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The Rhetoric of the Economically Disadvantaged: Analyzing a Marginalized Discourse

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The Rhetoric of the Economically Disadvantaged:
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ABTRACT OF THESIS

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Those who engage in contemporary begging activities compose and enact public rhetoric daily across the United States, and the collection and analysis of rhetoric from this discourse community is particularly important in a consumer capitalist society where those who are economically disadvantaged do not receive much academic consideration. This project attempts to provide a better understanding of the public rhetoric of those who beg in the modern setting via a Foucauldian critical apparatus in order to establish the speech acts of this marginalized discourse community as legitimate instances of an exercise of social action and public speech. A Foucauldian analysis of this indigent discourse community is valuable because it emphasizes the importance of surfaces in meaning production and reception, the interconnectedness of marginalized and mainstream subgenres of rhetoric, and operations of power in these interactions. While the study of such public expressions of need and urban poverty will not act as a solution to the complex network of issues that contribute to the persistence of begging as a social phenomenon or the creation of laws that violate the rights of those individuals, the findings and analysis of this research does support and encourage the recognition of this group as equally entitled to participation in public expression and involvement.

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"Well most the time it's blunt to the point. You know, hungry and homeless, please help." – Kevin, 40-year-old homeless man living in Albuquerque, NM

Significance

As a result of the increased trend toward industrialization across the globe, in the twenty-first century, more people than ever before live in closer proximity to each other than at any other point in human history. Despite this modern shift toward urbanized living, however, universal economic prosperity for those living in metropolitan settings is far from a reality. In fact, as of 2015, reports indicate that 13.5 percent of the American population were living in poverty (Proctor). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that begging is a commonly encountered street-level economic activity in major cities throughout the United States and most other developed Western societies. Roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf—the phrase I will use in most instances to signify the more familiar but derogatory terms "begging" or "panhandling"—is certainly not a new phenomenon. Yet, due to the increasing popularity of the city as a social living arrangement, expressions of urban poverty have developed certain identifiable rhetorical tropes and generic conventions. Few scholars have devoted study, however, to this discourse community's rhetoric, perhaps in part because those who are unemployed, homeless, or otherwise economically disadvantaged occupy low-prestige positions in America's consumer capitalist society; therefore, because researchers are inevitably informed by the values of

the market economy, those who do not significantly contribute materially either as producers or consumers in the traditional sense are identified as of little value, and their public discourse is likewise undervalued.

As Margaret Melrose maintains, "the contemporary phenomenon of begging warrant[s] research attention because it is an activity which has been often condemned but little understood" (145). Thus far, economists, criminologists, historians, and sociologists have dedicated the majority of the scholarly attention to documenting, researching, or analyzing the social norms—including the rhetoric—that impact these financially-struggling groups. A thorough analysis of the compositions of this discourse community has yet to be conducted by scholars of rhetoric, however, which makes this subgenre of charity rhetoric prime for new academic inquiry.

Collection and analysis of rhetoric from discourse communities of the lowest socioeconomic groups is particularly important in a consumer capitalist society where those who are economically disadvantaged do not receive as much academic consideration as middle and upper class discourse communities do because of their failure to consume and produce in the traditional economic system. It is not just the financially stable or economically wealthy who are agents of persuasion or are part of the social order, though; even those who represent the lowest level of the United States' socioeconomic hierarchy compose and enact meaningful rhetoric and contribute to the existing social reality and public sphere. The interaction between the productions of this marginalized discourse community's subgenre and other—more accepted, less stigmatized—subgenres of charity rhetoric, such as those employed by organized or

religious institutions, reveal that even this relatively unacknowledged discourse community is a part of a broader rhetorical community and tradition. To develop a more complete understanding of all charity rhetoric, then, it is essential to study all of its subgenres, including non-prestigious ones such as those produced by the homeless or destitute.

Furthermore, the study of the rhetoric of roadside charity collectors contributes to the understanding of how persuasion is rendered in the public sphere. The ways in which privileged or even simply familiar rhetorical genres persuade and create meaning are frequently objects of academic study; the discourse of subaltern communities is also worthy of scholarly research and analysis, however, because it is likewise a part of the existing social and cultural milieu. Better appreciating how a subordinated rhetoric, like that of roadside charity collectors, functions in a society where the dominant ideology promotes the exclusion or criminalization of that discourse's users, therefore, can increase not only the academic but also the generalized understanding of real-world applications and receptions of such discourse.

Beyond seeking to create either a comprehensive understanding of charity rhetoric or the rendership of persuasion by subaltern discourse communities, critical analysis of the conventions of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf also has wider sociopolitical and ideological implications for American society and modern Western society in general. When already marginalized groups in society are systematically ignored or denied their legitimate place in the social order, the consequences of such treatment is reflected and perpetuated further in the corresponding culture's norms. In

this case, failure to classify or acknowledge the activity and speech acts of roadside charity collectors as rhetorical, when it clearly is an operation within the larger tradition of rhetoric, represents an obvious discrimination against indigent members of society based on their socioeconomic status. The academic community, therefore, unlike mainstream society in many ways, has the opportunity to bring this marginalized discourse community's artifacts to the forefront in order to not only better understand and incorporate it into the existing body of knowledge, but also help reintroduce the idea that disenfranchised classes of society are active participants in the social order as opposed to mere representatives of social disorder unworthy of acknowledgement. Only when the existence and speech acts of indigent members of society are seen as connected to the common good, rather than hindrances to the maintenance of that common good, can the underlying causes of poverty, homelessness, and economic distress be fully addressed.

Indeed, when an entire socioeconomic class and their most—oftentimes only—public expressions are ignored or made to seem substandard, their rights can and do more easily go unprotected or violated. Thus, developing a recognition that the discourse community of roadside charity collectors is indeed a manifestation of rhetoric may help legitimize the position that the compositions of this community are no less deserving of protection under the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech than "all of those who combine solicitations for money with speech and expressive conduct—charities, retailers, performers, etc." (Cockburn 296). As long as this discourse community's productions are viewed as thoughtless uses of speech merely displayed to harass economically-stable individuals, however, the unjust denial and inequitable defense of First Amendment

rights for the already most socioeconomically-disadvantaged members of society will endure and perhaps escalate.

According to Patrick J. L. Cockburn's analysis of the legislative rhetoric and recent legal precedents set regarding the prohibition of begging, passage of anti-begging legislation is often designed to single out this discourse community based not so much on their activity—which in many cases is less intrusive and even less conspicuous than the donation requests of organized charities—but on the appearance or sociopolitical implications of their messages (297-298). In some instances, such as banning these activities within certain distances of schools or banks and ATMs, these laws can be understood as genuine measures taken to protect the equally important rights of other citizens; these are not the laws that are problematic for the purposes of this discussion. It is the legislation which outright bans or is excessively restrictive against roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf that represents a disturbing trend toward dehumanizing and criminalizing an already disadvantaged group in order to deny them the right to free speech that is extended to recognized or officially established groups who likewise request charitable donations in public. According to recent legislative records, "The number of cities with outright bans on panhandling increased by 25 percent between 2011 and 2014" (Wiltz).

Thus, in cities across the United States, laws are being proposed or have already been passed that represent serious impediments to homeless and/or jobless individuals' rights to free speech. In some of these instances, such laws have been repealed, but they have also sometimes been upheld and defended successfully with disturbing social,

political, and cultural implications. The most noteworthy of these implications is that sign holders are not classified as citizens enacting their right to free speech, but rather as unattractive impediments in the urban landscape. In order to evade potential First Amendment violation complaints and simplify the issue, members of this discourse community are dehumanized and classified in some legal discourse as if they were objects (equivalent to utility poles or mailboxes) obstructing the optimal functioning of city streets instead of human individuals entitled to exercise the rights freely enjoyed by more powerful members of society (Blomley 1703). The documentation and analysis of roadside charity collectors' compositions, therefore, acts as a direct challenge to the wide-spread marginalization of this group and their expressions of need and poverty by increasing the understanding of this area of human activity and asserting its rhetorical equality with other forms of charity rhetoric (which do receive First Amendment protections). Homeless and impoverished individuals may not be outfitted in uniforms or well-kept clothing or pass out reading materials or use bells and buckets to collect donations as officially-established charity organizations may do, but that does not automatically render their requests for charity more dangerous, less genuine, or less intentionally composed and enacted.

It is my position, therefore, that the signs produced by individuals who engage in roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf can be best understood according to Foucault's theory of discourse. As Foucault theorized and explored, all genres of discourse are always informed by the ideologies, institutions, and material circumstances—the surfaces—from which they emerge, and they represent power

dynamics at work in society. Indeed, when it comes to this subgenre of charity rhetoric in particular, the power of the existing socioeconomic climate cannot be underestimated. What separates "free speech" from "disorderly conduct" in society is contingent upon the current social and economic, as well as historical, surfaces of that culture. Only by fully appreciating the power of the pertinent surfaces that influence not only the rhetoric composed by roadside charity collectors, but also the complexity of their rhetorical situation, can we begin to distinguish begging as a speech act from an automatic "group[ing] together with other forms of social action that are deemed disorderly (drunkenness, sleeping or urinating in public, etc.)" (Cockburn 288). Instead, based on the forthcoming Foucauldian analysis, it can be understood that roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf is its own separate and legitimate exercise of destitute individuals' rights and ability to act as public rhetors. As a Foucauldian analysis of even a small sample of this discourse community's artifacts will illustrate, then, this group and their requests for donations are not outside the scope of the peaceful functioning of contemporary urban life or the tradition of public rhetoric.

In short, the study and analysis of this discourse community in relation to the surfaces from which it emerges and its rightful position among other subgenres of charity rhetoric serves both a purely scholarly purpose—to document and understand a little studied subgenre of rhetoric—as well as an important sociopolitical purpose; namely, increasing awareness of and legitimizing a discourse community's compositions in order to "support a more general human right to survive as a homeless person" (Cockburn 288). Whereas the precedents set by the rulings of judges and the positions of politicians and

lawmakers are inevitably more influenced by the concerns of their mainstream constituents and have more immediate effects on social conditions, the academic study of the public rhetoric of indigent members of society is nevertheless a necessary tool in safeguarding or advancing the rights of this marginalized group and legitimizing their subgenre of rhetoric. As Michael Adler observes, the scarcity of academic research on begging is noteworthy considering "its prevalence, and its increasing salience as a public issue" (163). By allowing journalistic investigations or anecdotal accounts of begging to be the primary body of research about this community and their discourse, then, an accurate critical understanding of begging and its role in society or as a form of rhetoric is unlikely to be reached.

It should be noted that the scope of this argument is interested in the peaceful display of rhetoric. Those individuals who practice threatening, aggressive, or overtly "lewd" behavior while trying to collect roadside charity on one's own behalf are not the subjects of this argument. The legitimate need for lawmakers and law enforcement agents to curtail dangerous activity is not in question. A rhetor, standing or walking, while displaying a written text, however, presents no more certain danger to the audience than any other pedestrian. (Moreover, all of the sign holders directly approached for a picture or interview for the purposes of this research sample were nonviolent, often friendly.) As Dennis J. Baker's assessment of the continued criminalization of those who engage in contemporary begging concludes, "The mere sight of a disheveled person in a public place does not cause wrongful offence in a humane society" (232). Thus, the immediate dismissal or criminalization of an entire discourse community based on inaccurate

assumptions or inadequate contextualization amounts to social intolerance.

