MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

GIVING VOICE TO THE STREET:
A CASE STUDY OF TORONTO'S *STREET VOICES MAGAZINE*

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Abstract

This Major Research Paper investigates *Street Voices Magazine* as an instrument and communications tool to engage and empower street youth in Toronto. The following questions guided my study: What are the ways in which *Street Voices Magazine* gives voice to the marginalized and silenced? Why is *Street Voices Magazine* an appropriate medium for connecting with street youth? A mixed-method approach was used to analyze the texts and images in three issues of the magazine to determine the effectiveness of the print medium, what these texts and images suggest about the motivations of the contributors, and whether the magazine meets its objective of serving street youth. The study suggests that the transformative potential of the arts, the role of the magazine in fostering in the contributors the identity of an artist, and the lack of other spaces for expression are significant themes that underpin *Street Voices Magazine*'s appeal and effectiveness. The study also leads to suggestions for further research, which could improve an understanding of this diverse demographic and confirm the impact of *Street Voices Magazine*.

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Giving Voice to the Street: A Case Study of Toronto's *Street Voices Magazine*

Introduction

Since all shelters have the same cause, wouldn't it be convenient if they all communicated and united under one medium, like a magazine? Just like how the Internet connected the world, a magazine could connect the street system. [...] As a united community our actions will be more impactful and our voices will be more powerful (*Street Voices Magazine*, 2014: Issue 1, p. 19).

Thinking about new ways of engaging and empowering homeless/street youth through media and the arts is a relatively rare topic in academia. Indeed, the majority of existing research in this area focuses on connecting at-risk populations to health-related information and resources. That being the case, there is an opportunity to examine the ways emerging media platforms are affording street youth with new avenues for expression, education, and connection to resources. Additionally, as a relatively new area of investigation for Canadian scholarly research, examinations of this topic can inform strategies to get young people off the streets, in addition to improving communications between the youth shelter system and other youth services in Canadian communities.

In a time when discussions about the relationships among technology, social media, and teens are seemingly ubiquitous, understanding how these media, phenomena, and agencies relate to street youth is a challenge. To examine the relationships among technology, digital media, and street youth this project will focus on the street youth-focused media product Street Voices and their publication *Street Voices Magazine*. Street Voices is a Toronto-based media-platform that uses a suite of communications tools to communicate with its audience of street youth, including *Street Voices Magazine* which will be the focus of this research paper. Choosing to study a print magazine in 2015 might be considered anachronistic, or even quaint. However, magazines have the

advantage of being able to be easily distributed across the youth shelter system and are able to be provided to youth for free. Magazines are also accessible to a diverse street youth population, much of which may not have ready access to the Internet. To support this case study of *Street Voices Magazine*, it is first important to discuss the history of Street Voices as well as *Street Voices Magazine* and its content, contributors, and audience.

Street Voices History

Joel Zola founded Street Voices in 2012 when he was living at a youth shelter called Eva's Phoenix in Toronto, Canada. The name "Street Voices" was chosen because it targets an audience of "street" or "street-involved" youth. Joel, who has experienced living in and out of youth shelters across Canada for the past seven years, saw the potential for an independent media platform to provide a much needed space for marginalized youth to express themselves, share their stories in a world where they are on the margins, and connect to community services and resources. In turn, Street Voices' mission is to "empower the marginalized voices of Toronto" (Street Voices Profile, 2015).

In 2013-2014, Joel completed SKETCH's Community Artist Training Program and programs with The Remix Project's Academy of Creative Arts and Academy of Business to develop the knowledge and networks necessary to launch Street Voices and more specifically *Street Voices Magazine*. Currently, the Street Voices media platform includes a video channel, website, and creative workshops, in addition to *Street Voices Magazine* (Street Voices Profile, 2015). The first issue of *Street Voices Magazine* was launched in June 2014, and there have been three issues to date (Issue 1: June 2014, Issue

2: December 2014 & Issue 3: April 2015).¹

Street Voices Magazine

Street Voices Magazine aims to provide a space for “raw and authentic” writing and artwork to be published and circulated in the youth shelter system of Toronto (Street Voices Profile, 2015). Content is submitted primarily by youth who are either currently or were formerly living inside the shelter system. Youth’s submissions are sent either online via email or in-person through Joel’s networks within the shelters. Submitted written content (e.g. poetry, articles, stories, etc.) can be found in the *Word On The Street* section of the magazine and submitted visual art pieces (e.g. photography, illustrations, paintings, etc.) can be found in the *Street Gallery* section. Joel notes that prioritizing these youth as key contributors in these sections is done deliberately to give this demographic an outlet to express themselves and to be heard. In terms of reception, the magazines are primarily distributed for free in youth shelters and drop-ins to ensure a ready and accessible audience of street youth.

The second part of the content is pre-planned and written by *Street Voices Magazine*’s staff writers. The pre-determined topics for each issue include *Community Profile*, a profile on a community service or youth shelter; *Street Profile*, a feature story on a youth’s transition from homelessness to success; and a *Youth Services Directory*, that lists free programs and services in the community for youth to access.

This research paper will investigate *Street Voices Magazine* as an instrument and suite of communications tools capable of engaging and empowering street youth in Toronto, Canada. Questions guiding my study include:

1) How does *Street Voices Magazine* provide an outlet and voice for street youth?

¹ Issue 4 was published in August 2015 and so was excluded from this study.

2) Is a magazine an appropriate media product for connecting and communicating with street youth in 2015?

In the following section a review of literature offers insight on street youth in Canada and more specifically, in Toronto, with a special focus on their media preferences and access to technology and the potential for alternative media to provide a space for street youth expression and education.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three subsections: 1) defining street youth and their urban contexts in Canada and especially Toronto; 2) trends in media consumption and accessibility; and 3) the potential for alternative media to reach this at-risk demographic. I will first review relevant scholarly research on street youth to better understand this demographic and to provide insight on the street youth contributors and readers of *Street Voices Magazine*.

1. Street Youth

Defining Street Youth

There are many terms to describe young people who are homeless including street youth, street-involved youth, and homeless youth, and all these terms are used interchangeably (Kelly & Caputo, 2007). A Canadian definition of homeless youth refers to young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who live independently from their parents or guardians and lack many of the social supports deemed necessary to provide a safe and nurturing environment to transition from childhood to adulthood (Gaetz, 2014). More specifically, these young people lack stable housing, employment, and educational opportunities, and they may experience inadequate access to healthcare and other support networks (Homeless Hub, 2009, Gaetz, 2014).

Defining homeless youth is difficult because of the eclectic housing status of young people living on the streets. Homeless youth may be living temporarily in hostels, shelters, living in “squats,” or on the streets (Homeless Hub, 2009, Kelly & Caputo, 2007). They may also be “crashing” with friends or living with family. Regardless, these youth are constantly at risk of losing their shelter (Homeless Hub, 2009). It is also

challenging to define the experiences of street youth in Canada and more specifically in Toronto because they make up such a diverse and heterogeneous population.

Who are Street Youth?

The street youth population includes a complex mix of young people including, but not limited to, run-aways, youth who have been kicked out their homes, as well as those who have left child protection services (Gaetz, 2014; Kelly & Caputo, 2010). Common factors linked to youth homelessness include family problems, personal issues, and the failure of social welfare, educational, and correctional systems (Higgins, 2003; Kidd, 2004). Research on youth homelessness in Canada, and more specifically in Toronto, confirms that youth generally turn to homelessness for reasons beyond their control (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). These factors include fleeing from abusive situations, being released from foster care or correction centers, and having nowhere else to turn than to live on the street (Homeless Hub, 2009; Hendry et al., 2010).

