

# **Squeegee Punks Reunite: Safe Streets for all**

An insider qualitative study

by

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An oral defense of this thesis took place on June 20, 2023 in front of the following examining committee:

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

## Abstract

Squeegee Punks were a fixture on many busy street corners in urban cities in Canada in the mid to late 1990s. During the height of the squeegee kid phenomenon, multiple studies were conducted on how squeegee work impacted street kids and their subsequent criminalization through the Ontario Safe Street Act. However, studies have not been conducted on Ontario's former Squeegee Kids since 1999. This insider qualitative research provides the lived experience perspective of (n=9) squeegee workers from the 1990s. This study used the following guiding research questions: 1) How did Squeegee Punks in Ontario experience the moral panic surrounding squeegee work? 2) What can the processes surrounding the construction and management of a squeegee punk deviant identity add to our understanding of how people navigate deviant identities? 3) What social and historical conditions interacted with the moral panic to shape the Squeegee Punk deviant identity? 4) What policy lessons can we learn from the experiences of Squeegee Punks in the 1990s, and what alternative policy responses were available?

## Author's Declaration

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Samantha Blondeau

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## Statement of Contributions

### **sole authorship**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

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## **Introduction**

In the mid-1990s in Ontario, it was common to see street kids on corners of busy urban cities, squeegee in hand, offering to wash car windshields for spare change; in the media, they became known as Squeegee Kids. However, after a successful anti-squeegee worker campaign in Ontario, squeegee work was criminalized after the Ontario Safe Streets Act (O.S.S.A.) was passed on January 30, 2000. The O.S.S.A. is widely regarded as Canada's first Neo vagrancy law, reminiscent of Vagrancy laws passed over 700 years that punished people for being visibly poor in public spaces (Chesnay et al., 2013; Esmonde, 2002; Gordon, 2004; Hermer, 2020; Hermer et al., 2002; Ranasinghe, 2015).

A handful of studies have explored squeegee work and the criminalization campaign that led to the creation of the O.S.S.A. in the late 1990s (Hermer et al., 2002; Esmonde, 1999; Gordon, 2004; O'Grady et al., 1998) further studies on the enforcement of the O.S.S.A. followed (O'Grady et al., 2013). The studies that have been completed focused on the role of squeegee work or the implications of the criminalization campaign. To date, there have been no follow-up studies on the Squeegee Kids that were criminalized by the passing of the O.S.S.A., and there is a gap in the scholarship regarding what squeegee work was like for Squeegee Kids before the criminalization campaign or how Squeegee Punks in Ontario in the 90s experienced the moral panic created around them. The following thesis is an insider qualitative analysis exploring the lived experience perspectives of n=9 Squeegee Punks in Ontario in the 1990s.

### *Format of the thesis*

The first chapter of this thesis reviews the literature on Squeegee Kids, including brief overviews of homelessness in Canada and Canadian vagrancy laws. I then review the history of squeegee work in North America, with an overview of the literature on squeegee workers in North America and the connection between squeegee work and the introduction of broken windows policing in New York. I then review the moral panic waged against squeegee workers in the mid to late 90s, followed by a review of the consequences and alternatives to criminalizing homelessness. Chapter two covers an overview of the following theoretical frameworks utilized in the study 1) Becker's interactionist theory of deviance, 2) Cohen's moral panic theory, and 3) Becker's deviant career theory. Chapter three covers the methods used in this qualitative study, including researcher positionality, data collection, sampling techniques, and rationale. Chapter four covers the results from this study, including context for the squeegee punk careers, the impact of public perception, the consequences of the moral panic, external factors impacting the moral panic, and alternatives to criminalization. The fifth and closing chapter is the discussion and conclusion.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### *Homelessness in Canada a brief overview*

Homelessness became an issue of concern in Canada over three decades ago in the mid-1980s. The current housing and homelessness crisis that Canada is experiencing has been precipitated by deep cuts made to social programs and the federal government disinvesting in affordable housing in the 1990s, subsequently downloading the responsibility of social housing to the provinces, territories, and some municipalities (Geatz, 2010; Geatz et al., 2014; Buccieri et al., 2023). According to the most recent statistics, approximately 235,000 people in Canada are experiencing some form of homelessness, and approximately 35,000 are youths aged 13-24 (Strobel et al., 2021).

### *'Street Kids'*

Youth homelessness has been recognized as a priority issue after years of research demonstrating that preventing youth homelessness reduces the chances of experiencing chronic homelessness in adulthood (Geatz et al., 2013). However, society's views of youth who experience homelessness have shifted significantly in the last couple of decades (Kidd & Taub, 2004). Kidd and Taub (2004) examine five eras of the social construction of youth experiencing homelessness. Tying each era to the most utilized terms in the scholarship, the first era was characterized by the beginning of research into runaways in the 1920s. The research framed youth experiencing homelessness as runaways and delinquent youths, mostly framing children running away from home as a criminal act. The next shift discussed by Kidd and Taub (2004) frames running away as an instinct and impulse that problematic youths could not control, therefore adding a biological determinism angle to the research. This view led to the belief that

runaway was a mental defect; thus, eugenics was presented (for a short time) as an option to address the issue of runaways. The third shift is where we see the medicalization of runaways by introducing the runaway reaction in the DSM-III. The counterculture movement of the 1960s brought another change in how youths experiencing homelessness were understood through a lens of multiple socio-cultural factors. The fifth shift is when the term street kids started to become apparent in the scholarship, and there was a move away from the term runaways, partly because studies had shown that many youths deemed runaways were kicked out of their homes (Kidd & Taub, 2004).

The era of street kids, runaways, and throwaways continued into the 1990s (Hagan & McCarthy, 1992; Webber, 1991). The scholarship on street kids has seen many different trends over the decades, including studies exploring the individual causes and characteristics of street kids (Karabanow, 2006; Yates, 1988), the effects that street life has on youths (Hagan & McCarthy, 1992; Thulien et al., 2019; Webber, 1991), and the importance of community amongst street kids (Karabanow, 1999; McCarthy et al., 2002). Street families became a point of interest in the scholarship on street kids, with studies examining how street families are created and how they impact the lives of street kids (Barker, 2013; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Farrugia, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2002; Smith, 2008; Thompson et al., 2013; Tyler & Melander, 2011; Thulien et al., 2019; Whitbeck et al., 2004). McCarthy et al. (2002) argued that street kids have different types of relationships on the street, but street family relationships have more significance. McCarthy et al. (2002) highlighted the tendency for street kids to use terms like street mom or street brother to indicate the most important relationships. Unsurprisingly. Street family relationships were found to have protective factors (McCarthy et al., 2002).

### *A brief introduction to Vagrancy Laws*

Over the last four decades, numerous strategies have been attempted to address homelessness in Canada. However, criminalization has been the de facto policy response for over a century (Gordon, 2004; Ranasinghe, 2010; Ranasinghe, 2015). The first federal vagrancy act was created in 1869, 23 years before the criminal code of Canada was created (Gordon, 2004; Ranasinghe, 2010). The Canadian vagrancy act of 1869 states, " Everyone is a loose, idle, or disorderly person or vagrant who:

- (a). Not having any visible means of maintaining himself lives without employment;
- (b). Being able to work and thereby or by other means to maintain himself and family willfully refuses or neglects to do so;
- ( c). Without a certificate signed, within six months, by a priest, clergyman or minister of the gospel, or two justices of the peace, residing in the municipality where the alms are being asked, that he or she is a deserving object of charity, wanders about and begs, or goes about from door to door or places to beg or receive alms;
- (d). Loiters on any street, road, highway, or public place, and obstructs passengers by standing across the footpath or by using insulting language, or in any other way
- (e). Causes a disturbance in or near any street, road, highway, or public place, by screaming, swearing, or singing, or by being drunk, or by impeding or incommoding peaceful passengers (Canada, 55 Vict., c.29,s.207)

If you were found guilty of being a vagrant, you could be sentenced to up to 6 months in jail. The underlying deserving and undeserving poor narrative can be seen in how the Act was worded by criminalizing people based on actions associated with being willfully unemployed and therefore undeserving of charity. Further, the Act was also written in a way that simultaneously punished

the undeserving poor while attempting to protect the deserving poor by allowing provisions for people who were unable to work for a variety of accepted reasons (widowers, disabled people, orphaned children) (Gordon, 2004; Ranasinghe, 2010; Chambliss, 1964). Criminalizing begging ensured that non-disabled poor people were pushed to wage labour jobs (Gordon, 2004; Ranasinghe, 2010).

Vagrancy law reform did not come up until the Archibald commission revised the Canadian Criminal code in 1938 (Ranasinghe, 2010; Gordon, 2004). However, the criminal code reform was put on the back burner for the next seven years due to the impending world war. Vagrancy law reform began in earnest in 1953 after all three political parties agreed that the lack of employment or the choice to be employed should not be grounds for criminalization (Ranasinghe, 2010; Gordon 2004). However, it was not until 1994 that the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's vagrancy law as unconstitutional. Finally in 2019 the Vagrancy act was formally removed from the Canadian criminal code (Gordon, 2004; Canada, 2017). As the repeal of the Vagrancy Act from the criminal code of Canada was occurring, proponents were gearing up to create a new set of neo-vagrancy Bylaws perpetuating the deserving and undeserving poor narrative.

## **The History of Squeegee Work in North America**

### *The Beginnings of the Criminalization of squeegee work*

The relationship between broken windows theory, neo-vagrancy laws, and squeegee workers has an interesting history. In 1982, Wilson and Kelling published an article in the Atlantic titled *Broken Windows Theory of Policing*. Wilson and Kelling (1982) argued that when neighbourhoods look run down and show signs of physical disorder (graffiti, broken windows)

and signs of social disorder (panhandlers, people experiencing homelessness), those neighborhoods are more prone to criminal activity. A fundamental assumption of broken windows theory hinges on neighborhood residents having a consensus on what signs of physical and social disorder are causes for concern. As such, Wilson and Kellings' (1982) broken windows of policing theory capitalized on the rising preoccupation with disorder seen in the 1980s (Aiyer et al., 2014; Gau, 2010; Ranasinghe, 2011; Welsh et al., 2015).

Wilson and Kelling (1982) operated from the assumption that crime and disorder are two separate concepts, even though some of the examples of social disorder that they provided (graffiti) are already considered street-level crimes (Gau, 2010). Rather than acknowledge the long-known reality that people living in poverty or experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of being a victim of a crime (Fitzpatrick et al., 1993; Kushel et al., 2003), the broken windows theory of policing frames them as precursors to criminal activity (Aiyer et al., 2014; Gau, 2010; Ranasinghe, 2011; Welsh et al., 2015).

The merits and implications of broken windows theory are extensively covered in the literature (Aiyer et al., 2014; Gau, 2010; Harcourt, 2005; Herbert, 2001; Konkle et al., 2019; Philo, 2019; Ranasinghe, 2011; Welsh et al., 2015). Studies have shown that the current standardized use and understanding of broken windows policing has led to marginalized communities becoming over-policed and a deterioration in relationships between the police and the marginalized residents in the community (Gau, 2010; Konkle et al., 2019; Hinkle & Weisburd, 2008; Welsh et al., 2015). Despite these critiques, however, broken windows theory has had a major influence on the criminalization of homelessness, including on the policing of squeegee work.

***New York Squeegee Men- the testing ground for broken windows policing***

The history of squeegee work in North America dates back over four decades. The drastic and deep cuts to social welfare and housing programs in the United States that started in the 1980s translated to a rise in visible poverty in the form of panhandlers and squeegee men on city streets in large urban centers like New York and Baltimore (Bird, 2021; Vitale, 2005). During the 1980s and early 1990s, squeegee men were fixtures on many busy New York Street corners, offering to wash windshields for change. After unsuccessful attempts by different city officials to get squeegee men off the streets of New York through existing by-laws, George Kelling (the criminologist who co-authored the broken windows theory of policing in 1982) was commissioned by then Mayor of New York Dinkins and the then police commissioner Ray Kelly to do a research study on the squeegee men “problem” happening in New York.

Kelling’s (1994) study defined squeegee men as “youths who extort money from car drivers by washing windshields” (Kelling & Coles, 1996, p. 3). The findings from Kelling's (1994) study separated the squeegee men into three groups, “*two sets of competent, hardworking window washers and a third group of fairly pathetic hangers-on [who appeared] burnt-out and seriously under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or both*” (Kelling, 1994 as cited in Bird, 2021). The descriptions that Kelling used for squeegee men were subjective at best. After documenting two incidents of aggression, Kelling recommended broken windows policing as the solution required to address squeegee men in New York (Bird, 2021). The broken windows policing in New York is viewed as one of the most significant reforms in the institution of policing in recent history. Broken windows policing, otherwise known as quality-of-life policing, has remained the de facto policing strategy for the New York Police Department and has been subsequently taken up by numerous other police departments across North America (Welsh et al., 2015).



### ***Baltimore Squeegee Men***

New York was not the only major city in the USA to have squeegee workers making waves in the headlines with their attempts to survive. Squeegee workers have been a fixture on street corners in Baltimore for over four decades. In 1985, Baltimore began enforcing an old bylaw that forbids providing a service or selling anything on city roads to stop anyone from engaging in squeegee work (Hall et al., 2021). In the 1980s, Baltimore was a hot spot for squeegee cleaners in a similar fashion to Toronto in the 1990s. The Squeegee workers of Baltimore are typically young Black men who wash car windshields on corners to earn money (Hall et al., 2021; Wegner, 2018). Over the last four decades, Baltimore Squeegee workers have made news headlines every couple of years, and calls for further criminalization are tabled as options again (Hall et al., 2021; Wegner, 2018). After a recent violent interaction between a young squeegee cleaner and a motorist that ended with the motorist dead and the 15-year-old squeegee cleaner charged with murder, Mayor Brandon Scott took steps to start the Squeegee Collaborative of Baltimore. The Squeegee Collaborative of Baltimore is discussed more in-depth in the alternatives to criminalization section.

### ***Squeegee Punks in Ontario - An Introduction***

The focus of this analysis is on squeegee punks. Squeegee punks are a self-identified subgroup of squeegee kids (which are themselves a subgroup among young people experiencing homelessness). Squeegee punks emerged in Ontario in the 1990s and what we know about them in the research comes from the broader literature on squeegee work among youth. During the mid-to-late 90s and the effect of the campaign mobilized to criminalize squeegee work in Ontario. During the mid-to-late 1990s, Squeegee Punks became a fixture on street corners in

many urban Canadian cities. Squeegee Punks were often seen in groups, squeegees in hand, often dressed in painted leather coats with their liberty spiked mohawks dyed bright colours and standing up straight off their heads offering to wash car windshields for change (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Hermer et al., 2002; O'Grady et al., 1998; Parnaby 2003; Ranasinghe, 2011). When Squeegee Punks started to appear in the early 90s, they were viewed as kids actively trying to earn an income rather than panhandling on the corner begging for spare change (O'Grady et al., 1998). Much like in New York and Baltimore in the early 1990s, the late 1990s in Toronto were marked by a campaign to criminalize squeegee work. In response to a growing moral panic, the O.S.S.A. was introduced. The focus of the legislation is to address aggressive panhandling.

In 1998, The Toronto police force asked for an increased budget to implement the Community Action Police Program (CAPP, 1998). CAPP was used as a targeted policing campaign against Squeegee Kids before the enactment of the Ontario Safe Street Act (Esmonde, 1999; O'Grady et al., 2001; Parnaby, 2003; Ranasinghe, 2010). The targeted policing campaign had been kicked into high gear by 1998 and was used to justify further the calls for official legislation that criminalized squeegee work (Hermer et al., 2002). On January 31st, 2000, the Ontario Safe Streets Act received royal assent resulting in the criminalization of squeegee work by prohibiting aggressive solicitation. The number of squeegee workers on the street after the O.S.S.A passed was significantly lower within six months (Hermer et al., 2002). The Ontario Safe Streets Act (1999) enactment was the final step in the moral panic constructed around Squeegee Kids, and the issue dissipated from public view and concern.

During the height of the squeegee kid phenomenon, Esmonde (1999) conducted an in-depth ethnography of squeegeers in Toronto in 1997 -1998 and subsequently documented a

crucial point in the history of Squeegee Kids in Ontario; the criminalization campaign mentioned earlier. Esmonde (1999) spoke with 14 squeegeers during her fieldwork while also attending Ontario Coalition Against Poverty meetings. She gained access and built relationships with two vocal squeegeers responsible for the five values campaign. Two Squeegee Punks in Toronto spearheaded the five values campaign, 1. Don't swarm cars. 2. Respect people's wishes. 3. Do the service for free if people don't want to pay. 4. Maintain a sense of humor. 5. Violence will not be tolerated (Esmonde, 1999).

Esmonde (1999) is the only study distinguishing between Squeegee Kids and Squeegee Punks. The following excerpt provides a taste of how Squeegee Punks were framed in the study:

Jason and others distinguish between the Squeegee "Punks" and Squeegee "Kids." Squeegee Punks dress in punk fashion and profess an 'anarchist' ideology though there is a broad spectrum of understanding and commitment to this ideology. The label Squeegee Kids refers to everyone else. Jason, as a Squeegee Kid, tended to blame the Squeegee Punks for all of the jumping. However, I saw many Squeegeers, both Kids and Punks, who washed windows even after they had been asked not to or when the drivers had indicated that they did not have any money (Esmonde, 1999. p 63). Esmonde said that "not all squeegeers are this committed to customer service, many of the Punks are quite derisive of this attitude" (p.66).

Something interesting about the scholarship is that the studies conducted on Squeegee Kids shared similar findings about the positive impacts of squeegee work on street kids. Studies examined the benefits of squeegee work for street kids, including a study that O'Grady and colleagues conducted examining squeegee work's impact on street kids (O'Grady et al., 1998). The study consisted of one group of Squeegee Kids and one group of street kids who did not

participate in Squeegee work. The Squeegee Kid group was less likely to engage in criminal activities and substance abuse and had better self-reported mental health than the street kids who did not participate in squeegee work (O'Grady et al.,1998). Overall, the findings suggested that squeegee work positively affected the quality of life for unhoused youth (O'Grady et al.,1998).

Dachner and Tarasuk's (2002) findings also supported that squeegee work positively impacted Squeegee Kids. The authors reported that many Squeegee Kids they spoke with relied on selling drugs or other illegal activities for income before they began squeegee work (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002). The study was being conducted at the same time as a municipal bylaw to criminalize squeegee work and aggressive panhandling was being proposed in Toronto, and the Squeegee Kids they spoke to talked about the differences in how they were being treated and how much money they were making (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002).

The final study on Squeegee Kids conducted before their criminalization was an ethnographic account of how the criminalization campaign and moral panic impacted Squeegee Kids just before the implementation of the O.S.S.A. (Hermer et al., 2002). Hermer et al. (2002) were able to speak with 10 Squeegee Kids about their experiences leading up to the enactment of the O.S.S.A, and the findings indicated that many of the Squeegee Kids interviewed had experienced increased negative police interactions as well as a decrease in the amount of money they were making. There was also an indication that many Squeegee Kids disagreed and did not understand why there was a need to criminalize squeegee work. The authors highlighted that despite the decrease in monetary gain doing squeegee work, it was still considered the best legitimate employment option for many Squeegee Kids (Hermer et al., 2002). Hermer et al. (1999) concluded that street kids who chose to squeegee were making a rational choice based on

the circumstances they were trying to survive and that criminalizing squeegee work would push vulnerable youth further away from the needed services and support.

Despite these insights, the scholarship on Squeegee Kids in Ontario still needs a lived experience lens. Studies have been conducted on Squeegee Kids rather than with Squeegee Kids (more on this further in the lived experience section).

## **Creating a moral panic**

### ***The continuation of the criminalization of squeegee work***

Evidence suggests that squeegee cleaning emerged in Ontario around 1995. Beginning in 1997 media coverage began to shift extensive focus was given to reports of aggressive behavior. During the late 1990s, newspapers across Canada printed multiple stories like the one that follows:

This is a crisis. This is a problem, this is a major problem in the city. [...] This menace and there's a disaster waiting to happen on our streets. There's people being hurt, there are people who could be hurt, there's people who could be killed, and you don't think that's a disaster.

(The Toronto Star, 30/07/98:B3 as cited in Parnaby, 2004)

This is how Mel Lastman, the former mayor of Toronto, described “Squeegee Kids” in Toronto in August of 1999. Further, Mike Harris ran for his second term as the Premier of Ontario on the Safe Streets platform. He vowed that if re-elected, he would ensure that the police were extended the power to enact a law-and-order response to the “war on Squeegee Kids” (Toronto Sun July 28 1 998: 14 as cited in Parnaby, 2004). The Ontario Safe Streets Act received royal assent on January 31, 2000, effectively criminalizing Squeegee Kids without naming them. Although squeegee work and Squeegee Kids were not explicitly named in the Act, it listed

"aggressive soliciting on a roadway, providing services on a roadway, and the disposal of used needles, broken glass, and condoms" as prohibited and unlawful activities (Safe Streets Act, 1999).

The O.S.S.A. was amended in 2004 to allow charitable groups to continue to solicit donations on roadways (Chesnay et al., 2013). This translated into these charities being able to seek donations to provide services or support to youth and adults experiencing homelessness; however, people who were experiencing homelessness could be fined and/or arrested for asking for spare change to meet their own basic human needs.

The creation of the O.S.S.A. was heavily influenced by the moral panic that framed Squeegee Kids as the folk devil. Many scholars have discussed the specifics of the moral panic constructed around Squeegee Kids (Esmonde, 1999; Esmonde, 2003; Gordon, 2004; Hermer et al., 2001; Ranasinghe, 2011; Parnaby, 2003). The political and social rhetoric mobilized to villainize Squeegee Kids positioned Squeegee Kids as a subpopulation separated from the larger street kid population (Gordon, 2004; Ranasinghe, 2011; O'Grady et al., 2013). Subsequently, Squeegee Kids were positioned as dangerous and required a law and order response.