In order to promote a more socially tolerant socioeconomic order, then, the field of rhetoric can contribute a Foucauldian analysis of this indigent discourse community, which will take into account the importance of surfaces in meaning production and reception, the interconnectedness of marginalized and mainstream subgenres of rhetoric, and operations of power in these interactions. As Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg assert of Foucault's theory of discourse, "he forcefully states that discourse is a form of social action" (1434). Better appreciating the rhetoric of roadside charity collectors via a Foucauldian critical apparatus, therefore, can help establish the speech acts of this marginalized discourse community as legitimate instances of an exercise of social action, which will challenge the association of modern begging activities with disorderly conduct.

Survey of Scholarship

In "Why Begging Offends: Historical Perspectives and Continuities," Angus Erskine and Ian McIntosh examine some of the enduring impressions of begging that inform both how the public and policies respond to this fringe economic activity. They trace the modern conception of the "deserving poor" to Martin Luther's *Book of Beggars*, where different types of beggars are described in order to divide the worthy from the fraudulent. As Erskine and McIntosh observe, in the post-reformation Christian tradition, and especially in the Western free-market economy, the poor are often portrayed as dishonest, fraudulent, or asocial, and therefore a threat to organized social order (40-41). Indeed, examining written accounts of beggars from the 17th to the 20th centuries, Erskine and McIntosh identify several recurring ways in which beggars are typified or reported on; mainly, that the public is repeatedly concerned by the prospect "that those who beg may not be what they seem" and by "the amount of money they make" (29). According to Erskine and McIntosh, negative representations of beggars—in many cases, it would seem, with little verifiable or substantive proof—are consistently circulated by the media. Beggars are cast as largely deceitful in their displays of need (i.e. faking disability, illness, etc.) or accused of earning sizable income from their street-level economic activity. As a result, public perceptions of beggars remain largely ambivalent or unsympathetic. Thus, Erskine and McIntosh's historical research, although unconcerned with the specific rhetoric of beggars, does shed light on the how long-standing attitudes toward begging have come to influence the contemporary social interpretation of this activity. Indeed, due to the public's antipathy towards modern beggars, the interactions of

beggars with potential donors are understood as an often fraudulent or antisocial exchange in need of elimination.

In another research project conducted by Erskine and McIntosh, "'I feel rotten. I do, I feel rotten': Exploring the Begging Encounter," they examine begging not from the perspective of the beggar but from the perspective of the audience addressed. Conducting interviews with individuals who regularly encounter beggars, Erskine and McIntosh use the discursive data they collected from 55 interviewees to asses public attitudes toward begging, including what factors respondents said influenced whether or not or how much money they donate, and how "real" beggars and begging activities are defined (for instance, respondents were found to classify impoverished-looking individuals loitering or present on the streets as beggars even if those individuals were not engaged in requesting donations). Among their findings, Erskine and McIntosh found that a judgment of the beggar's "genuineness" was the deciding factor in how begging is perceived and whether or not a donation is given; those ways in which a beggar's so-called genuineness was measured or constructed by passers-by varied significantly, however (185). Some reported that when begging individuals were sitting or looked otherwise low-energy, it acted as a confirmation of their needy status to passers-by because such wearied behaviors indicated that the begging individual, indeed, was in some way unable to work in the traditional sense. Meanwhile, other respondents reported the converse: that those who beg passively or in a passive position are interpreted as lazy and even more undeserving because not only are they asking for a unilateral gift, but also they are doing so without exerting "enough" effort (186-188). Significantly, Erskine and

McIntosh also found that being poor alone was not sufficient justification for begging in many respondents' opinions. For many, literal homelessness was essential to authenticating the genuineness of a beggar's needy status (189). An archetype of the "real" beggar also appears to exist in the public consciousness, which is based on the romanticized tramp figure—an old homeless male. Of course, this finding informs the degree to which any young or female individuals who engage in begging can be deemed genuine by passers-by, suggesting that a certain type of ethos is expected of individuals who beg by potential donating audiences.

They also found, although an instance of street-level economic activity, "Within the begging relation… moral decisions are brought into the foreground over more strictly economic ones" (193). In other words, even though the amounts donated by single passers-by are usually of trivial importance (spare change or small bills), a concern for how that often negligible amount of money from the individual donor will be used or the actual "need" of the beggar figure heavily into the decision to give and the general reception of the begging encounter. Indeed, according to many respondents, an inability to know what one's money will be spent on by an individual who receives it through begging is a major deterring factor when confronted by such a situation, which suggests that many individuals view the modern begging exchange according to the traditional economic system; in a consumer-capitalist society, paying money usually entitles an individual to adopt the role of a customer, and customers expect to "get" what they pay for. As a result, because those who give to modern beggars cannot ensure their money is being spent in the ways they believe it should be (on food, clothing, shelter, necessities,

etc.), they view the exchange as suspect. Thus, while Erskine and McIntosh are concerned with advancing the understanding of begging from a sociological perspective, their discursive data is nonetheless helpful for a rhetorical analysis of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf because their findings contribute to a clearer understanding of some of the prevailing attitudes toward begging in Western society, which can be helpful in the establishment of how and why roadside charity collectors render meaning in the ways that they do. Moreover, their findings also illustrate that the attitudes and hostilities of the target audience shapes the reception of the compositions produced by this discourse community.

Bill Jordan's "Begging: The Global Context and International Comparisons," illustrates how the decline of social welfare programs and the surplus of unskilled laborers in developed countries where those jobs are increasingly exported has contributed to a significant rise in modern begging—and a renewed stigma against that informal economic activity. As Jordan notes, "begging becomes prevalent when there is a large volume of impoverished and socially excluded population, but other possibilities of informal economic activity [such as subsistence horticulture or animal husbandry] are blocked" (51). Thus, a variety of socioeconomic factors contribute to the reemergence of begging as an economic practice used by unskilled laborers who cannot find employment or sufficient employment. Yet, because the mid-twentieth century experienced a so-called "golden age" of welfare in Western first-world societies, begging did become a much less common urban sight; the returned visibility of begging, therefore, without a returned awareness of the reasons why begging represents an apparently perennial economic

practice, all but ensures the public's reaction to this activity will remain a largely negative one. Jordan does not offer a rhetorical analysis of the beggars' public displays of need, but he does contribute to the understanding of why the rhetorical situation of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf elicits such reproach. Jordan contends, "Begging challenges the pedestrian to face up to destitution (pretended or real), and to communicate something about the value of a human being expressing distress and need" (54). Whether or not passers-by choose to donate, then, is not a simple matter of how persuasive the rhetoric composed by begging individuals is perceived to be. As Jordan describes, pressure to donate is also impacted by the constraints of the rhetorical situation because:

> To encounter a beggar is to be asked to make a judgment about a fellow citizen's plight. Are they "genuinely" destitute, homeless, and freezing (in which case, how can one withhold a small payment)? Or is there a "hidden reason" (such as alcoholism, drug-use, gambling, criminality or idleness) that explains their situation? Welfare states collect taxes and contributions from citizen to employ officials—bureaucrats and professionals—to make such judgments, in the distribution of benefits, services, treatment, training, and punishment. Citizens pay good money not to make such judgments, and to experience the moral perplexities and pains of framing and communicating them. Hence they resent the serial experience of being asked to decide whether to give. (55-56)

Providing this audience-centric element of the rhetorical situation, Jordan contributes significantly to any rhetorical analysis of begging because his assessment may help explain why, indeed, there appears to be so much tension between the discourse community of those who beg and mainstream society. And, of course, understanding this tension allows for a more accurate analysis of why sign holders make certain decisions in the composition and delivery of their rhetoric.

Hartley Dean and Margaret Melrose's "Easy Pickings or Hard Profession? Begging as an Economic Activity," maintains that begging "should be understood as a specific form of economic activity occurring within particular historical circumstances and local contexts" (84). Through interviews conducted with nineteen individuals found to be begging in England and Scotland, Dean and Melrose use that discursive data obtained to assess the similarities between individuals who engage in contemporary begging as well as the similarities of their experiences. As they found, "Experiences of dysfunctional families, of institutional care and/ or brushes with the law… figured significantly within the narratives which were disclosed," and past or present substance abuse and addiction issues were also recurring features of the experiences discussed by interview subjects (85). Perceptions of begging as an economic practice, average amounts received through such activity, methods for requesting charity, and reflections upon self versus the mainstream public were also among the topics discussed with interviewees. Although Dean and Melrose caution that their research cannot claim to be representative, they argue that the even if their findings only reflect a fraction of the truth, their research nevertheless provides valuable insight into the current dysfunctions or limitations of

social policy aimed at such impoverished citizens. Of course, as sociologists, Dean and Melrose are concerned with the ramifications of the "social exclusion" experienced by impoverished individuals and the complexity of improving the policies meant to serve or protect destitute citizens. As my own rhetorical analysis of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf will establish, however, while individuals who are members of this marginal discourse community may experience social exclusion, their rhetoric is very much a part of the public sphere in which it is enacted.

In "The Face that Begs: Street Begging Scenes and Selves' Identity Work," Andrew Travers performs a cartographic analysis on the face-to-face interaction of begging. Significantly, Travers asserts, "In the substantive studies of begging to date, the emphasis is nearly always on what can be said about beggars as people who have an unusual livelihood and not on what can be said about interaction when it is the public occasion of begging" (122). Although he is specifically interested in sociological inquiry, his assessment of the relatively little amount of scholarship that analyzes how the public "contributions"—whether classified as the interactions or rhetoric—of contemporary beggars is likewise applicable to the current (lack of an) archive on this topic in the rhetorical discipline. Travers analyzes begging according to Blum's cartographic frame, where the beggar's actions are seen as a production of envy in the beggar and, in turn, an acknowledgment in the potential donor of their enviable status (thus, the experience of both relief at their non-impoverished status and discomfort with their privileged position). Next, the begging interaction is analyzed according to MacCannell's cartographic frame, where the expressions of urban poverty displayed by beggars are understood as

affirmations of an affluent symbolic order. In this category, Travers provides insight into the complexity of the semiotic relationship between signifier and signified:

> the beggar's acutely-distressing experience of hunger and homelessness may be represented and masked by the simple written sign, 'Hungry and Homeless'. This sign stands in relation to the need it proclaims as might a sign reading 'I have been run over' held up by a roadside accident victim who is bleeding to death. And every aspect of the beggar's demeanour is in line with the 'Hungry and Homeless' sign. Foreclosed though traded upon by the beggar's adoption of nearly liturgical speech forms, intersubjectivity expires in dramatic restraint. Within tight propriety limits, the spectacle of beggary substitutes for the pornography of suffering a "softcore destitution." (129)

Finally, Travers analyzes the begging interaction with Frank's cartographic frame, where an instance of begging is understood as a scene in which the social gap between beggar and donor or non-donor (actions taken by passers-by are irrelevant) is confirmed. Travers, then, applies a sociological critical apparatus to contemporary begging as a public action, but his establishment of a need for more research testifies to the value of engaging in a rhetorical analysis of begging, which can—among other things—expand the full semiotic implications of roadside charity collecting not completely acknowledged by Travers.