In some cases, it is the youth's own personal challenges – including substance abuse, depression, sexual orientation, and learning disabilities – that create added tension within the home (Gaetz, 2013) and when secondary factors are added to the mix – including dropping out of school and being involved in delinquent and criminal activities – they are forced to leave home (Karabanow, 2004). Given these circumstances, street youth likely consider being homeless to be the only alternative available to them (Kelly & Caputo, 2007; Higgins, 2003).

Diversity of Street Youth Population

It is important to recognize the diversity within the youth homeless population. The following discussion highlights the fact that street youth are often members of larger

marginalized groups and communities. Research in Canada shows, for example, that Aboriginal youth (Baskin, 2013) and black youth (especially in Toronto) are over-represented in the youth homeless population (Springer, Lum & Roswell, 2013). Furthermore, LGBTQ youth make up a significant amount of the youth homeless population (between 25 and 40 percent) (Abramovich, 2013). If you consider that LGBTQ youth make up only 5-10% of the general Canadian population (Josephson & Wright, 2000), this could point to homophobia as one of the leading contributors to homelessness (Homeless Hub, 2013). This group may also continue to face discrimination when they are on the streets (Gaetz, 2013). There is also a growing body of research on legal refugees as part of the youth homeless population (Gaetz, 2013; Homeless Hub, 2009).

The Experiences of Street Youth

Some street youth may experience mental health problems or addictions while some do not (Gaetz et al., 2013). They are also subjected to feelings of isolation, discrimination, and are at higher risk of suicide, sexual transmitted diseases, and unplanned pregnancy (Kelly & Caputo, 2007; Stewart et al., 2010). Studies show that these risks increase the longer the youth are homeless (Gaetz et al., 2013). Other research has focused on self-harm, violence, theft, drug dealing, and alcohol/drug use (Homeless Hub, 2014). Young people who are homeless may use the latter as coping strategies to deal with the marginalization and trauma they have experienced prior to and during their stay on the streets (Homeless Hub, 2014).

These issues highlight the fact that the street youth population is clearly an at-risk group that exists on the fringes of society. While their experiences show a need for social

and community services to get involved, street youth are often suspicious and wary about social- and community-based organizations. These young people may not trust or want to engage in a society that has rejected them time and time again, let alone a system that has failed them deeply; this makes it difficult to draw street youth to the services and resources they so desperately need.

Street Youth Population in Canada & Toronto

Canadian studies show that there are over 35,000 different youth who experience homelessness over the course of the year (Gaetz et al., 2013) as well as some nights where there are over 6,000 youth living on the street in Canada (Homeless Hub, 2015; Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter & Gulliver, 2013). In Toronto, specifically, the numbers reveal that there are approximately 10,000 youth who experience homelessness every year and on any given night, there can be between 1,500-2,000 homeless youth seeking shelter and support (Fair, Moore, Robson & Gosse, 2009). The ratio for youth homelessness in Canada and similarly for Toronto is “typically two homeless males for every female” (O-Grady & Gaetz, 2004). It is important to note that these numbers do not include those who do not enter the shelter system and thus does not account for youth living on the streets, those temporarily crashing with friends, etc. Furthermore, it is difficult to truly determine the size of the problem of youth homelessness, as these young people are often moving between various housing situations (Homeless Hub, 2015; Kelly & Caputo, 2007).

Young people who are homeless are coming from all over Canada, including both rural and urban areas, and are not just from the downtown cores of big cities (Homeless Hub, 2009; Skott-Myhre, Raby & Nikolaou 2008). However, it should be noted that there

a high number of homeless adults and youth who head to the downtown cores in big cities such as Toronto in hopes of opportunity and access to more diverse and higher-capacity social services (Frankish, Hwang & Quantz, 2005).

Even the social services in downtown areas fall short in being able to support the burgeoning homeless population (Gaetz et al., 2013). Looking at this gap as it relates to youth services in particular, some non-profit organizations and governmental agencies have taken it upon themselves to provide services and resources for homeless youth. More specifically, media and arts-based initiatives and organizations that focus on reaching this marginalized demographic are helping to make services more approachable, accessible, and engaging for street youth (Hendry et al., 2010). It has been found that when these young people feel comfortable, in control, and empowered, they are more likely to access the services they require and may feel less acutely like they are on the margins of society.

2. Trends & Access to Media

Is There a Digital Divide?

There is extensive research on youth and their everyday relationships with technology, the Internet, and more specifically social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2015). Young people go online to build and maintain relationships with peers, to find or access information, and to explore different forms of identity formation (Hendry et al., 2010; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Previous research on street youth demonstrates that they too access technology consistently and frequently and use the Internet for similar purposes as non-street youth (Karabanow & Naylor, 2007; Guadagno, Muscanell & Pollio, 2012, Rice & Barman-

Adhikari, 2014). In terms of social and instrumental purposes, street youth use email and social media to stay in touch with family and friends that are otherwise inaccessible (Karabanow and Naylor, 2007; Bender et al., 2014; Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014) and they use the Internet for finding resources including housing, potential employment (Eyrich-Garg, 2011; Karabanow & Naylor, 2007) and health-related information (Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2011). Furthermore, there is a significant number of street youth reported to own a cellphone according to recent studies (Rice, Lee & Tait, 2011; Pollio et al., 2013). Rice & Barman-Adhikari (2014) note that the majority of research on this topic has focused on street/homeless youth in the United States, with one Canadian study from Karabanow & Taylor (2007). Regardless, this research suggests that the digital divide is perhaps less significant than would be expected when considering this marginalized demographic (Bender et al., 2014; Guadagno et al., 2012).

Street Youth & Access to Technology

It is important to consider how street youth, as a marginalized and resource-poor demographic, are accessing and utilizing technology. Street youth typically get online at least once a week and rely on a variety of free access points including public libraries, youth services agencies, and to a lesser extent Internet cafés, their friends' or families' computers, as well their own cellphones and computers (Polio et al. 2013). Looking at cellphone usage, one study shows that street youth who have cellphones use them primarily for phone calls (100%), followed by texts (61%), and lastly for accessing the Internet (20%) (Eyrich-Garg, 2011). However, there are many challenges that interfere with street youth's access to technology. For example, street youth report losing and giving away their cellphones as well as their cellphones breaking down or being

subjected to theft (Bender et al., 2014). Additionally, these young people may often change their phone numbers or emails and forget their passwords, which makes it difficult to keep in continual contact with this demographic (Bender et al., 2014).

It is also important to consider that youth who are literally homeless may not have such ready access or be preoccupied whatsoever with utilizing technology (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014). Given the obvious challenges street youth face in accessing technology, it is difficult to see cellphones or the Internet solely as being within the reach of this demographic. Furthermore, the majority of the literature on homeless youth and technology focuses on the social benefit of staying connected to mainly maintain pre-existing relationships. The next section will investigate alternative media – and even analog media – which may be more accessible to street youth and offer a wide range of supports and opportunities.

