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**STREETS OF KAMLOOPS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY**

by

**Brian Robertson**

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1975

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE**

in the School

of

**Criminology**

© Brian Robertson

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May 1993

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## ABSTRACT

This examination of the experience of urban homelessness is an exploratory study in the neglected area of skid row life in Canada. The fieldwork was carried out in Kamloops, British Columbia, between July and December, 1992. The data consist of field marginalia, observations, and notes derived from unstructured and semi-structured interviews. A dichotomy of viewpoints was elicited: one part from street people, one part from administrators or employees of social control agencies. Over one hundred street people contributed to the data, and over sixty agency personnel. Previous symbolic interactionist studies of skid row, spanning seven decades, were employed as exemplars and as guides to investigation.

Several recurrent subjects or motifs emerged during the course of field studies. These comprised explanations and accounts of: (1) employment and sources of income, (2) race and race relations, (3) drug and alcohol use, (4) spree behaviour, (5) violence, and (6) the street as mutual aid community. Of these, two themes appeared pivotal and received extensive analysis, namely, drug/alcohol use and employment and sources of income.

Results reveal a high degree of organization and adaptability among street people. Successfully "getting by" denotes achievement of living the life of the street. Income Assistance (welfare) subsidization is the single most important source of financial support. The pace and manner of daily routine, for both individuals and agencies, fluctuated in resonance with issuance, on the last Wednesday of each month, of welfare cheques.

Further revealed was that the average or median age of street people was lower than data from previous studies had indicated. Native Indians were over-represented on skid row proportionate to their numbers in the general population. Alcohol and drug usage levels were seen as high, as was the level of violence (itself closely related to drug use).

Denied access to the mainstream of Canadian society, street people derive status and identity from adhering to the code of the street.

## **DEDICATION**

**To my wife, Louisa  
and our sons,  
Sandy, Luke and Ian**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank and acknowledge: my Senior Supervisor, Dr. Robert J. Menzies and fellow Committee Members: Dr. Dorothy E. Chunn and Dr. F. Douglas Cousineau for their superb assistance in editing, advising and encouragement. Special thanks to Dr. Kenneth W. Stoddart for acting as External Examiner.

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## INTRODUCTION

One sultry day in July of 1992 a friend took me to "have a look" at the Kamloops Food Bank and Outreach Society's Drop In Centre. The friend was aware of my search for a suitable ethnographic site in which to carry out graduate fieldwork. My original intent had been to study changes wrought in clients residing at a drug and alcohol treatment centre. I was loathe to relinquish the idea of studying interactions at a total institution<sup>1</sup>: the structure offered by such a setting seemed somehow necessary. Yet, after conversations with Drop In staff and volunteers, as well as a brief time observing clients, I was intrigued.

Who were these "street people" frequenting the Drop In Centre and kindred agencies? Over the next couple of weeks I walked around downtown Kamloops, spending time at the Drop In, the New Life Mission, main Public Library, and the Social Services and Housing office. I also explored the parks and littoral adjacent to downtown. By the second week I was recognizing and exchanging nods of greeting with people encountered previously in one or more settings. I was no closer to answering my initial question, really, but was discovering a large number of other puzzles and issues requiring explanation.

In late July I made one early morning ramble through parks and untended enclaves of trees and occasional dense undergrowth. I briefly glimpsed an older man operating two shopping carts full of cans, bottles and whatever else caught his fancy. I came across (often literally stumbled upon) numerous evidences of human activity. Nests of old clothes, flattened cardboard boxes, empty jugs, cigarette butts, mildewing pornography magazines, campfires, and other items were found in every secluded spot near the riverbank. Under a low railroad trestle was found all the debris of desperation and

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<sup>1</sup> Goffman's (1961a) concept of "total institutions" refers to settings such as prisons and mental institutions, etc., in which inmates are segregated from the larger society for appreciable time periods and "lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life." (Goffman, 1961a: xiii)

despair: empty crack vials, discarded hypodermic needles, empty prescription pill containers, and more. The number of thrown away aerosol cans of Lysol reached into the hundreds. Here and there they displaced the scrub grass and weeds as principal ground cover. There were also numerous empty plastic bottles of Listerine in various flavours, cough syrup containers and the more orthodox detritus from the liquor store.

I settled myself in the trestle's shade as the temperature rose into the 90s Fahrenheit. It was another beautiful day in the semi-desert of British Columbia's south-central Interior.

As my eyes adjusted to the semi-darkness, I noticed some graffiti emblazoned on the steel plating at the back of the trestle. "Zappa and the Mothers! Fillmore West, Feb 3, 1973!" announced the words, unseen by the sun for nearly twenty years. I wondered where the author of that message was now. How many people had come to this spot over the years, perhaps to become invisible to others, then to use something that made them invisible to themselves? Who were these "street people?"

This paper furnishes an overview of skid row<sup>2</sup> in Kamloops. Emphasis is put upon the street people who inhabit skid row and also upon the agencies that serve them. The dynamic relationship between street people and agency people provides some of the parameters for the study.

The format is ethnographic. Data were gathered through a variety of naturalistic methods ranging from passive observation to formal interviews. As the research proceeded, themes and salient topics emerged. This, in turn, prompted further refinement of investigation techniques.

In Chapter I the phenomenon of street people is placed in historical context. Images of homelessness, poverty, alcoholism, skid row, drug addiction, mental illness, and

<sup>2</sup> Although many writers, particularly academics, use the term "skid row," the correct form appears to be "skid road." For the etymology see *A Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles* (Drysdale, 1967): "The original SKIDROAD . . . was Yesler's Way in Seattle, Wash., built in 1852." However, since skid row is the acceptable form for this, an academic enterprise, it is the form I shall use throughout.

other perceptions are plotted through more than a century of previous literature. Several previous interactionist ethnographies are selected as exemplars, which serve to guide the study following. Two major and several related minor themes also serve to organize the data.

Chapter II introduces Kamloops skid row in greater detail. Following this, the methods, techniques, and strategies of applying the study to the field are discussed and examined. Particular attention is paid to rationales and decisions mentioned in the chosen exemplars.

Street scenes from the relatively fixed observation points of various agencies are presented in Chapter III. As the images glimpsed by agency people from their vantages are laid side-by-side, a composite of who street people are seen to be takes shape. The chapter is summarized around several emergent themes, utilizing appropriate points from previous works.

The sense that street people have of their surroundings is presented in Chapter IV. This street level view is fluid and the data suggest a thematic panorama. The chapter is presented as the findings suggest, around those themes and topics street people voice as being relevant to their world.

Chapter V offers a summary, some conclusions, and suggestions for future research. Questions posed in earlier chapters, particularly Chapter I, are addressed in the light of data presented.

## I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

Homelessness, as a North American phenomenon, has always been with us. Hoch (1987) documents the historical antecedents of today's homeless street population in the United States. Close parallels exist for the Canadian context. Indeed, during times of recession or depression the impoverished and migratory moved easily from one country to the other well into this century.

The skid rows or rookeries of mid-nineteenth century England often provided the settings for Charles Dickens' novels. The *declassé* slums of Paris likewise gave inspiration to Victor Hugo. Romanticized and fictionalized though it was, this genre gives us one of our earliest looks at modern urban homelessness.

Shortly thereafter, more realistic treatments came with Henry Mayhew's (1862) *London Labour and the London Poor* and Friedrich Engels' (1845) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. The latter was written in German and not available in English until 1887.

In 1890 Salvation Army founder William Booth published *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. Contained within was a description of Victorian society's "submerged ten percent," including the urban homeless with their ragged, wretched poverty and ravaging drunkenness (Booth, 1890).

On this side of the water, a century ago, yellow journalism discovered skid row among a host of urban issues. The writings of Upton Sinclair and Herbert Asbury<sup>3</sup>, among others, focused on poverty, crime and underworld connections to political structures, and the bohemianism and hedonism of decaying underclass areas.

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Asbury's four volumes on U.S. cities (San Francisco, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York), particularly his *The Gangs of New York*.

In the world of academe, by the end of the First World War, the Chicago School of Sociology was in full flower. Park and Burgess (1925) presented their concentric zonal or "bull's-eye" model for spatial distribution of crime. Later, Shaw and McKay (1931) applied and demonstrated longitudinal aspects of this zonal model. Ethnographies were produced by (among others) Anderson (1923), *The Hobo*, Sutherland (1937), *The Professional Thief*, Whyte (1943), *Street Corner Society*, and Lindesmith (1968), *Addictions and Opiates*.<sup>4</sup>

So it transpired that, for almost a century, a description of the urban homeless, whether in Britain, the U.S. or Canada, was virtually synonymous with an account of "alcoholic men clustered on skid rows" (Fischer and Breakey, 1991). The stereotype was that of a middle aged alcoholic Caucasian male. Indeed, in her landmark study, *Stations of the Lost*, Wiseman underscores this point, terming this common profile a "social silhouette." She remarks upon its persistent and unchanging nature in describing skid row denizens from 1920 onwards (Wiseman, 1970). Recently, however, there have been numerous suggestions that this silhouette is changing, perhaps changing dramatically. If this is so, then there is a clear indication that the experience of homelessness may also be in transition.

Since 1978, and particularly within the last 10 years, the literature has spoken of "the new urban homeless." While skid row is still the arena for most homelessness, the composition and numbers of the homeless are the subjects of some debate. Deinstitutionalization of mental patients and related concepts such as noninstitutionalization, underinstitutionalization, and transcarceration (Cohen, 1979, 1987, 1989; Lowman, Menzies and Palys, 1987; Scull, 1982, 1983) are used to explain a significant amount of this change.

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<sup>4</sup> Lindesmith's fascinating life history of a heroin addict utilized the self same informant as did Sutherland in presenting his life history of a professional thief. The informant, Chic Conwell, thus had two Chicago School life histories taken from his experiences.



While deinstitutionalization appears to have much the same meaning in Canada as in the U.S. (from whence come most of the studies and publications) there are differences. The whole process began much sooner in the U.S. (mid-1950s) than in Canada (1970s), allowing a far longer period for the emergence of social repercussions south of the 49th parallel. Conversely, given a much shorter time span the process has been accelerated in Canada. Underpinning much of the rationale of deinstitutionalization is the availability of drug maintenance therapy through outpatient clinics<sup>5</sup>.

Third, given that much of Canada's deinstitutionalization is quite recent, the existence of large numbers of non- or underinstitutionalized mental patients is unlikely. This group -- comprising potential mental patients who would likely have been institutionalized had not the asylums and hospitals been closed down -- is characterized by some commentators as over-represented on the streets of American cities (Stefl, 1987).

Other subtypes of the "new" American homeless include Vietnam War veterans (Robertson, 1987), blacks, Hispanics, single women (Fischer and Breakey, 1991), and women with children (Sullivan and Damrosch, 1987), with the widespread observation that they are generally younger than in previous decades (Peroff, 1987) and include adolescents (Rotheram-Borus, Koopman and Ehrhardt, 1991). Clearly many of these categories have little or no applicability to Canada. Others, such as single women, families and adolescent children, could be increasing here. A further category, that of Natives<sup>6</sup>, could be inflating the ranks of the urban homeless, and if so, would likely have relevance for Kamloops, a city with a Native presence since its inception. Hauch (1985), for example, estimated that 72% of Winnipeg's skid row homeless were Native.

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<sup>5</sup> Development of the Thorazine family of drugs forty years ago, some commentators assert, enabled this process. However, Scull (1983) cautions against accepting the explanations of "lunacy reformers" themselves at face value. While the explanation may seem logical (*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*) and is convenient, it may not be true.

<sup>6</sup> By "Natives" is meant those aboriginal peoples of Canada commonly referred to as "Indians" (a term many Native people find unacceptable).

## IMAGES OF THE HOMELESS

The literature does not present unanimity, nor clarity, about what is changing. While (as I shall discuss shortly) differing definitions of homelessness, which engender disparate measurement techniques, yield huge variations in the numbers of homeless persons believed to exist in a given population, these same vague or differing definitions produce other anomalies.

James P. Wright, in his excellent article "The Mentally Ill Homeless: What is Myth and What is Fact?", discusses several of these anomalies (Wright, 1988). Primary among these are the criteria whereby ethnographers determine street people to be mentally ill. These include (1) having received psychiatric treatment, therefore being professionally diagnosed; (2) being considered mentally ill by other street people; and (3) exhibiting bizarre behaviour to the ethnographer. Both (3) above and, to a lesser extent (2), are deficient because unqualified sources are making the diagnosis<sup>7</sup>. Also there is the danger of assuming causal relationships that either do not exist or are distorted.

Are the mentally ill being dumped on the streets, or are the streets producing them? Wright asserts that the ability to cope with street existence indicates mental health -- a high level of organization and coping ability:

That the homeless manage to survive at all under these constraints illustrates truly remarkable adaptation to conditions of extreme deprivation. In at least some conceptualizations, the ability to adapt to misfortune and to survive in spite of everything would be taken as signs of mental *health*. That the homeless even survive their condition, in other words, indicates a remarkably resourceful level of functioning [emphasis in original] (Wright, 1988: 184).

He further suggests that long term street life can produce "mental illness" by its very stressfulness and precariousness. For example, "paranoid" levels of suspiciousness are necessary and prudent responses to the dangers of the streets.

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<sup>7</sup> From a labelling perspective the judgment of "professionals" is equally suspect; i.e. the three categories of people are engaged in labelling.

Of most importance, Wright notes, alcoholism and drug addiction can be (and often are) considered types of mental illness, so it matters whether or not alcoholics/drug addicts are considered a separate category of street people. If "alcohol and/or drug addicts" equal 50% of a homeless population, and the mentally ill (exclusive of addictions) comprise another 25%, then the total of all "mentally ill" would be 75%. This brings us to yet another complicating factor: dual diagnosis (mental illness *and* addiction) which implies both blurring and overlapping of categorical boundaries.

Again, are addicted or alcoholic people being dumped onto skid row, or does skid row leave a person vulnerable to substance abuse? Is this perhaps a method of ordering or coping with a dreary but anxiety-ridden milieu?

How much is really new here, however? A recent edition of *U.S. News and World Report* announced that the "new" homeless more and more were looking like the "old" homeless (Whitman, 1990). The report claimed, in part:

Substance abuse is slightly *more* prevalent among the new homeless than among their predecessors of the 1950s and 1960s when the skid-row image of the homeless was predominant [emphasis in original] (Whitman, 1990: 27).

Is Wiseman's "social silhouette" reasserting itself in the 1990s? It is interesting to note that a large proportion of the skid row men that Wiseman studied in the 1960s would by today's standards and measurements be included among the mentally ill, dual diagnosed *and* alcoholic categories. One of the principal stations of these lost was the State Mental Hospital. Granted, by the time of Wiseman's study there were in existence specialized alcoholic wards, but the point is well made that numerous men had been stigmatized by their stay in a mental hospital (Wiseman, 1970).

In fact, the earliest Alcoholics Anonymous literature gives many instances of alcoholics being labelled mentally ill, treated in mental asylums and sanatoria (for their alcoholism) and believing themselves "crazy" (AA, 1939).

Leaving for a moment the "who" question, we turn to the question of "how many." Peroff (1987) surveys the estimates and presents a range for homelessness among the U.S. population from 200 000 up to 3 million. The low figure belongs to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the high to the Committee for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), a D. C. advocacy group. Basically, critics of low estimates maintain that an artificially deflated definition of homelessness is being used. Conversely, those who disparage high estimates charge that the same homeless people are frequently being counted several times. It seems safe to say that methods of counting make sense only if one "buys into" the basic assumptions underlying method selection. As a final comment to this "numbers game" I paraphrase the editors of *American Psychologist*, who in their November, 1991 issue stated that any number of homeless is too great.

#### EXEMPLARS AND ANTECEDENTS

This study is in the tradition of ethnographies derived from participant observer investigation. It is also in the tradition of those ethnographies that are interactionist, seeing subjects in a dynamic state of constant mutual re-shaping of relationships with each other and with others (Goffman, 1961a, 1961b, 1967; Becker, 1963; Polsky, 1967). In this case the subjects are agency and street people: welfare worker and welfare client, thrift store employee and down-and-outer, mission worker and sinner, landlord and tenant, and so on.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the nature and experience of homeless street people. A second purpose is to examine the findings and conclusions of several previous studies and to discuss relevant similarities with and departures from results of this research. Two major themes will be examined in this manner: drugs (including alcohol) and income. Although alcohol is a drug, the part played in street life by other licit and illicit drugs will also be examined. Often, however, it is impossible to clearly separate discussion of alcohol use from that of street drugs and prescription drugs. The

clearly associated topics of employment and income sources of street people form a second dominant theme.

Theoretical antecedents of this thesis project, those earlier ethnographies of skid row, go back many years. As previously mentioned, *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923) stands as a landmark, catching the verve and complexity of skid row Chicago at the beginning of the U.S. Prohibition Era. Anderson's observations and classifications of "Hobohemia" provided historical mirrors of what is new and what is enduring for *genus* skid row. Interestingly the "street" was synonymous with a segment or aspects of skid row life even in Anderson's day.

Not only had beverage alcohol use been recently rendered illicit in the U.S. (Volstead Act, 1919) but so had non-medical use of heroin, morphine and a host of other substances legally termed "narcotic" (Harrison Act, 1914). Yet Anderson's references to these substances seem almost contemporary:

Drug addicts among homeless men seldom are transient. Those who are transient are often cocaine users who are able to do without the drug for considerable periods of time. Not infrequently, "coke heads" or "snow birds" are found among the hobo workers. When on out-of-town jobs they are prone to go to town occasionally to indulge in a cocaine spree much as a "booze-hoister" indulges in a liquor spree (Anderson, 1923: 67).

Users of heroin or morphine are not able to separate themselves from the source of supply for so long a time (Ibid., 67-68).

The Hop Head is an interesting type. He is usually in a pitiful condition, for he has small chance, living as he does, in the tramp class, to get money to buy "dope." Frequently he resorts to clever and even desperate means to secure it. One type of dope fiend is the Junkie. He uses a "gun" or needle to inject morphine or heroin. A Sniffer is one who sniffs cocaine (Ibid., 102).

They [drug users] may be forced to live in cheap hotels and to eat in cheap restaurants but only to save money to satisfy the craving for "dope." Drug addicts wander very little except to make rapid trips from city to city. The drug addict tends to become a criminal rather than a migratory worker (Ibid., 69).

As I shall demonstrate in Chapter IV, these statements are nearly as representative of Kamloops in 1992 as Chicago seven decades earlier. Note that Anderson seems to see

"coke heads" and other drug users as distinct from inebriates. While alcoholics and drug users live and work side by side, they are discrete groups. In part this is put down to drinking and drugging being two very different behaviours:

The drug addict employs every scheme to keep his practice a secret whereas the drinking man strives to share his joy with others (Ibid., 68).

Anderson (1923: 40-57) presents a thorough discussion of "getting by," which includes employment and other sources of income. Indeed, the five types of homeless men that Anderson identifies are classified according to employment status and history. These are (a) the seasonal worker (an upper-class hobo), (b) the transient or occasional worker or hobo, (c) the tramp who "dreams and wanders" and works only when it is convenient, (d) the bum who seldom wanders and seldom works, and (e) the home guard who lives in Hobohemia and does not leave town (a stationary casual labourer).

Anderson cautions that these are not hard and fast distinctions and that men pass from one group to another. The important points are that:

The hobo is a worker. He is not a steady worker but he earns most of the money he spends (Ibid., 41).

The bum, like the tramp, is unwilling to work and lives by begging and petty thieving (Ibid., 96).

A partial list of non-employment activities that produced income in Anderson's time included panhandling, jackrolling<sup>8</sup> and stealing. How much Anderson's categories of homeless men and their economic activities are relevant to present day Kamloops will be examined in Chapter IV.

Two later U.S. studies, *Stations of the Lost* (Wiseman, 1970), another previously mentioned landmark, and *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (Spradley, 1970) offer more self-consciously symbolic interactionist treatments of the skid rows of San Francisco and Seattle, respectively, in the late 1960s. Both studies have as a primary locus the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Jackroller* was the title of a 1930 book by Clifford Shaw, a colleague of Anderson's. It presents the life history of a young man who "rolls drunks," i.e. robs inebriates too drunk to effectively resist.

interaction between male skid row alcoholics and the criminal justice system. In particular they look at the injustice of drunk court and its aftermath, a revolving door process that demeaned all involved.

