would offer Frank a breakfast bar. “They aren’t too bad” he said. I asked him why he called them blockers. He said it was because when people took the free product, whatever it was, they would look at the product, read the package,*
and get tunnel vision. He said that “blockers” and their products make selling the paper significantly more difficult. (Fieldnotes)

Shortly after arriving at StreetWise in early June, I learned that the organization was planning on selling the property that they owned on South Michigan Avenue. The South Loop has undergone a rejuvenation in recent years with upscale restaurants moving in, condominium buildings going up and trees being planted. In fact, as Dr. Harter and I walked to one of our first meetings with StreetWise in March of 2005, I commented how it was not very long ago where I would have questioned the safety of South Michigan. Because StreetWise had bought their building on South Michigan a number of years ago, they were the beneficiaries of booming real estate prices. A handful of board members mentioned that they had held out on selling longer than many other local property owners in order to catch the peak of the real estate bubble. The property at which StreetWise had operated since the mid 1990s was worth just over $2 million dollars. The property on Michigan Avenue was sold during the summer and StreetWise moved to a rented space on the West Side.

The StreetWise building that was sold was a symbolic and material resource drawn on by organizational members and issues of space, generally, and the sale of the building, specifically, surfaced as very important and interesting during my time at StreetWise. StreetWise used a portion of the profits from the sale of their building to pay off debts that the organization had run up in recent years as it emerged from a difficult financial period. In many ways, the experiences of the organization paralleled those of its vendors. StreetWise, in essence, became homeless as a result of some earlier financial
difficulties. StreetWise transitioned from property owners to renters, lost a significant portion of its assets to pay off debt and moved locations—all of which represent experiences and circumstances that its constituents are all too familiar with.

At the same time, vendors become very connected to the public space they occupy. Many speak proudly that they have sold papers at the same spot for years on end, just as I would say I am proud to have been employed by Ohio University for the last 3+ years. Many vendors take ownership of the public space they occupy. Consider Jamie, a vendor who sells near the University of Chicago in the Southside Hyde Park neighborhood.

Jamie: I’ve been a part of cleaning up Hyde Park. I just hate to see people take advantage of situations. My thing is that no one owes us anything. I feel that a vendor should not get upset when they speak to a person and they don’t speak and they don’t buy their paper. They are not obligated to buy anything. The consumer is not obligated to even read our paper. It’s up to that individual. It’s all in how you present yourself. If you go out there and present yourself in a negative way then you may get a negative response. I’m very courteous. I’m polite to all the customers no matter what race, creed or color they are. A customer may buy me lunch, breakfast, dinner something like that these are things that people do as humanitarians to make other people feel good. It’s not all about money. I have met a lot of influential people who have been in position to help me though selling StreetWise. I’ve come from a very low point in my life and StreetWise has
helped me to climb a ladder which has brought my self esteem way up and I feel good about myself. I feel good about being a part of this organization.

Jamie initially mentions the idea of “cleaning up Hyde Park” which was echoed by multiple other vendors during interviews. Vendors talked about “running panhandlers off their corner,” “cleaning up these areas,” and “opening up a spot” as well as corners being “shut off, “off limits” and “clowns messing up corners.” Vendors take ownership of their space and pride in cultivating it. Through performing their work on street corners and by becoming an established presence in the public space, vendors feel they are contributing to society by bettering themselves as well as preventing panhandlers from harassing the public. Many vendors sell in front of businesses ranging from drugstores to coffeeshops to fast food restaurants. Derek talks about the importance of the business that operates at the corner he sells at.

Derek: You got vendors out here thinking it’s a joke. They wanna get high. They wanna have money to go talk about, look how much I made out there selling papers and all. I’m not homeless when I got papers and go to this corner. This is my only corner. I ain’t got no other corner or nothing. This is the only one. Something happen to that store today or tomorrow, I’m lost. See what I’m saying? That store get burned down, my job burn down. See what I’m trying to say? So some of the vendors out here, they go to any corner. They don’t give a damn. As long as they can make that ten or twenty dollars, they go to any corner. I don’t. I go to that one corner.
Derek’s comments touch upon a few ideas to be presented in this chapter. Derek talks about how “his job” would be affected if something happened to the store that he sells in front of. Derek also references other vendors and how “they don’t give a damn…they go to any corner” which could be read as contempt for the vendors who don’t follow the rules of StreetWise or use their money to acquire drugs or alcohol. But this statement could also be read as a deep identification with the store, his customers, and the public space that Derek occupies when vending the paper. It should be clear by now that many vendors see StreetWise as a “real job” and Derek is among them. Derek’s comments highlight ideas to be presented later including connection with other members of the public, businesses, store managers, and customers.

Kimberly, who vends in both the city and the northern Chicago suburb of Evanston, took photographs that represented her different perceptions of the spaces in which she works. The first photo is of her main spot, in Evanston. The second photo is of a spot in the heart of downtown where she sometimes sells StreetWise. The photographs are followed by the portions of her interview where she discusses these pictures.
Image 3 – Sidewalk in downtown Evanston, IL
Kimberly: Basically, I took some scenery of Evanston to kind of make a contrast between the suburbs and the city. How the city is much more congested and how that’s much more relaxed. And people are just strolling, and walking around, and going through the over-priced shops. I mean, a little small coffee is like two, three dollars.

David: So, in Evanston, it’s a little more relaxed.

Kimberly: Right. People walk their dogs, and the mothers and fathers are with their children.

David: Does that make it better? Easier to vend?
Kimberly: It makes it easier to vend. I feel like I don’t have to push as hard, you know. Just say, “Good morning. Good evening. Would you like a paper on your way out? When I’m in the city, I gotta be a little bit pushier.

David: What do you mean? More aggressive?

Kimberly: A little bit more, ‘cause sometimes you have the panhandlers in the city. They wanna accost you. I just feel like just punching some of them out. Know what I mean? I’d like to see some new spots open up. You know, get it established with the business. Maybe some of the staff can do it, or maybe a veteran vendor, or somebody can start breaking ground. I would love to see it spread out in the suburbs. I’m thinking of some suburbs like Warrenville, Naperville, Romeoville, Wheaton, you know. Downers Grove, places like that. I like to see it spread out in the suburbs, ‘cause I don’t think we hit that many suburbs. Seems like it’s just Evanston and Wilmette.

McKerrow (1999) argued that “space-time structures life, and through that influence, affects discourse in unseen, unfelt ways. Understanding those ways is critical if we are to explore the freedom to be what we are not, to become what we have not yet thought” (p. 272). Kimberly’s photographs represent her interpretations of two spaces which she occupies when selling StreetWise and indicate some of the ways in which space influences communication, perception, and emotion. Kenneth Burke argued (1950/1969), “terrains determine tactics” (p. 12), and this is certainly reflected in Kimberly’s narrative.
Moreover, if Kimberly is more relaxed vending in the loop (and more aggressive in the city), it seems plausible that customers’ experiences are also shaped by socio-spatial dynamics.

Mark, a former vendor and current staff member, talks about the need of StreetWise to monitor the public space that its vendors occupy.

Mark: A street team. Paid, paid. I’ve had some good street teams. But I’d had a better team if they were being compensated. Really. A lot of it comes just from their loyalty to me and the organization. You gotta be able to do that after, and that should go along with the spin control and using the media. You gotta. You gotta spin control ‘cause when people see StreetWise, they’re thinking there’s homeless people. Do they expect you to stay homeless? I mean, StreetWise is for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. They empower people and help them become self-sufficient. Everyone’s at risk of being homeless. A lot of vendors have used it as a stepping stone to get out of a situation. They might not be living in no brick bungalow house, but they got a room. They ain’t gotta sleep on the train or the El.

To better understand the difficulties that can occur by a vendor being moved off of a space, consider Valerie who had only vended for a few months at the time of our interview.

Valerie: Well, yesterday I stopped at one of my spots around 4:00 in the afternoon. The security guard that was there came out and I said, “Well, I’m one of StreetWise.” He said, “No, StreetWise isn’t there anymore. They don’t allow it
to hand it there anymore.” I was like, “I been coming here since I started StreetWise.”

David: So yesterday, a security guard came up and you were getting ready to start selling, and he said, “No more StreetWise”?

Valerie: No more StreetWise there. And this is my favorite spot.

David: Did you ask him why, or what happened?

Valerie: No. So I said, “Well, then we won’t come back no more.” Maybe they got nervous or something. I don’t know. The managers in the stores do that.

David: How does that make you feel?

Valerie: I was upset. That’s my favorite spot, and I shop there once in awhile.

Vendors become attached to the public spaces they occupy. When their occupancy of that space is contested or sometimes revoked, it can have a significant impact on the vendors’ financial income and feelings about selling the paper. Disruptions of public space impact vendors in multiple ways. “Being established” at a spot is one of the factors vendors associate with good income (e.g. “building up a spot”). Vendors build a connection with the space and the people that occupy that space. As such, space constitutes a site and medium for the enactment of cultural power (see also Shome, 2003). Spatial politics are particularly salient for many vendors, given that their “spot” might be the only consistent claim to space they experience.

Public space is not the only contested space of concern to StreetWise vendors. At the building on South Michigan Avenue (sold in August, 2005), there were noticeable demarcations of “upstairs” and “downstairs.” Upstairs represented the staff and board
while downstairs represented the vendors. The notions of “upstairs” and “downstairs” were fairly evident a few weeks into my fieldwork. However, in the later summer, a vendor, Gary, commented on the new StreetWise offices when he approached the cage (the “cage” is the enclosed area just inside the front door of the StreetWise offices where vendors purchase their papers) to buy his newspapers. I happened to be observing near the cage that day and asked Gary if he would like to do an interview. He agreed and the following excerpt details his explanation of the comment I overheard.

David: You said something yesterday when you were in buying your papers and I wanted to ask you about it. You mentioned how this place is all on one floor, and that will change things around here.

Gary: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, a level playing field. Yeah, it is a good thing, I think it is. Well, first of all, they got a lot of work to do here. We got a lot of work to do here to get it back up and running. But after being in it, it’s a nice, big space. It’s got everything we need. You know, they can make partitions and hook the lights up and it’ll be all right. But what I mean by level playing field, the other building…you know, we owned it at one point. They bought it, I don’t know. They might have even sold it. But then you had the first floor and all the staff was on the second floor. If you are a vendor, you couldn’t go up to the second floor.

You know that, “Yeah, you can go up there, yeah you can go, anybody can come up there.” That open-door policy crap. But, you’d have to call up there, and then once they got this QAT force, only QAT members could go up there, or walk you up there. I thought that was crazy. Here, there ain’t no upstairs, there ain’t no
downstairs; it’s all level. And the washrooms are here, and the vendors can walk through and see the staff. If they have something to say to ‘em, say it. Maybe the staff would be more involved in the vendors. Being down here, they’ll see all the vendors constantly. You know, the vendors will have to use the bathroom when they come in or something. They can’t stop us from doing that, so they’ll have to see the vendors. Then it might change some of the way they look at vendors.

The old StreetWise building had three floors. The main floor was primarily where the vendors relaxed, bought their papers, used the restroom, etc. The second floor was where the staff and director’s offices were located as well as the board room. The third floor of the building was used for storage. As a rule, vendors who were not members of the QAT (Quality Assurance Team) were not allowed upstairs. If a vendor needed to speak with someone upstairs, the vendor had to have the receptionist call upstairs first. Staff and board members could roam freely about the building. Krista, a vendor, connects the notion of upstairs/downstairs (spatial relations) to hierarchy (power relations).

Krista: It’s just like a hierarchy, you know. You get all these people upstairs, I mean they talk to you or are they’ll wave. And a lot of people who are vendors don't even know who they are. For a long time the biggest rumor was that the board was stealing all the money. And in reality the board is volunteering. Then the people upstairs, they do get paid, because they wouldn't be up there. But I'm just saying people need to come out and tell the facts. And the Board of Directors needs to be down here more. The people from the board need to be down here
more. The vendors have to deal with people thinking that we’re bums outside.

And then we have people who treat us like bums when we’re here.

Krista, recognizing the understanding that many vendors have of the board and the staff members, maintains that there is a lack of connection between the board and staff and the vendors.

Some of this communicative disconnect is attributed to the spatial division of upstairs/downstairs. Deeply entrenched forces work to fix the meaning of particular spaces (e.g., upstairs is for staff), endowing spaces with fixed identities that include and exclude individuals. Shome (2003) noting the influence of Massey (1995) suggests that:

If spatialities of power constitute and reconstitute our identities, then we need to think of space and spatial relations not as inert backdrops against which struggles of identity occur. Rather, these relations themselves must be seen as active components in the unequal and heterogeneous production and distribution of identities, politics, and actions. (p. 43)

“Upstairs/downstairs,” the symbols and the spaces, actively contours, interrupts, and maintains power relations at StreetWise. Vendors felt that upstairs was off limits to them which runs contrary to repeated messages that this is “their organization.” Likewise, vendors have an impression, whether justified or not, that “the people upstairs” don’t care about them which is a difficult perception to manage as in many ways “the people upstairs” are co-workers. The power of this symbol and material reality is significant to people other than vendors. Travis, a board member, also recognizes that the space at the Michigan Avenue building had significant implications on vendor/board/staff relations.
David: There’s also a sense of upstairs and downstairs.

Travis: Yeah, I hate that. I may be making a generalization that I have no business making, but it’s kind of what I’ve seen when you’re having trouble in your personal life with status. Vendors, by and large, are at the very low end of the status structure in our society that whenever you can find or make status for yourself you do. So status has a bigger than otherwise place amongst the vendors. “I’ve been many years. I have more status than you.” That seems to be like seniority kinds of things take on bigger meaning than it does in other areas. And being able to walk upstairs is a status that some of the vendors definitely make the other vendors know they have it and you don’t. So that is another reason why I love the concept of a one floor operation. I don’t like it (upstairs/downstairs), it’s counterproductive. You can’t make it a cohesive group.

Recognizing the power dynamics, and the limits that can be placed on communicative possibility in and through space, the organization made a conscious decision to have the new office all on a single floor. StreetWise moved into a new, single floor, rented office space on the near West side of Chicago two weeks before the end of my fieldwork.

Stacey: We’re going to provide the vendors with an area that is nice. Just because you’re poor, doesn’t mean you have to be in a yucky surrounding. Just because you’re poor, doesn’t mean that you should be able to accept filth. Just because you’re poor, doesn’t mean that you can’t have nice, bright cheery things.
Many cities have used legal methods to deal with homelessness. Many of these initiatives intersect with public space in interesting ways. Ranging from making panhandling illegal (Atlanta) to criminalizing public “camping” (Sarasota, FL) to buying people without homes bus tickets out of town (San Francisco), public space broadly conceived is intimately connected with issues of poverty and homelessness. Martha, leader of an umbrella organization that coordinates homeless-oriented organizations in Chicago comments on StreetWise vendors, public space, and the usage of space to raise consciousness.

Martha: Guarding our public spaces, guarding is the wrong word, but maintaining our public spaces is also a valid need of every citizen. And there is something slightly at odds with that. It can be. Not every StreetWise vendor’s like that. But it can be.

David: What do you mean when you say maintaining public spaces?
Martha: Okay. Let me give you an example. The city just launched something called the open spaces initiative. That is new money that they’re putting into getting folks off the streets and into housing. Mostly like out of the parks. But off the streets. So there’s a street homeless problem. There’s a visible street homeless problem and those people are really hard to serve. And they, I don’t know, you probably know the profile there. A lot of them have mental illness and drug addictions and stuff like that. I think because the StreetWise vendors are on the street, the public doesn’t distinguish always, that’s not a hundred percent true, but between them and the folks that are street homeless. And it just adds to more
feeling on our streets that the issue of homelessness is not being addressed. And that it’s in your face.

David: One of the reasons that I was initially drawn to StreetWise is because of the very nature of the product they sell they bring homelessness into the public space, right? They have to stand on the street corner to sell their product. So by the very nature of the organization they’re bringing homelessness out for people to see.

Martha: It is complicated because I can see the activism that went into this model. But I think it’s backfiring. Because while it’s bringing the issue of homelessness into view, it’s not raising consciousness or awareness. So it’s like half the job has been done, or even just a quarter of the job was done.

Mark, vendor manager, recognizes the need for StreetWise to police the public space it occupies. The (mis)use of public space is directly connected to public perceptions of StreetWise, and thus, the success of the organization.

David: I understand that that’s a rule that there’s only one vendor a block. Why is there such a rule?

Mark: ‘Cause customers feel like everywhere a guy just asked me a few buildings ago. It’s too crowded. And then it shouldn’t be two or three vendors per block, not with a city like Chicago. The ones that make the money are the ones that take an extra train to go out to other areas that some of these cats don’t think about going. Those are the ones that make the money. City’s too big to be two or three vendors to a block. That’s one reason too, customers feel like they’re being harassed. And
they gotta say no. They gotta say no eight times before they get to the El station. It don’t help sales because now they instead of giving someone a chance, they pissed off at StreetWise. ‘Cause they feel like they’re being harassed. You know what I’m saying?

David: Yeah. I understand.

Mark: There you go. Put yourself in their shoes. You know? But if there was one vendor there, they’re more likely to do business with that one vendor. Try walking somewhere and you got people plus panhandlers asking for money.

Vendors and staff are keenly aware of the social, geographic, and economic dynamics of space, and creatively work to craft public and organizational spaces amenable to their goals (e.g., one vendor per block rule; one story office building).

“Like Fish Need Water:” Human Connections

We need each other like fish need water. For real. (Dennis, Vendor, Interview Transcript)

March 14, 2006. Just shy of 5 PM I leave the confines of Lasher Hall in search of coffee and a change of scenery with the hopes of rejuvenating my writing muse for the remainder of the afternoon. One local coffee shop is full of students studying for finals, so I leave to investigate one of the other local cafes. As I round the corner of Court and Washington, heading towards College Gate, I pass a small mountain of Girl Scout cookies, organized by color. A couple, male and female, makes their way towards the Athens County Courthouse. As I pass them, the
A woman says to the man, “Let’s cross the street. They are selling Girl Scout cookies up there.” The couple heads toward the curb to avoid walking past the scouts and their cookies. They are forced to wait for an ambulance to blare down Court Street before crossing.

Before I take 10 more steps toward my destination, a thousand thoughts whirl through my head. Why did this woman want to cross the street? Does she not want to say “no” to Girl Scouts? Does she not want to be given a sales pitch? Is she impervious to the persuasive powers of Samoas and Thin Mints? Are those Girl Scouts and their mothers threatening in some way? Why didn’t I get asked to buy some cookies? Sensitized towards issues of connection and public space, one question lingers: If a couple in Athens, OH cross the street to avoid Girl Scouts, then what hope do StreetWise vendors have? (Fieldnotes)

Nearly one hundred years ago, Dewey (1916/1966) argued that the experience of community loses meaning when the free interchange of varying modes of life experience is stifled. Historically, people have been formally and informally excluded from participating in public life, including people living in poverty and/or without homes. Subordinated classes, of course, organize access routes to public life despite their exclusion (Fraser, 1989). In the case of vendors whose identities typically are marked by years of exclusion and lack of voice, StreetWise represents a venue for community integration. In essence, advocates argue that newspapers such as StreetWise move “homelessness” and “poverty” from the backstage to the frontstage of public life,
increasing the likelihood that the problem of homelessness will be dealt with on some level. Inserting people without homes back into the public consciousness is a first step.

Authors such as Putnam (2000) argue that community and democracy occur within social networks and that connecting people to one another is a key element of a thriving society. Ed, a board member, stirs thoughts of Putnam’s “social capital” to argue how selling *StreetWise* can begin to connect marginalized people to the broader society.

Ed: The more exposure a vendor has to the traditional work force, people going to work, families, I mean the better off they are. They recognize that that is a part a strong part of any social fabric. At the same time the more the people who purchase the paper realize that this person is okay, has something to say, is intelligent, the better off we’re going to be also. So I think it benefits both the buyer and the seller and the seller maybe somewhat in the seller they’re recognize the importance of having a daily routine, cleaning up, dressing up, looking presentable and the buyer it may help them understand and not just with *StreetWise* but social responsibilities that they have to the people living on the streets. And it’s not just through buying the newspaper it may be coming active in other things.

Ed’s comment about connecting buyers and sellers speaks to a few pragmatist ideas. First, social capital is a powerful force and Putnam (2000) calls for the encouragement of the “positive consequences of social capital – mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness” (p. 22). By reconnecting vendors to the broader public, vendors can begin to participate in the community, hopefully leading to better
employment opportunities and living situations. Secondly, in a quasi-Frierian sense, Ed poignantly points out that customers also benefit by greater vendor participation in community life. Friere (1970) stated “the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44). In this sense, StreetWise is helping to connect people, allowing vendors to liberate themselves, and in turn, show non-StreetWise populations that vendors are “okay” that they “have something to say” and are “intelligent” and “the better off we’re going to be also.”

An interview excerpt from Fred, a vendor, speaks to the power of social capital, the power in freeing the oppressed and the oppressor, and teaching people to treat others in a more humane way. Fred took a photograph of a young girl. Every Saturday, this mother (whose feet can be seen in the background) gives her daughter a dollar to purchase a newspaper from Fred. This customer was significant enough for Fred to take a photograph. Below, we can see his comments on teaching children, and indirectly, fostering social capital.
Fred: Every, I think it's Sunday or Saturday, this lady will give $1 to her daughter and she will buy a paper. And I say, “You so nice.”

David: To the daughter?

Fred: Yeah. I say, “You so nice.”

David: I was just walking around today and I saw a mother give her kid a dollar, you know, over and give the guy the dollar. But it wasn’t to a StreetWise vendor. So what do you think about parents who, you know, teach their kids to help people who might be in need? I mean, this is obviously an important customer for you, right?
Fred: Yeah, it was a regular. I think it's good teaching people to be caring. And that's why I say "you so nice" every time they give it to me. You so nice. Because you know that teaches them to be nice to people as opposed to, you know, looking down on them.

Social capital is significant insofar as it develops networks of trustworthiness and reciprocity among people (Putnam, 2000; Dutta-Berman, 2004; St. John & Shepherd, 2004). Fred’s photograph frames trust in action. Fred snaps the shot just as the girl approaches with a dollar in her hand. In the background, the mother’s legs show the physical and symbolic distance that she shares with Fred and her daughter. Allowing her daughter to approach Fred to purchase a newspaper is a small act of trust that simultaneously teaches the daughter to feel safe with this vendor and likewise affirms Fred as a valued, contributing, law-abiding community member.

The commercial exchange that constitutes vending offers opportunities for sellers and buyers to connect. Meanwhile, vendors also have opportunities to connect with community leaders—people who have the power to significantly shape vendors’ quality of life. In the following excerpt, Fred talks about attending a community policing event and the benefits that he draws from it as well as what he feels he can give back to the community he is participating in.

Fred: Well, I think it's good to go to CAPS (Community Action Policing Strategy) meetings because I can get to know people who are concerned about the neighborhood and, plus, I was hoping that it would help generate more customers, you know? People would tell people, like their neighbors, that this guy comes to
the CAPS meetings. And he cares about the community. Plus, like I'm the eyes and ears on this street, you know? So I think it's the best it's a place for me to be. You know? If I'm going to be standing here, like six to eight hours every day or five days a week, six days a week, however many days I decide to work, I'm like the eyes and ears of the neighborhood. So if something goes down I'm pretty much aware of it. I should be there. Plus, I get 25 papers from Greg once a month if I go.

At CAPS meetings, Fred, a vendor whose work could be shaped by the dialogues that ensue, acts as a citizen, even public advocate, interacting with others and fostering the full and free interplay of ideas that Dewey viewed as essential to associated living. Fred, as the “eyes” and “ears” of the street, cooperates with others who have a vested interest in “the neighborhood.” Of course, there are economic incentives and consequences for participation in CAPS meetings—Fred receives free papers to vend and establishes and/or deepens relationships with customers. In reflecting on Fred’s experiences, I am reminded of Putnam’s (2000) argument that when economic activity is embedded in dense networks of social capital, citizens are more likely to broaden their vocational sense of self, developing the “I” into a “we” as participants work for both individual and collective benefits.

Zach, a vendor, snapped the following photograph, capturing relationships he has with a few local police officers as well as one of his regular customers. Taken just outside of the 7-11 where he sells, this photograph embodies a simple sense of fun and the development of friendships that StreetWise, in its finest moments, fosters—hallmarks of
the organization that benefit both individuals and society at large. The photograph captures a vendor connecting on a basic level to those in the community. Of particular note is that, with the exception of one vendor, every participant who took photographs of their StreetWise experience snapped shots of a customer(s).

Image 6 – Three customers in Lincoln Park

These connections between vendors and those who buy the paper are central to how vendors make sense out of their experiences selling StreetWise. Customer relationships are vitally important to vendors. Krista, a vendor who sells in the downtown area, talks about the importance of befriending a police officer or crossing guard.

Krista: One of the biggest assets you have as a StreetWise vendor is if you can get in with the crossing guard or a police officer, anything like that. It helps a lot
because if a panhandler came up and tried to hit you or something and she's right there she's more likely to side on your side, because she knows you're in the same spot every day and you don't bother anybody. It's a little more feeling of safety, knowing that you have somebody that has a little more power than you to tell somebody to get lost or to stop bothering me. It makes you feel a little better knowing there's somebody else to back you up, you know.

Connection to different community members strengthens social networks, creates community awareness about StreetWise, and gives the community a set of eyes and ears on the frontlines of their neighborhood. Importantly, Krista and Fred’s comments highlight the vulnerability that StreetWise vendors sometimes experience when selling the newspaper. It is unlikely that a food vendor on a corner or a person handing out free breakfast bars on Michigan Avenue need to worry about having someone in a position of power looking out for them. Social connection is powerful as is its absence.

Dennis, a younger vendor, who I spoke with many times over the course of the summer, speaks powerfully about the problems that he faces when he is selling the paper. Unlike many other vendors, who cited panhandlers as one of their most significant problems, Dennis struggles with a different quandary—his *invisibility*.

David: What are the biggest problems that you face when you’re out selling papers?

Dennis: The biggest problem I face is being ignored. If I’m talkin’ to you; just regular, “How you doin’ today, man? And if you can’t acknowledge somebody to say, “How you doin’ today?” A stranger you don’t even know….is worried about
your feelings, “How your day is goin’?”; Something is really wrong with you, for real, because obviously this person is happy to be alive. I’m happy to be here, shouldn’t you? That’s all I really want, man.

David: So what I hear you sayin’ is that just even being acknowledged is a big deal. Having somebody put their head down and walk past when you say “Good morning…”

Dennis: It’s a screwy feeling. It’s like, “Man, you’re not havin’ a good morning? You’re not happy to be alive today? It’s not a good morning to you? Did you really wake up on the wrong side of the bed?” What’s goin’ on, man? Because you can’t have that chip on your shoulder all day, man. It’ll get you in trouble.

David: So, if you say “Good morning. I hope you’re having a good day,” and then they do acknowledge you; maybe you have a conversation. How do you feel about that person?

Dennis: How do I feel about that person? Well, this person is probably feeling the same way I’m feeling unless it’s a sheet over their face, and they covering it up…deceiving me or something. It’s just a blessing to be here to talk to you today. I don’t care who you is. I don’t care what you do or what you did last night, but we’re here together right now, today, just this moment, you know what I'm sayin’?

That’s a good feeling, man, with strangers that you don’t even want nothin’ from; just a nice little conversation. I told this brother the other day…he just stopped and talked to me for a little while. He said, “Man, thank you for taking the time
“out to talk to me.” I said, “No. Thank YOU because you said to me that you needed to talk to me.” It might be me who needed YOU and I didn’t even realize it. It might have been me that needed your voice, your mind to say something to click in. You don’t know. We need each other like fish need water. For real.

People need to open they eyes up.

Dennis speaks beautifully about a problem that many other vendors mentioned: being ignored. Vendors are ignored for several reasons: panhandlers nearby, because potential customers on busy with their Ipods and cellular phones, or because a business up the street might be passing out free coffee, diet Coke or breakfast bars.

If, as Dennis suggests, “we need each other like fish need water,” then what consequences ensue when one’s presence is not acknowledged by others? Bakhtin (1984) posited that “absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, and unremembered” (p. 287). A thread throughout the body of Bakhtin’s work is a fundamental belief that authentic respect and ethical action are rooted in responsiveness to lived differences and otherness or, “the radical singularity of each person at every moment” (Morson & Emerson, 1991, p. 16). Dennis struggles with the reality of being ignored, unheard, and unrecognized. This is perhaps not surprising given that we define ourselves and others simultaneously by how we respond to them and how they respond to us in our uniqueness.