3. Street Youth & Alternative Media

Given street youth's marginalization, there is a lack of space (if any exists at all) for this demographic to participate in the traditional public sphere (McKee & Sexton, 2001). Alternative media can serve as an outlet for marginalized communities that other mainstream media simply cannot fulfill. While there is not a substantial amount of literature that exists on alternative media for and by street youth, there are a few articles that focus on the medium of print magazines designed to reach this demographic. In particular, these studies focus on *Gibber Magazine* from Perth, Australia and *Slice Magazine*, from Vancouver, Canada. Both these publications are recognized for their efforts in providing an uncensored forum for street youth to share writings and artworks amongst the local street youth community.

They also seek to educate the larger society by providing a more comprehensive portrait of street youth than the existing narratives in mainstream news media (McKee & Sexton, 2001). In the news, stories about street youth revolve around crimes, drug use, prostitution, or the “nuisance” of panhandling or squeegeeing (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, there is also a dominant discourse that regards street youth as “victims” and that their homelessness is the outcome of extreme poverty or fleeing from childhood abuse (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 1). Interviews with street youth show that often they did not view themselves as “victims” but instead noted that their homelessness was the outcome of what they had to do to deal with their situations (Higgit et al., 2003). As alternative media that target an alternative audience, *Gibber* and *Slice Magazine* provide a space for street youth to share their knowledge, experiences, and identities so that they can take ownership of their own narratives and find resilience in the margins.

More specifically, McKee and Sexton’s (2001) study on *Gibber Magazine* highlights the magazine’s key roles as defined from their qualitative interviews with 29 readers/contributors to *Gibber Magazine*, who were either homeless or had experienced homelessness. These youth described *Gibber Magazine* as providing a sense of community and identity, an outlet for expression, and education for those living on the streets and for the larger community. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that when researchers asked youth about negative experiences and representatives present in *Gibber Magazine*, the youth tended not to view them in negative terms but instead saw them as “truth[s]” or as “reality” (p. 11). Additionally, the positive representations present in the magazine were seen as offering hope for youth by encouraging them to think of themselves in “positive, powerful, and affirming ways” when thinking about their own

experiences of life on the streets (p. 12). Lastly, these youth acknowledged the lack of other spaces that they can participate in besides *Gibber Magazine*. Understanding the role of *Gibber Magazine* in the lives of street youth can provide valuable insight when examining Toronto's *Street Voices Magazine*. While the experiences of street youth have likely changed since this research by McKee and Sexton was undertaken – especially given the evolution of the Internet – it is useful to consider whether their categories of analysis are relevant for *Street Voices Magazine* in terms of its impact on the demographic of street youth.

It is worth noting that street youth publications like *Slice* and *Gibber* have no presence on the Internet, which could either mean they are promoted entirely offline or that they have ceased operations. Given their local distribution and appeal, I am unable to determine their current publication status. Nonetheless, based on previous research and current efforts to find a more inclusive medium to reach young people who are homeless, there remains much to be said on the potential of a magazine platform to engage this demographic in 2015. The following section presents the research questions that informed my analysis of *Street Voices Magazine*.

Research Questions

This research paper will address the following research questions:

RQ1 – Production: What are the ways in which *Street Voices Magazine* gives voice to the marginalized and silenced?

RQ2 – Reception: Why is *Street Voices Magazine* an appropriate medium for connecting with street youth?

Methods

To explore my research questions, I used a mixed-method approach in order to provide both a textual and visual analysis of *Street Voices Magazine*. I utilized content analysis to examine the written content within *Street Voices Magazine* including articles, interview features, and poetry as well as visual semiotics to analyze the visual elements within these texts, including but not limited to the artwork, photography, and advertisements within the pages of the magazines. Each entry/submission in the magazines was analyzed as one text. Accompanying artwork, images, and links were included in the coding to provide a contextual meaning. The scope of this research study includes the three issues of *Street Voices Magazine* that have been published to date, which brings the data set to a total of 77 textual contributions/submissions.

Using inductive grounded theory, I first immersed myself in *Street Voices Magazine* to code the written content and visual elements based on the nature of their intended impact on the Street Voices community. When looking at the Street Voices community, it is important to note this includes both the contributors and readers of *Street Voices Magazine*. After this open coding exercise, I organized the data into the categories of analysis and confirmed that these categories fit with the initial framework adopted from McKee and Sexton's (2001) findings. Although I have drawn on their categories as an initial starting point, I modified the categories and their definitions based on the findings from my research. Another important difference between the studies is that I am analyzing the content of the media as opposed to the content of the interviews (as in McKee and Sexton's study).

I drew upon McKee and Sexton's (2001) findings as an initial framework to analyze *Street Voices Magazine* because it focused on the same medium and targeted a street youth audience. I also took into consideration new circumstances facing this demographic in 2015, which I have discussed in my findings. Furthermore, given the fact that this study focuses on a textual and visual analysis, I have omitted three categories from McKee and Sexton's research that would be difficult to code without conducting qualitative interviews. My initial open coding exercise supported the decision to eliminate the following categories: *Community and Identity*, *Educating others* (the larger public), and *Lack of other spaces*. Additionally, it helped me conceptualize what categories were present and how they appeared in *Street Voices Magazine*.

In a closer examination of the data set from *Street Voices Magazine*, texts were coded into the categories on a thematic level where meaning was determined by the relationship between the concepts in the written and visual submissions. This content and visual analysis also allowed me to identify new combinations of the categories, which I will unveil and discuss in my findings.

Lastly, a quantitative content analysis was used on the same data set. The aim of this content analysis was to determine how many texts were submitted by street youth. Since it is only possible to identify the texts that are clearly marked as submitted by this demographic, this number included texts that either had direct references to personal experiences with living on the streets or in the shelter system as well as submissions to *Street Voices Magazine's Word on the Street* and *Street Gallery* which are sections reserved for street youth to submit content.

Findings & Analysis

Using Sexton and McKee's (2001) findings on *Gibber Magazine* as an initial framework to analyze *Street Voices Magazine*, the data collected reveals a number of key trends among the categories. I will begin by explaining how the framework supports my findings and ability to answer RQ1. This analysis will elaborate what the text or image in the issues of *Street Voices Magazine* tells us about the person who created it, the medium in which it was created, and the intentions and objectives of their work. Next, I will address RQ2, which will allow me to conclude whether *Street Voices Magazine* is an appropriate medium for connecting with street youth given its objectives. To discuss my findings, I will be highlighting specific examples from each category to address each research question.

Application of McKee & Sexton's Framework

Following the open coding exercise, I was able to determine which categories were present in the data and how they were contextualized in the pages of *Street Voices Magazine*. Using McKee and Sexton's findings on the utility of *Gibber Magazine* as an initial starting point, I was able to confirm that the following categories applied to *Street Voices Magazine* insofar as it provided a platform for: *Expression*, *Educating others* (who are on the streets), *Negative experiences and representations*, and *Positive representations*. I also created an *Other* category to organize all remaining texts that did not readily hold a purpose beyond a placeholder or numerical sense. Please consult the following coding chart, which includes definitions, indicators, and examples for these categories:

TABLE 1: CODING CHART			
Category	Definition	Indicators	Examples
<i>Expression</i>	Provides a forum for expression by street youth (creative, political, etc.)	Poem, artwork, story, photography, drawing, painting, graffiti	<p>“Starstruck” painting (Camille, 2015: Issue 3, p. 23)</p>
<i>Educating others</i>	Provides practical and informational resources for street youth	Services, resources, and practical information	<i>Community Profile</i> on Yonge Street Mission, <i>Street Voices Youth Services Directory</i>
<i>Negative experiences and representations</i>	Provides experiences and representations of the inability to address the challenges of street life	Story, poem, painting, etc. that stresses the negative prospect for the individual	<p>“Only seen my mom once in like ten years / Got me rolling a blunt with a case of beer / Trying to ease the pain feeling like the end is near” (Oddane, 2015: Issue 3, p. 10).</p>
<i>Positive representations</i>	Provides representations of the ability to address street life	Story, poem, painting, etc. that stresses the positive prospect for the individual / encourages others	<p><i>Street Profile</i> ex. DJ Romeo “When you accept not having anything, you can do anything ...Don't ever flop yourself. Go. Give it all you've got. Be the best. Make it happen (DJ Romeo, 2014: Issue 2, p. 14).”</p>
<i>Other</i>	Items that cannot be coded into the categories above	Other	Table of Contents, etc.