In "How to Turn a Beggar into a Bus Stop: Law, Traffic, and the 'Function of the Place'," Nicholas Blomley analyzes the sociopolitical implications of the rhetoric of

municipal traffic laws in which beggars are increasingly classified as static objects (on the same plane as fire hydrants and parking meters) who may obstruct the efficient flow of pedestrian traffic. Understood as such, Blomley argues, beggars are more easily dehumanized and their street-level economic activity is more easily criminalized, for according to such rhetoric those who beg are considered less as citizens (equally entitled to occupy public spaces, such as sidewalks, or exercise free speech) and more as hindering objects. Consequently, those interested in protecting the poor's equal rights to freedom of speech have often challenged such legislation; central to this debate and differing rulings of certain courts on this matter, however, is whether or not begging is recognized as a form of legitimate public expression, and if so, if the intended function of the spaces in which beggars display their rhetoric supersedes the individual's right to freedom of expression. As Blomley observes of existing legislative precedents, "Baldly stated, the sidewalk is a traffic corridor: beggars are obstacles. To the extent that beggars are engaged in expression (apparently their only basis for any rights-claim) they must give way to the purpose of the place" (1700). As such, Blomley maintains that municipal codes, although overtly concerned with controlling things, activities, and spaces—as opposed to persons—should not be interpreted as illiberal or aliberal, as they present themselves as being; on the contrary, the implications of such rhetoric is that, "the courts, using the traffic code, are able to deactivate, one by one, a battery of rights-based arguments. Claims that rest on personhood seem to have little purchase in a legal world of activities, things, and space" (1705). In this way, Blomley's analysis of the rhetoric of traffic codes, a seemingly innocuous but in reality deeply ideological discourse, provides

insight into yet another privileged discourse community that is in conversation with and threatens the voices of the marginalized discourse community of roadside charity collectors.

Dennis J. Baker's "A Critical Evaluation of the Historical and Contemporary Justification for Criminalising Begging" provides a thorough survey of the legislative measures taken to curb or eliminate begging. Ultimately, he uses this historical background to demonstrate why contemporary begging should no longer be criminalized. The need to control vagrancy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries served a legitimate economic and social purpose—to keep laborers in place despite labor shortages; consequently, such antiquated laws laid the groundwork for eventual anti-begging legislation, which claim to also promote social and economic order. The modern justifications for the criminalization of begging, however, are not valid according to Baker. As Baker contends, "The public are offended because they are disturbed by the supposed parasitic nature of begging… they see these people as getting something they have not earned… [but] the criminal law is surely not the answer for solving deservedness problems" (229). After all, Baker argues, the disproportionate earnings of entertainers and athletes, who can make millions simply by endorsing a product, are not policed, and the lack of "deservedness" for this type of income is at least as—if not exponentially more—apparent as in the case of begging. The idea that the presence of disorderly-looking individuals (such as beggars) in an area increases or encourages crime rates in that area, known as the "broken windows thesis," is likewise discredited by Baker. He argues that, based on the available research, "there is clearly no empirical

evidence to support the broken widows thesis. Therefore, it does not provide a sound factual basis for 21mphasizes21ng begging" (226). Although concerned with the constitutionality of citizens' rights to beg from a legal perspective, the insights offered by Baker are nonetheless useful because they demonstrate the importance of understanding the historical precedent of criminalizing and further marginalizing those who beg and their public actions—including their production of public rhetoric.

In "The Political Chaff from the Economic Grain? Rhetorical Accounts of the Embeddedness of Begging," Patrick J. L. Cockburn outlines the debate between those who advocate for the protection of beggars' rights to engage in their street-level economic activity (and display their expressions of need) versus those who classify all forms of begging, whether largely passive or overtly aggressive, as disorderly conduct in need of criminalization. He describes the recent rulings of judges across the United States on the issue of beggars' rights to exercise free speech under the First Amendment. Both pro- and anti-begging rulings have been reached, and Cockburn illustrates that the legal discourse—a rhetoric of privilege and power—used and published on this issue influences how free speech is then understood in relation to the powerless, specifically the economically disadvantaged (294). Cockburn's analysis of the legal discourse regarding the protection or prohibition of begging is ultimately concerned with not only how the dominant attitudes toward begging influence the impoverished individuals who engage in that activity, but also how "communication" and "common good" in general are impacted by the attempted exclusion of beggars from First Amendment protections. Consideration of these issues is helpful for the purposes of a Foucaldian analysis of sign

holders' rhetoric because it illustrates the constant negotiation for power at work between and among discourse communities, which will be a core component of the forthcoming rhetorical analysis.

Upon surveying the existing scholarship related to individuals who beg, it becomes clear that sociological studies and analyses of these indigent groups predominate. As a result, the current body of research contributes much to better understanding the social, historical, economic, and cultural constraints of the rhetorical situation produced by contemporary begging. When rhetoric has been considered in the existing scholarship, it has only been used to analyze the output of privileged discourse communities, whose power in some way impacts the freedoms of individuals who beg. The rhetoric of those who beg in contemporary Western society has yet to be studied on its own, however. As a result, there exists a major lacuna in the current scholarship concerned with modern begging—one which would best be filled by rhetorical analyses of this marginalized discourse community's compositions.

Introduction

In accordance with Foucault's theory of discourse and his own analyses of discourse, it will be helpful to first "map the surfaces of emergence" that inform the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf. As Foucault maintains, "surfaces of emergence are not the same for different societies, at difference periods, and in different forms of discourse" (*Archaeology* 1437). As a result, it is necessary to identify the surfaces that impact the compositions and performances of the rhetoric of this discourse community. In 2015, the official recorded poverty rate in the United States amounted to 43.1 million people living in poverty (Proctor). While this is certainly a high number, clearly the origins of begging as a socioeconomic phenomenon far precedes the twenty-first century and its current poverty crisis. Social and technological advancements have altered the rhetorical situation, however, which has resulted in changes to the discourse community and their rhetoric. Thus, a more detailed description of the current rhetorical situation in which this discourse community composes and acts, followed by a description of the typical delivery procedures of their rhetoric, is needed.

The invention of automobiles, paved and systematized roadways and subway systems, the popularity of living in densely-populated cities, and the increased literacy of even the low socioeconomic classes have all contributed to the paradigm shift in how the rhetoric of contemporary begging is both composed and delivered. Whereas throughout most of history, begging was traditionally a verbal activity, in modern America, it is now expressed via written text. This change is, in part, attributable to the improved levels of literacy throughout the populace. Indeed, according to the United States' Central

Intelligence Agency, the worldwide literacy rate now totals over 86% ("The World Factbook"). Even though unemployed individuals or individuals who receive government assistance do maintain significantly lower levels of literacy in America, as confirmed by the findings of Kirsch et al., functional literacy among the populace is still relatively high (60-61). Consequently, the available and, indeed, perhaps more accepted, medium of delivery is now the written word for this discourse community's subgenre of charity rhetoric.

Although the exact literacy levels of America's homeless is not well documented, because those who request charity on their own behalf typically must contend with an added obstacle between themselves and their potential donators—the automobile—their expressions of urban poverty also are composed in the written form out of necessity. Within the insulated space of a motor vehicle, drivers and passengers are sheltered from the audible stimulus of external individuals. The shift to written from oral delivery methods in roadside charity collecting rhetoric is the result. Because of this change in how people navigate contemporary metropolitan environments, the rhetoric of begging has been forced to acquire a more visual mode of transmission in order to remain viable for the users of this discourse. Nevertheless, the paradigm shift in medium has allowed for the unintended benefit of this subgenre of charity rhetoric to now be more easily documented and studied.

The advent of the national interstate system also helps account for the expansion of and changes to the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting and its rhetorical situation. Because interstate exit ramps and street intersections with stoplights are such heavily

trafficked areas, unlike their historical predecessors, those who engage in begging in the twenty-first century, can much more easily encounter hundreds and even thousands of audience members in a single day. The potential for their rhetoric to earn financial returns, therefore, is likewise drastically increased. For both of these reasons, then—the larger audience and higher stakes—modern roadside charity collectors employ a variety of rhetorical devices in an attempt to appeal, convincingly, to the greatest number of people.

Because roadside charity collectors must compose for an audience who will only see them and only for a brief period of time, their written statements must be concise and persuasive enough to motivate audiences to act quickly. Of course, this complex interaction between rhetorical situation and language's ability to be accurately understood aligns with Foucault's suggestion that statements are "linked rather to a 'referential' that is made up not of 'things,' 'facts,' 'realities,' or 'beings,' but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated, or described within it, and for the relations that are affirmed or denied in it" (*Archaeology* 1451-1452). According to Foucault's theory of discourse, then, the constraints of the rhetorical situation are not just an element, but perhaps *the* element that determines how texts are constructed and read. Indeed, in order for the rhetoric of sign holders to be effective, or understood at all, one must be familiar with the surfaces on which they operate and are informed by—in this case, the modern capitalist, Western industrialized city. In this way, Foucault's theory of discourse contributes to the understanding of the rhetoric of sign holders that the rhetoric of specialized communities is inextricably linked to its historical, material, and

ideological circumstances. Consequently, the conventions of roadside charity collecting and the ways in which audiences respond to this genre of rhetoric are equally contingent on the pertinent surfaces.

A familiar scene by today's standards, the modern activity of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf usually takes the form of standing, sitting, or walking on the side of a busy street or exit ramp, near a stop light, and displaying hand-written signs as those, who may act as potential donators, drive by in cars. In cities where the primary mode of commute is public transportation or pedestrian—as opposed to vehicular—traffic, this description of public begging is less applicable, for those who request donations in those urban environments can audibly communicate with their audiences. Because the research for this analysis was conducted in states without underground subway systems or high pedestrian traffic as means of daily commute, the description above is representative for the data collected herein.

The hand-written donation requests of roadside charity collectors often include the classical appeals of pathos, ethos, and/or logos and are influenced by existing rhetorical traditions, such as the call for religious offerings subgenre or the secular donation requests subgenre. Common persuasive rhetorical devices of modern textual communication, such as emoticons and *emojis*, have also been integrated into the roadside charity collecting discourse community. Although it does conform to certain existing discursive features, the rhetoric of modern roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf, nevertheless, generates new ways of understanding charity and poverty altogether. As Foucault asserts, objects of discourse

> are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavior patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization… They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority. (*Archaeology* 1439)

In this case, the major objects of discourse are charity and poverty; and as Foucault's theory reveals, the specific rhetorical situation from which such informal donation requests emerge informs how these concepts are then delimited.

With over half a million people estimated to be homeless in the United States in 2015—though not all who engage in roadside charity collecting are homeless, just as not all homeless individuals engage in this activity—the rising prevalence of roadside charity collecting in the industrialized setting makes it a regularly-encountered discourse (Johnson). Thus, even though individuals who are economically-disadvantaged may be the users of this subgenre of rhetoric, this marginalized discourse community does exert an influence on the dominant culture in which it operates by making public expressions of need and financial distress an increasingly visible component of the contemporary socioeconomic order. As a result, with their discourse so frequently appearing throughout the urban landscape, the effects of poverty and therefore a consideration of what constitutes poverty or what justifies charity are regularly, although arguably unconsciously, encountered by society. Not only this, but also the rhetoric of roadside

charity collecting on one's own behalf, when understood as both the linguistic message displayed and the physical presence of the sign holder, clearly distinguishes the subaltern rhetor from the mainstream audience. The audience, upon seeing the sign holder, then, is acutely reminded of their relationally elevated status in the socioeconomic order.