Acknowledgement, responsiveness, and connection with others remain vital to the work lives of StreetWise vendors. This begs the question: What factors limit potential
connections between vendors and other members of the public? Albert, a staff member states in response to my question: “Why are people scared of StreetWise vendors?”

Albert: Why do I think? I think a lot of it has to do with African-American and white. They are scared if someone is different. They also don’t have nice clothes on, might not have any place to live. Possibly are a different education level. All those things come into play and they’re just different and that brings difference. Differences foster fear in a lot of people. They’re just scared.

Albert argues that fear often accompanies difference. This explanation is plausible considering the circumstances of StreetWise. When (mostly) black men, with low income, who to varying degrees “look homeless” stand on street corners and disrupt people’s perceptions of public space, it is not hard to understand why middle to upper class citizens might be afraid of the differences that StreetWise vendors embody.

Timothy, an older black man who vends papers on the Northside of Chicago, talks about being able to connect with diverse others.

David: Tell me about the different types of people you meet when you are selling StreetWise.

Timothy: Yeah, like some is doctors, some is lawyers, attorneys. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Caucasians, Africans, Chinamens. One lady she from Egypt, she speaks very little English and she’s hard to communicate with because she say she don’t speak that good. I say I don’t speak your language at all, you know. I don’t know what you is but she kept saying, “I heard about that paper, I heard about that paper.” So I said, “would you like one?” She said, “Yeah. How much is it?” I said
$1.00. She gave me a $1.00 and waved. Other lady, she’s beautiful. She don’t speak no English either, she Polish. And she never buys the paper because she’s Polish. She don’t read American and she just says, “I don’t speak no English. No English. No speak.”

David: An Egyptian lady and the Polish lady…you still wave, say good morning. You said it was hard to communicate but then you kind of smile…

Timothy: Got to always have a smile. I need some teeth…but I still smile at them.

Timothy, through simple behaviors (e.g., waving) and being established in the community (Timothy has sold in front of the same Starbucks Coffee for 7 years), is able to connect with diverse others. Even in the absence of a shared language, Timothy seems able to foster relationships and trust with other people in the community. Small acts of participation and friendliness work to build and maintain connections among people who might otherwise see each other as radically different to the point of solipsism.

Connection is not a unitary phenomenon. That is, there is no one way that connection should be fostered. Scholars and organizations should be aware that connection can emerge in interesting and unexpected ways. This photo below, taken by a vendor, struck me as interesting from the first time I saw it. The colors of the photo, the dilapidated state of the building, the barren land that surrounded it intrigued me the moment I saw it. I assumed that there was an interesting story behind the vendor’s motivation to take this particular picture. I expected the story to be tragic, possibly a tale of alcoholism or maybe a robbery attempt. The actual story was quite different.
David: I was curious about this picture, I thought it was interesting.

Timothy: Oh, yeah, yeah. First dude I fight with.

David: How old were you?

Timothy: About 18, 19, I think I was. We was friends after we got fighting, we hit hard, you know. Surprised he hit that hard. And when I flew out that door, I got off the ground, I would have felt the shot but he hit me and we got to going some more. We started back and forth and hit me again right here. And I said, you know, out in the street and I was getting up, I seen the car coming, but I was kind of in a daze, you know. That was my first fight on Roosevelt. We got up, I got up, brushed myself off. Police. What y’all doing? I know y’all ain’t fighting. I said,
“No, we just joking around.” He said, “Well why’s your mouth bleeding?” I said, “No, we wasn’t fighting, I’m not mad at him. He’s not mad.” Y’all just playing rough? I said yeah. Y’all go ahead, you go that way and you go that way. And I walked off. So I see him about two weeks later, he say “Hey what’s up? And I say, “Oh nothing.” He said, “Lucky we didn’t go to jail.” I said “Yeah.” And I got me some rum and I drank it right here on the curb and gave him a little bit. He say, “You hit hard.” “Oh yeah, I hit pretty hard. We gonna do this again?” “Oh anytime you want to Tim. It’s cool man.” I got to go…I said “Bye. You take care.” We laughed it off. That’s the fun part about right here.

This story took place many years before Timothy became a StreetWise vendor. However, this narrative and picture should push the boundaries of how community and connection are conceptualized. This picture was not a depressing story about alcoholism or gentrification, but rather a story about connection under interesting circumstances for the mutual benefit of both parties. In order to avoid being arrested, both Timothy and the other man had to come together in that moment to convince the police officers they were friends and only play fighting. As a result, their friendship continued when they met after this instance. To many onlookers, this building likely serves as a symbol of inner city deterioration (and certainly that is one possible interpretation of this picture), to Timothy it serves as a pleasurable memory of a humorous story about how he avoided police detainment when he was a young man. Community and connection can manifest themselves in multiple ways. Communication scholars and practitioners should be on the lookout for new and creative ways to foster these connections.
Connection and social capital do not happen solely between individuals. Fostering connections among organizations is a vital step toward addressing the multi-dimensional problems surrounding poverty and homelessness. A case in point: StreetWise, and the vendors it serves, could benefit from developing stronger bonds with other social service agencies in the greater Chicago area. Networking and harnessing the talents of many different organizations has been a hallmark of the non-profit sector for many years. Martha, the director of a coalition of homeless-oriented organizations in Chicago talks about the “industry of homelessness” in Chicago and how organizational social capital can help create a well-equipped approach to dealing with homelessness.

Martha: Here in Chicago, the partnership was founded with an understanding that the problem of homelessness was not going away. And that after twenty years, the industry of homelessness, which we had never wanted to call an industry, but rather we had thought it was a temporary condition, but there was a realization that no, this really was becoming an industry. And that we better, then, address it as an industry. The reason that we found it necessary to collaborate here in Chicago was to change the power balance. Homeless services were really run by government here. And the constituency was ripe with ideas and knowledge was really not being tapped by government. And so we started organizing the provider community to take some power in relation to the field of homelessness. And it really did cause a major shift in how we address homelessness here in Chicago. Because eventually, government became more of a collaborative partner than the only entity in town. But when you have eighty-five, ninety-five agencies, how do
you collaborate? It’s better that they’re under one umbrella, and what our umbrella is dedicated to is mining the expertise of homeless service agencies because they’re in the front lines of addressing this social problem and using that to affect public policy. So that’s the model.

The needs of StreetWise vendors (and the broader population of people without homes) are diverse, running the gamut from food and shelter to job training and counseling. No organization working in isolation has the resources to adequately address such needs. Martha, advocating for collaboration among homeless service providers, sees the private sector as a place “ripe with ideas.” After developing non-governmental approaches to dealing with homelessness, the government became a partner in collaboration.

“Read the Paper. Take the Paper.:” Small Acts of Participation

“"There also is a problem that some people will give money to the vendor and not take the paper. That doesn’t help us. Actually that hurts paper sales and also means that people aren’t reading the newspaper." (Harvey, Board Member, Interview Transcript)

I have been thinking about this idea of “getting the newspaper into the hands of customers” and I have been thinking about it primarily in terms of rhetorical strategies and behaviors that vendors could use to succeed to a greater extent at getting people to take the paper. Having thought about this question for a few weeks now, not that behaviors and rhetoric are inconsequential, it occurs to me that getting the paper in the hands of customers is primarily related to
participation. People who do not take the paper, yet contribute a dollar to a vendor, are likely hurting StreetWise in the long run as their lack of participation (e.g. taking the paper, reading the paper) affects paper circulation, though it might help a vendor in the short term. If everyone who donated a dollar, took a paper (read: participated), StreetWise might circulate an additional 10,000 papers per week. That is significant revenue. Simple, small acts of participation matter. (Fieldnotes)

Towards the end of my time at StreetWise, I was left with a collection of thoughts, field note fragments, and observations that appeared disjointed. One of the few books that traveled with me from Ohio to Chicago was John Dewey’s (1916/1966) Democracy and Education. Upon reading and reflecting on this text, as situated within Dewey’s broader corpus of ideas about community life, I began to think about my observations and experiences in a deeper and more meaningful way. Dewey wrote, “A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic” (p. 95). Nearly eighty years later, Deetz (1992) argued that democracy has become more about expression and has moved away from people working together to solve localized problems. The issues in this theme, though diverse, have a common denominator in that each can be considered a small act of democracy, a small act of participation—small acts that matter in the daily lived organizational experiences of the citizenry, generally, and StreetWise vendors, specifically.
As foreshadowed in the first theme of this chapter (i.e., *flipping the script*), getting customers to take the newspaper in exchange for a dollar is a constant struggle for vendors and management alike though each deals with that struggle in different ways. Vendors deal with customers on a one-on-one basis and from interaction to interaction encourage people to take the newspaper. The board and staff encourage vendors to get the paper into the hands of customers in order to legitimate StreetWise as a business venture. Through vendor rules and regulations and equipping vendors with strategies they can use to encourage people to take the paper when they give a dollar, the board and staff recognizes that moving more units of papers is central to the success of StreetWise. In order to understand this interaction, I offer two extended vendor narratives that highlight the issues, tensions, and potential pitfalls that are embodied in the dollar-for-newspaper exchange process. Jamie, a vendor, comments on getting customers to take the paper rather than just donating a dollar and leaving the paper with the vendor.

David: You just said something that I’m interested in. Why did you say why is it important for you to get the paper into the customer’s hands?

Jamie: Because I am trying to get the people to read the paper so that they will understand what StreetWise is so that they will read the paper because people are so stereotyped about what StreetWise does or what StreetWise is. They’re stereotyped about the vendors and I want people to know that there are a lot of positive things that StreetWise does for us and it’s all through wanting to do something positive for yourself first. And that’s why I want people to read our paper like for example I was selling at this one place and this lady she said, “Nah
I don’t want no paper,” you know she had a very negative attitude which was okay. So, I just tell her “Have a blessed day.” She got in the car with her man friend whoever he was and when they pulled out she had a dollar sticking in her hand sticking out the window for me and she said to me, “Yeah you know you got a check coming in a few days anyways,” it’s the end of the month. Immediately I said, “No see you don’t know me ma’am,” I said, “I would like you to read this paper”. Sometimes my mouth gets me in trouble and I say things before I think but I said to her, “If you can read I’d like you to read my story because I do have a story in the paper.” I didn’t give her the current issue and I explained to her that I don’t receive a check. I don’t receive food stamps, I don’t receive anything. This is how I feed, clothe, and shelter myself - through the sales of this newspaper. I am working. I’m not out here begging. I am working and I gave her a copy of my story.

Timothy, also a vendor, tells the story of a specific confrontation when he encouraged a woman to take a copy of the paper.

David: Why do you think they buy it and not read the paper? Or don’t take the paper?

Timothy: Just want to help a donation, sometime they tell you, I don’t want the paper, I’ll donate this, just a donation. One lady got mad and took her $1.00 back.

David: When you asked her?

Timothy: Yeah. Tell me, “You ungrateful bastard. Give me my dollar.” So I said, after a split second, I had to catch myself, because I do have a quick temper. But
she called me “ungrateful bastard,” that made me mad. I said “Hold off a minute ma’am, here take this. All I want to say is how come you don’t want to read our paper?” I don’t got to give you no reason. I said, “You have a good day.” I said, “You have a good day, ma’am because we ain’t going no where with this conversation.” “I just don’t want it. Damn you. Nigger get out my face.” I said, “Have a good one, lady. You have a damn good one.” That’s what I told her, “You have a damn good one,” because she made me mad. That’s why I say you got to think before you react and that’s what I had to do right quick. I laughed about it after a while, after I think, the anger, I laughed about it.

David: Did that incident stop you from asking anybody to take the paper?
Timothy: Nope. You walk up to me right now, I never met you before, we never had this conversation and you walked in Starbucks, “Good morning how you doing, sir.” You came back out and gave me a dollar and said I don’t want the paper. I might ask you why, I might not ask you why, I might say have a good day. You learn by little mistakes. That wasn’t a mistake on my side, to me. I want to know why she didn’t want to read the paper and why she just wanted to give a donation. The way she reacted…I thought for months and months that I won’t ask nobody nothing like that. I don’t mean no offense, don’t take this the wrong way, but I don’t want her company reading StreetWise.

Getting the paper into the hands of the customer requires vendors to delicately balance on a line between sales and harassment. It is in vendors’ best interests, as well as the best interests of the organization, to have customers take the paper when they decide to give
StreetWise vendors a dollar. Vendors are encouraged to use strategies that will maximize their success rates at doing this. Based on my observation of vendor meetings, a core set of a few strategies are most common. First, vendors are encouraged to display a number of papers as opposed to one at a time to show potential customers that they are legitimate vendors who will offer a paper in exchange for a dollar. Second, vendors are told to physically extend their arm with the paper in it towards the customer. Many exchanges are exceedingly normal. This technique was only encouraged if it appeared that a person might not take the paper. Third, vendors were encouraged to vocalize strategies such as “Please, I want you to have this paper,” and “There is good information in here.” Conversely, by implementing these strategies, vendors become more susceptible of accusations of harassment or aggressive panhandling if they go too far in attempting to deliver the newspaper or if their behaviors are interpreted as such by people on the street.

Harvey, a board member, also recognizes people’s refusal to take the newspaper as a problem but his position stems more from an organizational perspective and less from a desire to communicate an individual narrative.

David: How do you think the community views the newspaper?

Harvey: We do fight an image of several problems. I think some people are put off by vendors, won’t buy a paper, won’t have anything to do with them. There also is a problem that some people will give money to the vendor and not take the paper and that doesn’t help us cause actually that hurts paper sales and also means that people aren’t reading the newspaper. We probably have some of the same problems that the big newspapers have as far as declining readership or people not
really reading the paper anymore. We need to be able to find a niche about what this newspaper is.

From a managerial perspective, it is in StreetWise’s best interests to maximize the number of papers taken by customers. That is, the more papers vendors distribute, the more papers StreetWise has to print (and vendors have to buy) in order to meet demand. Thus, when people donate a dollar but do not take a paper, less money is channeled to the organization, hurting its overall ability to operate. It should be noted that by refusing to take the newspaper, vendors are able to “resell” that paper for an additional dollar. So, in the short term, not taking the paper puts more money into the hands of vendors. But in the long term, it is damaging to the organization.

The unwillingness on the part of some customers to fully participate in the exchange process (i.e., unwilling to read or even take the paper) has unintended consequences for StreetWise—an organization whose mission they likely believe in. Participation, even in small ways, makes a difference to the democratic fabric of communities. Mark, vendor supervisor, reflects on his communication regarding strategies for getting the paper into customers’ hands.

Mark: They see it as a job. Take the paper. Read the paper. You know what I’m saying? I push this all the time. It should be somewhere space on the back of that paper that says, “Take the paper, read the paper.” I’m not saying don’t give them a tip. But we got a hand up, not a hand out. As far as the business is concerned, I don’t tell vendors give back no money. But get a product in their hand, because you want to build up a regular customer base. You out there trying to keep the
dollar and the paper, and the guy walk past and he gives you a dollar, and he says, “Keep the paper.” And you do it, next week when that guy walks past you, ‘cause he walks past you every day ‘cause he walks past the spot every day. 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? Customers pay more attention to the vendors than vendors think. They look at your appearance, your consistency, and they see you out here working. To them, it gives them the appearance of this is that guy’s job.

As discussed earlier, from a discursive aspect, customers who do not take the paper inadvertently diminish attempts on staff parts to legitimize vending as “real work.” He does simultaneously state that he “doesn’t tell the vendors to give back no money” which could work to delegitimate vendors as businesspersons. Mark recognizes that getting papers into customers hands helps to build up a customer base. Vendors must participate in this manner in order to make it financially viable for them to continue to sell StreetWise for any extended period of time. Vendors must be willing to hold up their end of the exchange process in order to establish themselves as an honest vendor and not as a panhandler or one-paper bandit.

Vendors are encouraged in other ways to participate in the organization in ways that will help them sell more papers. One of these ways is that they are encouraged to read the newspaper themselves so that they can be better equipped with knowledge about the paper to entice customers. They are encouraged to incorporate rhetorical strategies such as “There’s a great article about…” or “Read about….in this week’s StreetWise.”
Krista, a vendor, insinuated that she read the newspaper in order to help her sales, the following is our exchange about this small act of participation.

David: Do you read the paper? It sounds like you do.

Krista: Yeah. The biggest thing is your product. That's your product that you're trying to sell. It's okay to know what's on the cover, but at the same time, does the cover have anything to do about the story inside. I mean it's just a clip. That's how they get you to open the paper. So, I always read through it, because, I don’t know, sometimes you have the feeling like people think you're stupid. And I just love to be able to tell somebody what's in the paper when they ask, because then it's like, “Wow, they read. They can read.” It’s just shocking to them that StreetWise people can read. So I just want to be at least one of them that knows what's in the paper. Most of these vendors don't read the paper and that's the saddest thing. Because when someone comes up and asks you what's in it, you've got to make something up. I don't want to have to make something up. That's just embarrassing.

Another vendor, Scott, talks about the reasons why he does and does not read StreetWise before going out to sell the newspaper.

David: Do you read the paper before you go out and sell it?

Scott: Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

David: Why? How come yes sometimes, how come no other times?

Scott: Sometimes when I look at the topic it may look a little boring to me, that’s why I don’t read it. But a few of the topics interest me.
David: Do you ever notice a difference with how your customers respond to you when you read the paper as opposed to when you don’t?

Scott: Yeah, a big difference.

David: What happens? If you don’t read the paper, how is it different than when you do?

Scott: Well, if I don’t read the paper, my sales go kind of down. But when I do read the paper and the customers are like, “What’s in this week’s of paper?” And I tell them, my sales go up. They’ll always, “What’s in this week’s paper?” “Oh, they have this, they have that.”

David: So, it helps.

Scott: Yeah, it really does help when you read the paper. It does. And just like Mark’s always saying in orientation, read the paper. But sometimes, I may be tired and I get on the bus and fall asleep. And when I get to my location, I be honest. At least I be honest with my customer, like, “I don’t know what’s in the paper because I’m tired.” I just like to sell papers so I can have some money in my pocket so I can eat, help pay my rent.

Reading the paper is one small way that vendors can participate in the organization and in broader community life. Through reading the newspaper, in some small way, vendors are educating themselves from a knowledge standpoint as well as from a sales standpoint. These two vendors are quite clear that their sales are noticeably improved if they have some degree of knowledge about the content of the newspaper. It should be noted that all vendors cannot participate in this manner. More than one vendor,
when asked during their interview if they read the paper in order to improve their sales, replied that they could not read. Most quickly followed up that they hoped that StreetWise could help them to learn how to read.

Vendor participation at the organizational level of StreetWise proved to be an interesting issue that emerged over the course of my fieldwork. It is written into the by-laws of StreetWise that a vendor representative must sit on the Board of Directors. However, during my time at StreetWise, the vendor representative position remained unfilled. A few months before I arrived at StreetWise, the vendor representative position was filled. However, that vendor was removed from the position because he did not show up at a number of board meetings. In order to give this vendor a voice, a small portion of his explanation of the situation is presented here.

Gary: They got political on me. They told me I didn’t have to go to a couple meetings. Then when I didn’t show up at the meetings, they told me I didn’t make enough meetings. So, they expelled me from the Board. So, I thought that was kind of an under-handed move on their part. But you know, I said forget it. I couldn’t fight ‘em. I still thought it was real under-handed. I think the simple fact that I’m educated, and have some professional skills. I used to work in an office. So it wasn’t like I was a dumb vendor up there in the Board, just “Oh, yes ma’am,” you know. If something didn’t go right, I made it clear that I thought if it didn’t affect the vendors, the vendors didn’t benefit from it, I didn’t vote for it. The vendor rep basically is a token. Seriously, all you do is sit up there and they tell you what they’re gonna do. At the end of the meeting, they ask you what you
think. It don’t matter; they’re gonna vote on what they wanna vote on anyway.
You’re out-voted anyway. It’s only one vote; my vote. They never ignored me
though and I had a lot to say when I was up there.

Frank, a vendor, comments on the incorporation of vendor perspectives into
decision-making at StreetWise.

David: Are vendors asked to participate at all in these decisions that are made? I
mean, you mentioned there was a couple meetings that they had before, and

Frank: Nope. We’re supposed to have a vendors’ rep on the Board. We don’t have
one. We don’t even have a copy of our by-laws or anything.

David: You think that position’s gonna get filled?

Frank: No, ‘cause nobody’s pushing it because everybody wants the money.

Everybody’s too busy out there making their own money so they can get high, or
whatever.

David: So the vendors don’t want to participate?

Frank: Oh they do, and the only reason is because whoever gets appointed to the
Board gets a thousand dollars. That’s the only reason why anybody was running,
was for that thousand dollars.

David: Why don’t the vendors care about what happens to the organization then?

I’m not arguing with you. I’m just hearing a lot of different things, right?

Frank: Oh, a lot of vendors want to run. There’s about two-dozen vendors that
wanted to run. But that’s like making a five-year-old kid mayor of the city of
Chicago. These people don’t even know what the organization’s about. They have
no clue about business, about anything. So how can they represent me on how this money should be spent and that money should be spent. If he doesn’t care enough to find out what he’s representing, he’s gonna do is like a lot of these other idiots, “Oh, we bought the building. We own the building.” No, you do not. You’re a subcontractor. You bought the papers. We paid for you. You didn’t buy the building, StreetWise bought the building. Why don’t you do this, why don’t you do this, why don’t you, you, you, you. Do it for me, me, me, me.”

During this very interesting exchange, I pressed Frank just a bit to wrestle with the seemingly exclusive ideas that vendors are self-focused but yet need to participate in organizational life at StreetWise for the organization to thrive.

David: So you’re putting forth the argument that the vendors are looking out for themselves and they don’t want to help the organization, right? I’m not saying all of them. It’s the majority.

Frank: The majority.

David: So how does StreetWise survive then, because you also seem to be saying that vendor participating is something important for this organization to continue. The vendors have to care about StreetWise for StreetWise to exist.

Frank: Oh, definitely. StreetWise needs to offer more support. Okay? By showing like I said, what do we do? We give you ten papers and throw you out to the fucking wolves. Well shit, if that’s how you give a fuck about me, I’m out here fending for myself. What support are you giving me out here? None. Come around. Go into the stores and talk to the manager, “Hey, how’s our StreetWise
vendor doing?” Show that you’re interested. You don’t have to be out there every week. Just show that we care, but again we got no relations with the public. “They kicked out a vendor off of the” Why? Let’s go in there and talk to them. Nobody bothered to go in and talk to the guy. I went over there and you know what I found out? It wasn’t a vendor. It was a one-paper bandit pretending to be a StreetWise vendor.

Frank’s comments pose an interesting predicament for vendors as well as the board of StreetWise. Frank comments that vendors need to participate in StreetWise in order for the organization to thrive. However, due to many constraints ranging from needing to focus on basic needs to a lack of interpersonal skills, vendors are largely unwilling to participate in the ways allotted to them at StreetWise. Mark also reflects on the situation.

David: Can you give me your perspective on the vendor representative situation…with it being open and not being filled right now?

Mark: I think it’s wrong. I do. You have to have a voice for the vendors. The vendors should have a voice in the decision making process and the direction of where the organization goes. Me personally, I think you need like about two representatives on the board.

David: You don’t think one’s enough.

Mark: No. If I wasn’t in an employment position, I’d never stood for this. Never. I tried to pump them up as much as I could, in the capacity I’m in, but there was shaky time with some shaky individuals and don’t get me wrong. I kind of
understand what the board was looking at. I’m that person in the middle. Seeing everything. They had some shady characters was trying to run. We haven’t had a solid consistent vendor rep since I was on the board.

Mark believes that StreetWise needs to extend participation offers to the vendors to a greater degree than they currently do. Vendors are currently allowed one vendor representative. Mark believes two are necessary. Gary, a former vendor representative noted earlier that he knew he was outvoted as the vendor representative and that at times he felt like he was told what was going to happen rather than have his opinion considered. Some vendors, staff and board members commented at various times that vendors are not qualified to make long-term policy decisions for the organization. From one perspective, this is a valid argument. Vendors, generally speaking, do not have the formal education or managerial experience necessary for decision-making about the short and long-range plans of the organization. Yet, seen from a different perspective, many vendors possess a viable form of knowledge, often referred to as “street smarts” or survival strategies and stocks of knowledge developed in the process of living and coping with the ontological insecurities of their lives (see Harter et al., 2005). Vendor input can and should be incorporated into what constitutes knowledge for an informed decision.

Related to vendor participation via a representative on the StreetWise Board of Directors is vendor participation in the weekly meetings that are held at the StreetWise offices.

David: Do the vendors help participate in decisions that are made at StreetWise?
Krista: Yeah. But the problem is in order to get the vendors to say anything or to come to any meetings you have to close the window down extremely early so that they’re stuck here. And people always complain that, oh, I wish StreetWise had health fairs. I wish StreetWise cared about us and had dental. I wish StreetWise gave away housing. If they came to the meetings like they were supposed to, they'd understand that one day, one time Greg closed the window early because we were giving away housing, you know. SRO's, you know. And all these vendors sitting complaining that they want things, don't come to the meetings and then they say, oh, nobody wants do anything for us. So I'm just saying the majority of the vendors bitch about things and then when you bring it in, they don't even know it's here. I feel that we all have a voice. But the same time do we use it the way we’re supposed to?

In many ways, vendor participation in these weekly meetings was forced. On Wednesdays, when vendor meetings were scheduled for 2 PM, the window where vendors purchase their papers was closed and no papers were sold until after the meeting. Nearly each week, meetings were started 15-20 minutes late in order to allow more vendors to show up at the office. Vendors are required in their employment agreement to attend one meeting per month. While I did not take attendance at these meetings, generally there were about 20 vendors present and many vendors came every week while other vendors never came to a meeting. Nearly immediately after the meeting was dismissed, a long line of vendors would form at the window to purchase papers.
The following photograph was taken by a vendor named Paul who did not connect this picture to the forced participation that I noticed but did say, “This here is a picture of me standing in line after a vendor meeting.” While Paul did not attribute this scene to that of a lack of vendor participation, the post-vendor meeting rush to the window to buy papers, or the desire for vendors to simply get back out into the street to sell newspapers, this picture captures an event which happened on a weekly basis following vendor meetings.

Image 8 – Vendors purchasing papers after a Wednesday vendor meeting

Noted at the outset of this theme, Deetz (1992) argued that democracy should be more about people working in tandem with one another to solve the problems of a given
community. In offering his understanding of the politics of everyday life, he argued, “The issue is not a new democracy, a new structure and practice, but a micropractice, a democracy of the insides and the everyday perception, conception, and response to events” (p. 333). Albert, director of a Chicago-based homeless advocacy organization echoes those sentiments in his response to the question “What does the word “democracy” mean to you?”

Albert: You know, for me the democracy means the involvement of as many people as possible and getting involved and trying to improve the conditions in the society. I don’t equate it with vote. I don’t think it is democracy if that’s [voting] all you do. I think it means building structures that get involved and try to influence policy and influence direction. And that’s what we’re all involved in, that’s what we’re all about. You know I don’t like the direction the country’s going. I don’t like a lot of things about that direction. It’s not going to change unless there’s more people involved. Sometimes that means they could be involved in ways that I don’t like, but at least they’re involved in trying to do something and not just sitting back and letting things happen.

The exchange process of “getting the paper into customers’ hands,” vendor representation on the Board, vendor participation in meetings, and reading the paper in order to increase both knowledge and sales are significant small acts of participation. These are small ways in which vendors, staff members, board members, and customers participate democratically in everyday life. Democracy is not something that happens only on the first Tuesday of November each year. Rather, we embody democracy in our
daily practices and interactions. (Re)conceiving democratic practices as lived, embodied, and continuous can only enhance our community lives.

**Hierarchy of the Streets: “Cupshakers,” “One-Paper Bandits,” and Vendors**

*When I was out in the field with Frank today, he said that he tries to build a rapport with the public and that although his selling technique works, it takes a long time to build relationships. He talked about how some people took months to say “hi” to him or smile back when he says “good morning.” He also talked about how illegitimate vendors and panhandlers make his job more difficult. He called them “cupshakers” and “one-paper bandits.”* (Fieldnotes)

*Today at the office, Krista and I talked about selling StreetWise as opposed to panhandling. Krista said “You are selling them (customers) something. Panhandlers aren’t. You don’t have to stoop to that level.” There is an obvious hierarchy between vendors and “cupshakers.”* (Fieldnotes)

In considering the organizational life of StreetWise vendors, another issue that emerged from the data was that of hierarchy. Hierarchy, within the context of StreetWise, is interesting in a number of ways. First, some aspects of hierarchy can be seen in the internal workings of the organization. Also, hierarchies that bridge the organization and society emerge as vendors differentiate themselves based on living situation as well as in relation to panhandlers. Ferguson (1984) argued that hierarchies are powerful and function to make things appear as naturally ordered. Interrogating hierarchy as it relates
to organizational structure, relationships, and social discourses provides the context for this theme. Burke (1966), too, claimed that humans are:

goaded by the spirit of hierarchy. But if that sounds too weighted, we could settle for, “Moved by a sense of order.” Here, man’s skill with symbols combines with his negativity, and with the tendencies toward different modes of livelihood implicit in the inventions that make for division of labor, the result being definitions and differentiations and allocations of property protected by the negativities of the law. (p. 15)

Hierarchy truly is one of the most powerful hegemonic forces. Occurring everywhere and appearing nowhere simultaneously makes it difficult to see unless people are sensitive towards it and looking for the ways hierarchy can shape how people interact with one another. This theme will proceed by first looking at hierarchies that emerge between vendors and panhandlers and move towards broader organizational and societal hierarchies.