TABLE 2: AVAILABLE CODE COMBINATIONS			
Category	Definition	Indicators	Examples
<i>Expression + Positive representations</i>	Forum for expression with a positive outlook or focus on encouraging others	Story, poem, painting, etc. that has a positive outlook with no direct mention of personal experiences with living in shelters/the streets	"It's just a drawing but it's a latest achievement. Sometimes things don't have to mean anything. You just got to be proud of it (Christian, 2014: Issue 2, p. 19)"
<i>Expression + Negative representations</i>	Forum for expression with a negative view	Story, poem, painting, etc. that has a negative outlook for the individual with no direct mention with living in shelters/the streets	"Before I cut, I feel really guilty / Everything hurts, and nothing is worst. I scream and cry, I hate you, I hate you. / Why am I not ok" (Andrew, 2014: Issue 2, p. 5).

The major difference between the categories found in my study on *Street Voices Magazine* and the categories from the study on *Gibber Magazine* is that I am unable to clearly identify *Community and Identity*, as well as *Lack of other spaces* in a textual and visual analysis. Qualitative interviews, as demonstrated in McKee & Sexton's findings, provide a more fruitful exploration on these topics. Nonetheless, with the support of my study and current literature, I will attempt to make some preliminary connections on these topics in the Discussion section.

Findings

The findings reveal that *Street Voices Magazine* gives voice to marginalized and silenced street youth by providing an outlet for *Expression* (31%), *Educating others* via the sharing practical and informational resources (23%), in addition to providing a space to share *Negative experiences and representations* (4%) as well as *Positive representations* (13%) on coping with street life. The data revealed that there were also

code combinations for *Expression + Negative experiences and representations* and *Expression* (9%) + *Positive representations* (10%), which are similar categories to the latter but do not make a direct connection to street life. This increases the totals for *Negative experiences and representations* up to 15% and *Positive representations* up to 22%. The rest of the texts (9%) were coded as *Other* and do not support this discussion.

TABLE 3: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS		
Category	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
<i>Expression</i>	24	31%
<i>Educating others</i>	18	23%
<i>Negative experiences and representations</i>	4	5%
<i>Positive representations</i>	9	12%
<i>Expression + Negative representations</i>	7	9%
<i>Expression + Positive representations</i>	8	10%
<i>Other</i>	7	9%

TABLE 4: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FOR COMBINATIONS		
Category	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
<i>Total Expressions</i>	39	51%
<i>Total Positives</i>	17	22%
<i>Total Negatives</i>	11	15%

Furthermore, I was able to identify that at least 58% of the texts in *Street Voices Magazine* are submitted from street youth. This includes visuals from the *Street Gallery*

section of *Street Voices Magazine* (22%), texts from the *Word on the Street* section (27%), and texts where the contributors self-identify as being part of the street youth demographic (12%). *Street Voices Magazine* clearly notes that *Word on the Street* is reserved for “youth from within the shelter system” and *Street Gallery* is reserved for a broader group of “street-involved youth” (Issue 1, Issue 2 & Issue 3). It is important to keep in mind that my research methodology may have undercounted the submissions to the magazine from street youth as I can only identify those clearly marked as submitted by this demographic. The use of qualitative surveys or interviews could have produced more certainty in this regard by providing more information about the contributors.

TABLE 5: SUBMISSIONS FROM STREET YOUTH		
Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Self-Identification	7	9%
<i>Word on the Street</i>	21	27 %
<i>Street Gallery</i>	17	22 %
Total	45	58%

Analysis

In this section, I will analyze the findings in further detail in order to gain a deeper understanding of the categories and how they are conceptualized in *Street Voices Magazine*. This analysis will help investigate RQ1 and the ways in which *Street Voices Magazine* gives voice to the marginalized and silenced. To reflect on this initial question, I will elaborate on the following categories: 1) *Expression*, 2) *Educating others*, and the presence of both 3) *Positive representations* and 4) *Negative experiences and*

representations. I will also use examples from the text for each category whenever applicable and relevant to support this analysis. Following this investigation, I will be able to reflect on RQ2 more clearly and consider whether *Street Voices Magazine* is an appropriate medium to connect with street youth.

Expression

People just think you're trying to hide. / But the reality is / All you want to do is be found (Andrew, 2015: Issue 3, p. 5).

One of the central ways in which *Street Voices* gives voice to the marginalized is by providing street youth with the opportunity to contribute to the magazine and find an outlet for self-expression. My findings revealed that around half of the content (51%) in the issues analyzed served the purpose of expression. The majority of this content is submitted by street youth and is mainly poetry and visual art (including photography and artwork). Both poetry and artwork are forms of creative expression, suggesting this is an important function of *Street Voices Magazine* to serve for its contributors and readers.

Submissions from street youth also include articles, short stories, and essays, which often serve a greater social purpose in terms of expression. This includes discussion on what is politics, racism in the media, religion, and rethinking the shelter system and its current structures. Graffiti submissions to the magazine also serve as examples of both creative and social expression:

Figure 1. Photo of Graffiti Submission (Robert, 2015: Issue 3, p. 26)

Graffiti provides both a social representation of life on the streets and offers a challenge to conventional notions of what constitutes “art.” Overall, my findings provide significant evidence that *Street Voices Magazine* provides street youth with a venue for creative, political, and social expression to promote their work, share their experiences and opinions, and connect to their community.

Expressiveness is also tied into the uncensored nature of *Street Voices Magazine*. For example, submissions to sections *Word on the Street* and *Street Gallery* are not subjected to a rigid editing process and all submitted materials are considered acceptable for publishing in the magazine. Submissions are ready for publication as they are received and are not edited to follow standards of proper use of the English language or the correct use of grammar. In this regard, these submissions offer an accurate portrayal of the way the contributors express themselves. This uncensored forum can be seen in how submissions in *Street Voices Magazine* may include typos, profanities, and cover a

variety of taboo topics including self-harm, drugs, and suicide. For example, the following text highlights a combination of these topics:

Put my mind to this shit damn all this I demanded / While living in a shelter
around a bunch [of] addicts / Sleeping with them bug bugs man had to sell drugs /
Contemplated suicide had to turn to self-love / Had to pray and read my bible /
cause I was suicidal (Oddane, 2015: Issue 3, p. 10).

This text is just one example of many in *Street Voices Magazine* that highlight issues that youth may not typically be comfortable sharing with others. Having a space to voice their experiences and struggles through poetry and other expressive forms is both liberating and possibly self-healing.