Although British Columbia is the only other region with a provincial neo-vagrancy law, most municipalities across Canada have different types of neo-vagrancy laws, such as no loitering, no salvaging, and no sheltering (Hermer et al., 2021; Ranasinghe, 2011). Hermer et al. (2021) mapped neo-vagrancy laws recorded across Canada under COVID-19. The researchers mapped panhandling/soliciting, loitering, obstructing, salvaging, resting, sleeping, sheltering, and disorder offenses (Hermer et al., 2022). According to this research, only 25% of Canadians live in an area *without* neo-vagrancy laws.

### ***The Consequences of the Criminalization of Homelessness***

For over 150 years, criminalizing homelessness has been a de facto policy response in North America. Canada's first Vagrancy Act was created in 1869, and despite the removal of vagrancy from the Canadian criminal code in 2019, Ontario gave birth to Canada's first Neo Vagrancy Act in 2000 (Gordon, 2004; Leblanc, 2021; Ranasinghe, 2010). Over the last two decades, there have been many studies that examined the efficacy and effectiveness of neo-vagrancy laws in North America (Herring et al., 2019; Hermer et al., 2020; Townley et al., 2021; Robinson, 2017; Quirouette et al., 2016; Westbrook & Robinson, 2020). The majority of these studies established that criminalizing homelessness has complex and long-lasting consequences for unhoused people as well as for society as a whole (Herring et al., 2019; Hermer et al., 2020; Townley et al., 2021; Robinson, 2017; Quirouette et al., 2016; Westbrook & Robinson, 2020). Some of the known consequences of the criminalization of homelessness include social exclusion, criminal victimization, increased risk to personal and emotional safety, and distrust in social services created to address homelessness, as well as further perpetuating homelessness (Herring et al., 2019; Townley et al., 2021; Robinson, 2017; Quirouette et al., 2016; Westbrook & Robinson, 2020).

Further research has demonstrated that when street-involved youth are criminalized, their chances of exiting street life risk being diminished (Quirouette et al., 2016). Historically, street youths were considered a 'problem' that required management (Kidd & Taub, 2004). This included creating a mental health diagnosis termed the "runaway reaction" and criminalizing the behavior (Kidd & Taub, 2004). This belief became further entrenched in responses rooted in criminalization, such as ticketing their money-making strategies (Chesney et al., 2013; Hermer et al., 2020; O'Grady et al., 2013). Squeegee Kids remain an exemplary case study of the criminalization of youth homelessness. There is minimal evidence that these laws have positively

affected the state of homelessness in North America. Conversely, many studies (Robinson, 2019; O'Grady et al., 2013; Townley et al., 2021; Quirouette et al., 2016 ; Westbrook & Robinson, 2020) support the notion that neo-vagrancy laws have served to perpetuate further homelessness and the criminalization of homelessness and thus systemic injustice rather than reduce or structurally address it.

Despite the consistent findings about the consequences of criminalization of homelessness more broadly, when discussing the implications of the criminalization of squeegee work in Ontario, the information is sparser and more dated. Limited studies conducted during the height of the Squeegee Kid phenomenon attempted to gain insight from Squeegee Kids about how the O.S.S.A. criminalization campaign affected them (Esmonde, 1999; Hermer et al., 2002; O'Grady et al., 1998). Most research that included Squeegee Kids was conducted during the moral panic and focused on the policy's immediate impacts, but questions remain about the long-term impacts the criminalization of squeegee work had on the street kids who were targeted.

### **Alternatives to Criminalization**

#### ***Baltimore and New York Squeegee Men in the new millennium - A new view of Disorder***

While Squeegee Punks are a distant memory for most Canadians, squeegee work has been a persistent issue in American cities like New York and Baltimore for decades (Bird, 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Sheehan & Gibson; 2021; Sheehan et al., 2022). In the decades since Mayor Giuliani started quality-of-life policing, squeegee men have sporadically returned to New York's Street corners and been met with similar threats of eradication from the authorities at the time (Bird, 2021). More than one New York mayoral candidate has used a platform that promised to remove squeegee men from the streets of New York again (Sheehan & Fitz-Gibbon, 2021). Most recently, in the 2021 New York Mayoral race, a significant portion of Curtis's platform promised



an end to squeegee men on New York street corners, giving the nod to the days when Giuliani was Mayor and the NYPD utilized quality-of-life policing to end squeegee work in New York (Sheehan & Fitz-Gibbon, 2021). New York has seen a resurgence of squeegee men since 2020; in the summer of 2022, the following is an excerpt from an article from the New York Post on July 28, 2022:

“The dirty deed denizens — who became the face of ex-Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s quality-of-life crackdown in the 1990s — suddenly returned to the busy Manhattan intersection about three weeks ago.”

The call for criminalization was brought to the forefront yet again by the media and other community stakeholders (Sheehan et al., 2022). However, the current Mayor of New York has stated that he was once a squeegee man working on a New York Street corner and has vowed to avoid criminalizing policies. Instead, he has advocated for alternative social programs and access to mental health services to ensure that squeegee men of New York are not painted with the same problematic brush used historically (Sheehan et al., 2022).

The Baltimore squeegee collaborative is another example of an alternative to criminalization. As previously established, squeegee men have been a social issue in Baltimore for over four decades. While the initial response four decades ago was to criminalize squeegee work, the persistence of squeegee men to work the corners of Baltimore overshadowed any criminalizing policies used (Scott, 2023). An altercation between a 14-year-old squeegee man and a motorist ended in the motorist's death, and the 15-year-old pleaded guilty to manslaughter. It prompted Baltimore's Mayor to address the root problems that contributed to the need to resort to squeegee work to survive that went above and beyond criminalization (Shen, 2023).

The Squeegee collaborative comprises multiple stakeholders, including squeegee workers, local faith leaders, community advocates, and representatives from numerous community partners such as police and social service agencies. The following excerpt from the mission and values section of the Squeegee Collaborative report states:

The goal of the Squeegee Collaborative is to eliminate the need to squeegee in Baltimore by creating positive pathways to work, education, entrepreneurship, and support services for squeegee workers while providing enforcement that considers the public safety interests of squeegee workers and motorists. (P.10).

The focus on addressing the societal and structural issues that contribute to the need to earn money through sub-employment, like squeegee work is an alternative that Baltimore has experimented with in the past (Scott, 2023); however, this is the first coordinated effort that sought input from all community stakeholders including squeegee men. A vital component of collaboration was the time spent building relationships. The consultations with squeegee workers and other stakeholders occurred over several months and were done meaningfully. The involved squeegee workers were given time and space to share their stories and concerns about regulating squeegee work.

The collaborative plan includes multiple layers, including squeegee zoning, work training, and multi-staged enforcement. The squeegee zones were designated in collaboration and consultation with squeegee workers and other stakeholders like outreach workers, advocates, and the police. Leading up to the start of the zoning program, outreach workers were connecting with as many squeegee workers as possible to find out what they needed to be able to participate in the program. The enforcement is on the motorists as well. Both are warned if a motorist engages with a squeegee worker at a prohibited corner. Another aspect of the program is

connecting squeegee workers with other ways to earn money through employment opportunities and financial assistance programs (Wall, 2022).

Brandon Scott, the Mayor of Baltimore, spearheaded the campaign to develop the squeegee collaborative in Baltimore. The squeegee collaborative was launched in January of 2023, and the program included exclusionary zones, outreach, and multi-staged enforcement. While it is too early to make any assessments on the long-term efficacy of the programs, the level of collaboration achieved in the process is a fantastic outcome in and of itself. It serves as an example for other communities that are struggling with issues of visible poverty and homelessness. In February of 2023, the exclusionary squeegee zone part of the plan was starting to be enforced; it is too early to make any conclusions on the plan's long-term efficacy; there has been a visible reduction in squeegee workers on the prohibited corners and an increase in squeegee workers getting connected with employment opportunities (Shen, 2023).

### ***Lived Experience' Nothing about us, without us***

Programs like the Baltimore Squeegee Collaborative are examples of what lived experience-informed programs can look like. The current mayor of New York's disclosure of lived experience of squeegee work illustrated the importance of lived experience leadership. The recent trend of including the voices of people with lived experience in policy decisions can be attributed to work done by activists and scholars with their own lived experiences of marginalization (Nelson, 2020). "Nothing about us, without us" (Charlton, 1998, p. 16) was coined by a disability rights activist and has been taken up by scholars with lived experience of homelessness as well (Nelson, 2020). Nelson (2020) writes: "The often-unacknowledged violence of dismissing or overlooking the profoundly transformational knowledge of oppressed

and exploited people ensures that the mechanisms that shape these realities in the first place stay intact” (p. 98).

As my colleague Alex Nelson (2020) so eloquently expressed in the preceding quote, there is an untapped wealth of knowledge amongst people with lived experience of homelessness that, when mobilized, provides unique opportunities for change, as seen with the CAHOOTS project (Townley et al., 2021) and the Baltimore Squeegee collaborative (Scott, 2023). As a LivEx scholar (Scholar with lived experience of youth homelessness) with over a decade of front-line service provision experience, I have first-hand knowledge of the importance of policies and programs being informed by lived experience voices.

More importantly, there must be meaningful engagement with people with lived experience that extends beyond the standard box-checking exercise. The Declaration of the Rights of People with lived experience is a document that CLELN created and published in 2022. The declaration covered three main areas, justice, and action, access to resources and support, and leadership, and aims to provide people with lived experience, a document they can refer power holders back to before engaging in consultations (Adams et al., 2022).

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis aims to use an interactionist (Becker, 2018) approach to explore the social treatment of Squeegee Punks in the 1990s in Ontario. Mainly how they experienced the moral panic created around them that culminated in the creation of the Ontario Street Safe Act (O.S.S.A), how their lives were impacted, and what their experiences can tell us about the enactment of social policy. This work draws on Becker's interactionist approach to defining deviance and conceptualizing deviant careers. Still, it extends his work by considering a more complex and less linear approach to how deviant 'careers' and group membership unfold over time. Further, providing insight into how folk devils experience the processes involved in creating a successful moral panic.

### *Cohen's moral panic Theory*

Cohen's (2002) moral panic theory provides a framework to understand some of the processes involved in identifying the actors involved and how their efforts interact to create a folk devil and a heightened and disproportionate sense of concern. Cohen (2002) defined a moral panic as the overreaction and disproportionate attention given to a particular issue or group of people. According to Cohen (2002), there are five key players in a moral panic: 1) Folk devil, 2) Law enforcement, 3) The media, 4) Politicians, and 5) Public. Cohen (2002) set out five stages of a moral panic: 1) Increased concern about an issue or group of people, 2) Hostility towards the target group, 3) A level of consensus that the threat is real, 4) The attention is disproportionate to the issue, and 5) The situation is volatile.

Cohen's (2002) concept of moral panic is a useful lens for looking at the shifting reaction to squeegee kids and the emergence of the O.S.S.A. The Squeegee Kid phenomenon followed all

five stages of a moral panic that Cohen (2002) set out. First, Squeegee Kids were framed as a form of adolescent deviance and set apart from their larger community of street kids (Parnaby, 2003). By the summer of 1997, Squeegee Kids were being framed as a problem by multiple stakeholders, including politicians, law enforcement, and local business owners (O'Grady et al., 1998; Parnaby, 2003). In the case of the Squeegee Kid phenomenon, headlines across Canada painted a picture of violent street youth attacking cars and posing significant safety risks to the public (Bates, 2011; Parnaby, 2003). Multiple studies have been conducted on the media's role in the moral panic surrounding Squeegee Kids in Canada's mid to late 1990s (Bates, 2011; Jeppesen, 2008; Parnaby, 2003).

Second, the media focused a disproportionate amount of time on framing Squeegee Kids as a group of violent aggressors. Minimal attention was paid to how Squeegee Kids were at an increased risk of being victimized and displaced from the front-line service they needed access to be able to survive on their own on the street (O'Grady et al., 1998; Terasuk & Dachner, 2001; Parnaby, 2003). As the latter stages of the model, the level of hostile media coverage that Squeegee Kids received bolstered the idea that there were *new* reasons to be concerned, provided a vehicle to channel the hostility that was being directed towards Squeegee Kids and created a public impression that there was a level of *consensus* on the risk level (Hermer et al., 2001; O'Grady et al., 1999; Parnaby, 2003 ). Further to the media campaign, Mike Harris ran for his second term as the premier of Ontario on the Ontario Safe Streets Act platform, where he pledged to amend the Highway Traffic Act to criminalize aggressive begging on roadways to deal with Squeegee Kids.

### ***Becker's Interactionist Theory of Deviance***

While Cohen's (2002) moral panic theory provides an understanding of the outside/institutional processes involved in moral panics, Becker's (2018) interactionist theory of deviance offers some insight into the processes at play for the folk devil during the moral panic. Becker's (2018) interactionist theory of deviance is premised on the underlying assumption that "society creates deviance" (Becker, 2018, p. 8). To Becker (2018), society's role in creating deviance is multifaceted. Society does not only ensure that current norms are being reproduced. New norms are enacted to reify new forms of deviance. For Becker (2018), deviant impulses are something everyone possesses; therefore, having deviant urges or committing deviant acts is not a focal point of his theory of deviance. Becker (2018) is not concerned with personal reasons for deviancy. His curiosity is rooted in the processes that lead to a deviant label and how deviant-labeled people respond to those processes (Becker, 2018).

For Becker (2018), deviancy is marked by the consequences enacted upon the behavior rather than the qualities of the behaviour itself. This point is essential to consider regarding who decides what is deviant. According to Becker's (2018) theory of deviance, a power dynamic is always in play when deviance is constructed. For instance, politics are crucial in what is and is not deemed deviant. This was seen with the O.S.S.A., where the premier of Ontario and the mayor of Toronto combined forces to create legislation that criminalized squeegee work ( Bates, 2011; Hermer et al., 2002; Parnaby, 2003).

Becker (2018) coined the term "moral entrepreneurs" to encompass people who hold positions of power and launch crusades to have acts labeled as deviant. Becker (2018) points to an everyday power dynamic: Adults create rules for youth. If youth do not follow the rules, they may be constructed as deviant. Becker (2018) asserts that enterprise always has a hand in the

construction of deviance and that moral entrepreneurs are the driving force. Moral entrepreneurs can be separated into two categories: Those who make the rules and those who enforce the rules (Becker, 2018). Regarding rule creators, Becker (2018) discussed three types: the moral reformer, the prohibitionist, and the abolitionist. These rule creators justify their actions via a professed desire to improve life for all members of society. Another commonality they possess lies in their respective positions of power, which operate to legitimize their crusade against deviance (Becker, 2018). People who enforce the rules also operate from positions of power and are tasked with maintaining social order.

In this way, society is responsible for creating rules that establish what is and is not considered deviant (Becker, 2018). This means that deviance is fluid, and what is deemed deviant to one group may not be deviant for another (Becker, 2018). This is where the transactional nature of deviance comes into play. Deviant acts are labeled as such once a moral entrepreneur takes up the cause to launch a crusade that ends with the act being publicly deemed deviant. When Squeegee Kids started appearing on street corners in Canada, they were initially viewed as an industrious group of homeless youth trying to provide a service rather than sit on the corner and panhandle for money (Hermer et al., 2002). It was only when moral entrepreneurs (politicians, law enforcement, community stakeholders, and the media) started a crusade (moral panic) that led to the creation of the deviant label known as “Squeegee Kids” that squeegee work was deemed deviant.

The deviant act that Squeegee Kids engaged in depends on the standpoint being used. The moral panic framed Squeegee Kids as an issue of public disorder that threatened civil society. However, Squeegee Kids saw squeegee work as a means of street survival. Squeegee work provided street kids with a way to earn money that did not involve crime or hurting people.



While it is widely accepted that Squeegee Kids no longer exist, or at least in the same manner as the height of the moral panic, what is unknown is how the moral panic impacted them. One of the expected qualitative outcomes from this study is to understand the lived experiences of being a 1990s Squeegee Kid. The current literature on Squeegee Kids provides an outsider perspective on the institutional processes involved in the criminalization of squeegee work. Becker (2018) noted that the study of deviance is saturated with outsider accounts of the processes involved in being labeled deviant. The lived experience perspectives of my informants give insight into aspects of being labeled deviant that have yet to be fully explored.

### ***Becker's Deviant Career Theory***

The insight that lived experience accounts can provide includes a backdrop to discuss the nuances of a deviant career trajectory. Becker's (2018) deviant career theory provides a framework to understand the sequential events that contribute to the development of career contingencies that can contribute to the continuation of a deviant career or provide exit paths from a deviant career. 1) Engage in a deviant act, 2) Be publicly labeled as a deviant, 3) continue engaging in deviant behavior, and 4) Commit to a deviant group. Within this process, Becker (2018) is primarily concerned with the processes that lead to people continuing their deviant careers, which he labeled "career contingencies" (Becker, 2018, p. 23). Career contingencies include changes in the larger social structure and the person's motivations, desires, and perspectives (Becker, 2018).

When Becker (2018) discussed career contingencies, he proposed the idea of 'commitment' as a process that stops people from succumbing to their deviant urges. In other words, people's different commitments can affect their decision to continue or end a deviant career. Becker's (2018) concept of commitment entails people developing commitments to

institutions and societal norms that directly affect their daily lives. For instance, Becker (2018) argues that someone who must provide for a family and ensuing responsibilities may be able to stop themselves from engaging in a deviant act for fear of the negative impact on their pre-existing commitments. Becker (2018) argued that the opposite holds for people without commitments. People may commit deviant acts because they have not formally committed to institutions and social norms. Therefore, the perceived negative effect does not deter them similarly (Becker, 2018).

This does not allow for when people engage in deviant acts as a function of their commitments, much like the Squeegee Kids trying to provide for themselves and each other through squeegee work. The commitment to norms comes in when considering that squeegee work was considered one of the best ways to earn money on the street because there was no criminal element to it. Therefore, squeegee work was rooted in societal norms of legitimate income earning. In summary, Becker and Cohen provide valuable concepts for understanding the enactment and response to deviant labels. However, questions remain about the lived experience of deviant careers.

The guiding research questions for this study were 1) How did Squeegee Punks in Ontario experience the moral panic surrounding squeegee work? 2) What can the processes surrounding the construction and management of a squeegee punk deviant identity add to our understanding of how people navigate deviant identities? 3) What social and historical conditions interacted with the moral panic to shape the Squeegee Punk deviant identity? 4) What policy lessons can we learn from the experiences of Squeegee Punks in the 1990s, and what alternative policy responses were available?

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *Epistemology, Research Design, Rationale*

This study is informed by a lived experience lens, meaning that all aspects of this study were informed by my lived experience of homelessness. Given this lived experience, this study utilized an insider qualitative research framework to explore the lived experience perspectives of Squeegee Punks in Ontario in the mid to late 1990s. Insider qualitative research is when the researcher has intimate knowledge of the group being studied (Green, 2015). A cursory examination of the current trends in criminological insider qualitative research found that the scholarship is primarily concentrated on studies where the researcher has lived experience of incarceration (convict criminology), and they are examining the lived experience of other individuals who have been incarcerated or who are currently incarcerated (Ellis & Marquez, 2022; Ross & Copes, 2022). Related to homelessness specifically, an examination of the current trends in research into the lived experience of homelessness found that the scholarship is saturated with qualitative studies that aim to lift the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness (Gurdak et al., 2022; Magwood et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2020; Toolis & Hammock, 2015). However, I could not find any insider qualitative studies exploring the lived experience of the criminalization of homelessness. While a cursory examination of the scholarship shows virtually no insider qualitative studies examining the lived experience of the criminalization of homelessness, I am not claiming that none exist. Instead, I suggest that some scholars might choose never to disclose their history due to the stigma associated with having lived experience of homelessness in any capacity.

A grounded methodological framework was utilized to provide a detailed, rich account of what being a squeegee punk in the 90s entailed. I used the constructivist approach to grounded theory because it prioritizes the participants' experiences and views the data as a co-construction process between the researcher and the participants (Charmaz et al., 2011). One of the assumptions Charmaz (2011) identifies is that “multiple realities exist” (Charmaz et al., 2011, p5), as such the researcher is looking to understand the meaning that people make out of their experiences and to attempt to identify processes that may be associated with that experience. Constructionists are not concerned with identifying objective facts; instead, they seek to understand the context of the participants' views and experiences (Charmaz et al., 2011).

### ***Sample, Sampling Method, and Research Instrument***

The study began after a frustrating REB approval process that took over five months and two rounds of revisions. The sampling methods utilized in this study were convenience and snowball sampling. This study's sample size (n=9) consisted of participants self-identifying as squeegee workers during the 1990s. Eligibility for the study included being a self-identified squeegee punk who did squeegee work before, during, or after the implementation of the Ontario Safe Streets Act (O.S.S.A.). The self-driven aspect of the Squeegee Punk label informed the decision to specifically focus on Squeegee Punks rather than Squeegee Kids for this study.

A recruitment poster was circulated through social media posts (see Appendix D) on Instagram and Facebook; possible informants were directed to reach out via private message to ensure confidentiality. All informants were provided with the study information sheet (see Appendix A) and a copy of the consent (Appendix B) by email to review before agreeing to participate.