This theme highlights hierarchies that are evident between StreetWise vendors and panhandlers. Based on interview conversations, vendor photographs, and observations, some vendors hold animosity towards panhandlers because they affect vendor sales. Other vendors are more hesitant to complain about panhandlers because they have experienced panhandling as a means to survival. In the following excerpt, Fred talks about some of his experiences with panhandlers, customers, and those who choose to support panhandlers instead of StreetWise vendors.
Fred: See there's a panhandler that's sitting right here in front of Kinko's.

David: How does that make you feel as a vendor out there? This is at your spot right? You can see this panhandler from your spot. People stop and give him money. This happens many times a day. Right?

Fred: Right. They make more money than I do, to be honest with you.

David: And you're standing out there selling papers and people walk by you and give money to him. How do you deal with that? How do you handle that?

Fred: The ones that have helped me; that's I believe in God. I believe it is God's will that I will always be provided with enough money to make ends meet so to say. You know? I may not have, I may not save much, but I will make ends meet
for that day. So I don't worry about them. I think that they have some type of mental problem and then again some of them I think that. And then again I think that others may feel as though because I'm actually working and he's not, he may need the help more than I do.

David: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth at all, but it sounds like you don't really get mad that the panhandlers are there?

Fred: The only time I get mad at them is when they try to sandwich me off. You know? They'll get one by the corner and the other guy at the other end. I won't allow them to do that. You can one of you guys can work over here, but you're not going to get all of the customers coming from both directions. They'll say I would have bought a paper from you, but he asked. And like I said, because I don't say anything and they do. Panhandlers will say something to someone who walks past them and says no, but then gives to me. They will say, why you keep giving dude money and you don't give to me? I don't say nothing so customers know that I'm not a threat to them. They know I won't say "why are you giving you're money away when you could be buying a paper, helping me? So, you know, they take the easy way out.

Almost universally, StreetWise vendors cited panhandlers as one of the biggest problems they face when they are vending the paper. StreetWise vendors see themselves as more legitimate than panhandlers for a variety of reasons. It seems plausible that vendors could hold this position because they are participating in a capitalistic exchange.
Fred’s comments highlight an important theme that was discussed earlier, the importance of space. Fred is minimally critical of the panhandlers in his area, until they “sandwich him off” and get the customers coming from both directions.

Zach, a vendor on Chicago’s north side, is a vendor who thinks that selling *StreetWise* is more legitimate than panhandling.

Zach: It was kind of tough at first cause a lot of people don’t realize that if you do it right, your good work ethic, that StreetWise is a sales business just like any other business basically. It’s not like telemarketing when you have to be on the phone all the time and people screaming at you like, “Leave me alone!” Most of the time people just ignore you; they don’t want to deal with vendors on the street. They see that I’m trying to do something with my life. I’m not panhandling. I mean, damn, that would be even more embarrassing if I was just panhandling.

Zach’s internal privileging of vending *StreetWise* over panhandling begins to illuminate the multiple ways that vendors privilege their own work over those who they perceive to not work. While some of these comments sound as if vendors have focused disdain towards panhandlers (which some certainly do), vendors such as Zach seem to use this privileging to gain and build pride about their own work. Zach talks about “doing it right” and having a “good work ethic.” This illuminates another way in which hierarchy might be beneficial, particularly for those who are perceived to be at the bottom of a society.

Pamela follows with a similar excerpt but talks more specifically about how panhandlers or “cupshakers,” as many vendors refer to panhandlers, affect her sales and her ability to navigate public spaces.
David: What are some of the biggest problems that you face when you’re out selling the paper?

Pamela: Panhandlers. People shaking the cup. There’s just so many people in need out there. It’s become hard. At first it wasn’t that many people, but now you got vendors and people shaking a cup. It’s a lot of hungry people out there, you know. You gotta fight for your space. You gotta find a space, you gotta fight for it. Like just this week, I called the police on somebody. You know, they get aggressive. They don’t wanna leave, the wanna curse you out, but then customers don’t wanna give money, go in their pockets, while somebody’s standing there acting like that, or looking crazy. Yesterday when I went out, someone that had seen me arguing with this panhandler brought it up. You know, why were you arguing? What was the matter? And I didn’t even see this customer. So they notice that. But one thing, the camaraderie among the vendors and people shaking the cup is really amazing. It’s really amazing.

David: So sometimes you get along with the panhandlers?

Pamela: When it comes to getting the money, shaking the cup or selling the paper, no. But let’s say you’re hungry and you have a sandwich, they’ll offer you some or I’ll offer them some. In that respect, yeah.

Pamela clearly has had problems with panhandlers in the past, likely sees selling StreetWise as more genuine work, and places StreetWise at a higher status than that of panhandling. Hierarchy appears necessary on the part of StreetWise vendors in relation to panhandlers precisely because there are an overwhelming number of people who need
help. In order to gain financial survival, it is in a vendor’s best interest to position themselves above panhandlers to gain the greatest percentage of limited resources. While noting intermittent camaraderie with panhandlers, mainly in ways that are not related to money, Pamela highlights issues that were discussed in other themes as well such as “fighting for space.” Pamela also talks about needing to get in contact with the police to deal with a particularly aggressive panhandler highlighting the importance of social networks and connection.

One vendor, Sarah, offered a different perspective on panhandling that was echoed by a few other vendors. Despite nearly all vendors’ complaints about how panhandlers and illegitimate vendors affect their sales and the reputation of StreetWise, a few vendors were hesitant about passing judgment on panhandlers. Most vendors label vendors as “illegitimate” if they meet a variety of criteria: non-current badge, using a stolen badge, or no badge. If someone selling StreetWise, does not meet the rules that vendors must abide by if they wish to sell the paper, they are labeled as “illegitimate.”

David: I’m curious to hear your thoughts on this. There’s been a lot of vendors that know that panhandlers are a big problem. Do you have problems with panhandling?

Sarah: No. Like I said, everybody has to try to make their living some kind of way. Once upon a time, I was standing that way. I don’t have no problems with no one however they make their money. Just do it. Be good at what you do is what I say.
The inability to make any value claims is one of the main critiques of postmodernism and particularly nihilistic, relativistic incarnations of postmodernism. Relativistic forms of postmodernism are precisely those that pragmatists reject choosing (Rorty, 1999). In light of pragmatism, this lack of judgment on this vendor’s part is interesting in order to understand the ways in which vendors are limited and benefited by creating hierarchies (or not) in this manner. Vendors might be served through hierarchy with panhandlers because they are able to legitimize their work as a first step back or a contribution to the economy. However, to what extent are connection and compassion for others limited by positioning oneself above another? Would not the oppressive elements of hierarchy still exist, even in these interactions?

Within StreetWise’s walls, hierarchies also emerge, as would be the case in most any organization. In the following passage, Stacey, the director of the organization, talks about the necessity of hierarchy.

Stacey: Now there will be order. No family, no unit, nothing can exist without order. And one of the things that they never had, they had organized chaos. And to a certain level, I had to maintain organized chaos because that’s all I could do. We had to right-size the organization because of financials; we downsized to essential functions. We don’t have enough bodies or capacity to do some of the things that we need to do.

Hierarchy and structure are necessary to varying degrees for any organization—they can provide order and stability, reduce uncertainty, divide labor in order for individuals to interdependently reach goals, and foster accountability (Conrad & Haynes, 2001). Even
Ferguson (1984) recognized some of the problems associated with genuine egalitarian
and participatory organizations. “Decision making is usually time-consuming and often
frustrating to some members; the intensity of the interaction often advantages the most
verbally skilled members at the expense of those less assertive or vocal and inequalities
of ability and/or contribution surface among members” (p. 207). In the case of
StreetWise, a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure likely served to keep the
organization alive. Because of the organization’s dire financial situation, the director and
board members were forced to eliminate a number of paid staff positions, sell the
organization’s property, and eliminate some services for vendors (e.g., the Work
Empowerment Center). These decisions were made efficiently and without input from
vendors, and likely saved the organization from bankruptcy.

Stacey continues by talking about the responsibility that comes with occupying a
managerial position.

Stacey: I believe everything starts from the top down. If I can demand excellence
of myself and what I put out, then I can expect excellence. That building, the way
we were doing business, was not excellent. So, I can’t have any expectations with
anybody until I give us all the tools that we need to be able to produce excellence.
Computer systems that work. Phones put in. An environment that’s healthy, safe,
and clean. But it’s a double-edged sword too, because while I’m out here fighting
these battles for the vendors, I’ve got vendors cussing about this, and you didn’t
do this and I’m like, “Look, we have big issues to deal with right now and you
need to sit down and shut up while I deal with it.” I think that they, they on some
hands, they look at me as a mother hen, some of them look at me as a Hitler.
Some of them look at me like, “Well, she’ll fire you if you disagree with her.” Or
you got rid of her for this. Yeah, I got rid of some people that weren’t marching
with me because I had to. I’m going to make this work.

Stacey’s comments here definitely reflect the formal hierarchy present at StreetWise and
the responsibility that the Director feels for leading the organization into the future with a
respectable building, working computer and phone systems and strong leadership.
Meanwhile, Stacey recognizes pressure that is put on her by vendors while she is
attempting to make the organization more successful—for the vendors.

The vendors can be demanding and questioning, observations of the weekly
vendor meetings are evidence of this. But this excerpt from Stacey also provides insight
into vendor involvement in decision-making at StreetWise and, at least during the
summer of 2005, these comments from the Director would lead us to believe that vendors
are not very involved in any aspect of StreetWise decision-making. Some of the criticism
leveled against Stacey (i.e. Hitler, “she’ll fire you if you disagree with her”) are little
more than rumors and exaggerations. I was witness to many disagreements between
Stacey and other organizational members who were not fired as a result. However, the
Director’s willingness to tell vendors “to sit down and shut up” provides a partial glimpse
into some staff and board members’ perceptions of the vendors.

Carol, a staff member, talks about the necessity of hierarchy, but her comments
add a different layer to the discussion: how hierarchy also can be abused. Hierarchy can
be used to shield people from having to talk to one another, in this case, about sensitive issues.

Carol: Internal communication. It’s missing, it’s non-existent. You’ve got people that told me things, but they won’t tell the person who it directly affects. If next week, you want vendors to use the rear entrance instead of the front entrance, well, I’m not responsible for the vendors, so you need to tell the person who’s doing that. I’m going to give Joe Blow thirty days to straighten up. Did you tell Joe Blow that? If you didn’t…more than likely he’s not going to straighten up, because you’re telling me, but you’re not telling that person. Well, I’m going to cut so-and-so’s pay. Really, did you tell the person that? No, they’ll figure it out when they get the check. You know what I’m saying? I mean…no communication. Internal communication needs to be better, done, period. One of the reasons I left corporate America was because I was so tired of hierarchal structure. But now I see how it’s very helpful in getting things done. But at the same time I thought it was pure bureaucratic you know, but I mean to me that’s what really could be structure, we have to have structure. We have structure, we need structure.

I had multiple conversations with a variety of organizational members, primarily staff and vendors, in which they expressed frustrations similar to those of Carol—they often did not receive information from their supervisor that could impact their abilities to do their job well. Like Carol, many vendors saw hierarchy as potentially comforting and useful to the extent to that it enables them to do their job (see also Ashcraft & Kedrowicz,
2002). Even so, hierarchy can be used to shield people from communication, which diffuses responsibility and creates unnecessary ambiguity for people about their job.

Krista, a vendor, talks frankly about organizational hierarchy as she perceives it between vendors and the staff and board of StreetWise, who are collectively referred to as the “upstairs.”

David: If you could change one thing about the way that the StreetWise staff and the board communicate with the vendors, what would you change?

Krista: It’s just like a hierarchy, you know. You get all these people upstairs, I mean they talk to you or they’ll wave. And a lot of people who are vendors don't even know who they are. And they have this feeling like, like for a long time the biggest rumor was that the board was stealing all the money. And in reality the board is volunteering. But I’m just saying like people need to come out and tell the facts. And the Board of Directors needs to be down here more. The people from the board need to be down here more to kind of feel like, cause we, you know, the vendors have this feeling like, like we come in and we have to deal with people thinking that we’re bums outside. And then we have people who treat us like bums when we’re here.

And so to me it's just like, you know, a lot of vendors feel like the administration doesn't really like us. So, I mean I think that's the biggest problem between us and them. Don't get me wrong, there's people up there that come down here all the time and talk with us. There are some really nice people up there. And then some people you never see up there, and then when they come down here they’re snotty
or just snobby and they're in and out. Some of us don't know their names. We
don’t know who’s upstairs working. I mean they come down, they wave and say
“have a nice day.” And they leave, you know. So that’s the biggest thing, bridging
the gap, I think.

Alan, a board member, offers a different perspective on this issue which emerged
from a conversation that was related to vendor representation on the StreetWise board.

David: Something that’s been an interesting issue is that a lot of the vendors will
say they don’t really know what the Board does. They don’t know who they are.
Maybe some of that’s valid. Maybe some isn’t….

Alan: Well, hold on. If you were to ask anybody in any organization…you could
go to the Tribune Company, and you go to one of their employees and said, “Hey,
who’s on the Board?” or “What does the Board do?” They’re gonna say the same
thing.

David: That’s true.

Alan: I work for (company name deleted), and I don’t know who the board is. But
that being said, it doesn’t have to be that way. Right? And since it doesn’t have to
be that way, let’s do what we can to correct it. You know, I don’t think we have to
be accountable to every single whim of every single vendor as a Board, but I do
think that we have to have their interests in mind.

Krista and Alan’s comments touch upon the same issue but from differing perspectives.

As a vendor, Krista speaks about the ways in which the vendors might be constrained by
hierarchy. Because of hierarchy, and a lack of strategies to overcome it, Krista talks about
how vendors don’t know who is on the board, who represents them, who writes the paper, etc. This disconnection can cause feelings of isolation within the organization, polarization of parties (us vs. them), and contempt for those who work “upstairs” (i.e. rumors about stealing money). Alan, after noting that in most organizations employees don’t know who serves on the executive board, says that “it doesn’t have to be that way.” Organizations can invent strategies to overcome the stifling nature of hierarchy. In the case of an organization such as StreetWise, who serves a population who is oppressed in nearly every imaginable way, connecting vendors and staff and board members might benefit individuals and the organization in many ways.

One of the most poignant insights into hierarchy from this project came from Krista, a vendor who sells StreetWise in the heart of downtown. She took the picture below, and initially during her participant interview moved past the photograph fairly quickly. Something told me to ask her to go back to it and after asking, Krista eloquently stated the following, which reveals a great deal about social status, hierarchy, and experiencing the world as a StreetWise vendor.
David: I think this picture is really interesting, Can you tell me more about it and why you took it?

Krista: When you're working for StreetWise, you're the little guy. And, you know, people swear at you. They call you names. They, you know, they basically voice their opinion on you. They don't know you. And you know you get that every day. You get, deal, you know, to deal with people just being racist, being sexist, just, you know, being prejudiced. They just don't like you because they don't like you. Like, you know, because the world doesn't revolve around anybody. Because if you were to die tomorrow, the world would keep turning, you know. So I just think it's a humbling experience.
And plus, another reason why I took that picture, because it's kind of perspective. I'm way down here and then there's some rich people living up there somewhere, so. So, I was just, that's kind of like the whole thing when it comes to StreetWise. It kind of brings you down to size. Vendors are used to being spit at or people, you know, not giving them money. We're used to it, you know. But at the same time, if you take an ordinary person like yourself, go out there and you'd have to deal with people swearing at you and if you're not used to it, some people start fights or they'd be in jail. Or something would happen or they'd just say, oh, screw it, I don't want to do this and they'd go home, you know. So I'm just saying it's not for everybody either. So, but that's like in perspective. I guess that word, we're down here and they're up there.

Krista’s comments and photograph speak volumes about StreetWise vendors, possible sensemaking and reflections on the non-StreetWise population. The visual narrative provides perspective as to how Krista feels as a StreetWise vendor. This photograph provides powerful evidence regarding the emotional and psychological endurance that StreetWise vendors must expend on a daily basis. Social classes and hierarchies operate in significant but often hidden ways. We can imagine that if this study took place with corporate executives who work on Michigan Avenue, and they were asked to take a picture of typical day at the office, a picture taken out of the window of their 50th floor office building might occur. But it seems less likely that a business executive would make sense out of the picture out of his office window by talking about his high social status. While this example of a business executive is purely fictional, Krista reveals that
“ordinary people” are not as well equipped to deal with a situation such as vending *StreetWise*.

This interview excerpt also offers a glimpse into the complex ideologies that accompany hierarchy. Krista’s comments explicitly reference social position (i.e. being “up there” or “down here”). A key principle of any ideology is that it often remains hidden but appears to occur naturally. If, as argued by Giddens (1979), “structures of signification are mobilized to legitimate the interests of hegemonic groups” (p. 188), whose interests are best served by the socio-spatial dynamics of “upstairs” and “downstairs,” “up there” and “down here”? In some cases, vendors emphasized that they want and need the benefits that can accompany the engine of bureaucratic organizing—hierarchy—even as the director and board members worked to reinstate a hierarchy that had previously given way to chaos (and almost led to the bankruptcy of StreetWise). Yet, I also heard regret, shame, and in some cases pride, as vendors reproduced the very systems of signification (i.e., language such as “down here”) that also can work to dismiss their contribution to community life.

*Where Can This Paper Live? The Content of StreetWise*

“We should focus on the streets of Chicago, living in the streets of Chicago, and if that leads us down in some cases social paths, great. And in some cases it may lead us down to housing that’s great, in some cases that may lead us down to entertainment that’s great. But I think that’s where the paper could live.” (Ed, Interview Transcript)
Albert and Amanda talked about the paper for a while and seemed troubled that the paper has been turning into more advertisements than content. Amanda said, “Vicky is trying sell the paper how they say it should be instead of what it is.” There seems to be a prevailing attitude among the staff that StreetWise needs to be an activist medium that talks about issues of homelessness, poverty, etc. This is interesting in light of Amanda’s comments the other day about needing to do “objective” journalism. My understanding from overhearing conversations around here is that some people want to turn StreetWise into a high-end paper that caters to an upper class, educated, liberal, socially conscious people. Although Amanda seems frustrated by this, I have heard her identify this population as StreetWise’s demographic on more than one occasion. (Fieldnotes)

One question that moved towards the front of my consciousness as my fieldwork at StreetWise unfolded was that of “What does StreetWise want to be? How do vendors, staff, and board perceive the social and journalistic role of this newspaper?” The responses I heard to this question were as diverse as the people I spoke with, ranging from being an overtly activist paper that confronts issues of poverty and homelessness to being an upscale entertainment-type newspaper that covers issues from fashion to health to nightlife. Numerous individuals also argued for a combined approach to activism and commercialism. A constant theme, though, whether conscious or unconscious on the part of participants, was a belief in the vitality of the medium.

Alan, a board member, recognizes that StreetWise has a lack of resources. He also understands that StreetWise is currently lacking a person experienced with designing
content for a market such as Chicago in this type of newspaper. As a result, Alan would want to hear from other voices about how to properly design and create the content of the newspaper.

Alan: I’d like to hire someone who’s in the newspaper industry so that I can sit down and talk to them, about how to design a paper and how to fill it with content. But without the benefit of that expertise, I would like to see more articles about the city. The mayor has a ten-year initiative to end homelessness. There ought to be a clock in our newspapers; ten years and counting. It was announced when? Are we gonna be homeless-free in nine years, seven months, etc? The newspaper’s a powerful vehicle. It’s information that’s getting disseminated to the public. Two hundred years ago, the newspaper was crucial. Our history with this medium is very rich.

Many scholars have wrote about the important roles of newspapers in American society (deTocqueville, 1956; Schudson, 1978), including in a digital age (see Nord, 2001). Arguing that a move towards public journalism is occurring and supportive of democracy and community, Nord offered “civic journalism (or public journalism, as it is often called) embraces many ideas and practices but at its core is an effort to build community through the forum function of the press” (p. 10). StreetWise, then, is uniquely positioned to contribute to community formation.

During my time at StreetWise, a consultant was in the process of revamping a few editions of the paper that were to be published in late summer. These issues were to have themes (motorcycling, health and fitness in Chicago, etc.) and were to contain new
advertisers targeting upscale audiences. Ed’s, a board member, comments reflect the tension that StreetWise has experienced regarding its journalistic identity.

Ed: We’ve gone back and forth on what the paper should be. One of the interesting things to me is that one of the highest selling newspapers had an image of Osama Bin Laden or it had a captured image of Saddam Hussein. It was mind boggling to me that that would be the biggest selling edition. We are competing with the Tribune sometimes. Maybe there’s a combination of social issues we can take on as well as some social issues. But I don’t think we want to be a radical social newspaper or a radical paper for the homeless. I think that makes you less of a legitimate newspaper that hopefully people are going to buy and more of a donation to a social cause. I still think a lot of people view this as “I just donated a buck and got some value out of it and it’s really going to a social cause.” We shouldn’t try and take on the Tribune. We should focus on the streets of Chicago, living in the streets of Chicago, and if that leads us down in some cases social paths, great. And in some cases it may lead us down to housing that’s great, in some cases that may lead us down to entertainment that’s great. But I think that’s where the paper could live.

Ed’s comments illustrate the journalistic path that StreetWise has navigated during the course of its existence. Feeling the pushes and pulls of activist and commercial endeavors, Ed resists the either/or tension of activism and commercialism, opting rather for a both/and perspective that is open to exploring activist and commercial avenues as those appear before the writers and editors of StreetWise.
Resisting dualistic thinking is a hallmark characteristic of both feminism and pragmatism. Rorty (1999) argued that “pragmatists shrug off charges that we are ‘relativists’ or ‘irrationalists’ by saying these charges presuppose precisely the distinctions we reject. If we have to describe ourselves, perhaps it would be best for us to call ourselves anti-dualists” (p. xix). Likewise, Tong (1989) suggested “were we able to liberate thought from the binary opposition, we would no longer be compelled to neatly oppose thoughts, one against the other (male-female, nature-culture, speech-writing). Rather, we would find ourselves free to think new and different thoughts” (p. 222).

Searching for a middle-ground between commercialism and activism is an issue that StreetWise has negotiated throughout its history and one that it continues to deal with. By no means is this, nor should it be, a resolved issue.

As I alluded to in the introduction to this theme, not everyone agrees about the role of StreetWise as a journalistic outlet. Albert, a staff member whose job involves both writing and designing the paper, offered a different perspective about the role of StreetWise even as he recognizes that most people at StreetWise disagree with him.

David: What do you think the content of the paper should be?

Albert: What I think it should be is there should be a lot of stories about activism, homeless issues, homeless rights, or the horrible housing. I think all that stuff needs to be in the paper but I’m definitely in the minority when it comes to that. I think the division from people like Stacey and somewhat Carol and Vicky. I said it just needs to be like something for our demographic which is allegedly older people like in their 40’s that have a lot of money and they, according to the
direction now, they don’t want to read about those depressing things. They want to read about what is going on in Chicago and they want to see a lot of ads.

When pressed on the issue, Albert also adopts a more pluralistic approach to the role of the newspaper.

David: So is it one or the other?

Albert: I think it can be both. I think that if you’re going to buy this paper and you’re in your 40’s and rich, you actually might care about reading about homeless issues. So I think that should take a more prevalent place.

Albert’s comments, and others like him, embrace the democratic potential of civic journalism media as argued by Howley (2003) who said that “street newspapers are committed to ‘altering’ prevailing, social conditions and do so, in part, by publishing ‘native’ accounts of economic injustice from the local communities that they serve” (p. 274). Howley reasoned that street newspapers, by their very nature, serve “to engage reading publics in a critically informed dialogue over fundamental issues of economic, social, and political justice” (p. 274). StreetWise had undertaken discussions of limiting the amount of coverage given to homelessness in the paper, and I have presented just a sampling of the varying responses. To what extent, though, does the ebb and flow of social, political, and economic issues serve and undermine StreetWise’s position as an alternative or civic journalistic outlet? These are serious and complex issues that focus on the ultimate goals of StreetWise, the organization and the newspaper.

Vicky, identified as an outside stakeholder of StreetWise, served as a consultant to the organization over the summer months. In discussing a thematic edition of the
newspaper that was printed in August, 2005, Vicky, a longtime resident of Chicago and a marking specialist, said this about the journalistic role of *StreetWise* generally, and a more commercial edition of the paper, specifically.

David: What is it about that edition that makes it different, that makes it unique, that makes it what *StreetWise* wants to be or should be?

Vicky: Because it’s clearly targeted to the audience that buys *StreetWise*. The target audience is interested in motorcycles, nice restaurants and other things like that. Their issues are very upscale; college grads, high income, lawyers, teachers, people that have that kind of income. We’re slightly older. We are concerned about homelessness and self-empowerment and issues like that but we don’t want to read about it. We think we understand the organization enough to know that if I hand this vendor a dollar, this vendor is somehow leveraging that dollar into more business, independence and opportunity. But I don’t want to read about homelessness in the paper.

Vicky and Albert’s comments represent two positions on issues central to *StreetWise*: Where the paper can and should live, what it should look like, what issues it should address, who it speaks for, and who it speaks to. Likewise, these decisions, whatever they may be and however tentative in nature, have significant implications for a variety of stakeholders. If *StreetWise* adopts an activist approach with the content of the newspaper, they risk isolating customers who “don’t want to read about homelessness” and advertisers who don’t want to appear as having an agenda. A more commercial approach risks isolating vendors and staff who think the paper should be about
homelessness and life on the streets. Likewise, customers who expect a degree of activism from journalistic outlets such as *StreetWise* could be turned off by a commercial approach. This parallels Harter et. al’s (2004) argument that *StreetWise* “shifts attention from dualistic thinking characterized by mutually exclusive alternatives (i.e., money or mission) to a position that embraced seemingly contradictory positions – “money and mission” (p. 421). Additionally, Vicky’s notion that *StreetWise* customers want to help but simultaneously do not want to be confronted with homelessness in the newspaper runs counter to the communicative-democratic element that Howley (2003) argues makes street newspapers such a crucial part of public life.

Thus far in this theme, I have illustrated the tension that StreetWise has experienced regarding the degree of commercialism and activism. In addition to this tension, which is vital to the mission and day-to-day execution of StreetWise, another issue emerges as a central path for the organization to navigate. Discussion of issues of poverty, homelessness, housing, and the like were identified frequently as important issues by vendors. Particularly, the issue of vendor voice in the newspaper emerged as one that is central to StreetWise’s organizational identity and vendors’ identification with the newspaper. Vendors wanted to see stories about themselves, stories written by vendors (solo, or in tandem with an editor), poetry, etc. Krista touches on the content of *StreetWise* from a vendor perspective.

David: So, I get the impression that you think that, you know that articles on homelessness or low income housing, or whatever the case may be, that they need to be in there?
Krista: Yeah. One issue had a big page for Cadillac, one big page for the theater. And I was proud about it. I said good, well people are supporting us finally. It's nice to know that there's someone behind us that will, you know, thinks that we sell enough papers that they can put an ad like that in there. And so I'm happy about it. But at the same time is it going to change who we are? Everybody knows StreetWise as an activist paper. StreetWise prints what nobody else will print. We can’t be afraid our customers are too rich to care about homelessness. I mean they're not going to lose sleep over it, because they're rich. But at the same time it can happen to anybody. I mean, these kind of issues matter to everybody, no matter how much money you make. So, I'm happy to see the beauty stuff, the car stuff and everything. If they do put in there, that's fine. But I don't want to lose the content we have now.

Krista’s comments represent those of a number of vendors who feel that StreetWise should “be about the streets” and should have “homeless stuff” as its content.