Furthermore, Street Voices explicitly states that selected contributors will have at least one of their submissions published in the upcoming issue of the magazine (Street Voices Profile, 2015). This openness makes room for a diverse group of contributors, who are a part of the street youth demographic in Toronto, to share their stories on a wide range of topics and experiences. Moreover, the fact that uncensored writing and artwork from this marginalized demographic fills the majority of the pages of *Street Voices Magazine* shows their focus and commitment to giving street youth a platform to voice their opinions and experiences.

Educating Others

Street Voices Magazine also provides a space for street youth to educate others in their community. Additionally, this publication fulfills its mandate to share available youth services in Toronto. This combination of educational content accounts for 23% of the texts in *Street Voices Magazine*. Topics discussed include information on safer partying tips, learning preferences, and educational opportunities. To elaborate on the latter topic, the following example from *Street Voices Magazine* highlights one young

man's motivations in getting his high school equivalency certificate (GED). This text is also accompanied with a contact for readers to receive more information about where they can take this test. In this example, he explains that he found it difficult to concentrate with all the distractions in the shelter so a GED made sense to him. He shares: "It opens a door to college or university [and] is a safer alternative to make money"; he goes on to explain that he doesn't "want to be 30 years old going into high school or end up in jail" (Anonymous, 2015: Issue 1, p. 17). The text builds on his personal experience to help educate and encourage others that getting their GED is an obtainable and viable option. This information is especially important to share with *Street Voices Magazine's* readers as research shows that statistics on street youth indicates dropping out of school is a common reality for this demographic. Contributors are therefore motivated to utilize *Street Voices Magazine* to educate others by sharing their personal experiences in a way that readers can relate to, and provide practical and informational resources that readers can benefit from.

Another motivation for contributors could be to educate others from the general public who also read *Street Voices Magazine* about the realities of street life. The opportunity for street youth to take ownership of their own narratives is an interesting area of investigation, but unfortunately is outside of the scope of my research questions.

There are also preplanned sections of *Street Voices Magazine* that provide information on services available for street youth in Toronto. This content includes *Street Voices Magazine's Youth Services Directory*, *Community Profile*, and advertisements for arts-based, youth-oriented non-profit organizations. This content is important to communicate to *Street Voices Magazine's* readership because it is expressly designed to

meet their practical needs. The permanence of these features in the issues clearly demonstrate the magazine's efforts to educate youth about the services available in their community, including youth drop-in centres and shelters, community arts programs, and employment centres.

Figure 2. Youth Services Directory (Issue 2, pp. 26-27)

Street Voices Youth Services Directory

FIND HERE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE GTA WITH SPACES AND PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH. PROGRAMS CAN CHANGE, SO CHECK DIRECTLY WITH THE ORGANIZATION TO GET THE MOST RECENT INFO ON THEIR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

WORK

Youth Employment Services runs the Streets to Jobs helps homeless youth or young people who are at risk of becoming homeless. With the individual support of an employment counsellor/job developer youth are assisted with pre-employment and life skills training, job search assistance, financial incentives, job development services, subsidized work placements, and supportive referrals. The goal of Street to Jobs is to support homeless youth in taking positive steps towards permanent housing and greater financial self-sufficiency. For more information about Streets to Jobs, or to book the Streets to Jobs staff for a site visit or presentation call 416-556-8900 or visit 2562 Eglinton Ave. West, Main Floor.

YES offers an online job board at <http://www.yes.on.ca/jobboard/>, and employment workshops listed at <http://www.yes.on.ca/workshop-schedule/>. Job Central assists youth 15 – 30 years of age to find employment through group-based employability skills training and a work experience placement. The program provides holistic services for youth who are out of school, unemployed, and are facing barriers to finding a job. The program begins with two to three weeks of group-based employability and life skills workshops. Youth receive minimum wage and TTC tokens.

2502 Eglinton Ave. W (Streets to Jobs)
 T: 416-556-8900
<http://www.yes.on.ca>

► **Check also:**

Career Skills Incubator:
 585 Dundas St. East, Toronto M5A 2B7
info@careerskillsincubator.com
 T: 416-938-7290
<http://www.careerskillsincubator.com/>

Youth Employment Service YES:
 Unit 711-555 Richmond St. Toronto M5V 3B1
 T: (416) 504-5556
<http://www.yes.on.ca>

Tropicana Community Services:
 Unit 14-670 Progress Avenue
 Scarborough M1H 3A4
 T: (416) 439-9000
<http://www.tropicanacommunity.org>

Eva's Phoenix:
 11 Ordinance Street Toronto M6K 1A1
 T: (416) 364-4710 x265
<http://www.phoenixprintshop.ca/contact-us/>

SHELTER & FOOD

Horizons for Youth provides emergency accommodation for up to 35 youth each night. The Residential Program ensures the basic needs of each youth are met by providing them with a bed to sleep in, 3 meals per day, clothing, personal hygiene products and services, and access to internet, computer, and television. If you are between the ages of 16-24 years old and in need of a safe place to stay, contact Horizons for youth at 416-781-9898. Horizons for Youth offers day programs that touch on self care, conflict resolution, nutrition and housing. Young people have the opportunity to meet with a Housing Worker as well as participate in Ready, Set, Home, a workshop that educates youth on the realities of living independently. The Housing Worker connects young people with resources such as financial assistance and housing listings, and assists youth in making phone calls to landlords and attending apartment viewings.

Horizons for Youth also offers a pre-employment program called Career Horizons.

422 Gilbert Ave.
 T: 416-781-9898
<http://www.horizonsforyouth.org/>

► **Check also:**

Young Men Christian Association YMCA:
 Unit 300-2200 Yonge Street
 Toronto M4S 2C6
 T: (416) 928-9622
<http://www.ywcagta.org>

Young Women Christian Association YWCA:
 87 ElmStreet Toronto M5G 0A8
 T: (416) 961-8100
<http://www.ywcatoronto.org>

Youth Without Shelter YWS:
 6 Waverdale Court Etobicoke M9V 1P9
 T: (416) 748-0110
<http://www.yws.ca>

The Covenant House
 20 Gerrard Street East Toronto M5B 2P3
 T: (416) 598-4898
<http://www.covenanthouseontario.ca>

The Sistersing
 962 Bloor Street West Toronto M6H 1L6
 T: (416) 926-9702
<http://www.sistersing.org>

Eva's Initiatives:
 Unit 370-125 Spadina Toronto M5T 2C7
 T: (416) 977-4497
<http://www.avasinitatives.com>

Horizons For Youth
 422 Gilbert Avenue Toronto M6E 4X3
 T: (416) 781-9898
<http://www.horizonforyouth.org>

Jean Tweed Centre For Women and Their Families:
 215 Evans Avenue Toronto M6Z 1J5
 T: (416) 255-7359
<http://jeantweed.com/>

HEALTH

Sherbourne Health Centre is located at 333 Sherbourne Street, SCY – a health program of Sherbourne Health Centre – offers programs and activities for LGBT youth aimed at building an inclusive, welcoming community. Sherbourne also offers free counselling for individuals who cannot afford to obtain these services elsewhere.

The Women in Need Clinic (WINC) provides a welcoming environment for homeless, low-income and street-involved women (including trans-women) every Wednesday morning 9:30am-11:30am on Sherbourne's ground floor. WINC offers a free breakfast and one-stop access to community outreach staff, nurses, doctors and counsellors in a safe, non-judgmental space. There is no pressure to join in or access services, but many women enjoy the opportunity to socialize and get one-on-one support.