Data were collected through online Zoom and over the phone semi-structured interviews. Due to the pre-existing relationships with the informants, Dr. Tyler Frederick did a prescreen of the consent before the interviews were conducted. I reviewed the consent form before the interview began with each informant, and they each provided verbal consent. Each informant was provided with a small honorarium of 20 dollars before the interview started, and the interview times ranged from 45 minutes to three hours per participant. All the interviews were audio recorded on a handheld recording device.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a relaxed, conversational tone. This technique allowed for a natural conversation to develop, allowing for deviations from the interview guide when warranted. In line with a constructionist approach to grounded theory, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to explore the lived experiences of Squeegee Punks (Charmaz, 2011). The interview guide (see Appendix C) addressed vital themes about how the informants experienced being a squeegee worker in the 90s in Ontario, including motivations for doing squeegee work, the criminalization of squeegee work, and what alternatives could have been utilized. These interviews were conducted over the phone and Zoom. My links to the hidden population of Squeegee Punks and insider status as a street kid of the 90s allowed me access to some of the remaining group of Squeegee Punks and assisted in building rapport and establishing the trust of participants.

Four of the nine people interviewed had pre-existing relationships with me, and I had no history with five of them. As such, the interviews took on different levels of memory sharing and co-construction (more on this later). The four interviews with friends unfolded like two old friends taking a guided tour down memory lane. In the four interviews with people without a shared history, there were still shared memories either through knowing the same people or

having similar experiences as my friends, and I did. Given the sample size, the results will not be generalizable to a larger population. Instead, the results will provide insights into the lived experience of the informants who participated in the study.

### ***Coding and data analysis***

All nine interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The informants were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. All transcribed interviews were stored on a secured encrypted hard drive in a locked cabinet. The researcher was the only one with access to the complete research data. Once data collection was complete, the interviews were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo software. I conducted one round of open coding, highlighting the transcripts manually. After reviewing the first round of open coding, I proceeded to do two rounds of focused coding to verify the code structure and looking for missed codes. The process of coding began naturally and early in the process.

My insider status impacted the data collection and analysis in multiple ways. One way my status benefited from the data collection was my knowledge of the subculture which allowed for fluidity and a natural flow in the conversations. The choice to use the term Squeegee Punks was helpful for recruitment and had an impact on building rapport with informants that I did not have an existing relationship with. Conversely, my intimate knowledge of the subculture may have hindered some of the details collected from the informants. There may have been missed opportunities to elaborate on specific aspects of squeegee work such as jumping cars or the squeegee etiquette that many informants abided by.

I transcribed every interview immediately after the interview was conducted, and I reflected on the interview as I was transcribing, attempting to identify any trends or gaps in the

interviews that I wanted to address in the next interview. This is an area where my insider status impacted the coding and analysis, as the informants were talking with me, my own memories would be engaged.

### ***Data analysis***

An inductive approach was used to help answer the guiding research questions. After multiple rounds of thematic analysis were completed to establish trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), six overarching themes and 15 sub-themes emerged. The 15 sub-themes were distinguished but were not mutually exclusive due to the fluid nature of human experience. The six overarching themes that emerged from the interviews included the context of squeegee work, the shift in public perception, external factors that shaped the moral panic, consequences of the moral panic, squeegee punk teachings, and alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness. Fig 1.0 illustrates the thematic coding.

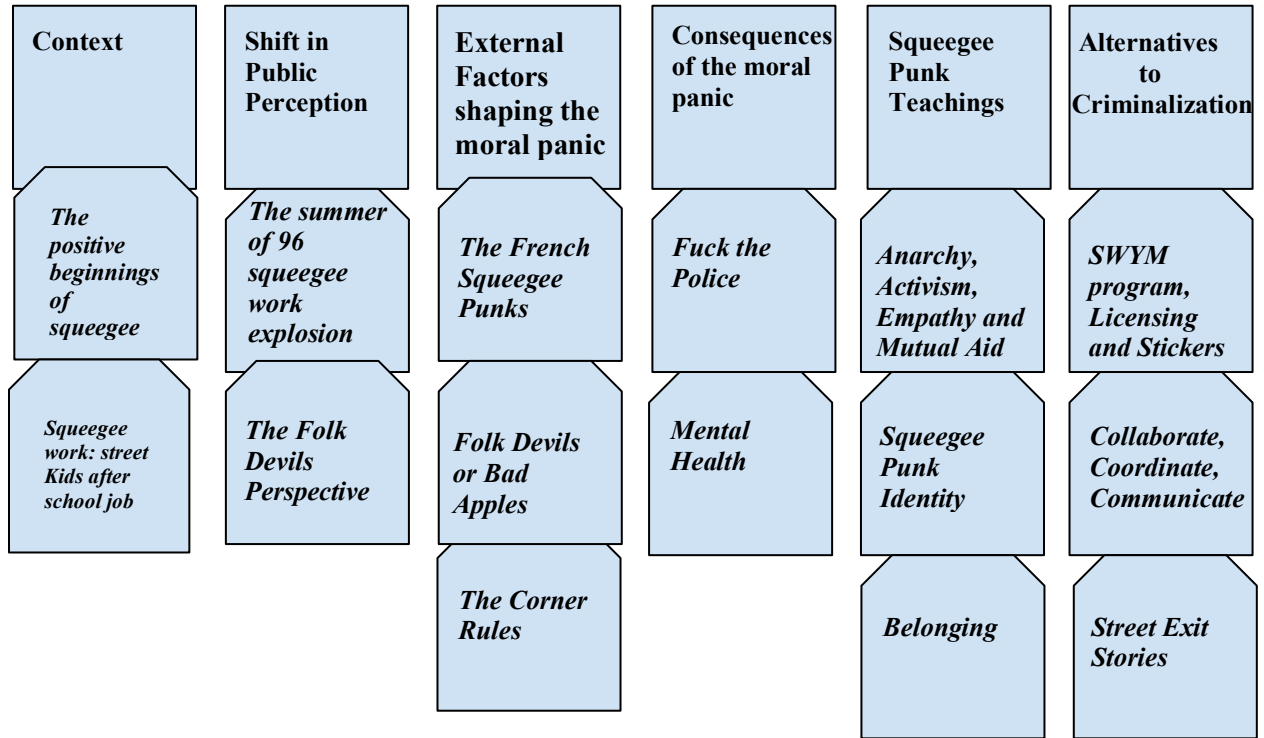


Figure 1.0 Thematic Coding Structure

### Researcher Positionality

This section is always the hardest to write because I always try to figure out what to include when discussing my positionality within the world or my research. I exist in the middle of a Venn diagram of multiple intersectionality's working together to inform my perspectives. The standard would be that I am a White settler, disabled, trauma survivor, non-binary, queer person who has lived experience of homelessness at various ages, including when I was a teenager in the 1990s. I also have twelve years of front-line social service work experience. In those 12 years, I spent six working in the homelessness sector. The combined lived experience of homelessness and professional experience working the front line of social services gives me a 360 perspective when discussing homelessness.



It is essential to highlight that I was not a squeegee punk; I was a street kid who was friends with many Squeegee Punks because Squeegee Punks were also street kids. I dropped out of high school in 1996 when I was 16 and in grade 11, but my time as a street kid with a drug addiction started in 1995 when I was 15 and in grade 10. My days as a youth with a drug addiction started even younger than that, at 12; my first drug dealers were doctors and pharmacists. The nights I spent on the streets, I spent high on PCP, LSD, or some other street drug with my friends, and no one slept. Once we would come down, we would find somewhere to crash because we usually knew at least one person who was either on good terms with their parents or had their place for the moment. In the end, it boils down to how I internalized my experience and identity, and at no point when I was a street kid I did not think of myself as a homeless kid. In elementary school, I was a latchkey kid; in high school, I became a street kid, a dropout, a drug addict, and a thief. I was called many things, but homeless youth was never one of them. So, terms like youth homelessness feel foreign when discussing my lived experience.

I remember the early days of squeegee work in Ontario because some of my closest friends from the street were the Squeegee Kids making headlines in the mid to late 1990s. I was still a street kid when the criminalization campaign started. Other than my friends telling me stories about working the corners when they were in Toronto, I was too busy getting high or trying to get high to pay much attention to the headlines in the paper. However, when the Ontario Safe Streets Act passed, I was in college working on my Social Service Worker Diploma, and I was still friends with the Squeegee Kids, who were being criminalized.

I share the group membership status of a 90s street kid with the informants, giving me an insider status that provides access to the remaining Squeegee Punks from the 1990s. That shared 90s street kid status gives me historical information about who was a squeegee punk in the 90s.

This helps offset the risk of informants misrepresenting their knowledge of the lived experiences of Squeegee Punks in the 90s. While historical knowledge is paramount, the strength of the relationships I built with four informants in the 90s is an underlying foundation for the success of this study.

As mentioned above, I have an insider status, but there are also varying levels of friendships and pre-existing relationships with the informants that are important to contextualize. Moses, Zita, Chloe, and Ryan are the informants that I am friends with. Moses and Chloe, I knew in elementary school. I was the first person to talk to Zita on her first day of grade nine at my high school, and I spent many a night downtown getting high with Ryan. I outline these connections because it would be a mistake to assume that the strength of my bonds with four informants did not influence the depth of the data.

## Chapter 4: Results

The results for this thesis start with a squeegee punk career timeline for all informants. The remainder of the section addresses how the informants experienced squeegee work before the moral panic, including how the informants made meaning from squeegee work. The following section explores how the informants described the shift in public perception during the moral panic, including observations from the informants about how the squeegee worker demographic changed in size and composition. The following section explores the external factors that helped to shape the moral panic according to the informants, including how the influx of French squeegee punk impacted the moral panic and how the informants denounced the aggressive behavior and attempted to self-govern. Followed by a section on the consequences of the moral panic, including descriptions of loss of trust in police and mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and problematic drug use. The following section addresses some nuanced implications of the moral panic that the informants described, including increased interest in activism and political and social issues, the various identities that existed for the informants, and the sense of belonging the informants described. The last section highlights alternatives to the criminalization of squeegee work, including informants' descriptions of what alternatives worked and things to remember when engaging people with lived experience in police and program creation.

Informants Squeegee Punk Career Timeline

Chloe	Brewster	Moses	Zita	Ryan	Dane	Anise	Ace	Jasmine
1992-1999 12- 19 years old Female	1994-1998 12 – 16 years old Male	1995-1999 14- 19 years old Male	1994-1998 14- 18 years old Female	1995-1998 14-17 years old Male	1997-1999 15- 17 years old Male	1995-1997 15- 17 years old Female	1997-1999 19- 21 years old Male	2000- present 15 years old 38 years old Female

Figure. 1.1

## Context

As illustrated in Figure 1.0, the majority of the Squeegee Punks that I spoke with quit squeegee cleaning before the Ontario Safe Streets Act received royal assent on January 31, 2000. Moses, Zita, Brewster, Ryan, Anise, Ace, Chloe and Dane quit squeegee work before the Ontario Safe Streets Act was enacted. However, Jasmine started squeegeeing after the Ontario Safe Streets Act was enacted and is the only informant who said she was still doing squeegee work. Consequently, the majority of the Squeegee Punk career trajectories primarily occurred before or during the moral panic, except for Jasmine, who started squeegee cleaning after the Ontario Safe Streets Act was passed. This means that the analysis focuses on the eight interviews that focused on the processes surrounding the moral panic, how the moral panic impacted the lives of the informants, and subsequently, how being the folk devil in a moral panic did or did not have an impact on the lives of the informants.

It is important to note that when the participants described their squeegee punk careers in the interviews, there was a larger street kid discourse because Squeegee Punks were street kids in the 90s. What is interesting is that while the larger societal discourse may have been able to separate those two life experiences at the time of the moral panic, the Squeegee Punks I spoke with still spoke through the lens of both identities in the interviews. I go back and forth between the terms squeegee punk, squeegee worker, street kid, and squeegee kid as they pertain to the information provided.

The Ontario Safe Streets Act was not the beginning of the criminalization of squeegee work. As early as July 1996, there were headlines in the Toronto Star quoting the police chief of Toronto calling for a harsher crackdown on squeegee cleaners; by the end of the summer of 1996, there were over 150 summonses issued to squeegee workers (Hermer et al., 2002). This

increase in the criminalization of activities associated with squeegee work was a precursor to the Ontario Safe Streets Act, passed in 2000. The timeframe of squeegee punk careers the informants spoke about occurred before passing the Ontario Safe Streets Act. As such, a significant portion of the interviews revolved around how Squeegee Punks in Ontario experienced the increased criminalization of activities associated with squeegee work and the moral panic that culminated in the enactment of the Ontario Safe Streets Act.

### *The positive beginnings of Squeegee work*

One of the critical aspects of a moral panic centers around the dynamic processes through which a particular group (the folk devil) is labeled as deviant and defined as a problem for a larger society that needs to be managed (Cohen, 2002). This labeling process does not happen all at once but unfolds over time. To this point, the informants talked about the different stages of being a squeegee punk in relation to how the public received them. All informants who squeegeed in the early 90s, when squeegee work began in Ontario, described the public and institutional reaction to Squeegee Punks as mainly positive. Being a squeegee punk, in the beginning, consisted of having regulars at your corner, doing squeegee tricks, and trying to make people smile as the cornerstones of doing squeegee work.

Many informants described the early days of squeegeeing (1992-1996) as being marked by various positive interactions with the public. Anise described the early days of squeegee work as “like a sideshow or something. They would be like, What the fuck are you kids doing? And they would be giving us like fifties and hundreds and shit because they were like, wow, this is fucking crazy.” Ryan described having good relationships with store owners downtown “They [store owners] would let us fill up our buckets all the time.” Chloe described how people were more receptive to people squeegeeing than panhandling when she first started panhandling:

“Well, in the beginning, when I first started, people were way cooler with squeegee people than they were panhandling.”

When Chloe described the early days of being a squeegee punk, she positioned squeegee work as something that the public respected and that she treated as a job:

We were actually working. We were making an honest living because a lot of the people that I did squeegee [their windows] said we appreciate you. After all, you are not just sitting on a corner asking for money; you’re working for your money.

Moses’s description of when he started squeegeeing echoed what Chloe told me: “It was pretty positively received. Like the newspapers were promoting it, had positive articles on entrepreneurship saying, you know, it is better than just sitting on the corner these kids are providing a service.”

Some informants described how the public goodwill extended past media representations and into the interpersonal interactions the informants had with the general public. Such as Moses’s description of the different ways that community groups would offer to help the squeegee workers; people got creative:

Sometimes, you get different church groups just all coming down with food. We had a church group squeegee for us once. They went out and squeegeed, and they gave us all the change they made; we had no clue what the hell was going on [laughing].

Moses described how Squeegee Punks became somewhat of a tourist attraction “like the double-decker buses would go by, and tourists would throw out change.” Brewster described a similar scene where school buses would come down lakeshore, presumably on their way to a field trip, and the kids would roll down the windows and throw change and snacks out:

Some of the funniest things, like school buses, would show up. All those fucking kids throwing change out the window, like, they just thought it was a hilarious way of getting rid of snacks too. And then it usually took two or three stoplights to pick up all the snacks and change.

It was not just the interactions with the general public that were well received; some informants also described the police interactions as being significantly more positive during this early period. Anise told me that before the moral panic started in the early days of squeegeeing: “There was no aggression at all from the police.” Moses’s description of the police coming and checking on them at the corners and making sure they did not have any open containers, and giving some leeway illustrated another way the relationships with the police were more positive before the moral panic started:

You know, some[police]were decent, some[police] were jerks. Generally, the decent ones weren't giving you tickets. You know there are decent cops and lots of interactions with these cops. Then there were assholes, you know. Usually, they would just sort of stop by the corner a couple of times a day and ask you how it's going, basically. Multiple times, I had bike cops ride up on me when I was drinking beer. They said, you know, don't smash bottles, and if no one complains, we do not care. You know, and that was fine, and those were what I considered reasonable police officers.

When Ace was describing his experiences with the police, he mentioned more than once how prior to Mike Harris's campaign for his second term as premier of Ontario, his interactions with the police were reasonably insignificant: “Before [Mike] Harris, I never even saw [police]. They didn't even bother me unless there was a call for a reason.”

In summary, this subsection focused on how some informants experienced being a squeegee worker in Ontario before the moral panic started. While also highlighting some different relationship dynamics some of the informants had with the police.

*Squeegee work: street kids' "after-school job."*

The early goodwill from the public and the police that the informants described allowed many informants to develop a positive relationship with squeegee work. One of the most consistent themes from the interviews centered around how squeegee cleaning was described and experienced as *work* rather than *just* a survival skill for youth experiencing homelessness. Squeegee work is not far from having a part-time job after school at a gas station pumping gas and living at home with your parents; the difference lies in the eye of the beholder. Various personal motivations influenced each informant's decision to do squeegee work, ranging from trying to finish high school, being able to afford beer and a punk show on the weekend, or not wanting to engage in illegal activities to survive. While the motivations varied, all informants derived meaning from their participation in squeegee work.

Anise explained that when she was a squeegee punk, one of her goals was to finish high school, but she highlighted that in the 90s, social assistance for students was almost impossible to qualify for because you needed to have an address to go to school and to have an address that usually meant being taken into care:

So, I got kicked off welfare at that time in schools, at least in the Ontario school board. If you were under the age of 18, if you were a minor, you couldn't go to school if you had no fixed address; you either had to go into guardianship or foster care. And like for many of us who, like, I guess I was still trying to do high school. So, for a lot of us that had been on



the streets for years already, like I was 17, I'd been on my own for almost four years. I'm like, What the fuck am I going to do in a fucking group home?

Dane was also trying to finish high school as a squeegee punk. Dane explained that when he was 15 years old, he had left home and was on student welfare trying to finish high school. He was not able to work and go to school, and he was paying \$450 a month to rent a room which left him with around \$50 for the rest of his bills: "So squeegeeing was a good opportunity for me, I guess because I can do it on my own hours when I was done school, I could do that." The city that Dane lived in had a core group of Squeegee Punks who would work the main corner downtown, so it was relatively easy for Dane to pick up a squeegee and start working:

You know, the typical thing would be to squeegee up enough to get a case of beer or maybe go to a punk show later that night if there was one going on, you know, basically bring some joy into a very broke life.

Zita was another informant who had tried to stay in school after leaving home, but it became too challenging to stay in school and support herself:

Well, it would have been the summer of 94, it's like those five years they were really blurry. A lot was going on; I had finished ninth grade at the end of the ninth grade when I got kicked out. And then, I did go into 10th grade for a little bit, but I wasn't able to stay because I couldn't support myself. And then that's when all the tours and stuff happened, and that's when I started squeegeeing.

The informants described squeegee work as the best option to make legitimate money when they were street kids. Zita explained that her choice to do squeegee work was not a choice in the strict sense of the word. The alternatives that she presented as options were becoming a "prostitute" or "robbing people's houses" because, as she pointed out: "You had to do something to earn money

because you were too young to have a real job, and I really had no inclination to hurt anyone. Squeegeeing was a way that I could survive without being a criminal.”

Zita further expands her description to include the reasons why getting another job was not an option for her:

And this is the other part too, you know, maybe not a lot of people want to hear that, but I'm on the street, I'm in a shitty situation. It's not optimal, but why should I have to rely on handouts all the time, or why can't I do something for myself? I can't go get a job, and even if I had a fucking job, how am I going to keep it? I don't have anywhere to fucking live.

Some informants explained that the benefits of squeegee work extended past the financial gain and included the physicality involved and the safety benefits of working in groups. Ryan compared it to panhandling, saying it was a better option because he was “actually working, moving,” and elaborating on that, he explained: "There was a lot of group mentality involved in it. So, you could be alone on the street, or you could be working corners with groups of three or four people. Safety in numbers.” Chloe also described the allure of the movement involved in squeegee work compared to panhandling and busking, and she explained that:

I was just very active, so I wanted to do more. And I met a couple of girls, and they were like, you know, you can make money doing this [squeegee work] because I've never done it or even seen it. So, I was like, Oh, that's cool. And then I actually really got into it because I enjoyed it, you know, making people happy and washing their windows and doing a really good job. It made me feel good.

Some informants described squeegee work as a business with regular customers that required impression management to ensure they could continue to earn money. Moses was one

of the informants who described squeegee work as a business, and his primary concern was keeping his customers happy. Moses described doing comedy routines and squeegee tricks on the side of the road as a part of his business strategy:

We would do a lot of comedy, like popping up, trying to make people laugh on their way to work to get better money, doing that was always better than jumping someone's window and pissing them off and having them throw a quarter at you.

Moses went on to describe what a typical day looked like for him during his squeegee punk career:

Well, like any other sort of business, I had regulars, like you have regular people that drive by the intersection at the same time every day, and you might not catch them every day because, depending on the lights and stuff, they might drive through. But, I mean, I had people like every second or third day, always the same people. You get to know some of them, you know.

He also explained that he would be on the corner earlier than his counterparts as a way to avoid the corners being too crowded and as a way to ensure that he had good odds of being the first squeegee punk his customers came across that day:

That's why I always liked squeegeeing in the mornings. I'd get up for the morning rush hour. When everyone else is hung over and sleeping in general, you know, later in the day when there are five or ten people on the corner trying to make money, I'm sitting in the bar cracking my beer.

Continuing with the business aspect of squeegee work, Ryan described how he would take new street kids under his wing, and they would be apprentices; he explained that making

people smile was a crucial factor in making money squeegee cleaning: “You know what? They figured it out by watching me. It was kind of one of those things. If you can make someone laugh, they will give you some money.”

Many informants described gaining a work ethic that manifested in different ways over time. Dane talked about how the time he spent doing squeegee work impacted how he operated in the world as he traveled around North America in the late 1990s:

And there's a work ethic involved in it, too. I hadn't really had a job at the point in my life when I squeegeed. When I was traveling around the US; sometimes, we would put a sign up by the light by the highway, and while we were doing that, one of us would be picking up garbage on the side of the road, and people would see that we were working and doing something to improve where we are, you know. So that's the kind of thing where we would be sitting there trying to make money. We may as well be doing something more, and if I hadn't squeegeed, I don't think I would have thought to pick up garbage while we were sitting here. It's like a little thing. But it helps to create a bit of a work ethic for kids. It was positive, in that sense of work ethic and feeling like you're somebody and you can do something that somebody actually appreciated. Rather than just sitting on the corner and begging with a sign and a cup, like. Help me, please because I'm poor.