The vendors seem to hold this position for multiple reasons. Some vendors see content about homelessness as a niche that can differentiate the paper from other newspapers. Frank, a vendor said, “We’re supposed to be different from the Sun Times and the Tribune. We’re not. Let’s put something about the streets in there. We’re competing with the Sun Times and Tribune. Guess what? You lose.” Other vendors see this type of content as a way to give vendors voice and participate in the creation of the newspaper. Benjamin states, “I’d like to see more vendors writing columns. That’s more personal, when vendors can be reporters. There was a vendor like that. He told stories
about his life as a vendor. And it came from his mouth.” Even still, some vendors adamantly disagree with this position and want to see *StreetWise* be more commercial. Fred argued that *StreetWise* needs to “keep writing good articles about stuff other than homelessness. That's what the paper needs more than anything.” Regardless of the positions of the various vendors, their identification with the content of the newspaper is strong. The content of the newspaper should be carefully considered in terms of multiple audiences, both internal and external to StreetWise. Other stakeholders hold more exclusionary positions about the content of the newspaper.

David: I’m getting the impression that stories about homelessness, poverty, vendor voice in particular, don’t have a place in that paper.

Vicky: Not a big place.

David: So how do you sell that to the vendors? Because the vendors see the paper partially as a place for them to talk about what’s important to them.

Vicky: Well, they have to have some voice.

No substantive answer was given for how StreetWise could adequately withdraw vendor voices from the newspaper, but still have vendors identify with the content of *StreetWise*. Vicky was part of a group of people who were looking to change the content of the paper from its current state to more upscale, themed issues. As can be seen from Vicky’s comments, vendor voice could play a more limited role in the content of *StreetWise*. Based on vendor comments throughout this theme, this decision is certainly not without significant consequences.
A few interview excerpts from people in charge of decisions about the content of
the newspaper can help to understand how StreetWise can find a happy medium between
commercialism and activism. Amanda, the editor of StreetWise, highlights her vision for
the role of “homeless issues” in the paper, as well as StreetWise’s connection to public
life in Chicago and historical aspects of the city that influence content decisions.

Amanda: Chicago has changed. It’s not as affordable as it was. If you talk to a
native Chicagoan they’re probably going to tell you that they liked it when it was
a slum and it was easy to get around. I mean like, Zach, in the current issue that’s
out today he’s talking about you know, going through these dilapidated buildings
and stuff. And everybody really did like the city when it was easy to get around.
When it was affordable. When you didn’t have to be at the top of your game to
afford an apartment. You could be an artist; you could maybe be just an average
worker. Should it be homelessness issues and stuff? Every time there’s a
homeless story if we can give it a spin, yes, we should run it. But there aren’t
homeless stories every week. I think I see it more in terms of marginalized people.

And surprisingly, marginalized people can be a lot of things.

Amanda’s role as editor of StreetWise is a critical one, as she has a significant say in what
will and will not appear in any given issue of StreetWise. Amanda’s consideration of
multiple types of oppression as appropriate topics for StreetWise is interesting in light of
postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminists have routinely positioned themselves as
concerned with intersecting forms of oppression (i.e. – racism, classism, homophobia, as
well as sexism) and, in a Frierian sense, the liberation of all persons are intertwined with
all oppressions (hooks, 1990; Peach, 1998). Approaching oppression more broadly rather than how it specifically relates to homelessness offers a potentially interesting solution for StreetWise. Instead of covering “homeless” issues, StreetWise could broaden their perspective to include other social justice issues.

Without losing focus on homeless issues, StreetWise could begin to talk about issues of women in the workplace, immigrant workers, homosexual rights and/or issues pertaining to any other group that might not have a forum for their particular issues in other media. Again, editorial decisions are significant ones for StreetWise, particularly because they deal with issues that are generally outside of mainstream journalism. Travis, a board member, speaks about the consequences of editorial decisions regarding the content of the newspaper.

Travis: Should, could, would it be a good thing if StreetWise somehow used the papers as a particular kind of agenda or voice for certain kind of things? That gets us into an arena that we would really have trouble managing: the whole political contact, the whole issue between content and advertising. Advertisers will take issue if you start going left wing, they’re not gonna be comfortable, if you start going right wing they’re not gonna be comfortable. Then it gets into a whole kind of decision process of editorial stuff. I don’t, we don’t have the wits to be able to manage. If you had a big staff, if we had that staff at 25 doing all kinds of different things, maybe we’d be able to think about what kind of a voice do we want to have or what kind of a social impact do we want to have as a paper. We struggle with can we just get content that might interest somebody to read?
Content related issues are significant decisions for StreetWise with important implications in a number of areas, particularly in relation to the fiscal viability of the organization and the economic self-sufficiency of vendors.

*The Brink of Existence and Nonexistence: StreetWise and Success*

Krista talked about something else that has come up a few times (in various forms). She has a cell phone. She talked about how she has to try not to use it when she’s selling papers because people see that as a luxury. She explained how she has a child and her mom watches him during the day—sometimes she needs to check in or needs to be found. Plus, she’s not homeless. These vendors are supposed to be moving towards self-sufficiency but it seems to me if they show signs of overcoming poverty (nicer shirt, cell phone, etc), they are looked down upon as having “luxury items” or that they are wasting their money. *(Fieldnotes)*

Ephemeral concepts such as “success,” “efficiency,” and “progress” are decidedly modernist in their orientation and guide many organizations’ overall missions and behaviors. StreetWise interacts with people who are at an extreme end of the socio-economic continuum. StreetWise’s mission statement sounds distinctly different than would the mission statement of a for-profit newspaper, no doubt in part because of the marginalized population it works with. It reads:

StreetWise was founded to meet a vitally important area of need among the homeless of Chicago. Through our operation of a street newspaper, we seek to empower men and women who are homeless, or at risk of becoming so, as they
work toward gainful employment. We strive to help the homeless of Chicago help themselves through opportunities to earn a living and gain valuable job skills. StreetWise’s mission mentions concepts such as employment, empowerment and opportunities which are vastly different than those concepts that would appear in a for-profit corporate mission statement. This begs the question: What is “success” for StreetWise? Success at StreetWise is necessarily fluid and contextual.

Stacey, the Executive Director, talks about how StreetWise must have a multifaceted perspective on what constitutes success.

Stacey: There are some people that this is the top for them. And that’s fine. But I don’t think it’s the 99 percent. I know it’s not 99 percent. So for those people we are faking it, we insulate them, we help them. But I think we can still do a better job with those who this is their best. I don’t believe in trial and error with human beings. I don’t believe in that. The vendors need this right now. Some of the vendors are right on the brink of existence and nonexistence. And so, this organization means so much to them. However, the converse side of that is, because we have been an enabling type of organization rather than a promoting type of organization, when you enable somebody for a while, the mentality changes that you owe them. That this is my right, to be enabled. So we have an honest entitlement mentality among the vendors.

Many board members and staff spoke to the issue of success in this way. What if StreetWise is the best job that a given person can accomplish? Most people said there needs to be space for people for whom StreetWise will be the best job they will ever
have. Recognizing this, Stacey argues that StreetWise has enabled people to continue unhealthy habits in the past and that the organization can help all vendors succeed in new ways.

For other vendors, success might mean leaving the organization and moving onto better-paying jobs, and for others success might mean selling 50 more papers a week. Stacey remains reflexive about how to best meet the diverse needs of vendors and the original goals of StreetWise.

Stacey: What were we created for? What was our purpose and function in the very beginning? That purpose was to empower men and women to self-sufficiency. So when I look at the word empower, when I look at self-sufficiency, selling 30 papers isn’t going to help you be self-sufficient. When I look at to empower somebody, somebody has to want to be empowered. You have to have a goal. You have to want to move somewhere. Right now, StreetWise is pilfered almost, as a right, not a privilege, or an opportunity. Privilege is too strong of a word, as an opportunity. All of our members aren’t trying to get toward self-sufficiency. In many cases, we’re enabling vendors to stay addicted, to not deal with systemic issues that are creating poverty. We’re supposed to be an advocate for them. We’re supposed to be a place where they can safely come and say, “You know what? I’m addicted to cocaine, I don’t know what to do, but I want to change.” We should be able to help them develop a plan. When you get to this point here, you can represent us and sell StreetWise for a few months. We’ll help get you some skills and find you a job. StreetWise should put itself out of business. We
shouldn’t be here forever. The thing that hurts me the most when someone says, “I’ve been a vendor for 13 years.”

Achieving success at StreetWise, in terms of vendors and their income, puts the organization in a difficult predicament. Precisely because anyone can come in off of the street, sit through a training session and go out and represent the organization (which was touted as a strength of the organization), vending can contribute to subsequent problems (e.g., people are able to use the financial opportunities offered by StreetWise to perpetuate substance abuse). These problems, in turn, can foster systemic dilemmas because StreetWise is represented in public by their vendors. It is in the organization’s best interest to make sure that the majority of vendors are good stewards of the business.

Many vendors use StreetWise for its intended purpose, as a temporary opportunity for income to get through a rough time. Most staff and board members identify StreetWise as originally intended to be a temporary financial fix, but simultaneously acknowledge that some people will work for StreetWise for a longer period of time. Sarah, who has been a vendor for two years, frames StreetWise as a “stepping stone” that is helping her move onto more gainful employment.

Sarah: StreetWise has been a great stepping stone. It has given me an advantage to know that I am able to do something that I enjoy doing, and that’s selling the newspapers, meeting people. People give me input on where I can get employment. I feel that I’m able to go further to accomplishing things because I’m not bound by anything anymore.

Frank, another vendor who has only been so for a few years commented:
David: What do you see the role of StreetWise for you? Is it a long-term thing, is it a short-term thing?

Frank: I see it as a short-term, ‘cause as soon as I get enough money together, what I want to do is get my own business going again. I’ve already started some plans on that. I’ve seen about getting my corporation papers back in order. I bought some supplies for my woodworking shop already, and that’s all in storage. Yeah, I’m just waiting to get enough capital and that, and maybe probably an investor. I already found one investor, but probably a couple more investors, and get it going again.

David: What can StreetWise do to help you get where you want to get?

Frank: Well, that’s easy. They’re giving me an opportunity to where I can make money so I can get the money together. Plus the people that I’ve met on the streets selling the paper and that are interested in some of my products.

Sarah also revealed in her interview with me that she had an interview the following week for employment in a cafeteria. Unable to follow up with how the interview went, it is clear that she feels that StreetWise is helping her find other employment with more stable income and benefits such as insurance. Frank is using the money he makes from StreetWise to pay rent at an SRO, buy food, and save money to get his personal business back in order. Mark, staff member and former vendor, talks about the small types of successes that StreetWise should focus on in order to create and maintain a high quality vendor force.
Mark: One other thing is you have to raise their self-esteem. For a lot of them, their self-esteem drags, especially when they first walk through the door. That’s one of the most gratifying feelings that I have is to see somebody come in off the street and their self-esteem is dragging, and then give ‘em a resource like StreetWise, to be able to generate some funds, and in two weeks or a week later, see ‘em with a little bounce in their step, feeling’ good about themselves. That’s the first step, helping their self-esteem. Get it back. Because I’ve seen a lot of people come to StreetWise about ready to just give up. Yeah, they made wrong choices. They continue to have made those wrong choices, and decisions. But no one gave ‘em a chance either. So that doesn’t help the self-esteem. So they feel they’re digging a deeper hole. But when they come to StreetWise and they see that, “Hey, it’s on me now. I can make as much money as I want.” And it’s not really always about the money, sometimes it’s the inner peace that’s in oneselfs. ‘Cause after you get through trying to fool him and get over on them and con them, you can’t bullshit yourself. And a lot of us try real hard, but we never succeed. We know if we accomplish what we set out to do, we wanted to do. We really actually accomplish that. And we know if we didn’t. But when you do start accomplishing things that you set out to do, you begin to feel good about yourself, and that’s that inner peace.

Communication scholars (Deetz, 1992) and non-communication scholars and writers (Arendt, 1958; Ciulla, 2000; Fletcher, 1999; Terkel, 1972) alike have argued that work is central to the identity construction of Americans. Participating in meaningful, rewarding
work is just as important to StreetWise vendors. Building self-confidence and self-esteem is a first step in the process of creating meaning around work.

Another intriguing issue surrounding success and StreetWise vendors are material signs or indicators of success. One of the previously noted strengths of StreetWise is that vendors are responsible for their success and failures. If they consistently come in to buy papers, they can build up a spot and make a decent amount of money every week. Some vendors purchase 200+ papers per week. Assuming they sell all of their papers, including tips, a vendor can make a few hundred dollars a week. This obviously allows vendors to purchase not only shelter and food, but other items such as clothes, accessories, and entertainment. Vendor’s successes selling the newspaper puts them in a double-bind.

Rodney, a staff member who distributes papers to vendors who come in to purchase them notes:

Rodney: Yeah, some customers are offended by those types of things. But once again, you know, and having more direct contact with the vendors and talking to a lot of them, Joe Q. Public has a tendency to not want to buy from them if they see signs of success. Which is kind of different, you know? If the vendor's out there dressed in a nice outfit, not necessarily a suit and tie, but, you know, a clean pair of pants, a shirt, he's clean-shaven, you know, smells good. If he's got some nice tennis shoes or shoes or leather shoes on or and a watch and a phone or they see him with a car, they go ballistic. You know, so it's a two-edged sword.
Many vendors noted this type of double bind. From not using cell phones in public, to wearing certain clothes and not others, and to not displaying money, vendors reported many behaviors that they need to alter to hide their successes from public view.

These changes are not limited to simply material goods. Vendors must be conscious of how they talk about their non-work life and their living situation or they can experience backlash from the purchasing public. Consider the following exchanges with two vendors. The first interview excerpt touches on how a vendor explains that they are not “homeless.”

David: May I ask you a question about this photo? One thing that I’ve learned in talking to a lot of others, is that you obviously from this picture, you just told me you have an apartment. Some vendors are homeless. Right? They live out on the streets. You don’t live out on the streets; you have a place to live. But one thing that some vendors talked about is that vendors think that everybody in the public thinks that all StreetWise vendors are homeless. Have you thought about that?

Valerie: I’m not homeless, though. I’m poor, so I live off this income. I’m on disability. So, that’s why I decided to do StreetWise; extra money in my pocket. And I can be able to save. Save some money.

David: Another thing that some vendors have said is that when they’re out on the street, when they’re selling the paper, people might say, “I’m not giving money to you homeless people,” or whatever. Have you had people like said things about being homeless to you when you’re out on the street selling the paper, even though you’re not homeless?
Valerie: I had one customer ask me, “Well, where do you sleep at?” I said, “At home.”

David: And what did they say?
Valerie: He just kept and after that, he just kept going.

David: He just waved his hand at you and left.
Valerie: And just left, yeah. Say, “She ain’t homeless, ya’ll just selling StreetWise.”

Another vendor talks about the consequences he experienced when he told some customers about what he did with a portion of the money he made from StreetWise. Reflecting on a picture of a business where Fred used to work, he reflects on his future plans as well as what happens when those plans are divulged to customers.

David: Is that something you would want to do is work there again?
Fred: No, I plan on being a comedian. I'm not trying to work anywhere else other than on stage. I want to win open mic competitions against other comedians. I want to take a class. I want to either become a host at a club, or have my own TV series, or do stuff like the people coming to shows and see one-night stand type action…stuff like that. Or the hosting thing. The way I plan to do that is the money I get from StreetWise…I'm going to take a comedy course class at Zany's. I took the beginner's course, but they have an intermediate course which is $300. I tried to sell StreetWise to get it, but once people found out what I was actually doing with the money, I lost a lot of customers.

David: Really?
Fred: Yeah. As long as I was just a little homeless guy, they had their little condescending dollar then, you know, it was okay. But once they found out that I got ambition or potential, they wanted no part of it.

David: So you would openly tell your customers what you want to achieve, what you want to do with the money that you're earning. And then you saw sales drop off, customers would leave?

Fred: Yeah. People, the same people who used to buy papers from me on a regular basis would just walk by and smile at me now and say hi. You know? Then I see these people like once a week, and like clockwork they would always help me out, they would always get a paper. Now that they know that I'm trying to do something; I'm not trying to buy drugs, or I'm not homeless as they say, I lost a lot of customers when they found out I had a cell phone. I lost a lot of customers when they found out I had a car, too.

David: Did any of this change how you sold the paper? Did you stop telling people what you want to accomplish?

Fred: No. My sales pitch was always not to say anything. Because there were so many vendors in that area, you know? I felt as though as you see me standing there with this paper in this bad zone, you already know why I'm here. So there's no need for me to, you know, say StreetWise or anything like that so I didn't say anything other than hello, good morning, and have a good day, stuff like that. You know. Let you make your own decision. So I didn't change. I just stood there and watched them walk by and smile.
Goffmann (1959) argued that actors perform roles in everyday life and that “frontstage” behaviors operate in a general and fixed fashion. Prescribed societal scripts exist for what a “homeless person” should look and act like. Financial success is not an element of that script, even to a small degree. Thus, items such as cellular phones, nice shoes and name brand clothes disrupt people’s expected scripts of what “homeless” is. Vendors are then caught in a double-bind where if they succeed to any degree, further successes are potentially limited and if they do not succeed, they fit the “homeless” script but remain susceptible to all of the known and recognized problems of being without a home. These scripts are not limited to only material goods, as shown by Fred’s narrative. Telling a customer that he was using part of his income to take a comedy class soured his relationship with that customer. Why, after all, should someone who is homeless be taking a comedy class? Mark, vendor manager, stated in his interview, “What, do they expect us to stay homeless?” Resisting scripts of homelessness can enable and constrain vendors. By selling the newspaper (i.e. – getting employment), vendors resist scripts related to panhandling but in succeeding at selling the newspaper, vendors violate homeless scripts which in turn affect their abilities to overcome homelessness or maintain their current financial situation.

Knowing that success is, by necessity, multi-faceted and occasionally double-binding, one final question regarding success at StreetWise is begged. What can the organization do in order to achieve their conceptions of success? Bradley, the director of an advocacy organization comments that getting vendors from StreetWise to jobs that have livable wages is essential.
Bradley: It’s harder to figure out ways to help people get better jobs. How do you move people out of StreetWise, what’s the next step after StreetWise? How do they become $10 an hour, $15, $20 an hour? So they can get their own apartment, maybe a car. That’s harder. It’s harder on our society to combat that. So, we have organizers that work shelters. They work in women’s shelters and men’s shelters. We have policy people that look at different ways other cities do things, other states, different analysis of the city budget, state budget or federal budget to help us figure out strategies to go after.

Success is positioned as achieving more than what StreetWise can offer though certainly Bradley is not dismissing the role that StreetWise needs to play in moving vendors towards better paying jobs. Recognizing the difficulty that such upwardly mobile socio-economic movement takes, StreetWise is left to combat difficult circumstances. They are simultaneously faced with task deemed “difficult” by a leading Chicago expert in homelessness and doing so with limited resources.

Stacey, the Executive Director, notes that discomfort needs to be a part of the vendor experience.

Stacey: On one hand, if the vendors are happy, I don’t know if they’re necessarily moving toward self-sufficiency. The experience of vending needs to be pleasant, it needs to be professional and it needs to be moving. You know, anything stagnant gets stale. Well, my concern is not necessarily whether the vendors are happy, because this is a shop of tough love. This is not a good place to be if you’re a StreetWise vendor. So the last thing you need is for somebody to sit and
have a pity party with you. That’s not going to help you. It may be a sad situation, well, what are we going to do about it? What’s the solution? I don’t think we’re doing anybody a favor not telling the truth. Whatever the truth now, if the truth is blurry, well then there’s nothing to say it. But you’re using destructive habits, what do you think is going to happen?

Stacey’s comments reflect the ongoing struggle that the board and staff of StreetWise must face with their vendor force. Vendors do occasionally come in under the influence of alcohol or drugs. New vendors show up every week and StreetWise, due to the setup of their organization, is largely unconcerned with past indiscretions and does not question problems that the vendors might be currently experiencing (living on the street, drug or alcohol problems, family issues, etc.). Stacey argues that StreetWise might need to do more to make the vendors “unhappy” or “uncomfortable” in the sense that StreetWise needs to be a partner in addressing the issues that vendors might face. The organization needs to give vendors opportunities to state what problems they are facing and then, together with the organization, the vendor can gain access to resources and people who can solve those systemic issues.

So what concrete benefits can StreetWise offer in order to help vendors move towards self-sufficiency at a rate acceptable to all involved parties? Ed, a board member, notes that some of the benefits that StreetWise has offered in the past have been temporarily discontinued. However, those educational opportunities and networking with other organizations is a key going forward for the organization to move vendors toward self-sufficiency. Ed comments:
Ed: The work empowerment center has fallen off. I think we should revisit that. Revisit opportunities to get vendors to trade up. That’s what I think we should do. I do not think we should be in the housing business. I do not think we should be in the SRO business. It’s interesting like any business if you have a good core value, a good core product stick to that product. I think we should stick to our product, produce a good paper, help those less fortunate, have an opportunity to move beyond their current means and then maybe give them up supply them with job possibilities.

Likewise, Frank, a vendor who has firsthand experience with the difficulties of trying to get one’s life back in order while dealing with homelessness. Frank comments:

Frank: Another thing we should spend some of our time on is educating these people. These people are out here making a hundred and fifty dollars, two hundred dollars on a Friday night. Then comes Monday, “Hey man, you got a couple dollars so I can buy papers?” What did they do with the money? Have a bunch of counselors. Have somebody to train them how to save money, how to work with money. You talk to these men, “Oh, I’ve been a StreetWise vendor for ten or twelve years.” I would be ashamed to say something like that. Where’s all the money? What are they doing with it? This is where StreetWise should come in and educate people, and work with the homeless. Set up different things. Set up bank accounts for them. People want credit cards, and it’s real easy to get a credit card. They don’t have the faintest idea of how to do it. Half the people can’t read.
Frank offers some concrete solutions for what StreetWise can do to help vendors succeed. Offering services such as financial counselors, literacy classes, setting up banking accounts, job finding services, housing references are all benefits that StreetWise can offer to help vendors move toward self-sufficiency and independence.

In the summer of 2005, StreetWise did not have the financial or staffing resources to offer these types of services, but many vendors and board members see them central to “putting ourselves (StreetWise) out of business” as the Executive Director mentioned earlier. As another board member, Travis commented:

The next step for StreetWise is getting it to be a really useful referral place for the vendors. Refer them to housing, refer them to jobs that will take these kinds of vendors, refer them to social services that they need. That requires a full-time staff member that evaluates the needs of the vendors through some interview process. Getting the other side of the equation that staff member to interface with agencies to create the referral network that is needed.

Lastly, Vincent comments on the difficulties of succeeding and the dismissal that he experiences from some individuals as he does his work.

David: What, in your own words, is the mission of StreetWise? Why does this organization exist?

Vincent: Well, the mission is basically to have a person become self sufficient. Ain’t nobody giving us nothing. We gotta get up out of our bed every day and buy these papers and go out there in the climate, when it’s a hundred degrees like the other day or whether it’s thirty below zero and sell these papers. Not only do we
have to buy these papers and sell ‘em, we have to go out there and get a location. Which ain’t easy to do. ‘Cause most people don’t want you standing out in front of they store or wherever you going, making no money and they ain’t getting no cut from it. We have to use our people skills to get accepted at them stores. So we got to go through a lot to sell this paper. So it ain’t no handout. So you know, when people try to look down on us, I mean they ought to respect us for taking initiative wanting to do something, you know?

Despite organizational limitations, individual problems, and systemic issues that cause homelessness, the fact remains that many vendors are doing the best they can to move through StreetWise to better paying, more stable jobs. Vincent’s comments highlight the difficulties scenes, times, and conditions that vendors must traverse in order to have a marginal chance at moving on from StreetWise. Vendors must get up early like everyone else, work outside in the cold and heat, find a decent location that is willing to have them work in front of their store and deal with people looking down at their efforts. Success is difficult for StreetWise vendors but by opening up space for different conceptions of success, the work of StreetWise and its vendors becomes more achievable.
Chapter Five
Discussion

About a century ago, William James wrote:

*In God’s eyes the differences of social position, of intellect, of culture, of cleanliness, of dress, which different men [sic] exhibit, and all the other rarities and exceptions on which they so fantastically pin their pride must be so small as practically quite to vanish; and all that should remain is the common fact that here we are, a countless multitude of vessels of life, each of us pent in to peculiar difficulties, with which we must severally struggle by using whatever fortitude and goodness we can summon up. The exercise of courage, patience, and kindness must be the significant portion of the whole business; and the distinctions of position can only be a manner of diversifying the phenomenal surface upon which these underground virtues may manifest their effects. At this rate, the deepest human life is everywhere, is eternal.* (1977, p. 650)

William James’ powerful words implore us on a basic level to rethink the differences that sometimes divide and marginalize: why wealth is valued at the expense of poverty, why uncontested space is appreciated more than fissures, why domiciled individuals are more important to society than people without homes. Differences do matter. However, James argued that when all is said and done, exercising care and love towards others, through our words and actions are what matters. While clichéd, James argument serves as a necessary reminder; each person’s contribution to the world is valuable.
In many ways, doing this dissertation, talking about it, arguing for its value and the value of the organization is, at a basic level, the vision that James advanced. Selling StreetWise is a contribution to the world. It might or might not be as valued by society as a whole as teaching college classes, or laying bricks, or trading stocks. But to a feminist pragmatist such as myself, “value” is a negligible distinction. In a way, it does not matter what StreetWise vendors contribute, it matters that they contribute. And they do. I believe they do. I believe the evidence presented here demonstrates that StreetWise vendors matter.

I began this dissertation by addressing and questioning the American Dream. I argued that the American Dream is metonymized, in part, to home ownership. I still believe this to be true. One look no further than the multitude of vendor comments that considered the American Dream just as most Americans do: the house, white picket fence, and a car in the garage. For many vendors, the American Dream remains just that—a dream, something lost in thoughts and imagery of the mind, yet something continuously worked towards. I think the reality is most vendors know the popular collective image of the American Dream is one they will never achieve. But that does not prevent StreetWise vendors from working towards the Dream and living their lives as best they can. While the house with the picket fence might exist only as an unattainable ambition, I think that the majority of StreetWise vendors do the best they can from day to day to maintain their being in a manner respectful of the community in which they exist. The themes offered in this dissertation tell a story of people I found to be genuinely good people who struggle on a daily basis in the face of obstacles I can still only imagine. The
themes offered here contained their success and failures, the beauty and the unsightly, and their struggles and triumphs.

My dissertation journey emerged from a desire to foster deeper discussions, scholarly and otherwise, about how communication intertwines with material, physiological, and institutional forces to shape how people experience poverty and homelessness. In particular, I sought to understand how StreetWise mobilizes various resources for vendors even as they seek to engage the broader public as citizens, enhance civic discourse, and foster a full and free interplay of ideas in the public sphere. Feminist and pragmatist theories offered me a useful lens through which to consider StreetWise and its stakeholders. Pragmatism made me aware of and sensitive toward issues of participation, integrative thinking, and civic life. Meanwhile, a feminist lens helped to gain a better understanding of power/resistance and social change. Combining these theoretical perspectives helped reveal layers of meaning from the discourses of StreetWise. Collectively, the insights gained from observing StreetWise from a standpoint informed by feminist and pragmatist work contributes new knowledge to the body of work in communication surrounding democratic values and organizing, social capital, space, corporeality, and feminist communicology.

Theoretical Implications

In order to explain the significance of my interpretation of the collected data, I will first proceed with a discussion of the theoretical implications of my findings. Considering the research questions individually, I will highlight themes, issues and concepts that are pertinent to each.
Research Question One

The first research question asked: How is democracy understood and enacted in the context of StreetWise? Synthesizing the insights of four themes can help to answer this question: “Flipping the Script:” Crafting a “Real Job,” Upstairs/Downstairs & Maintaining Public Spaces, “Read the Paper. Take the Paper.:” Small Acts of Participation, and “Where can this Paper Live? The Content of StreetWise.”

Democracy is enacted and limited in multiple ways at and around StreetWise. Both inside and outside of the organization, democracy takes on multiple forms and in some cases, does not happen. My first research question was guided by a fundamental desire to explore democracy and organizing from a boundary-spanning perspective, as called for by many communication scholars (see Cheney, 2001; Cheney et al., 1998, Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Harter & Krone, 2001). In fact, Cheney et al. argued, “the degree to which each of us is embedded in overlapping and, at times, competing activities and relationships suggests the importance of looking simultaneously inside and outside the organization” (p. 41). As I initially argued, StreetWise represents a salient context in which to understand the boundary-spanning nature of participation in community and institutional life.