Just because homeless and unemployed individuals are a real part of the modern socioeconomic order does not mean that they are an accepted part of that order. As Jordan explains, due to the rise and spread of social welfare programs in the mid-twentieth century until the 1980s, begging in industrialized Western society became a much less visible social phenomenon, but "the new global economic conditions, because they fundamentally change the bargaining position of unskilled workers throughout the developed (and much of the developing) worlds, are now contributing to a reappearance of many forms of street-level economic activity" (43). It is because of its temporary disappearance, then, and now the increasing re-emergence of public begging as an economic practice of indigent members of society that can help account for "the stigma of begging in a contemporary economy (especially in a liberal polity whose political culture 28mphasizes self-responsibility and moral autonomy)" (Jordan 54). Clearly, historical surfaces have a deep impact on the prevailing contemporary attitudes toward roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf. These factors, in turn, influence the effectiveness of this discourse community's rhetoric among audiences and the willingness of those audiences to read the artifacts of that discourse community at all (a topic that will be revisited later). Needless to say, the dominant economic climate—consumer capitalist—in which this rhetoric is enacted has a major impact on its role and

persuasive power. As Adler argues, “We live in a market economy and market values, which include the principle of exchange (normally of goods and services for money), are all pervasive: so much so that we feel uncomfortable with transactions, like begging, that do not reflect this principle” (165). Clearly, then, understanding the determining influence of the existing socioeconomic surface on the interaction between sign holder and public audience cannot be underestimated, for it reveals why modern begging and the market economy are seemingly incompatible. Begging activities are predicated upon values, such as the common good and the acceptability of charity; meanwhile, market economies are dependent upon values, such as individualism and the expectation of an equal exchange.

It is likewise important to take into consideration the mainstream genres of rhetoric—besides charity and all its subgenres—that directly influence the discourse norms of roadside charity collecting on one’s own behalf. These represent another essential component in Foucauldian analyses of discourse: the authorities of delimination. According to Foucault, it is the ruling social institutions and their designated standards of normality and acceptability that influence how all subordinate discourses are interpreted (*Archaeology* 1437). It is the agents of power and authority in society that determine the conditions of existence for other groups. Cockburn’s examination of how legal discourse in the United States alters how modern begging is practiced as well as the public’s reception of that activity provides a primary example of a powerful authority of delimination—the law. Emphasizing the need to protect begging as a manifestation of public speech, Cockburn notes,

> A legal argument about the social significance of begging has the potential to shift the conditions through which the economy is instituted by supported rulings that can hinder or protect an economic practice (albeit a marginal one) in the relevant public spaces. More broadly, these arguments may affect wider audiences, either directly by reaching them through the popular media, or indirectly by altering the common spectacles of urban life and subtly shifting a population's sense of what constitutes normal socio-economic order. (287)

In other words, when formal laws are passed or rulings are made that contribute to the criminalization public begging, it affects the interaction between those who engage in this activity out of necessity (sign holders) and those who witness this activity (drivers) and therefore the rhetoric used by the disadvantaged discourse community. As a result, one can easily recognize how privileged discourse communities, like that of the legislative and judiciary systems, directly impact marginalized discourse communities through their establishment of widespread public notions of acceptability, lawfulness, and justice. Although one might initially suppose that the discourse of legal communities and the discourse community of roadside charity collectors were entirely unrelated, in fact, they are engaged in direct conversation with one another. Legislators and judges determine standards of public safety or lawfulness in response to the practices of modern beggars; likewise, sign holders adapt and revise their rhetoric in order to sustain their activity in response to the norms imposed on them from agents of power.

Due to the fact that sign holders must quickly and powerfully seize the attention

of potential donors in spite of their marginalized, often criminalized, positions as rhetors, it is perhaps unsurprising that classically persuasive appeals and devices are found on roadside charity collecting signs. In fact, upon studying a small sample of these signs, recurring discourse conventions become apparent. As Foucault observes, “there is scarcely a society without its major narratives, which are recounted, repeated, and varied; formulae, texts, and ritualized sets of discourses which are recited in well-defined circumstances” (“Order of Discourse” 1464). The informal requests for charity from roadside charity collectors are no exception to Foucault’s observation. This is a subgenre of discourse that follows certain formulaic patterns and is practiced within a certain rhetorical situation.

Methodology

The pool of texts documented for this analysis were collected in March and October of 2016 on the streets of Oklahoma City, OK, Albuquerque, NM, and Leavenworth, KS. In order to increase the number of texts available to analyze for the purposes of this research, pictures of signs were acquired from different states due to using the help of several volunteers, who were located in different cities in the southern United States. Due to the relatively low amount of pedestrian traffic in these cities, most begging activities in these metropolitan areas take the form of individuals holding written signs to communicate—as opposed to individuals verbally requesting donations from passers-by or individuals with no signs whose empty containers represent the request for donation—only individuals holding written signs were approached or documented for the purposes of this research.

Initially, only photographs of roadside charity collecting signs were collected; during the first phase taking place in March 2016, twenty-three photographs of signs were obtained. During the second phase taking place in October 2016, an additional six photographs were collected and six recorded interviews with sign holders were held. With the assistance of multiple volunteers, photos of signs were taken whenever an instance of roadside charity collecting was observed. In some cases, sign holders were approached and unofficially (without recording) interviewed if their sign's meaning was unclear and the sign holder was willing to provide additional contextual information. After accruing a photographic archive of signs, the text of each sign was transcribed. When recorded interviews were collected, the discursive data was saved and transcribed,

although only the relevant portions of the interviews were included in this analysis.

Analysis of the photographic data revealed four appeals, sometimes occurring in combination with others, could be used to broadly categorize the major persuasive themes of this discourse community: appeal to the audience's religious values, appeal to the audience's sense of patriotism, appeal to the audience's humor, and appeal to the audience's humanity. As it will be illustrated, finer points of analysis including the role of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, drawing and symbol usage, the rhetors' physical appearances, recurring phrases, and explicit expressions of a strained power dynamic between social classes were also examined based on the samples taken during the course of this research. These discursive elements were treated as features of the rhetoric of this discourse community as opposed to distinct grids of specification.

Recorded interviews were conducted with six different sign holders; one who was using an example of a sign featuring a religious appeal; one who was using an example of a sign featuring a patriotic appeal; one who was using an example of a sign featuring a humorous appeal; and three who were using examples of signs featuring a humanity appeal. Additional recorded interviews were collected in the humanity category due to failure to receive direct answers to certain questions. Each interviewee was asked a series of three questions: 1) How effective is this sign in terms of the donations it helps you receive? 2) Do you only use this sign, or do you vary signs? 3) How much money do you receive a day using this sign? The first and third questions were designed to help gauge the effectiveness of the different types of appeals using the amount of donations received as a reflection of audience response. Knowing whether sign holders varied the signs they

displayed also helped establish whether or not the persuasive effects of different types of rhetoric were recognized by members this discourse community. Establishing whether or not there are intentional compositional or delivery choices made by the sign holders was of particular interest for this study, because it could help refute the idea that this discourse community does not attend closely to the content of their speech acts.

All of the analysis and artifacts documented for this research represent an ethnographic study of the discourse of this marginalized group and the discursive formation in which such rhetoric is composed and enacted. The photographs used as the basis for this research are contained in Appendix A, and the recorded interviews are contained in Appendix B.

Organization

The remainder of this project will be divided into the four sections based on the four thematic appeals identified as the grids of specification. Each of these sections will provide the transcribed texts of the signs that represent a usage of that section's appeal. An analysis of those texts and their reflection of Foucauldian surfaces will be included. Finally, transcribed portions of the interviews conducted with sign holders representing that section will provide additional insight into the success rate of each rhetorical appeal; conclusions will be drawn based on these results. The fourth section will be followed by a final, fifth section in which several other recurring devices and features discovered in the sample will be analyzed.

Appeal to Audiences' Religious Values

The thematic categories, to be discussed shortly, represent Foucault's notion of grids of specification, which are "the systems according to which the different 'kinds of [begging]' are divided, contrasted, related regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects of [charity] discourse" (*Archaeology* 1437). (In Foucault's example discourse analysis, "kinds of madness" and "psychiatric discourse" were his subjects, but the subjects of this analysis were inserted for ease of definition within the context of this study.) Grids of specification, along with surfaces of emergence and authorities of delimination make up the discursive formation; identifying all of these components was necessary according to Foucault's model of discourse analysis illustrated in *The Archeology of Knowledge*.

In the sample of texts in which signs appealed to the audience's religious values, several recurring statements emerged. "God Bless You," "God Bless," and "Bless You" occurred on twelve of twenty-nine signs. "WWJD [What Would Jesus Do]," "God love [sic] all," "Faith, Peace, Love, Joy," the general association of monetary donations with "Blessing(s)," and drawings of crucifixes and other Christian symbols were all manifestations of the religious theme. Because the signs which serve as the sample data for this analysis were collected from Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, the high occurrence of the religious appeal lends significant support to Foucault's theory of discourse regarding the importance of surfaces on rhetorical output. The wide-spread religious culture of central and southwestern America would, indeed, be among the surfaces the signs' authors would be influenced by. Therefore, the repeated appearance of

the religious appeal in the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting is entirely appropriate, for it reflects the cultural environment from which it emerges and is a part of. As Foucault theorizes, "there is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them" (*Archaeology* 1456). Thus, in a climate where religious institutions, ideologies, and discourse hold a prominent position, the use of or allusions to religious phrases and symbols in roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf reinforces the religious surfaces that surround them, even though they are used to a secular end—to collect a unilateral gift for oneself.

Confirming the importance of the religious surface on the rhetoric employed by roadside charity collectors, expressions of secular gratitude, such as "Thank You" and "Thanks," occurred less frequently. As opposed to "God Bless You," and all its minor variations, the secular equivalents appeared on only eight of the twenty-nine signs. When understood according to Foucault's theory of discourse and the power exerted by surfaces, such results may indicate that religious expressions of gratitude are considered more meaningful, and therefore persuasive, than the non-religious expressions. Moreover, because religiousness is often associated with charity, use of common religious phrases may, intentionally or unintentionally, be an invitation to associate the rhetorical situation at hand (roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf) with the rhetorical situation where donations are likewise encouraged (church services).

The deviation from the religious sentiment "God love[s] you," with one sign

featuring a secularized version, “Love U!” is also worthy of examination. Admittedly, the latter phrase is rare in this discourse community’s artifacts, for it is conventionally used between familiar individuals as opposed to strangers. Yet, such an adaptation may represent an effort by the sign holder to translate an otherwise common Christian expression into non-religious terms in order to appeal to a wider audience. The rarity of the use of the direct “Love U!”, however, may signal that this adaptation is less effective. Thus, it provides an example of how a rhetor’s familiarity with the surfaces in which their rhetoric operates influences how persuasively they can compose. Indeed, while the truncated “Love U!” may be an attempt to make a recurring religious appeal reach a broader audience, its lack of use among other roadside charity collectors implies that such a revision is more likely to be unsuccessful or even misunderstood as an unwelcome displacement of an established religious phrase. Thus, this deviation again reinforces Foucault’s assertion that surfaces always impact how meanings are both made and interpreted among discourse users.