Of particular interest with Spradley is the discovery of terminology ("dingbats," "homeguard," "tramps," etc.) found a half century earlier in Anderson's Chicago. This seems both to contradict and to corroborate Anderson; contradict because he [Anderson] indicates: "Change is characteristic of tramp terminology and tramp jargon" (Anderson, 1923: 99). When we look more closely at Spradley's findings we discover that though his "bucket full of tramps" may have appropriated the jargon of Hobohemia, many words and terms have become transmogrified. Indeed, Anderson's five skid row types (migratory worker, hobo, tramp, bum, and homeguard) seem transmuted in Seattle 50 years later to a blurred lumpenized "trampdom," despite distinctions made by some informants. Subtitled "An Ethnography of Urban Nomads," the work stresses, as with Anderson, the mobility of street people.

There is not much mention in Spradley of drug use, other than alcohol, on the street. The topic of earning a livelihood is a different matter. Spradley's tramps are not workers to the extent that Anderson's hobos are. Yet work is clearly one of the possible strategies in "getting by":

[Tramps] can beg, sell their possessions, work, go to welfare agencies, collect discarded items such as bottles and sell them, steal, sell their own blood (Spradley, 1970: 78).

A "working stiff" is a tramp who usually works to earn his livelihood. A "ding" or "dingbat" begs (in Anderson the "dingbat" is not associated with begging or panhandling but is called one of the "dregs of vagrantom"). Other categories of tramp such as "home guards" and "rubber tramps" are less restricted in livelihood gambits:

"A rubber tramp travels from harvest to harvest" [quotations in original] (Ibid., 77).

From Seattle, a home guard tramp might go to eastern Washington during the apple harvest, but he would usually return to Seattle (Ibid.).

[A tramp] may apply for a job in another town with the railroad in order to receive free transportation to that town (Ibid.).

Again, categories indicate tendencies. Where Anderson (1923) indicates that people pass between the categories of tramps, hobos and bums, Spradley states:

Most men, at one time or another, may have to use all these strategies, but *some* tramps become identified by their customary way of making a living [emphasis mine] (Ibid., 78).

In some ways these findings resemble those of Anderson, more than those from the study of present day Kamloops.

Wiseman (1970), like Spradley, has little to say about the theme of drug use, apart from alcohol. In fairness Wiseman specified that she was studying alcoholics, while Spradley was investigating inebriates. To bring drug use into the discussion might seem a clouding of issues under those circumstances. Wiseman does mention the practice of alcoholic jail inmates being used to smuggle "marijuana, LSD, heroin, or other drugs . . . inside the premises" (Wiseman, 1970: 111). The assumption seems to be that alcoholics and drug users are mutually exclusive categories. My research indicates that this is not the case. The number of alcohol users who could better be termed polydrug or multidrug users is larger by far than the category of "pure" alcoholic.

What Anderson terms "getting by" and Spradley "earning a livelihood," Wiseman (1970) deals with under the topic "money." The usual sources of income (stealing, panhandling, work, selling blood) are mentioned along with a few others (such as selling hair). One source with central importance to my later discussion is this:

The most dependable source of money is the government -- city, county, state or national. Those persons who receive welfare cheques, disability cheques, social security, pension or other forms of regular payment are considered to be in an enviable position. They are also marked men when it comes to intramural panhandling. . . . The day before the first of the month, when the cheques are due in the mail, men on Skid Row meet each other with the greeting, "Tomorrow's the day! Tomorrow's the day!" (Wiseman, 1970: 34).

Note that receiving a government cheque makes the recipients "marked men." This singling out clearly indicates that most men are not so marked. This situation will be



compared with the present, which is typified as a time of almost universal government cheque reception.

Subsequently three less ambitious and more specifically focused studies have appeared in the Canadian context . Brody's 1971 *Indians on Skid Row* is a treatment of migratory Natives on what appears to be the Edmonton skid row. Brody places special emphasis upon the place of drinking patterns of Caucasians and Natives in coping with skid row existence. He also notes how systematic racism is reflected in the non-acceptance of Natives into mainstream Canadian life. A somewhat psychological explanation is offered to explain why skid row is preferable to reserve life whereas nothing outside of skid row seems open to Native people:

Skid row is able to offer the Indian a more gratifying life than either the relative sobrieties and exclusiveness of middle-class White Canada, or the isolation, accompanied by the sense of weakness, of the native reserves (Brody, 1971: 7).

Brody discusses five possible sources of money on skid row: savings, welfare, begging, theft, and prostitution. Following this discussion the significance of the absence of employment earnings is dealt with.

Of interest, apart from the absence of employment income, is the part welfare plays:

The welfare cheques, therefore, provide people on skid row with rolls which can, if so desired, be spent extremely quickly. Such rapid spending facilitates the spree drinking which most authors on Indian drinking have associated with reserve modes. In fact, spree drinking is very common on skid row -- among migrants and regulars alike. . . . the welfare cheque is gone within one or two days (Brody, 1971: 19).

Such disposition of welfare cheques, Brody discovered, was associated more with "Indians." Whites and Metis were more apt to have savings from extended work up North, and to have a proportionally longer spree as a result.

Drigo's *Outsiders Looking In, Insiders Looking Out* (1984) is a glimpse of Toronto's skid row with emphasis on the detoxication (centre, unit) alternative to the revolving door processing of skid row men through drunk court. "Detox," originally

planned with skid row inebriates as the target group, is seen to be moving away from this model.

Drigo's findings display clear indications of multidrug use. Again, this is a study that focuses on the drinker, or "public inebriate," so naturally alcohol consumption is stressed. An increasing use of non-beverage alcohol was noted, especially a common room deodorant (presumably Lysol) and shaving lotion.

It was further stated that:

*It is not unusual to find Skid Row inebriates under the influence of pills, and usually pills in combination with alcoholic beverages [emphasis mine] (Drigo, 1984: 16).*

An administrator is quoted:

I knew one guy that used to drink leaded gasoline. I know other men that use pills along with liquor and still others sniff glue (Drigo, 1984: 33).

The topic of obtaining a livelihood is not touched upon *per se* by Drigo.

Although published in 1985, Hauch's *Coping Strategies and Street Life: The Ethnography of Winnipeg's Skid Row Region* enlists data from a slightly earlier period (1979-81) than does Drigo. As with the previously mentioned studies in this section, the author was a participant observer. Unlike most recent studies (and more like the earlier U.S. research) Hauch perceives skid row as a casual labour pool. This fact is central rather than incidental; skid row men are seen as exploited workers, toiling at often strenuous and dangerous jobs for minimum wages -- and for the enrichment of both employers and private employment agencies.

Like Drigo, Hauch refers often to Spradley (1970) and Wiseman (1970). In fact Hauch's data lead him to disagree with Wiseman's conclusions (as well as those of Brody (1971)). In particular Hauch dismisses Wiseman's "now" orientation as an explanation for sprees and binges:

Employment and residency patterns are shown to be much more a reflection of low wages, arduous and demeaning labour, and scant long-term employment opportunities than some predisposing feature of personality (Hauch, 1985: 38).

Economic factors certainly play a part in putting people onto skid row and in preventing them from leaving. Numerous writers and researchers (Anderson, 1923; Bogue, 1963; Hoch, 1987) have noted the growth of skid row in bad economic times and its subsequent shrinking with the return of prosperity. But only a minority of people adversely affected by economic downturns wind up on skid row -- and many of these later leave. Probably no single reason suffices to explain who is recruited to skid row or who makes a long term commitment to the place. What I would offer by way of explanation is a particular view of the future held by many street people. Seeing the future as, at best, unpleasant is certainly reason enough to dwell more on the past and present.

Hauch's treatment of Brody is terse:

Brody (1971) attributes binge spending, or the "spree," on a Canadian skid row to "Indian culture" (Hauch, 1985: 36).

Hauch's disagreement seems to be that since binge spending is a characteristic of skid row people generally, the reason(s) for this behaviour apply to all. "Indian culture" cannot explain why non-Natives behave the same as Natives on skid row.

There are but a few brief mentions of drugs in Hauch. Most notable is the following observation:

Many obtain prescriptions, especially for sedatives and seizure managing drugs, and use them with alcohol to enhance the intoxication (Hauch, 1985: 83).

This discovery is very similar to some of Drigo's (1984) findings.

Although the six preceding ethnographies are the most relevant to the Kamloops study, they are not the only pertinent materials in the literature. An interesting treatment of skid row can be found in Blumberg, Shipley and Barsky (1978) in which the authors attempt to predict the emergence of skid rows by identifying "Skid Row-Like People" throughout the population. Using a medical analogy the authors state that, "'Skidrowitis' can be found to a greater or lesser degree in everyone" (Blumberg, Shipley and Barsky, 1978: 181). Skid row is not a place -- "Skidrowism" is a human condition.

*Skid Row in American Cities* by Bogue (1963) is a study with a predetermined agenda, that of eliminating skid row (through gentrification or urban renewal). Of interest here is Bogue's grouping of skid row men into a hierarchy of six classes, each of which is further subdivided. The classes include (a) elderly or physically disabled men, (b) resident workingmen, (c) migratory workers, (d) "bums" (beggars and panhandlers), (e) criminals and workers in illegal enterprises, (f) chronic alcoholics. When men appeared in two or more classes or categories, they were assigned to the lowest in which they appeared. Similarities to Anderson (1923) and Spradley (1971) are apparent, as are significant differences in taxonomies.

In Chapter III, I intend to examine the image of street people as seen by agency people. The two themes of (a) employment and sources of income, and (b) drug use will guide this scrutiny. The subject of violence, closely associated with drug use, will be discussed under the latter topic.

## SUMMARY

After considering street people in an historical context, I looked at some current ideas on homelessness. In Chapter III, my intention is to examine the images of street people as seen by agency people. As these images are presented, I will compare them with current ideas found in the literature. Do agency people feel that street people are becoming younger, that more females and families are appearing amongst them, or that the numbers of mentally ill are increasing?

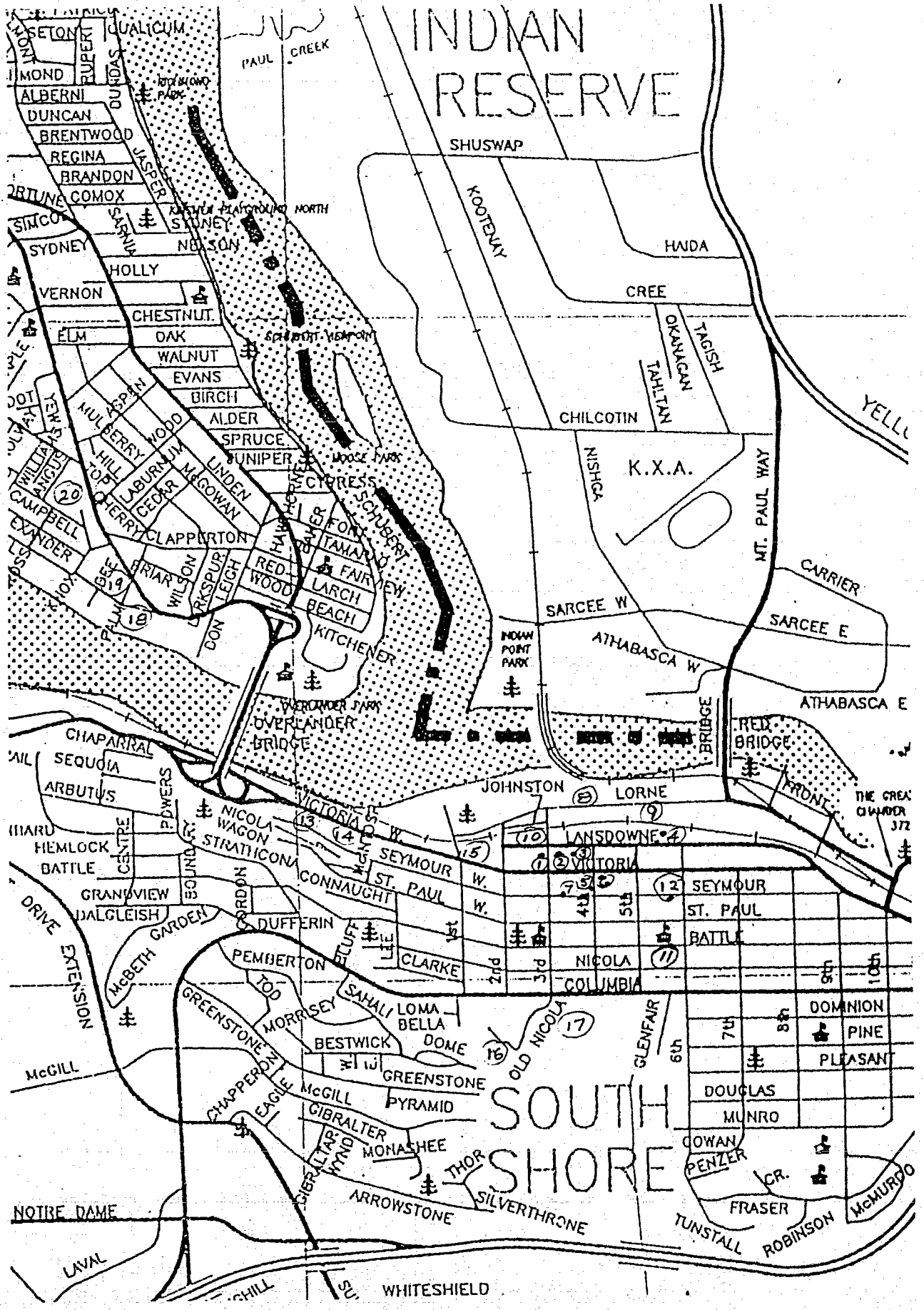
Also, in Chapter III, I will collate images presented by agency people with those six exemplary works described. In particular, I have chosen two broad themes to structure comparisons and collations. These broad topics or themes are (a) employment and income generating strategies, and (b) drug use, including related topics such as violence.

Later, in Chapter IV, the images street people themselves envision will be presented thematically. Again, comparisons with the six exemplars will shape this development.

Next, in Chapter II, I discuss the fieldwork setting and the research decisions that shaped the study.

## LEGEND

- 1 Tim Horton's Donuts
- 2 Frank's Pool Hall
- 3 Central Station Pub
- 4 Thompson Park Mall
- 5 Street Beat
- 6 Plaza Hotel
- 7 Social Services and Housing
- 8 Riverside Coliseum
- 9 Drop In Centre
- 10 New Life Mission
- 11 RCMP Building
- 12 Salvation Army Thrift Store
- 13 Rendezvous Hotel
- 14 Kamloops Christian Men's Hostel
- 15 Public Library
- 16 Phoenix Centre
- 17 Royal Inland Hospital
- 18 Interior Indian Friendship Society
- 19 Salvation Army Family Services
- 20 Village Hotel



## II. KAMLOOPS

### THE SETTING: SKID ROW

Skid row in Kamloops does not present itself in a neat geographical package -- not an unusual situation, as Bogue (1963) indicates. This is especially so for a city like Kamloops, situated as it is at the confluence of two broad rivers. Skid rows have their similarities, but each is distinct, with some exhibiting far more anomalies than others.

Kamloops' main skid row area resembles a shoestring archipelago running east to west (see Map and Legend immediately preceding). At the western end is the Overlander Bridge, linking Kamloops with North Kamloops (separate cities prior to amalgamation a quarter-century ago in 1967). Under flows the Thompson River, newly formed a few hundred yards east from the mingled waters of the North and South Thompsons.

Road traffic exiting the Overlander for downtown follows venerable Victoria Street. Cliff-sides to the south and the waters of the South Thompson close by on the north mean that no side streets intervene for nearly a half-mile eastwards. Along this short stretch known as West Victoria are two places of note to this study: the Rendezvous Hotel and the Kamloops Christian Men's Hostel.

One block west of First Avenue, West Victoria Avenue becomes East Victoria (although locals refer to this as simply Victoria Street, giving the small segment described above the designation "West"). In this first block is found the main branch of the Public Library. From First eastwards, the cross-streets are given numeric designations (Second Avenue, Third Avenue, etc.), and the downtown widens, and spreads out. To the north now run Lansdowne Street and, next to the River, Lorne Street; to the south, Seymour, St. Paul and Battle Streets parallel Victoria. Throughout this downtown core or central business district of retail outlets and office buildings appear skid row sites or establishments frequented regularly or largely by street people. These locations comprise the archipelago-like structure of this urban environment. With a storefront here and there,



a rooming house around a corner, an alcove in a lane, the downtown appears lightly infiltrated by Skid row. Even Fourth and Victoria, since the 1960s, the traditional centre of street life, is preponderantly a mainstream retail area. Yet interspersed within a couple of blocks in various directions are all six downtown pubs, a few all-night restaurants, arcades, pool hall, tattoo parlours, thrift stores, liquor store, welfare office, countless rooming houses and Thompson Park, the downtown mall.

Following the South Thompson River east from the Overlander Bridge is a strip of undeveloped land varying in width from a few to a few dozen yards. A path or two winds through the wild grass and scrub bush paralleling the river on one side, parking lots and Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) right-of-way on the other. After a few hundred yards the path enters the western tip of a city parks system that extends along the River eastward for approximately a mile. With acres of lawn and miles of paved, tiled or gravelled walks and paths lined by countless shrubs and flower beds, Riverside Park in the west melds into Pioneer Park in the east. The park areas offer facilities and attractions for swimmers and cyclists, toddlers, tennis players, joggers, lawn bowlers and others in search of recreational pursuits. No less for street people, this is a multiple purpose area.

Pinching the park near midpoint down to little more than a riverbank path is the newly (1992) built Riverside Coliseum. East and west on adjacent blocks of Lorne Street are two of the more visible outcroppings of skid row. Between Second and Third are a number of dilapidated or condemned houses, festooned with graffiti on their plywood-covered windows and doors. Tucked in behind, off an alleyway, is Johnston Lane, address of the New Life Mission. Between Fourth and Fifth (and continuing east to the Red Bridge at approximately Seventh Avenue) are more aging buildings, rooming houses and a few retail sites. Just east of Fourth and Lorne can also be found Kamloops Food Bank and Outreach Society's Drop In Centre. Although not catering exclusively to street people, this is one of the agencies or institutions most used by them.

Behind Riverside Coliseum a railway spur line vaults the South Thompson on a bridge that provides access to the Indian Reserve. The north shore of the South Thompson at this point (and running several miles east) is Kamloops Indian Band land. This Reserve, which includes the largest of several area industrial parks within its boundaries, has become a suburb of Kamloops. Lightly populated, with many houses more seemingly on acreages than lots, most homes on the Reserve are but a five to ten minute drive or twenty minute walk from surrounding Kamloops.

South of Lorne Street is the "spine" of downtown, the CPR line. East of Third Avenue are the "yards," bordered for the most part with a steel mesh fence that limits cross traffic (particularly from Thompson Park Mall and adjacent parking areas).

Outliers or outcroppings of skid row exist outside of this archipelago within the downtown core. Rudiments of a skid row appear across the Overlander Bridge in North Kamloops. This is most apparent along Tranquille Road in the vicinity of the Village Hotel.

Deteriorating neighbourhoods (or segments of neighbourhoods) are starting to appear south of downtown along Battle Street. Even further afield, informants have mentioned an abandoned trailer, a notorious basement suite, an underground parking area, a large culvert and other semi-hidden or semi-wild spots in the city.

## THE STUDY: METHOD

During July of 1992 exploratory research was carried out in downtown Kamloops. Apart from considerations of finances and logistics (a one-hour commute each way for the researcher) the primary question was "is there sufficient accessible material to provide for a fieldwork project?"

A personal friend with the Salvation Army provided introductions to administrators and personnel at several agencies, among them Kamloops Food Bank and Outreach Society's Drop In Centre and the New Life Mission. Several times over the following

few weeks a passive participant observation method was employed at the Mission, Drop In Centre and a few other sites, such as the Social Services and Housing (Welfare) office. Walks were also taken through downtown streets and parks at various times of day.

By the end of July several trips for the purpose of watching and listening revealed that these sites (some more than others, naturally) provided often rich and abundant windows on Kamloops street life. Consequently, in August a research proposal was submitted and approval sought from the Simon Fraser University Ethics Review Committee. In the meantime exploratory fieldwork was stepped up after Labour Day.

Frequency of observations was increased as was the number of sites, but for now the method remained that of low-interactive participant observation. The reason for this is that it was felt that a fair amount had to be known about street life in Kamloops in 1992 before pertinent questions could be asked and significant sources identified. Spradley (1970) addressed this point as follows:

Initially the data were gathered by *listening* and *observing*, not to discover answers but to find what questions to ask. The core of the ethnographic method is this search for questions in the field situation [italics in original] (Spradley, 1970: 69).

One thing that became clear early on was that the original intention to tape-record encounters, discussions and interviews was inadvisable. The furtiveness, suspicion and occasional outright paranoia that permeated this skid row milieu suggested that most street people and many agency people would be daunted to relative silence by the machine. In fact, several persons even said as much.