To begin, the importance of the organizational-environmental interface for vendors’ participation in public life is revealed in attempts by the organization to “flip the scripts” that guide commercial and social relationships between vendors and the broader public. During my time in the field, StreetWise put forth an alternative narrative of vending, one that resisted the reduction of vending to panhandling while emphasizing its
legitimacy as real work. The very demand for a counter-narrative demonstrates an astute awareness on the part of staff that providing opportunities for people to vend does not guarantee that they will be able to fully participate in community life. Participation, thus, cannot be understood in isolation from broader environmental forces (e.g., dominant scripts of what counts as a job).

It is within the complex interplay of organizational forces (e.g., rules of engagement for vendors) and environmental forces (e.g., perceptions of panhandling) that empowerment and participation emerges. The very nature of their labor demands that vendors cross the boundaries of StreetWise, and in doing so they attempt to craft viable employment in conjunction with others including police officers, store owners, other vendors, and most importantly, customers—each of whom shape the extent to which vendors can economically, socially, and politically participate in community life. In sum, in order to understand how democracy is enacted (or not) at StreetWise, I had to look beyond the organization to explore the inter-relatedness of internal and external affairs. In doing so, I was able to witness (and extend) a glimpse of the reflexive relationships between intersecting and overlapping communities that strive to support democratic living and organizing.

In terms of the content of the newspaper, StreetWise also works to function democratically by covering segments of society that rarely appear in mainstream news publications. StreetWise, like other newspapers, is a narrator of public life, shaping the collective memory of a community (see Dewey, 1927). Recall the editor of the newspaper claiming that she, in part, saw StreetWise as a voice for those who might not
have it. StreetWise holds promise for community-building by virtue of its potential to make social issues and experiences more transparent. Additionally, StreetWise uses the newspaper to tell the story of its vendors through printing their poetry, occasional musings and through the “vendor voice” column. StreetWise, as an alternative news source, helps to encourage multivocality, particularly including those people who often go unheard and unrecognized in public discussions. Yet, StreetWise must work to “flip the scripts” that guide some customers’ behaviors, customers who choose, for instance, to not take the paper and instead offer a monetary donation to the vendor. When customers do not take or read the paper (i.e., small acts of participation), they inadvertently diminish the democratic potential of StreetWise. Meanwhile, StreetWise must manage tensions between what was described as an “activist” versus “commercial” agenda (i.e., one that won’t turn off advertisers). These relational and economic forces shape what StreetWise accomplishes through its newspaper.

StreetWise, as an organization unto itself and to the extent to which it is present in broader public life, is ripe for democratic participation. As I argued earlier, small acts of participation make a significant difference in daily organizational and democratic life. From considering the voices of those who might be overlooked to simply saying “hello” to a vendor to taking the newspaper and reading about the issues therein, the little, seemingly insignificant behaviors we mindlessly accomplish on an everyday basis in actuality are very powerful mechanisms to participate democratically in daily life. Crossing the street to avoid a StreetWise vendor (or Girl Scouts) reinforces notions, both publicly and privately, that it is acceptable to ignore undesirable people from the public
sphere, that they have nothing to contribute and that they are not worthy of our concern and care. Small acts of participation can continue to be important acts in gradually deteriorating the powerful grip of homelessness. When dealing with such a pervasive and debilitating problem, indeed small individual acts of participation may be the most significant means by which homelessness can be ameliorated. The problem of homelessness is too great for any one individual to solve in a wave of her or his hand. However, through reconsidering daily interactions and behaviors, a summation of seemingly diminutive actions can add up to real solutions for the problem of homelessness. At the least, minor behavior changes can help us live better in relation to all people as well as more democratically.

Of course, my findings pointed to forces that work to deter the democratic impulse and ethos of StreetWise. Pervasive notions of hierarchy are embodied in both social and spatial divisions within the organization and outside of its physical walls. The notions of “upstairs/downstairs” as well as differences identified among vendors and panhandlers are anti-democratic to the extent that hierarchies stifle the participatory process. Of course, unequal power dynamics operate in any organization, including those guided by a participatory spirit (see Ashcraft, 2000, 2001; Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2003; Glaser, 1996; Harter, 2004). Of particular note is how traditional power relations at StreetWise are largely emergent and established through the interaction of participants. That is, a formal hierarchy was not initially imposed from above. Remember that on the organizational chart of StreetWise, vendors are placed at the top of the structure. Even so, and in sharp contrast to the formal organizational chart, the symbolic and material
delineations of hierarchy noticeable at StreetWise reinforce stereotypical notions of “board/staff” and “vendor,” of those with power and those without and of those who make decisions and those who adhere to those decisions. Barnett and Low (2004) argue that “democracy needs to be understood in relational terms, as a means through which autonomous actors engage with, act for, influence, and remain accountable to other actors, a process carried on through institutional arrangements that embed particular norms of conduct” (p. 7). Space matters to relational, participatory democracy. In the case of StreetWise, physical separation among staff and vendors both reflects and reifies distance between those who make decisions and the intended beneficiaries of such decisions.

Importantly, the present findings from StreetWise expose a critical ontological flaw in the corpus of organizational communication research and theory surrounding democracy and organizing. Organizational communication scholars have taken, to this point, a rather privileged and elitist approach to organizational democracy. The entirety of organizational communication scholarship, as it relates to democratic values and organizing, assumes that persons are ready to address higher order needs such as voice and participation (Cheney, 1995, 2000, 2001; Cheney et. al, 1997. Cheney et. al, 1998; Deetz 1992). As shared by Travis, a Board Member, during one of my initial visits to StreetWise, “these vendors don’t generally care about democratically participating in StreetWise. They are worried about where they are going to sleep and what they are going to eat.” Communication scholars need to rethink democracy and organizing
literature as it presupposes a high degree of socio-economic privilege among organizational members.

Insofar as our literature tacitly assumes that people are ready and willing to participate in organizational life, it needs to be called into question. Democracy assumes representation of all voices; yet, communication scholars continue to talk about organizational democracy with little recognition of how socio-economic conditions (including poverty and homelessness) shape if and how people perform a democratic subjectivity. As I was writing this discussion chapter, I acquired the most recent issue of *Management Communication Quarterly*. In the lead article, Cheney and Cloud (2006) leveled harsh criticisms against organizational communication scholars for engaging in “discursive indulgence” (p. 505) when theorizing about democracy, and simultaneously issued a call for engaging the material world when doing democracy research. My dissertation speaks directly back to this call, issues that I unpack further in response to the next research question.

*Research Question Two*

The second research questions considered: How, if at all, is the enactment of democratic values in the context of StreetWise influenced by social, material, and corporeal forces? Three themes speak particularly to this research question: *The Cadillac and the Cold: Corporeality and Materiality, Upstairs/Downstairs & Maintaining Public Spaces* and *The Brink of Existence and Nonexistence: StreetWise and Success*. Social, material, and corporeal forces proved to be extremely important in the enactment of democracy in and around StreetWise.
First, as was mentioned regarding RQ1, the body affects participation. The body influences connection. In many ways, analyses of many communicative issues should include considerations of the body as its status influences everything else (see calls by McKerrow, 1998; Selzer & Crowley, 1999). While work on corporeal rhetoric has grown in recent years, the body needs to be recognized not only as something subject to analysis and criticism, but as an active element that continuously affects participation, relationships, forays into space, democracy and more. Participation and democracy are influenced by corporeal forces in that on a very basic level, people and their bodies must be taken care of if participation, democracy, and relationships are desired. People cannot be expected to function as self-actualized members of a community if basic needs of shelter, nourishment, and health are not addressed.

Social forces act upon vendors on two levels. Most broadly issues of space need to be of concern to vendors and the organization. I have already argued for a reconsideration of space within the organization. Space, as a social and material force, does not solely function as a background against which homelessness and StreetWise operates. Rather, space continually (re)produces the public sphere as a place where homelessness and StreetWise is and is not acceptable to varying degrees. StreetWise, to a much higher degree than other organizations, needs to be conscious of how their vendors affect and alter public space. By crowding downtown with a large number of vendors, StreetWise puts itself at risk. Likewise, by spreading out to suburbs, StreetWise risks a backlash by unwelcoming communities. These considerations should not stop StreetWise, or other organizations like them, from operating in public space. The
organization should not fear placing its vendors out in public. StreetWise does, however, need to be conscious of the ways in which they use, occupy, and interact in public space.

On a more individual level, material discourses act up on vendors to place them in a double-bind of success and homelessness. As was argued in Chapter 4 in the “Success” theme, vendors become caught in a double-bind of success when they work for StreetWise. When working for StreetWise, vendors are stigmatized as “homeless.” As a result the successes they have as vendors are held against them in the public eye. A vendor who succeeds enough to buy nicer clothes, a cellular phone, or a bag to carry their papers begins to look unlike a homeless person “should” look. Thus, they are punished through decreased sales and deteriorated relationships. This double-bind presents an opportunity for education and growth. The existence of this double-bind presents an opportunity to inform people about the mission of StreetWise and the roles that vendors must navigate as they attempt to move towards even better employment.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked: How, if at all, does StreetWise, both the organization and the newspaper, foster and/or inhibit democracy in the greater Chicago area? Two themes in particular spoke to answering this research question: “Like Fish Need Water:” Human Connections and Upstairs/Downstairs & Maintaining Public Spaces. Streetwise works to foster democracy through the bridging and bonding of diverse communities, the creation of social capital, and through granting access to participation in public space.
First, one of the most important findings of this project was that StreetWise, without question, creates opportunities for vendors to form connections with people who would likely be considered very different. Vendor after vendor talked about how doing their job brought them into contact with many different people. Customers and non-customers alike were some of vendors’ favorite aspects of their job. All but one vendor taking pictures of at least one customer serves as evidence of this. Through StreetWise’s ontology of work, communities and populations are bridged and bonded. Working at StreetWise allows vendors to participate in their daily sales, but also grants them space to participate in community policing meetings, public forums and with local businesses. StreetWise builds these relationships through the nature of the business they do. The work of StreetWise creates social capital. By creating networks of trust and reciprocity, StreetWise fosters democracy in Chicago. If we think about democracy as the combination of participation as well as voice, StreetWise as an organization and newspaper creates democracy in both of these realms.

Additionally, StreetWise fosters democracy by enabling vendors to participate in public space. Often we take for granted our daily opportunities to converse in a restaurant, speak on a street corner, and occupy public time and space. StreetWise gives vendors, who as part of the lowest element of the socio-economic system, are often shut out from these aspects of public life. Many cites across the United States have enacted laws whose sole purpose is to hide away the homeless and make it difficult for them to function in their daily lives. StreetWise enables vendors to participate in public time and space. Many vendors proudly exclaim that they helped “clean up that corner” or that they
are the “eyes and ears of the neighborhood.” Vendors and staff commented that helping vendors getting their pride and self-esteem back was a key aspect of socializing vendors at StreetWise. Just as helping vendors establish a regular income is important, so too is the opportunity for them to participate in community life. My results point to the various ways that such participation helps increase vendors’ self-confidence.

Interestingly, StreetWise’s potential to foster democratic life through its newspaper vehicle is shaped in part by the organization’s material circumstances. Just as vendors might not prioritize democratic participation at StreetWise in favor of meeting lower order needs, so too Streetwise (at least during the summer, 2005) found itself in crisis management mode fighting for its very survival. Although our interviews prompted discussions between myself and staff and board members about the purpose and vision of the paper as an agent of democracy, much of the day-to-day talk and action was focused on survival—being able to keep the doors open for one more day, one more month. The organization was barely surviving in a fiscal sense. There were no resources available to funnel into editorial agenda-setting or strategic planning, helping enhance the literacy of vendors, or meeting other needs of vendors that could help the organization (and the paper) to thrive.

Research Question Four

The fourth and final research question posed: What challenges do StreetWise stakeholders face as they organize and implement resources for people without homes or those who are at risk? Three themes can help to answer this question: “Strength from the Pain:” (Re)narrating Histories, “Flipping the Script:” Crafting a “Real Job” and
Hierarchy of the Streets: “Cupshakers,” “One-Paper Bandits,” and Vendors. My analysis in Chapter Four revealed how vendors experience a multitude of daily challenges and hardships. This section will focus on three specific issues pertaining to problems and challenges that vendors face on an ongoing basis.

First, discourses of what is and is not a “real job” have significant impacts on vendors’ work lives. At the most basic level, working for StreetWise is a step back into the working world for vendors. For others, it is the last step before falling into a state of homelessness. Employment at StreetWise is employment. It is the exchange of a product and service for money. However, the hegemonic and discursive construction of a “real job” work to delegitimize and demean the significant effort it takes for vendors to engage in work that is a first step back or a last step before extreme poverty. Clair (1996) argued how the colloquialism “a real job” functions to degrade the work of women and those in educational settings. Based on the findings of this study, the phrase “a real job” also works to minimize the work of the extremely impoverished.

Another issue that significantly impacts vendors on a daily basis is that of individual and organizational histories. Personal histories, as well as those of the organization, proved to both enable and constrain behaviors and means of continued success. Vendors struggle with being able to get past less desirable aspects of their history. In order to continually succeed at StreetWise and beyond, vendors must recognize past indiscretions such as drug/alcohol abuse, criminal activity, defaulted loans and issues outside of their control such as domestic violence and tumultuous family situations. Vendor histories, as well as those of the organization, are embedded with
material realties that make getting past those histories difficult. However, ownership of that history is essential for moving forward. For example, StreetWise’s inability to account for past grant dollars causes problems going forward. However, the people who caused such accountability problems for StreetWise no longer work for the organization. Yet the material reality of that history remains problematic. The same is true for vendors. Some vendors talked about how a legal issue from years ago kept them from getting certain types of employment or took them out of the running when potential employers found out, despite the vendors recognition of their past problems.

Finally, hierarchies operate as a significant challenge to StreetWise as it must simultaneously distinguish itself from the population of people it is attempting to help. One other significant problem relates to the hierarchies that are created between StreetWise vendors and panhandlers. Panhandlers are simultaneously the people who work against public perceptions of vendors (i.e. people think all vendors are panhandlers, vending the paper is organized panhandling, etc.) and are the people who StreetWise is ultimately working to help. StreetWise vendors and panhandlers occupy similar public space, appear similar to passersby, and are afflicted by many of the same problems (under-education, addiction, extreme poverty). StreetWise vendors and panhandlers largely come from the same population and all the members of that group are prime candidates for help from StreetWise. At the same time, StreetWise and its vendors must work to differentiate themselves from panhandlers so as not to limit the successes of the vendors or the organization. In essence, they must push away the people they are trying to help.
Practical Implications

Along with the theoretical implications, which are essential to the communication discipline, in order to fulfill the feminist/pragmatist ethos of this project, I also offer practical implications. Specifically, I offer four areas in which StreetWise can revise their daily practices in ways I believe will benefit the organization and its people. I will proceed through four practical implications for StreetWise by starting with the most individually-oriented suggestion and finish with the broadest changes.

First, I would suggest a reconsideration of the training process that vendors receive upon entering StreetWise as well as ongoing help. Currently, vendors are given little more than a few hours of training that covers the basic rules of vending StreetWise, brief discussion of where they are thinking about selling their papers and the very moving story of the vendor manager’s history with StreetWise. However, room remains in the valuable time that StreetWise has with new vendors to improve the type and quality of discussions that the organization is having with new vendors. Multiple vendors commented about how after their brief training on their first day they received no help and felt “thrown to the wolves.” Staff and board members commented about how one of the first things new vendors had to do was fill out paperwork about themselves. In doing so, the organization assumes that all new vendors can read. Through rethinking the initial vendor training as well as the ongoing training, StreetWise will be able to accomplish three goals. First, with more directed training, StreetWise will be able to maintain, and possibly improve how vendors are able to sell the paper on the street. Through teaching them basic selling techniques, telling established vendor stories and outlining appropriate
and inappropriate vendor behaviors, StreetWise should be able to maintain and grow their sales force. Secondly, initial and ongoing training will help StreetWise foster discussions with vendors about succeeding and the implications of that success. StreetWise can dialogue with vendors about money, clothes, and moving beyond StreetWise. Third, establishing ongoing training can help StreetWise maintain awareness about their vendor force. Ongoing training will also provide understanding of the ongoing changes and needs of the vendor force. Periodic “check-ins” with a staff member could go a long way to make sure vendors are aware of the most current organizational information and that the organization is in tune with the problems, needs, and successes of that particular vendor. Additional staff would likely be necessary to implement such a solution.

Secondly, StreetWise needs to work to enable vendor participation in the organizing process. Vendors have many important low-order concerns to worry about in their daily lives. Generally speaking, they are undereducated and unfamiliar with the workings of the decision-making process of a multi-million dollar organization. However, neither these conditions nor any others should preclude the staff and board of StreetWise from considering vendors as a critical stakeholder in decision-making. The board and staff can encourage vendor participation in a number of ways. First, meaningful vendor representation on the Executive Board will give vendors a voice in decision-making process. The Executive Board might reconsider the $1000 stipend given at the end of a completed year in favor of an evenly distributed stipend, or some early benefit. This would help assure that vendors do not have to sacrifice short-term well-being in order to participate in the democratic processes of the organization. Secondly,
the Board should hold semi-annual meet and greets with the vendors so that concerns, problems, triumphs and successes can be raised by both parties. The Board did one of these meetings shortly before I arrived at StreetWise and everyone who mentioned it said it was useful to partially eliminate some of the existent hierarchy. These opportunities for connection and dialogue between the Board, staff, and vendors should continue.

A key element of both pragmatist and feminist theories is a desire to transcend dualistic thinking. As I discussed in the “Where can this paper live?” theme, an ever-present struggle of StreetWise, concerning the content of the newspaper is a tension between activism and commercial viability. Therefore, I believe that StreetWise can undertake moderate changes to reframe the content of the newspaper so that previous debilitating binaries can be overcome. I propose appeals to community life as a means for StreetWise to transcend the activism/commercialism binary. Through appeals to community life and civic participation, StreetWise can debilitate the ongoing struggle between advocating a cause and negotiating the presence of commercial aspects to the newspaper. These community appeals are easily inserted into the ongoing discourses of the newspaper. For example, this summer, I was asked, along with Dr. Harter to write a StreetWise article about the upcoming Chicago BluesFest. We concluded the article by writing, “This year’s Chicago Blues Festival offers a unique opportunity to enrich community life – it is free and accessible to the public, brings life to the history of Chicago, and connects diverse people” (Novak & Harter, 2005, p. 2). Appealing to an enriched community life and a celebration of local history is a small way to navigate and transcend polarizing dualisms. StreetWise can employ pragmatist and feminist principles
(without labeling them as such) and appeal to values such as community, connection, democracy and voice which will help the newspaper get past sticking points of sellout commercialism or extreme activism.

The last, and broadest, practical implication for StreetWise is to increase their presence in social networks on both the individual and organizational level. On the individual level, StreetWise needs to vigilantly encourage vendors to attend community meetings, policing meetings and public forums that concern homelessness, poverty and/or StreetWise. These venues seem invaluable for building connections between vendors and the people they hope will buy their papers. On the organizational level, StreetWise needs to maintain relationships, and foster new ones, with community organizations, other service providers and coordinating organizations. Maintaining these relationships will help StreetWise to participate in the community dedicated to eradicating homelessness which will have material and social benefits. More staff might be required to establish and maintain these various community relationships. However, establishing an even broader social capital network will help StreetWise flourish into the future.

Limitations

On the whole, I am very pleased with and proud of the work I have done during the process of this dissertation. Completing this project has been a rewarding and challenging experience. However, three specific limitations stand out as things I would do differently if given the chance. First, I believe being more familiar with the organization prior to going into the field would have helped me plan my fieldwork more efficiently. It was not until a couple of weeks into my fieldwork that I realized spending
part of my time walking around downtown Chicago and/or observing vendors during scheduled times would be very difficult. Not fully understanding the transient lives of the StreetWise vendors led me to believe that it would be easier to locate and observe them than it actually was. For future projects, I will engage in more pre-field work time that is focused on understanding the daily patterns of organizational behavior so that my time in the field can yield the maximum potential.

Secondly, I believe one set of key voices is absent in the vast amount of data collected for this project: StreetWise customers. Approaching customers while in the street observing vendors was both intimidating and impractical. I found it intimidating to approach people who purchased StreetWise in those few seconds when such an approach was even possible. Never mind the difficulty in explaining why I was there observing in the first place, what my project is about and why their input is so valuable. Future work could be done in any major metropolitan area with a street newspaper to better understand the discursive understandings of the customer in these interactions. Possibly through survey data or structured interviews, the knowledge of customers of StreetWise (or publications like it) would add another much needed piece of the discursive puzzle.

Third, one of my objectives when I started this project was to gain an understanding of the contingencies of the organization-society relationship. I believe I captured this, in part, through the depth of insight provided about vendor interactions in the public. Another element of the organization-society relationship are interorganizational relationships. I believe capturing this interorganizational aspect of the organization-society relationship could have been improved. I did secure four interviews
with significant stakeholders in organizations outside of StreetWise. In terms of access and logistically, capturing inter-organizational relationships was a challenge. Establishing which organizational relationships are key and then convincing people outside of StreetWise that their input about their relationship with StreetWise was not always easy. I think most of the difficulty in this area can be attributed to two factors. First, only being in the field for three months made identifying and establishing these relationships challenging. Secondly, I believe the state of StreetWise in the summer of 2005 played into this difficulty. A number of people I contacted for interviews stated that they did not feel qualified to talk about StreetWise because their organization’s relationship with StreetWise had devolved.

**Directions for Future Research**

I believe that the best research generates questions as it seeks answers. This project stimulated questions as I spent time in the field and as I analyzed the gathered data. In this section, I would like to offer two general considerations for future research and five specific ideas for future projects. Generally, I believe this study confirmed the continued need for discursive understandings of various aspects of homelessness as well as other social problems. Discursive approaches to social problems, or organizations working to solve those problems, offer the communication discipline the best aspects of political science, sociology, history and others combined with our discipline’s attention to symbols. In addition, this study has confirmed my desire to work with organizations that work for social change and social betterment. Secondly, communication scholars need to stay involved with contemporary social problems including homelessness. Offering the
benefits of our discipline to those engaged in the field with these problems will continue to foster and nurture the discipline. This project undertook only one aspect of homelessness. The industry of homelessness as well as people dedicated to the eradication of the problem will need the input of many more scholars on many different issues to continue combating this problem.

Specifically, this project has stimulated questions in many related areas. First, a project that captures a glimpse of the experience of homelessness, whereby a researcher is sensitized toward the systemic, material, corporeal, linguistic and symbolic aspects of homelessness can further develop Pragmatism (particularly the work of James and Dewey) as a useful theoretical frame for communication scholars. A second direction for future research would be to trace the history of street newspapers in the United States. No such treatise on this topic exists. Positioning street newspapers important elements in the democratic fabric of America would be a useful endeavor for both understanding history and justifying the present and future of street newspapers. A third direction for research would be continued focus on the relationships between organizations. While I believe I have added to the communication discipline’s body of knowledge on this subject, the inter-organizational relationships proved to be difficult ones to capture. Studies that attempt to understand the connections between organizations are still necessary. Fourth, communication scholars must continue to interrogate the body as a medium and outcome of social and personal realities. While much important initial work about the communicative implications of the body (McKerrow, 1998; Selzer & Crowley, 1999) has been done in communication studies, room for much work remains. Issues including the
production and creation of bodies, means of overcoming corporeal limitations and the symbolic power of the body continue to need interrogation by scholars who engage questions from discursive perspectives. Lastly, I think that further rhetorical explorations of StreetWise and other newspapers like it are necessary. The content of these newspapers and the subsequent discussions of poverty and homelessness remains a crucial and ripe forum for analysis. Old and newer editions of StreetWise that I collected during my fieldwork have appeared initially to be artifacts through which the history and development of public discourse can be interpreted and understood.

My Journey with StreetWise

I could not be happier or more grateful for the time that I spent with the many people that make StreetWise a vital piece of Chicago’s present and past. What I can do for StreetWise pales in comparison to what the vendors, staff and board of StreetWise have given to me in the duration of this project. StreetWise welcomed me to their organization with open arms and let me get involved when and where I wanted to and let me sit in the background and observe when that was appropriate. While I can give them copies of photographs, posters and executive summaries of my dissertation, they have given me much more than I can return. Getting to understand this institution, which I firmly believe is an intricate piece of Chicago’s storied history, was an honor. A few notable, personal issues emerged during my fieldwork. This space is to air those issues and recognize the place they hold in relation to the findings and conclusions presented throughout this dissertation.
The first important issue that I would like to discuss is the stress that came from doing this project. By stress, I am not referring to anything outside of the process of the fieldwork. Of course, writing the dissertation proposal and the final two chapters caused stress at various moments. What I am referring to is the stress that comes with embedding oneself in the lives of people who work very hard to simply survive and deal with many personal struggles in doing so. Hearing such personal stories of struggle, success and failure, both during scheduled interviews and in personal conversations, evoked a number of emotional responses. One of these responses was stress. On many evening trips home, my mind was preoccupied with something that had happened that day. Some days, this preoccupation was a result of an interesting interaction or observation. Many days, this preoccupation was the result of hearing a disheartening story. Stories of drunken driving accidents, evictions, drug abuse, workplace politics, self-actualization, domestic violence, public housing and job loss forced me to stretch and grow in ways that I had not fully considered prior to entering the field.

The second important issue that arose during my fieldwork concerns guilt. Much like the story I told in Chapter 1, where I experienced guilt after witnessing a man looking for food in a garbage can, I had these same feelings during my fieldwork. The difference was that during my fieldwork, this emotion was experienced on a near constant basis. Many times, listening to vendors’ stories left me feeling helpless rather than empowered. Many evenings, I returned to my parents’ home without an appetite for dinner. Many nights, I turned off the lamp next to the bed wondering where people I had
seen only hours earlier were sleeping. While I was not debilitated by guilt, I did experience it. And I believe it is noteworthy.

The previous two paragraphs covered some of the negative, but useful, emotions that emanated from my experiences at StreetWise. Not all of my experiences were as such. The personal connections that I cultivated with various members of the StreetWise organization are those that will remain with me. They may not remain with me in the sense that I, or they, will maintain these relationships over time (though some relationships have continued). Rather, the memories of these relationships will continue to shape who I am as a person, as a teacher and as a scholar. As a person, these relationships will be renewed when I walk the streets of any major city and see a person without a home fighting for existence. I will be reminded to help. As a teacher, I have already been able to use examples from my StreetWise experiences and relationships to interact with undergraduates in the classroom. As a scholar, the relationships I developed at StreetWise will shape the questions I choose to ask (and try to answer). The people of StreetWise have made all of this possible and I am humbled and thankful.
References


Cole, P. (2004, November 7). America voted Bush back in, and we have no right to complain. *Independent, 17.*


Appendix A

Streetwise Organizational Chart
Appendix B

Research Access Letter from StreetWise

February 7, 2005

Lynn M. Huter, Ph.D.
OHIO UNIVERSITY
School of Communication Studies
Laker Hall
Athens, OH 45701-2979

Ms. Huter,

Attention: Ohio University Institutional Review Board

Please accept this letter as enthusiastic support for a collaborative research project between StreetWise of Chicago, Illinois, and Dr. Lynn Huter of the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. We have granted access to Dr. Huter and her research assistant David Novak to conduct participant observations at the StreetWise office and among vendors and customers, and to conduct in-depth interviews with staff, vendors, and customers. We believe this project will help StreetWise as we engage in a programmatic effort to better serve our vendors and the public at large who read our newspapers and support our efforts.

If I can provide any other information about this collaboration, please feel free to contact me via telephone at 312-554-1342 or via email at dweina@streetwise.org.

Sincerely,

STREETWISE INC.

[Signature]
Dee Ann Wein
Executive Director

cc: Pam McElvane, Board Chair
Appendix C

Ohio University
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Project Outline Form

Title of Research Proposal: Democracy and Organizing in intersecting and overlapping communities: StreetWise as an organization for social change

Investigator(s) Information

Primary Investigator
Name: David R. Novak
Department: COMS
Address: 037 Lasher Hall
Email: dn120403@ohio.edu
Phone: 593-4833
Training Module Completed?: Yes

Co-investigators

Name
Department
Address
Email
Phone
Training Module Completed?: Yes

Advisor Information (if applicable)

Name: Dr. Lynn Harter
Department: COMS
Address: 012 Lasher Hall
Email: harter@ohio.edu
Phone: 593-4830
Training Module Completed?: Yes

Anticipated Starting Date: 06-20-05
Duration: 3 mos
(Work, including recruitment, cannot begin prior to IRB approval. This date should never precede the submission date)

Funding Status
Is the researcher receiving or applying for external funding? Yes
(Note – This refers to funding from entities outside of Ohio University)
If yes, list source:

(Note – If an application for funding has been submitted, a FULL copy of the funding application must accompany this form as APPENDIX G)
If yes, describe any consulting or other financial relationships with this sponsor:
N/A
Is there a payment of any kind connected with enrollment of participants on this study that will be paid to persons other than the research participants?