The Health Bus delivers mobile on-the-spot nursing care at locations across downtown Toronto. If you are under 17, you can access dental care. For more info about the Health Bus stops, call 416-324-4070.

333 Sherbourne St.
 T: 416-324-4166
<http://sherbourne.on.ca>

► **Check also:**

Sherbourne Health Centre:
 333 Sherbourne Street Toronto M5A 2S5
 T: (416) 324-4180
<http://www.sherbourne.on.ca>

LAMP Community Health Center:
 185 Fifth Street Etobicoke MBV 2Z5
 T: (416) 252-6471
<http://www.lampchc.org>

The Griffin Centre:
 1126 Finch Avenue West Toronto M3J 3J6
 T: (416) 222-1153
<http://www.griffin-centre.org>

BlackCAP:
 20 Victoria St. 4th Floor Toronto M5C 2N8
 T: (416) 977-9955
<http://www.black-cap.com/>

COMMUNITY ARTS

The Remix Project is a 9-month arts incubator and training program that is divided into four academies: Recording Arts, Business, Creative Arts, and The City Life Film Project (film & TV).

The Remix Project is open to youth who meet the following criteria: between the ages of 15-24, reside in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), can spend a minimum 10 hours per week at Remix. Anyone that fits the description is welcome to apply. The program is nine months and starts in February each year.

Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis. All applicants will be scheduled for an interview in January. Participants are selected based on: talent; creativity; drive (or level of motivation); need. To apply, visit <http://toronto.remixproject.com/apply-now/>. If you're interested in checking out the 5,000 sq. ft. Remix space, contact adde@theremixproject.ca to set up a tour.

2 Forde Ave. Suite 201
 T: 416-583-2120 x1
<http://toronto.theremixproject.com>

► **Check also:**

AVNU:
 180 Shaw Street Toronto M6J 2W5
 T: (416) 516-1559 x101
<http://www.avnu.ca>

Grassroots Youth Collaborative:
 180 Shaw Street Toronto M6J 2W5
 T: (416) 547-1855
<http://www.grassrootsyouth.org>

Manifesto Festival:
 37 Bulwer Street Toronto M5T 1A1
 T: (416) 436-8404
<http://www.mnfto.com>

Presenting Our Vision:
 125 George Street Toronto M5A 2N4 (416) 366-90336 <http://www.povfilm.org>

Rise Edutainment:
 1080 Progress Avenue Scarborough M1B 5Z6
<http://www.riseedutainment.com>

Sketch:
 180 Shaw Street Toronto M6J 2W5
 T: (416) 516-1559 <http://www.sketch.ca>

Spoken N' Heard:
<http://www.spokenheard.ca>

Unity Charity Unit:
 208-501 Yonge Street Toronto M4Y 1E4
 T: (416) 317-3127
<http://www.unitycharity.com>

COMMUNITY SPACES

The 519 Church Street Community Centre:
 519 Church Street Toronto M4Y 2C9
 T: (416) 329-6874
<http://www.the519.org>

Evergreen Yonge Street Mission YSM:
 381 Yonge Street Toronto M5B 1S1
 T: (416) 929-9614
<http://www.ysm.ca>

Redemption Reintegration Services RRS:
 1450 Wileland Avenue
 Scarborough M1P 2B9
 T: (416) 613-2917
<http://www.reintegration.ca>

Student Commission of Canada:
 23 Isabella Street Toronto M4Y 1A7
 T: (416) 597-8297
<http://www.studentscommission.ca>

Positive Representation

I had to do it on my own, from homeless to a national published writer, by myself. Who else was going to believe in me? Who else was going to help me glue together the shards of situations and help me reach my goals? Just because it's difficult, does not make it impossible (Samantha, 2014: Issue 1, p. 3).

Street Voices Magazine also provides a space to share positive representations and offer words of encouragement to readers. While this accounts for only 22% of the texts analyzed, it provides a contrast to the dark topics discussed in the magazine about the harsh realities of life on the streets. Contributors are motivated to share their stories to

provide hope to street youth and share with them more positive ways to reflect on their own lives and potential. It is important to note that these texts not only highlight the positive aspects of these young people's experiences, but also shed light on the obstacles they faced to get where they are today.

For example, the *Street Profile* on DJ Romeo highlights his story, one that went from "living on the streets of Toronto to his takeover of the Los Angeles scene" (Issue 2, Cover Page). Romeo first came to Toronto to pursue his career as a DJ and experienced many roadblocks along the way. He lived on the streets before turning to the shelter system for support. During his two years in the system, he notes experiencing depression and contemplating suicide. Fortunately, he was able to connect with The Remix Project, a local arts non-profit organization that works with marginalized youth who helped him establish his brand and expand his contacts to take his DJ career to the next level. Romeo's honesty about his experiences with being homeless to becoming a successful DJ is driven by a motivation to inspire street youth to follow their dreams and allows him to serve as a positive role model and a spokesperson for this community.

He also provides words of encouragement directly to the readers,

When you accept not having anything, you can do anything [...] Don't ever flop on yourself. Go. Give it all you've got. Be the best. Make it happen (DJ Romeo, 2014: Issue 2, p. 14).

To further emphasize these motivational messages, these words are repeated in larger fonts adorning the pages of this magazine's feature story to visually highlight their importance and ensure they do not escape the readers' attention:

Figure 3. Excerpt from *Street Profile* on DJ Romeo (Issue 2, p. 14)

This is one example of many texts in *Street Voices Magazine* where contributors provide words of encouragement or share their personal stories to empower and motivate readers to think of themselves in more affirmative ways.

There are also texts in *Street Voices Magazine* that provide positive representations but make no direct mention of personal experiences living on the streets. These texts, which fit in the *Expression + Positive representations* category, also provide positive and supportive messages for street youth. As an example, the next poem

provides words of encouragement for readers to keep living because things will get better:

The sun is gonna shine again, / Just lift your head up, little brother. / The sun is gonna shine again, / Just lift your head up, little sister (Renee, 2014: Issue 2, p. 7).

Street Voices Magazine provides positive representations and messaging for street youth that reward and empower contributors and readers alike. In doing so, it creates a supportive environment where contributors feel comfortable in sharing themselves without feeling compelled to obscure or protect their identity.

Negative Experiences & Representations

Since I left, I have had problems with anxiety, assertiveness, and making friends and I lost all my support which includes financial support. [...] They criticized me so often that it destroyed my self-confidence in the rare times I had some. I have been living on the streets now for 4 years since I left my faith (Gaetan, 2015: Issue 3, p. 7).

Given *Street Voices Magazine*'s uncensored nature, there are also texts submitted from street youth that highlight negative experiences and representations. This category makes up 15% of the content in the magazine. It is important to note that street youth might not view these texts as negative by definition, but instead see them as their lived realities or as truths of life on the streets. For those outside the street youth community, the material presented in *Street Voices Magazine* may seem harsh in its language and bleak in the nature of the topics that are discussed.

Common topics for the writings and artwork in the magazine include drug-use, drug dealing, abusive/mentally unstable family situations, and racial and social injustices such as negative relationships with the police. The next example shows the extreme of this category with a memorial for a youth who was a passenger in a fatal car accident.