Ace, the only informant who identified as a squeegee kid, described how squeegee work was essential to his survival on the street. “I literally did it [squeegee work] to save my life.”

In summary, this section provided an overview of the context of the informants' squeegee punk careers and a framework to understand how the informants experienced the beginning of their squeegee work careers. While also providing an overview of how the informants experienced goodwill from the public and the police in the early days of squeegee work in Ontario in the early

to mid-1990s. This section also highlighted how the informants made meaning from their squeegee punk careers before the moral panic. The quotes and analysis illustrate how the informants experienced squeegee work as a job and actively chose to engage in squeegee work rather than passively sit on the corner and panhandle.

### **The shift in public perception**

The success of a moral panic rests primarily on the successful creation of an extreme overreaction to a group or situation known as the folk devil (Cohen, 2002). As such, the shift in public perception described by the informants provides insight into some of the internal processes experienced by a folk devil. While the informants who started their squeegee career from 1993 - 1995 shared similar observations about when the public perception shift started, there were varying levels of awareness of what influenced the shift in perception. Some informants described an influx of squeegee workers during the summer of 96 as a precursor to the shift in public perception they experienced.

#### *The Summer of 96 squeegee work explosion*

When I asked the informants about what they remembered about the shift in perception, some of the informants described a significant change in the size and makeup of the squeegee kid demographic happening during the summer of 1996, which was followed by a noticeable change in interactions with the public and other institutions like the police.

Anise explained that there had been some significant events in Quebec in 1996 that she thought impacted the influx of squeegee workers in 1996:

The spring of 1996, and then also in the summer of 1996. There were significant riots in Montreal around two things that happened on Saint John Baptist. And then there was also a show that was shut down with a crowd of young punks and people outside of it. and it was really bad. So, these kinds of conflicts between the police and stuff sort of popped off here in Montreal to the point where there was like a pretty significant amount of damage that was done in the downtown core. But some riots happened in Quebec City. Many trials went on because people were really badly wounded, like some people were permanently paralyzed. So that's how the summer of 1996 started out. And at that point traveling through the cities was very popular. So we had a core group of friends, but those core group of friends traveled from Vancouver to Halifax down to Tucson and Tempe, across to Louisiana. Like it [squeegee work] was in New York. It was everywhere. So. You know, I think one of the things that happened is that, you know, you would really see the same kind of communities of people in different cities all over the newspapers.

Anise went on to say: "I remember by the time the summer of 96 came, there were exponentially more kids on the street, but not all of them were squeegeeing." Moses also thought the influx was impacted by the way French Squeegee Punks were being treated in Quebec:

But definitely a lot more French [punks] because the Quebec cops were worse than the Toronto cops. They were beating the hell out of them, so they were leaving Quebec in droves and coming to Toronto. So that's interesting. The way it goes, right migrate to the next big city where people are in.

Moses went on to describe how he thought that the mid to late 90s in Toronto was a perfect storm situation:

I think that you know, it was kind of the perfect storm, you know, you had a bunch of people and not much work and I don't know if it was really a growing music scene or whatever, but just attracting this sort of scene, attracting people, you know, hey, I can make a living and have a good time and, go see bands and enjoy myself and what not, you know, and not be miserable and broke all the time. But I think the downside of that was it also brought in a lot of people who were, you know, had some drug addiction issues and stuff with people who were more desperate, more pushy, more jumping on cars more than, you know. So, it's the whole, you know, like when too many people in a squad get busted.

When I asked Brewster about the influx of Squeegee Kids, he believed that the influx was at least partially influenced by the ease with that you could make money doing squeegee work in comparison to other options like panhandling:

Because it was a way to make money easily, you would buy a \$7 squeegee. You get a couple of water bottles with some dish detergent. There we go. You're making money. You know, it's better than sitting on the street asking for change, which you can still make money from flying a sign, but it was just, you know, if you didn't have a guitar, and you had a squeegee at least you're doing something to try to earn money, like, hey, thanks for the three bucks for the five bucks or the Loonie or whatever.

In summary, this sub-section discussed many of the informants' observations about the influx of squeegee workers in Ontario in the summer of 1996. This subsection also discussed some of the reasons informants provided for the sudden increase in squeegee workers.

### *The folk devil's perspective of a moral panic*

The squeegee worker explosion of 1996 was met with newspaper headlines comparing Squeegee Kids to swarming insects, followed by politicians and business owners raising concerns about how Squeegee Kids were negatively affecting their business, and motorists were raising concerns about being approached while stopped on the street (Hermer et al., 2002). This shift in public perception that marked the beginning of a moral panic was experienced and described in different ways by the informants. Most informants discussed the shift in their awareness of the rhetoric being leveraged against them to fuel the moral panic. Other informants discussed some substantial changes they experienced and witnessed regarding experiences with other Squeegee Punks, police treatment, and experiences with the general public.

Anise, Moses, Chloe, Ace, and Zita all possessed heightened awareness and understanding of the shift in public perception. Whereas Brewster, Dane, and Ryan described being less aware of the more significant issues that were going on. The varying degrees of awareness about the moral panic is unsurprising given the time period and housing status of the majority of the participants, which could make it hard to follow the news coverage.

When I asked Anise about the moral panic that was waged against Squeegee Kids, she told me that she was aware of the headlines demonizing Squeegee Kids. When Anise described the media attention that Squeegee Kids were attracting in the 90s, she explained that it got to the point where even *she* thought Squeegee Punks were dangerous:

It was crazy. it really messed with your head. When you're a teenager, you think that the world is looking at you and everything's about you anyway. So, to be in a situation where the newspapers and the provincial government are against you, I honestly thought we were the criminal element of Gotham City.



Not only did Anise describe internalizing the hostile rhetoric that was being printed in newspaper headlines she also described how her interactions with the police solidified those messages:

It was so hostile to a point where it was unimaginable, you know, cops would routinely pull their guns on you. They would jump the curb and drive their cruisers up, like bumper to where you are. You have to jump up and get out of the way. So, it was hard to not see yourself as being, you know, I must be the fucking public enemy number one.

Chloe explained that she started to notice the increase in aggression from some Squeegee Punks before she started to notice the shift in how the public treated her: “I got attacked a few times, you know, and it wasn't just by the people in the cars, it was by the squeegeers. They would fight for a corner.”

Chloe was the only informant who talked about trying to counter the moral panic being waged around them. Both of Chloe’s strategies to counter all the bad press in the media were ingenious; she started squeegeeing topless and gave out free squeegee coupons. Chloe explained that when squeegeeing topless, she was trying to “take away from all the angst and the people fighting.” She went on to tell me that she wanted to see people smile and try to take some stress away from the situation and capitalize on the new law that allowed women to be topless in public:

I did that because I wanted to take away from it. Truthfully, I wanted to take away from all the angst and the people fighting and all this. And I thought that that would be perfect to do it, because it came out that we could walk around without our shirts on, So I was just like, really? I was doing it because I wanted to. I wanted people to smile. I wanted there not to be fighting and arguing all the time. I knew that doing that would take a lot of the

stress away from it as much as I had tons of people wanting to talk to me about it on camera. I really did for a bit. Yeah, it took away from it all.

Chloe and I laughed when I told her about the following political cartoon, I found depicting Mel Lastman wiping the topless squeegeers off the streets.



This is what she had to say about it:

That's so cool, though. I really did it to take away from all the fighting; I'm like real peace, love, and happiness have always been a glass half full. I just. I've always wanted to make everything around me sunshiny, even if it's just a smile at the end of the day, for somebody or whatever. I just, you know, everybody wants to be an asshole, and they want to be in their ways. And that's fine. They can. But I. It's not going to change who I am.

Chloe's motivations behind putting free squeegee coupons on people's windshields were to get the public to remember that Squeegee Punks were providing a service and were not trying to harass people like the headlines were saying at the time:" So they'd be looking at it positively, you're not being harassed, but you, you know, this person come to this corner at this time, and you'll have a free squeegee."

Chloe told me that she knew people were getting scared because of all the headlines talking about how aggressive and dangerous Squeegee Kids were:

People were scared. They were scared. You could see it in their faces like, ‘Oh, no, what's he going to do to me?’ Right? Yeah. They had it all over the newspapers that Squeegee Punks were bad and aggressive. You have to let them just to have them stay away from your car” She told me that her regular customers would tell her that she was different and that “You're not as bad as they [newspapers] say you guys are.

Chloe told me that she thought the public did not understand what it meant to be a squeegee punk:

I don't think that it was just an overnight thing. I mean, I know that there were a few Squeegee Punks, like I said, from Montreal that were aggressive, but it wasn't like that. It was a lot more together. We were all there for each other. We were all out to help one another. We'd always have chats. We'd always figure out who is going to be where. And yeah, and then I feel like because we were there for so long, I think that society thought that we would wear off, but it never did. So, we [the public] don't want these Squeegee Punks here, so we're going to do everything we can and say anything we can to get them out of here. So, by making the government paint us out to be these fucking horrible people, that's when it [the moral panic] started. And people were frantic to make money and trying just to make a living where we were being painted to be these awful people.

Chloe went on to describe a situation that happened between her and a motorist while she was squeegeeing at the height of the moral panic: “This car just keeps zooming, and fucking yells at the window, fucking dirty squeegee punk. And I'm thinking, oh, my God, he was actually trying to fucking run me down.”

Chloe remembered a lot about the moral panic and the shift in public perception, but it was not until she interviewed with me that she knew about the O.S.S.A.

Ace was aware of the moral panic; he told me how the police changed after Mike Harris ran for his second term with the safe streets campaign that promised to criminalize squeegee work. Ace explained:

I remember, like, at first, there was no problem. There were no problems at all. I never had any problem with cops at first. But then [Mike] Harris was running on the second term, and then that [Squeegee Kids] really started becoming news. It was all over the news about this [Squeegee Kids].

It is worth noting that not all of the respondents described the same level of hostility. When I asked Zita whether she knew about headlines and the war on Squeegee Kids, she explained that her housing status made it nearly impossible to keep up with the headlines: “Well, in the beginning, I had no fucking clue, like who was reading the newspaper.”

Zita also explained that she did not have many negative experiences with the public, which meant she was not experiencing the hostility other informants spoke about. As Zita put it:

Like from my experience, I didn't really have very many negative experiences from the public, Like you'd have people even like sit down and chat with you or you know, you mean like for the most part in Toronto, I didn't have very many negative experiences with most people going by who didn't own a fucking TV. I slept under a bridge, you know, they mean, newspapers. Those cost money, and I'd rather spend it on food. So, no, there really wasn't a lot of information. I think what I heard most about it was when people who were on the street working with us informed us.

Zita went on to describe how she experienced the relationship that Squeegee Punks had with the police and how the shift started to occur after one of the days of action riots that happened in queens park. Zita explained that while:

There was a clear divide between us and them [police], but it was pretty much govern yourself as long as you're not crossing any lines and you're not causing any trouble, and then, yeah, there was a shift because there was all this stuff going on.

Zita referred to the civil unrest in Ontario in the mid to late 1990s around the austerity measures that the Harris government enacted. Zita described being involved in protests with: “Police in riot gear riding horses and the paramedics and stuff trying to help people. And they were getting trampled by horses like it was fucking chaos. Yeah. And then in the courtroom, that was interesting.”

The response I got from Ryan about his level of awareness of the moral panic had a similar flavor to Zita's response. Ryan pointed out that he was living in a squat with no television and could barely afford to survive on the street, so the last thing he was worried about was reading the local paper, if he could even find one. Brewster also had minimal knowledge of the moral panic because he started to work as an arborist at 16 and stopped squeegeeing before the moral panic ramped up. Brewster told me all his friends were still Squeegee Punks, so he was somewhat aware of what was happening and witnessed some of the negative shift in attention from the public and the police.

Dane told me the moral panic confused him, he understood why people would not want kids with chains and spikes near their cars, but that was the only angle that made any sense to him. He went on to talk about how the other concerns did not make sense if people were thinking about squeegee cleaning ethic:

I understand people being worried about chains and scratching their cars. But that's about the only part I understand. Like the rest of it doesn't make any sense. But that's also because I was privy to what squeegee work ethic is and that it was a job and kids didn't want to piss

off the people driving the cars because then they wouldn't let them wash their windshields anymore.

Dane went on to explain that:

Most of us were just regular kids, just like the kids they had or their friends, you know, like we all had a bit of a rougher upbringing, but we were all just regular teenagers for the most part.

In summary, this section has focused on how the informants experienced the change in public perception, highlighting some specific events that contributed to the shift, like the influx of squeegee workers in the summer of 1996. This section also illustrated the varying levels of hostility that the informants experienced due to the moral panic while also discussing how the moral panic impacted some of the informants' experiences with other Squeegee Punks, the police, and experiences with the general public. The analysis also highlighted the different levels of awareness of the moral panic being waged around them.

### **External factors shaping the moral panic.**

As the informants described how the shift in public perception and the moral panic impacted them, I was reminded of the complex interplay between the moral panic created around Squeegee Punks and multiple external societal factors. In line with the results previously discussed, there was a varying degree of awareness of the external factors that contributed to the success of the moral panic. Anise, Zita, Chloe, Moses, and Ryan discussed some external factors in their interviews. However, there was one external factor that the majority of the participants identified, which was the influence that the French Squeegee Punks had when they started to come into Ontario in the mid to late 1990s.

### *The French Squeegee Punk influence*

I had forgotten what the French Squeegee Punks were like until I conducted these interviews, but as soon as Moses mentioned them, all my memories came flooding back. I was close with Moses, Zita, and Chloe in the 90s, so some conversations about the French Squeegee Punks brought back my memories of hanging out with French Squeegee Punks. The descriptions that the informants gave me matched many of my memories. The French Squeegee Punks were known for their intensity and aggression but also their fierce love and protection.

The informants described various interactions they had with French Squeegee Punks; all of the interactions included aggressive behavior. There was an underlying theme concerning the effect that the influx of French Squeegee Punks had on the moral panic. The variation came in how the informants understood French Squeegee Punks and where their aggression came from. Zita, Moses, and Chloe were the informants who squeegeed in Quebec and often hung out with the French Squeegee Punks in Ontario. Some informants cautiously explained the French Squeegee Punks' influence on the moral panic, while others specifically named some of the problematic behavior that French Squeegee Punks brought with them.

When I asked Zita about the French Squeegee Punks, she quickly reminded me that she hung out with the French Squeegee Punks all the time and that being a street kid in Montreal in the mid to late 90s was a much different experience than being a street kid in Ontario, she went on to describe that it was a brutal experience:

So, I actually hung out with a lot of French Squeegee Punks; that was a lot of the people I hung out with, and they did bring some other things to the table that were pretty tough. But we all took care of each other; you know what I mean? And when they saw that, they didn't deal with things the same here in Ontario, like it's different there [Montreal]. It's very different there [Montreal]. Like, I was in Montreal, too, and living on the streets of

Montreal is way different from Toronto. Montreal was tough, I could tell you some messed up stories. I was walking down the street when a guy actually pulled over in a car with plastic all over the inside of his car: the roof, the dashboard, the doors, everything. Asking if I wanted a ride, I was like Excuse me.

Zita went on to say:

The people [in Montreal] were very different, and how other people preyed on street kids in Montreal was brutal. So, when I look back on it, they were more fucked up than we were., but do you blame them?

Moses was another informant who spent time squeegeeing in Quebec and regularly hung out with French Squeegee Punks. He echoed what Zita described but added that there was a level of desperation and drug addiction that came along with their arrival in Ontario:

But then I think in Montreal, they were more desperate, Montrealer's, I think it was poor, very poor in the early nineties. And there are just a lot of poor kids on the streets compared to Toronto. Then you add on the drug addiction and the desperation level increases.

Another point that Moses brought up had to do with the child welfare system in Quebec and how that was also a motivating factor for French Squeegee Punks to leave Quebec and work in Ontario and other provinces across Canada:

Well, this is certain in Quebec when you got picked up, at least back then, when you got picked up if you were under 18, they put you in child welfare, but their child welfare is basically like a child prison until they could, like, adopt you out to somewhere.



The fear did not stop with a child welfare response in Quebec. Moses went on to describe one of the times he was woken up by the Securite du Quebec and lined up against a wall with machine guns pointed at him for sleeping in a park:

I remember being in Saint Jean [Quebec] when the police decided to raid it, and just everyone in the park was rounded up and thrown against a wall with machine guns pointed at you. And basically, strip-searched on the wall. Like down to your boxers, at least. And so, you know, for no other reason than you were sitting in a park, so that was interesting.

Chloe started talking about the French punks when she told me about when she noticed the shift in public perception. Chloe explained that the language barrier played a role in their aggressive nature: “A lot of the French punks came up, and a lot of them had the bilingual barrier there. So, they would not take no for an answer.” Chloe was cautious about talking about the French Squeegee Punks until I reassured her that she was not the only person who had mentioned them. She breathed an audible sigh of relief and began describing her experiences with French Squeegee Punks. Chloe described increased tension on the corners between the Ontario Squeegee Punks and the French Squeegee Punks. Chloe’s explanation highlighted how the aggressive behavior she observed from the French Squeegee Punks impacted squeegee work on multiple levels, there was the public perception issue and the direct loss of business issue:

A lot of the time, the French punks came out, and they would get angry because it was almost an entitled thing like they expected them to want their window washed, and if they didn't do it, they would do it anyway. So, people would get pissed, and there would be fights like because there were corners that people had for years. And so, they'd be like, this is my corner. You're not respecting it a lot. And then there'd be fights. So, it ended up

having them [French punks] pushed down towards Front St, and it's kind of screwed things even more because, in the people coming up all the way up to Spadina and Queen, they would have already had their window wash. And they're like, fuck off type thing because it's still on Spadina, right.

Chloe also told me there were times when the French punks left after causing trouble, and the Squeegee Punks left working the corner would end up having to deal with the police:

There was this kid from Montreal. He fucking smashed some guy's windshield. After he [the motorist] wouldn't let them squeegee the windshield. And that's the thing. A lot of the time, they wouldn't get caught because by the time the cops got there, they were gone. So, the people that were there would be the ones getting it from the cops because they'd say, oh, the squeegee punk on this corner that it put it up. And then when they actually got there, the people that took over because nobody was there.

Chloe explained that the French squeegee punk influence significantly impacted how the public perceived Squeegee Punks: “So this is when it started getting bad. it was not good because people would start getting out of their cars and wanting to fight us.”

When we talked about how different it was to be a street kid in Quebec in the 90s, Chloe was trying to describe what it was like to squeegee in Quebec. She told me she wanted to use a metaphor from when she used to be a stripper because she was unsure how else to describe the difference between squeegeeing in Ontario and squeegeeing in Quebec:

You are right because it was way different there. It really was. Yeah. Ontario, I'm in Papineau, and that's where I worked. I would squeegee there, and it was intense. I don't

know how to explain it, but it was okay. This is how I'll explain it. I can explain it from this point of view when I was stripping. While stripping, I went to the States, and the state is way different. Yeah. It's basically like you have to stand behind glass. You can't get fully naked because it's so intense, and guys get so crazy, and they'll be really hardcore. Okay, where it's like this in Montreal, where it's super intense, the people are not happy. They're like, they don't want you anywhere near their vehicles. And you're lucky if you get a few vehicles to squeegee, so you would have to jump. Right. So, this is why. Yes, many of the squeegee Punks were the way they were when they came to Toronto because that's what they knew.

Some informants described resentment towards the French Squeegee Punks and the attention they brought when they showed up places. Anise described them as “heat scores” and “I would also say that like that also came down to the fact that like what I was talking about, visibility, like kids from Quebec like really show fuck out.” Ace told me that he noticed the difference in the way the French punks acted while they were squeegeeing; he went as far as to say: “That really changed it out here, and really that's really when I think war began and when they started showing up in droves.” Brewster told me that the French Squeegee Punks were a “different breed of punks” he went on to explain: “That they have got thicker skin or something some of them had a chip on their shoulder, like, oh, we are so hardcore. And so, yeah, okay, bud.”

When I asked Brewster if he squeegeed in Quebec, he quickly responded, “no, thank god.” When I asked him why he explained that Quebec was known for “driving crazy” and “people were a lot more fucking angry.”

In summary, this subsection has described the experiences that the informants had with French Squeegee Punks in the mid to late 1990s. It highlights how the informants described

observing the increase in French Squeegee Punks occurring around the same time as the shift in public perception was becoming noticeable. This subsection also illustrated how the informants had different levels of understanding of the cultural differences between the French Squeegee Punks and the Squeegee Punks from Ontario and how those differences impacted the larger group of squeegee workers.

### *Folk Devils or bad apples*

In addition to the consensus on the French Squeegee Punks' influence on the moral panic, there was also a consensus on denouncing aggressive behavior while squeegeeing. This is of specific interest because the crux of the success of the moral panic hinged on the narrative that Squeegee Punks were aggressive and dangerous, and the *only* way to handle them was through criminalization. Another thing to note is that all of the informants acknowledged that aggressive behavior was a part of being a squeegee punk; however, the assumption that all Squeegee Punks were aggressive is where they took an issue.

The term "jumping cars" refers to washing car windshields without asking permission first. The term occurs repeatedly in the quotes from the informants about aggressive behavior. Moses explained that he had personal etiquette that he followed on his corners and that he frowned on aggressive behavior. However, he knew that many other squeegee workers from other cities were known for their aggression:

I personally always asked people, and I did not like jumping on cars, so that was just my personal etiquette. But I mean that in that sort of way when it sort of started out in the early days, that was the more common etiquette but then. I don't know. It was like a lot of influence from squeegeeing style, Montreal, New York, and stuff where they'd just jump on cars. So that sort of influenced a lot of that.