Therefore, a system of note-taking evolved. But this, too, could have been off-putting in some situations or at some sites, such as those with people constantly coming and going. If notes were not taken during the encounter, whether it was overheard conversation, a discussion or informal interview, then notes were recorded as soon as possible afterward. Occasionally some shorthand notes were cribbed during an encounter,

to be fleshed out later. During the latter part of the study, when formal interviews became the rule, notes were almost invariably taken during the exchange.

As time wore on, note-taking became less problematic. The often-announced identity as a "student doing sociological research" made note-taking and question-asking behaviour more acceptable as the researcher became a more known part of everyday routine<sup>9</sup>. For a couple of months the car (usually parked behind the Coliseum) became the place where the morning's or afternoon's notes were done. After the arrival, around Halloween, of snow and freezing temperatures, the Public Library or the lunchroom of the Salvation Army store in North Kamloops replaced the car. The lunchroom at Phoenix Centre served the same purpose during a practicum there in early November. On a few occasions notes had to be completed later in the evening at home, or even the next day when the fieldwork itself went late into evening.

Ethics Review Committee approval was obtained in late October. With this, the passive, fly-on-the-wall type of investigation, having served its purpose, was superseded by a more interactive participant observation. Arrangements were finalized with several organizations for interviews, meetings, introductions, and in one case, a practicum.

## DEFINITIONS AND DECISIONS

With this transition to greater interaction came a need for trenchant definitions. As previously stated, this study examines the nature and experience of homeless street people, but both "homeless" and "street people" have come to have many different meanings, varying from researcher to researcher (Fischer and Breakey, 1991). While not all homeless are street people, street people will be considered homeless within the purview of this study. Therefore, street people comprise that subgroup within the homeless population

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<sup>9</sup> As Stoddart (1986) points out, there are several ways of becoming less visible, of "disattending," as a participant observer in the field. Apart from familiarity gained with the passage of time, the student role was helpful. People expect a student to ask questions and take notes.

who are visible and who elect to make at least minimal use of services and provisions available for those in their situation. Consequently, the debate concerning the nature and number of homeless people excluded from the term "street people" is not a concern of this thesis, except where their situation is discussed by subjects within the groups under study.

Since my study looks to Wiseman (1970) as an exemplar, it is worthwhile to see how research decisions were made for *Stations of the Lost*. Initially, Wiseman intended to study the "life of the Skid Row alcoholic from his point of view" (Wiseman, 1970: 272). After a number of interviews and periods of observation, contours in skid row terrain became apparent, and she decided that the study must include the institutions of skid row as much as the men who interact with them. Representative or "exemplar" organizations were selected as her study progressed. Only a few were so chosen, one or two of each of three "types," as it would not have been possible to study each and every one. In a smaller centre like Kamloops (population 75,000) such decisions were relatively easy to make. Many facilities and institutions are one of a kind.

Wiseman defined as a "Skid Row alcoholic man" one who had lived within the confines of skid row during the previous three years and had been institutionalized at least three times for a drinking problem. With the decision to adopt these definitions, Wiseman showed flexibility -- a willingness to keep options open and be informed by ongoing field data. Wiseman's intention was to avoid the tendency to find what was assumed to exist (fitting reality to the theory). Although the existence of women and non-alcoholics on skid row was noted, Wiseman restricted her study to "alcoholic men." Similarly, my study focuses on adults, while noting the existence of "street kids" on skid row.

Also, following Wiseman and Spradley (1970) my fieldwork employed a loose framework of questions, gaining fineness of definition as the investigation advanced.

Who are street people? What is homelessness? How is it defined in this particular context? What causes homelessness? What can be done about it? Should anything be

done about it? How is homelessness related to other social "problems": alcohol and drug use, crime and unemployment?

My study does not assume that absolute and objective answers to these questions exist. What I wish to delineate are two sculptings of the face of street life. This is not to say either that these are the only two portrayals or that the "truth" lies in some mean or amalgam of the two. In the words of Van Maanen (1988) this is a "realist tale," but one with two refrains.

The term "agents of social control," as used by Wiseman, is derived from an observation by C. Wright Mills (Wiseman, 1970: 220). Mills castigated sociologists for having a middle class bias when investigating "social problems." Wiseman expanded this realm of bias to include "field service investigators, probation officers, psychiatric social workers, adoption agencies, mental health hospital staffs" (Ibid.).

While not disagreeing with Wiseman's usage of the term, I would expand it somewhat in light of intervening research. Cohen (1979) talks of "thinning the mesh and widening the net" (p. 347), as agencies of social control disperse increasingly throughout society, expanding the level of intervention and escalating the size of their clientele. To ethnocentrism I would add increasing pervasiveness as constituent elements in a working definition.

For purposes of this study agents of social control will include employees, members or administrators of governmental agencies and the criminal justice system. These organizations take in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the provincial Ministry of Social Services and Housing. Also subsumed are societies chartered under the Provincial Societies Act such as The Phoenix Centre, Kamloops Food Bank and Outreach and Kamloops Youth Resources. These latter organizations are situated at what Cohen would call the "soft end" of the social control continuum. Although "agents" of this latter type of organization might disagree that their "care" or "treatment" represents social control, this control is a matter of function rather than intent. As Cohen (1979) puts

it, "the softness of the machine might be more apparent than real" (p. 350) while conceding that "the intentions . . . are often humane, compassionate and helpful" (p. 350).

The primary research question is this: what similarities and differences exist between the way street people and the way agents of social control (interacting with them) experience and define situations? How divergent (and divergent how?) are these two descriptions/explanations of one and the same process? Blumer (1967) suggests that this dynamic process, one of symbolic interaction, is itself the explanation.

A second question flows from the first: what are the implications (any? many?) of the images presented by these dichotomous world views? A possible implication is the opportunity for increased knowledge and enhanced communication. Should client and agent better understand the position of the other, both are thereby empowered to change their lots for the better.

A final consideration is to examine how changing perceptions affect the lives of agency people and street people. Here, the results of previous ethnographies will be compared to findings of this present study.

In talking with agency people my initial question invariably was: "Who are Kamloops' street people?" From the response I took cues as to follow-up questions. If the person emphasized a particular aspect of street life or street people (violence, drugs, mental illness, homelessness, etc.) I would explore that. Only when that aspect seemed exhausted would I suggest a further subject by a terse, but gentle, prompt. Sometimes the context would allow a single word delivered in an interrogatory tone ("alcohol?" "crime?" "games?"). Other times a brief statement would seem necessary to shift or expand the conversation. The consistent rationale was to keep investigator pollution to a minimum. Often respondents would seek clarification seemingly in an effort to tailor their answers in my frame of reference ("What do *you* mean by 'street people'"; "What *about* alcohol?"; "What *kinds* of crime do you mean?"). I felt in most cases that this jockeying and direction-seeking needed the reassurance that the only "right" answer was the one that the

respondent wished to give. A consistent effort was made to put the onus gently back on the respondent ("Let's pretend I know nothing about this, that I've just arrived from Mars - tell me what *you* see"). Almost without exception respondents (immediately or after brief uncertainty) understood and stayed with the open-ended framework.

A final question was usually asked of agency people: "What can or should be done, if anything?" Again, this deliberately vague question elicited frequent requests for me to supply more meanings or definitions. I lightly deflected such requests, insisting that what the respondent meant was the only important thing. I needed them to define the problem (if any) and the solution (if such applied). I often lightheartedly observed that if I answered my own questions I would be just as dumb at the end of things as when I started. I was coming to the experts: I did not want to restrict their answers.

My initial question to street people invariably was: "If you could change one thing, what would it be?" There were almost no requests for clarification or expansion. Occasionally a person could not answer, but that did not seem to have anything to do with not understanding the question. Once during the discussion the respondent was asked the same question as were agency people: "Who are street people?" This wrinkle proved fruitful and it was employed consistently thereafter. Street respondents were asked to grade or judge various organizations or agencies as to usefulness or relevance in their lives (Mission, police, Welfare, etc.). I then began asking agency people what organizations or agencies *they* felt were doing the most for street people. Again, transposing what was originally a question designed for one group to the other proved fruitful and was continued.

A further benefit of the interview style employed was the time it allowed for note-taking. With only a few orienting questions and short promptings in between, I could be involved almost wholly in listening and note-taking. I did not have to carry a conversation or control the interview with leading questions. Indeed, I suspect, a more intense interview style would have compromised live note-taking to a serious degree.



Very often sites determined encounter styles. Some, like the Drop In with its loud stereo and usually full complement of people, lent themselves to conversation and group discussion but inhibited interviews, formal or otherwise. By suggesting a walk or a coffee at a nearby restaurant I would often be able to develop a conversation into an informal interview.

Except for brief interludes, beer parlours proved impossible (loud, dark, distracting) for any but the most superficial conversations.

Where some privacy was available, all kinds of encounters were possible. At Phoenix Centre, for instance, everything from superficial conversations to formal interviews of both agency people and street people could be carried out.

Some sites, like the parks, produced good discussions in September, but there was no one there to talk to in sub-zero December. The following discussion provides a brief treatment of most sites important to this study.

## THE SITES

A practicum, or "student field placement" was granted at Phoenix Centre, an outpatient counselling and detoxification facility, during the first two weeks of November 1992. Although originally designed more with community college welfare aide students in mind, the student field placement criteria were liberally interpreted by staff and administration, giving my research methods maximum effectiveness.

Phoenix Centre is located about a mile south of the downtown core on a hill overlooking Royal Inland Hospital. As it is a medically oriented detox, close proximity to the Hospital emergency ward and psychiatric wing is useful. The arrangement is also handy for the two staff doctors attached to Phoenix Centre.

Apart from providing a valuable placement through which to contact street people, administration at Phoenix also offered a list of contact persons at other organizations. This

list proved very useful and a further offer, to mention the administrator's name, opened doors on a couple of occasions.

One of these doors led inside the RCMP building just to the south-east of the downtown area. There, a veteran member with both the Force and the Kamloops Detachment made time on a busy day to answer questions. Although quite forthcoming himself, this officer doubted whether other members would provide much of an interview. I was free to ask around, but was cautioned that I would likely get "yes" and "no" answers with little volunteered. Partly for this reason, more reliance was put on conversations with two ex-members to round out the RCMP "point of view."

The administration and staff of the Downtown Social Services office on Seymour Street made available most of an afternoon in mid-November. About a dozen staff members took part in a round-table discussion of street people and their relation to the Social Services operation. This opportunity was much more than I had originally requested and yielded a quantity of data that otherwise would have taken several days to gather.

Kamloops Youth Resources Society is an entity that provides a variety of programs and services for children (eighteen years and under, as provided by statute). Funding is almost entirely by the Social Services and Housing Ministry, who require criminal record clearance for anyone having dealings with children under their care, or care of contractor agencies. Having received clearance, I approached Street Beat, an innovative program of Kamloops Youth Resources.

Located across Fourth Avenue from the Plaza Hotel, the Street Beat office is home base for the staff of two. Much of their work involves circulating (walking a semi-flexible beat in the downtown) and making themselves available to street kids. In summer the beat includes the waterfront parks in addition to the year round sites -- Thompson Park Mall and several locations on Victoria between Third and Fifth. Among these are Frank's Pool Hall, the Plaza Coffee Shop and Tim Horton's Doughnuts, a twenty-four hour operation.

On several occasions I accompanied one or both of the Street Beat workers on their rounds. Their sensitivity to clues and subtleties on their "beat" aided this study by allowing me to see what I otherwise might not have seen. Additionally, of immense value were introductions to several individuals subsequently interviewed.

Also funded almost entirely by Social Services and Housing is Kamloops Christian Men's Hostel. A males-only facility housed in an older, well-maintained wooden structure, the Hostel provides beds for up to 38 transient or homeless men. In addition, the Hostel staff put out three meals a day (8:00 a.m., 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m.) seven days a week, in a dining room seating about 32.

Normally, the maximum length of stay is three days, although in exceptional circumstances, the Downtown Social Services office will extend the limit. Although meals are provided not solely for residents, they are normally unavailable to Income Assistance (welfare) recipients during the two weeks following cheque issue on the last Wednesday of each month (known as Welfare Wednesday).

Those men on their three-day residencies are required to be out of the building between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. (except for access to the dining room for the noon meal, should they desire it). During these hours cleaning and maintenance take place. Much of the cooking and cleaning work is done by men hired from the ranks of former residents.

Around 8:30, when the Hostel closes for the morning, a steady stream of men head east (a similar phenomenon occurs following the noon meal). A few head for the New Life Mission, most for the Drop In Centre. Others, more in good weather than in bad, head for the train tracks or highway, on their way elsewhere.

The Mission serves a light brunch six days a week, following a sermon scheduled for 9:30. The door is locked from then until the conclusion of the meal to avoid interruption of the sermon and to prevent anyone from partaking of brunch without having

been present for the sermon. A mid-afternoon meal, at 3:00 p.m., is similarly offered six days a week. On Sundays a mid-day meal is prepared.

The Mission building appears to be a converted warehouse with the public area occupying almost half the main floor. Half this area, in turn, contains a pulpit and metal folding chairs while in the other half two tables seat 15-20 for meals with a small kitchen around the corner. Copious amounts of bread and baked goods daily donated are free for the taking from several shelves and tables near the door. Trays of doughnuts are provided for consumption on the premises, but no coffee is available except at mealtimes.

The Drop In Centre, like the Mission, is open those hours the Hostel is not (8:30 to 4:00 p.m. to be precise), but unlike the Mission is closed on weekends. Frequently, soup or other lunches are provided at the Drop In. As well, there are tables of bread and baked goods free for the eating or taking away. Coffee is brewed constantly throughout the day - several gallons on some days.

The Drop In Centre itself is located on the main floor of an old house. The living room/dining room is used as a lounge and filled with upholstered furniture -- sofas, easy chairs, rockers. A stereo system, several tables, ashtray stands, potted plants compete for much of the remaining space. An adjoining room contains used clothing free for whoever wants it. A shower is available, including shampoo, towel and disposable razor. These toiletries, plus cards, writing paper and many other articles are available from the small staff office to the side. In the rear a much-used card table abuts the kitchen area. The food bank downstairs is not wheelchair accessible, but the Drop In floor is.

Most weekdays except Welfare Wednesday and the two days immediately following, the Drop In is much used. Beyond about 25 people, it is standing room only. Despite this, there are frequently 30-35 people on the premises. On a few occasions, such as special lunches prior to major holidays, upwards of 100 people are served serially with one or two dozen eating standing up. Smoking is allowed, except in the kitchen area.

Interestingly, most agencies prohibit or severely restrict smoking even though most street people smoke.

During the period July to September, exploratory and orienting participant observation at the Drop In consisted of sitting for an hour or two at a time in the lounge area and sampling conversations. Subjects of discussion, topics of conversation and the level of emotional energy thereto attached yielded an increasingly clear idea of what things were of greater or lesser importance. Early on, for instance, the central place Welfare Wednesday occupied in the monthly ebb and flow of events strongly suggested itself. In this way emphasis shifted as ongoing data pointed to avenues of inquiry.

At different times of the day, week or month and with the changing season, some sites gained or lost importance to the study. Sleeping in the parks (or partying in the parks) was much more notable in July than in October and more notable, relatively, in October than in December. Similarly, panhandling waned as the temperature dropped.

The bars, restaurants, clubs and so on became more a focus of investigation on Welfare Wednesday and following than at other times. It was also worth checking at the Drop In and Mission (as well as Hostel and elsewhere) to see who was still around (if anyone) at that time.

Approaches were made to several individuals who owned, operated or managed rooming houses and residential hotels. A couple did not want to talk, a couple agreed to briefly answer questions and a few consented to a formal interview. All those landlords approached were connected with residences for which street people had indicated a proclivity.

Brief conversations were initiated with a couple of waiters and bartenders. Noise levels in most establishments precluded anything much being discussed with staff or patrons.

A staff member at Kamloops Interior Friendship Society spent part of an afternoon discussing the place of Natives on the street. Part of the mandate of this agency is to

facilitate the relocation of Native people from reserves to urban areas. Therefore staff have a particular perspective on homelessness and problems on the street as it pertains to Natives.

Both Salvation Army thrift stores were visited as well as the food bank/family services office adjoining the North Shore thrift store. Three employees and two volunteers were interviewed.

Several retailers and merchants along Victoria Street were engaged in conversation, particularly as to their attitudes toward street people. Also, the staff and patrons of Frank's Pool Hall volunteered their impressions and ideas on a variety of topics.

By mid-December when the field work was completed, over 100 street people had contributed to the data. With some, it was snippets of overheard conversation, with others an interview running perhaps an hour or more. Over 60 agency people were spoken with or interviewed during the same time period. Whenever possible, without breaking confidentiality, facts or allegations derived from one source were "run by" others, sometimes in a hypothetical guise. Occasionally this process of verification led to identifying some information as almost certainly fanciful. Other times verification just underlined that there really is more than one way to interpret the same phenomenon (or what to the investigator may seem the same).

In Chapter III, I shall look more closely at the agencies sketched out above. In particular I shall present and examine those perceptions agency people have of street people. Parallels or contrasts with findings in previous studies (six exemplars mentioned), will serve to ground or underline significance. Two themes (see Chapter I) will be sketched in: income generation/survival activities and drug use.

In Chapter IV, images peculiar to street people will be displayed. Here, the aforementioned themes of income and drugs will attain full development. Again, comparisons and linkages with exemplar literature will be amplified.

### III. IMAGES OF THE STREET

#### INTRODUCTION

Those fragments of the skid row archipelago that I have selected as exemplars are diverse. Each agency is more or less aware of the others, but usually only imperfectly so, having meagre or erroneous knowledge of counterparts. The image that personnel at one agency have of a complementary organization is frequently derived from mutual clients, particularly street people<sup>10</sup>. This is not surprising when we consider that what these agencies have in common is a clientele wholly or significantly composed of this target group.

As such, this array of organizations could be termed a "system," albeit one that is loosely coordinated. Not unexpectedly, some components mesh more closely with certain other parts. For example, Street Beat and Kamloops Christian Men's Hostel work in close proximity with their funding agency, the Social Services and Housing Ministry. Yet these two entities themselves (Street Beat and Hostel) have very little to do with each other.

As indicated in Chapter II, agency people were usually asked two orienting questions: "Who are street people?" and "What (if anything) should be done?" Who street people are is a question answered differently by different individuals. Often the assessment or image will vary from one agency to the next and among workers within a single enterprise. Who they are, what in particular distinguishes street people to an agency person, largely determines what solution or cure might be offered.

Numerous themes and common threads appeared in the data. Of these, several displayed sufficient frequency and apparent centrality to be pursued. Included as thematic topics are, as previously mentioned, drug use, and employment and income sources. Some other frequent themes, emerging from observations and interviews, are violence (often

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<sup>10</sup> Although the term "clients" has widespread use among agency people, street people rarely employ it (and when they do, often put a sarcastic spin on it).

mentioned in conjunction with drug use); race and race relations; the street as a mutual aid community; and alternative understandings of spree or binge behaviour as und deferred gratification reflecting a "now orientation" (Wiseman, 1970), or as a dictate of the constraints of the political economy of the street (Hauch, 1985).

Following, then, are street images gathered from numerous sites. Recurrent themes lead from one agency to the next, often being themselves reshaped as the streetscape shifts. I begin at the Social Services office on Seymour Street, due to the pivotal place of the welfare cheque in the skid row scheme of things.

#### SOCIAL SERVICES: "THE WELFARE"

The Downtown Social Services office on Seymour Street has a heterogeneous clientele, with street people forming an identifiable component. While Social Services provides financial aid for many different people, for street people Social Services is the (almost) universal provider. Those on the street in Kamloops not dependent upon welfare are few: a handful receiving various pensions -- military, Canada Pension Plan disability or Old Age Security -- plus several choosing to scrape out an existence without an ongoing governmental subsidy of any sort.

Although Social Services benefits (Income Assistance) have not officially been called "welfare" for two generations, it is still "welfare" to street people. "The Welfare" is the office and bureaucracy that dispenses it.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, even Social Services employees sometimes refer to their place of employment as "the Welfare Office" (far more frequently than street people refer to it as Social Services).

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<sup>11</sup> Street people (and other clients) often refer to their Social Services worker as "my social worker" when, in reality Income Assistance is handled by Financial Assistance Workers (FAW's). Social Workers are employed by another branch of the Social Services Ministry to apply the Family and Children's Services Act (and other statutes) and are separate from Income Assistance concerns, dealing almost exclusively with children and child protection matters.



At the Downtown Social Services Office in Kamloops, most workers are women. Of the fifteen or so Social Services personnel who contributed to this study -- line staff, support workers, supervisors -- only one was a man.