When the sign holder who was holding a sign reading, “Help strandid [sic] homeless -n- hungry anything would be a blessing God Bless Faith Peace Love Joy,” was interviewed, in answer to the first question in the series, he replied, “It works. It works. Everybody know it a lie. I’m not hungry.” When prompted again about the effectiveness of this sign, he noted, “It all depends on the day. Sundays suck. Sundays ain’t never good.” In the context of this particular instance of roadside charity collecting on one’s own behalf, since his sign (in part) represents an attempt to appeal to the audience’s religious values, such an observation is somewhat striking. Although the sign holder

asserted that this style of sign indeed "works," his remark about Sunday, the day most associated with religious activity in the Christian tradition, reveals that audiences are actually less likely to donate to agents of roadside charity collecting on this day. A wider polling of roadside charity collectors' experiences with this phenomenon would need to be conducted in order to confirm its accuracy. However, a cursory analysis of this insight might show that audiences are less likely to feel the urge to donate to "informal charity," such as sign holders, on a day when many members of that driving audience may have already donated to an established religious group. Adler provides a potential, alternate explanation of this phenomenon, in his explanation of the dominant values that inform passers-by perceptions of those who beg,

> Giving alms and helping the poor are encouraged by many religions that regard charity as one of the highest virtues. However, the norm of beneficence is almost certainly weaker than the norm of reciprocity and plays second fiddle to it. This is because... it conflicts with the ideology of the market, which is hostile to the view that people should get something for nothing. (166)

If one agrees with Adler's assessment of the tension inherent in the sign holder/potential donor dynamic, then, the overriding importance of the contemporary economic surface may help account for the less influential power of the religious surface even in regions of the country where religion is a highly influential institution.

To the second interview question, the sign holder confirmed, "It varies." To the third and final question about how much money he received a day using this sign, he

answered, “Anywhere between forty and eighty.” Based on his responses as well as the later input of the other interviewees, and very much counter to my initial hypothesis, the type of appeal used was not a strong determining factor in the effectiveness of the signs—i.e. their ability to generate donations. Instead, according to half of the respondents, it was the time and location, the *kairos*, of the sign’s usage that proved most important. This interviewee voluntarily offered, in contrast to his statement about Sundays, “I was out here one Saturday made 300 dollars by 11 o’clock in the morning.” Thus, while the rhetoric of the sign holders’ texts is apparently significant to all of the sign holders themselves based on their continued variation of their signs despite relatively stable amounts of income, the impact of their rhetoric on donating audiences needs further investigation in order to confirm if the content of roadside charity collectors’ messages influences whether or not, and how much, capital is contributed.

Appeal to Audiences' Sense of Patriotism

Another popular appeal employed by roadside charity collectors is the appeal to the audience's sense of patriotism. "God Bless America" offers one way in which this appeal manifests itself; the more common manifestation, though, is the claim of military (and sometimes a specific war) veteran status by the sign holders. For example, "Hungry vet," "Homeless Vet," and "Hungry vet needs your help" simultaneously invoke the audience's pity and establish the sign holder's ethos as a former military service member. As opposed to all of the other common appeals found on roadside charity collecting signs, those who claim to be veterans actually subvert the typical sign holder/donator power dynamic. As veterans, sign holders assert their own authority and credibility—an authority and credibility most Americans assign great esteem to, no less. Whereas the appeal to the audience's religious values can be interpreted as an invocation of the spiritual ethos of God, the appeal to the audience's sense of patriotism reveals that military veterans can rely on their own personal ethos to motivate drivers to be charitable. Moreover, yet again, the fact that the veteran appeal appears so frequently in the discourse of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf confirms the extent to which surfaces impact discourse communities. In this case, because former military service members often occupy respected positions in contemporary American society, an invocation of this ethos serves as an effective rhetorical device for sign holders.

Despite the perceived importance of having pride in one's nation in the American socio-cultural register, to the first of the three interview questions, the sign holder displaying the "Homeless vet anything helps God Bless" sign indicated, "Not very

effective." Reinforcing this further, after confirming she too varied the types of signs she used, she was asked if she noticed a difference between the donation amounts she received with this sign compared with the others to which she replied, "Yes." To clarify, she was asked if she received more donations using her other signs to which she again replied, "Yes." When asked the final question about the dollar amount received per day, she indicated that using the veteran sign she made "About forty-five."

To account for this discrepancy between the high amounts of patriotism in the United States and the apparently unenthusiastic response roadside charity collectors receive when using signs claiming veteran status, it is important to again consider the pertinent surfaces which inform audiences. Attitudes toward current or former wars and the military in general can greatly fluctuate based on the media's coverage of domestic or foreign military efforts, popular culture's depiction of wars, past and present, and the existing or proposed public policy surrounding the military—all important agents of delimination in society. As a result, the reliability of the effectiveness of the appeal to the audience's sense of patriotism is perhaps more volatile and unpredictable than some of the other categories. Although, as it will be shown, the average income generated by this sign actually did fall within the norm expressed by all of the categories' respondents.

Appeal to Audiences' Sense of Humor

In the pool of roadside charity collecting signs used for this analysis, the appeal to the audience's sense of humor was similar to the appeal to the audience's patriotism in its infrequency of appearance. Only four of twenty-nine signs provided evidence of this appeal, including: "No lie need a drink 4:20," "Why lie I need a big beer," "I'm 2 ugly 2 prostitute and 2 real 2 steal" and "Ninjas kidnapped girlfriend need money for Kung-fu lessons!". Although humor is often a highly effective rhetorical device in many other genres of persuasion, due to its low occurrence in roadside charity collecting, it is apparently not as reliably persuasive (this observation will receive more attention shortly). Looking to the conventions of the charity genre of rhetoric in general provides insight into the relative infrequency of humor in the composition of donation requests, whether formal or informal.

All rhetoric designed to motivate individuals to donate capital, time, or any other resources conventionally uses a more serious, as opposed to humorous, tone in order to convey the imminent need for charity as well as to prevent audiences from misreading humorous rhetoric as non-pressing rhetoric. After all, any organization or individual who requests charity desires a prompt and generous response. As a result of this, the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting signs, as a subgenre, reflects typical elements of the charity genre of which it is a part. The interconnectedness of similar discourse communities is something that Foucault acknowledges, "Things are already murmuring which our language has only to pick up; and this language right from its more rudimentary project, was always already speaking to us of a being of which it is like the skeleton" ("Order of

Discourse" 1470). Foucault's theory of discourse, therefore, emphasizes that discourse—even that which is produced by marginalized members of society—is always informed by and in conversation with previous acts of discourse. In this way, the relatively low occurrence of humorous roadside charity collecting signs can be understood as its operation within, or "picking up" of, existing discourse norms.

The less frequent documentation of humor in the roadside charity collecting signs is also informed by the material conditions, and one of the most immediate surfaces, that surround it. Since roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf is an activity of many homeless, unemployed, or underemployed individuals, the lack of humor in many signs reflects the sobering physical and psychological realities of living in poverty. From the audience's perspective as well, the exclusion of humor from roadside charity collecting signs can be seen as a demonstration of the legitimacy of the sign holder's position. In order to prevent undermining the audience's perception of their authenticity as an impoverished person, then, sign holders may exclude humor from their signs to conform to existing notions of how "neediness" should appear. To reject the norm of humorless rhetoric in this discourse community, then, may represent an instance of sign holders drawing upon other genres in order to construct their messages since charity rhetoric does not traditionally employ humor. This is significant because it suggests that sign holders are influenced by multiple more established genres and subgenres of rhetoric, meaning sign holders conscientiously construct and render persuasion.

Despite its low occurrence in relation to the other appeals, the representative interviewee, holding the "I'm 2 ugly 2 prostitute and 2 real 2 steal" sign, claimed, "It's

very effective. Uh, people see comedy, they laugh, and tends to give them—they give out more money rather than say fucker to you. They'd rather give you a five or a ten." Unlike the other roadside charity collectors interviewed, this sign holder indicated he did not vary his signs regularly due to its apparent effectiveness compared to his past experiences. To the second question he answered, "I been using this sign for the last year. Various signs before didn't work, so this one I'm stickin' with it." In this case, the lack of rotation of his signs did not indicate that he did not appreciate the power of his rhetoric to influence audience response, but rather that an effective rhetorical appeal has the potential to produce the desired persuasive effect with regularity.

As the humorous sign's author continued, "This has been more effective than any of them." His awareness of the control differing signs' compositions has over the interactions and results he meets with directly challenges the notion that the messages of roadside charity collectors' texts are not constructed with intention. In answer to the third question, however, the sign holder's response matched the average donations received by the previous two (and it will be shown, fourth) respondents: "Average anywhere from forty to eighty dollars." Like the average daily donation amounts reportedly received by the representatives of the religious and patriotic appeals, the average amount reportedly received on a day-to-day basis by the representative of the humorous appeal was similar; in fact, it was identical to that reported by the representative of the religious appeal (also forty to eighty dollars)—a significant finding that will receive further discussion shortly.

Appeal to Audiences' Humanity

Finally, appealing to the audience's humanity was nearly universal across all of the signs documented for this analysis. As a result, the appeal to the audience's humanity often occurs in conjunction with other appeals. The most diverse in its manifestations, this category includes rhetoric such as, "Homeless," "Homeless wife and son," "Hungry and homeless," "Hungry," "Hungry with Cronh's Diaeses," "Hungry!! Need help," "Please help!," "Down on my luck," "Down and out," "Need work," "Everyone needs help at some point in life," "Financially distraught," "Travelin' broke," "Home Where? When?" "I have 1 baby no gas no food to go home," and "I already am, I always was, and I still have time to be a somebody." While some of these variations are more descriptive than others, in each case, they all foreground the difference in economic stability between automobile-enclosed audience and exposed sign holder by referencing their marginalized, needy status.

The response of the roadside charity collector using the "Travelin' broke anything is a blessing" sign to the first question was: "It's been alright. Made about ten dollars within the last hour." In answer to the second question he explained, "We vary signs depending on where we are, where we're doing, and what we're trying to get." This response, in accordance with the responses of the other sign holders, expresses an awareness of the dynamics of the rhetorical situation in which he is an author and the power of adapting his rhetoric to influence the amounts donated by the driving audience. As alluded to earlier regarding the relatively similar amounts received across all four major appeals, to the third question he answered, "Fifty dollars."

Several key similarities between the activities and experiences of the four different sign holders emerge. Each one discusses the intentional variation or selection, as a result of variation, of their signs. Still, the close proximity of amounts received among the interviewees reveals that the differing of thematic appeals does not, in fact, dramatically change audience response. In other words, despite sign holders' own opinions, the similarity of daily earnings reportedly received by representatives of each appeal suggests that the donating audience may not be persuaded to give based on the linguistic rhetoric that sign holders construct. Instead, the lack of significant fluctuation in donation amounts received between representatives of the major thematic categories implies that the variability of the content of their written messages is not as influential a factor as the rhetorical situation in general. As the discursive data supplied by the representatives of each appeal suggests, the sign holder's impoverished appearance, the place, the kairotic moment, and each audience member's personal attitude toward begging, poverty, or charity may be more important factors in an audience member's decision to give or not give than the persuasiveness of the linguistic message composed for and directed at them.

Of course, these results complicate the need for anti-begging legislation even more, for they imply that the public speech acts of the most destitute members of society largely go overlooked or only minimally acknowledged by members of the more stable socioeconomic classes; thus it is especially worthy to consider why the public rhetoric of this group is so often targeted for further censorship and criminalization. Whether it is a comfortable reality or not, homelessness and/or joblessness are a reality for many

individuals in America. Denying their existence or their voices does not eliminate the need for the many economic, political, and social issues that caused their poverty to be addressed. Thus, refusing to grant them spaces and opportunities to display their rhetoric does not really serve even the financially-fit members of society; those groups seem to be scarcely paying attention to their messages of distress anyway. Instead, legislation that too harshly restricts the lowest socioeconomic class's right to free speech only serves to perpetuate a false socioeconomic landscape where those who do not have or cannot acquire enough capital to participate in the traditional economy do not have the right to be seen or heard if it is mildly inconvenient or unattractive for the rest of the members of society.