As mentioned earlier, Ace was the only informant identifying as a squeegee kid versus a squeegee punk. He described observing how some of the Squeegee Punks could be aggressive:

I noticed things because there were multiple Squeegee Kids, many of whom were aggressive. Some would bust windows when the guy didn't give them anything, or they would just jump[cars]. They wouldn't even get any kind of sign out of the person in the car.

When we talked about jumping cars, Ace told me unequivocally that he did not condone that practice: "Never. That was my number one rule, man. Don't do that; you're just going to make somebody angry."

Ryan was a different story; when I asked him if he had ever jumped cars, he responded: "Yeah, absolutely." He clarified that he would never get upset if people did not pay him and that he got so quick that he could do three cars in one light. When I asked him what happened when he jumped cars, he told me that he had a gun pulled on him by a motorist in Toronto once. However, Ryan was way more interested in telling me the most unexpected consequence because he jumped a car; he interfered with data collection for a scientific study:

I'll tell you a funny story. A guy got really, really pissed off one time. He didn't pull a gun on me, but one guy did pull it out on me, and he had a bunch of cocaine on. Have I just. I'm homeless. What the fuck do you think I'm going to do? And he's like, All right, brother. And anyway. But no one guy got really pissed at me, yelling, Stop, stop, stop. I told him, " Trust me, man; I won't hurt your car. I am not going to hurt your car. And he is like, Dude, I mean, he was like a third car I had done, so he is like, Man, I am a student. I am actually studying how much soot builds up driving around Toronto on my windshield like this in the actual study.

Ryan was chuckling as he finished the story telling me he yelled after the guy to “work it into his results. For Ryan, his priority was quantity and quality, so stopping to ask permission did not make sense to him. He thought if his work was good enough, people would pay. He also noticed other types of aggressive behavior and did not condone it. He described unruly groups of Squeegee Punks he tried to avoid because they gave everyone a bad name:

Yeah. So, it got a little bit out of hand. It was fucked right up, man. Some of them [Squeegee Punks] would be fucking pissing in their squeegee buckets, like literally washing windows with piss and cider. Yeah. No, I had nothing to do with that shit.

When I asked Brewster if he saw people jump cars, he described situations where motorists would get upset because they did not want visibility-intoxicated Squeegee Punks touching their cars:

Oh, big time. You know, you got people that are high and drunk, and don't get me wrong, I'd be half drunk too, but then it's like, you know, people did not want you to touch their vehicle. And, like in Toronto, you got a lot of nice cars and stuff and shit. And so there was an argument, yeah, there were many times. There were arguments because the driver just did not want anyone touching their car,” he went on to describe a situation where two people were so intoxicated that they jumped cars after people would say no and, in Brewster's opinion, “that caused problems and then that made us look bad.

Chloe described how the aggressive behavior and jumping cars worsened as the number of Squeegee Punks increased:

The way it all turned out. Because people are not respecting and just doing it because they don't care. There were so many people doing it now. At that point, I think it was getting everybody known at that point, and it was like first come, first serve. It was just getting, I

don't know, a word for it, but really intense and really like too much because there were so many people.

Dane gave a different perspective on the possible roots of the aggression. He explained that street kids he knew had been on the street since they were 12 and had developed some intense coping skills to survive:

Many of the kids I knew then grew up on the streets and were 12 years old. So, they kind of had a different way of survival. A lot of times that kind of aggressive behavior was sort of a defense mechanism. I know I did a lot of traveling in the U.S. as well, a lot of the train-hopping kids and all those people that when you first show up, they would try to take something off of you, and if they were able to take it off of you then they would take everything from you - it was really tribalistic.

In summary, this subsection has focused on how all informants denounced the aggressive behavior they witnessed while squeegeeing. This subsection also illustrated the informants' varying explanations for why there was so much aggression on the street after the influx of squeegee workers in 96 and the increased numbers of French Squeegee Punks working in Ontario.

### *The corner rules.*

Not only did all of the informants denounce the aggressive behavior, but there were also many stories about self-governance or at least the attempt to self-govern. The issue of aggressive behavior was one that the informants all agreed needed to be dealt with. Since the police were not usually friendly, Squeegee Punks had a system of self-governance on the corners they worked on. The style of self-governance was in line with the way that Squeegee Punks lived in

that it was sometimes brutal but necessary to get the point across. The self-governance started with rules about what was acceptable on the corner based on whose corner it was. Zita told me:

That was one of those, like, rules that we had that you didn't do. Yeah. And yeah, that would still happen sometimes. But yeah, like. You know, if we saw it, we'd say something. You know what I mean? There might be a conflict about it, but there was a point, and I guess this is like when all this hype was happening, people were getting more desperate.

Moses was known for running one of the corners on Queen St, and as such, he had an established etiquette that people were expected to follow if they were working on his corner:

If it was on my corner? I was possessive over my corner. Cause that's where my customers were. So, I didn't allow it; there were no jumping cars at my corner. I mean, we didn't do that up the down the road at York and Lakeshore. You're not on our road or whatever. Not our place, not our problem. But yeah. So, we kind of regulated that now, mind you, when we weren't there, obviously. Generally speaking, like, if I was somewhere else, I wouldn't step in. A couple of times, I dragged people off the street where they're just, like, wasted. Okay, I'm going to get hit by a car. Just. Okay, get them, you know, go sit down, and you're making a fool of yourself? Yeah. Like they were punching one guy in the head because he was out huffing glue with a squeegee in his hand, oh, stumbling in traffic with a glue bag, I was just like, dude, you're really ruining our look here. But I was dragging him over and just kind of popping him to knock him out and make him take a nap, so, you know, so that kind of stuff happened. Yeah, just a little bit of regulation.”

Moses explained that there was an element of image control as well:

I just kind of kept tabs on everything, and I do not know because, you know, again, it is all about the image, right? You know, the people driving by can't tell you from the next guy



with the squeegee, you know, So yeah. You don't want to have one person ruin it. With them here, it's like, no, get the fuck out of here and ruin it for everyone. which is what happened.

Brewster gave a similar description of self-governance amongst Squeegee Punks on the corners, echoing the importance of keeping up appearances to keep making money:

And then we're willing to work with everyone out there. When someone started on shift, it caused problems with the drivers. You know that's screwing with your job and money, too. So, we would be like, you know, headed out somewhere. Out, you know, or we're going to thump you. Okay. All right. Like, you know, you're making us look bad. We don't need to go somewhere else, or you're not going to like it. I know that sometimes it just be a scrap fight, okay? But it's just trying to be like, hey, don't bug the people that don't like to be bugged like you let them be.

Chloe described how the rules on the corners started to get harder to enforce as the numbers of Squeegee Punks got higher:

Oh, yeah, because we had rules because we had it so we could switch it up, we had it. So, this is our corner for today. And we would talk amongst each other. Where later on. It wasn't like that. It was just first come, first serve. We don't even know half of these people; if we don't give them our corner, it's like survival of the fittest. Whoever is fucking tough enough to take over gets it.

In summary, this section has discussed the external factors that shaped the moral panic from the informants' perspective. Including discussions from the informants about the role French Squeegee Punks had on the hostile rhetoric being mobilized, the consensus about denouncing

aggressive behavior, and descriptions of some of the ways Squeegee Punks tried to govern themselves. Overall illustrating what issues were significant enough for the informants to identify and discuss the moral panic being waged against them.

### **The consequences of the moral panic**

The consequences of the moral panic that the informants described varied similarly to their awareness of the moral panic. Some of the consequences that the informants discussed fall in line with the scholarship on the consequences of the criminalization of homelessness already discussed (Westbrook, 2019; Westbrook & Robinson, 2020). The majority of the informants described developing trust issues with the police and society in general as a consequence of the moral panic waged against them. Trauma played a role in the trust issues many informants expressed. There were multiple stories of Squeegee Punks being abused by the police, and the few who tried to file a report were dismissed, as well as stories of police not responding to situations where Squeegee Punks needed help. The majority of the participants talked about varying degrees of police harassment and brutality that they were subjected to and/or witnessed during the last few years (1997-1999) of the moral panic; before the O.S.S.A passed.

### ***Fuck the police***

Anise and Chloe had the most detailed descriptions of police brutality out of all the informants; disturbingly, both Anise and Chloe also had personal stories about sexual abuse at the hands of the police. Anise attributed the increase in police harassment and brutality to the increased negative public perception of Squeegee Punks: “We were in a city that was routinely telling us that it hated us” She went on to tell me about a handful of situations on the street that were brutal, including stories about public humiliation at the hands of the police.

Anise explained that some police had a wider reach than others and knowing whom to watch out for was important:

So, there were a couple of police officers that had a really wide reach. Right. They had a really wide reach. And they were involved in the communities in ways that regular cops weren't okay. So, part of and part of being on the streets then was knowing to avoid that, knowing to avoid getting messed up with.

One of those police officers, Anise mentioned, arrested her one night because she refused to jump on one foot:

He was well known for harassing the Squeegee Kids. And he harassed me really badly, like. He. Then he arrested me. It was like this charge that I had for the longest time. And then I finally got it cleared by a couple of detectives and like 22 or something, but he basically just arrested me. Like he would have younger cops that would come with us, and he just fuck with you. He arrested me because he was trying to get us to spin on one foot and spin around in circles and jump up and down one leg and all that stuff. It was in February at night, and I was like, Dude, fuck you. I was like, I'm not doing this. Like, I just got so upset. And so, he was like, you better do it, or I am going to arrest you; I didn't do it, and he arrested me.

Anise also described what types of police interactions she would experience when she woke up in the morning in the park:

I used to actually live in the park where there used to be a giant metal dragon sculpture, and they used to always come, and they would wake us up. Oh, man. Near brutal. They would like to wake us up. They would take antibiotics that I had, and they would dump them and step on them. Of course, they take like any needles. We used to all sleep in the

park more than once; they would have the city come early in the morning and hose us when we were sleeping, which was awful because everything you owned would be soaking wet. I remember I went to put my shoe on, and my foot just went through my shoe like I pulled my shoe up my leg, and I was just like, fuck, like, but they used to do that, which was awful because all your stuff was wet, but also it was really painful those hoses on the city trucks are like kind of brutal.

Some other stories I heard from the informants about police interactions included brutal, traumatic details. Chloe's story about being strip-searched in an alleyway in downtown Toronto for squeegee cleaning on the corner of Queen St before the O.S.S.A was passed illustrates some of the brutal reality that Squeegee Punks were faced with during the moral panic:

The cops were on us twice as hard. Me and this other girl were squeegeeing on the corner of Queens, and we just took our time off for lunch because the McDonald's was right there. So, we went and ate, went around behind the McDonald's, sat in the back alleyway, and smoked weed. Well. A couple of cops came in, and one strip-searched me in the alleyway and said, because you're a squeegee punk, you can't fucking do anything. Like and had me up against the wall, put a fucking rubber glove on, didn't put any fucking ointment or anything on it, and shoved right up my fucking ass. So, it was like getting to the point where the cops were just not caring, and they were being super violent.

Chloe described other situations where French Squeegee Punks were beaten so severely by the police that they were hospitalized. Her rationale for why she thought it was happening came down to the pressure from the moral panic: "Yeah, it was getting intense all the way around because I think the police were doing it because they had tension on them to get us to stop because

of the way it all was.” Chloe told me that things got so bad during the last winter before the O.S.S.A was passed that Squeegee Punks had to run and hide in alleyways if they saw cop cars around:

I was working there in the wintertime, and we were trying to run away; we knew as soon as we saw a cop down the road, even if it was three or four blocks away, we had to run and hide. That was our thing. We had to run and inside pull our buckets. We had to make sure that they did not see us because shit would always go down.

Chloe described still having anxiety and trust issues when dealing with the police:

I always have my guard up now with the police. I don't trust them. I always worry and wonder when they come to my house, I get scared. I get my defense mechanism up and start right away. I am going into defense mode, in anger mode. And when I think if a lot of the shit that happened back then didn't happen, then I probably have a different outlook on it.

Ryan described situations where the police would come into a squat and assault the people living there and then destroy it: “They [police] come in with Billy clubs and clear out, but they literally fucking burns them down.” He told me about other times when he knew people had died in those same fires, but no one ever talked about it:

I can tell you. Shit. You know, it's never been reported. I lived in the tent city underneath Lake Shore. I lived in the scaffolding. We took these chain link fences and put them down. I went back to the old, abandoned factory, but they burned down, but people died in those, and that never got reported. They fucking killed homeless people. They burned them down.

The stories about the police were not all about brutality in the most obvious sense of the term. Some of the stories involved more nuanced covert abuse from the police. Moses told me that sometimes it was "...a kick in the back to wake you up." Moses went on to describe other ways that police interaction interfered with surviving on the street:

But yeah, they were brutal at times. I never got brought into jail on back, but it had, you know, they'd just steal everything laughing and just, you know, grab your stuff, grab it any gear you had, and we'll just, you know, take everything and leave you with nothing.

Dane talked about how police were "always a worry" because they would use being on the corner to run your name, and if you had any warrants or were carrying any drugs, the police could arrest you. Brewster and Ace told me they never had any issues with the police when they were squeegeeing. Brewster explained that, in his opinion, respect is a two-way street: "You know, once again, if you treat them [the police] with respect and usually they'll treat you with respect." and there were times when fellow Squeegee Punks seemed to make situations worse than they needed to be:

But yeah, the cops, you know, it wasn't too bad. But then again, with many punk rockers that think they're hardcore. Get all cops are bastard shit for no frickin reason when it's unnecessary. And then they'll get and then just get blown up into a bigger scenario where the cops have to, you know, use his power because someone's being a dick.

Ace, a self-identified squeegee kid rather than squeegee punk, echoed some of what Brewster described. In that, Ace enjoyed the interactions with the public a lot more than his interactions with Squeegee Punks. He went on to explain that, in his opinion, the way Squeegee Punks behaved was the reason for the moral panic:

Just the people I dealt with daily, not even the people I squeegee with. Because there was really a lot of them, I didn't want to deal with them. I didn't like them. I didn't like the way they acted and didn't like the way they presented themselves. And I thought, this is why they're, after you know, this is why they're doing this. It is because of the way you guys act. If they never acted like that, I don't even think that enough taxes or money aside.

While all of the informants spent some time squeegeeing in Toronto, many of them also squeegeed in other cities across Canada, including Montreal, Kingston, Vancouver, and Peterborough. Whether it was because they were traveling across Canada or in their hometowns, there was a sense that squeegee workers were not welcome in any of the cities the informants spent time in. Dane explained that in Kingston, the police would do sweeps every May to try to clean the streets up before tourist season started. He also talked about how Kingston police used a targeted policing campaign before passing the Ontario Safe Streets Act:

I can't remember what it was called. I remember that they were targeting specifically aggressive panhandling, and aggressive is a very subjective term. It meant if you said something to somebody that could be taken as aggression because somebody's trying to walk down the street as soon as you interrupt them, that's a form of aggression. I remember that every day the police did a sweep of downtown before the tourists would come in for the summer. And so right at the beginning of the summer, the police are going to arrest anybody they can on a warrant or anybody out on bail; they try to get people in bail conditions, which is pretty easy with the kids that they could walk up in snow and that's a breach bail. So, the jail or open container was always an issue, you know, because they knew where the lockdown kept us and which entrance to walk in. We wouldn't see them as quickly or so. I mean, there was always a sort of a war on street kids.

Moses was one of the participants whose squeegee punk career was ended by the moral panic because he was charged with one of the last reported squeegee kid attacks on a motorist before the Ontario Safe Streets Act was passed:

Basically, I was making money for cheeseburgers. I was asking the drivers if I could squeegee the window. Guy called me over, and I started doing the window, and then he grabbed my squeegee and pulled it [squeegee] inside his window, and I pulled it back. And then the next thing you know, eight cops had me on the hood of his car and dragged me over to the top of the road. And. they smashed my head up against a pipe on the wall. Split my head open. I asked why I was being arrested. And they said he saw me trying to assault the motorist with my squeegee.

Moses explained that his friends tried to ask the police why he was being arrested, and they got arrested for obstruction of justice. Moses reiterated, "My friends and I were just trying to make money for cheeseburgers '. Moses told me that he spent two months in the Don jail at 17 after that charge:

And I had to go in and go through the whole delousing. They are not gentle through any of the process. I never got to see a nurse for bleeding all over the place from my head, which was not pleasant, and so I spent two months, almost two and a half months, in the Don.

A bail condition for Moses was that he was no longer allowed to do squeegee cleaning or hang out with Squeegee Punks. His squeegee career was effectively ended through the moral panic. Moses described how his squeegee punk career impacted his opinion of the police:

Obviously, you know, it's pretty much a distrust. As I said, I can't see the, you know, it can't be a blanket statement about all cops I have met at times. You know, even ones that



are, I would say, do their jobs and do it well and properly. And there are others that, you know, you can sometimes tell right away.

When I asked Zita how the moral panic impacted her, she clearly stated, “I have no trust in the system.” Zita expressed frustration at how the system is set up to listen to the politicians and lawmakers rather than those who have lived experience and know-how of these systems play out in real-time.

Zita gave me an analogy for what she thought of implementing the O.S.S.A and the moral panic before the Act was passed. Using the analogy of deinstitutionalization, Zita explained how society failed to provide Squeegee Punks with the resources they needed to succeed once the O.S.S.A was passed:

So, it's Almost like when they shut down mental institutions. The mental institutions were not a healthy or good environment for people. Really?. Which is why they got shut down. but the transition is where the problem lies. There was no transition, and society was not prepared for it. And it just happened, and society wasn't prepared for it, and the patients weren't prepared for it. And it just created this massive problem that made society less safe and patients more vulnerable.

In summary, this subsection discusses how many informants experienced anxiety and distrust of police and other institutions due to the moral panic and subsequent criminalization of squeegee work. This section also highlighted that the informants had varying degrees of negative interactions with the police ranging from brutal to decent.

## *Mental Health*

For many of the informants, the trust issues that they developed from the moral panic were compounded by a varying degree of mental health issues that some of the informants are still learning to navigate in the present time. Most informants described experiencing long-term mental health effects stemming from the moral panic against Squeegee Kids. Substance issues were a common theme, as well as symptoms of depression and anxiety. For Anise, the impact on her mental health as an adolescent and beyond was significant:

Yeah. So, your perception of reality is pretty fucked because, you know, if you think people are like your teen years, they always seem like they're a bigger deal than they are. And I'm like, really? Because my teen years were on the front of every fucking newspaper. You know what I mean? Like, my perception of self and my perception of safety. Like, all of that stuff, I still really struggle with trauma. Not like, obviously, I didn't just end up in those situations for no reason. Like I came into those situations with a lot of childhood trauma. And to be in those situations and have it reaffirmed on a public stage that there is something so inherently wrong about you that you need to be treated that way was fucking fucked up. And you know, if you want to survive that, you're going to spin it into hell yeah, there is, motherfucker. You better watch if you want to spin it in. If you want to flip the narrative on something that's saying that about you, the only way that you can do it is to double down and try with all your little 100-pound fucking strung-out teenager might be the scariest bad guy anybody's ever seen. Because that's all you have. That's all you have to go with.

Chloe made it clear multiple times during her interview that being a squeegee punk meant more to her than just doing squeegee work. She talked about making people smile and having friends to lean on when she needed help. So, when the moral panic started to hit its peak, and the

police were starting to crack down on squeegee workers before the O.S.S.A passed, things changed. Chloe was candid about how that impacted her mental health:

So, because there were a few times that I was like to the point where I wanted to kill myself even though I was happy, go lucky every day I. I felt hopeless at this point because, the squeegee, everything had gone downhill. Yeah. So, I felt like I couldn't do this anymore because it was getting serious, and people were getting hurt badly.

Chloe explained that the moral panic: "Really put me into depression because I was still on the streets, and I didn't know how I was going to get by day to day. So, I started busking again, which pushed me into stripping." Chloe said that she felt society created the squeegee punk issue and not vice versa: "Because they were writing shit. They were writing stuff about how bad we were. I think a lot of it stemmed from society to push us to this."

When I was talking with Chloe about how the experience of being a squeegee punk in the 90s impacted the rest of her life, she described how it helped her navigate the world later on:

Yeah. Big time that I am street smart like I'm, I'm very street smart and living on the streets and doing all that. And it really bugs me that I'm sure I'm aware. But before, I looked at things as giving everybody a chance to; they give me a reason not to. I believe everybody deserves a chance, and I believed that way more than but not as much now like it's almost. Fate. It's pushed me to believe that not everybody deserves a chance. And some people are just very hurtful and hard-core. And maybe I'm a little bit jaded by all that because of things I went through back then.

When I asked the informants if they thought they had any long-term consequences from the criminalization campaign they were the subject of, most of the informants had a hard time

making any direct connections to issues in their present lives, the majority of the informants talked about consequences in an intersectional way highlighting the challenge in tracing the impacts of the campaign linearly.

The informants talked about how the campaign to criminalize squeegee work impacted their drug use and dependency. Including how the shift in public perception and the shift in the drug scene away from drugs like PCP and towards drugs like heroin and cocaine were occurring around the same time period.

Anise told me: “When I first started squeegeeing, most of my drug use was like things like PCP and marijuana and stuff. But once I started using opiates in 97, I stopped squeegeeing.”

Dane talked about how he started shooting up heroin at 15. At the same time, he was a squeegee punk, and how the methadone dependency he has because of his opiate addiction was one of the only concrete long-standing negative consequences of his squeegee punk career:

The only sort of negative that I can think of is that is drug dependent, and that started way back then. And that's kind of a theme as a coping mechanism. You know, you have to seek outside of that kind of substance to do that. So, I still take meth [Methadone] to this day. As a result of that, I'm still dependent on meth [Methadone] for life. So, I mean, that's related.