The view of street people from the Social Services office recognizes variation within that cohort while at the same time offering generalizations. Street people belong to a self-identifying group: often that is how outsiders determine who does or does not belong. According to workers:

Street people all know each other, use first names with each other . . . they're regulars.

They (street people) are like a big family, sharing, looking after each other . . . have high loyalties to peers.

Moreover, most workers do not see street people as literally and strictly homeless in the sense of being shelterless. There is a strong impression, though, that the shelter often falls short of being a home.

Lots are NFA<sup>12</sup>, but have a place to live.

Some won't live in regular housing . . . prefer to "rough it."

Some fall through the cracks, should be in boarding homes.

Most of those referred to live in hotels and boarding houses. In these facilities, often a half-dozen or more tenants have to share a common bathroom. Some rooms have refrigerators, some don't. Some have cooking facilities, others don't. Some rent by the week, others by the month. Virtually all require more than Social Services allots for shelter, compelling the recipient to spend grocery or clothing money to make up the shortfall in rent money.

Another common observation by workers is that many street people are produced by "the system" or were "system kids." The "system" referred to is the welfare apparatus and to most workers includes both the Income Assistance and child protection components:

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<sup>12</sup> No fixed address.

A lot of these (street) people were system kids. Some were in foster homes or their families were collecting since before they were born. They don't know anything else and they're dependent. They can't clean up the messes they make, they're continually in here to get us to clean it up for them.

System kids enter adult life skill-less.

With the ones that were foster kids they got treated special until they turned nineteen and then the social workers drop them like turning off a switch. That's the way the system is and there's no smoothing a transition from foster kid to adult. You can see why they'd be lost when they turn nineteen.

Alcohol is a factor in the lives of most street people in the Social Services view.

Drugs are also prevalent, it is felt, but not as widespread. One worker expressed it this way:

The mentally handicapped don't use drugs or alcohol, but most all others do.

Others echoed similar feelings:

Alcohol may be the single biggest problem, but this isn't a contributing factor to be putting them on the street.

They may drink to make street life bearable.

In some respects, the alcoholics and heavy drinkers are preferred clients:

Bottom rung drunks are easiest to deal with, they are appreciative.

Is it perhaps because they have given up, whereas angrier, hard-to-deal with ones haven't yet? When they're beaten down, not accepted (real down and outs) they no longer care, are accepted by their own group, unless they have something, *then*<sup>13</sup> they had better share with the group.

[Street people] are the least demanding group, they will drop into the office to socialize, exchange gossip with workers.

There is also the widespread feeling among workers that older street people are less angry than the young:

Younger are often angrier and feel that there is nothing waiting for them.

We're their mommy and daddy and they manipulate and whine like bratty kids. They throw tantrums when we don't give them what they want. In a way, it isn't their fault. No one rewards them for growing up. They can't stand on their own two feet because they never have.

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<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise stipulated, emphasis found in quotations is by speaker and in the original.

These observations recall Anderson's (1923) remarks, quoted in Chapter I, that young men put the blame on circumstances, while older men blame themselves.

Among Social Services personnel there is evidence of a great deal of will to understand and make allowances for street people. One worker stated emphatically that "our standards are not their standards" and went on to underline the idea that it was neither right nor useful for workers to judge clients by criteria outside the client's own value structure. While workers do not dispute the rightness or wisdom of this stance, they do have mixed feelings:

Who are we to set standards for others? But it rankles that people I carry on my taxes are so demanding! I want! You have to! Gimme! But these *are* a minority.

It galls to have an abusive, nasty client make demands and be rewarded with the demands being met. But these are people frustrated by powerlessness, this is to be expected.

Why should we pay for choices others make? And can we continue to pay it?

Am I, as a worker, contributing to a client's demise, supplying money to buy liquor that is killing them? And building dependency? Yet the alternatives seem worse, and who are we to judge?

You want to shake them, if they'd only try, they could get off the system and make something of themselves. They just don't try.

The moral judgements evident here seem to oscillate between a liberal permissiveness and an authoritarian rigidity. With some workers it would seem as if this vacillation is due to a contest between views held by their private selves and those appropriate to their public roles.

Several staffers agreed that street people accord Social Services workers a kind of associate membership in their world. Stories were told of friendly, supportive greetings and actions when workers crossed paths with clients on the street or in haunts like the bar (That's my worker! Watch your mouth -- she's good people!).

Individual observations of street people that gained some endorsement from fellow workers included a remark pointing to the marginality of street people:

Street people are invisible to most who don't deal with them.

There was also an observation on the ratio of the sexes:

More men than women, but quite a few women.

Voiced, too, were insights into motivations, conditions and values:

Often people don't initially choose the street, but are forced there, adapt, accept it.

Street people prefer to be on the street.

The street is a violent milieu.

Street people don't scam, by and large, other groups probably do more.

Street clients frequently complain about welfare frauds.

"Scamming the system" -- welfare fraud -- is a constant preoccupation with workers. Vigilance is encouraged and expected by the employer. As indicated, street people do not present a major concern. What do occur, particularly with transient or migratory street people, are "good stories" making the rounds. A "good story" is advice from one street person to another about a successful scam<sup>14</sup>. Workers feel that the advice usually backfires and that the loopholes perceived by potential scammers are imaginary. A perennial issue (particularly in summer) is the illicit collecting of welfare monies from two or more provinces for the same month.

One young guy filled out his form that he had collected in 8 of the other 9 provinces at some time in the past, so I checked up on the one he had left blank, and sure enough, that's where he had collected! I also checked the others and he hadn't collected in any of them.

Sometimes they get bad advice from older or more experienced types. They come in and try a scam, but it's like telling a joke and forgetting the punch line. One guy tried to say he'd come from Ontario, but all his I.D. was Alberta, picture I.D. card, driver's license, the whole schmeer. Asked, "Ever spend much time in Alberta, ever collect there?" Says, "No, just passed through it."

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<sup>14</sup> Goffman introduces a concept, that of "secondary adjustment" to deal with such behaviours. Goffman (1961a: 189) defines secondary adjustment as "any habitual arrangement by which a member [client] of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization's assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be. Secondary adjustments represent ways in which the individual stands apart from the role and the self that were taken for granted for him by the institution."

So new "stories" come into vogue, pass, and are replaced by another bit of sage advice. The reality is that, in this computer age, all provincial and territorial social welfare data banks are mutually and quickly accessible. Restricted access is also available to data from other government bureaucracies, particularly the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

What seems to happen is that occasionally a scam will succeed owing to worker negligence. The scammer will attribute his success to the cleverness of his misleading information and pass his insight on. Those following this advice will usually discover themselves found out and embarrassed. In Chapter IV, welfare scams will be looked at from street people's points of view.

Workers generally seem to like what they do and feel positive about the system in which they work. With Canada's present social welfare system, they affirm, no one need go hungry, unhoused or unclothed. While the system is not perfect, they say, it is an improvement over the past and is a far sight better than what is available in the U.S., for instance. They feel that the system is a great accomplishment, given Canada's population and wealth, and it should be defended against erosion.

Changes should be made within and without the system, though, to improve the lot of street people. How Social Services workers see street people is further revealed in the constructive criticism offered. A consensus observation is that "money won't solve the problem." By that is meant giving more money in Income Assistance to recipients. Street people having more disposable income is not seen as a solution and may indeed be an exacerbation. Most of the changes and improvements, however, do require expenditures of money:

Mentally ill require more supports than now exist, perhaps hostel-like (voluntary semi-institutionalization?): could have less controlling environment, with resources on demand, three squares, basic medical help. . . mentally ill often don't take [their] medication.

I think foster homes should go. They usually don't work but orphanages did. A lot of kids came out of orphanages years ago and did very well. You don't see foster homes doing nearly so well.

[Children need] prevention, education, dysfunction-proofing. . . . it is a personal evolution.

The above comment is one that appears again and again in different words: straighten out the child or risk having an adult twisted largely beyond redemption.

#### PHOENIX CENTRE: "DETOX"

Admission data at Phoenix Centre's detoxification unit indicate that over the last few years street people have comprised only 2% of the client population. As Drigo (1984) points out the "detox option" was originally developed with skid rowers or street people in mind. Over the years, this emphasis has shifted. Some staff suggested the figure a decade ago was more like 40%. These diminishing admissions of street people have been previously witnessed in Toronto:

An implication is that some alcoholics with more social and financial resources are occupying beds intended for Skid Row men (Drigo, 1984, page 51).

Clients at Phoenix detox now come with referrals and are put on a waiting list.

During the two weeks I was at Phoenix Centre, street people made up 10 to 20% of the clientele (two to four out of twenty). This discrepancy was explained by one staff member:

Well, look at the time of year. It's cold outside!

Others added:

We see far fewer [street people] these days because of referral. A lot of men on the street don't see a doctor. Also, we have a waiting list and if you are NFA and have no phone, how do we contact them to say a bed is available?

As well, your definitions and ours could be quite different. We do have a few street people right now, it does appear. But we tend toward an NFA definition, where you are a bit more inclusive.

In fact, during my November practicum there was agreement by most staff that people I identified as street people met their criteria as well (see definition in "Method"

section of Chapter II). Indeed, a couple were first identified by staff and mentioned to me as possible subjects.

Where, staff were asked, did they think street people now went for help? Some Phoenix employees suggested that knowledge of detox procedures had become widely dispersed on the street, allowing a "do it yourself" alternative. Personnel at other agencies disagreed that an ersatz detoxification agenda had become part of street culture. A few instances were related where staff or volunteers, with great trepidation, monitored someone in withdrawal. On one occasion a man withdrew "cold turkey" from heroin addiction at the Drop In Centre. All staff could do was to place blankets over the fellow and make numerous phone calls, none of which led to professional help being obtained.

Like the "real down and outs" at the Social Services office a similar preferred type is seen at detox:

Give me an old alcoholic any day. The withdrawal is much more straightforward and easy to deal with - they seem to think, "I got myself into this, now it's my job to get me out." The alcoholic past his mid-twenties is much more likely to feel that detoxification and recovery are his problems and we're here to help.

Even so, street people are not seen as good bets for treatment. As proclaimed in the Detox policies and procedures manual on narcotics withdrawals:

The client's tendency [is] to be poorly motivated and highly manipulative. Parenteral<sup>15</sup> narcotic users must be excellent actors, liars and very street wise to be able to maintain their habit. A high level of criminal activity is generally required to pay for their drugs. A good assumption to make is that the client will be highly skilled at manoeuvring you and will initially exhibit sophisticated drug seeking behaviour.

Staff members see street people as having their own goals for treatment, which are different from institutional expectations:

Street people I think, and this might not be a majority opinion [at Phoenix Centre], come here because they're sick. No, really, I think they fully intend to get better in a limited way, but not to get out of that life. Face it, what are their options? They aren't connected to others, apart from people

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<sup>15</sup> By parenteral is meant "by injection" as opposed to via the alimentary canal. Popular routes of injection are intravenous, subcutaneous, and intramuscular.

from the street. They go back to what they came from because their range of options, changes they can make in their lives are really narrow.

With some of the street people I think what we see is the attempt to get back some of the buzz or zip from their drug. Like it just isn't doing anything for them and they're using more and more. So they stop using for a while, hoping that when they start again, the buzz, the high, will be back.

One morning a "house meeting" heard complaints regarding an alleged limited fare for breakfast. One client claimed he could not partake of the mid-morning aerobic exercise program because he couldn't eat the "boring" breakfasts. It appeared that breakfast consisted of five types of dry cereal, hot porridge, fruit, toast and jam. Staff later discussed the complaint:

Isn't it interesting that the complaints of this sort always come from the street people or those that don't even eat breakfast before they come here?

Yes, it's never the people who manage a home and do for themselves. They appreciate the quality and variety, because they know what's involved.

A client's response to treatment was spoken of similarly:

She has had her own agenda from the start and it does not include changing herself or going without drugs.

Comments such as the above, infrequent as they may be, are offered in a philosophical, rather than judgmental vein. Complaints, as well as non-compliance with treatment, are seen as symptomatic of the drug dependency condition. Even when a client is asked to leave as a result of drug use during treatment, the confrontation tends to be gentle and non-judgmental. On one occasion, during my practicum, a resident informed staff that another client was using narcotics. After verifying the accusation, staff informed the malefactor of treatment termination. This sparked a spasm of rage, during which the client cursed, threatened, and threw a can of hairspray. Not once did staff lose their aplomb or poise. According to staff the reason for such smooth professionalism is that many staff members are nurses<sup>16</sup>. A sense of nurturing and healing pervades Phoenix Detox, strongly suggestive of a hospital setting.

<sup>16</sup> Both male and female nurses. The gender breakdown on Phoenix Detox staff was roughly four women to every one man.



While some staff members may prefer to treat old alcoholics, most clients are polydrug users. This is even more true of street people. It is extremely rare to find a street person under forty years of age who uses only one drug consistently. There may be a preference, a drug of choice, but myriad other substances are often freely substituted. Generally hard drug users (heroin, cocaine, etc.) imbibe alcohol infrequently and moderately. Conversely alcohol users use little in the way of hard drugs. But both groups utilize numerous soft drugs and prescription items (particularly marijuana and valium).

### ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

To the RCMP the downtown core and its street people are but a small part of the several hundred square miles for which the Kamloops detachment is responsible. Members are moved from location to location and from shift to shift quite rapidly. No member has skid row for a "beat" more than four consecutive shifts every few weeks or months. The Kamloops RCMP feel that this policy reinforces their claim that all citizens are treated alike by police.

Previous studies (Wiseman, 1970; Spradley, 1970; Drigo, 1984) indicate that police deal much more harshly with street people than they do with other citizens. A spokesperson for Kamloops RCMP suggests the opposite is true in his jurisdiction:

No, street people are charged like anyone else. If a drunk is performing, it doesn't matter who he is, a street person is less liable (if anything) to be arrested or held for sobering up . . . he doesn't have a car, lives nearby, is known, whereas the more affluent would be kept to prevent a possible impaired trip to suburbia.

Not surprisingly the period of highest police activity and interest in skid row is Welfare Wednesday and the several days following (in effect a five-day weekend every month).

The number one offence is "intoxicated in a public place," especially on Welfare Wednesday. Also, a surprising number report a stolen cheque or stolen welfare monies [a required step for one wishing the Welfare Office to replace it].

Like other agencies, the RCMP see the composition of street people changing with the seasons and the weather:

There is an influx of transients every spring, then they leave in the fall, going to Vancouver, Victoria, or perhaps back East, if they come from there.

A lot of French come west every year, lots this year again; they're just about over for the year.

These transients are sometimes wanted [have warrants outstanding]; they frequently commit crimes. The Men's Hostel is routinely monitored.

Although the RCMP image of street people tends to focus more directly on criminal behaviour, it is not altogether different from other views.

Street people have a code of ethics, if we want to call it that. They help each other out. They will even help authorities on serious occasions, like when one of them is murdered . . . but they usually keep silent, don't cooperate.

The RCMP stance is that the street doesn't seem more dangerous and violent than ten or twenty years ago, but embedded in this assessment is an element of uncertainty:

Well, there is more crime due to more people, most of it is population growth. And street people often don't report crime. Say they are assaulted, they don't report it. There could be more violence, I just can't say. Perhaps it is throughout society, and not just on skid road.

Asked if a drug problem existed on Kamloops streets, the member replied:

Based on [city] size, the drug problem is no different from other places this size. All of it is here -- pot, heroin, LSD making a comeback, cocaine.

Crack?

No, it isn't a big thing. But, being in between major centres -- Vancouver, Calgary, Jasper -- leads to part of the problem. Also the climate is right for growing marijuana.

An ex-RCMP officer later mentioned seeing a drug dealer operating fairly openly from a "food fair" table in Thompson Park Mall, complaining:

*That I never saw when I was in plain clothes.*

Then added:

But everyone knew who we were anyway.

The solution offered has echoes, as well, of the answers emanating from other agencies:

I'd educate people, it all goes back to raising kids, parenting. Educate people to care more for the unfortunate, help them to raise their self-esteem so they can begin caring more for themselves.

#### KAMLOOPS CHRISTIAN MEN'S HOSTEL

More than any other facility used by street people, the Hostel serves the footloose and migratory. Although Kamloops-based men occasionally do make use of it, three nights accommodation is too little to make a real difference to a shelterless local. On occasion, such as when a man has an apartment or room rented, but it is not available for a week, Social Services will confirm the pending rental and extend his time at the hostel by four days. Men who spend their summers in the parks, or otherwise out of doors, will sometimes take a break in the Hostel for three days, but again, this does not seem to happen often.

How locals do make use of the Hostel is in obtaining three square meals a day, except for the week following Welfare Wednesday. Men who come in at this time are questioned aggressively by staff. Those who are not on Assistance or whose Income Assistance cheque is unavailable are permitted in the dining room. That only a handful of men (around three to six) appear for meals at this time is indicative of the overwhelming reliance on Income Assistance by street people. By the second week after Welfare Wednesday, the numbers rise again, peaking just before the next cheque issue.

The operation of the Hostel presents a blend of flexibility and firmness. Staff state that there is always a bed available, even at three or four a.m. "Men often show up throughout the night, having arrived in Kamloops on freight trains," said one employee. Even if a man has been drinking, as long as he is tractable, he is accommodated. If a man creates a disturbance, is abusive or destructive, he is put out.

One staff member remarked:

These men aren't childish or stupid and it is a mistake to treat them like that [as if they were].

Yet complaints by staff about men's behaviour seem to be at odds with the previous statement:

Here, they complain. Like, this morning there was Cream of Wheat for breakfast. When we offered seconds we got some hoots and rude remarks. I told them, "Just wait until Cream of Wheat is breakfast seven days a week." They just don't appreciate that it is better than it could be or might be. My own family gets bacon and eggs and pork chops a lot less than these guys.

Last week somebody stole the salt and pepper shakers from a table. We confiscated the rest, which is why you don't see any salt or pepper out there now. One guy tried to get us to put them out by "returning" some shakers he stole from a restaurant. Well, they'll eventually get them back, since the stolen ones haven't been returned, but they have to pay the price for a while.

Sometimes we find empty bottles, used syringes, that sort of thing. We're always checking up, but can't stop it. I think a lot goes on we're not aware of.

Men are encouraged to eat quickly and leave even in slack periods when only one dining table is in use. The same prodding takes place when the activity room closes in the evening. Here, residents and non-residents mingle, watch television, read or play cards. Early in the night RCMP members inspect the registration book for new arrivals. The names and Social Insurance numbers are fed into the computer. Should it be necessary, the police will return later to question or arrest. A staff member suggested:

I don't know if you need to talk to the guys here. They're the same ones you see at the Drop In.

To a large extent this proved an accurate statement.

## NEW LIFE MISSION

The Mission is one of two avowedly fundamentalist Christian organizations serving street people (the other being the Salvation Army). Previous studies (Wiseman, 1970; Drigo, 1984) have indicated that such organizations have an idiosyncratic view of street people, often differing from that of other agencies. Such appears to be the case here. By

and large, though, staff and volunteers at the Mission do see the same things as other agency people. They just come to different conclusions.

Street people are seen as:

Drifters, rooming house dwellers, transients, NFA, relatively homeless . . . people who never really take responsibility for themselves.

People who are down and out, alcoholics, people coming out of jail . . . many street people have criminal records . . . many are violent, virtually all carry knives . . . some eat five times a day and complain, complain, complain.

With all street people, when one man has money, all have money. There's self interest in helping each other. That's why a man never gets anywhere if he reforms but doesn't leave the area. He's defeated by the code of the street.

All of us have fallen natures, but Indians are in a terrible moral state. Virtually none know who their fathers are. The stupidest thing is for Indians to want to go back to where they were before the arrival of the white man, living an ignorant, disease-ridden existence.

Parents too often today don't bring up kids to be responsible.

The "welfare system" is seen as one of the evils of street life:

The welfare system is wrong. Men or women should have something to do. God made man to be responsible, welfare takes initiative away, you gear your life to the welfare cheque and vegetate. We get worse, not better, if we have no responsibilities.

Simply doing away with Income Assistance, though, is recognized as no answer:

There are a lot that would go to work at the drop of a hat, but there are no jobs around. After enough years [on the street], re-acquiring work habits is very hard. There's also the attitude of "why should I, if no one else does?"

A staff member indicated that while "these other outfits help" what was most needed was "the Gospel":

The only lasting and complete answer is Jesus. Detox sobers a man up, AA helps and so on, but the whole life needs changing or the man will just slip back and the cycle begins again. It's either black or white -- the Lord said, "You're either for me or against me." That's the way it is.