☐ Yes  X No

(If yes, describe.)

N/A

Review Level

Based on the definition in the guidelines, do you believe your research qualifies for:

☐ Exempt Review       Category ______________________

☐ Expedited Review   Category ______________________

☐ Full Committee Review

Final determination of review level will be determined by Office of Research Compliance in accordance with the categories defined in the Code of Federal Regulations

Prior Approval

If this or a similar protocol been approved by OU IRB or any other, please attach copy of approval and label as Appendix E.

N/A

Recruitment/Selection of Subjects

Estimated Number of Human Participants  100

Characteristics of subjects (check as many boxes as appropriate).

☐ Minors  ☐ Physically or Mentally Disabled  ☐ Elementary School Students

☐ Adults  ☐ Legal Incompetency  ☐ Secondary School Students

☐ Prisoners  ☐ Pregnant Females  ☐ University Students

☐ Others (Specify) ______________________

Briefly describe the criteria for selection of subjects (inclusion/exclusion). Include such information as age range, health status, etc. Attach additional pages if necessary.

Participants will be selected for inclusion in this study based on their involvement with StreetWise, a newspaper that is located in Chicago, IL. Participants will come from various populations within StreetWise, including the Executive Board, staff members, and newspaper vendors.

How will you identify and recruit prospective participants? If subjects are chosen from records, indicate who gave approval for the use of the records. If records are "private" medical or student records, provide the protocol, consent forms, letters, etc., for securing consent of the subjects for the records. Written documentation for cooperation/permission from the holder or custodian of the records should be attached. (Initial contact of subjects identified through a records search must be made by the official holder of the record, i.e. primary physician, therapist, public school official.)

Participation in this study will be voluntary.

Please describe your relationship to the potential participants, i.e. instructor of class, co-worker, etc. If no relationship, state no relationship.
I will be a volunteer at StreetWise while I am participating in data collection. The organization knows of my intent to study them and my position as a researcher will not be withheld from anyone. Attach copies of all recruitment tools (advertisements, posters, etc.) and label as APPENDIX B.

Participants will be recruited based on recommendations of responsible potential participants from the Executive Director of StreetWise.

Performance Sites
List all collaborating and performance sites, and provide copy of IRB approval from that site and/or letters of cooperation or support.

Interviews will be conducted at the StreetWise offices. A photocopy of the letter from StreetWise’s Executive Director, Ms. Dineen Weinz, is attached as Appendix E. This letter confirms that they have granted access to their organization.

Project Description
Please provide a brief summary of this project, using non-technical terms that would be understood by a non-scientific reader. Attach an additional page, if needed, but please limit this description to no more than one typewritten page.

My dissertation, overseen by Dr. Lynn Harter, will explore the enactment of democracy both within and across organizational boundaries, which is currently an opportunity to advance organizational communication scholarship. By working with StreetWise, a newspaper in Chicago, IL that works for the empowerment of people without homes and those at-risk for homelessness, I will be able to see how this particular organization influences, or does not influence, the various community discourses of democracy. As a street newspaper in Chicago, StreetWise is uniquely positioned as an alternative media outlet in a city where there has been vigorous discourse regarding issues of homelessness, poverty, space, and visibility. As an alternative media outlet, StreetWise enters public discourse in Chicago with specific goals and particular interests. By enacting civic journalism, public discourse is democratized and thus “recognizes the value and acknowledges the authority of the poor and makes these voices public” (Howley, 2003, p. 284). StreetWise functions as an important organization in the social change fabric of the community of Chicago. Since 1992, StreetWise has interacted with multiple stakeholders such as vendors, government, advertisers, and other social-change oriented organizations, and serves as an important “net of collective action” (Czarniawska, 1998). Because StreetWise has granted me access to their community, I will be able to work from within their movement to help those without homes and get a unique perspective on their approach to solving, in part, this important social problem.

Through various qualitative research methodologies, I will be working with StreetWise to understand various aspects of their discourse community (Naples, 2003). By engaging in participant-observation, in-depth interviews and participatory photography, I will get a unique look at the discourse community of StreetWise. By attempting to conduct research with stakeholders that reside outside of the organization,
I will hopefully learn how the democratic values and social conscious of StreetWise are communicated across organizational boundaries and how StreetWise influences, and is influenced by, broader discursive communities.

Please describe the specific scientific objectives (aims) of this research and any previous relevant research.

Based on the various literatures that I review in my dissertation, I hope to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How is democracy understood and enacted in the context of StreetWise?
RQ2: How, if at all, is the enactment of democratic values in the context of StreetWise influenced by social, material, and corporeal forces?
RQ3: How, if at all, does StreetWise, both the organization and the newspaper, foster and/or inhibit democracy in the great Chicago area?
RQ4: How, if at all, does StreetWise, both the organization and the newspaper, function to bridge and bond members of diverse communities?
RQ5: What challenges do StreetWise stakeholders face as they organize and implement resources for people without homes or those who are at risk?

Methodology: please describe the procedures (sequentially) that will be performed/followed with human participants.

The research procedures for this study fall under four broad categories. They will be treated in the rough order of their implementation below. However, qualitative research is often an iterative process where researchers simultaneously employ multiple methodologies.

Participant Observation

Participant observation, noted by all ethnographers as a key element to any study that calls itself ethnography or claims to be guided by ethnographic principles, involves getting close to the participants of particular social settings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In essence, participant observation is research by doing. By “looking and listening, watching and asking,” participant observers learn the setting in which they are entrenched (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 19). For this study, I adopt what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) term a “participant-as-observer” (p. 147). This involves openly acknowledging my role as a researcher with an ability to “study a scene from the vantage point of one or more positions within its membership” (p. 147). As a participant observer at StreetWise, I will be participating in at least three different settings that will inform my data collection process. As a volunteer at StreetWise, I will spend time observing interactions between staff and vendors at StreetWise’s main office and observing vendors sell newspapers at various locations throughout the city. Additionally, I will observe CCC meetings where multiple service providers engage each other. In the next paragraphs, I will describe my research plans for each particular setting. I anticipate volunteering for approximately 30 hours per week at Streetwise beginning in mid-June, 2005, and continuing through the first week of September. My goal is to complete at least 350 observation/volunteer hours during this summer.

Participatory Photography
Participatory photography is the second element of my research design. My goal is to have 25 vendors involved in the participatory photography component of the research project. I brainstormed with Ms. Weinz and Mr. Crane how to smoothly execute this element of the research plan and encourage participation. First, they suggested that we should plan on distributing 50 cameras with the goal of having 25 sets of photographs taken. Cameras have “exchange value” on the street, so I am prepared for the fact that some of the cameras might not be returned. Second, through our conversation, we decided that I could talk to vendors during one of the weekly vendor staff meetings (Wednesday afternoons), providing an initial explanation about the goal of the participatory photography: to tell the story of what it means to be a vendor. In order to encourage participation, the staff of StreetWise will provide each vendor with 10 free newspapers. Once the vendors who will take photographs of their daily interactions and experiences are selected, and directions are given, the vendors will be given a camera and informed that they will receive 10 complimentary newspapers for them to sell. Once the camera is returned, and the photographs have been taken, I will take responsibility for getting the photographs developed. The cameras that I have identified as ideal for this process are 27-exposure, 400 speed film with a flash. I received a research grant from the School of Communication Studies to cover the costs of the cameras and film development. Because I am planning to distribute 50 cameras, this could ultimately result in 1350 total pictures which would be an unmanageable amount of visual data. To reduce the number of visual artifacts, I will have vendors select the 10-12 best photographs from their roll of film and encourage them to select photographs that capture the various dimensions of vending, including successes and challenges. After photo development, the photos will serve as a starting point for vendors to talk about their daily experiences during in-depth interviews.

In-Depth Interviews
Underscoring my research design is a fundamental belief that participants are authorities regarding their own life experiences. Participant interviews are a logical mechanism through which to allow participants to account for their experiences. Simply put, “interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 3). In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that allows people to describe the ways in which they understand their world, the ways in which they make sense out of their world, and allows them to account for their experiences. For some vendor participants, the in-depth interview portion of my methodology builds off of the participatory photography element of the data collection. I also will engage in interviews with approximately 25 vendors who do not engage in participatory photography, staff, board members and other stakeholders recommended by the Executive Director. Interviews vary in their structure and format from ordered and structured to more emergent styles that are guided by a broad set of topics. The interview format that I will utilize in this dissertation leans more towards the latter. I adopt a more emergent, free-flowing, “co-authored” approach towards interviewing (Tripp, 1983). This approach towards interviews benefits me in this project in three distinct ways.
First, after my initial meetings at StreetWise where I had several conversations with vendors, staff, and board members, I learned that the environment at StreetWise is quite chaotic. Board members come and go from meetings without warning, staff members are constantly busy and vendors congregate in the building and come and go frequently. StreetWise is not a typical organizational environment where a researcher would be able to sit down and have an uninterrupted conversation. This would seem to be the case especially with vendors. Secondly, over the course of this project, I want to honor the stories of individuals. Importantly, the ability to tell vendors stories more effectively and eloquently is one of the project outcomes desired by the staff and board of StreetWise. From my initial conversations with a few vendors at StreetWise, attempting to impose a rigorous interview protocol with vendors in particular could stifle the emergent, co-constructed element of the interview process. Third, and related to the second point, is that a completely structured interview could function to paint the experience of homelessness with a monolithic, reductionistic brush that is neither ideal or ethical. Lastly, an emergent approach to the interview process coincides with my views on epistemology and the role of the “researcher” and “participants.” In order to fully value the various positions that the participants bring to bear in their lived organizational experiences, I cannot overly prescribe the interview content. Quite to the contrary, I will work to allow participants to talk about their experiences in a relatively unrestricted fashion (Fontana, 2003). I have developed interview protocols for (a) vendors, (b) staff members, (c) board members, and (d) those outside of StreetWise based on the research questions guiding this dissertation.

Once informed consent procedures have been followed, interviews will be guided by the tentative protocols; I will allow, however, sufficient space for the unique stories of individuals to emerge and will revise the protocol while I am in the field and as unintended issues emerge that merit attention. All interviews, with participants’ permission, will be audio recorded digitally. If the participant agrees to have his or her interview recorded it will be transcribed in its entirety. If the participant does not agree to be recorded, then notes will be taken during and after the interview. Again, Ms. Weinz has encouraged recruiting participants during the weekly staff meetings. Each participant will receive a $15.00 stipend for participating in an interview. For those vendors who also participated in the photography project, they will not be able to receive the $15.00 stipend and participate in the interview unless the camera is returned. The School of Communication Studies has awarded me a research grant to cover these financial expenditures.

Document Analysis is another method, like interviews, that is strongly connected to participant observation. Documents are artifacts that are critical to the functioning of organizations, groups and individuals and can provide historical context, corroborate observations and interview data, evoke new questions or ideas and provide data that is not available in any other format (Glesne, 1999; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Documents by themselves can have limited significance (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). However, when related to other types of evidence, document analysis can prove to be an enlightening method of data collection. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) as well as Hodder (2000) argued that this connection between document analysis and other forms of data collection is
fostered in three main ways. First, document analysis can be linked to, and thus confirm, “the talk and social action contexts that the researcher is studying” (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 117). Second, documents can help to recreate past events that the researcher is unable to observe. Documents “endure and thus give historical insight” (Hodder, p. 704). Third, documents “reflect certain kinds of organizational rationality...they often embody social rules...that govern how members of a social collective should behave” (p. 117). Documents that will be considered artifacts for analysis for this study will include, but are not limited to, the newspaper itself, memos, previous research studies funded by StreetWise, training materials, organizational policy handbooks, published articles about Streetwise and the organization’s website. Currently, I have collected four years of StreetWise back issues and I will continue to collect the newspaper while I am in the field. Now that I have outlined the four methodologies that I will use to execute my ethnographically oriented fieldwork approach to StreetWise, I will outline the data analysis procedures that I plan to use to make sense out of the various types of data. Describe any potential risks or discomforts of participation and the steps that will be taken to minimize them.

I anticipate not potential risks or discomfort based on participation in this research project.

Describe the anticipated benefits to the individual participants. If none, state that. (Note that compensation is not a benefit, but should be listed in the compensation section on the next page.)

There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study other than the compensation that was noted previously. It is my intent to make a formal presentation to the organization six months after the end of fieldwork. It is my hope that based on the findings of this project, the organization will be better equipped to serve its various clients.

Describe the anticipated benefits to society and/or the scientific community. There must be some benefit to justify the use of human subjects.

My dissertation, overseen by Dr. Lynn Harter, will explore the enactment of democracy both within and across organizational boundaries, which is currently an opportunity in organizational communication scholarship. By working with StreetWise, a newspaper in Chicago, IL that works for the empowerment of people without homes and those at-risk for homelessness, I will be able to see how this particular organization, which is geared for social change, influences, or does not influence, the community discourses in which they exist concerning democratic values. As a street newspaper in Chicago, StreetWise is uniquely positioned as an alternative media outlet in a city where there has been vigorous discourse regarding issues of homelessness, poverty, space, and visibility. As an alternative media outlet, StreetWise enters public discourse in Chicago with specific goals and particular interests. By enacting civic journalism, public discourse is democratized and thus “recognizes the value and acknowledges the authority of the poor and by making these voices public” (Howley, 2003, p. 284). StreetWise functions as an important organization in the social change fabric of the community of Chicago. Since 1992, StreetWise has interacted with multiple stakeholders such as vendors, government, advertisers, and other social-change oriented
organizations, and serves as an important “net of collective action” (Czarniawska, 1998). Because StreetWise has granted me access to their community, I will be able to work from within their movement to help those without homes and get a unique perspective on their approach to solving, in part, this important social problem. This information can only be gathered through the use of human subjects. Specifically, those who are employed at StreetWise.

Describe procedures in place to protect confidentiality. Who will have access to raw data? Will raw data be made available to anyone other than the Principal Investigator and immediate study personnel (e.g., school officials, medical personnel)? If yes, who, how, and why? Describe the procedure for sharing data. Describe how the subject will be informed that the data may be shared.

Only the primary and the dissertation director will have access to the raw data. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. However, once transcriptions are created, there will be no identifying characteristic on the transcripts. The raw data and transcripts will not be provided to any party who might be able to connect a person with their specific answers. If requests for data are made, only the anonymous transcripts will be provided. Additionally, all interviewees will be made aware of the confidential nature of the interviews and the anonymous nature of the interview transcripts.

Will participants be: Audiotaped? X Yes □ No

Videotaped? □ Yes X No

If so, describe how/where the tapes will be stored (i.e. locked file cabinet in investigator office), who will have access to them, and at what point they will be destroyed.

Audio files will be transferred directly from digital audio recorder to the primary researcher’s laptop computer that will be with him at all times or stored in a locked office. The laptop computer is password-protected, meaning only the primary researcher can use the computer containing the audio files. Once all audio files have been transcribed, the original files that identify the participants by name, will be deleted and only the anonymous transcriptions will remain.

Provide details of any compensation (money, course credit, gifts) being offered to participants, including how the compensation will be prorated for participants who discontinue participation prior to completion.

Participants will be compensated in two ways. First, participants who volunteer for interviews will be given $15.00 upon completion of the interview. Interviews will last approximately 1 hour. Secondly, upon completion of the interview, participants will be given 10 newspapers, free of charge, which they can then sell for a profit. Non-vendor (non-homeless) participants will not be compensated in any way.

Instruments
List all questionnaires, instruments, standardized tests below, with a brief description, and provide copies of each, labeled as APPENDIX C.

Four interview protocols are listed under Appendix C as different participants will receive slightly varied questions.
How will the data be analyzed? State the hypothesis and describe how the analysis of the data will test that hypothesis.

There are no hypotheses as this is a qualitatively oriented study. The research questions for this project were listed previously in this IRB proposal. Below, I provide the methods that I will use to analyze the data that will be collected.

Data Analysis

The previously described data collection procedures are sure to produce a large amount of data consisting of fieldnotes, interviews, photographs and documents. First, I will use NVivo to manage the transcripts and fieldnotes. As Richards and Richards (1998) suggested, using computer-assisted software, such as NVivo, for data management can increase the efficiency with which I will "manage" the code-and-retrieval parts of the analytic process. With the help of NVivo, I can create a root directory to keep track of actual products of coding, including conceptual labels and data segments. I want to stress that the success of computer-aided analysis still rests with my theoretical sensitivity when creating and using codes. I will not use NVivo to identify themes throughout the analysis; I will use it as a tool to help me manage the large volume of textual data.

In order to inform, extend or challenge current understandings of democratic values and organizing, I will engage in a constant comparative method of data analysis. Constant comparison is one aspect of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Constant comparison is an active, ongoing (re)consideration of data as it is collected. Boje (2001) proposed that the purpose of constant comparison “is to do the ethnographic data collection, coding and analysis as you go, rather than to collect a lot of observations, interviews or surveys then code it once and for all to prove or disprove a deductive hypothesis” (p. 51). Constant comparative analysis allows the researcher the freedom to constantly rethink old data in light of newer data and vice versa. Rather than interpreting all of the collected research at one point after the researcher has left the research setting, the constant comparative method affords researchers flexibility and creativity while engaged in the research process. Constant comparison allows researchers to note interesting occurrences and focus on those in the analysis as well as explore those previously unseen issues that might emerge from performing ethnographically-oriented fieldwork.

Data collection, as well as constant comparison, should continue until "theoretical saturation" is reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 110). When incidents continually appear in the observation or interview process, I can feel confident that arguments will be grounded in the data. Once saturation has been reached, I can feel relatively confident that I can leave the field and continue to reinterpret the collected data and begin to write analyses. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted, “In-the-field analysis also plays a role in researchers’ deciding when to leave field settings” (p. 223). If the researcher is not forced to leave the field, “indicators of data quality, redundancy, and abundance – become important factors in deciding when to leave” (pp. 223-224).

Member Checking

Member checking or member validation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) is a process in which qualitative field researchers verify their interpretation of a social setting with
selected members of that setting. The underlying belief of member checking is that social actors are capable of making sense out of their own world. Lindlof and Taylor stated that member checking “means taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participants recognized them as true or accurate” (p. 242). Member checks generally involve asking participants questions such as: “What did I get wrong?” “Have I been fair?” “Do you recognize anyone?” By asking these types of questions, researchers are able to gauge to what extent the scholarly interpretation of the setting rings true with those who actually experience it. Member checks do not solely function to make sure that the researcher’s interpretation falls in line with that of the participants. The researcher is still entitled to their particular interpretation of a given setting. But the member check process exists to make sure that the researcher’s interpretation overlaps to some extent with how social actors view their world. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also noted that the member check sessions often can result in additional information that can help the researcher continue to analyze a setting or pick up on something that might have been missed initially.

**Informed Consent Process**

Attach copies of all consent documents or text and label as APPENDIX A.

Informed consent is a process, not just a form. Potential participants/representatives must be given the information they need to make an informed decision to participate in this research. How will you provide information/obtain permission?

I will be completely clear with any potential interviewees as to the purposes of the project. I will show participants the interview protocol before the interview begins or I will read them all potential questions. If the participants have any questions regarding the nature of the research either myself, Dr. Harter or StreetWise Executive Director will have the ability to answer questions regarding the research.

How and where will the consent process occur? How will it be structured to enhance independent and thoughtful decision-making? What steps will be taken to avoid coercion or undue influence?

The informed consent process will take place prior to each interview. The interviews will take place at the StreetWise offices. In order to enhance the potential participants thoughtful decision, I will first explain to them the overall goals of the project, their contribution to that project should they choose to participate, and I will make them aware of their ability to choose to not participate in the study.

Will the investigator(s) be obtaining all of the informed consents? X Yes □ No

If not, identify by name and training who will be describing the research to subjects/representatives and inviting their participation?

N/A

Will all adult participants have the capacity to give informed consent? If not, explain procedures to be followed.

Yes, to my knowledge, all participants have the capacity to provide informed consent.
If any participants will be minors, include procedures/form for parental consent and for the assent from the minor.

*No participants will be minors.*

Are you requesting a waiver or alteration of Informed Consent? □ Yes  X No

An IRB may approve a consent that does not include, or alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent. Provide justifications below for the waiver.

*N/A*

a. Describe how the proposed research presents no more than minimal risk to participants.

*N/A*

b. Why will a waiver of informed consent not adversely affect the rights and welfare of participants?

*N/A*

c. Why is it impracticable to carry out the research without a waiver or alteration of informed consent?

*N/A*

d. How will pertinent information be provided to participants, if appropriate, at a later date?

*N/A*

Even if waiver of written informed consent is granted, you will likely be required to obtain verbal permission that reflects the elements of informed consent (if appropriate). Please specify below information to be read/given to participants.

*N/A*

Will participants be deceived or incompletely informed regarding any aspect of the study? □ Yes  X No

If so, provide rationale for use of deception.

*N/A*

Attach copies of post-study debriefing information and label as APPENDIX D.

**Investigator Assurance**

I certify that the information provided in this outline form is complete and correct.

I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, conduct of the study and the ethical performance of the project.

I agree to comply with Ohio University policies on research and investigation involving human subjects (O.U. Policy # 19.052), as well as with all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research, including, but not limited to the following:

- The project will be performed by qualified personnel, according to the OU approved protocol.
- No changes will be made in the protocol or consent form until approved by the OU
IRB.
Legally effective informed consent will be obtained from human subjects if applicable, and documentation of informed consent will be retained, in a secure environment, for three years after termination of the project.
Adverse events will be reported to the OU IRB promptly, and no later than within 5 working days of the occurrence.
All protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. Research must stop at the end of that approval period unless the protocol is re-approved for another term.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

**Principal Investigator Signature**__________________________________________**Date** __________

**Co-Investigator Signature**__________________________________________**Date** __________
Faculty Advisor/Sponsor Assurance

By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student(s) or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol. In addition:

I agree to meet with the investigator(s) on a regular basis to monitor study progress. Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.

I assure that the investigator will report significant or untoward adverse events to the IRB in writing promptly, and within 5 working days of the occurrence.

If I will be unavailable, as when on sabbatical or vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

Advisor/Faculty Sponsor Signature__________________________Date _______

*The faculty advisor/sponsor must be a member of the OU faculty. The faculty member is considered the responsible party for legal and ethical performance of the project.
Checklist:
X Completed and Signed IRB-1 (this form)
X Appendix A - copies of all consent documents (in 12 pt. Font) including
X Informed Consent to Participate in Research (adult subjects)
N/A Parental Permission/Informed Consent (parents of subjects who are minors or children)
N/A Assent to Participate in Research (used when subjects are minors or children)
N/A Appendix B - copies of any recruitment tools (advertisements, posters, etc.)
X Appendix C – copies of all instruments (surveys, standardized tests, questionnaires, interview topics, etc.).
N/A Appendix D - Copies of debriefing text
X Appendix E - Approval from other IRB, School District, Corporation, etc.
N/A Appendix F - Any additional materials that will assist the Board in completing its review
N/A Appendix G – Copies of any IRB approvals
X Appendix H – Copies of Human Subjects Research Training Certificates (for all key personnel involved in non-exempt research)

All fields on the form must be completed, regardless of review level. If a field is not applicable, indicate by inserting n/a. Incomplete forms will result in delayed processing. Forward this completed form and all attachments to:

Human Subjects Research
Office of Research Compliance
RTEC 117

Questions? Visit the website at www.ohio.edu/research/compliance/ or email compliance@ohio.edu
Ohio University Consent Form Template (must be in 12 point font)

Title of Research: Democracy and Organizing in intersecting and overlapping communities: StreetWise as an organization for social change
Principal Investigator: David R. Novak
Co-Investigator: Dr. Lynn M. Harter (Advisor/Dissertation Director)
Department: School of Communication Studies

Federal and university regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

**Explanation of Study**

Purpose of the research – The purpose of this study is to understand vendor participation at StreetWise and help the organization tell better stories that highlight the successes of the vendors.

Procedures to be followed – The procedures of this study involve interviewing StreetWise vendors.

Duration of subject's participation - Your participation will include the time spent in this interview which will be approximately 75 minutes.

Identification of specific procedures that are experimental – There are no experimental procedures in this research.

**Risks and Discomforts**

There are no risks involved with your participation in this study.

**Benefits**

There are no benefits involved with your participation in this study.

**Alternative Treatments (if applicable)**

N/A

**Confidentiality and Records**

All interviews will be confidential (your identity will be known only to the researcher) and all interview transcriptions will be anonymous (no one will be able to connect you to your answers).

**Compensation**

If you are a StreetWise vendor, you will be paid $15.00 upon completion of your interview. In addition, you will be given 10 free StreetWise newspapers. If you are not employed as a StreetWise vendor, there will be no compensation.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact David Novak at dn120403@ohio.edu or by phone at 740-698-0157.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

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I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University.
and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

Signature_________________________________________ Date__________
Printed Name________________________________________
Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

Project Title: Democracy and Organizing in Intersecting and Overlapping Communities: Streetwise as an Organization for Social Change

Researcher(s): David Novak

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Lynn Harter

Department: College of Communication

Institutional Review Board Chair: Jacqueline Long, M.B.A.

Approval Date: 06/28/05

Expiration Date: 06/27/06

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
# Research Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Hrs.</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>3/21/05</td>
<td>1-4:15PM</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>CCH Survey, Readership Surveys</td>
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<td>9-10:30AM</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>12-4:30PM</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>Various</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>7:45-8:30PM</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>Various, Evanston Meeting</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Handout @ Evanston meeting</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
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<td>In the field w/vendor, in the office</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Breakfast bars</td>
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<td>Duration</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Y N</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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Appendix F
Interview Protocol – Vendors

Time of interview: ____________________  Date: _________________________
Place: ______________________________  Pseudonym: ___________________

If the interviewee took photos, ask the participant to talk about the photos and why he/she took them, what they reveal about StreetWise, the experience of poverty, and the life of vendors.

Tell me your story of how and why you started to sell StreetWise papers.

To what extent do you read StreetWise? How does the content of the newspaper influence your interactions with others?

Tell me about your life aspirations.

  Do you view StreetWise as a stepping stone to another job? If so, what can StreetWise do to help you reach your aspirations?

  Do you view selling StreetWise as a career? If so, what can StreetWise do to help make vending a way to earn a living?

How do you feel when you are selling StreetWise? (e.g., energized, embarrassed, etc.)

To what extent, if at all, does selling StreetWise bring you into contact with diverse people in Chicago?

How do you think community members perceive StreetWise vendors?

What does the word “democracy” mean to you?

Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions. In your own words, how would you describe the mission of StreetWise? How would you describe the values of StreetWise?

  Can you think of times or situations when members of StreetWise talk about the values guiding the organization?

  Are there things that prevent StreetWise members from living their values?

To what extent do you participate in the day-to-day running of StreetWise?
Are vendors asked to participate in decision-making at StreetWise? Meetings?

When you think about vending, what are some of the typical problems that you face?

What could StreetWise do to help you manage these problems?

If you could change one thing about the way StreetWise staff communicate with vendors, what would it be?

What other resources could StreetWise provide you to enable you to succeed as a vendor?

How would you define “the American Dream?”

Are there important issues about StreetWise that I have not talked about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix G

Interview Protocol – Staff Members

Time of interview: ____________________  Date: _________________________
Place: ______________________________  Pseudonym: ___________________

Tell me your story of how and why you started working at StreetWise.

Tell me about your life aspirations.

Do you view StreetWise as a stepping stone to another job? If so, what can StreetWise do to help you reach your aspirations?

To what extent, if at all, does working at StreetWise bring you into contact with diverse people in Chicago?

What contact, if at all, do you have with other organizations who work to fight homelessness? Other people at those organizations?

How do you think community members perceive StreetWise?

What, to you, is the role of StreetWise in creating civic involvement?

What does the word “democracy” mean to you?

Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions. In your own words, how would you describe the mission of StreetWise? How would you describe the values of StreetWise?

Can you think of times or situations when members of StreetWise talk about the values guiding the organization?

Are there things that prevent StreetWise members from living their values?

To what extent do you participate in the day-to-day running of StreetWise?

Are staff members asked to participate in decision-making at StreetWise? Meetings?

What are some of the typical problems that you face in your job on a daily basis?

What could StreetWise do to help you manage these problems?
What do you love about your job? What are the best things about working at StreetWise?

If you could change one thing about the way StreetWise communicates, what would it be?

What other resources could StreetWise provide you to enable you to succeed as a staff member?

How would you define “the American Dream?”

Are there important issues about StreetWise that I have not talked about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix H

Interview Protocol – Board Members

Time of interview: ____________________  Date: _________________________

Place: ______________________________  Pseudonym: ___________________

Tell me your story of how and why you started working with StreetWise.