Anise talked about how her heroin addiction dictated what Squeegee Worker Youth Mobilization (SWYM) program stream she could participate in:

I was on a methadone maintenance program and was also using heroin. So, like, I think there was like I couldn't be in the carpentry one or the bike one. I had to be with the people

that were I had to be with the people that were, you know, doing digital stuff or whatever way that I had to be. My classmates had to be strung out like me.

Chloe described drug use as one of the constants in her life until a couple of years ago when she could finally find a way to get on methadone and stay clean. Her drug use happened in tandem with her experiences as a street kid and then as a squeegee punk. When Chloe described her struggles with drug addiction and how long it took her to get clean, you could hear both of us trying to hold back the tears. When you have the decades of shared history and tragedy that we do, there is never an opportunity missed to celebrate the people who are still alive and fighting:

It took 18 years I was addicted to heroin. I was a heroin junkie and smoking crack for a long time here, too. And that's why I moved away. So, I came back because my mom, I had a heart attack, and I was scared because when I got here, I was worried that I'd fall back into it because of what was happening, but I didn't. I realized I didn't need it anymore.

Zita did not talk as much about her struggles with addiction as she described what it was like to worry and watch friends die from poisoned drugs or drug overdoses. Zita described how frustrated she gets with some of the people we know who survived their days of drug use. We talked about how quickly people seem to forget that in the 90s, we were not dealing with a poisoned drug crisis. Many of our friends only needed an ice bath to wake up, not multiple doses of naloxone.

Moses talked about how drug addiction also fueled some of the increased aggression because people were getting more desperate:

But I think the downside of that was it also brought in a lot of people who were, you know, some like drug addiction issues and stuff with people who were more desperate for each other, more pushy, more jumping on cars more than, you know. I mean. Yeah. So, it's the whole, you know, like too many people in a squad get busted.

In summary, this section focused on the consequences the informants described experiencing during the moral panic, including increased trust issues with the police. This section also highlighted some of the mental health issues the informants described experiencing in relation to the moral panic, including the realities of the drug addiction that was common amongst Squeegee Punks.

### **Squeegee Punk Teachings**

The results took an interesting turn when the informants started to describe some of the more nuanced implications they experienced from the moral panic that was waged against them. Some informants described how the moral panic solidified their existing anarchist and activist tendencies. Other informants discussed how their experiences taught them how to have empathy and compassion for others and how that manifested in their adult lives. There were also discussions about the different terms used in the 90s to describe Squeegee Punks and how the majority of the informants described the importance of the punk family to their overall survival on the street and in the years after.

#### *Anarchy, Activism. Empathy and Mutual Aid*

Dane and Chloe described being influenced to seek out more knowledge about anarchy and activism partly due to being Squeegee Punks in the middle of a moral panic. When I asked

Dane if he thought that his experiences as a squeegee punk had any impact on his current view of activism, he responded with: “Yeah, I mean absolutely my politics haven't changed much since then.”

Chloe explained that she got more interested in politics after her experience as a squeegee punk “I was so angry. That is when I started listening to political and all of them. Like I wanted to be more into the social side of things, you know, and how squeegee is in pro punk and all this anti-government.” Chloe went on to explain that during her time as a squeegee punk she:

I wanted to get out there and tell people that that's not what we're [Squeegee Punks] all about. You know, start painting this picture that we're like this. Maybe if you hadn't painted this picture, we wouldn't have been in the situation we were in.

Since Ace was the oldest yet, the most novice street kid turned squeegee kid; he told me that his time being a squeegee kid taught him a lot about people on the street. He also described how being a squeegee kid opened his eyes to what the establishment was all about and how to navigate police interactions:

But that's actually back then is when I first started seeing the establishment for what it was. I was still pretty young. But I was still learning. And yeah, that's influenced how I operate today and 100% what I thought of the police. Certain police anyway, not all police. Because not all police are the same, you know, if one cop, you get up and he's really nice to me, and then the next cop comes up, and he's a JAG. So yeah, it really; I've learned how to read cops better, for sure.

When Moses explained how his time as a squeegee punk impacted him, he told me that many decisions he made as an adult were informed by his experiences as a squeegee punk in the 90s in Ontario. Moses got emotional and started to cry when he talked about how his time on the

street and as a squeegee punk greatly influenced his decision to try to help vulnerable children in his neighborhood when he lived in Winnipeg as an adult:

I'm going to break into tears. But there are some other stories. When I bought my first house, Me and my girlfriend lived across the street from these two native kids. Their grandmother is raising them, and their mother is out of the picture, and she got sick, and we used to babysit them, right? And so even the grandmother said she wanted us to take them in. To foster them. And then we said okay, sure, you know, but they wouldn't let us take the kids because they said we weren't a culturally appropriate household.

Moses explained that he understood the importance of placing Indigenous kids in culturally appropriate homes. However, the reality was that his house was ideal for many reasons and would have allowed the kids to visit their grandmother regularly. Unfortunately, the alternative left the kids separated and with lifelong consequences:

Yeah. Well, the unfortunate part when that happened was, and this pissed me off because even if it was not the ideal solution, it was a short-term solution. We knew these kids. The grandmother wanted us to have them, and because she was still across the street, she just couldn't physically take care of them. But then they could still see her visit her, you know, They're across the street and. And anyhow. The younger one, the boy, got adopted, but the older girl, she was 15, and they put her in a hotel room downtown. And then there were other kids in the Tennessee program or whatever in the hotel there. But basically, she wouldn't play like some gang leader. So, they beat her so severely. She's now brain-damaged and. The mentality of a three-year-old. That's horrible. You know, it's just that I've never once been in the hospital, and I have never seen anyone look like that.



Moses ended his story explaining how his time on the street as a squeegee punk affords him a level of empathy that he appreciates:

Just the understanding to have some compassion for people in that situation because they know, you know, sort of. All the variables that could be. Well, I shouldn't say that. I don't know all the variables that could happen in someone's life that cause them to end up where they are.

While Moses had a lot to say about what he learned from his time on the street as a squeegee punk, he pointed out how complex the whole situation is for him:

But it's like a double-edged sword in a way. Yep. There were a lot of really crappy times. There are, like, really fun times. But at the end of the day, how I feel about now is that I think it's given me a lot of strength in a weird sense because I'm not worried about losing a place to lose. I know how to survive; I know how to exist. I don't want it ever to happen again. But I think because a lot of people are terrified of that, right? Yeah. Um, and I just think it's allowed me to live a less stressed life, having more confidence in my abilities to survive no matter the situation, you know? I mean, I do. And it's like hard, you know, struggle and hardship, you can grow from it. You know, you can have two things happen: it can crush you, or You can grow from it.

In summary, this subsection highlighted some nuanced implications of the moral panic for the informants, including an increased interest in activism. This subsection also highlighted how some informants attribute their empathy and tendency to offer mutual aid to their time as a squeegee punk on the street.

### *The squeegee punk identity*

The way many of the informants discussed the implications of being a squeegee punk in the 90s in terms of activism and ideology intertwined with the identities that were highlighted throughout the interviews. Most informants identified as a squeegee punk rather than a squeegee kids. However, some informants used the term home bums to replace the popular term Squeegee Kids. Conversely, all of the informants also identified as a street kid. This is of interest because, for a moral panic to succeed, there needs to be an identified folk devil (Cohen, 2002); while the campaign may have been successful at convincing the general public that Squeegee Kids were different from other street kids, the majority of the informants I spoke with did not internalize that rhetoric. A handful of the informants drew attention to the Neo-Nazi skin-head punks that were also squeegeeing and had been lumped in with the larger group of Squeegee Punks in the public eye.

When Anise and Zita spoke about the different groups that did squeegee work, their terminology was "Squeegee Punks" or "home bums." Home bums was the term used for the local street kids, and that usually meant that they set the tone for how people behaved while squeegeeing.

You get into a whole other thing. That's a street kid. Dynamics, so it depends on whether you were in Montreal, Toronto, or Peterborough, and the terminology was home bums. So, the street kids from that area kind of dictated those rules, people would come in, and if they didn't follow the rules, then yeah, people would do something about that because don't just come to my town and ruin this for everyone. This is how I survive; you know what I mean? So, yeah, you'd have to be territorial.

Anise said, “You weren't a squeegee kid; you were a squeegee punk. “She went on to explain that by 1997 she resented the squeegee punk label, and she returned to panhandling, where she sat with a cup, a sign, and read a book as people decided to give her change or not:

Honestly, by 97, I wasn't a squeegee punk anymore, and I was pretty resentful of that terminology because it had been so heavily politicized. That was just that. It was just. I was really resistant to being called a squeegee kid. I had no interest in hanging out with people that squeegee.

Ace was the oldest when he started squeegeeing. He told me that squeegee work reminded him of his time working in carnivals. Ace was the only participant I spoke with that identified as a squeegee kid rather than a squeegee punk. As such, he explained that he was strategic about his squeegee work. He sat back and observed what the “Squeegee Punks” were doing, and he made some specific choices that he thought would allow him to make more money:

I did it differently and never touched people’s cars that didn't want me to. I never wore chains, zippers, or anything like that to scratch a person's car. I always bought Adidas—\$200 or \$150. Adidas at the time, in the nineties, was really expensive shoes, and the person in the car would say to me, for instance, oh, I can't afford \$450 Adidas. I said I couldn't afford a \$50,000 car.

Numerous things about Ace set him apart from the other informants regarding the squeegee kid identity. Not only did he set himself apart from the Squeegee Punks in the street when he was working, but he was also the only informant that lived at the youth shelter. The remaining informants, who identified as punks, described avoiding shelters at all costs, staying in squats, or trying to find a place.

Many informants identified different crews of squeegee workers, there was the Queen street crew and the Younge street crew and both crews were known to have issues with each other. More than one informant described the Younge Street squeegee crew as neo nazis. Zita explained some of the reasons behind the problems between the Younge Street crew and the Queen Street crew that she knew about and experienced:

Young Street were more skinheads, and Queen Street were more punks. And there was quite the rivalry there because, you know, there were many skinheads versus punk situations because they were involved in a couple of rapes on top of beating up punks when they were sleeping in the park.

Zita explained that the Queen Street crew tried to regulate things, but the Younge Street crew made that difficult:

And that was the thing too. You know, one of the big conflicts between the Young Street and Queen Street crew was the fact that the Queen Street did regulate things to try to be that wallflower to do what they needed to do without, you know, and the, uh, the Young Street crew, they were. They were more diabolical.

Moses echoed what Zita described about the neo nazis and the conflicts with the punks: A bookstore got burned out like a firebomb, and that shit triggered a whole bunch of crazy shit. I don't know. It was like basically a street war between punks and neo-Nazis.” Moses described some personal experiences with the Younge Street crew as a Queen Street punk “You reminded me of the time I was getting kicked in the head by 11 skinheads in the park because I had the wrong patch on my jacket.” The patch that Moses described was a patch that most of us wore; it was an Anti Racist Action patch. Moses finished his thought about the Younge Street skinheads

with this: “It was bad for a while; they were fucking stabbing kids over what T-Shirt they were wearing, you know, kind of fucked up.

In summary, this sub-section focused on the informants’ various identities attributed to street kids, including Squeegee Kids, Squeegee Punks, home bums, and skinheads. This subsection also highlighted how some informants internalized the negative rhetoric associated with the labels while others who were less aware did not describe the same negative associations with the labels.

### *Belonging*

In line with the scholarship on street families (McCarthy et al., 2002, Hillary, 2008), most informants described a sense of belonging and being truly accepted that created a bond and a shared commitment to caring for each other that has lasted decades since the moral panic. Many informants talked about how belonging to the punk family offered a sense of belonging and connection for kids who otherwise felt alone and abandoned by the adults responsible for caring for them. It is essential to acknowledge that the sense of community extended past Squeegee Punks and into the larger street kid community before the Squeegee Kid label was created and assigned. Many informants described finding friendship, a sense of belonging, and authenticity in the Squeegee Punks and other street kids they met in the 90s, which was unparalleled to their friendships as adults.

The majority of the informants described maintaining long-standing relationships that extend across many geographical boundaries that cannot be compared to other relationships in their lives. A key point of relevance for this theme lies in the reality that I would not have been able to complete this study without the solid relationships and commitments I forged with four of

the informants I would not have been able to conduct this study. As I established earlier, I was not a squeegee punk. Still, I was a peripheral member of the squeegee punk crew because I was friends with them when we were all just street kids and society had not had a chance to put a differentiating label on us yet. The following excerpt from the end of the interview with Zita illustrates how vital these relationships are:

**SB:** What do you want people to know about what it was like being a squeegee punk? What would you want people to know about your experience as a squeegee punk?

**Zita:** You assume I want people to know anything about it?

**SB:** True. However, I feel that's a fair assumption because you're going to be with me where I'm asking you questions about things I know.

Zita: But you know, I wouldn't be having this conversation with anybody else but you.

Moses, Zita, and Chloe detailed the relationships they forged with other Squeegee Punks while they were doing squeegee work, and how they compare to relationships they have with other people in their lives today. I am including the following excerpt from the interview with Zita where we discuss the difference in the relationships, we had with other kids on the street in the 90s and what that means for our relationships today to illustrate some of the complexity in trying to discuss the relationships we forged as street kids:

**Zita:** Those people I survived with, when they would look at me and have conversations with me, it was like they were looking at my soul. That connection that you made with people. And you can feel it in your heart, in your; it's like being shown a piece of contentment and harmony on a person-to-person level.

**SB:** Mm hmm.

**Zita:** And knowing that you will never have that again.

**SB:** Bittersweet, right?

**Zita:** Yeah, And I didn't have to hide it. And they didn't have to have a guard up. And I mattered. And they mattered. And we did what we had to do to help each other out, be there for each other, and support each other. And we could be ourselves. And it was okay. And now I'm here, and I'm trying desperately. And it's like. Back, you know, so when you're looked at as This is just my fucking job, or you're looked at as, how can this person help me? Or What can I take from them? And you're just like, It's disgusting. Society can be so fucking disgusting. Do you know what I mean?

**SB:** yeah, I know what you mean

**Zita:** And it's like, just. Let me go back to where I could be fucking free and be myself and be okay. And it's weird to think that, like, that is okay. And this. This is. So quick. So, phony. Do you know what I mean?

**SB:** I do.

**Zita:** And something that was perceived as so horrible. And even though it was hard and even though there were. You know what I mean? It was you. At least you felt supported. And you know what I mean?

**SB:** I know. I struggle a lot because I find myself thinking back-to-back then, and I wish. It's funny. I do. I wish you could go back even though I know how hard it was and how I would take

all of that again so that I could have everybody else back again, and we could just be together like that again. It's weird, right?

**Zita:** It's like a mix of things, like there's. There are pros and cons to everything. Yeah, but it was just. It was so different, you know, like, because. As. If somebody wore that quote-unquote uniform that the rest of the world was so afraid of. Yeah, I knew I could trust them until I couldn't. Yep. And then now that I'm here and I look at societies, quote-unquote, uniform, I can't trust them until I can. And there are very few that I can. It was okay to be fucked up.

**SB:** Yeah. Okay, to be damaged, right?

**Zita:** Yes. Let's just fucking live for today and see, you know.

There was a shared pain in our voices as we had this conversation because we both knew that we would never have relationships and experiences with people like we did when we were street kids in the 90s. That feeling is really hard to articulate to someone who does not share it with you, and sometimes a strange feeling creeps up and makes you wonder if you are romanticizing the past. When Dane was describing how important the relationships he forged in the 90s still are to him, he interrogated the idea that he romanticizes his time as a squeegee punk:

Yeah, most of my memories of it are super positive. Like, you know, when I think about squeegeeing, I think it kind of brings up my most romantic notions of the punk scene: getting up at noon and going and squeegeeing up another case of beer and then seeing the show. And maybe some folks are going back and seeing your friends there as you showed up. And yeah, that all feels very, I mean, retrospectively, it's probably very candy-coated compared to reality. But to this day, I see people all over southern Ontario and the USA



consistently. And just because I look the right way, I will be spotted by someone I know from back then.

Dane quickly pointed out that the parts he thought he might be romanticizing had to do with the substance abuse he was dealing with. He explained that he does not focus on being dope, sick, or hungry when thinking back. He thinks of the community and the camaraderie he found in the punk scene when he was a squeegee punk.

Chloe was another informant who valued the authenticity in the people she interacted with and her friends when she was a squeegee punk:

I had some good friendships; you know what I mean? And it was authentic. It wasn't fake; it wasn't plastic. These people were authentic and down to earth, and some of them were really fucked up. But whatever, you know what? They're being as real as it gets. And I just love that. And that was like the great down, dirty, raw truth of being a squeegee punk. It was a family like it was a family. And when it was good or so good, like we had each other, you know? And even though we were all everybody's alone, we still really had each other, like. And even though we were on the street, it didn't feel like we were like. It felt like we. We had each other's backs, you know? And it was nice. We were strangers. But a fan, a family basically is. How about? Yeah. And it really made me feel at home even though I was on the street. It made me feel like I had people there. Like, almost like a biker gang, you know, like, just a funny little mix.

Moses told me that when he was a squeegee punk, everyone was “surviving together” There was a shared sense of community and commitment to the group’s survival that was bigger

than individual needs. He went on to describe what he wants people to know about what it was like being a squeegee punk:

They don't understand what a community was like, I knew I could trust a lot of people, and they would have my back, and that was something I didn't feel anywhere else. It was that sense of community and camaraderie, surviving together kind of thing.

Moses elaborated further on the idea of surviving together: "You're broke, I help you out, I'm broke, you help me out, everyone eats, everyone drinks, and no one was really keeping tabs obviously speaking if you were decent and reciprocated."

In very typical Moses fashion, he followed up his statement with a colorful description of one of the times he was released from jail and the warm welcome that was waiting for him once he hit the streets in his jail jumpsuit and blue jail shoes:

[Laughing] It's so funny that one day when I was getting released for breaches from the Don, they'd always wait till after because they would release you from the courthouse. And all your stuff would be at the jail, Of course. I was in your orange jumpsuit and. Or not. Orange, blue. Um. Sorry, too much TV [Laughter] Right. Yeah. Blue jumpsuits in Toronto jail. And then, you know, you had to walk around and, um, actually, it was funny. The one time, I was walking down Queen Street, and the first cruiser pulled over and flagged me over, and I pulled out my bail papers. So, I'm like, yeah, I didn't just escape. It was 5:00, and I couldn't get my stuff from the jail. Yeah. So a buddy Danny Fox at the horseshoe I'm walking past there, and he calls me over, and he buys me a pint, And so we're laughing, he's laughing at me eh cause I'm sitting there in the jumpsuit and he's like you know you just got out you're broke so you know other people bought me food. Then a French guy

approached me and said, “ Oh, I love those slippers [both of us erupt into loud laughter.] I miss those slippers. I'll give you four king cans for those slippers, the crappy jail shoes. Now I'm walking around barefoot for the rest of the night, but I had four king cans {laughter erupts again}. It was funny but made me feel like I had returned home.

The street was home for Moses, and his family was there waiting for him. Brewster talked about the “punk rock family” and how much he loved squeegeeing in his era before he became an arborist. When I asked Brewster if he still hung out with the same people he did in the 90s, he enthusiastically responded, “Oh fuck yeah.” He went on to name a long list of mutual friends that we have that he still hangs out with, along with mentions of some of our friends who have died. Brewster described a punk gathering multiple times a year since the 90s as an example of the long-standing connections within the punk rock family.

In summary, this section focused on some of the nuanced implications of the moral panic described by the informants. This section also illustrated how the informants identified themselves and other street kids. This section also highlighted how many of the informants conceived their counterparts on the street as family and the longevity of the bonds that were created in the 90s for the informants.

### **Alternatives to Criminalization**

The majority of the informants' squeegee punk careers ended before the enactment of the O.S.S.A. Therefore, their experiences speak to the targeted policing campaign that helped inform the support for implementing an official law and order response to squeegee work. The informants discussed their knowledge of existing and proposed alternatives to the criminalization of squeegee work. They provided examples from their own experiences of how many exited

street life. As previously established in the literature review chapter, there was a push to create alternative programs for squeegee workers before the final push for implementation of the O.S.S.A.; one of those programs was the Squeegee Worker Youth Mobilization (SWYM) program. The city of Toronto funded the program, and it was short-lived. There were talks about implementing a squeegee licensing program and a person independently trying to start a no-squeegee sticker campaign. People could use a sticker to say yes or no to get their windshields cleaned.

### *SWYM Program, licensing, and stickers*

The interviews explored the informants' understanding and awareness of alternative programs being discussed or implemented before the O.S.S.A.'s enactment. While some informants had some general knowledge about alternative programs, Anise was the only informant who had engaged with an alternative, the SWYM program. Ironically, Anise explained that she was no longer a squeegee punk when she enrolled in the SYWM program; her opiate addiction was why she was registered. When Anise and I discussed alternative measures, she gave me an overview of her experience with the Squeegee Worker Youth Mobilization (SWYM) program. Anise highlighted the reality that the program that was created to help street-involved youth from having to engage in squeegee work missed the mark on the types of skills they were teaching:

It was good, but the only problem was a lot of the skill set they were training you for like you couldn't get entry-level jobs. And so, like I did the digital film, where would I have gotten a job? I just lucked out that I had gotten a job at Much Music. It's ridiculous. Like, that's not a typical trajectory. Some other people did some practical stuff. I know I had a

friend who did carpentry and bike repair. But a lot of the stuff was for, like. I don't know, it was good, but I think the funding got cut after a year or something mark after a year or something.