Many members of the Mission Board, in addition to staff and volunteers, are involved in prison outreach programs. These programs, Man to Man (M2M) and Woman to Woman (W2W), for male and female inmates respectively, are separate from the

Mission. For those prisoners released in the Kamloops area, however, the Mission serves as a base for continuing contacts made in jail. Also, each December, a Prison Fellowship Banquet is held at the Mission. Men are given a day pass from a local jail and are joined by wives and girl friends for a traditional turkey dinner.

Partly because of this outreach emphasis to released or paroled convicts, New Life Mission discourages use of their facility by street kids. One staffer added:

We also discourage the kids from dropping around because of pedophiles and crazies. Once we had to tell some scantily clad girls to leave.

Where personnel at most other agencies accept that street people have different values than they, and to a greater or lesser extent respect those differences, the Mission does not do so. Street people are living wrongly and must be helped to change:

We must show tough love sometimes, structure is a necessity if we are to get anywhere.

Everyone has to do something for something. If everything is done for a person, they become dependent.

This uncompromising demand for greater responsibility from those seen as irresponsible leads to a controlling attitude. While trays of doughnuts are available at all times, "coffee is not always available, as most wouldn't stay for the service." Similarly (as previously mentioned), the door is locked at the commencement of service and reopened when the meal is over, to prevent people from arriving just for the meal. A telephone is available, but staff must dial the number, a procedure also common to jails, where Corrections staff dial for inmates. Music played on the stereo consists of hymns and traditional Christian music and is selected by staff. There is a clear sense that, to those making the rules, Mission clients are outsiders.

## **DROP IN CENTRE**

Although not all street people make use of the Drop In, it draws a broader cross section and greater numbers than does any other agency. As mentioned in Chapter II, up

to 30 or 35 people may be at the Centre at any one time, with approximately 100 being served lunch on special occasions like Thanksgiving. Except for Welfare Wednesday and its immediate aftermath, the Drop In is used at close to capacity most other weekdays of the month.

Commonsense suggests that a major reason for this popularity is that the facility is made (within reason) to reflect the desires of its users. In contrast to the New Life Mission, for example, smoking is permitted in most areas, the stereo is controlled by clients, and card playing is permitted. Selected clients are in charge of coffee, clean-up and so on. Many clients display a proprietary interest in the smooth and proper running of the Drop In. Seeing many of the rules as derived from their input, they carry out policing of those regulations.

Staff appear to keep rule making to a minimum. Violence, extreme drunkenness, drug use and dealing are not permitted on the premises. An offender may be barred for short periods of time for transgressions.

Understandably, the Drop In view of street people tends to be more understanding and non-demanding than that of some other facilities. Referrals are readily available for those wishing to change or reform, but the Drop In is a place where street people can relax without criticism of their life choices.

Staff and volunteers have these observations as to who their street people clientele are:

They're all drinkers, the men anyway (and many of the women). I can only think of two that aren't and one was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. The other guy insists he doesn't drink but he's been observed in a drunken condition once or twice and smelled of alcohol and appeared hung over on several other occasions.

Ron doesn't drink, he's one of only a couple of men that don't. But I think he's heavily into drugs. I don't know what they do when they leave here and I don't *want* to know.

During one of my observation sessions at the Centre, a Native couple came in. The woman had two black eyes and severe facial bruising. The man was arrogant and half drunk. An employee observed to me and another staff:

I'd like to hang him up by the balls! I hate wife beaters!

Still, when that same employee came to deal with this couple, she behaved in an objective, professional way, refusing to let her feelings hinder the rendering of service.

One employee related a story concerning the relationship between Drop In clients and the RCMP:

A constable drove up in uniform with a dozen or so bags of doughnuts contributed by Tim Horton's. He was delivering them as a favour. As he approached the front door, there was a thundering frenzied exodus of men out through the back. The place was depopulated almost instantly. The men returned singly or by two's and three's later that day.

The employee opined that a number of men had outstanding bench warrants for their apprehension -- many for Failing to Appear (FTA) perhaps. Another staff member also felt that had the odd man stayed, and perhaps exchanged greetings with the policeman (or helped unload doughnuts) he might have been identified as a "rat" (police informer). So it would be prudent to vanish with the others and so appear "solid."

Staff are often amazed at the power of word-of-mouth information to bring transients to their door. Each year transients from as far away as Quebec and the Atlantic Provinces show up at the Food Bank or Drop In, fully apprised of the services available.

Last year, I guess it was, we had some guys from New Brunswick said they heard about us from somebody at a hostel in Toronto.

One of the functions of a hostel or drop in is as an information exchange. While staff are prepared to direct and refer clients to other agencies, most of the information desired is passed from one street person to another. Anderson (1923), too, noted the importance of the hobo "jungle" as an information clearing house. In Chapter IV this function of the Drop In and the Hostel will be more fully investigated.



## STREET BEAT

This agency is a specialized one, dealing with street kids eighteen years and under<sup>17</sup>. Workers<sup>18</sup> at Street Beat see many similarities between their clientele and that serviced by agencies designed more for adults. There are also significant differences.

One dissimilarity is that few street kids collect Income Assistance. It is available to seventeen and eighteen year olds, but under stringent conditions. The rhythm of life dictated by the monthly issuance of welfare cheques is missing. Nor are the beer parlours and clubs frequented by many street kids. Some do appear older, some have fake identification, so a few are able to visit clubs and bars.

Street kids do frequent the same part of town as do their adult counterparts. In the summer in particular, street kids use the parks, much as their older counterparts do. That is, there is socializing (hanging out), dealing and sleeping overnight. Thompson Park Mall is a sometimes hangout, but the video arcade discourages anyone under sixteen from patronizing the place during normal school hours. Tim Horton's on Victoria near Fourth is another popular spot. Street Beat workers reported that the previous year Tim Horton's management tried to curtail use of their restaurant as a hangout by instituting a "no smoking" policy. It didn't work.

By and large street kids and adult street people move in different circles. That this is so seems to suit Street Beat just fine, as the workers pay little attention to adults unless one of the latter is paying suspicious attention to one of "their" street kids. More so than other agency people, Street Beat workers act as advocates for their clientele.

Another way street kids differ from adult street people is in their gender proportion. Street Beat records indicate a preponderance of females in about a two to one ratio. By

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<sup>17</sup> Only agency interviews took place. Street kids eighteen and under were observed, conversations overheard, but no interviews took place. Street Beat workers did, however, introduce the writer to former clients who had recently turned nineteen. These young people were subsequently interviewed.

<sup>18</sup> Street Beat has two line workers, a woman and a man. This gender parity is deliberate, with provision of role modelling for street kids in mind.

contrast, my own observations of adult street people revealed about nine men for every one woman. Incidentally, Street Beat put the number of street kids at "about thirty-five" during the time of my study. Highest numbers recorded were in the summer of 1991 when approximately three hundred were seen<sup>19</sup>.

Many of the summer sightings or contacts are of "curb kids." The term is illustrative, referring to kids (usually from the suburbs) who are attracted by the mystique of the street scene. They hover at the edges of the action, cautious but curious. One Street Beat worker actively tries to scare these novices back to the suburbs by "treating them like real street kids." This treatment includes the giving of a "kit" containing information (health, where to access services), condoms and chewing gum. The chewing gum is there to rid the mouth of the aftertaste of latex (which gets in the mouth through oral sex using the condom). Street Beat feels this strategy is often successful.

A sizable proportion of street kids are "system kids." To Street Beat "the system" is the child protection structure of social workers, group homes and foster homes. Many street kids, having tasted independence and high earnings (albeit from drug dealing and prostitution), aren't about to surrender their freedom to a foster home. Nor is there much attraction in returning to their "own" home -- an alternative that often doesn't compare very well to the street. According to Street Beat most street kids have been abused and brutalized in the family home -- they are runaways and throwaways. They have become very suspicious of adults and are cynical in the extreme of grown-ups' motives. Street Beat finds it takes time and consistently open behaviour to build trust among their clientele.

Street Beat workers also see:

Quite a few mentally ill people on the streets. Particularly schizophrenics. I don't know that they are treated much the same as other street people. I do know they get sold drugs the same as everyone else, if you want to consider that equality. Most of them appear to need help [which they aren't getting].

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<sup>19</sup> Baron's (1989) study of an adolescent punk subculture in Victoria, B.C. revealed a more traditional male gender bias. Of the thirty-five youths looked at in the study, twenty-one were males and fourteen females.

Whether the street people in question are adults or kids, mentally ill or not, one Street Beat worker emphatically feels that all see the street the same way:

Everyone hates it. Everybody eventually gets to the point where they have to get away from it.

Workers at Street Beat occasionally hear complaints from local merchants that street kids are bad for business. One merchant is reported to have angrily ordered Street Beat to "take these kids somewhere else" as if the agency had created the problem. Street Beat tends to react to such criticism in a manner similar to that of street kids: with a sarcastic cynicism that questions the motives and morals of the critics. After all, outsiders with money do approach the teens on the street for drugs and sex.

Like adult street people, street kids "watch each others' backs." Hookers have a mutual help or "buddy" system in place. They will not permit "johns" to take them any distance or transport them in vehicles without their peers seeing the john, eyeballing the vehicle and license number. This system also can work as support group back-up to prevent drug deal rip-offs being perpetrated on teens by outsiders.

The street can be just as dangerous and violent to kids as to adults. One story from the Street Beat staff serves as illustration.

A few years ago a seventeen-year-old guy had run up a tab of \$12 000 to a dealer. The dealer and a couple of goons took the kid for a ride out in the country. After smacking the kid around some, the dealer told him he had until the next day to pay up.

The seventeen-year-old spent the next day in agony. Unable to sleep, he walked the streets. Seeing an elderly man, perhaps a tourist, using a banking machine, he thought to assault the man and steal his money. He found that he could not do it.

So he showed up empty handed the next day, wondering what would happen to him. It was explained that a solution might be available to discharge his debt:

All he had to do was kill somebody the dealer wanted done. He'd be paid \$25 000 -- discharging his debt and establishing a credit of \$13 000. Given a day to think it over (do someone or get done yourself) the kid approached Street Beat.

Street Beat moved quickly, getting the young man a one-way bus ticket to a distant town. Living incognito, unable to return to Kamloops, the young man subsequently died of AIDS. While tragedies such as this are not everyday events, similar things happen again and again to street kids in Kamloops.

## INTERIOR INDIAN FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY

In talking with and observing Kamloops' street people, no mention of the Friendship Society was made by them<sup>20</sup>. Despite this, I felt that the Society's specialized mandate, to aid Native people moving from reserves to urban areas, could provide a valuable window on the street: in particular I sought an agency viewpoint of Natives on the street. As well, virtually all Society staff members are Natives themselves.

One worker with wide experience in serving the needs of street people pointed out that while Natives in the skid row population shared the same problems as other street people, they also had problems particularly their own. The major problem (identified also by Brody, 1971 and Hauch, 1985) is that of culture shock. When asked to identify the special problems faced by Native people coming to Kamloops, the worker replied:

Culture shock for those coming from reserves. There, they know everyone, community support is a given. Loneliness and separation tend to be overwhelming when they come to the city. Therefore, they gravitate towards groups they know, bar scenes and so on -- they go where they know they will find people known to them. This is an attempt to replicate community . . . quiet and reserved, they are not likely to ask help of strangers.

Another problem plaguing Native street people is the legacy of the residential school system:

Effects of the residential school system are still big. [Street people are] anaesthetizing pain of family destruction . . . can't go home again because reserves are no longer home.

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<sup>20</sup> Which is not to say that Native people (including some Native street people) do not take advantage of the programs and services offered by the Society -- they do.

In effect, the Native people who are products of the old residential school system are culturally in limbo. They have lost their "Indianness," no longer "fit in" on their reserves, but have received no compensatory ingress to mainstream white society. They are left with the society and culture of skid row<sup>21</sup>.

Otherwise, the observations are strikingly similar to those of non-Native agencies:

Transient population has an extremely strong info network.

Lots of characters!

Men look after each other . . . great sense of loyalty to each other and also to care providers from various agencies. [They] will stick up for workers they respect, make them part of mutual-help community.

Eccentricity is okay, but mental illness not (crazies given wide berth as if it were catching) . . . no one . . . wanted to drink with "handicaps."

Here we have comments noting the information exchange (such as Drop In or Hostel), street people seen as characters (also reported by Welfare Office and others), and the popular observation of a sense of mutual aid community among street people. A final thought suggests that while being a "character" is okay (perhaps even *de rigueur*), being mentally ill is not.

Alcohol and drug use among Natives on the street seems similar to the whole:

[The] vast majority have either an alcohol or drug problem. This goes back to a lack of roots, identity, a need to cope with pain. Bottom cases use shaving lotion, Lysol, minority also use needles. Acceptance by the street culture prevents people from leaving, particularly addicts.

This closing comment regarding a person's inability to break free from the street is reminiscent of a remark by a Mission employee about men attempting to reform, but being defeated by the code of the street.

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<sup>21</sup> Brody (1971) notes that even on skid row acceptance by Indians of another Indian is based more on participation in group activities (often illegal) than race. In Brody's own words: "Participation is more important, ultimately, than Indianness." (Brody, 1971: 16)

## SALVATION ARMY

The "Sally Ann" maintains two stores, both on the periphery of skid row. To the east of downtown is a thrift store, while just across the Overlander Bridge (and around the corner from the Friendship Centre) is a second thrift store combined with a family services office. This latter operates Kamloops' second food bank plus a counselling and referral service.

Street people frequent these establishments, although single parent families and the poor generally (who are not on the street) make up the bulk of the clientele. A Sunday dinner at the Temple Corps draws a number of street people from the South Shore. Transients are helped with gas money and bus tickets on occasion. Doubtless in part due to the wide range of services offered, the Salvation Army receives a complex array of images about street people.

[Street people are] people who got lost in cracks in society.

Most of the people on the street feel pain, they drink or drug to kill the pain. They're abused, rejected, alcoholism, sex abuse, you name it. They're just trying to deal with the pain and the poverty and only making it worse.

There are more now, since 1980s, younger.

They stick together, know who each other are -- are survivors in a peculiar way.

A lot of characters, non-conforming personalities, unique individuals.

The majority seem to be in a lot of pain, for whatever reason.

[They are] more prone to violence, values have changed so much, so quickly.

Most, not all, are alcoholics, drug abusers.

The street is a violent place, beatings in the park -- a number have things stolen, even clothes. Men robbed in hostels, rooming houses, hotels.

Some are really energetic, most are low self-esteem and de-energized.

Getting younger every year. Large numbers are NFA, few are transients. Violence should not be underestimated.

Among the several employees and volunteers interviewed there was general agreement on the prime place occupied by the welfare cheque in the life of the street person. In most ways the ebb and flow of service demands on other agencies are tied to Social Services cheque issuance, the Salvation Army being no exception.

As with many other agency people, most at the Salvation Army see no real solution for the problem of street people. As one employee put it:

Catch them when they are young enough: older ones, just accommodate them.

A lot of them -- it's the only thing they know. The fathers did, brothers . . . welfare is a multigenerational thing.

A new generation of street people starts when they are children . . . with no expectation of employment.

Natives are often afflicted in childhood, families disrupted, residential schools have little good to be said about them -- they destroyed people.

This latter observation was one of only two regarding the special plight of the Native street person by a non-Native agency person.

## OTHERS

About a dozen individuals were engaged in conversation and a few formally interviewed whose situations made them neither agency people nor street people. These included a few downtown area merchants, a few rooming house or residential hotel operators or managers, and a few hotel employees. One beer parlour waiter, with over a dozen street people sitting in his bar on Welfare Wednesday, gave as his opinion that street people never went to the bar. In his mind, it seemed, if they could afford beer, they could not be street people.

No merchant I spoke to complained of street people hurting business, of shoplifting or panhandling. All expressed mild concern or compassion.

Rooming house operators were less charitable in their impressions of street people:

Street people are the result of indulgent parenting.

They live in a hole in the ground, they always get kicked out when they rent because they wreck the place.

A number are armed with knives, don't turn your back on them, it would be naive to do so.

All they think about is their drink or their drugs, their next bottle or their next fix.

Most street people are drinkers, druggers, drink Listerine, canned heat . . . live by prostitution, violence, former tenant recently knifed another man.

Two managers disagreed as to who was the least desirable tenant:

People from Quebec are the worst . . . rent to one Frenchman, you've got four in the room first thing you know . . . they are the most vicious and violent.

Young people are the worst, eighteen to twenty years old.

One landlady complained of "the inflexibility of the Welfare" in dealing with mentally ill tenants. Two tenants apparently maintained rooms, without occupying them for two or three weeks at a time. Again, mentally ill were mentioned as the exceptions -- street people who didn't drink or drug.

Another operator justified charging twenty-five dollars in excess of Income Assistance rates for a room on the grounds that:

It's twenty-five dollars they won't be spending on liquor.

Another rooming house manager stated:

The street people I see are all welfare recipients.

Then added:

There's jobs out there for every one of them, sure for \$5.50 an hour, but we all start somewhere.

In general, rooming house owners and operators have less sympathy for street people than do agency people. Street people are seen as welfare dependent, drug and alcohol addicted, and unwilling to work. Many are perceived to be violent and carry knives.



## SUMMARY

As suggested, agency people's images of street people display variation both intra- and inter-organizationally. Common threads and themes, however, link all components of the skid row archipelago. Among these motifs and themes are (1) race and race relations, (2) drug use, (3) employment and sources of income, (4) violence, (5) the street as mutual aid community, and (6) explanations of spree behaviour.

First, according to figures supplied by the Interior Indian Friendship Society, at least 7500 Native people live in the Greater Kamloops region (area population 100 000). Of this 7500, about 3500 live on ten area reserves, while in excess of 4000 live off reserve. During the summer and fall of 1992, approximately fifteen percent of street people observed appeared to be Native (with men and women in roughly equal numbers). Therefore Natives seem to be over-represented on skid row relative to their proportion of the general population.

Perhaps the most significant thing about the racial composition of street people was the paucity of comment by agency people about it. Apart from comments by a worker at the Interior Indian Friendship Society (who was approached for the specific purpose of discussing Natives on skid row) only two agency people mentioned race when describing street people. One observation was by a Salvation Army employee, in reference to the part played by residential schools in damaging Native children. This echoed remarks by the Friendship Society staff member. A second mention was from a person with the New Life Mission who felt that much of the Natives' plight could be blamed upon their pagan culture. Despite this, the Mission staffer believed Native street people show more willingness to help themselves than do their white counterparts.

For the most part, agency people do not seem to see race as an issue or problem on the street. The Friendship Society employee was asked directly: "Is there racism on the street?" The response was

No. You have cliques, petty jealousies, but not based on race.

Street Beat workers speculated on the absence from the downtown area of Native youth. Workers felt that Native teenagers usually avoided skid row, tending to congregate instead in North Kamloops. In fact, Street Beat had previously tried, unsuccessfully, to establish an outreach on the North Shore. The amount of time required to establish trusting relationships with a second group of street kids was, they came to feel, detracting from work with the original bunch. This difficulty in establishing credibility also underlined the discrete memberships of the two groups of street kids.

Second, agency people at all facilities describe street people (with a few exceptions) as frequent drinkers, heavy drinkers, or alcoholics. To a far lesser extent, drug use is mentioned as a characteristic of the street person profile. Yet when the images are those seen from the street, by street people -- as in Chapter IV -- greater prevalence of drug use is apparent.

Third, the question of employment and income was another dominant motif in agency imagery of the street. Beginning with Anderson (1923), the literature shows a gradual diminishment of the importance of labour income and a corresponding increase in dependence on welfare over time. Anderson's hobos were first and foremost workers. With Wiseman (1970) and Spradley (1970) many bums and skid row alcoholics still worked as day labourers, unskilled or semiskilled casual labourers, and so on, but saw welfare as more desirable. By the time of Hauch (1985) only the dregs of menial physical labouring jobs still existed for skid row men.

In 1992, in Kamloops, welfare is almost the only game in town. Each Welfare Wednesday, places like the Hostel, Mission, and Drop In are either deserted or have a corporal's guard of clients. As mentioned, a few people collect military pension, disability pension or old age pension. A few scrape a livelihood out of scavenging cans and bottles. Some enter and leave the work force periodically as taxi drivers. But for most street people the welfare cheque is the main or sole source of income.

One anomaly is the drug dealer (a couple of whom double off and on as taxi drivers) who often makes a lot of money. Since virtually any profit realized is converted to drugs for the dealer's own use, this type is usually just as broke as anyone else on skid row. Indeed, the drug dealers interviewed in Chapter IV all reported that they still collected welfare despite their apparent income.