Figure 4. Memorial Photo Submission (Issue 2, p. 24)

Although this illustrates the hard end of the spectrum for this category, it is powerful to see the impact this young man has had on his peers in the street youth community. It is important for these types of stories to be heard so that contributors have the opportunity to be in control of their own narratives and to feel included in a community that accepts what they have to say and provides a space to say it, whereas other media might shy away from the darkness of their experiences.

At this point in my analysis, I have reflected on RQ1 to understand the ways in which *Street Voices Magazine* provides a voice for street youth. Moving onto RQ2, I will

now explore how *Street Voices Magazine* is an appropriate medium for connecting with this demographic. This next section is divided into three parts: 1) the accessibility and multifaceted potential for print, 2) the arts as a tool of re-engagement, and 3) the relevancy of a magazine as a medium to connect with street youth in 2015.

Accessibility & Multifaceted Use of Print's Potential

The magazine utilizes a multifaceted approach to providing information about its services through lists, feature stories, and in print advertisements. This variation in presentation of services ensures that hopefully one of these methods is successful in reaching readers and educating them about the services available to them. Connecting street youth to these resources is important because in many cases these are services that these young people need to survive in order to transition to more positive/safe spaces. Because the magazine is distributed within the Toronto shelter system for free, it is more likely to get into the hands of the youth for whom these services are designed. Furthermore, the fact that services are documented in the magazine and readers do not need Internet access to find services helps street youth become aware of the support available to them regardless of the constant flux of their living situations and their access to digital media.

One of the ways in which *Street Voices Magazine* communicates community services to street youth is through the *Community Profile* section. The *Community Profile* section features an article about a local youth services organization in the community and includes an interview with key staff member(s) who describe the organization, its available services or programs, and success stories from youth they have worked with. For example, in the first *Community Profile* on Evergreen Yonge Street Mission, it

provided a more in-depth look at the services available, the relationships fostered between the staff and the youth, and photos of the space – all meant to make these spaces seem more accessible and less intimidating to readers:

Figure 5. *Community Profile* on Evergreen Yonge Street Mission (Issue 2, pp. 10-11)

It also equips readers with the knowledge of the supports they can find at these organizations and offer an alternative presentation of one of the organization also listed in the *Youth Services Directory*.

The *Community Profile* section, *Youth Services Directory* section, and advertisements all present useful, practical information but do so in ways that will appeal to the inclinations of different readers. While an in-depth story in the *Community Profile* might capture the imagination of some readers and cause them to pursue that service if relevant to them, other readers might prefer simply to skim through the *Youth Services Directory* for what they need. The route to the service is not as important as getting to the

service in the first place, which explains the multifaceted approach taken by the magazine. Additionally, having the magazine available in the shelter system for free enhances the likelihood that street youth will be made aware of these services.

Re-engagement Through the Arts

Street Voices Magazine uses the arts to connect with street youth. In this regard, it is also the case that the majority of the advertisements and *Community Profile* features in the magazine are for non-profit arts organizations that support this demographic. Furthermore, in each of the *Street Profile* features, the youth interviewed credit one of these organizations as being fundamental to launching their career into the cultural industries. This added exposure through the magazine helps connect these organizations to readers and expands their reach to this often transient audience.

Furthermore, these texts educate readers about the arts training and programs available to them and may inspire these young people to take control over their realities and participate in these organizations. The fact that arts organizations have chosen *Street Voices Magazine* to reach out to this audience suggests both that the arts have value in improving the lives of street youth and that the magazine is seen by these organizations as an effective means of communicating to them. I will be coming back to this concept in greater detail in the Discussion section. Additionally, I will also look for research that supports the “identity of the artist” as an identity that appears obtainable for this demographic. For example, the SKETCH Community Arts advertisement is “Calling All Culture-Makers” and clearly is appealing to readers to access their artistic potential:

Figure 6. SKETCH Advertisement

Relevancy of Print in 2015

It is also important to consider the ways in which a magazine is a relevant medium to connect with street youth in Toronto. Based on my analysis, I would suggest that the fact that there is aggregated information for services in each issue of the magazine means that street youth can easily access services without necessarily needing an Internet connection to find the location, phone number, or to learn more about available services. Nor for that matter do they need to consult multiple publications. In this sense, a magazine is useful because of its portability and youth can repeatedly refer

back to information in the magazine even when they are living on the streets.

It is also useful for street youth to be able to get this information for free and without requiring access to a cellphone, personal computer, or public libraries and Internet cafés where they might not feel comfortable searching for help. Finally, one copy of a magazine could potentially travel through the hands of many different youth, helping multiple individuals in the process. Of course, the magazine still includes references to online sources since it is indeed 2015 and the Internet cannot be avoided. However, the fact that online access is not essential is empowering to street youth who are reading the magazine, as they may not otherwise have ready access to the information and messages *Street Voices Magazine* contains.

As a print magazine, street youth may also be attracted to *Street Voices Magazine* because it is an alternative medium that “looks cool,” is distributed for free in their community, and targets a demographic that is on the margins and alternative to mainstream society. Furthermore, the fact that there is a lack of other spaces for street youth to participate in within the traditional public sphere may confer a sense of ownership of the magazine and its content to these readers. In this regard, the use of stories, poetry and art produced by street youth may strengthen this sense of ownership and act as a “Trojan horse” to draw attention to the practical information also found in the magazine. Further research is needed in order to understand whether *Street Voices Magazine* is indeed an optimal media modality for connecting with today’s street youth in Toronto.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore the ways in which *Street Voices Magazine* provides a voice for street youth and whether it is an appropriate medium to reach this demographic in an age of digital media. My analysis suggests that *Street Voices Magazine* has the potential to be an appropriate medium to engage and empower street youth in Toronto. Several themes have emerged throughout my study including the transformative potential of the arts, the identity of the artist as an identity category that seems available to street youth, and the lack of other spaces that exist for street youth to take control over their own narratives and to share these stories with their communities.

The Power of the Arts

There is a clear focus on artistic expression in *Street Voices Magazine*. *Street Voices Magazine* provides street youth with a creative outlet for telling their stories and expressing themselves. Often, these stories are personal in nature and provide insight into their lives and into the ways they see and understand their worlds. While there is not a vast amount of research on the benefits of the arts for street youth, the research that does exist is a valuable starting point in making the case for the power of the arts to engage and empower this demographic and the potential for media like *Street Voices Magazine* to help unlock this power.

Recent studies have focused on the arts as a means of helping to alleviate the anxieties and emotional turmoil street youth face. In one study with Toronto and New York street youth, youth described their expression through the arts in terms of its power to transform, communicate and facilitate self-exploration (Kidd, 2009). Art and expressive processes allowed them to redirect their emotional energy (Kidd, 2009). More

specifically, in another more recent study, street youth saw poetry and other writings as a good way to release their emotions, their inner conflicts, and angst and regarded poetry as a medium through which they could communicate to other street youth (Nymathi et al., 2011). A discussion on the subject of *Slice Magazine*, a similar publication to *Street Voices Magazine* that existed in the late 1990s-2000s, noted one example of a young person who felt that before he contributed to the magazine he was emotionally unreachable. His sharing through the magazine brought him out of his shell and he became more social with others once this emotional weight was lifted off his chest (Howard, 1999).

Along these same lines, there are indications that given a forum to share their work with others, young people can experience catharsis and introspection (Nymathi et al., 2011). In this way, art can help in the healing process for disenfranchised youth (Kidd, 2009). Furthermore, experiencing this kind of artistic expression can potentially help readers of, for example, *Street Voices Magazine* gain insights into themselves and motivate them to get help or connect to services.