As a synthesis of this research seems to emphasize, then, the rhetorical situation in general (an impoverished-looking individual requesting donation) and its constraints are the most significant factors in the contemporary beggar/passer-by exchange; the thematic differences of the texts written and displayed by these discourse community members being far less important a factor than my original research question assumed. Nevertheless, despite the apparent lack of attention paid to the linguistic rhetoric composed by sign holders, Foucaldian analysis illustrates that the rhetoric of indigent groups is just as much a part of America's public sphere as other group's rhetorical contributions, for although the compositions of roadside charity collectors are considered marginal or counter-culture, they are actually just as much informed by the existing discourse environment as any other group or individual's. By contextualizing or situating discourse among the relevant surfaces according to Foucault's theory of discourse,

recognition of the power dynamics at work that make certain discourse communities subordinate to, but not entirely separate from, others can be established.

Indeed, when this commonly-encountered rhetorical situation is understood according to Foucault's definition of ritual, the reasonably steady effectiveness of each appeal can be better understood. As Foucault asserts,

> Ritual defines the qualification which must be possessed by individuals who speak (who must occupy such-and-such a position and formulate such-and-such a type of statement… it defines the gestures, behavior, circumstances, and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse; finally, it fixes the supposed or imposed efficacy of the words, their effect on those to whom they are addressed, and the limits of their constraining value. ("Order of Discourse" 1468)

Roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf, as an area of human activity, fits Foucault's definition of ritual, for the individuals who engage in the activity must be qualified in that they must be (or convincingly appear) economically disadvantaged. If they do not "read" as in need to their audience, their appropriation of the discourse, regardless of thematic appeal employed, will indeed prove ineffective. Likewise, the sign holder's general statements, gestures, behavior, and circumstances must align with the social expectations for begging in order for audiences to recognize and assume their role (donator) in the ritual. The relatively fixed level of donation each sign holder receives confirms the rituality of the exercise; more amounts are not received even when messages vary because it is the exchange of actions, not the communication of unique ideas, that is

being experienced by rhetor and audience.

Of course, the significance of the textual aspect of sign holders' discourse as well as the rhetoric of their physical appearance may also be understood according to semiotics. As Bakhtin's contribution to semiotics emphasizes,

> the [significance of a whole utterance] is determined not only by the linguistic forms that comprise it—words, morphological and syntactic structures, sounds, and intonation—but also by extraverbal factors of the situation. Should we miss these situational factors, we would be as little able to understand an utterance as if we were to miss its most important words. (1224)

Thus, the individual engaged in roadside charity collecting can be understood as the signifier, and the signified is urban poverty and need. When semiotics is applied to roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf, then, a sign holder being visibly disheveled, weather-beaten, or looking otherwise pitiable or impoverished acts as a signifier of the state they are in (or their begging activity implies), which is poverty, the signified. Audiences' responses to sign holders, therefore, are as much—if not more, as may be the case—inspired by the appearance of the sign holder as the linguistic message they are displaying, for signified (poverty) is conveyed by both. As a result, the varying of linguistic messages may not be a highly significant factor in the donation amount received because the audience is inclined to donate based on their readings of the "sign" as a whole: sign holder's needy appearance as indication of poverty. In other words, when understood according to semiotics, the sign holder himself or herself as a whole is

the sign passers-by "read." Their holding of a written message may contribute to the completeness of the entirety of their "sign," then, but the specific details of their written texts are rendered largely irrelevant, for passers-by have already seen and read the complete "sign" of the person engaged in begging activity.

Another potential explanation for the lack of significant difference between donation amounts received between appeals can be found in Burke's dramatistic pentad. Like Foucault's discussion of ritual and Bakhtin's semiotics, the scene-act and scene-agent ratios may help account for the apparent irrelevance of sign holders' written rhetoric in the determination of donation amounts offered by many passers-by. As Burke explains, "the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (1302). Paradoxically, then, although sign holders and passers-by are inhabiting the same scene in a literal sense, it would seem that many passers-by do not recognize themselves as belonging to the same scene as impoverished sign holders; as a result, they interpret the acts of sign holders and/or the sign holders themselves as incompatible with "their" scene, causing a lack of persuasive effect on many passers-by. Of course, sign holders and passers-by are actually participants in the same scene, for they are both living in a modern consumer-capitalist society at the time their exchange takes place. Yet, if the understandings of consumer-capitalist society by passers-by excludes individuals who are impoverished or property-less, then those passers-by will indeed find the acts of begging committed by begging agents incompatible with the scene. In reality, of course, the scene of a consumer-capitalist society is in fact well-suited for sign holders' begging acts

because such a socio-economic system naturalizes the idea of economic stratification and often perpetuates it.

Thus, and as the research of Erskine and McIntosh, Jordan, and Baker likewise indicates, there evidently exists a discrepancy between how passers-by and sign holders view the social acceptability and necessity of begging activities. When understood according to Burke's scene-act or scene-agent ratios, though, the antipathy of many passers-by may be the expression of their belief that the scene does not fit the sign holders or their acts well. As Burke describes, "the scene-act ratio either calls for acts in keeping with scenes or scenes in keeping with acts" (1306). When acts (begging activities) or agents (those who engage in such activities) do not suit the scenes in which they take place or are, therefore, the persuasive effects of such real-life "dramas" are less likely. Naturally, consumer-capitalism is not the only scene in which the agents or acts of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf take place, but it is among the most important scenes to consider due to the experience by both rhetor and audiences of this act as a, albeit fringe or marginalized, economic activity.

An interview conducted with a second user of the appeal to the audience's humanity reinforced the apparent lack of attention paid to sign holder's written texts further. The roadside charity collector using the "I already am, I always was, and still have time to be somebody.. Anything helps Thank you!" sign answered the first question with, "Um, barely making it, you could say that." He later elaborated more, and corroborated what the first interviewee asserted, "Every day is different. You could fight for twenty bucks or maybe you might get lucky with fifty or sixty. I mean that that's

damn good. For me anyways." After confirming he too varied the signs he used, however, and when asked if varying signs resulted in varying results, he answered in a way that seemed to reflect the reality of all the other sign holders despite their opposite responses: "Um no."

Voluntarily expanding upon that idea, he offered, "I don't, I don't know. I wish I was one of those people makin' 200 dollars. I'm sittin' here like where're they at?" He was asked if he knew others like himself who really received that much money per day from roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf, to which he answered, "Long time ago maybe. There's too many people doin' it. People see the same thing. They don't wanna see it anymore. The money stops." The voluntary observations and reflections of this sign holder validates the significance of defending the First Amendment rights of those who occupy the lowest socioeconomic positions in society. With more and more homeless, jobless, or otherwise impoverished members of society resorting to this form of expression in order to generate income, it is all the more important to ensure that their right to free speech remains intact even if their socioeconomic statuses have been downgraded. It cannot become routine to treat this country's destitute citizens as burdensome, unappealing objects to be removed from the cityscape. It cannot become acceptable to deny the country's destitute citizens their right to publicly exercise free speech just because their messages convey a complicated and unsettling truth about the current socioeconomic environment.

It is especially because "There's too many people doin' it. People see the same thing. They don't wanna see it anymore" that the rhetoric, both linguistic and physical, of

this discourse community should not be unnecessarily censored but instead studied and afforded renewed attention. The desensitization of the financially-fit classes to this marginalized discourse community's presence and speech acts should be alarming, for it means that the surfaces which inform the driving audiences' blasé reactions indicates an indifference to, or perhaps failure to recognize at all, the serious dysfunctions of the current socioeconomic environment. That is why criminalizing their peaceful display of rhetoric must come to an end. As Cockburn maintains, "the beggars' message amount to a socio-political commentary that has consequences for the public's view of their social world" (296). To deny—even more than their property-less, marginalized positions already do—the destitute a chance to actively participate in the advancement of their perspective of the socioeconomic order ensures that the underlying issues related to their powerlessness remain unsolved.

Other Significant Features and Devices

Another significant feature of the roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf subgenre was the misspelling of words and grammatical errors. These errors, although not likely intentional, affirm the disadvantaged position of sign holders in relation to donators. Whereas misspellings of words or grammatical errors usually undermine the intrinsic ethos of a piece of rhetoric, in the case of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf, these errors can actually act as confirmation of the credibility of sign holders as legitimately disadvantaged individuals. Errors occurred on five of twenty-nine signs, including, "Anything will helps [sic]," "Hungry with Cronh's [sic] Dieases [sic]," "Help strandid [sic]" "Homeless vet anything help's [sic]," and "God love [sic] all." Because a lack of or insufficient formal education is often associated with low socioeconomic discourse communities, these errors in spelling and grammar often provide a net benefit to the sign holder by reinforcing their needy status to audiences. Here, the surfaces at work are both responsible for the errors committed and the effect of these errors on audiences. Inadequate funding or availability of education, as a material, institutional, or economic surface, may account for some sign holders' errors. Meanwhile, the perception that deviations from or inaccuracies in standard English signify a low socioeconomic status and lower intelligence is a socially-constructed expectation, and it represents a powerful ideological surface as well.

Non-standard abbreviations were excluded from the analysis of misspelled words because, for instance, "U" instead of "You" is an accepted contraction in digital discourse; therefore, the use of such an abbreviation may or may not be a genuine

misspelling on the sign holder's part, and it likewise may or may not be considered a misspelling depending on the general subject position of the potential donor. Similarly, lack of capitalization or punctuation—both discourse norms in digital rhetoric, which increasingly informs standards of correctness in the general public—are only considered erroneous to certain donors, so instances of these usage inaccuracies may or may not affect audience perception of the sign holder's disadvantaged status. Within this rhetorical situation, which is an informal one, like similarly informal instances of electronic communication, punctuation is openly and acceptably omitted without a noticeable alteration in meaning. Excluding the use of exclamation points and question marks, punctuation such as periods, commas, and apostrophes occurred on only eight of twenty-nine signs. Dashes to separate words and phrases (as opposed to commas or periods) were also used, but these unconventional constructions were not counted as errors for the purposes of this analysis. For certain demographics of drivers, though, all of these more borderline "errors" might likewise support the ethos of the sign holder as an authentically-disadvantaged individual.

As the lack of attention to standard rules of punctuation illustrate—and the discussion of the influence of *emoji* culture will further demonstrate shortly—this marginalized discourse community's rhetoric reflects the accepted trends of dominant culture's rhetoric. The infrequency of punctuation usage in digital rhetoric such as texting and social media compositions has made correct usage of these features less important in most informal rhetorical situations involving written communication. Again, then, the interconnectedness between even this marginalized discourse community and mainstream

discourse communities can be observed, for they emerge from the same set of social surfaces.

Confirming that roadside charity collecting does, in fact, conform to a larger genre of charity rhetoric, Deborah Schaffer describes that the rhetoric of print-based requests for donations from companies and organizations is often typified by short, simple words and phrases and the second-person pronoun (277). Clearly, the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf likewise follows this structure with the use of the second-person pronouns in expressions of gratitude (thank you, bless you, etc.) as well as using short words and phrases. In the case of short words and phrases, the rhetorical-situation—briefly-stopped drivers cannot, after all, read extended pleas for charity and also gather and dispense money to the sign holder in the time typically elapsed during a red light—and the compact medium of communication (small cardboard or plastic scraps usually) impact the length of written expressions. Despite the presence of these practical constraints due to rhetorical situation and medium, the fact that the roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf resembles more formal instances of charity requests indicates that marginal subgenres of rhetoric imitate conventions of the more accepted and legitimized subgenres. In other words, the broadest genre of charity rhetoric encompasses a spectrum of subgenres that are inevitably interrelated.