Panhandling is another source of income agency people feel street people pursue. Several staff at the Mission or Drop In reported clients bragging of making \$100 for a half day's work. This, too, I will examine briefly in Chapter IV. Panhandling, of course, is one of those constants on the street: Anderson (1923) mentions it in some detail, as, to a lesser extent do Wiseman (1970), Spradley (1970), Brody (1971), Drigo (1984), and Hauch (1985).

Fourth, there is the theme of violence in the streets. In the agency person's view of street people a seeming paradox exists here. Various staff members typified street people as belonging to a family, having high peer loyalty, helping each other out, sticking up for each other, backing each other up and so on. Almost as frequently, agency personnel saw the street as violent and threatening.

Street people were beaten, robbed, and extorted. Several times it was mentioned that they carried weapons. To some staff members it almost seemed that, to be a street person, was to carry a knife. Presumably the knives were protection against other denizens of the street, for when robberies or beatings took place, they were carried out by other street people. Only rarely did violence involve a "square john" or outsider.

So we have an image of community, a mutual aid society of street people, where "all for one and one for all" is the ideal. On the other hand, we have many, perhaps most, street people armed against their peers. It is difficult to see these images as anything other than mutually contradictory. Yet often both images would be blithely presented by the same agency person. In Chapter IV I shall further examine this paradox, attempting to see it as street people do.

Several times agency people presented the image of street people as lacking self-esteem or having a low sense of self-worth and little self-confidence. Street people were seen as de-energized, overly dependent, lost, not able to stand on their own two feet, not caring for themselves, not even trying, not taking responsibility for themselves.

In Chapter IV I shall examine explanations given by street people for why this may appear to be so.

## IV. IMAGES FROM THE STREET

### STREET LEVEL

The agencies considered in the previous chapter are relatively fixed in place, both literally and figuratively. Each provides a specific vantage -- a unique window from which the street may be viewed. Street people, on the other hand, are mobile and may acquire polymorphic views of persons, institutions, and events in their environment. These two views, then, are not opposing: they do not present themselves as equivalent or symmetrical. They are contiguous, without being mirror images.

For this reason, reflections from the street tend to resist the relatively structured presentation applied to agency images of the street. From the fairly fixed perspective of agencies, imagery and thematic content tend to be shaped and controlled by the organizational forms in which they are embedded. The RCMP, for instance, display clear and stable pictures of street people and events in their world. In contrast, images of the RCMP from the street are intertwined with multiple and complex visions of law, authority figures, criminal justice and other fragmentary reflections. If the collective agency illustration is like a sculpture, the corresponding amalgam street person's image resembles a collage.

The flows of images between agencies and the street are not necessarily reciprocal. Agencies that supply some sharp visions of street people, curiously, sometimes are not a factor in what street people portray of their surroundings. Such agencies include Street Beat, Phoenix Centre, and the Interior Indian Friendship Society. Each of these organizations was spoken of often by staff at other agencies, but mentioned only once or twice or not at all by street people themselves.

Those agencies that did receive mention, were usually mentioned a great deal, and often in conjunction with other issues. For instance, the police are usually spoken of in association with crime, imprisonment, or some other subject or theme. No neat

demarcation lines exist. In discussing what is important to street people, how they see the institutions around them, I discovered that the interconnectedness of street-level views defied attempts at neat description. The following themes serve more to orient than to define areas of discrete subject matter.

## SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

One Social Service employee talked of "the view from the other side of the counter." By that she doubtless meant the street client's account of the welfare transaction. It is that -- a street narrative on dealings with the Welfare office -- but at the same time is far more than that. It is also a street level appraisal of welfare as part of a larger calculation, a strategy of "getting by" as Anderson (1923) termed it. Street people seem to consider welfare the central or cornerstone facet of an overall survival strategy. To most street people, welfare is a given, a principal income source, around which other activities are organized. In most cases these other economic activities -- including, in various combinations, scavenging, panhandling, scams, theft, prostitution, drug dealing, bootlegging, and so on -- are supplementary and are viable only if welfare is secured. The feasibility of the other economic and recreational pursuits is dependent upon monthly welfare money.

Some Social Services staff felt that their agency was seen in a love-hate context by some street clients. The accounts of street people furnish evidence to support this:

"Come back later. We're awfully busy. We can't help you with that." So why do they need all those people to tell you that?

They think you got nothing better to do than keep going back or just sitting. They want you to always look for jobs, but [want you to] sit in their office all day.

Yeah, sit there and watch them do nothing.

The perception of these men was that welfare workers considered a client's time as relatively worthless, whereas the worker's time was correspondingly priceless. The system

seemed geared to the convenience of civil servants rather than to the needs of clients.

Another man offered a possible explanation:

Problem with the Welfare Office is a lot of the social workers [sic] are former recipients who have bettered themselves. They took courses and got off welfare themselves and now they lord it over unfortunates like they used to be . . . they might say they care and I guess maybe they do give a shit, but only from nine to five on days they're open.

This comment is reminiscent of Wiseman's finding about "ex-alcoholics" hired by the Christian Missionaries:

(They are former drunks themselves) and now they are drunk with power -- it's the old story of the corporal trying on the general's pants and getting a certain amount of authority (Wiseman, 1970: 206).

Hauch (1985: 42-43) relates a near-identical experience concerning a man caught between his obligations as a street person and his responsibilities as a new employee of the Salvation Army.

While some street people may include front line workers in their extended group, a few are suspicious:

I went to go into the Welfare, but I saw the cops were in there. The Welfare tells them if somebody they want is coming by for their cheque. And they sit and wait for you to show up. I've known a few guys to get it that way.

Several others at the Drop In, hearing this, scowled or shook their heads in the negative.

One man seemed to sum up the contrary view:

They have to be frauding the Welfare, that's why the cops are there. If the cops checked on all the guys they want, you know they'd be there every day.

The image of the Social Services employees as police stooges was not upheld by most street people. In the above response, for example, there is an implication that the Welfare may legitimately call in the police if they are the party being defrauded, while it is dirty pool to allow themselves to be bait in a trap. In the latter case, they are "ratting" after a fashion, involving themselves in something seen as none of their business.

It would be inaccurate to portray street recipients of welfare as being overly critical of Social Services. Most street people show a calm acceptance most of the time. Most display a pleased anticipation as Welfare Wednesday approaches. Wiseman (1970: 34) reported that men on skid row greeted each other with, "Tomorrow's the day! Tomorrow's the day!" one day before the welfare cheques arrived. Similarly, street people at the Drop In, New Life Mission, or Hostel cheerfully remind each other, "Payday tomorrow! Tomorrow's payday!" However, there are a few issues that elicit strong feelings from significant numbers of street people.

One of these is the belief that people attempting to get off the system have impediments put in their way. Particularly, people who take schooling, training or upgrading report loss or threat of loss of welfare support:

They reward wino bums . . . the system keeps you on welfare . . . you can't go to school -- if you are a bum they will treat you well. It is unjust. They should be trying to get people off -- they reward you for doing nothing with your life. There has to be a way out -- pay people to go back to school.

Since I'm on the system, I've had a lot more compassion for people like my sister. She's a fighter, but the system has really rode her down. She tried to get off, applied for a student loan, and they just cut her off. She had two or three months no help before she even heard from the student loan.

In the case of the young man who complained of the preferential treatment offered wino bums, with the withdrawal of his welfare support he was forced to reorder his strategies. He continues with his education, but reports that he has returned to drug dealing to remedy his financial shortfall.

There is, too, a great deal of resentment and animosity toward the other face of the Welfare: child protection. A large minority of street people tell of their involvement, as children, with social workers, foster homes and family court. Not a one, from teen-aged to middle-aged, has much that is good to say about his or her experiences:

The foster home was full of *really* troubled kids. Everyone was doing drugs. But I felt more at home on the street.

Social workers don't listen. When I was four or five and my sister was nine, Mom left for three days. Neighbours phoned the Welfare. They did



nothing. I didn't talk to them next time, just waited until I was old enough to leave.

Sat in a social worker's office for two hours, spoke four words, later saw several page report [to family court], fabrications -- that hurt, really hurt. Here was an important, educated woman, giving me a death sentence in words.

Social workers would pretend to listen, but nothing would happen. [I] hated these workers, couldn't trust them.

Native children, taken from reserves and placed in white foster homes for most of their formative years, appear to be those most in limbo. Like the previous generation of Natives who were victimized by the residential school system, Native kids acculturated in white foster homes do not become white, nor are they able to fit in on a reserve. The several Native hard drug addicts encountered in the research all had this foster home background in common.

A point that rankles some street people is the Social Services requirement that single employable recipients document their attempts to obtain employment. Implicit is the street person's understanding that there are no jobs; the Welfare is also aware of the situation, but the charade must go on. Considering that non-compliance with this perceived demeaning bureaucratic game puts a client's income in jeopardy, the responses are illuminating:

I just open the phone book and copy down some construction outfits. They'll never fucking phone, anyway.

I said I lost, misplaced the form and couldn't remember just what I'd put on it. They gave me a new one next month and just started over.

The contempt for this requirement and the sarcasm it generates ("job hunting -- we should hunt something that's fucking extinct?") is doubtless based in part on reaction to a stereotype: the image of street people as bums who refuse to work. If the number of street people perusing the help wanted ads in the newspapers and the Canada Employment Centre job listings is any indication, quite a few really do want to find work. Most seem to feel quite acutely, however, that the odds are against them.

Appearances -- clothing, hair, earrings -- limited access to shaving or bathing facilities, together with sparse or nonexistent work histories conspire to put street people at a severe disadvantage when it comes to competing for jobs. Kamloops is a city where even the deflated unemployment figures of Statistics Canada have, for a decade, run at twelve or fourteen percent (and real unemployment may be twice or triple that). Street people are keenly aware that the job market is largely closed to them.

That having been said, it should also be emphasized that some street people do work. One man worked on call as a swamper with a moving van franchise. Two men and one woman worked intermittently as cab drivers. Another man was a weekend musician, doing occasional dates at Legions and clubs. Others laboured seasonally, particularly Natives who picked fruit in the Okanagan and Wenatchee Valleys.

Numerous middle-aged and older men had employment histories as equipment operators, miners, cooks -- a whole range of jobs that have largely disappeared along with the megaprojects that created them. In many cases, age, declining health, and substance abuse (not to mention loss of hope at ever working again) have rendered these men largely unemployable.

Many younger men have no work history at all. The aforementioned van line employee alleged that these young men are seen as:

Useless, who'd hire these assholes? [They're] unskilled, [have] poor attitudes, no work history. They're used to welfare, jail, bars, clubs, drugs -- nothing else. Don't have a clue how to make money legitimately, and look down on those that do.

If legitimate employment avenues are blocked, what illicit or other means to survive are available? There are many, indeed, and they are of great variation. Several street people, usually older men, scavenge for bottles, aluminum cans, and other discarded objects. In itself, this is not illegal, but, when monies earned are not divulged to the Welfare, it can be considered a "scam." Scams may or may not involve the Welfare

Office (as was discovered in the previous chapter, Social Services personnel do not consider street people likely frauds or cheats).

Apart from failing to report earnings (a more passive fraud) other welfare scams include obtaining Income Assistance from two or more jurisdictions for the same month.

The wisdom of the street proclaims that there are loopholes to be exploited:

What you do is, when you get to Calgary, don't tell them you just came from B.C., 'cause they'll know that you already got a cheque. You say you're from T.O. and they won't know if you did or didn't, but you're not saying you did anyway. So you get a cheque in Calgary and you can even get one in Regina by telling them you're from T.O. and heading out to B.C.!

Again, as the previous chapter indicated, this belief is false. Only worker negligence should allow such a ploy to succeed.

Another popular scam usually takes place in late spring or early summer. Here, the street person moves without giving notice<sup>22</sup>, using the rent money<sup>23</sup> to travel or party. Sleeping in Riverside Park or on someone's floor may subsequently become necessary.

Clients claiming a bare larder occasionally approach the Welfare in mid-month for emergency help. If a grocery voucher is issued to address the crisis, this voucher may be flogged at a discount to obtain cash. The voucher may be redeemed and groceries then sold for a cash discount, or items may be returned to the store later for a refund.

Scams not involving the Welfare include shifting price tags on goods in a store to obtain a "bargain." A similar activity involves bilking a department store. An item is taken from one department to another, the price tag removed, and the object presented as a previous purchase, now returned with refund requested. The sales receipt, of course, is lost or in another coat.

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<sup>22</sup> If indeed, it has to be given. Most hotels and some rooming houses are exempt from landlord/tenant legislation.

<sup>23</sup> It is a common misconception that Social Services usually pays rent directly to the landlord. "Rent direct" is implemented only in exceptional cases, particularly when clients demonstrate a persistent or chronic inability to pay the rent themselves. Social Services is extremely reluctant to pay a client's rent directly as they feel that such arrangements rob the client of opportunities to learn responsibility and to maintain self-respect.

The old standby, however, is panhandling -- usually begging money from passers-by on the street. There is disagreement as to the usefulness of panhandling. Some men report little or no success:

Aw, three bucks, all fucking morning for about three bucks.

Others bragged, one man crowing:

I made twenty bucks in less than an hour. Some days I've cleared a hundred dollars easy.

Some panhandlers appear to have finely worked strategies and tactics to make the endeavour a paying proposition:

Get the office workers when they're coming back from coffee. The women feel sorry for you and the salesman, whatever, he has to make a donation or otherwise look like a cheap asshole in front of the broads.

You stand in the middle of the sidewalk when everybody gets out after a Sunday morning of screaming for their Jesus. That's the perfect time for the right guy to clean up. . . . Just don't work the same church too often or a couple of heavies will check you out before the flock come by for fleecing. And stay away from Catholic Mass. They're the cheapest bastards. I'm no racist. I was raised RC and I know.

Panhandling is a good weather activity. As my field work took place mostly in the autumn, I couldn't gauge the effectiveness of panhandling in high summer. Those men who approached me in September, however, were definitely part of the three dollars per morning fraternity. Three men, who were frequently seen panhandling after Labour Day, seemed to be wasting their time. Their approach neither intimidated nor entertained. One seemed to evoke disgust, if anything, with his dour querulousness. Only once was any one of the three seen to be given anything.

A peculiar survival stratagem that hints of drug acquisition behaviour is the collecting and processing of cigarette butts. This is an economic/recreational activity of larger proportions than an outsider might imagine. Numerous times I witnessed men tearing open collected butts and rolling the recycled tobacco into cigarettes. On a few occasions a man had perhaps one to two hundred butts in a plastic bag. He hunched over, tearing open the butts as if he were shelling peas.

Lore of the street indicates the best locations for finding the choicest butts. One such place is the main Public Library on Victoria. The building is smoke-free, so visitors and workers step outside to a sheltered area. Sand urns contain some longish, hastily butted cigarettes. As the Library is on the track from the Hostel to the Drop In, it is checked for butts a few times a day.

In dry weather there are gleanings from sidewalks. In wet weather the malls are a possibility. When other sources are exhausted (and Welfare Wednesday draws nigh) ashtrays in the Drop In, pool hall and bars are checked. Often these butts are made from previously recycled butts (which may themselves be descended from reused butts, which may . . . ad infinitum).

One regular claimed:

It began as a fucking joke, but a time or two ago when smokes went a way up in taxes, it wasn't just the odd misfit and retard, everybody started picking up butts from the street. Fuck me, I don't even think about it anymore, 'cause I used to wonder what some of these scums might have, you know, AIDS or some fucking thing! [laughs] But a guy's gotta smoke!

Those street people who do not smoke are nearly as rare as the few who do not drink. In addition, a recent study linked these and other behaviours:

Compared with nonsmokers, cigarette smokers report a higher lifetime frequency of substance abuse, severe depression, anxiety disorders, and personality disorders involving aggressive or antisocial behaviour (Bower, 1991: 351).

A decade ago, a carton of cigarettes cost less than ten dollars. It now costs over fifty dollars. Fine cut tobacco prices have risen accordingly. No wonder that discarded cigarette butts have attained such increased importance. One has to wonder, though, what the long-term health implications are for street people who practise this toxic recycling.

Gambling and games of chance are not features of street life, with the exceptions of bingo and lottery tickets. Several street people, particularly Native women, mentioned an interest in bingo playing. One woman, having won a jackpot of a few hundred dollars, felt

compelled to declare the winnings to Social Services. Had not the names of winners been made known publicly, she might have chosen not to divulge.

Many street people purchase lotto tickets, particularly on Welfare Wednesday. Quite often those tickets bought are of the "scratch and win" or instant win variety. For whatever reason, there seems less interest in buying a chance on a number to be drawn a week or two hence.

### RULEBREAKERS, RULEMAKERS

There is no clear boundary where scams become serious criminal activity. The usual penalty for the latter is somewhat greater than that accruing to the former. Also, the strategy of getting by, with its attendant income strategies, drifts into other, more overtly criminal, activities, like drug use. Prostitution, for its part, can be either income generating strategy or drug acquisition strategy, or both. Similarly, as previously indicated, drug use and violence are intertwined themes with implications for the criminality of street people.

Central to any treatment of criminal activity, violence, and drugs is the role of the police. Previous studies (Wiseman, 1970; Spradley, 1970; Drigo, 1984) document widespread hostility directed by street people toward the police. Often, this hostility was reciprocated (see Chapter III), although not in kind, because of the power differential. Yet, In Kamloops, cop-hating is the exception, rather than the norm, among street people.

This is not to say that street people *like* the RCMP: recall the frantic exit from the Drop In when an officer delivered some doughnuts or the response of the man on seeing the RCMP in the Welfare Office. Attitudes range from approval to rabid condemnation, but most fit somewhere around sullen acceptance or grudging respect:

Cops are just doing their job. When they hassle you, you are generally asking for it. If they bust you, well, you likely did something bustable. There are some assholes, but there are in any group you want to mention. Cops are no different.

I was harassed every day in Revelstoke, but only twice here [Kamloops] when I gave them reason to. They don't drive around looking for me. I don't get hassled because I don't do anything to deserve it. I have no problems at all with them [RCMP].

Police are not bad in Kamloops. Some good ones, some bads. Just doing their job when they busted me.

Cops in this town are like referees in a hockey game. You fuck up, elbow, trip, slash, they blow the whistle, you go off for two minutes, five minutes. They're just doing their jobs, playing the game same as you.

A different image was cast by a few men. Interestingly, these venomous portrayals of the RCMP were all by self-admitted hard drug users and dealers:

Cops are the lowest of the low. You know where cops come from? They are the guys in high school that everybody else pounds on, tosses into the lockers, they get smacked around and then they put a uniform on them, that's why they're the way they are.

You know, I can always tell a cop. My gut gets, uh, like I want to puke. Really does! My gut always tells me when there is a cop around, it hasn't failed yet!

Cops, man, I'd just like to rip their heads off and shit down the neck!

Harness bulls are liable to bust up your rig [hypodermic syringe]. Harness bulls think we're shit but basically don't do much. Narcs are a different story.

Even with this animosity, however, comes some recognition that cops are just doing their jobs. The most caustic and derogatory outbursts by street people on the subject of police seem to coincide with instances of criminal behaviour perpetrated by cops. In particular the police in Vancouver and Edmonton are singled out for mention. Stories are told of officers beating men in elevators or interrogation rooms in Vancouver. A man, about thirty, relates the following incident:

So they're giving us the usual shit and abuse. The big fat one calls us motherfuckers and just like that [snaps fingers] my brother comes back at him, "If your mother wasn't out working the street, we wouldn't be fucking her, would we?" Man, after they got through pounding on us, I shit blood for a week!

In both Edmonton and Vancouver, it is asserted, drugs seized as evidence are used or sold by "bent" cops. Often only a small fraction of the confiscated dope is later submitted as evidence in court.

Much of the criticism of the police comes from those instances where they are not "just doing their job," but are perceived to be engaged in criminal activities themselves. Street people consistently display an acute sensitivity to hypocrisy on the part of those in authority.

A slightly different slant on enforcing the law is offered by the same street types. One drug user complained:

Cops and other authorities shouldn't be made to hassle people who are just having a good time.

This is akin to the process, "defense of the Good", proposed by Katz (1988). To legitimize and justify criminal and anti-social behaviour, the "deviant" strives to have the behaviour redefined as actually being desirable. Here, drugging behaviours are seen merely as exercises in a person's pursuit of happiness or pleasure, a socially applauded concept.

Similarly, other drug-using street people argue for legalization (or decriminalization) of drugs:

I'd legalize dope, man. An addict isn't a criminal, he's a sick person. Yeah, legalize heroin and tax it to pay for places like this [Phoenix Detox]. Look at Amsterdam, in Holland, they legalize dope and tourism is up 1000% and the gangs, the criminals are out of it. A guy could lead a normal life, work, the whole bit . . . he doesn't have to be a criminal, they make him a criminal.