Why do you give your time and energy to StreetWise?

What, if any, are your aspirations for StreetWise? What do you want StreetWise to be?

Do you view StreetWise as a stepping stone to another job for vendors? If so, what, in your view can StreetWise do to help vendors reach their aspirations?

To what extent, if at all, does working at StreetWise bring you into contact with diverse people in Chicago or elsewhere?

How do you think community members perceive StreetWise?

What does the word “democracy” mean to you?

Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions. In your own words, how would you describe the mission of StreetWise? How would you describe the values of StreetWise?

Can you think of times or situations when members of StreetWise talk about the values guiding the organization?

Are there things that prevent StreetWise members from living their values?

To what extent do you participate in the day-to-day running of StreetWise? If you do not participate in the day-to-day activities, what role do you play in the organization?

Are board members asked to participate in decision-making at StreetWise? To what extent do various members of the board participate?

What are some of the typical problems that you face in the work you do at StreetWise?

What could StreetWise do to help you manage or solve these problems?
If you could change one thing about the way StreetWise communicates, what would it be?

What other resources do you feel the Executive Board can provide to other members of StreetWise that will enable the members of the organization to succeed?

How would you define “the American Dream?”

What can the staff and/or vendors provide to the Executive Board that will enable the Board to succeed?

Are there important issues about StreetWise that I have not talked about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix I

Interview Protocol – Outside Stakeholders

Time of interview: ____________________  Date: _________________________

Place: ______________________________  Pseudonym: ___________________

Organization/Purpose: _______________________________________________________

Tell me in what capacities you interact with StreetWise. How long have you been working with StreetWise?

How do you perceive StreetWise? What do you think of the organization?

How do you think community members at-large perceive StreetWise?

Why do you work with StreetWise?

What does the word “democracy” mean to you?

If you could change one thing about the way you communicate with StreetWise and the way that StreetWise communicates with you, what would it be?

Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions. In your own words, how would you describe the mission of StreetWise? How would you describe the values of StreetWise?

Have you ever been asked to participate in decision-making at or with StreetWise? To what extent do members of other organizations help with decisions at StreetWise?

Have you ever had problems in working with StreetWise?

What could StreetWise do to help resolve these problems?

How would you define “the American Dream?”

Are there important issues about your interactions with StreetWise that I have not talked about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Discourse Excerpts</th>
</tr>
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| *“Flipping the Script:” Crafting a “Real Job”* | David: Do you see Streetwise as a career? Or do you see it more as a job that will get you to something else? Is it a long-term thing, a short-term thing?  
Zach: I think it’s long term. There’s not much out there I really care about. I don’t see myself as a 9-to-5 guy, McDonalds or being in the stock markets, some dot com company or whatever. It’s just not me. I don’t know if a lot people understand this. And they’re stressed out; they won’t understand it because they’re busy making money. Money’s great, but you got to have something to base it on. The career is going to be number one. Your career seems more like your life rather than a job. How many people have that? To be into something and still a lot of them look miserable. Look at human resources agencies, they don’t care. It’s just boring and something to do and they look like death warmed over. And I’m sure I tried stuff in the past that’s made me want to fall asleep on the job. Be it busboy or just doing flyers and stuff, being dressed up as a hot dog. A job for Gold Coast Hot Dogs on Dickens and Clark back in the early ‘90s. It’s not there anymore.  
David: Why do you think the legitimate badges are such a big deal?  
Rodney: Well, the legitimacy of them is the fact that you want to know who has your badge. You want to make sure that you've had some kind of contact with that person to kind of insure that he's really not way out there, you know? So this is why the badges are important. You've had, oh; I think its badge numbers now in the 7,000's since the organization was initiated. So you might have a lot of guys out there with outdated badges, former vendors, you know, who might be either selling your paper or selling someone else's paper under the guise of StreetWise. So this is why it's important to make sure that these badges are valid because then you know that you have a consistent vendor; that you don't have somebody who was an ex-vendor and is out there doing all kind of stuff, you know.  
Jessica: Like I said before, it’s a newspaper that takes time to be noticed if people will really just stand out there with it. I believe |
that yes, it helps people who have a job, to have a job who don’t have a job. But I believe it’s a newspaper like any other newspaper. Sometimes if a person is not really just standing right there in front of your face with something, a lot of times you’re not going to buy it if it’s just in a box. Because if you’re walking by a box, if you’re standing there, like some people are gonna be like, “Okay. I know the newspaper’s in the box, but I have to pay to get it.” But like it’s a little different from coming from a person. They want to consider the person and know what’s inside the paper better that way. Yeah so that’s why they people will purchase the paper, StreetWise.

David: Why does the organization exist?

Jessica: To help people who don’t have work be encouraged to learn that there’s a different way of life to do what they can do, a legal way. Encourage them to have a legal way of work. It’s kind of...for people who are shy, it’s kind of like, kind of scary to start off and doing in life to be out there in a crowd of people.

David: What’s the mission of StreetWise, in your own words. Why does this organization exist?

Gary: Well, it’s several stories. In my own words, the mission is to empower men and women that are homeless, or on the verge of becoming homeless, to become self-sufficient and take care of themselves. That’s in my own words. We don’t have to stand out there and beg nobody for no money; we actually got a job selling the paper. So I think that’s a positive thing, and it’s a good thing. A lot of the customers like us, respect us respect, and want to see the vendors out there selling the paper, and helping themselves.

David: How do you think the community, the public in general, perceive StreetWise vendors?

Fred: Hmm. I think most people feel as though it's really hard to say most people. I just on my block, and in my community I would say, I believe that the majority of people there feel as though I should get a job. I've had people in not in that area but in other places where I've sold papers literally come up to me and say why don't you get a job? Why are you selling this? You look like you're a pretty intelligent person? Why are you standing here selling StreetWise? And I look at that now and say man I thought I was working. This may not be the best job in the world, but its legal, and unlike your job or the job you suggest I get, they're always hiring. You know? I don't have to fill out an application and wait on a call. I can come down here on a Monday and
Wednesday and get go to work that day. So I’m assuming that the majority of people think that hi we're panhandlers.

David: What are some of the typical problems that you face when you’re selling StreetWise?
Sarah: Okay. People look at me and say, “She’s able-bodied. She can get a job.”
David: Let’s say somebody walked up to you on the street. “You’re able-bodied; you could get a job.” How would you respond to that?
Sarah: How would I respond to that? “Do you have any job leads? Are they hiring where you work at?” I just be trying to find out where the leads at. I will follow up on your job leads, and I get the information, and that’s how I got the information.
David: What do you think when somebody says something like that?
Sarah: Hey, it’s okay because still, they have to work for their hard earned dollars. I know perhaps the job doesn’t pay a lot; it don’t cover everything, so unless you have another means or way of getting money; if that goes for selling StreetWise or selling Polos, perfume, Avon…you know what I’m saying? People have to survive. StreetWise is not for everybody, and hey, that’s okay with people that does think that way, but they don’t ask you what the person is really going through or been through in order to get where they’re at.

“Strength from the Pain:”
(Re)narrating Histories

Timothy: Okay the reason why I took this particular picture of Starbucks is because this is the Starbucks where I started from six years ago. And over the years me and the managers, the different manager that was there. We got along. After to explaining to them about I’m StreetWise, I sell the paper. I treat the customers like customers. I don’t drink. I don’t just hide. I don’t force nobody to buy a paper and what makes this picture more so important because at first I didn’t think the customers were gonna accept me as fast and the manager’s kind of you know like funny, he didn’t want really be bothered but he said, I’m gonna give you a thirty day trial, after thirty days I want you outta here if anyone complained, which he didn’t get no complaint.
David: That was your first spot? How long did you sell there?
Timothy: I sell there now, it’ll be seven years. That’s my main spot. Still my spot, seven years I’ve been at this spot.
David: And did he come talk to you after 30 days?
Timothy: At six o’clock that morning. I’ll never forget it. I was standing outside. He said, “Good morning, Timothy.” I said, “Good morning.” He went inside, I was standing out there,
customers started coming you know. He came in we had three people come in. They got their coffee and stuff and they pick up, bought the paper you know. So he said, “Timothy can you come on in for a minute.” So I walk in and he said, “You know your 30 days is up.” I said, “Yeah, how’d I do?” He said, “Ah, you know how you did.” He said, “Well we ain’t had no complaints.” He said, “Everybody said whose that new guy selling StreetWise out there,” he said, “I told them that’s Timothy. They said well he’s really nice. Is he gonna be here all the time?” You know. So he “I ain’t got nothing more to say, you’re doing a good job.”

Zach: People don’t have appreciation for nice little simple houses anymore. It’s all about condos now and really big and ugly buildings. Also this city was known as a city of neighborhoods. And you have all of this gentrification going on. It’s hard to say that it’s still your neighborhood anymore. I have a lot of dreams about the neighborhood. I think people are afraid to face their past. They think it has no bearing on their future. There is something they’re afraid of…but I’m not afraid to take it on. Because it makes you grow more. It makes you tougher.

David: Martha, one of the other things that I’ve been interested in because I’m a native Chicagoan is kind of the historical relationship of primarily the government in Chicago and it’s dedication or lack thereof to solving issues of homelessness. Because you’re kind of a key player in Chicago, regarding this issue, could you kind of give me your take on how Chicago has maybe both succeeded and failed in the realm of homelessness?

Martha: Well, there’s been an evolution. And it’s been a fairly remarkable one. In Chicago, both its government and its provider community are on the cutting edge of this movement to end homelessness. To its credit, our government saw early on the benefit of this movement and signed on to it. And Mayor Daley has really I gotta tell you he’s really stuck his neck out on this thing. And as a result, he’s become considered a national leader on this movement to end homelessness. And President Bush’s point person on homelessness who’s sort of a friend to the partnership has worked very directly with the mayor and he’s getting the mayor to the roadhouse on the issue. So, we didn’t start there, but that’s where we are now.

David: Maybe you could start by telling me kind of how you got involved with StreetWise. Tell me your story with the organization.
Pamela: Oh, okay. I came to StreetWise maybe about three years ago. I was an executive assistant, and they downsized shortly after 911. Lost my job, collected unemployment, got my extension, and lost my apartment after my extension ran out. I don’t have any relatives here, so I became homeless. A friend of mine told me about StreetWise, and that’s how I came to the organization. It’s good, you know, at that time I didn’t have no income, so it allowed me to eat. It allowed me to pay for a place to stay day-to-day, but as far as any other services, they didn’t offer any. I was really expecting more services, like social services, but that wasn’t there. So after I started selling the paper, I became fairly good at it, and I just continued to sell it. So now, a couple years have gone by and I’m still here. Now my career goal is not to become a life-long vendor, but I just can’t seem to get it going, you know.

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<th>The Cadillac and the Cold: Corporeality and Materiality</th>
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Stacey: They’re enterprising too. You wouldn’t believe everything’s a hustle. Everything can be converted to cash. To me, I don’t look at that as a negative, I look at that as okay, there’s some people here with retail capabilities, from sales, entrepreneurial type capabilities. They will take the coats we give them and set up a stand three blocks away and sell them. Is that bad? No, we gave them to them to do what they want.

David: That’s where you stand?
Benjamin: That’s where I sit in the shade. That’s in the morning in the shade here? In the morning and the afternoon. So then this is where I usually get most of my money is here in front of this currency exchange. Yeah and then there’s a CTA stop over here that goes north to Howard and a lot of people go on there and they come across the street, go the grocery store, come down and buy newspapers from me. So they’re all to the side to this one here and then the shade is in early evening is right here. So I don’t go over to here until the shadow goes over here by the boxes.

David: You follow the shade around?
Benjamin: Yeah because it’s cooler and you can stand there longer.

Travis: StreetWise doesn’t have the staying power of funding to support anything that’s a flop for many years before it’s successful. Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour couldn’t pay for the cost of the bus on a regular basis and it could only be placed at funders put their money and it would do that if it really had the bang for the buck for the vendors. I don’t perceive that it helped a lot of
vendors up and out but it was a focal point for their energy and something for them to do and they earned money doing it. We had funders who would fund and pay the vendors for their hourly wage to do the work. You couldn’t sell enough tickets to do that. Now if you had a good marketing person behind it and could market that while within the city and get it into the newspapers and it would be to become a thing to do for visitors to Chicago and get marketed well. That kind of stuff? Exactly. Then it could succeed as being a money maker at its own perhaps. But we don’t have anybody that can do that on staff.

David: Do you see StreetWise as a job or a career?
Timothy: Well, I’m 57 years old. Ain’t too much more I could do, I don’t guess. I got a bad heart, I got high blood pressure and my back is just about gone. I don’t think nobody gonna hire me. I want to stay; I want to stay with StreetWise until I get disability or something I think. I don’t think I could do a eight hour job, doing maintenance because of the mopping, the sweeping, carrying out the garbage and all these go with the job. Someday some guy say they cans be heavy, I can’t really pick up that much stuff because of my back. But if I had to, my heart is just, like I say, my heart is in it, but my back ain’t, I could do anything with the heart, but age wise, age is what’s my problem, I don’t think I could do it, I might last maybe a good year, God’s willing. But yeah, I was to do something else but I feel good here, I want to stay until my time is up.

David: So right now and in the foreseeable future StreetWise is your living, right? That’s how you earn a living?
Timothy: Well I don’t get no disability, no welfare, no nothing. All I get is StreetWise all I get.

Kimberly: This Sunday was totally thrown off because of the heat.
David: Yeah. It’s been way too hot out there.
Kimberly: I’ve made probably about anywhere from sixty to seventy dollars less than I normally make. You know, because I think I only made a little bit under thirty dollars. That’s not good to only to make thirty each way.

David: Right. What are some of the typical problems that you face when you’re vending StreetWise?
Kimberly: Well, yesterday was the heat. Sometimes when the weather gets extremely hot, or extremely cold, it gets too unbearable and it’s like to the point where I can’t stay out here, because I was starting to get light-headed yesterday. Literally.
I’m like, if I would have stayed out here another five or six minutes, they might’ve had to dial 911. So, I had to put my papers in the thing, and just take off.

David: Go find some air conditioning or something?
Kimberly: Right. Sometimes I go into Starbucks. They got plenty of air conditioning. They let me come in there and cool down, or I go down the street and cool down. But it was funny, the library wasn’t open, so I couldn’t cool in there, ‘cause their air conditioner is not as Starbuck’s air conditioning, it feels like a refrigerator in there. So I got to carry this sweater with me, or whatever. Some people have too much air conditioning.

David: What’s the American Dream?
Frank: To get rich. To have a big house, have the babes, have the big cars, chauffer…
David: Chauffer?
Frank: Chauffer. But my American Dream is I’d like to have about a hundred and eighty, two hundred acres, have a nice tract out in the back. Have my motorcycle shop. Let me just build my bikes and race on my racecourse I built in my backyard, and just leave me the fuck alone. I don’t want no cops. I don’t want no mayors or judges or just go ahead, do whatever you guys want to do. Just leave me the fuck alone.

David: What’s the American Dream?
Pamela: (Laughter) They say the white picket fence and the house.
David: What is it to you?
Pamela: The American someone like me, there is no American Dream. Really, it’s not. I don’t think so. I’m…
David: Why not?
Pamela: After going to Europe, America you know, you have a lot of things you can do, but it’ just, I don’t know. It’s just like they’re killing us. You know, the food, the drugs, just the whole thing you know, I watched a lot of documentaries when I was in Europe, actually about America, and it just watching documentaries like that ‘cause America’s really jacked up. So much under-handed stuff going on, and it talked about the deaths of Tupac and Biggie, like they were almost orchestrated from, almost probably like the F.B.I. So, that just really makes you wonder. And how like in the projects, they have gang wars. A lot of times those are just orchestrated other people orchestrate those things. So if you’re not wealthy, there is no American Dream. You know, you just have to go with the flow. You really don’t
### Upstairs/Downstairs & Maintaining Public Spaces

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<th>have many options. And if you’re not motivated and aggressive, you ain’t going too far, and that’s not good.</th>
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<td>Frank:</td>
<td>Because that person, if he doesn’t care enough to find out what he’s representing, how is he going to care enough to fight for what’s all he’s gonna do is like a lot of these other idiots, “Oh, we bought the building. We paid for the building. We own the building. No, you do not. You’re a subcontractor. You bought the papers. We paid for you. You didn’t buy the building, StreetWise bought the building. But everything comes out the same. Not what I could do to help you to help me, it’s what are you going to do to help me. I want you to build me a condominium so I can live free. Did you hear that at the meetings? “How come you don’t do this? Why don’t you have a place for us to come and sleep? Why don’t you do this, why don’t you do this, why don’t you, you, you, you do it for me, me, me, me.”</td>
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<td>Carol:</td>
<td>I mean we pretty much found a place and moved in. Over the last several months we’ve gone through three different spaces. We started with just moving two doors down. Part of that was the person who’s making the decisions about where we’re going to move is not even functioning. So, at that stage in the game, which should have happened even though it was the same person’s responsibility, what should have happened was a broker, a rental broker, whomever, should have been brought into the picture. Who knows our situation, who we are, what we do, we need somebody who’s going to stick up for that. If they, if you know that people are going to have a problem and they tell you, because then they’ll tell the executive director that they’re going to have problems renting to us then he needs to know that our problems and we look over there. So a lot of legwork has passed because Pam was out so okay, your outsourced the critical pieces is what needs to happen. And then you, you know, I think the whole thing has gone by too quickly.</td>
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<td>David:</td>
<td>Did you have problems in the past or ever with like getting established in front of a business like this?</td>
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<td>Vincent:</td>
<td>Well, you gonna always have problems but you know, a winner never quits. It’s all about determination and it’s all about, “hey you gotta do what you gotta do.” I mean one monkey don’t stop no show. So, if one person says no, you move on to the next. Life goes on. I mean, there are always gonna be people that don’t want you around, and there’s gonna always be people that do want you around. So I ain’t got time to sit around and dwell on the people that don’t want me around or get personally involved</td>
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in why they don’t want me around. The spot I’m working at now, every spot that I do work at were closed down to make a long story short. And I wind up opening ‘em back up. Other vendors been there and messed it up. And they say they don’t want nobody there.

David: And then what? So like Mark will talk with them or…
Vincent: No, I’ll talk with them. This is my thing. Mark don’t do nothing for me. It’s my responsibility to go out there and open up a spot. They don’t do that.
David: Was the Jewel that you sell at now a closed down spot?
Vincent: Oh yeah, definitely.
David: So how did you do that, get it opened back up? Who did you talk to? What did you do?
Vincent: I talked to God first of all. And God know I got deals. And God know I got a son to take care of. I don’t know whether you believe in God or not, but I do. So the answer to that question is, I talked to God about it and long as I’m doing the right thing and now maybe if I was a drug addict and I wanted to use the money for drugs, maybe it wouldn’t have been opened back up. But like I say, I talked to God about it, and prayed about it, and actually I went out there with my son and started selling. So I guess they respected that. And they saw. They had an opportunity to see that I’m not standing out here to get no drink. I’m not standing out here to buy no drugs. I’m standing out here to buy this little nine year old kid some clothes and some food. So they respected that. And they opened the spot back up for me. They welcomed me to be there. And you know, respecting the customer, not harassing ‘em. I mean, by the way I carry myself.

Stacey: I was looking for a place that would let me have a number of vendors that I have. And I wasn’t going to hide the vendors. There were people that wanted us to use the back stairs, and the vendors can do I’m like, kiss my ass. That offended me more than anybody ever calling me a nigger. That offended me more than anything.

David: That’s where you stand?
Benjamin: That’s where I sit. That’s where I sit in the shade in the morning and the afternoon.
David: You follow the shade around?
Benjamin: Yeah because it’s cooler and you can stand there longer. So then this is where I usually get most of my money is here in front of this currency exchange. Then there’s a CTA step
over here that goes north to Howard and a lot of people go on there and they come across the street, go the grocery store, come down and buy newspapers from me.

Krista: For instance the smoking rule out in front of the building. I don't smoke, but it’s kind of upset me because we, you know, at first we implemented no loitering in front of the building. Okay, that's fine. Have a cigarette, come back in. But now it's like they're so embarrassed by us standing out in front the building, they don't even want us smoking out there. And at the same time, it's stupid to tell somebody they can’t smoke in front of their building, to go next door. What if we move and then the people next door don't like us smoking in front of their building? Where you going to go, two blocks down to make sure you can smoke a cigarette?

Stacey: Now, we’re doing a low-budget renovation here, but I’m getting the highest end of the low budget that I can possibly get. It will flow. The vendors were upset about the sale of the building. And that was a sensitive issue for us. But still, it was one of those things, I don’t have time to sit here and coddle with you guys to make you feel good that we have to sell this building. We’re running out of money. Now that was serious tough love. I have never spoken to them so harshly before but it was kind of like a real come-to-Jesus type of meeting. I said, “This is not a badge of honor to say I’ve been with StreetWise for 13 years. My next question to you is why? You know, it’s not a badge of honor to say, ‘Well, this is all I know how to do.’ My next question is why?” Now, StreetWise is not responsible for making sure people aren’t homeless. That’s your responsibility. That’s not my responsibility. All I can do is provide a helping hand and this little bitty piece that I can do. And this piece is the glue to your bridge to help you do the rest of it. But you have to do it.

“Like Fish Need Water:” Human Connections

David: You don’t want to deal with people, or?
Valerie: No. Didn’t want to. I didn’t want to deal with the people, really.
David: You don’t?
Valerie: But I enjoy meeting them, communicating with them. I’ll just smile, make their day good, too.
David: Have you found that, ‘cause that’s another thing that a lot of vendors have said. That it’s pretty cool that they’ll talk to a lot of customers, or potential customers, and they enjoy just getting somebody to smile back at ‘em, or say good morning. But that really gets them excited.
Valerie: Well, I smile at them when I sell my paper and say, “StreetWise,” or they give me a dollar, and some days they’ll tell you, “Keep the money.” I say, “Well, God bless you. Thank you, God bless. Are you sure you don’t want your paper? They got some good articles in this paper. You don’t know what you’re missing.” I’ll smile and say, “Yeah, you don’t know what you’re missing.” You know, and then sometime this guy come and about give me a five-dollar tip, and did not get one paper, and he done did it more than one time. I say, “Here, you want your papers?” and he say, “No,” and I, “Sure, you want your paper,” and he kept going. I didn’t get a chance to talk to him. He just took off.

Frank: On the most part, they don’t like us because we’re nothing but a bunch of homeless crack heads, lazy, no good. That is the concept of us and we are not doing anything to change it. The little bit we’re doing doesn’t filter out to Joe Q. and Mary K. out in the streets. A few people see it, but like I said, they’re used to dealing with the one-arm bandits. One bad apple spoils the whole barrel. You could have fifty good vendors out there, and just have that one bad vendor out there. That’s the one that they’re going to remember. And we’re not doing anything in the public’s eye to eradicate that from them. Until we start doing something, the reputation ain’t gonna change. I got people that it took me a year for them to even say hello to me.

Timothy: You got to build it up so they trust us, you know. And one lady left her purse and stuff and run and catch her to give her purse, you know, man, had about $500.00 in there. She left it right there and she and I looked up and she was going down the street and I looked and I seen it and she left it wide open. Devil said take it, stick it in your pocket and cool out. I grabbed that thing and we got to, you know, I caught her at the bus stop. She left it, she stopped, oh thank you Timothy I sure thought that was in my purse, you know. I go by what my momma said, my momma use said if you can’t pay for it, you don’t need it. If it’s not yours return it. God gonna bless you that. She came back and gave me a $100.00 as prize. She said I had $600.00 in there. She said how come, why didn’t you just keep it? I said, ain’t mine. I didn’t earn it. I just see you forgetting it, it’s yours. You need it. You work hard for the money. She got more than I get and got light, gas, cable, whatever salary like. I said, you know you work, I said I’m a hustler, I said, been hustling off of you the best, I wouldn’t a gotten nothing for that, you know. So I said you need to do, it’s your money, you need it more than me, so hey I just
gave her, she said, Timothy you’re something else, here, here’s a $100.00.

Gary: There’s quite a few of the people in the Cultural Center that buy StreetWise. In fact, the people in the Cultural Center have been very helpful to me. As far as, you know, when they have functions they’ll let me know. Like they have things for Veterans every now and then, and they have dinners, and they’ll let me know so I can ‘cause they know I’m a Vet and I come up in there and eat. Then they all about eight or nine of the different employees buy the paper from me on a regular weekly basis, so that’s cool. I’m always you know, they’ll let me come in the building any time. You know, winter, summer, and just sit there and relax. They invite me in all the time, “Come on in out of the rain. Come on in out of the cold. Come on in out of the heat, and get something to drink,” that sort of thing. So, they’re real cool. At the same time, the Metro stops right there; the Metro police and all the Metro people are cool with me. They know me, so they kinda, you know, buy the paper and invite me inside when it’s real inclement conditions. Though I try to stand outside in the elements because, you know, that’s what I do; I sell papers. And people seem to like it more when they see me out there. I don’t know, they buy the paper more. It’s like, “Why are you out here? Take this.”

David: When it’s raining….
Gary: Yeah, “Why don’t you go downstairs out of this mess?” you know. “I’m okay, I’m okay.” So they look for me out there. I’ve found that since I’ve been there selling the paper that the customers really look forward to seeing me out there, and it’s I’ve developed a lot of friendships with quite a few of the customers. Yeah, a lot of regulars stop and talk and, you know.

David: Tell me about like some of your customers and how you meet all these different people when you’re selling the paper.
Scott: Well, when I go I got one particular spot that I like so much. All the police know me up there. A lot of the customers know me up there. And a lot of my customers know me up there. And a lot of my customers, I can joke with a lot. Some I can’t. I get dirty looks, I get bad looks, and I get the worst comments. Like one guy no, let me rephrase this. Let me rephrase this. About two years ago, this lady walks up to me and this day I was happy selling the paper. And I’m saying “StreetWise, StreetWise. Get your copy of StreetWise today.” It’s a good article that week. I forgot what article it was that. She was like, “You ought to get a fucking job.” I looked at her like, and I
dropped my papers, like, and I didn’t know what to say right then. She was cursing me out. And I just like stood there, and I just like let her go on and let her go on and blast me out. Okay. I picked my papers back up. She was like, “Fuck you.” and I was like, “Oh, you got a Bible in your hand. Are you supposed to be a Christian lady and you cursing me out like this? Why? I ain’t done nothing to you. This is my job. This is the only thing I can do for right now to support myself.” Okay. She stuck her index finger up at me like this and walked away. And I was like, “Well, you have a great day, ma’am.” Got in her car, started it up, and I guess she had a stick shift. And it sounded like when she went to drive off, the car cut off on her. She had to restart it again. And she was like, “Fuck you, get a job!” And I was like, “I don’t believe this.” That ruined my day.

Krista: So I'm just saying like, you know, it's good and bad, you know. But you need to deal with all the attitudes, you know. Whether they like you or they don't. Some people just have a chip on their shoulder. They're with a wife they can't stand and they're in a job that bores them to death. And so they're on their way home and they see the friendly StreetWise vendor with a big smile on their face saying have a great day. And they figure, why the hell is he so happy? He doesn't have any money. You know, what is he trying to do? Or he's probably so phony, they say. Or, they say what a jerk, you know. Or they try to just throw you off so you can feel like shit, you know. And so that's like one of the biggest challenges, dealing with everybody's attitude. I mean, ‘cause even if you're doing the best that you possibly can, there's always somebody else who wants to bring you down, you know. So that's the biggest challenge to me.

Bradley: Well who benefits when it’s just individuals, there’s organized networks out there, there’s organized corporations, there’s you know, there’s somebody is winning this political game and as long as the only way people can even think of their involvement is to yell and scream the loudest, people in power don’t really care about that. They’re not going to change somebody by just you know that, you’re going to change when more groups get together and potentially there’s a threat that something might change with real numbers but it’s not going to change, we’re a society that really values individualized and values individuals standing up to speak and that’s good, I think that’s one of the gifts of society. But, there’s a real disparaging, you know there’s a word that call “interest groups” right? Now
that’s a, that’s a bad term in our society. Those are just, you know those are special interest groups, well the truth is everybody needs to be involved with some organization that’s pushing for interests. You know, and it should be a group if you’re going to have to make a change. Usually the people that don’t like special interest groups are those that feel those groups are conflicted with what they want. So you know, I’ve seen the country very different you know, 30 and 40 years ago. But, and I see it becoming much more individualized I think that’s what happened in the ‘80s, ‘90s with the mono-wealth and the you know, successes it created, how much you have and that becomes the norm by what you think is important. It’s, it breeds more of individualism and I could make it, my food stamps made it and if you didn’t make it, it’s because you just didn’t try hard enough. And you know, if you’re at the top and you’re successful you think that’s true.