Similarly, traces of the rhetoric used in the call for offerings during church services can be discerned in the discourse of roadside charity collecting. In accordance with this tradition, instead of providing a preferred minimum donation amount, many sign holders leave the sum bestowed entirely open to the audience's discretion.

"Anything," "Any," "Spare whatever you can" are regularly incorporated into roadside charity collecting signs. Occurring on fourteen of twenty-nine signs, such deferrals to the audience's own judgment about the funds contributed reinforce the power dynamic between sign holder and driver by phrasing requests in these undemanding terms. Again, the request for non-specific donation amounts also confirms that roadside charity collecting conventions often borrow from the rhetoric of other charity subgenres, such as the call for offerings.

The infrequency of the appearance of "Please," which occurred on only five of twenty-nine signs, requires analysis, for it subverts expectations for polite discourse norms. The physical appearance of the sign holder and the rhetorical situation, however, often act as the implicit *please*. An unkempt appearance—sometimes including tattered clothes, a sunburnt complexion, actions or accessories implying a disability, or a dejected facial expression—is the agent that transmits the sincerity of the roadside charity collector's request. As an extension of the sign's linguistic message, the sign holder's appearance and deportment exert an undeniable influence on the audience's perception of and ultimate reaction to the donation request. Indeed, the sincerity or validity of the roadside charity collector's claim is often established, or refuted, based on the physical presentation of the sign holder. Thus, and as previously asserted, the textual rhetoric employed by the sign holder may prove less important than the visual rhetoric of the sign holder's appearance, for it is highly communicative element in the semiotic function at work. As Bakhtin asserts, "The reality of the sign is wholly a matter determined by [social] communication. After all, the existence of the sign is nothing but the

materialization of that communication" (1213). It is both the outward appearance of the sign holder as convincingly needy and their written request for donation—both signifier—that refer to one of the primary intended signifiers: urban poverty. Consequently, a formal expression of politeness may seem redundant, for in the rhetorical situation, or instance of social communication to use Bakhtin's terminology, of roadside charity collecting, determining the degree of the sign holder's need is left up to the driving audience based on how well the sign holder's physical appearance conveys the intended signified—that the individual begging is, indeed, in need of a unilateral gift due to their impoverished status.

The materials typically used to display compositions are also worth noting, for they convey important information to audiences about the rhetorical situation. Traditionally composed on pieces of cardboard, only occasionally are scraps of plastic or poster board used (six of twenty-nine signs). These signs usually are small—in other words, do not significantly obstruct the view of the sign holder—and are written in black ink. Uses of colored ink or multi-colors occurred on ten of twenty-nine signs, and eight signs were large enough that they somewhat obstructed the audience's view of the rhetor. An elaborately executed sign may have an inverse effect on the audience's perception of the sincerity of the sign holder's need, for having access to high-quality materials such as colored or multi-colored writing utensils or new-looking poster board may raise questions of how those resources were acquired by the sign holder. Again, audience expectations of markers of socioeconomic distress act as an important surface to consider when evaluating conventions of this discourse community.

Returning to a separate rhetorical genre that is sometimes reflected in this marginalized discourse community, roadside charity collectors increasingly use elements of digital rhetoric in their hand-written compositions. Smiley faces, sad faces, caricatures, hearts, stars, and various other drawings are regularly featured on roadside charity collecting signs. Significantly, on twelve of twenty-nine signs, such symbols accented the accompanying text. Although non-linguistic symbols have apparently always been a component of written communication, the twenty-first century has witnessed a renewed frequency of accenting one's messages with such symbols. Now commonly referred to as emoticons and *emojis*, smiley faces, sad faces, and most other human facial expressions are used in conjunction with instances of digital, textual communication.

Obviously, roadside charity collecting signs are not digital texts; they are handwritten. Nevertheless, audiences often see digital-based symbols appear on these handwritten signs. For example, imitating the open or closed parenthesis, the colon, and the apostrophe symbols, such drawings often occur: ":)" and ":'(". In the digital medium, these symbols were appropriated in order to imitate a smiling face or crying face because the digital medium did not allow rhetors to draw. Due to the ubiquity and proliferation of digital rhetoric, however, such conventions have now re-entered written discourse, despite the ability for those who are hand writing messages to draw more complete symbols. Foucault's insight into the influence of institutions on the manifestations of language may help explain this. As he posits,

> The statement cannot be identified with a fragment of matter; but its identity varies with a complex set of material institutions… The rule of

> materiality that statements necessarily obey is therefore the order of the institution rather than the sapio-temporal localization; it defines *possibilities of reinscription and transcription*. (*Archaeology* 1458)

Foucault identifies material institutions as determiners of the ways in which, and the cognitive limits within which, discourse is composed. Understood according to Foucault's theory, then, the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf incorporates elements of digital discourse because the digital medium is an extremely influential delimiting agent in the modern era. So much so, in fact, that it has been reabsorbed even into non-digital discourse, which is made evident by the reinscription of digital discursive features into non-digital compositions.

Even more representative of the *emoji* trend—for *emojis* are fully developed digital caricatures—some sign holders drew caricatures alongside their texts. One American Indian sign holder, for instance, included a drawing of a stereotypical representation of an American Indian alongside his textual message, "Home Where? When?". When interviewed about the intended meaning of his sign, he indicated that his sense of homelessness was trifold. Not only was he currently living among the homeless community in Albuquerque, therefore literally without a home, but also he was trying to collect enough donations to travel back to his original home in Arizona. Finally, as his sign references, his American Indian identity problemetizes the concepts of "home" and "homelessness" entirely for him. The use of the American Indian caricature, then, reinforces his appeal to the audience's humanity by emphasizing his membership to a historically persecuted ethnic group, who were systematically driven out of their ancestral

homes and thrust into situations of chronic poverty. His stereotyped depiction of himself is an allusion to this historical and political surface.

Like the roadside charity collector who uses his sign to openly challenge police officers, to be discussed shortly, the rhetoric employed by this American Indian sign holder is a form of political commentary in addition to being a request for charity. The *emoji*-style American Indian drawing paired with the message draws additional attention to his commentary because *emojis* are notorious for including oversimplified, racial stereotypes in their repertoire of symbols. Like all of the other roadside charity collecting signs that pair drawings with text, this sign is clearly informed by the modern digital surface from which it emerges. Yet, its rhetoric also reflects the historical, cultural, and political surfaces that continue to make the idea of home a complicated one for many American Indians.

Although apparently exceptional according to the pool of texts documented for this analysis, occasionally the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting provides critical commentary on social conditions. On a two-sided sign, one sign holder wrote, “I’d rather take an ass-whipping.” Here, the sign holder is challenging the unjust laws pertaining to the prohibition of public begging and addressing the police officers who are tasked with enforcing those laws. Upon a brief unrecorded interview, the sign’s author explained that when he sees a police vehicle approach or pass him, he displays this confrontational side of his sign. The phrase on his sign refers to his intention to continue his public requests for donation even if it means he will receive punishment or physical harassment from agents of law enforcement. Such an instance of engagement in social and political

commentary is noteworthy because, as opposed to all of the other instances of roadside charity collecting, this rhetoric is directed not at the potential donating audience but to the "oppositional" audience. Here, the rhetoric of the sign holder is designed to directly defy those who are in a more powerful position instead of trying to evoke pity and monetary support. Furthermore, this sign holder's confrontational rhetoric is informed by yet another surface at work in the composition of roadside charity collecting signs: the institutional disapproval and, in some areas, prohibition of public begging.

As Baker explains, the legal precedent for criminalizing begging in Western society is over 750 years old (212). For economic reasons that served the elite and further immobilized the lower classes, after the population reduction caused by the Black Plague, the increased demand for laborers resulted in workers suddenly possessing more bargaining power with their employers and in the general economy. In an attempt to halt the progression of this newfound power and the literal physical mobility of individuals of a low socio-economic rank, rulers throughout Europe passed laws making vagrancy illegal. Vestiges of this initial criminalization of the economically disadvantaged then translated into an eventually widespread conception of the poor, especially the homeless or jobless, as socially and morally inferior individuals in need of regulation as well as personally responsible for their indigent conditions. As Baker describes,

> Begging was an accepted and vital practice for many in the early Middle Ages, but it was eventually regulated and then generally forbidden. Quixotic notions about begging being creditable were ultimately superseded by more practical intrusions. There was an increasing focus on

> the character of the beggar and his or her deservedness. Those who worked were considered to be good Christians because they contributed to society through their work. Meanwhile, those who were not working were thought to be anti-social, immoral, and fraudulent. (214-215)

Although the contemporary incarnation—roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf—of begging has changed over time and only accounts for a minority of the population's means of income, the association of being economically unsuccessful with being socially inferior continues to linger in the twenty-first century. This is particularly true in America, where individualist and capitalist ideologies inform the cultural environment and make individuals solely culpable for their economic success or failure.

Due to the long history of criminalizing begging, Baker establishes that there have been enduring ideological and socioeconomic consequences for how the contemporary discourse community of roadside charity collectors continue to be perceived. In fact, despite much evidence and empirical data that actually proves the contrary, "claims still persist that beggars are tied up in a lot of other crime and that their presence in an area leads to social deprivation and environmental decay, which ultimately induces third parties to commit more serious crime" (Baker 226). Based on Baker's extensive examination of the history of legal measures taken to systematically regulate and penalize the homeless and jobless in Western society, the surfaces that influence the driving audiences' relatively stable reception to this discourse community's rhetoric and the rhetorical situation can be better understood.

Regardless of the many intellectual advancements that have been made, which

promote the recognition that chronic poverty and homelessness are results of a myriad of many complex factors—not simply the responsibility of an irresponsible individual—Baker notes, "little has changed over the centuries as beggars are still seen, by many, as lazy undeserving tricksters and fraudsters" (228). The tradition of being socialized to see the poor and their public speech acts as undeserving of attention, therefore, is an apparently persistent one. Recent media reports of fraudulent begging, where individuals who beg reportedly earn healthy incomes from such street-level economic activity, inform much of the public's negative or ambivalent attitudes toward sign holders. Based on the research of Roger Hopkins Burke, however, he found, "there appears to be little evidence to suggest that begging is a particularly lucrative way of life and indeed the literature suggests that virtually all beggars have one thing in common—their poverty" (229). As both Adler and Erskine and McIntosh allude to, then, it is indeed problematic when journalistic accounts or investigations of begging are the leading sources of knowledge because they can sometimes be, although not necessarily intentionally, inspired by the goal to alarm or entertain rather than objectively or accurately inform. Developing a critical understanding of this minority group's compositions is valuable, then, for it can assist in the dispelling of inaccurate and damaging stereotypes by encouraging a full acknowledgement of contextual influences or, in the context of this analysis, Foucauldian surfaces. Ultimately, all members of society benefit when it is recognized that "Passive begging in contemporary society is a symptom of a number of social problems including homelessness, poverty, drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, a lack of education and vocational training, and so on" (Baker 214).

It is not only ruling institutions but also the corresponding dominant ideologies that exert an influence on the conventions of discourse communities. Because sign holders, in the current social climate, must attempt to establish their moral integrity in order to be perceived as deserving of charity, their rhetoric must convey their being genuine, unassuming, and adequately desperate. As Foucault would note, the historical, ideological, and institutional surfaces in which roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf operates informs both the composition and reception of the subgenre. In the case of the "I'd rather take an ass-whipping" sign, this interaction between relevant surfaces and rhetorical production is especially discernible because it reflects the sign holder's awareness of the current sociopolitical setting in which his discourse is being enacted.