It's all supply and demand, eh? I saw a need [for heroin] and I met it. Nobody has to buy, do they? Legalize it and take the black market side out of it.

Here, self-justification argues that bad laws create bad people and advocates decriminalization of drugs.

Another hard drug user/dealer took me to task for my employment of the term "drug abuse." In effect, he was accusing me of ethnocentrism:

This is prejudice. Who says what's use and what's abuse? People just use things differently and use words like "abuse" as a put-down. In other words, you use different than me, you're abusing, which makes me out to be okay. Shouldn't anybody be throwing rocks with all the glass houses around.



Clearly, this man believed the best defense of his lifestyle was an offensive against labelling by outsiders.

An interesting insight is provided by the angry reaction of street addicts when they encounter a drug dealer who is a non-user. This unlikely occurrence elicited the following reaction:

Fundamental scum is the name for it. It's just, well, kind of disgusting . . . if a guy is using and dealing, you can understand where he's coming from. He's likely solid, you know, or he wouldn't be set up. But a guy that just does it for whatever, there's no excuse. I wouldn't buy from him unless I was desperate, because I don't know what his game is.

The most vitriolic reaction to authority and hypocrisy was aimed not at police, but at more distant figures, particularly politicians. Perhaps because they are perceived as the ultimate rule makers, yet at the same time give the impressions of flouting the rules, they are doubly resented by those who are relatively powerless. Street people do seem to respect power and the powerful, but allow no latitude for human frailty. The deceitful and maladroit are turned on savagely.

In response to an item on a radio news broadcast, a Drop In patron exclaimed:

That fucking Mulrone, give that cocksucker an enema and you'd need a microscope to find him.

An older man, on his second of three days at the Hostel, offered these sentiments:

Trudeau warned us about this fucking Mulrone, eh? He said, "Look out if you're poor, or elderly, or sick." We didn't fucking listen. People just don't learn. If Canadians had any pride, they'd shoot a son-of-a-bitch like Mulrone as soon as he opened his fucking mouth. Shoot the lying fucking asshole dead.

On October 26, 1992<sup>24</sup> a referendum vote was held in Canada. During the days leading up, the "yes" and "no" arguments on the worth of the Charlottetown Accord were not a topic of conversation at the Drop In or elsewhere on skid row. Voting day itself was

<sup>24</sup> For those gratefully absent from Canada during this recent constitutional spasm, about 56 per cent of the country voted "No" to this "package" of proposals. British Columbia, at around 68 per cent "No," was a bastion of the negative vote. Within B.C., the Kamloops area was at approximately 73 per cent "No." Judging by voting day comments skid row Kamloops was an epicentre of resistance to the Charlottetown Accord. Many apparently perceived the "package" to grant special constitutional rights to Quebec and to aboriginal peoples, at the expense of the rest of Canadians.

a different matter. A man entered the Drop In shortly after 9:00 a.m. He announced to a handful of people that, "I've just come from voting!"

Another man gravely intoned, with mock seriousness, "I find out you voted 'yes', I'll kick your teeth down your throat." Both men laughed.

As the day wore on, it was plain that only a "no" vote was acceptable on the streets of Kamloops. If anyone differed, he kept it a well-guarded secret. Anti-Quebec feeling was a noticeable component with those who elaborated on their choice:

I hope the whole country votes "no" to that agreement. Then Quebec can get the fuck out, and they can give all their money back to Ottawa in Canadian dollars. All they owe. Then the rest of the country can get on with being Canada. Piss on them.

There were vigorous nods and mutterings of agreement. One young man excitedly exclaimed, "Fucking right!"

Interestingly, none of the anti-Quebec sentiment was directed at French Canadian street people (of whom several were present). It did not seem a personalized issue, despite the obviously high level of emotion displayed. Moreover, there was no expression of anti-aboriginal feeling, nor were any of several Natives encountered throughout the day heard to voice an opinion on the referendum.

Following the U. S. presidential election a discussion arose. A consensus opinion at the Drop In was that:

Bush fucking blew it. He didn't take Saddam out. Should have blown that camel-humper to kingdom fucking come.

Yeah, if he had snuffed Saddam he'd still be president.

The assumption, unquestioned, was that it was within the U.S. President's power to do what was suggested. That he did not do so was seen as a failure of will. Again, weakness in "social betters" is little tolerated.

Later, an intense young man asked several of his friends, "How can you tell when a politician is lying?" He then gleefully answered his own question, "His lips move!"

Several days later a middle-aged regular at the Pool Hall and Drop In defined a politician as:

A guy who takes a shit and afterwards doesn't have a clue which heap to tie the belt around.

A sometimes hard drug user encountered in The Plazoo<sup>25</sup> had reservations about legalizing hard drugs. Although vaguely in favour of decriminalization, he feared that politicians would tend to become drug lords as drug taxes made them increasingly wealthy:

We could legalize, but it might be better to isolate. Because if heroin is legal, cops become pushers and politicians become drug head honchos. It'll just spread cancer to healthy areas.

A final comment on politicians and the political process goes to an old age pensioner who remembers a boyhood on the Prairies during the 1920s and 1930s:

Street people are just a symptom of corruption and inequality, but the NDP sold out, so maybe there is no solution.

This feeling that there is no solution, no way out, is one that is prevalent on skid row. With many street people it takes the form of a vague dissatisfaction or inarticulated frustration. With others, it is a nightmare image of the future, even an apocalyptic vision.

## DYSTOPIAS, DRUGS, AND VIOLENCE

As observed in Chapter III, agency staffers occasionally remarked that street people faced, at best, an uncertain future. Many street people agree, but put it in stronger terms. If the future is as bleak as many street people envision it to be, then living in the present, insulated with as much booze and dope as possible, becomes a rational decision. Dystopian visions can also excuse a botched life, for, in the midst of perceived cosmic disintegration, who is to care about or take notice of an individual failure?

One man, much nearer the end of his life than the beginning, saw this future:

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<sup>25</sup> The beer parlour in the Plaza Hotel. Dubbed "The Plazoo" by management, it is advertised as a watering hole for "party animals."

You know what things are going to be like fifteen years from now? Next year, sometime, the financial system is going to collapse. Stock markets, currency, everything. The forest industry has had it, mines are closing, fish are all dead. The whole fucking planet is playing out. Your banks, they'll come out of it okay, if anyone does. What there is of it still worth owning, they'll own. Most of it will be totally fucked up. Cities no one can live in, crime -- they'll just need to start shooting the cocksuckers -- courts and jails won't be able to handle it. And the police won't be around, with no taxpayers to pay their salary.

A man nearly forty years younger responded to my asking what might be done by saying:

Nothing. What is the point? The world is a hopeless and fucked up place. Everything is dying, strangled, poisoned. People are shit and deserve what they get. It's too late for everything and everybody. Everything we do makes it worse, so why do anything except what we want? Anything we do has the same result, so who is someone to say this is good, this is evil? It is all the same.

Another young man lamented:

Canada is turning into a communist police state, they're fingerprinting elementary school kids . . . seventy percent of Canadians have criminal records.

These are not uncommon images, although they are more clearly articulated than most. The question emerges: does such extreme pessimism develop from living on the street, or does the street attract nihilistic minds? Dreary years of living in a hostel or rooming house, eating at a mission, shopping for clothing at a thrift store -- these life constraints are not conducive to optimistic visions. It would seem much more likely that street life fosters or at least exacerbates feelings of futility and morbidity. Since these images are spread throughout society, it is difficult to imagine skid row acting as a magnet for those imbued with *weltschmerz*.

There are other points to consider regarding these dystopian images. Seeing the future as a drab and dreary (not to mention scary) place can be, at least in part, projection of a personal present on a collective future. Further, for a person placed in a position of dependency, imagining the future to be in the hands of impersonal forces (or an oligarchy so alien and distant as to amount to the same thing) removes any need for risk-taking or personal responsibilities. Any decision is the wrong one, and anyway, there is no choice.

Yet, perhaps that is not so, and there is some choice in the matter. A decision to live for the moment seems rational if tomorrow and the tomorrows beyond are hopelessly degraded. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die," sums it up nicely.

Many, of course, construct no externalized dystopias but put the future purely in a personal context:

My life is as good as over. I'm *never* going to get off the heroin. I stuck a needle in first time when I was eight [is now twenty-eight years old]. This is all I have known, all I can do, all I'm *ever* going to do.

A thirty year old man stated:

Aw, if I was younger, but you can't start over if you're older. There's no way to unfuck yourself once you're past a certain point.

Another man in his mid to late twenties told someone who was trying to console him:

I'm no fucking good to anyone. There's no point to life . . . it's no good. You don't understand. My kid would be better off without a dad.

The frequent observation by agency personnel that street people lack self-esteem seems borne out. Again, however, seeing oneself as a loser or victim serves a function: one does not have to risk failure. No personal responsibility need be taken.

Numerous agency people proposed a connection between street people -- whom they saw as "damaged," "in pain," "injured," or "abused" -- and alcohol and drug taking behaviours. Drugs and alcohol were to "buffer the pain" or "kill the pain" and were a coping strategy. Obviously, the drinking and drugging "worked," in a pragmatic sense, or the behaviour would not have been continued. Over time, the partial solution becomes part of the problem. Instead of making life more bearable, the drinking and drugging become the person's life.

Anderson (1923) noted a difference between drug use (secretive) and drinking (open). A similar observation was made by Polsky regarding hard and soft drug use:

Although beat heroin users and beat marihuana smokers are part of one subculture, they tend to split into two separate groups when it comes to the specific activity of taking drugs, each developing its own customs (Polsky, 1967: 170).

A like division exists among street people in Kamloops. On one hand are hard drug users and on the other are drinkers of beverage alcohol<sup>26</sup>. The groups are not mutually exclusive, and members of both groups do use soft drugs or prescription drugs coterminously with heroin and alcohol<sup>27</sup>. Heroin and cocaine users, however, who are also heavy drinkers (and vice versa) do not mix drugging and drinking. A person may be part of one group at one time, part of the other group at a different time, but not part of both simultaneously.

Drinking and getting drunk are popular topics of conversation where street people congregate (like the Drop In). Only once, however, did I hear a comment about drug use. This occurred when a man indicated the eagle tattooed on his arm, saying he "really cranked it up the eagle's ass yesterday." The garish blue and red bird hides the scabs and bruising, evidence of repeated injections. Apart from the secrecy associated with drug use, another reason for overhearing so few references to substance abuse (other than alcohol) was that the hard drug users spent far less time at places like the Drop In than did other street people.

One man who has lived on the streets for ten years (since he was a teenager) described a normal day:

I sit in the Plaza [Plazoo beer parlour] say, and a guy comes up, wants a gram of coke. I get it for him, it costs me seventy dollars, I sell it to him for one hundred dollars and take a quarter of it as well. I do this ten or twelve times a day at least. . . . I make a thousand dollars a day, but at the end of the day I'm just as broke as when I began.

This man also reported taking cabs to other beer parlours, to lounges, clubs and other places in his role of middle level dealer.

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<sup>26</sup> As a rough generalization this division correlates with age. Drinkers tend to be older street people, hard drug users tend to be younger. However, exceptions are numerous.

<sup>27</sup> One hard drug user detailed his usage over the previous thirty days in these proportions: marijuana use, 30/30 days; codeine use, 30/30 days; valium use, 30/30 days; heroin use, 20/30 days; demerol use, 20/30 days; morphine use, 3/30 days; cocaine use, 20/30 days; alcohol use, 1/30 days; barbiturate use, 1/30 days.

As in Anderson's time hard drug users tend to stay put. A heroin addict is typically a non-transient street person due to a need to access supply. As one heroin dealer/user put it:

I can find dope when no one else can. I'm selling expertise, what I know, who I know, and there's always lots of people want to buy.

Relocating in a distant city means that a reputation for reliability and discretion must be labouriously reacquired. This is a leap in the dark most street level users and dealers will not take. One man thought it preferable to go to jail for a few years than to leave an area in which he was a part of the drug infrastructure. Indeed, according to several men, access to drugs is more likely in jail than in a city in which they have not lived before. A few men remarked that their introduction to heroin or intravenous drug use occurred in jail.

Although some writers (Anderson, 1923; Polsky, 1967) portray hard drug use as a solitary act and liquor or soft drug use as more conducive to group behaviour, numerous instances of hard drug partying are recounted. Generally such gatherings seem more fraught with danger or brutality. Drinkers and soft drug users will steer clear of hard drug types for this reason, citing possible hassles and sudden violence as deterrents. Heroin or coke addicts themselves will mention the possibility just as often, but will euphemize it. In this way, a savage beating will be a "straightening out" or "having the facts of life explained."

One young man was once sold what was purported to be cocaine, but in actuality was pure Drano. After injecting the bogus coke, the man spent a lot of time in the Intensive Care Unit. This same man also spoke calmly about the dangerous habit of sharing needles, which he admitted to doing out of impatience. He spoke, too, of having been beaten and shot at. All in a day's work.

Also part and parcel of the hard drug enclave is the brutalization of women. Several male heroin addicts ventured the idea that their drug of choice had aphrodisiac qualities. One man insisted, as well, that heroin made him more popular with women:

It's amazing what a girl will do for a little packet of powder . . . amazing!  
The first thing I get them to do is bark like a dog, then, say there's five guys  
in the room, why then, five blow jobs and this little envelope is yours!

At first I thought the man was being sarcastic or sardonic, but no subtlety was intended. The statement was meant to be as misogynistic as it appears, nor was it atypical. The following scenario was played out in a skid row beer parlour some weeks later.

A heavysset man was seated at a table with two smaller men. A thin, garishly attired young woman, perhaps in her late teens, approached the table. It crossed my mind that her eye make-up gave her the appearance of an anorexic raccoon. She apparently requested money from the big man, because his reply (which carried) was:

You make me some money, then you can have money to stuff your guts!

Just enough for a hamburger . . .

Aw, for fucks sakes!

He raged in reply, sweeping several coins of change onto the floor, saying:

Get your fucking hamburger, then!

As she knelt to gather that change, she was told:

And don't sit on your ass in the coffee shop all night. Eat and get to work.

This public degradation ceremony underlines the usual status of women in the hard drug world: abused objects. A nineteen year old man suggested the danger to women who are not even part of the hard drug crowd:

[They] should have a youth shelter here. In summer, the kids sleep in Pioneer Park, Riverside [Park]. And with all the creeps using needles down there. What chance does a sixteen year old girl have, if she's sleeping down there and five whacked-out heroin addicts come across her?



Not just teen-aged girls, not just women, but most street people believe they are under frequent threat of violence. One man steered clear of the Drop In, preferring the New Life Mission:

I stay away from there [Drop In]. A lot of the young guys are trouble. You've got something they want, you better give it to them or they just take it. Some of the older guys are just as bad.

Other men had similar experiences:

The street has changed a lot in the last 6 to 7 years. These kids now don't give a shit about anything. They don't care what happens to them, what they do. It's got dangerous, violent. There are some really twisted people out there.

I'd get rid of the rip-off assholes, the ones who are vicious and violent. There's some that should be put someplace else.

Some of the animals you see around here deserve to be locked up. These are truly ugly people and to be avoided at all costs.

There's no honour among thieves, there used to be. Some guys will help you out, but don't trust them with your valuables. With some, don't turn your back.

A man who buys and sells prescription drugs related this story about one of his suppliers:

Wally, he isn't going to carry a roll or his per<sup>28</sup>. Somebody would take it away from him. That's one reason he sells to me, you know? One time some assholes were waiting for him when he came out of the drugstore. They grabbed his per and broke two ribs. People know when somebody is due, where they go to fill the per, and so on. I have to, to make my buys, eh?

"Drugs" was the reason given for a perceived increase in violence on the street:

Drugs . . . so much around, so many do it. It changes the way people think. . . . Hard drugs bring other stuff into it, guys do what they're told to do to get drugs, women, too. Tell kids, "Do this" [because] YOA [Young Offenders Act] protects you. Heavy stuff and no penalty paid . . . to a lot of [younger] guys, it doesn't seem bizarre, just business as usual. One kid, he was fifteen or seventeen was given a knife, told, "Carve that goof a new asshole." Kills guy, gets three years and is out already.

Even though people look after each other, [there's] often violence, usually over drugs.

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28 "Prescription"

There's always been drugs [on the street] but now bigger, more, where used to be rare . . . hand in hand with violence.

When street people attribute violence to the presence of drugs, they are indicating it is really the dealing that is fraught with violent possibilities. A man who makes extra money "straightening guys out" in the aftermath of a drug deal gone wrong offers several observations:

I almost never have to do anything . . . most muscle on the street is "do it yourself." A guy doesn't get to be a big honcho unless he's solid, rugged. Your big operators can all take care of themselves -- they don't need to buy muscle.

Killings resultant from rip-offs, or drug deals turned sour, are often mistakes:

Snuffs? It happens, but not much. Sometimes [it's] just discipline that gets out of hand. Some of the puppies at obedience school just have bad luck.

This occasional "enforcer" also corroborated other information asserting that one drug buyer in debt was sometimes enlisted to punish another bad debtor:

Guys [that] jackrabbit owing . . . can cut a deal to do some other guy to work off debt. This is when things can go wrong -- can't collect from a dead guy.

Violence resulting from drug *use* is also a possibility, especially with the use of stimulants. Grinspoon and Hedblom (1975) document the rage and havoc associated with amphetamine psychosis<sup>29</sup>. A similar state is produced by heavy usage of other central nervous system (CNS) stimulants, notably cocaine and its derivatives. Doubtless, there are instances of violence in which both usage and dealing of drugs are contributing factors.

A third violence-producing situation could be termed "traditional." This is violence associated with alcohol consumption.<sup>30</sup> After each Welfare Wednesday a number of street people sport black eyes and other noticeable bruises and abrasions. These injuries are

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<sup>29</sup> A byword of the 1960s was "speed kills." Speed (methamphetamine or "crystal") was rejected after a trial period by the hippie subculture that embraced marijuana and LSD. Over the last couple of decades, speed use (particularly intravenously) has been more associated with working class subcultures (like outlaw bikers). See Cavan (1972) and Grinspoon and Hedblom (1975).

<sup>30</sup> Katz (1988) notes that studies have consistently shown the presence of alcohol in two thirds of situations leading to homicide.

invariably associated with a drinking party of some proportions. Just as invariably the person other than the one relating the story got the worst of it. Logic suggests that, with the increase in polydrug use, the incidence of violence is potentiated along with the psychoactive effects of the combinant drugs.

An interesting situation is the apparent mutual animosity between people having one primary or declared drug of choice and another. As noted earlier, alcohol drinkers and hard drug users, quite consistently, are mutually exclusive groups. An addict stated: :

[I] don't like boozy fucking drunks around, [they] are unpredictable, sloppy, get mean when they get drunker. Go from feeling good to wanting a scrap. [Drunks] draw heat (police attention).

A soft drug addict (pot, peyote, LSD, etc.) painted this scene:

Spending time at the Plaza is an invitation to grief and hassles . . . alcohol and chemicals are bad news. Alcohol makes someone an instant asshole, then you mix in chemicals.

Alcoholics and heavy drinkers describe the drug crowd in much the same language. Addicts are seen as "unpredictable" and likely to draw police attention. One drinker confided that he would:

Spend more time at Central Station [pub] than the Plaza . . . fewer wannabee gangsters, hyped up punks [addicts] that like to hurt people. Got to whack down drug bosses [big dealers], killers, [have] heavy penalties: fuck with kids, get hanged.

Although a few individuals change group membership, by and large addicts and drunks are discrete groups. Where they are similar is in choice of substitutes for their drug of choice. Here again, however, they remain separate groups, because the substitutes (often black marketed prescription drugs) are used in different ways.

## DRINK AND DRINKERS

A man in his mid-fifties shared his feelings about alcohol and drugs. Over four decades, this man had used "whatever was available," which was likely every drug ever known on the street. What he always came back to was the certainty that:

Alcohol is still it. There's nothing else comes close to doing for me what it always does. Except heroin, a few times I've used it, shot up, eh? And it comes close, it isn't as good as booze, even when it is its best.

Although this man considered himself an alcoholic, his life history was punctuated by long periods of abstinence as well as periods of substitute substance use.

An expanding body of literature disputes the claim that alcoholism is either incurable or a disease. Allied studies have attacked a perceived tendency to consider most excessive or binge drinking as alcoholic. Heather and Robertson (1981, 1985) claim high rates of spontaneous remission of alcoholism symptoms over time. Earlier Cahalan (1970) had introduced findings that suggested alcoholism was not a progressive disease as diagnosed alcoholics were shown to be able to return to social drinking. It does not appear, however, that these types of studies controlled for substitution of other addictive substances.