Anise talked about how her heroin addiction dictated what SWYM program stream she could participate in:

I was on a methadone maintenance program and was also using heroin. So, like, I think there was like I couldn't be in the carpentry one or the bike one. I had to be with the people that were I had to be with the people that were, you know, doing digital stuff or whatever way I had to be. My classmates had to be strung out like me.

When I asked Dane if he knew about any of the alternatives proposed in Toronto, like the SWYM program or the stickers, he told me that the SYWM program sounded similar to a program he was involved in through his local youth shelter. The program that Dane participated in was not specific to squeegee workers; it was geared towards any street-involved youths to help them gain employment skills:

I remember I did a thing where we were supposed to learn job skills. They held it over the summer, paying us \$70 every two weeks. And we had to spend maybe 5 hours a day, Monday to Friday, developing skills. Most of it was hanging around.

When discussing what types of alternative measures the participants thought could have been successful, Brewster, Ace, and Dane agreed that with some regulation, squeegee work could have been negotiated as an acceptable form of street employment with some regulation. Brewster had the following suggestion for what some regulations could look like:

Like a timeline like some punk rockers would go all night long on Lakeshore.... And a lot of people, they don't want you coming up to your cars when it's late at night... So, you know, with a structured time, like, 7 a.m. to, I don't know, 9 pm, I don't know. Like, who knows? Maybe something like that. Yeah.

Brewster also pointed out that: “a lot of people, they don't want you coming up to your cars when it's late at night.”

Ace echoed what Brewster said about having designated squeegee times, and he added his opinion on how licensing may have been helpful as well:

Licensing would have worked, but the point was that now it's going to become a company. You're going to be hired by some asshole. Yeah, like everything else. And you know what? You're not going to get what you deserve at it.

Ace considered other variables as well:

And, like I said, if you kept it only for people in bad places, homeless people. You don't have a place. You're living in a shelter. You can do that. Yeah. You got a home? No, you can't do that. Yeah, because you know what? Then it will become that they're not even going to get those jobs anymore. Eventually, now it's going to be all. Now it will be like a business, just like any other business.” Essentially, Ace thought that regulation could have helped, but it needed to be informed by squeegee workers who understood the needs of the people involved.

When I asked Zita for her opinion on the licensing idea, her answer was very much in line with her previous responses in that she was skeptical of whom the solution was meant for:

Okay, so the thing is, I'm living on the street. I'm doing my thing. For the most part, the world around me doesn't get that far, and it's just kind of background noise. Right. It's not

involved in my life. It's not involved in how I live or learn anything. Right. And now you're going to come in and try to regulate me as part of your system in some way and expect me to comply with your formalities when that is not like that structure is not a part of my life. And I'm supposed to adapt to that. Well, if I could adapt to all your structures in life, would I be where I am, you know?

Dane told me that he thought the stickers on people's windshields may have been a good idea because it allowed a certain distance between the motorist and the squeegee cleaner. He suggested that the sticker had more of a positive message than a negative one. He explained that seeing stickers that indicated people wanted their windows cleaned would be received better in general by Squeegee Punks than seeing no squeegee stickers, though:

You talked about stickers on people's cars, and yeah, that would have been fine, I think, because somebody had a sticker on the door. I want to be left alone. Or even if they are the only people who have stickers. The people that wanted me to have their window squeegeed cause then it wouldn't be a thing that says fuck you, Squeegee Kids. People might feel like that's a scary thing to do. But, yeah, I mean, I think that could have been really helpful. To create some path for kids to continue doing it the way that, you know, the most squeamish people are scared. But, you know, like. Well, it's weird to me that people found it so uncomfortable that somebody was coming up to their car and that they needed to do something about it and stop it like it. Just ignore it if you don't like it. People still come up to my car, driving to work, and ask for money. They just aren't squeegeeing, right? Yeah, it is not offering anything. And that's fine. If I don't have the money, then I just ignore them. If I don't want to talk to them, I just ignore them. Nobody ever harasses me; no one bangs on the windows.

Dane explained that he thought the city could have created opportunities for the Squeegee Punks to do some of the city work, like landscaping and clean up, to provide an alternative to squeegee work for street kids. Dane also talked about how his experiences with squeegee work progressed to other opportunities that helped increase his self-esteem and confidence in his abilities:

I can even say that from my experience. I squeegeed then I got the job at the youth shelter, it wasn't a huge job, but I got one. But, you know, I worked for the last six months in my first job. But part of it was just having a youth shelter thing was something to put on my resume instead of just saying I've never had any job. I've never had to even show up somewhere at a particular time and like feeling like I had some business walking into the place and saying, Hey, you should try hiring me because, you know, and then earnings of my it was it was preferable to even if it wasn't much money still struggling like an apartment at least where I was. No, I mean, I could have five roommates or whatever, but many kids did that.

In summary, this subsection focused on what the informants knew about the alternatives that were being presented. This subsection also highlighted which alternatives the informants thought had merit and what could be changed to improve them.

*Collaborate, coordinate, and communicate.*

While some informants stated they would have been willing to consult with the lawmakers about alternatives to criminalization, there was still an underlying distrust of the process. Many informants explained how they would not have trusted any authority to talk to them because there



had been such a deep distrust between some Squeegee Punks and stakeholders pushing for their criminalization.

Zita and Anise had a lot to say about how they felt consultation would have gone if they had been approached in the 90s. Zita passionately told me that while she would have been willing to have conversations, she did not think anything different could have been done: “I’m not represented. You want to hear me? Why? You’re wasting your time and mine. Because it has nothing to do with me other than being the problem for you.” For Zita, her existence was portrayed as an issue that needed to be addressed when she was trying to figure out how she was going to survive:

I don’t understand how I’m the problem because, whatever life has gone by, I’m not breaking into your house. I’m not beating up your kids. I’m not spreading drugs, disease, or you know what I mean? I’m just trying to do what I can where I am. And quite honestly, many of us felt safer in that wide-open world than we did behind closed doors.

Zita made it clear that there were key factors that needed to be taken into account by the power holders if they wanted to be able to engage with people with lived experiences: “If you actually want to fucking help, then you’ve got to learn to *“collaborate, coordinate and communicate.”*” Zita elaborated on the importance of trust between the power holders and people with lived experience and how trust and communication work together:

What’s the actual problem here? Do you know what I mean? It’s difficult because you’re asking a society, a government, or an organization to solve this problem when there’s no trust. So, like how do you go at this? First, we got to work on trust and then communication. You know what I mean. And connecting with people, you know, talking about that whole lived experience professional thing, is where you could possibly get some trust. But you

know, on the other end of that, we're going to have to trust you, and they can't turn around and sell out their past, you know, to appease their future. So, you got to be careful with that, or you're going to make that distrust even greater. Do you know what they mean?

After highlighting the complex and fragile process of trying to establish trust, Zita went on to explain that:

I think that the answer lies in a coordination of perspectives. Yep. Do you know what I mean? From the perspective of regular society, I'm not a part of regular society, so. It doesn't represent me whatsoever, and even if I did give you my feedback and what I think is not really going to fucking matter because you're not doing it for me. You're doing it for you, and you Don't give a shit about what I think, say, or feel.

When I asked Anise about what, if any, alternatives may have been helpful for her and other Squeegee Punks in the 90s, she echoed Zita's' disillusionment with the notion that society would have accepted any other option but to try to eradicate them from the street corners across Ontario. Anise described:

There are too many things happening. I mean, the austerity measures Mike Harris put in place were devastating. However, they were devastating for a really small part of the population. Most of the people you meet. We're getting there now because shit just trickles downhill until it eventually pulls big enough that everybody's standing in it. But back then, most people didn't hate life because of Mike Harris's austerity measures. He cut taxes by 30% and cleared the deficit in four years.

When I asked Moses what Squeegee Punks needed in the 90s that may have helped them stop squeegeeing, he made it clear that housing would have made a big difference:

Ultimately, what they needed was housing in a large sense. But I mean again because a lot of them are under 18. You know, running from, you know, shit situations and whatnot that maybe they want to stay under the radar, and there is a certain like part of it too is a, you know, sense of adventure and sense of freedom and just, you know, being able to make your own way in the world and not have any confines

Chloe talked about how she thought some sort of community education about who Squeegee Punks were by Squeegee Punks may have been helpful; she gave me a detailed description of how she would have set it up had she had the chance to:

I do feel like if we say we had an outreach thing where we could sit down and do interviews with Squeegee Punks and show them the day-to-day life, what we were all about before that maybe we would have had, they would have had a different outlook on it because it was good. As I said, it was good, and it was a big part of a lot of people's lives. It was very much the call when you entered; it was very interactive. Like it was really I found good for society. Like, I found that you could talk to people easier. You could introduce yourself to other Squeegee Punks and, you know, just shine on where it's kind of like working in an office. This is your job. This is your job. This is where you are. This is your cubicle. This is your cubicle, you know? And we are we, you know, chose to switch up. We all had it like our place in a way. We had a place, and our place had us, you know.

I asked Chloe if she thought something like a squeegee punk union could have made a difference in the future of squeegee work, and Chloe was convinced that if society was allowed to understand what squeegee work was and who Squeegee Punks were that squeegee work might still be an option today:

If we could get our word out there and what we were all about and show the people that we weren't what we were painted out to be, they basically made us that way because we had to be. As I said, there were a few bad apples in the bunch. But, like, the majority of the people were good. And we were happy with the situation that we had. It wasn't like an issue to star in any news. So yes, I think if we had a squeegee union and somebody willing to put our words in a video or something and put our name out there, it'd be different, you know what I mean? And it would have been different. And still, even now, like if we could get it back to the way it was.

Dane told me that even though he does not believe that reform of the systems is possible, he would have chosen to talk with any lawmakers or politicians that came in good faith looking for input. Moses shared a similar sentiment that he would have “given his 2 cents” if he had been given the opportunity. Ryan told me he thought having a third-party mediator might have been helpful as a way to try to connect with the Squeegee Punks. Ryan specifically mentioned a well-known punk named Spider, who was like a father figure to the majority of the Squeegee Punks that worked across Canada. Ryan explained, “Because Spider was who helped us. “

Anise highlighted the importance of ‘meeting people where they are at.’ She described what it was like when she would go into the local drop-in, what worked and made a difference, and what made things more complicated. Anise described what the difference was between the staff that would want to save her versus the staff that knew what she needed when she came in:

They would tell those people to leave you alone. They would be like; we’ve got this person for an hour. This is a person's, like, has an hour. We need to get them food. We need to find out if they need to see a doctor to get antibiotics. We need to give them a clean, fit, and stop it. If you bombard them at the door wanting to save their life, and sign them up

for a trial program, they will just walk away. Yeah, I really think that if you have an approach where if somebody comes to you and says, literally, all I want is a bowl of soup and a bag of clean syringes, do that. And if you consistently do that, you will build enough trust with that person that they'll start listening to you.

In summary, this subsection discussed the importance of 'meeting people where they are at' and the importance that some informants put on trust and communication when describing what may have been effective in helping Squeegee Punks in the 90s. As well as highlighting pragmatic solutions like housing.

### *Street Exit Stories*

Many interviews naturally ended with the informants describing their street exits. Many informants described a natural progression away from the street and squeegee work. In contrast, other informants had a concrete understanding of how they exited the street and ended their squeegee punk careers, including remembering the names of some of the most influential people. The street exit trajectories the informants described provided insight into what other alternative measures could have been explored before the moral panic that ended in their criminalization. Anise talked about the small interactions that added up and helped her get off the street, and Moses talked about a program and a couple of people who changed his life. Their street exit trajectories took different routes, but the one thing that they had in common was that someone met them where they were at.

Anise's squeegee punk career ended through a combination of support and opportunities. Anise explained how a chain of events that started with outreach workers helping her get on a methadone maintenance program for her opiate addiction enabled her to participate in the

SWYM program. Ultimately ended up being offered help and then a job by a person who watched her struggle on the street from the inside of the Much Music building:

I can tell you who got me away from the street. The person that got me away from the street was a social worker. I reconnected with her. There was a new outreach program that started at the time called Satellite. It was run by a guy named think Larry Clark, who is awesome, and it was the methadone program that almost all of us got on, which is fucked up for various reasons. But they started it in Liberty Village and would do everything to get you on methadone. They would come and sit with you. They just did everything they could to try to get me on methadone. And then once I got on methadone, I wanted to do the squeegee kid mobilization thing, and they were like, and I just couldn't do it right. I couldn't sit somewhere for fucking 6 hours without being well. And they said, if you want to do this, try the methadone and see if it'll work out. And I kind of did. A lot of the people that got into it [SWYM]like me, I wasn't somebody who was squeegeeing really:

Moses and I talked about how his experience working at field-to-table in Toronto changed his life. Moses described a series of events that culminated in his ability to get off the streets and stop squeegeeing. While on bail, he went down to the drop-in center, and one of the workers there told him about the field-to-table program. You could hear the gratitude in Moses's voice when he said, "I need somebody to track him down and thank him for kicking me in the ass" Moses went on to explain:

He told us about this place that was like a job training program. And he kept saying, like, look, you guys need to go down to this. You need to go down, you know? And we're like, Yeah, okay. Well, you know, we were teenagers. But every day, he was like, did you go to

apply? Yeah. Finally, so finally we went down to it, and we applied to it. And we both got jobs.

The field-to-table program was not specifically for Squeegee Punks; it was a program created for at-risk youth that taught horticultural skills, amongst many other things. Moses gave the following explanation and description of the program:

Foodshare ran the program. So, it was a branch of them, and they had a produce warehouse and a very interesting program that basically was like a co-op of farmers who got together to buy refrigerated trucks and then started, and then they got some funding, and they did like a good food boxing for people in the Inner city. So, they would distribute like they teamed up with small local farmers who couldn't always get their produce to market and sort of provided a buyer for them. And then, we would have a team of volunteers pack the boxes, and a team from 1001 Queen Street mental health place would come in to watch the boxes and stuff. That was part of my job. I was organizing those guys And ran the greenhouses after I went through the program. They had a warehouse, a catering company, and commercial kitchens in the basement. And then they have rooftop greenhouses. So, you get to do, you know, a bit of each one, and you learn some skills in each area. And then, they hired me back to help teach next year's course and run the produce warehouse. So, I ended up working there for three years.

Moses described how the first couple of months he worked at the field-to-table program, no one knew he was homeless because he thought he would lose his job, but once he disclosed his housing situation, the people who ran the program made changes to try to help him succeed and gave him opportunities to lead and help other street kids who were at risk:

I slept under their loading dock for my first two months there. And it's funny, the one guy when I finally told him the driver because he always commented on how we were the first people at work, I was nervous about telling him. But it was the only way I could be there on time. But, I mean, that's just the thing. You know, they tolerated the fact that we were street kids. We, you know, didn't shower every day. We didn't have clean clothes and whatnot.

Moses ended up working for the field-to-table program for another three years. He was offered a mentor-type position, and the program ended up being primarily Squeegee Kids by the third year. The program ended up putting in showers and laundry as another measure to try to meet people where they were at and take away barriers to success. By the time Moses left the program, they had high success rates:

I think they said it's 70 or 80% like people would go on and get other jobs afterward. And I continued. So, it was like a very high that is even, and even in the squeegee year, was probably at least 60, 70%. And I know other people who went through that same thing, and it was life-changing, but as far as I know, at the time, that was the only one I knew of. At that time, I hadn't heard of any others anyways.

When Moses started describing the field-to-table program, I was instantly taken back to the late 90s when we stood on a well-known squeegee corner in Peterborough. He told me all about the program with the greenhouses on the roofs. I can still remember our conversation that day and how different Moses was. At this point in our lives, I had known Moses for almost ten years, and I had never seen him so happy. I can still see the huge smile on his face as he explained how fantastic his new job was and how much it changed his life. Moses and I talked about that day after



he finished telling me about the program again in the interview. I never knew the program's name, but how I saw it changed Moses's life throughout my career as a front-line social worker who worked with many street-involved youths.

In summary, this section has focused on how the informants described and discussed alternatives to the criminalization of squeegee work, including experiences with the Squeegee Worker Youth Mobilization program and their opinions on licensing. This section also highlighted the importance some informants placed on communication and trust when trying to engage people with lived experience in program and policy development. Some of the street exit stories the informants described also provided insight into successful ways to engage people with lived experiences of homelessness. Further illustrating the importance of including lived experience voices in decisions that affect them.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

### *Discussion*

The results from this study add a lived experience perspective to the complex social phenomenon of Squeegee Kids in Ontario in the 1990s, more than 20 years after their criminalization. The insights from their lived experience add depth to understanding what was known as the “squeegee kid phenomenon” in Ontario. The guiding research questions for this study included 1) how did the Squeegee Punks of the 90s experience the moral panic that was waged against them? 2) What can the processes surrounding the construction and management of a squeegee punk deviant identity add to our understanding of how people navigate deviant identities? 3) What social and historical conditions interacted with the moral panic to shape the Squeegee Punk deviant identity? and 4) What policy lessons can we learn from the experiences of Squeegee Punks in the 1990s, and what alternative policy responses were available?

The themes that emerged around how Squeegee Punks experienced the moral panic around them included the various ways the informants discussed the shift in public perception and the external factors occurring around them, simultaneously playing a role in constructing the moral panic. The informants discussed how distinct groups of punks were doing squeegee work that got clumped together in a larger group of Squeegee Kids. The informants drew attention to the role that a migration of French Squeegee Punks into Ontario played in the start of the moral panic. As well as the rivalry between the Young Street Skinheads and the Queen Street Squeegee Punks.

The findings suggest that there is complexity in how the labels are internalized. In particular, they point to varying levels of awareness of those labelling processes

This dynamic complicates Becker's (2002) assertion that society creates deviance by imposing a deviant label that individuals internalize. As the results demonstrated, the informants described varying levels of internalization of the deviant label of squeegee kid based on multiple factors described by the informants. Some of these factors included the level of awareness of the hostile rhetoric being mobilized. The varying level of awareness was demonstrated by Anise's higher level of awareness of the hostile rhetoric in the media and then her subsequent internalization of the deviant label of squeegee kid to the point that she intentionally rejected the squeegee kid /punk label before the moral panic was over. In contrast, Zita described having a minimal level of awareness of the moral panic and the hostile rhetoric being mobilized against Squeegee Punks. As a result, she did not express the same disdain for the label of squeegee kid or squeegee punk. This raises questions about what processes interrupt the internalization of a deviant label imposed by society.

The combination of Becker's (2018) interactionist theory of deviance, Cohen's (2002) moral panics theory, and Becker's (2018) deviant career theory provide one way to explain the processes that played a part in constructing Squeegee Kids as deviants. In this analysis, a key assumption is that deviance is constructed and controlled by people in positions of power. The Squeegee Kids' Street Kid status aligns with Becker's (2018) concept of commitment. Many Squeegee Kids I interacted with had years of street involvement before picking up a squeegee and washing windows for change. The 'street kid' status implies Squeegee Kids did not have the typical commitments to institutions and norms. Instead, they established their norms and commitment through street sub-employment. Arguably, street kids started to squeegee to adhere to the social norm of working to earn an income, which in turn was viewed as a sign of disorder.

This highlights how the commitment to the street kid identity may interfere with the internalization of the squeegee kid identity being imposed and constructed by society.

Another insight that can be drawn from this analysis relates to the sense of community and belonging that came through in many of the informant's interviews. Many informants described how the relationships they built while squeegeeing were as important to their survival as their financial gain from squeegee work. Informants talked about the profound impact those relationships had on them and that many of those relationships are still intact today. Zita and Chloe discussed the importance of authenticity and how that helped foster a sense of community amongst the Squeegee Punks, the informants spoke about. This theme aligns with literature on street families and the role they can play for youths experiencing homelessness. Studies have found that street families can have protective factors for youth experiencing homelessness (Ruddick, 1996; McCarthy et al., 2002; Smith, 2016). The scholarship has focused on the role that street families play for street kids while they are street-involved (Barker, 2013; Ruddick, 1996; McCarthy et al., 2002; Smith, 2016); the findings from this study suggest that the street family connections can extend well past the shared time on the street. Further studies should be conducted to explore the role street families play in the lives of youths who have experienced homelessness after they exit the street.

The informants had a variety of insights into the social and historical context surrounding the moral panic that was waged against them, including the welfare austerity measures and the influx of Squeegee Kids around 1996, accompanied by the French squeegee punk influence. These findings are interesting because they complicate the linear notion of how a moral panic is constructed. The shift in perception that some informants described included aspects not included in the scholarship on the moral panic created around Squeegee Kids. The informants

clearly distinguished between French Squeegee Punks, Neo-Nazi Skinheads, and Squeegee Punks, highlighting how society viewed those three groups as one large group. These external forces were obfuscated by the rhetoric being mobilized while simultaneously contributing to the success of the moral panic. The external forces the informants described and the history of criminalizing squeegee work in North America illustrates how complex the squeegee kid situation was in Ontario.

Another insight that can be drawn from the analysis is the heterogeneity of the group of Squeegee Punks and the larger group of street kids the informants spoke about. The informants described complicated inter-group dynamics, such as attempting to govern how squeegee workers behaved and the varying opinions on police enforcement. There is a tendency in the scholarship to reinforce the idea of homogenous groups of people who experience homelessness, attempting to create recommendations for programs based on homogeneous group characteristics. The findings from this study illustrate the importance of the nuanced differences between the informants and how they experienced the moral panic.

The street exit stories the informants described provide powerful insights into what worked for engaging Squeegee Punks in the 90s. The theme of meeting a person where they were at, coupled with connection and belonging, was the backdrop of the street exits the informants described. Another insight that can be drawn from this analysis lies in the importance of lived experience perspectives on policy and program decisions. Even though the O.S.S.A. was passed 23 years ago, the informants provided detailed and rich descriptions of their experiences. They used their perspectives to give insightful suggestions about what could have been done instead of criminalization in the 90s. The issues they discuss have not changed; their insight and experiences are still relevant because the root issues they were dealing with still exist. They

illustrate the value of reaching out to people with lived experience of homelessness from various backgrounds and time frames. There is a tendency to think of people currently using services or living precariously as the primary group to contact for consultation. However, the results from this study indicate that there is a much broader group of people to draw on who have lived experience of homelessness that can provide vital and relevant insight.