Broadly speaking, research on mental health and the arts suggests that the latter can have a strong positive effect on the former, but this effect is not well studied relative to street youth (Kidd, 2009). The transient nature of the lives of street youth makes it very difficult to design a study that would allow a firm conclusion about the links between artistic expression and mental health. The connection between street youth and the “identity of an artist” instead seems to provide more promising research on the importance of an outlet for creative expression in their lives.

Identity of the Artist

My findings suggest that *Street Voices Magazine* is succeeding in providing an outlet for artistic and creative expression for street youth. Even beyond the arts and writings submitted by the youth, the preplanned content and the majority of advisements mainly focus on non-profit arts organizations that similarly see the arts and creative expression as a pathway out of homelessness.

The clear connection between street youth and the power of using the arts for expression points perhaps to their identification with the “identity of the artist” (Kidd, 2009; Thomas et al., 2011). Previous research on street youth and the arts confirms that the identity of the artist is a persona that seems available, accessible and is likely to be embraced by this demographic (Kidd, 2009; Thomas et al., 2011). Through this identity, street youth can build new relationships with the community around them and re-establish the links that were broken and that led to their life on the streets.

Lack of Other Spaces

My research has identified that there is no other published forum in Toronto that provides regular accounts of street life or an opportunity for street youth to share their artwork and words. The importance of *Street Voices Magazine* is that this medium can potentially support Toronto’s street youth by filling a niche that other media have simply ignored. Street youth are “rarely presented as part of ‘us,’ the wider community when they are represented in the media” (McKee & Sexton, 2001). It is therefore significant that these young people have the opportunity to participate actively and to contribute to a medium that values what they have to say and the ways they feel they need to say it. It is also empowering for readers to hear stories they can relate to,

empathize with, and even learn from (Nyamathi et al., 2011, McKee & Sexton, 2001, Howard, 1999). This relationship between contributors to the magazine and its audience allows for street youth to feel like they are not alone. Furthermore, it is important for these young people to see their community being represented in print and that these printed portrayals appear to be honest and representative of their experience (McKee & Sexton, 2001). The fact that *Street Voices Magazine* is clearly made for street youth is something they probably have never experienced nor thought they would have come across. *Street Voices Magazine* therefore has the potential to be a building block for Toronto's street youth community.

Limitations & Directions for Future Research

Given the fact that *Street Voices Magazine* only has three issues to date, my research only offers initial insight on the utility of *Street Voices Magazine* for Toronto's street youth. Since *Street Voices Magazine* is still a fairly new publication, it is still open to changing its format and content over time which could significantly affect the accuracy and consistency of my results. At a later point in time when there are more magazine issues to analyze, a similar and more expansive study could provide a stronger data set and more granular findings on the topic. Research on the distribution and consumption of *Street Voices Magazine* could also offer insight on its impact and reach. In turn, this could provide a stronger case for *Street Voices Magazine* for funding opportunities as well as serve as an inspiration for new media platforms to target a street youth audience.

Another limitation includes analyzing solely the texts and images within the pages of *Street Voices Magazine*. A more multi-faceted approach including the use of qualitative interviews and collection of data on the demographics of *Street Voices Magazine*'s contributors and readers would offer greater insight on the utility of magazines and their impact on engaging and empowering Toronto's street youth. More specifically, talking to the contributors and readers could have provided a stronger understanding of what *Street Voices Magazine* means to them and open up a discussion on topics such as community, identity, and lack of other safe spaces. Such a study would be most effective once *Street Voices Magazine* has been around a longer period of time and has had the chance to establish itself as a staple in Toronto's street youth community and shelter system.

Another direction for future research on street youth includes focusing on the identity of the artist as an identity that seems obtainable to this marginalized demographic. While my findings briefly touch on this topic, I recommend that the relationship of this identity category to street youth experiences and opportunities should be investigated in greater detail through the utilization of qualitative interviews with street youth in order to understand the impact and potential for the arts to engage and empower the marginalized and the voiceless.

Conclusion

This research paper examined how *Street Voices Magazine* gives voice to street youth in Toronto. This magazine does so by providing an outlet for expression through art and writing, educating others about street life, connecting youth to resources, and by providing more accurate representations for this community for those who do not know this community well, if at all. It also explored how the medium of a print magazine makes sense for reaching this demographic since street youth's living situations and access to technology is not consistent and paper remains portable and accessible. The multifaceted use of print, re-engagement through the arts, and the accessibility and relevance of print to connect with this demographic are all evidence of how *Street Voices Magazine* is an effective medium to connect with street youth.

While additional research is needed in order to better inform the topic – from interviews with street youth to an analysis of the distribution of the magazine in the shelter system – this paper suggests directions for new research on street youth, a topic where there is not much to be found. Furthermore, it also provides insights on street youth from the perspective of communications research, which is rare given the more common studies in disciplines such as social work or psychology. It is my hope that this case study adds to the understanding of this diverse audience and helps support engagement strategies that use the arts and alternative media in connecting with street youth. My argument in support of arts empowerment could also inform funding opportunities and could serve as a source of information for other media platforms outside of Toronto that target a street youth audience, with a view to helping them heal and connect to resources with the ultimate goal of getting young people off the streets.

Appendix A. Content Coding – Street Voices Magazine Issues

ISSUE 1 FINDINGS							
Number	Expression	Educating others	Negative	Positive	Other	Expression + Negative	Expression + Positive
1				1			
2					1		
3				1			
4		1					
5	1						
6	1						
7	1						
8						1	
9						1	
10	1						
11						1	
12			1				
13						1	
14						1	
15							1
16							1
17				1			
18	1						
19	1						
20	1						
21	1						
22		1					
23		1					
24		1					
25					1		
26	1						
27		1					
TOTALS	9	5	1	3	2	5	2

ISSUE 2 FINDINGS							
Number	Expression	Educating others	Negative	Positive	Other	Expression + Negative	Expression + Positive
1				1			
2					1		
3				1			
4	1						
5	1						
6	1						
7							1
8	1						
9		1					
10		1					
11				1			

12		1					
13		1					
14	1						
15							1
16		1					
17	1						
18	1						
19	1						
20	1						
21							1
22			1				
23					1		
24		1					
25		1					
TOTALS	9	7	1	3	2	0	3

ISSUE 3 FINDINGS							
Number	Expression	Educating others	Negative	Positive	Other	Expression + Negative	Expression + Positive
1				1			
2					1		
3				1			
4	1						
5							1
6						1	
7			1				
8	1						
9							1
10			1				
11		1					
12		1					
13				1			
14		1					
15		1					
16	1						
17							1
18						1	
19	1						
20	1						
21	1						
22		1					
23					1		
24					1		
25		1					
TOTALS	6	6	2	3	3	2	3

Appendix B. Content Coding – Cumulative Results

TOTAL FINDINGS							
Issues	Expression	Educating others	Negative	Positive	Other	Expression + Negative	Expression + Positive
Issue 1	9	5	1	3	2	5	2
Issue 2	9	7	1	3	2	0	3
Issue 3	6	6	2	3	3	2	3

TOTAL SUBMISSIONS FROM STREET YOUTH			
Issues	Self-Identification	<i>Word on the Street</i>	<i>Street Gallery</i>
Issue 1	2	11	4
Issue 2	3	4	8
Issue 3	2	6	5
Totals	7	21	17

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