What I found among Kamloops street people was a willingness to use "whatever was available." With the use of so many substances by so many individuals (polydrug use), old labels like alcoholic, drug addict and so on seem inadequate descriptors of what really takes place. Among street people, the height of the month's drinking occurs on Welfare Wednesday and the few days following. After the spree is over, a number of strategies emerge. Abstinence, practised by a few, needs little elaboration.

Interestingly, street people who cease their drinking do not relinquish their group membership. Neither do they automatically rise clear of skid row, like a buoyant object no longer anchored to the ocean floor. As one man in his early thirties remarked:

You know, guys that don't drink or smoke spend just as much. I stopped drinking one time for three months and didn't have any more money. Still bought drinks, bought rounds when I was playing pool, like. So it don't make any difference.

Previously mentioned as survival strategies, activities such as panhandling also serve as alcohol acquisition ploys. A small group of men were seen occasionally panhandling for the last required dollar or two in front of the Seymour Street liquor store. Their approach utilized a frank sincerity: "We need another buck and a half to get drunk,

brother." The shock of such blunt honesty, they seemed to think, would be more efficient than trying to claim that the money was for some other purpose.

This group, which occasionally formed briefly in front of the liquor store, fit the description of what the literature refers to as a "bottle gang" (Spradley, 1970; Hauch, 1985). The term "bottle gang" is one that is alien to the street. No one encountered during this study had ever heard the label before. The behaviour and activity it describes, however, are known. The street term is "making the run." This pooling of resources follows a spree period and avoids abstinence.

The run is made by a selected or appointed member of an *ad hoc* group of drinkers, usually numbering three to six. If, as in the above example, the group forms at the liquor store, (a rare tactic, employed only to procure the day's first bottle) no runner is required. Wherever the group has formed (often during the drinking of a previous bottle), whether it be somebody's room, an underground parking lot, an alley behind a dumpster, a collection is taken toward the next bottle. When the necessary sum is reached, a runner is chosen. Some care is exercised in choosing the best person available.

The person making the run must be -- or appear to be -- reasonably sober. Otherwise, there is the danger of attracting the attention of the police (bottle or funds lost to the group), or being refused service by the liquor vendor or clerk. The person must also have an acceptable record with previous runs to the bar, liquor store, or bootlegger. That is, the person has a record of coming back (not absconding) and with a sealed bottle (did not drink half of it on the way back). Other factors include the runner having a partner (girl friend, boy friend) in the waiting group, which is seen as reasonable guarantee. Also, if one person puts up the lion's share of the proceeds, this is a strong argument that they be the one who makes the run.

An alternative to raising money for communal bottles is the tactic of substitution. A number of substances are favoured, including after-shave (Aqua Velva, Bay Rum). These are relatively inexpensive (and are shoplifted with relative ease). Most popular,

perhaps, is a common disinfectant (Lysol) which retails for less than two dollars a can. Cough syrups and mouth wash concoctions are also desirable. One morning a discussion was overheard around the euchre table at the Drop In. Several players inquired of a Native woman regarding a rumour that her common-law had taken the altar call at the New Life Mission. The woman responded that he had, "Raised his hand and stumbled down to the front."

The several men playing cards digested this for a moment, then one suggested:

He was into the hair spray, Lysol, some fucking thing.

The woman replied:

Yeah, yeah, he was, but after, he got into some Listermint. He smelled good, but his head was really fucked up!

One of the more bizarre examples in the search for alternate intoxicants involves the long-playing record album. Two Newfoundlanders of middle age explained the process:

You take a few records and drop them in a big pot. You want them to sweat, so you don't crank the heat too high. Real low heat does it. After a while no more juice is coming, so you can put the heat up a little. Just to get a few more drops, maybe. Then you pour it off and cool it down, then drink it.

The men joked and laughed about whether Dolly Parton was better to drink than Barbara Mandrell. "Garf (sic) Brooks was okay, too!" enthused the more extroverted of the two.

Because drinking (whatever is drunk) is usually a more social activity than drugging, greater group solidarity is built up among drinkers than among druggers. Storytelling of past adventures enhances group feeling as do joking relationships (which also often recount shared experiences). Waiting for the mail to come on the morning of Welfare Wednesday, a Native man reminded his drinking buddies of a spree the previous summer:

Remember that time behind the United Church? You were passed out in the alleyway with your mouth open! And the flies [wiggles fingers extravagantly in front of face] they was buzzin' around it lookin' for a place to shit!

This anecdote touched off a series of remembrances of drunks past and a barrage of mutual insults. The camaraderie is centred around a single behaviour and often seems shallow (at least to an outsider) but very obviously builds a sense of identity and community among those enjoying it.

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Another phenomenon that appears to build community or group solidarity is the bestowing and use of nicknames or pseudonyms (street names). Most street people have pseudonyms, but not all. Many share a nickname, especially common ones like "Frenchie," "Newf," or "Cowboy." In this case a modifier is often attached (Big Frenchie, Old Frenchie). Some are known by their Christian names (or a diminutive thereof) with a modifier ("Fast" Eddie, "Big" Joe, "Uncle" Ronald). Almost never do street people know each others' full names.

An example of this arose one day when a call came on the public phone at the Drop In. A card player answered, then paged the person for whom the call was intended. By his attitude it seemed clear that he did not think the person was present, nor was he familiar with the name. When it was his partner at the card table who rose to take the call, his surprise was evident. The card partner was a man he drank with, played pool with, and who was observed to be perhaps his most constant companion over the preceding several weeks.

Wolf, in his excellent ethnography of an outlaw biker gang, deals at length with the function and meaning of nicknames:

Club names are particularly effective in facilitating the incorporation and maintenance of outlaw roles and identities. A nickname serves to bolster a patch holder's self-esteem by making him feel both important and unique as an individual; it is a declaration of personal identity (Wolf, 1991: 76).

While the names are alike and the bestowal process similar, I am not convinced that the same end is served as in Wolf's example. Among street people, being known as

Smokey, or Noodle, or Sharky could just as well be a protection against that person's "real" identity becoming known on the street. With many street people, only a street face is presented with the street name -- the full identity is affiliated elsewhere and will be reclaimed upon leaving the street. By this I mean that the role played by the street person is but a partial identity. "Who they really are" is guarded against the day when the life of the street can be left behind (and with it the identity known as Drifter, Snake, etc.).

Another reason may explain the use of pseudonyms on the street. Could it not be possible that who or what one used to be is of such unimportance on the street that previous identities become redundant? Yet street people, particularly when they are in their cups, are often heard to brag about what they once did and who they once were.

Another use of pseudonyms is in labelling. Often persons perceived as being mentally ill are awarded street names like Skitz, Space Monkey, Zombie, and so on. Usually there is a perjorative, "otherizing" element to these particular bestowals. The intent seems to be to signal exclusion, rather than acceptance.

In Chapter I the question was posed: are the mentally ill being dumped on the street, or is the street producing them? If alcoholism and drug addiction are, indeed, classified as mental illnesses, then most street people are mentally ill. Ironically, the handful of people on the street universally recognized as mentally ill (schizophrenics, manic-depressives, etc.) by agency people and other street people are usually abstainers from drugs or alcohol. Incidentally, they also usually are reported to abstain from the maintenance medication prescribed for them.

Scattered reports from both agency workers and people on the street indicate that the mentally ill and physically disabled are victimized more often than other street people. Typically, the mentally ill will be ripped off in a drug deal, while the physically handicapped will be robbed or suffer extortion.



A few individuals were apparently of the dually diagnosed type. One man, suffering from what appeared to be Tourette's syndrome, allegedly "chipped"<sup>31</sup> at a hard drug habit. Another, a thirty-nine year old man with Korsakoff's syndrome<sup>32</sup>, was mentioned. An examining physician reported:

I spoke to the man for a few minutes, received fantastic accounts of trips in flying saucers and such. I went out to the nursing station for a moment, and when I returned to the room, the man had no recollection of ever having seen me before. No one wants to take this fellow. Nursing homes and extended care facilities feel he is too young, also maybe that his memory loss is self-inflicted. Yet he has to be institutionalized, he can't remember recent events from one second to the next. If no one takes him, I'll have to release him tomorrow.

Here was a clear instance of a mentally ill person falling between the cracks. Such failures of the social safety net were not numerous, but were frequent enough to be, at the very least, disconcerting.

The general question emerged: is substance abuse a method of ordering a dreary, anxiety-ridden milieu? There is no clear answer to this one. Drinking and drugging behaviours preceded and facilitated a descent to skid row for some people. With others, these behaviours do appear to be an attempt to mute the harshness of life on the street.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has examined views from street level. The themes of (a) employment and income generation, and (b) drug and alcohol use framed this inquiry.

In a sense, all activities by street people could be considered survival strategies, or "getting by." Income acquisition is indissolubly linked to drinking and drugging behaviours.

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<sup>31</sup> "Chipping" or "chipping away" is regular intermittent use of a hard drug, usually an opiate such as heroin or morphine. In the minds of most addicts, this "chipping" will eventually and inevitably escalate into constant daily use -- being "hooked by the bag."

<sup>32</sup> *Korsakoff's syndrome* or *Korsakoff's psychosis* is a form of mental illness associated with alcoholism. The condition is generally believed to result from sustained excessive alcohol consumption. Symptoms often include hallucinations, confusion, and sporadic paralysis of the hands and feet. Sufferers also experience memory gaps, particularly of recent events. They usually fill in the gaps with accounts of fantastic experiences, told in a very believable way.

A profile of street people in Kamloops in 1992 reveals that men far outnumber women. Women on the street are generally younger than their male counterparts. While there are far more white than Native men on the street, Native women are more numerous than white women. Hard drug users are generally younger (and operate at correspondingly higher energy levels) than are drinkers.

In Chapter V I will summarize this study. Questions posed in earlier chapters will be addressed and some conclusions offered. In addition, guidelines for future research will be suggested.

## V. CONCLUSION

### WHO ARE KAMLOOPS' STREET PEOPLE?

In Chapter I a series of questions were asked. It is now appropriate to return to them. The data suggest answers to some questions, and rephrasing of others.

During the course of this study the question was asked several dozen times: "Who are Kamloops' street people?" Agency people usually responded with a list of categories, sub-groups and constituent parts, indicating that they saw the term "street people" as a catch-all or omnibus expression. Conversely, individual street people often saw the group with which they identified or to which they adhered as the one to which the phrase "street people" best applied. Pot smokers on the street considered soft drug users as representative street people, in contradistinction to "jailbirds," "whacked-out heroin addicts," and so on. Drinkers, in their own minds, were street people to an extent that "gangster" hard drug users and "pillheads" were not. To hard drug users, they were "street", much more so than "wino bums" and others.

Agency people were generally not as precise in identifying the differences between criminals among street people and street people who commit criminal acts. Street people were usually acutely aware of the predators among them, while being aware that, given the opportunity, predation by one's peers was always a possibility.

Throughout this study, "getting by" has emerged as a key term. Indeed, in a wider sense, "getting by" could stand as a metaphor for street life. Although Anderson (1923) originally used the term more to describe methods of securing food, clothing, and shelter, these pursuits adhere closely to all other activities. Drinking and drugging behaviours are closely intertwined with income generation, shelter acquisition, and so on.

Street life is not desultory, but requires a high degree of organization and flexibility. As one agency worker put it:

[People] aren't on the street because they are stupid. They often work harder at getting booze than people work at jobs.

A drug dealer, who dealt mostly in pharmaceutical items, made these observations:

I have to hustle to move this product, eh? I might hit a half-dozen pop stands before I get my investment back. It's all business, there's no time to party. Look, when all that money is rolling in, you're forced to spend it . . . always taking care of business, you can't slow down.

I harken back to Wright's words cited in Chapter I, where he states, in part:

That the homeless even survive their condition, in other words, indicates a remarkably resourceful level of functioning (Wright, 1988: 84).

No matter the group of street people -- Lysol drinkers, heroin addicts or whatever -- the management of resources and opportunities is remarkable.

What may appear to outsiders as disorganization or dysfunction is often a methodical or pragmatic seizing of the main chance. Passive-aggressive is the favoured behaviour mode utilized to construct secondary adjustment. If an impression of irresponsibility and immaturity is left with agency people, so much the better: less will be expected in the future. Missed appointments and so on are, in this light, a street person's rejection of someone else's agenda. Similarly, an endless stream of complaints can serve to encourage agency people to take responsibility for something that is not their concern. After this shift takes place, the street person is in a position to further manipulate officialdom, having bamboozled them into quitting the high ground.

Above, I suggested that "getting by" or surviving could be sustained as a metaphor for street life. This concept requires some elaboration. To those street people most firmly entrenched in the daily use of psychoactive substances, the ceaseless and relentless search for the next bottle, the next fix, or the next prescription is "getting by" in the larger sense. It is the *raison d'etre*, that which gives purpose to their lives. Where an outsider derives status and meaning from career and family, an inveterate street person achieves peer esteem and a sense of identity by what she or he does and how he or she does it. Not only to survive, but to flourish, by the code of the street is very often a much more seductive challenge than what the world outside can offer. One dealer-cum-pimp pointed out:

They offer you upgrading and retraining and shit. Minimum wage shit. All of us here have seen mucho dollars. Can you imagine Carol or Rita waitressing, hairdressing? After hustling up a thousand bucks on a weekend?

Also recall the hard drug dealer, previously quoted, who asserted:

This is . . . all I can do, all I'm *ever* going to do.

## THEN AND NOW

The feelings expressed above lead, quite naturally, to my next question: are the "new" homeless different from the "old" homeless? Is Wiseman's social silhouette changing? Based upon the data from this study, the principal change in the characteristics of street people is that of age. Street people are younger, by far, than reported by previous studies. The "middle-aged alcoholic Caucasian male" is still well represented. But he now shares the street with a younger generation. Men in their late teens, twenties and early thirties are as numerous as their older counterparts. Both age groups appear to share educational levels below the social average.

Another factor is that this younger age group, unlike their middle-aged peers, have little or no work history or job skills. The young male street people have gone, as one informant pithily put it, "from adolescence to obsolescence" without ever connecting with the social mainstream.

The ramifications of this absence of work experience or job skills cut deep. Agencies and programs aimed at rehabilitating those who were never "habilitated" in the first place usually end in mutual disillusionment for the parties concerned. The assumption that a client needs only to be "got back on his feet" -- when he may never have been in this position before -- is a dangerous one.

There may be a higher proportion of women on the street than previously, but the gender ratio observed during the period of this study suggests about nine men for every woman.

Native people were slightly over-represented on the street in relation to their proportion of the general population. While forming slightly less than ten percent of the Kamloops population, Natives appeared to make up approximately fifteen percent of the street population. Interestingly, there was close to gender parity among Natives on the street.

Mixed race drinking groups were common, although all-Native and all-white groups were also seen. Mixed race couples were rarer than same race couples, but the former were quite common. The most common configuration of mixed race couple was that of a Native woman and white man (also noted by Brody, 1971).

On the subject of numbers, a rough estimate for the span of this study (from late summer to early winter, 1992) would be a maximum of 200 to 250 street people and a minimum of 100. Due to the transient nature of much of this population, only approximations are possible. As previously reported by Street Beat, the number of street kids in Kamloops, in September 1992, was about thirty-five. The data clearly show that (a) adolescents are a significant, sizable group on Kamloops streets, and (b) street kids are a relatively discrete group from adult street people.

In Chapter I, I characterized some aspects of the street scene as little changed since Anderson chronicled Chicago's skid row. The passages describing drug addicts are particularly relevant. Hard drug users, Anderson relates, are "seldom transient," being unable "to separate themselves from the source of supply" (Anderson, 1923: 67-68).

Heroin addicts in present-day Kamloops indicate that they are not migratory for the same reason. Similarly, as Anderson indicates, drug addicts share skid row with other classes of homeless people, but "the drug addict tends to become a criminal, rather than a migratory worker" (Ibid., 69). There is a real sense that the hard drug scene in Kamloops today is shunned and ostracized by many other street people. In large part, this exclusion seems due to the perceived violent, criminal nature of the hard drug subculture.

Unlike Anderson's hobos, today's street people are not usually workers. But, like the hobos and tramps of old, many are migratory. In fact, a large number of homeless men still ride freight trains across the country. Gone, however, is the jargon of the hobo jungle. Today's railway interlopers are just "guys who hitch rides on freight trains." But some things do not change. Anderson described the superior status assumed by the train rider (or any migratory tramp or hobo) over the non-migratory homeguard. One man, delivered by CPR earlier in the day from Winnipeg via Jasper, looked at the Drop In regulars with some condescension:

Why do they sit around all summer in this place? They could go places, do things. I don't know what's the matter with them.

As previously indicated, Wiseman (1970) and Spradley (1970) stand as intermediate portrayals of skid row. In some respects, they paint street life more as Anderson saw it, while in other ways they foreshadow the present more closely. With Wiseman is seen the apex of formal criminal justice system involvement on skid row: "sentencing as an assembly-line outrage" (Wiseman, 1970: 100). A parallel picture emerges from Spradley's (1970) treatment of drunk court in Seattle.

Compared with the repetitious overprocessing of street people in the 1960s, today *seems* a period of benign neglect. Agencies of social control physically extrinsic to skid row have abated their involvements. At the same time, "soft end" organizations (Cohen, 1979) such as food banks have located on skid row. Seen originally (in the early 1980s) as a short-term response to a temporary problem, food banks now appear to be a permanent feature of street life. Similarly, during the last two decades, welfare provisions have expanded to include single men and women. With this development has come a shift in social definition of the street person from inmate to client. That is, those who a generation ago would very likely have been caught up in the assembly line "justice" of drunk courts are now the raw material of "soft end" social control organs.

## IN CONCLUSION

In recent years, the topics of homelessness and the mentally ill in the community have been given some attention. Most studies of these two groups have tended to be quantitative in nature. In a very modest sense, this study was done to help address a dearth of qualitative studies, and particularly, an insufficiency of treatments of skid row generally. During the course of this investigation, two related areas requiring greater examination suggested themselves.

First needed is a qualitative look at street kids -- another neglected area in contemporary research. Baron (1989) suggests a much greater complexity and diversity in this area than subcultural studies of the previous generation revealed.

Second, the desirability of a study of relationships between agencies was strongly underlined by the data. Internecine feelings, agency to agency, shape the way street people approach and manipulate agency people. A companion study of how agency people practice "getting by" is indicated.

Given the overview nature of this project, I am reluctant to offer specific proposals or recommendations. Several people -- street people and staff members of agencies -- offered prescriptions, however, that I felt under some obligation to pass along. One suggestion was for a youth hostel or shelter, and another for a detoxication unit created especially for street people.

Street kids and their advocates pointed out that young men were wary of using the Kamloops Christian Men's Hostel. A few indicated that they chose to sleep in parks or parked cars rather than rub shoulders with some of the older men who used the Hostel. Nor do young women or men on the street see foster homes as viable alternatives. They would prefer a shelter that has no ties to social workers or family court.



An alternative to Phoenix Centre Detox already exists. Through the Salvation Army office in North Kamloops fairly immediate referral is often available to Army detox and treatment facilities in Vancouver, and at Miracle Valley, near Mission. Understandably, many street people reject the idea of leaving the local area to obtain detox services, even if their way is paid.

Phoenix Centre Detox itself may be maximizing the effectiveness of its program by targeting groups that display better response to treatment. The idea of a single facility in the community to meet the needs of everyone may not be the most efficient model. Perhaps a walk-in, low-intervention detox located on or near skid row would better serve the needs of street people.

Dispersal and decentralization of specialized services on skid row may better meet the requirements of some street people. Yet, more well-meaning and compassionate intrusions do not provide a clear, simple answer to the problem. However valid on their own merits (in isolation) such piecemeal responses are, they could become just another part of the problem, over time, by building greater dependency.

It is difficult to argue against initiatives that make the uncomfortable more at ease and make those at risk more safe. While no acceptable quick and easy solutions exist, what would best satisfy street people's needs over the long run is a policy of empowerment. Those who wish to quit the street life must be given leave and means to do so.

To paraphrase the Street Beat worker quoted in Chapter III, eventually everyone comes to hate the street and tries to escape from it. The worker then went on to underline how difficult this escape was to engineer. Having internalized the rules of the street, the person is most comfortable in that milieu. The repulsion must be strong to overcome the inertia of a personality grounded in skid row.

Rejecting the code of the street without accepting (and being accepted by) the outside world and its rules, leaves a person in limbo. When someone meets with rejection

and failure (as all do) in his or her attempt to enter mainstream society, the familiar street is a beckoning siren, promising structure and insulation from the unknown.

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