Another insight from the analysis connects to the consequences of quality-of-life policing, backed by existing scholarship. Numerous studies have found that trust issues with police and institutions have been reported as consequences of legislation criminalizing homelessness (Dej. 2020; Hermer et al., 2022 Hermer et al., 2002; Westbrook, 2019). However, the informants also drew attention to what they learned during their squeegee punk careers that have benefited them in their life course, such as a work ethic and empathy for struggling others. These findings illustrate the complexities of being a street kid in the 90s.

I am struck by the history surrounding squeegee work in the 1980s and 1990s in New York and Baltimore. I am left with even more questions about the motivations fueling the moral panic surrounding Squeegee Kids in Ontario. As many people pointed out, at the height of the moral panic, there were already mechanisms in place to address the aggressive behavior in the Canadian Criminal code. Yet, Ontario forged ahead with the first piece of neo-vagrancy legislation to be created in Canada, otherwise known as the Ontario Safe Streets Act. Studies have also demonstrated that within a decade since the O.S.S.A. was passed, and the number of squeegee workers decreased, but the number of tickets issued kept rising exponentially (O'Grady et al., 2013).

The similarities between the situations far outweigh the differences. Take, for example, the headlines printed about the squeegee men in Baltimore and New York versus those printed

about Squeegee Kids in Ontario. All three situations produced headlines that compared squeegee workers to insects and framed them as increasingly dangerous to the public while simultaneously ignoring the larger issue of poverty and a move away from the social welfare state (Bird, 2021; Hermer et al., 2002).

Another similarity can be found in the political campaigns that leveraged a platform of law and order response to squeegee work as a campaign promise. As mentioned earlier, a part of Mike Harris's campaign platform for his second term included a promise to give police more powers to arrest Squeegee Kids and get them off the streets. Rudy Giuliani won the Mayor of New York race in the early 90s with a similar campaign promise about ridding New York's Streets of squeegee men (Bird, 2015; Hermer et al., 2002; Parnaby, 2003).

Meaningful engagement with people with lived experience of homelessness begins with building relationships. Sheldona Stokes, the president of the Squeegee Collaborative, explained that the time spent building relationships and trust in the months of collaboration with squeegee workers and stakeholders are the reasons for the early success of the Squeegee Collaborative. This reminds me of the relationships and sense of belonging the informants found significant about being a squeegee punk. There was also a significant relationship component to the alternatives the informants discussed. Illustrating the importance of meaningful engagement with people with lived experience of homelessness in decisions that affect their lives.

Unfortunately, I have some first-hand knowledge of those box-checking consultations, which are insulting and waste everyone's time. It is also important to remember that when asking people with lived experience for their opinions or suggestions, there needs to be a clear understanding of what can be realistically achieved. Far too often, people want to ask the magic wand question but cannot affect any needed change. Agencies and organizations that want to

operate from a lived experience lens should consider how many people they employ in their agencies with lived experience. Furthermore, how many upper management and executive director positions are held by people with lived experience? These are all questions that the Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network (CLELN) recommend that power holders ask themselves when they seek to consult with people with lived experience of homelessness.

### *Limitations*

Limitations for this study start with the time constraints. The five-month wait for REB approval negatively impacted the data collection and subsequent sample size. The results from this study are not generalizable due to the sample size of (n=9). This study would have benefited from being able to conduct member checking (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006), but due to time constraints, this was not possible. The official member checking is a process where the informants in the study are allowed to review the data to ensure they are being accurately represented (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Due to the nature of the interviews and the experienced being explored, this study could have benefited from using an oral life history interview technique because it allows for multiple interviews and provides multiple opportunities for member checking during the process (Jesse, 2019). As has been established in the scholarship on insider qualitative research, a significant amount of emotional labour can be associated with the analysis. Ensuring the space and time to process the data analysis is vital (Shaw et al., 2019). I bring this up here because I came into this research with over a decade of mental health training and a trauma-informed lens, and I struggled with the emotional load of this study. When I started this project, I knew I would need time to process the emotional triggers accompanying this study, so I tried to allow myself as much time as possible to conduct the interviews. The five-month delay from the REB was a crucial factor in my struggle with the emotional load of the study.



This is an issue that should be addressed and corrected for future studies that will be conducted at Ontario Tech University.

### *Concluding thoughts*

The results of this study provided a rich lived experience account from informants who were squeegee workers in Ontario in the mid to late 1990s. These results also provided insight into some of the processes of a moral panic from the folk devils perspective and gathered lived experience insight into program and policy recommendations for addressing issues related to homelessness without criminalization. The results from this study also add to the existing scholarship on Squeegee Kids in Ontario and their subsequent criminalization by contributing updated information from an otherwise hidden and inaccessible population.

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## **Squeegee Punk Study Information Sheet**

**Title of Study: Squeegee Punks Reunite: Safe streets for all**

**Who are the researchers?** Sam Blondeau is a graduate student researcher completing their MA in Criminology at Ontario Tech University Tyler supervisor.

**What is the study about?** This study is looking at the impacts of the Ontario Safe Streets Act (O.S.S.A). I am interested in highlighting the lived experience perspective of Squeegee Kids who were the main target of the O.S.S.A. I am going to ask you about what it was like to be a squeegee kid in the 1990s and how the O.S.S.A impacted you and the people around you. Based on what you share with me I want to create a zine that provides a lived experience portrayal of the life-long implications of policy decisions such as the O.S.S.A. The zine will be in conjunction with the MA thesis that I will be writing.

**What impact is anticipated?** The hope is that this research study will highlight the lived experiences of individuals who were targeted by the Ontario Safe Streets Act. I would like to provide policymakers with insight into the long-term life consequences of policy decisions.



**Who is being asked to participate?** Anyone who identifies as a Squeegee Kid from the 1990s.

**How do I consent to participate in the study?** Step 1: read the forms to make sure that you understand what we are asking; Step 2: look at the benefits, risks and requirements of the study Step 3: ask us any questions that you have; Step 4: once you understand everything, tell us if you want to participate. If you want to participate, you will provide “oral consent “ over the phone to Dr Tyler Frederick.

**What is involved in participating in the study?** You will be asked to do one one- to two-hour interview if you are willing to talk about your own experiences as a squeegee kid with the Ontario Safe Streets Act. If you want to join the study, you can contact Sam Blondeau. They will work with you to schedule times that work for you.

**What types of questions will I be asked?** You will be asked demographic questions (for example, age, sex, gender, sexual preference, race/ethnicity, etc.) and questions about your experiences as a squeegee kid.

Here are some examples of questions:

**Example questions:**

What was involved in “squeegee work”?

Can you tell me about any squeegee kid control measures that were being used or talked about before the O.S.S.A was passed?

**Some of the questions might remind you of tough times and things that are hard to think about. You can tell me that you want to stop at any time. I will also give you a list of local places to get support. If you need to, we will help you contact a friend who can support you.**

**Do I have to participate?** No. It is okay if you want to be a part of the study, but decide that you don’t want to answer all the questions, or that you want to stop participating. Joining the study or leaving it *will not ever have any effect* on your relationship with Sam Blondeau or Ontario Tech University.

**Is the information I give confidential?** Yes. The information you share is private. But we still have to follow the law. Being a part of the study doesn’t change any legal rights. ***It should be noted that there are some rare limits to confidentiality.*** All names and personal information that can be used to tell who you are will be removed from the information I collect. If I use quotes in the report, I will not include any information about who you are. Notes and recordings of the interview will be saved on an encrypted password-protected USB drive. Once I write out the information in the recordings, I will destroy them.

**Are there risks?**

There is also a risk that you will be upset by what is talked about in the interview. Please let me know right away if this happens. I can provide you with local crisis support numbers or help you find another way to cope that is comfortable to you including taking a break, rebooking the session or ending the interview.

**Are there benefits?** There might not be a clear benefit to you personally.

**If I participate in the session, when, where, and how long is it?** There will be one to two-hour interview. The interview will take place in a private setting of your choice or over Zoom.

**Who will facilitate the sessions?** Sam Blondeau will conduct the interviews

**Can I stop participating in the study after I have given consent?** Yes. You can leave the study at any time. Leaving will have no effect on your relationship with the researchers or Ontario Tech University

**How do I participate in the study?** You can contact Sam Blondeau. Sam can be reached at Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net or 705-772-2130 (call or text).

**Will I be compensated for doing the study?** Yes, you will receive \$20 for each session you participate in. You will be paid at the start of the interview and if you decide to leave later you do not need to return the money.

**Is data collected as a part of this study?** The individual interviews will be recorded and written out. Two weeks after recordings are made all identifying information will be removed.

**What happens to the data and where is it kept?** The data will be stored on an encrypted, password-protected hard drive. It is kept for seven years after the study and then destroyed. The master list linking the participant names to the ID codes will be destroyed one month after completion of all recordings in the study.

**Who will have access to the data?** The researcher Sam Blondeau will have access to the de-identified data (attached to a unique ID code rather than a participant name) on an encrypted computer.

**How do I find out the result of the study?** A digital copy of the zine will be provided to all the participants as well as a digital copy of the final thesis.

**Has this study gone through an ethics review process?** Yes, this study has been reviewed by the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board under the title, “Squeegee Punks Reunite: safe streets for all.” The study number is 16936.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, complaints, or adverse events, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 721-8668 ext. 3693 or at [researchethics@ontariotechu.ca](mailto:researchethics@ontariotechu.ca).

**Questions.** If you would like more information about the study, please contact the researcher.

**Principal Investigator:** Sam Blondeau

**Email:** [Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net](mailto:Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net)

**Cell Phone:** 705-772-2130 (call or text)

**Research Assistant:** Sam Blondeau

**Email:** [samanthabloudeau@trentu.ca](mailto:samanthabloudeau@trentu.ca)

## ***Appendix B Consent Form***

Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study Title of Research Study: Squeegee Punks

Reunte: safe streets for all

Name of Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Tyler Frederick

PI's contact number(s)/email(s): tyler.frederick@ontariotechu.ca.

Names(s) of Co-Investigator(s), Faculty Supervisor, Student Lead(s), etc., and contact number(s)/email(s):

Sam Blondeau: email Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net

Departmental and institutional affiliation(s): Criminology, Ontario Tech University

External Funder/Sponsor: (if applicable)

### Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Squeegee Punks Reunte: safe streets for all. You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read the information about the study presented in this form. The form includes details on study's procedures, risks, and benefits that you should know before you decide if you would like to take part. You should take as much time as you need to make your decision. You should ask the Principal Investigator (PI) or study team to explain anything that you do not understand and make sure that all of your questions have been answered before signing this consent form. Before you make your decision, feel free to talk about this study with anyone you wish including your friends and family. Participation in this study is voluntary.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (Ontario Tech University) Research Ethics Board 16936 on Oct 13th 2022.

### Covid- 19 Addendum

At this point in time, the risk of Omicron variant of concern in Ontario is high and the risks of further transmission, severe disease, reinfection, and breakthrough infection in Ontario is moderate with a high degree of uncertainty. The overall risk assessment may change as new evidence emerges (Public Health Ontario, December 2021). We will keep you informed on these changes.

### Purpose and Procedure:

#### Purpose:

You have been invited to participate in this study because you have identified having lived experience as a squeegee kid in the 1990s. This study is looking at the impacts of the Ontario Safe Streets Act (O.S.S.A). I am interested in highlighting the lived experience perspective of Squeegee Kids who were the main target of the O.S.S.A. I am particularly interested in the alternative measures that were being used prior to the O.S.S.A being implemented and the long term impacts of the O.S.S.A. I am going to ask you about what it was like to be a squeegee kid in the 1990s and how the O.S.S.A impacted you and the people around you. Based on what you share with me I want to create a zine that provides a lived experience portrayal of the life-long

implications behind policy decisions such as the O.S.S.A. The zine will be in conjunction with the MA thesis that I will be writing.

#### Procedures:

##### Zoom interview

If you decide to participate in the study, I will email you a copy of the consent form to review prior to the interview. We will review this consent form online, using shared screen function in Zoom. You will have a chance to ask any question you may have prior to signing the consent. If you consent to participate, you may indicate that I can type your name on the consent form, and then will email a copy of the consent form to you to keep for your records. you will take part in a 1 - 2 hour interview about your experiences as a squeegee kid in the 1990s. The interview will be audio recorded in order to get an accurate transcript of the interview. There will be approximately 15 participants in the study.

##### In person Interview

If you decide to participate in the study, I will email you a copy of this consent to review prior to the interview and ask me any questions that you may have. If you consent to participate you will sign 2 consent forms I will keep one for my records and you will be given your own copy. You will take part in a 1 – 2 hour interview about your experiences as a squeegee kid in the 1990s. The interview will be audio recorded in order to get an accurate transcript of the interview. There will be approximately 15 participants in the study.

#### Potential Benefits:

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study

#### Potential Risk or Discomforts:

There is a chance that you will feel social pressure to participate based on pre existing relationships, it is important to know that your relationship with Sam Blondeau or Ontario Tech University will not be affected by your choice to participate in this study. If you choose to leave the study your relationship with Sam Blondeau and Ontario Tech University will not be affected. There is also a risk that you will be upset by what is talked about in the interview. Please let me know right away if this happens. You can choose to skip the question, take a break , rebook, or just end the interview. I can help you connect with supports that are comfortable for you.

Four County Crisis Line 1 866 995 9933

Canada Suicide Prevention Service 1 833 456 4566

Hope for Wellness Help Line 1 855 242 3310

#### Use and Storage of Data

The data will be stored on an encrypted USB drive that will be stored in a locked cabinet. In person interviews will be recorded with a hand held recorder, the audio file will be transferred to the encrypted USB drive the same day the interview takes place. Sam Blondeau and their supervisor, Tyler Frederick, will be the only person with access to the data. All original recordings will be destroyed once the interviews have been transcribed. The anonymized data will be kept for 10 years. All information collected during this study, including your personal information, will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside the study unless required by law. You will not be named in any reports, publications, or presentations that may come from this study.

#### Confidentiality:

Your privacy shall be respected. No information about your identity will be shared or published without your permission, unless required by law. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law, professional practice, and ethical codes of conduct. The main limit to confidentiality is that we are obligated under law to break confidentiality if it comes to our attention that someone is at significant risk of harming themselves or others. We anticipate this situation to be unlikely, but in the spirit of full disclosure we want to make note of that limit on confidentiality. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit over the Internet. Any quotes that appear in any written work or presentations will not have your name attached and will not contain any specific details or identifying information., However, note that given the small nature of the network being sampled, participant involvement may be potentially guessed by other participants and network members who are non-participants. To address this, effort will be made to minimize any potentially identifying or highly specific information when discussing the findings or providing illustrative quotes, but do keep this limit to confidentiality in mind when choosing what to disclose.

#### Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may partake in only those aspects of the study in which you feel comfortable. You may also decide not to be in this study, or to be in the study now, and then change your mind later. You may leave the study at any time without affecting your relationship with Sam Blondeau or Ontario Tech University. You will be given information that is relevant to your decision to continue or withdraw from participation. You may refuse to answer any question you do not want to answer, or not answer an interview question by saying, 'pass'



## Right to Withdraw

You can withdraw from the research project up to 2 weeks after the interview is completed. After the two-week period, the data will be anonymized and your data will not be able to be removed, any data that you have contributed will be removed from the study and you do not need to offer any reason for withdrawing.

## Conflict of Interest

Researchers have an interest in completing this study. Their interests should not influence your decision to participate in this study.

## Compensation, Reimbursement, Incentives:

You will receive 20 dollars as compensation for your time, you will be paid before the interview begins and if you choose to leave the study you do not need to return the money.

## Debriefing and Dissemination of Results:

Participants will be asked if they would like to be notified of the result of the study. Sam Blondeau will create a document with an overview and explanation of the findings that will be provided to the participants that have indicated an interest in being informed of the findings. Sam Blondeau will also create a Zine that will be made available to any participants that request it. Participants can contact Sam Blondeau through email at [Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.ca](mailto:Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.ca) to indicate if they would like to be sent a copy of the Zine and the overview of findings document.

## Participant Rights and Concerns:

Please read this consent form carefully and feel free to ask the researcher any questions that you might have about the study. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, complaints, or adverse events, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 721-8668 ext. 3693 or at [researchethics@ontariotechu.ca](mailto:researchethics@ontariotechu.ca).

If you have any questions concerning the research study or experience any discomfort related to the study, please contact the researcher Sam Blondeau at 705 772 2130 or [Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net](mailto:Samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net).

By signing this form you do not give up any of your legal rights against the investigators, sponsor or involved institutions for compensation, nor does this form relieve the investigators, sponsor or involved institutions of their legal and professional responsibilities.

## Consent to Participate:

Consent to study participation may be obtained in various ways such as: written, oral, use of a substitute decision maker, or online. For the section below, chose the wording that applies to the method in which consent was obtained.

### a. Written Consent

Include the following statements:

1. I have read the consent form and understand the study being described;
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and those questions have been answered. I am free to ask questions about the study in the future;
3. I freely consent to participate in the research study, understanding that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. A copy of this consent form has been made available to me.

Print Study Participant's Name      Signature      Date

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Print Name of Person Obtaining      Signature      Date

### b. Oral Consent

If the consent has been obtained orally, the consent form must be dated and signed by the researcher(s) indicating that the participant had the capacity to consent to the study.

1. I have read the consent form to the participant and they have indicated that he/she understands the study being described.
2. The participant has had an opportunity to ask questions and these questions have been answered. The participant is free to ask questions about the study in the future.
3. The participant freely consents to participate in the research study, understanding that he/she may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. A physical/digital consent form has been made available to him/her.

## *Appendix C Interview Guide*

### Squeegee Punks Reuinte: Safe streets for all Interview Questions

1. What was involved in “squeegee work” ( Prompts : supplies, etiquette, travel, emotional labour)
2. Can you tell me why you decided to do squeegee work?
3. What were the pros and cons of being a squeegee kid?
4. Looking back, what do you make of the public and political concerns about “Squeegee Kids”?
5. Can you tell me about any squeegee kid control measures that were being used or talked about before the O.S.S.A was passed? ( Prompts: squeegee kid work program, no squeegee stickers, licensing, probe for formal and informal)
6. What types of “squeegee kid” control measures do you remember being used before the O.S.S.A?
7. Were there any practices among Squeegee Kids that concerned you at the time?
8. Is there a way those practices could’ve been better managed rather than the O.S.S.A
9. Can you tell me what interactions between the police and Squeegee Kids looked like ?
10. Can you tell me what a day in your life looked like before the O.S.S.A campaign started?
11. Can you tell me what changed in your life after the O.S.S.A was passed?
12. Can you tell me about the interactions with the police after the O.S.S.A was passed?
13. How did the O.S.S.A affect your quality of life?
14. Do you feel like your experiences under the O.S.S.A had any long-term impacts on you?
15. Do you wish policies existed so that “Squeegee Kids” didn’t need to exist, or do you think there was something important or valuable about that group experience that could’ve been supported through something like a harm reduction approach?

What did being a squeegee kid mean to you ( Prompt:If you could describe what it was like to be a squeegee kid in the 90s in one sentence what would you say

Appendix D Recruitment Social Media Post

**WEATHER**  
MON 12°C  
TUE 13°C  
WED 17°C  
THUR 17°C  
FRI 17°C  
SAT 17°C  
SUN 17°C

**THE TORONTO SUN**  
VOL. 27 NO. 188-W WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 1998 112 PAGES 80 CENTS

**PREMIER: WIPE OUT SQUEEGEE PROBLEM**  
Harris orders provincial crime commission to find a quick solution: Page 4

**'Nothing but thugs'**  
Premier declares war on squeegee kids  
By JAMES WALLACE  
Queen's Park Bureau

Premier Mike Harris has ordered his Crime Commission to find a way to wipe out Toronto's squeegee kids.  
The commission is probing changes to provincial laws that would make it easier for police to arrest squeegee kids and drivers who tip them.  
City crime commissioner Jim Brown said he is asked to consult with police, the public and with Mayor Mel Lastman to find a provincial solution to T.O.'s growing squeegee kid problem. Something's got to be done, Brown said. "I'd like to see Toronto cleaned up."

handlers, he said.  
Brown said the NDP "pulled the teeth" from the law and, as a result, police don't have the power to arrest people who refuse to pay fines.  
"These kids are just ripping up the tickets the police give them," he said.  
The province collects about \$112 million annually in fines levied under the PIA.  
However, as of March 1998, outstanding fines totalled \$42 million. "We're three years behind in collecting that money," Brown said.  
If the law is changed, police would get the power to arrest anyone who ignores fines. That would allow Toronto to follow in the footsteps of other cities, such as New York, and crack down on its squeegee kids.  
"There's more of them coming here all the time," Brown said. "We're going to become the squeegee capital of the world if we don't act. We believe we can fix that."

**MIKE HARRIS**  
Wants to clean up streets

**Were you considered a "squeegee kid" in the 90's?**

**Do you remember when the Ontario Safe Streets Act (OSSA) was passed ?**

**Would you be interested in participating in a study looking at your experiences of being a squeegee punk in the 1990s and the long-term consequences of the Ontario Safe Streets Act?**

For information about how to participate send an email to : [samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net](mailto:samantha.blondeau@ontariotechu.net) or send direct message to me on this platform

**"This study has been reviewed by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (Ontario Tech University) Research Ethics Board # 16936 on October 13th 2022**

Ontario Tech UNIVERSITY