David: How come you don’t sell in front of the theater? If you’re interested in the people that are coming from the theater, how come you don’t sell in front of the theater?

Jessica: Greg, Mr. Greg said that I shouldn’t sell there. He said he told me at least ‘til August. But it seems like he hasn’t changed his mind yet. August of this year, he said that because of the incident that happened there with me and one of the employees there. It wasn’t a bad incident I don’t think, but it was kind of bad the way they made it out to be that

David: You had a problem there before?

Jessica: Uh-huh. I asked for a sample of popcorn, and she said, the lady said to me, she said, “Leave before I call EPD.” So I’m like, “EPD? I wonder what that means?” to myself. And I said, “Oh, Evanston Police Department.” So I said, “Ma’am, all you had to say was, ‘No.’” And I said, “Have a good day.” And I told one lady, “Have a good day, too.” And by the time I leave that place and moved five blocks away around the corner me and my boyfriend, I was stopped by the police. And they said, “This lady says that you are, she’s complaining about you. She wants to sign a complaint about you mouthing her off.” I said, “Well, I didn’t mouth her off. All I said is all she had to say was no.” After all that, I was arrested; and then they banded me from the Century Theater. Just was asking for a sample of popcorn. They barred me up, and Century they don’t want me there anymore.

“Read the paper. Take the paper.”

Small Acts of Participation

Frank: We have QAT people, right? One’s supposed to be here every three hours. They don’t even bother showing up for that. But come Wednesday when those papers are out, you’re gonna have papers. “I wanna get paid,” even though I didn’t do my
fucking work, I want my pay. “Hey Mark, you got some extra papers?” Not one of them, when we’re gonna move, I mean, “Oh, you’re moving? Do you need help?” How many people volunteered to work? None of them.

David: Stacey says, “Frank, you wanna help us move?” I go, “Yeah.” ‘Cause I talked to Mark, I said, “You guys gonna need any help moving?” Nobody, all during the move, nobody came up and said, “Do you need help?” She had to get people from Gateway, she had to get people from Wisconsin. That pissed me off more. To hire people from Wisconsin to move, and we got all these vendors? And they’re all crying poor? But did anyone ask? Half the vendors, “Oh, I didn’t know we were moving.” We’re here Wednesday, a guy went to the other place on Wednesday morning to get papers. He said, “I didn’t know you guys moved.” That’s how much they care about the organization.

Frank: They don’t even bother taking the paper. That’s a big slap in the face for StreetWise. They just keep giving them money. The hell with StreetWise. Think about what that little statement made. They’re just giving them money and don’t bother taking the paper.

David: Why don’t people take the paper?

Frank: Why? ‘Cause, what’s in it for them? Nothing’s in it for them.

David: But they still give you a buck?

Frank: Oh, yes. It’s not the paper. It’s the person and what I represent. I represent me. I represent StreetWise. StreetWise is a homeless paper, here. As I stand out there at Christmas time, “Where’s your bell?” All right? If you’re in a Santa suit or a three-piece suit, if you’ve got Salvation Army, they’re gonna put money in that damn bucket. They ain’t giving it to the Santa Claus, they’re giving it to the Salvation Army because of what they represent, and what they do. I’m with StreetWise, but I represent the homeless. They’re giving the homeless the money. They don’t give a shit about StreetWise either, ‘cause StreetWise don’t give a shit about them.

David: Do you think it’s important to have vendors in the vendor rep position?

Gary: Oh, it’s extremely important. It’s extremely important. It’s just I think it’s very important to have a vendor in that position. I feel like the Board appreciates vendors in that position, but I think that and I feel like any vendor that runs should be able to do it. But from what I’ve heard now you know, vendors used to vote
for the vendor rep. I was elected, voted in, by the vendor force. Now what I hear is you gotta write some type of thing as to why you wanna be a vendor rep. Stacey and Elaine decide, you know, read your little essay, and decide who’s gonna be vendor rep, which is ludicrous, it really is. The vendors should be able to vote for the vendor rep, and that’s who, once the vendors voice their choice, that’s who should be the vendor rep. You shouldn’t have to write no essay or nothing else, bottom line.

David: Do you think the vendors in general are kind of ticked off about that?
Gary: They should be ticked off.

David: Do you think what do you do regarding people that give you the dollar give you a dollar but don't take the paper? Do you try to put the paper in their hand?
Fred: I tell them thanks for sharing your blessing with me. Any time somebody gives me if it's a dime, a penny, thanks for sharing your blessing with me. God will provide. God's will provides. So those that will come to me and give me money and not take a paper should not affect the people that actually do come and buy a paper. We're obviously selling enough papers to, you know, survive. So I'm not going to discourage nobody. If they put money in my hand, or buy one paper and give me $5, I'm not going to say here, take your change. You got to take this. Or they give me a dollar and say no I don't want the paper, that's fine. Because I'm not going to sweat them because I don't want to run them away. I'm not going to give this guy a dollar because he going to try to give me a paper; I don't want a paper; I just want to help him. I'm not going to do that.

David: It sounds to me like I understand everything you're saying. But you'd still you think it's important for people to take the paper? Ideally, would you like to see everybody take the paper?
Fred: Yes. I want more people to buy the paper, because they like the paper and it's a good paper. There was one time when all it talked about was homelessness. I hated selling that paper. Because some people come in here and they bitch about everything, up and down. They want to put religious passages in the StreetWise. And they want to do things like that, you know, just off the wall, out of nowhere. And, you know, it's like but what do you really need though? Do we, you know, do we really need that or do you need a place to stay? Do you need medical treatment? Is there something your customers would like to see in the paper? And it's just like, you know, but they'd rather complain that we're not getting our own SRO, you know. And, you know,
it's just like no matter what we do they're not happy. So there's always, there's always going to be somebody who's miserable. So, I think that they ask us, you know, how we feel. But at the same time what can we do about some of those issues?

David: What does the word “democracy” mean to you?
Timothy: I don’t know. Democracy. I heard the word before, democracy. I don’t really know whether how to explain democracy that’s a, some word in business that the White man put together to make a how you, democracy. A group of people making decisions. I guess.

David: To what extent are vendors asked to participate in decisions that are made at StreetWise?
Pamela: They aren’t.
David: How come?
Pamela: I guess that’s their executive policy. They don’t; they just make the decisions.
David: Do you think that vendor input is considered for decisions?
Pamela: No, I don’t think so.
David: Should it be?
Pamela: Yeah, it should be. Yeah, it should be, and they should be honest with the vendors. Honesty doesn’t really seem to exist as much. They say one thing, but they do something totally different, and that’s not good.
David: What’s your take on this whole with the vendor rep position being open.
Pamela: There’s nobody there.
David: Is that a vendor rep a sufficient tool for the vendor voices? Should there be more? I mean, is that enough?
Pamela: It doesn’t seem to be because there are like twelve people on the Board. You only have one vendor rep, and a vendor rep is probably just a token. It’s a vendor, you know. It may be someone that’s really articulate and really good, but the Board’s already made their decision. I think the vendor’s probably just a token. I think they just make they’ll listen to the vendor input, but I don’t think it’s gonna make much of a difference. And I don’t understand why there’s not a vendor rep now. Gary was the vendor rep and he was I don’t even know if he finished out his time. But I know I heard him say he didn’t make no meetings, or something, but it wasn’t nothing that was spoken about. And then they put up some criteria for a new vendor rep, but we never heard nothing more about it.
David: So you’d like to see more communication between the Board and the staff and the vendors?

Pamela: Yeah, because last Saturday a Board member came by the office, and he stopped and introduced himself. Talked to people as they came in and brought papers. And that was a good thing. So, you know the way it is now when the Board comes it’s already like an invisible wall up between the Board and the vendors. You know, there’s already an air of animosity because they don’t interact with the vendors. You know, it’s like they’re there, and the vendors are here.

David: To what extent are vendors asked to participate in decisions that are made at StreetWise?

Vincent: None whatsoever. That board had the nerve to tell us that we not competent enough or responsible enough to pick elect somebody on the board. Now how you gonna judge the crew that we got now with the crew that was in the past? I think that’s real disrespectful. And I don’t think none of the board members done walked in our shoes anyway. So they shouldn’t be making decisions for us no way. I mean, our situation ain’t tangible to them. If you ain’t never walked in our shoes, please. You ain’t never went out there and sold no papers. You ain’t never stood out there in thirty below zero weather. You ain’t never stood out there in a hundred degree weather. Who is you to make decisions for me? I mean, we should be involved in the decision making, simple as that.

David: What kinds of decisions have been made that, say, you might disagree with or have caused the vendors problems or --

Vincent: I think, well, first of all, we know any organization, especially an organization like this, I ain’t gonna call no names, but we know that this organization done had a lot of grants over the years, a lot of money done come to this organization. A lot of successful people, like Oprah, basketball players, they done put a lot of money into this organization. And I don’t see where no vendors have benefit. For example, if I lose my badge today or tomorrow, why should I have to pay twenty dollars to get another one? It don’t make sense to me. And that’s just one example. Why did they raise the paper to thirty five cent? It don’t make sense to me. What did happen to all the money that came through here? And why is it that a lot of these charitable corporations and all that are whatever? You know, the people that donate grant money, why is it that they no longer interested in donating money to StreetWise? Why is that? Please. So that’s all I gotta say about that.
David: So, I’m guessing from your beginning comments that I don’t wanna say what I think. Would you so do you think that vendors need to have more of a say?

Vincent: Definitely. I think we need vendor representation on the board. They claimed the person wasn’t coming. Well, that person should have been replaced. You know, just because one person was irresponsible don’t mean that every vendor that get on the board is gonna be irresponsible. Please. To me, they don’t want a vendor involved. Please. How could you have a vendor best interest at heart if it ain’t a voice there? You understand my point? Something wrong with that picture. Something wrong with that picture.

Hierarchy of the streets: “Cupshakers,” “One-Paper Bandits,” and Vendors

Frank: They’re not letting the people know what StreetWise is about. How can a vendor know what we’re about when the upper echelon doesn’t even know? “Oh, you’re not about helping the homeless? Then what are you about?” Well, “Our vendors are not homeless,” and then say, “But they were homeless. They’re not homeless because …. ” See what I’m saying? They’re defeating their own purpose. We are homeless, and we are out to help the homeless so this way they won’t be homeless. Oh sure, they’re not homeless. Yeah, they got a room, but have them this week find out where they’re at. They’re back out on the street. They’re not a paycheck away, they’re maybe two or three days away from being moved out on the street.

David: What do you think about this, and I don’t know your personal situation. You might have a house to go home to at night.

Vincent: I most definitely do. I have a beautiful place to go home to and I thank God every day. I got more space than I need, I’m comfortable, I got mostly all the necessities that anybody else got that’s working everyday.

David: So, how do you deal with this kind of stereotype of anybody who’s selling Streetwise is homeless

Vincent: Well, not lately because I work out in Wilmette, in the suburbs, and people know me and I mean, people can see what you’re about. They can see that I’m a nice person; they can see that I take care of my hygiene. They can see that I speak pretty well; I’m courteous. So they know me. So, they don’t really look at me the way they do all the other vendors, so I really don’t have that problem that much where I work. But you know you always gonna have a jerk wherever you go.

Fred: The only way that would happen is if somebody asked me
what is the money for? But I would tell them the basics, you know. This is helping me to get as far as room and board. You know people used to ask me when they first when I first started selling over there they asked me was I homeless? I told them no I wasn't homeless. I may not stay in the same place every day, but I'm not homeless. If I sell enough of these I can afford a room somewhere.

Gary: But other than that, basically that's the main issue. The main problems I have are with the panhandlers and cup-shakers. And homeless people, they wanna fight. I’ve had to defend my property, my territory, a couple times. Basically what I do, ‘cause I’m right there next to Metro, I don’t fight ‘em. I just tell ‘em, “Wait a minute. I’ll be back,” and I go down and get Metro. The Metro will call the police. The police come and say, “Oh, you gotta leave. This is his spot. It's better than me doing it. I’m a little older and smarter; I’m not going to fight nobody unless I have unless they’re threatening my life, then that’s a different story.

Rodney: Well, the general public has a perception that everybody selling StreetWise is homeless.
David: Right.
Rodney: And so they have a tendency to want to put them into the same category as a panhandler, all right? As opposed to being an entrepreneur who is using this as a means to sustain his livelihood. And because those two persons are so parallel to the general public conception is what causes a lot of problems in the public eyesight, but in reality if they really knew what the mission of StreetWise is, it's just to help a person have a better lifestyle. A lot of these guys make a very comfortable living. Now what they decide to do with their money is a different thing. But just as society has a dim view of them and panhandlers, merchants take advantage of the vendors in these SROs where they charge them anywhere from $80 to $100-some a week for a single room with a shared shower and bathroom and no cooking. So, you know, it's just the evils of the world.

Carol: Yeah, I know from my personal opinion before I even, got to work here, I probably never would have thought that I’d would work here because I always worked in corporate organizations, I’ve always worked the banks. But, as a person walking down the street, I’ve always been more likely to 100% of the time, if I'm going to give money on the street to people, StreetWise vendor
before I give it to a person standing there. And that’s just my personal, you know, take on it. I’d much rather see people trying to do things legitimately, you know, versus just, you know, sitting on the corner shaking you up. It’s also been told to me that it’s same person every day, I walk home this way every day and I see the same guy, you know. And it’s known, you know. And I’m more likely to try to get a paper from that person when I see him on a regular basis. So that, I mean, that’s just my observation, my feelings before I was an employee.

Priscilla: Okay. Back in 2002, June 8, I started to sell StreetWise. The reason I started doing that was because it was pretty strange, so I never I’ll tell you what I did before going onto everything else. I started it because it was a time in my life where my husband and myself, before this guy that I’m with now. When we were together, he would have an issue where he wasn’t really, he didn’t have a steady job. But he wanted me to, he would panhandle for money. And he would ask for me to panhandle for me. And I said, “I don’t want to panhandle for money,” I said, “because I don’t want to be asking nobody for their money.” There’s a soup kitchen that feeds out here. And if I eat there, I get food from them, enough to keep for later. I don’t want to ask anybody for their money. So I did ask someone to help us buy something to eat one time, about maybe once or twice. And I don’t believe at that time I shook a cup or nothing like that. But I just shook a cup for like money, to panhandle some money.

David: Do you think that do people not know the difference between you selling Streetwise and somebody panhandling, or they don’t care? I mean, ‘cause it’s two different things, right?
Benjamin: Yeah.
David: If you’re asking for money, it’s one thing.
Benjamin: Uh huh.
David: But you’re selling a newspaper.
Benjamin: Yeah.
David: Do people not understand the difference?
Benjamin: People won’t give you the chance to talk to ‘em. And there’s one guy came up and says, “Hey, the Streetwise vendor.” Says, “What is this Streetwise vendor for?” I says, “To get the people off of a rut they’re in and give ‘em a job. And give ‘em opportunities to improve themselves.” So, I sold him a paper and he gave me a dollar more. He says, “Keep it.” So I got two bucks for that newspaper. And he says, “That’s a good thing.” People don’t understand that it’s a job. When they read the newspaper,
they find out what it is. But it’s hard to get them to stop and talk to you. Kimberly: It makes it easier to vend. I don’t feel like I have to push as hard, you know. Just say, “Good morning. Good evening. Would you like a paper on your way out” or, you know. When I’m in the city, I gotta be a little bit pushier. David: A little more aggressive. Kimberly: A little bit more, ‘cause sometimes you have the panhandlers in the city. They want to accost you, and then some of them I just feel like just punching them out, and so forth. Know what I mean? David: How come? Kimberly: Sometimes they get real nasty with me, sometimes. David: With you? How come? Kimberly: They feel like I’m taking away from their panhandling, you know. They see me with the papers, and they’re, “What are you doing here?” They say little smart stuff. I used to kinda argue back with them, but now I get so nice with them I make ‘em look stupid trying to do stuff. They actually run away from me. David: Well, what kind of stuff would you say? Kimberly: I actually speak to ‘em, and say, “How you doing today?” and, you know, “Isn’t it a nice day?” and then I and then the customers be looking, “Wow!” you know.

David: Talk about that. When you started and then you kind of went off on a different direction when you were seeing how people think that Streetwise is organized panhandling but it’s not. Zach: Oh yeah, a lot of people. I know that a lot of people. Sitting there, walk past me call me a panhandler, a bum or whatever. Obviously those were not my customers and they are just they never took the time to really just find out what was going on. But especially somebody selling being a one-paper bandit that definitely like usually show Streetwise in the wrong way. But calling it organized panhandling is like cause there are some people like who cause selling the paper but some people are just doing it to get drunk and booze up. So it’s a great excuse for somebody to get more money than usual instead of standing on the street by themselves with nothing to offer. Some people, unfortunately, use the paper in the wrong way. It’s almost like for somebody like me, maybe it’s looked at as like extravagant panhandling in a way. Or I think a lot of people look at anything on the street as panhandling. If you’re playing the guitar there’s always somebody on Jackson or on the subway playing the guitar, dancing. Michigan Avenue and Chicago, dancing and blah blah.
If you’re out on the street selling something, that’s cast as elaborate but if you’re just doing it by yourself with nothing, that’s definitely being a bum. But if you’re offering a service then maybe it’s what I said earlier about organized panhandling. Yes it’s organized but it’s something to offer too. If you’re really care about yourself, you’re helping yourself out and those you care about. And it’s something to offer your customers. You give up a customer base. It starts out looking like organized panhandling and after a while it becomes a service like a regular newsstand. But, of course, there will always be those that’ll look at it the other way. So there’s always some confusion of organized panhandling and a public service. So you can’t win all the time but hopefully you can win at least 25% of the time. Those who like develop a relationship with like those who know you. Definitely outweighs the negative.

David: What kind of stuff gets you frustrated?
Kimberly: Basically, some thoughts would be in my mind about somebody on the outside trying to do those messages about get a real job, or certain things people have said to me. When they try to put me down for selling StreetWise, and whatever. Then sometimes, there’s some people that still stereotype StreetWise and says, “Are you homeless?” I don’t want nobody to think I’m homeless.

David: How do you answer that if somebody asks you?
Kimberly: I tell them, “No.”

David: Then do they, do they look at you and say, “Oh, I thought you had to be homeless to sell this paper?” or do they think that’s a normal answer?
Kimberly: I really don’t get it a whole lot, but sometimes I do. I try to explain to ‘em that it’s not you don’t have to be homeless, but a person that is homeless can sell them. You know, that’s what I try to explain it that’s basically how I explain it.

David: Anybody can sell StreetWise, right?
Kimberly: Right. I explain to them a person that is homeless can sell ‘em, but you don’t have to be homeless to sell papers. You know, ‘cause I know there’s vendors that own houses that sell StreetWise. Of course they probably need to keep the mortgage up, you know, ‘cause I can imagine it’s very expensive.

David: Yeah. Well then you have you have an apartment, you have a car, right? You have that’s not homeless, right?
Kimberly: Right. I mean, sometimes I’ve been kinda tight in a corner. I almost got my car repo’d a couple of times, and I was able to get out there and sell papers and get the funds together.
Run to the bank and make a car payment. In fact, I did that like about three weeks ago, ‘cause they almost repo’d my car. But, you know, I was able to get through, you know

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| Frank: The writing’s so bad that it ain’t gonna be worth a shit anyway.” That’s the comments I was getting. “What the fuck do you know about that?” You know, “I don’t wanna read this garbage.” But the same article in the Tribune, they’re reading it. That’s how much respect our paper has, because of all the bullshit we’ve going through. At one time, I imagine they had some really fantastic writers, but they were paying them. They actually decided to dump them and get the vendors to write. Writing goes down, “What’s this garbage?” Half the stuff she’s pulling, is pulled right off the fucking AP. Same thing the Tribune’s getting, the same thing the damn Sun Times is getting, and all this. We’re competing with the Sun Times and Tribune. Guess what? You lose. What we got to remember is our roots. You have to dance with the bitch that you brought. David: What? Frank: You dance with the lady that brought you there. Now in mid-stream you want to change horses. Hey, man. And then you wonder why nobody’s paying any attention to you. I don’t pull punches.

Krista: And they say more people are reading us then the Reader right now, you know. I mean just because the Reader’s a throwaway, you know. They just pick it up to find out if there's any apartments for rent, and they throw it out. And so for me, it's just like is it going to change, you know, because all the vendors say that they print shit in StreetWise nobody else will print, because they just don't want to. They're afraid to. They're afraid their customers are too rich to care about homelessness. I mean they're not going to lose sleep over it, because they're rich. But at the same time it can happen to anybody. So, I mean maybe they’re, maybe they have distant relatives who are poor. Maybe they have somebody that they don't see that much, like their mother and they had to put them in a home. I mean these kind of issues matter to everybody, no matter how much money you make. So I mean, I'm happy to see the beauty stuff and everything. If they do put in there, that's fine. But I don't want to lose the content we have now. So I mean it's okay to say we're changing, but is it actually going to benefit us, you know? I mean, and the biggest fear is that we’re going to, they say we’re trying to gear the paper towards the people who buy it. But at the same time a lot of those people are interested in these things that we
have the paper, like the CTA strike that was happening, the orange alert this week, you know. They're worried about these hard-hitting issues about homelessness and stuff. And so it's like, you know, a lot of vendors are worried they're going to cut all that out. They're going to, you know, cut all the activism that we've had all these years and they're going to start putting in beauty tips and sports, you know. That stuff is fine, but are they going to cut out the stuff that makes StreetWise what it is? But at the same time is it going to change who we are? Everybody knows StreetWise as an activist paper .... And so for me, it's just like is it going to change, you know, because all the vendors say that they print shit in StreetWise nobody else will print, because they just don't want to. They're afraid to. They're afraid their customers are too rich to care about homelessness. I mean they're not going to lose sleep over it, because they're rich. But at the same time it can happen to anybody. So, I mean maybe they’re, maybe they have distant relatives who are poor. Maybe they have somebody that they don't see that much, like their mother and they had to put them in a home. I mean these kind of issues matter to everybody, no matter how much money you make. So I mean, I'm happy to see the beauty stuff and everything. If they do put in there, that's fine. But I don't want to lose the content we have now.

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<th>The Brink of Existence and Nonexistence: StreetWise and Success</th>
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<td>David: And how do you meet people where they’re at but also maybe in large possibilities in which they could give back to community in ways that they haven’t thought about before?</td>
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<td>Travis: In the private sector in my company, there is no question I saw a huge correlation between those that saw no boundaries to their job description and those that climbed up the ladder. Say we’re having the carpets cleaned on Saturday and so Friday we need to get everything off the floor. The people who are willing to stay after work on Friday and not even be asked. Just stay. Somebody’s got to do this and they see me, the president of the company, going around picking up wastebaskets and putting them on desks and getting everything off the floor. The hiring vendors full-time at StreetWise is a good thing to demonstrate up and out Greg, for instance is a good thing. But on the other hand, most of them have significant baggage that make them really hard to work with. It’s hard to shape and mold those people and make leaders out of them as well as followers of the executive director when they really haven’t had sophisticated business experience where they’ve seen good mentors.</td>
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<td>David: Can I ask, is it hard to try to save up money to get all these</td>
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things going while you’re working for StreetWise?

Frank: Yes, it is. I pay eighty dollars a week in rent. I got a Link card which is good for a hundred and forty-nine dollars in food at Jewel’s, Dominick’s, or at any major market. Before I started with QAT, I was putting away a hundred, a hundred and fifty dollars a week away. That’s after I paid for everything. I paid eighty dollars a month for transportation. I buy a one-month bus pass that’s seventy-five dollars. Nobody knew about my spot prior to that. So on an average day, I was making twenty dollars in the morning, I was making another thirty dollars in the afternoon, then on Fridays, I’d make fifty dollars in my one spot, and I’ll make sixty to eighty dollars in my evening spot. So, I was able to eat and buy clothes and all that, because I didn’t have nothing. I lost everything. I lost all my motorcycles, except for one. I lost all my cars. I lost my trucks. I lost my house. I lost all my tools. I lost my shops, everything. Even the money that was in my accounts; it’s all gone. When I came out, all I had was a pair of pants, a shirt, and about twenty bucks. In my year I’ve been working with StreetWise, I got about three grand in my savings account, I got about a hundred dollars in my checking account.

David: Can you tell me I want to ask you a couple other things. Can you tell me a little bit about how and when you got started with Street-Wise?

Dennis: How and when? Well, how was because I was out panhandling, and I didn’t like the feelin’; it wasn’t me, man; it wasn’t my drive. I got a lot of drive in anything I do, and I wasn’t feelin’ what I was doin’. I felt my sense of pride was leaving. Street-Wise gave it back to me a lot, despite of what other people think. You an electrician? Hey, I’m an electrician too. I know how to do wires and stuff. I been to Job Corp. I know how to do that, you know what I’m sayin’? You a carpenter? I been workin’ with wood my whole life. Hard work is nothin’ to me nothin’, you know what I’m sayin’, so it’s just when I found Street-Wise and I knew they was always there, but it just when I started sellin’ the papers, man; it just gave me another sense of pride. Something else too is experience in life, you know what I’m sayin’? And it’s been a good experience, man; I try to tell people every day to come down here, man, on orientation day to get plugged, man. You won’t be out there beggin’ for change no more, man; you’ll be happy enough that you got that $30.00 or $40.00 in your pocket for givin’ a paper away, and people tellin’ you, “It’s a good thing you’re doin’ somethin’ doin’ somethin’ with yourself,” you know what I’m sayin’? It’s a good feelin’ when people will tell you that you’re doin’ somethin’ with
yourself, man; you not doin’ nothin’, because if you not doin’ nothin’, well, you got time for the devil.

Carol: Well, I think that if you are going to provide growth plans to help that person get to these, then fine, skate. But it’s kind of like saying I’m going to get people off welfare after so long and then I don’t care what you do after that, but you’ve got to be off welfare. You know what I’m saying, person been selling for 15 years, so what? I mean to me, I mean that’s not so much of a failure story as it is somebody who’s dedicated to what it is they do. They got a job. This is there job, I mean I don’t, but I think if you want to set up that time line say within five years you need to be done with StreetWise then I hope they have the programs or something in place and get to work with that person so at the end of five year period they can get a handle on it, because if you told a person you cut them off and not train them for anything else to do, then you know somebody, you know you got a great uncle, you know. What am I going to go through life or Mark’s been here for years, you know if anyone, you know has anyone done anything, any work with him outside of you know, I don’t know the answer to that, but I’m just saying, you know. He would be a perfect example. I mean what else is Mark going to do? Timothy doesn’t work here anymore, terminated, whatever reason. What else is Scott going to do? Timothy had a bad back, he’s illiterate and he’s got some kind of you know, mental disability, I’m not quite sure what it is. But you talk to him, say things to him and then he’ll come back and holding on you know. What else is Timothy going to do besides sell StreetWise?

David: In your own words, what is the mission of StreetWise, what is it here to do?

Scott: It’s to help yourself through self-sufficiency, to empower yourself to do better. You can do better but if you have a criminal background, you’re movement ability is very limited because like if you go to apply for a job, “You don’t want to hire this guy. He was in jail too many times. He may go back to jail again, and then we gonna have to pay time and expense to find somebody else” and blah, blah, blah. So that’s why StreetWise come into play, to help us to better ourselves. And that’s why I’m saying, I ain’t going nowhere for a while. To get me enough money to get that expunged, and I’ll keep this as a part-time job while I do other things. As Mark always state this in orientation too, is to keep your badge and keep in contact because you never know. Next week you may lose this job, and you’ll need StreetWise again.
David: What’s the mission of StreetWise? Why does this organization exist? In your own words.
Kimberly: Basically, I see it as a way of helping a person give a person the opportunity to build their finances up so that they can support themselves to make choices what they wanna do in their lives. Whether they wanna go to college, whether they wanna go to trade school. If they wanna start their own business. I’m going to college for a career, instead. Then also, it also is a good springboard even if you wanna start another non-profit organization, working in a specific field. Like me, I have a passion and an interest in working with victims of domestic violence, because I was formerly abused myself. Some people say I think it should be a short term 2, 3, 4 year thing if they can’t get themselves back up on their feet and offer something better after that there needs to be something in place…

Ed: I have not problem with somebody being a vendor for the rest of their lives. I think if they are happy and content, if that’s helping them meet their minimal needs then they should feel free to be able to that. It’s far be it from me to suggest it’s time for you to move on. When maybe this is, maybe they’ve hit their stride; maybe they’re doing as well as they can. It would be nice however, to have an opportunity for those that can go beyond this to give them the opportunity to go beyond StreetWise.