As Foucault maintains, "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" ("Order of Discourse" 1461). Examination of the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf confirms this claim. Certainly in the instances of "Home Where? When?" and "I'd rather take an ass-whipping," the explicit attempt to gain power over discourse—and therefore power in general—can be observed. Yet, perhaps less overtly, all roadside charity collecting rhetoric does, in fact, illustrate the struggle for power that Foucault describes. By asserting themselves as public rhetors, sign holders composing in this marginalized charity subgenre imply that while they may occupy the lowest socioeconomic position in society, they are, nevertheless, entitled to be active participants in public discourse. The intent behind their discourse, furthermore, emphasizes the fact that those who can

effectively manipulate rhetoric are not “powerful” in an indistinct, intangible way; no, an effective use of rhetoric literally translates into economic benefits and power. Because individuals who are economically disadvantaged are usually excluded from privileged discourse communities, it is important to recognize and document the rhetoric of which they are the primary users and leaders. Like any other subgenre of rhetoric, this one invents or borrows certain appeals, tropes, and conventions. While the roadside charity collecting subgenre may spring from and be influenced by other genres and subgenres of rhetoric, contemporary public begging also represents a legitimate discourse community with a rhetoric of its own. Thus, its continued presence in industrialized modern society makes it a discourse community in need of continued consideration and research.

Conclusion

Using Foucault's theory of discourse, the rhetoric of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf can be analyzed and studied based on the surfaces which inform it and the agents of delimination surrounding it. As even an initial investigation of roadside charity collecting reveals, the discourse employed by this marginalized community is delimited by the institutional, historical, and material realities from which it emerges and operates within the context of. Thus, recognition of these surfaces makes it possible to productively study how urban sign holders create meaning and render persuasion in the public sphere. Conversely, when the productions of this discourse community are seen in isolation, severed from their relevant surfaces, the individuals involved are more easily dehumanized and criminalized. That is precisely why the foregoing analysis and continued research of this subgenre of rhetoric is necessary. Such scholarship can not only contribute to the more accurate understanding of the public rhetoric of marginalized discourse communities, but also help eradicate the unjust denial of free speech rights to the destitute members of society who engage in roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf.

The content of these messages is not unimportant or insignificant. The unappealing appearances and deliveries of such messages (the rhetoric of not only their words but their persons and circumstances) should not disqualify individuals who beg from being allowed to claim their right to free speech. Their rhetoric represents a real part of the contemporary socioeconomic order in the United States. Thus, suppressing their ability to engage in public acts of free speech only serves to alleviate a very minor

discomfort (the witnessing of a person in need) for those who wield socioeconomic power without addressing or solving the underlying causes of rising poverty and homelessness levels or the lack of adequate infrastructure to support the most destitute of the country's citizens. If their accompanying actions are truly a danger to or an infringement upon the rights of their audiences, the prohibition of their conduct is not at issue. But to classify their speech as conduct—a distinction that makes it acceptable for lawmakers and law enforcement to evade First Amendment violations—simply because the existence and the content of their messages represents an uncomfortable truth for mainstream members of society is unjust. As this opening study into this discourse community's compositions suggests, roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf is an instance and subgenre of charity rhetoric—not a mindless instance of disorderly conduct.

Indeed, based on the photographic data collected for this research, appeals to the audience's religious values, patriotism, humor, and humanity served as Foucaldian grids of specification. Contrary to the initial hypothesis that served as the impetus for this research project, however, variations of appeals appeared to have little effect on the persuasive or motivational effect on audiences. As the results of the discursive data revealed, the monetary amounts received by sign holders were relatively stable across appeal boundaries. Therefore, as the findings of this study might suggest, the appearance of the sign holder as impoverished-looking and the constraints of the begging encounter as a rhetorical situation may be more influential agents of persuasion than the linguistic texts composed and displayed by sign holders. For this reason, the introduction of

semiotics as another critical apparatus through which artifacts of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf may be understood is a productive complement to the Foucaldian critical apparatus.

Of course, surfaces of emergence also exerted an influence on both the major and minor discursive features documented in the photographic data. For instance, the popularity of the religious appeal and use of devices typical of digital rhetoric on hand-written signs were among the rhetorical components that were traced back to the influential surfaces that inform the selection or inclusion of such features. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between mainstream and marginalized discourse communities is greatly enhanced by Foucault's theory of discourse because it emphasizes the idea that discourse not only reflects hegemonic systems of domination and subordination, but also—and particularly significant when applied to the understanding of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf—"discourse is the power" which communities and individuals attempt to capture or maintain.

Denying or limiting First Amendment rights to the most impoverished members of society who are participating in the same activity—with ultimately negligible differences in medium and delivery—than companies and organizations, whether secular or religious, who likewise solicit donations or funds from passing audiences, then, represents a major prejudice in the United States' consumer capitalist society. When billboards and storefronts can display signs designed to encourage spending, and secular and religious organizations can display signs and directly approach audiences in public spaces to solicit donations, but those who are destitute are subject to specific targeting

and unfair censorship, the institutionalized regulation of expression indicates a socioeconomic bias against the poor. The rhetoric of the commerce industry and organized charities or religious groups should not be met with less strict regulation than that of the indigent. As Foucault's theory of discourse maintains, the acceptability or legitimatization of certain groups over others is not innate; all normative standards are socially and culturally determined. Likewise, the criminality of begging is socially and culturally contingent—not inherent.

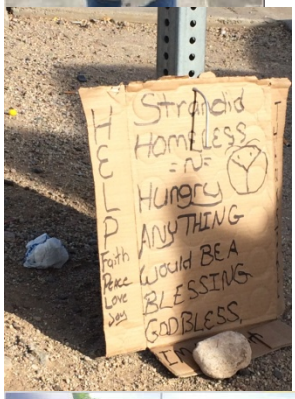
While the study of public expressions of need and urban poverty will not act as a solution to the complex network of issues that contribute to the persistence of roadside charity collecting on one's own behalf as a social phenomenon or the creation of laws that violate the rights of those sign holders, continued analysis of this discourse community does support and encourage the recognition of this group as equally entitled to participation in public expression and involvement. This is because, demonstrating that sign holders are active agents of persuasion in the existing socioeconomic order may help combat the hegemonic ideologies perpetuated by discourse communities of power that, as it has been shown, would have those who beg dehumanized in legal rhetoric in order to maintain their subordination. Contemporary beggars are maintaining their existence in a way previously understood as an unfortunate but perennial street-level economic practice. Thus, the criminalization of this activity stems not from the act itself but from an increased trend toward dehumanization of the homeless and impoverished in order to more easily punish them for their existence. For this reason, and based on this initial research and analysis, it should be apparent that advocating for the free speech rights of

this discourse community is advocating for the continued and equitable protection of all citizens' free speech rights.

Clearly, the theories and critical tools of rhetoricians are ideal for analyzing texts of all genres. This is why rhetorical analyses of the compositions of marginalized discourse communities are especially important. The field of rhetoric, then, can contribute a more accurate understanding of how even "powerless" agents render persuasion in the public sphere. Appreciating not just the legal, historical, economic or sociological implications of begging but also the rhetorical implications of this discourse creates the potential to demonstrate that a financially-disadvantaged discourse community is as richly communicative as any other, and therefore deserving of serious academic inquiry and social protection.

Appendix A


NEED
HELP!


HELP
Faith
Peace
Love
Joy
Stranded
Homeless
Hungry
ANYTHING
Would BE A
BLESSING
GODBLESS,


Home
Where
Wheel


NINJAS
KIDNAPPED
GIRLFRIEND
NEED MONEY
FOR KUNG-FU
LESSONS!

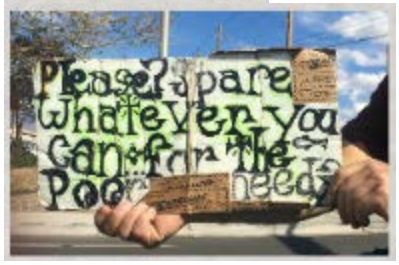

WHY LIE I
NEED A
BIG
BEER


HUNGRY
VET

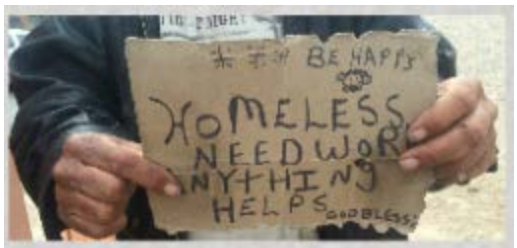

Homeless
ANYTHING IS
A BLESSING THANK
YOU

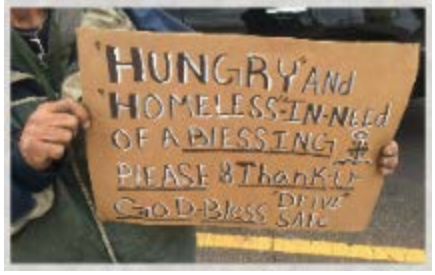

Everyone
Needs Help
At Some Point
In Life.
Thank You
Drive Safe!

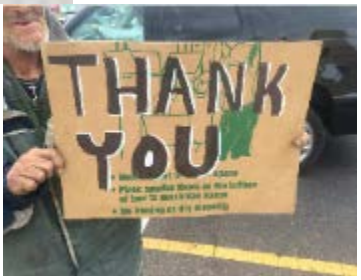

NEED HE
ANYTHIN
WORKS
LOVE U!



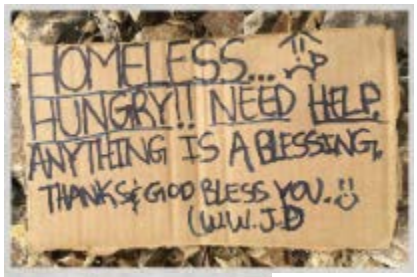
(double-sided sign)

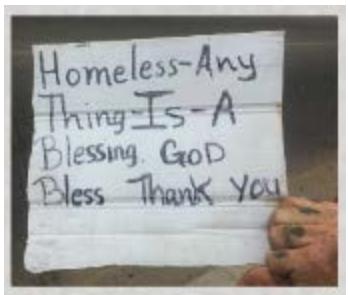


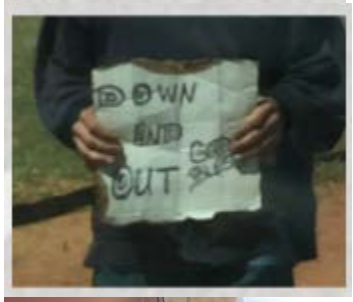




(double-sided sign)




Homeless-Any
Thing-Is-A
Blessing. GoD
Bless Thank You


OUT


I ALREADY AM.
I ALWAYS WAS.
AND STILL HAVE
TIME TO BE A
SOMEBODY..
ANYTHING HELPS
Thank You!


I'M 2 UGLY 2
PROSTITUTE.
AND 2 REAL 2
STEAL!


Homeless
Vet anything
Helps.
God Bless


TRAVELIN'
BROKE
ANYTHING IS A
BLESSING!!!


HOMELESS
HUNGRY
PLEASE HELP!

Appendix B

Religous.m4a

Patriotic.m4a

Humorous.m4a

Humanity.m4a

Kyle.m4a

Kevin.m4a

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