

“When You’re Homeless Your Friends Are Like Your Home”: Street Involved Youth
Friendship in Victoria, Canada

by

Thayne Vernon Werdal
BA, Malaspina University College, 2006

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis explores street involved youth friendship in Victoria, Canada. The friendships of street involved youth—that is “young people who may or may not be homeless and spend some time in the social and economic world of ‘the street’” (Perkin 2009)—are regularly thought and talked about as being prone to deviant or risky behaviour, particularly in social scientific literature and by the mainstream media. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 street involved youth (ages 16 – 21) who talked about friendships as important relationships offering (among other things) help, protection, support, nurture and meaningful existences not available to them otherwise. Street youth friendships allow youth some escape and respite from damaging neoliberal political-economic policies in Victoria, Canada. In addition, street involved youth friendships bring into question dominant developmentalist discourses and assumptions as youth agentively and expertly negotiate their friendships in careful and nuanced ways.

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Dedication

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Chapter 1: Street Involved Youth Friendship in Victoria, B.C.

This chapter outlines my research questions and objectives, applicable anthropological literature, the location of my research in Victoria, British Columbia Canada, and the conceptual framework that was used for this research project.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Street involved youth are often represented in mainstream media and sometimes in popular and academic literature as dangerous, violent and deviant (Beazley 2002:1666; Beazley 2003:182; Wingert, Higgit and Ristock 2005:58; Bucholtz 2002:526-527; Rice 2010:589; Karabanow 2004:1, 46). Further, friendships among street involved youth are often presented in the literature as intensifying this inherent deviance, victimization, risky behaviour, substance abuse and violence (Tyler and Melander 2011:802; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:232; Kipke et al 1997; McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan 2004:808). Noticeably absent in these representations and in anthropological literature are street-involved youth's own voices and emic perspectives of their friendships. This thesis addresses this gap by studying how street-involved youth in Victoria, B.C. conceptualise, talk about and experience friendship.

1.2 Research Questions / Objectives

This qualitative research project, based on semi-structured interviews with eleven street involved youth, focused upon three central questions. The first question was: *How do street involved youth conceptualize, classify, talk about and enact friendship?* The second question was: *What do street-involved youth see as being important sources of difference in friendships?* (e.g. gender, age and street knowledge among other things).

Finally, the third question was: *What do street-youth see as being the important aspects of friendship?* (e.g. companionship, assistance/protection, access to resources).

1.3 Literature Review

This literature review is not a complete and comprehensive survey of the anthropological literature on friendship, youth or street-involved youth in general. I am interested, rather, in looking to the literature that lays at the intersection of these topics. I focus, whenever possible, primarily on street-involved youth in urban Canadian settings; although I consider relevant sources from other locations as well. For the purposes of this proposal, street involved youth are “young people who may or may not be homeless and spend some time in the social and economic world of ‘the street’” (Perkin 2009). In this literature review, I focus mainly on anthropological material, with some additional material drawn from works by sociologists, social workers and psychologists.

1.3.1 Friendship:

In anthropology, the study of friendship has often been discussed in terms of kinship, that is, friendship often was thought of in terms of fictive kin or as an extension of the kinship system. For example, Killick and Desai (2010:4) have outlined how, in anthropology, kinship connections have ended up trumping and obscuring other relationships that people may have. Paine eloquently pointed out how often “anthropologists lived lives dominated by friendship but instead wrote about kinship” (quoted in Coleman 2010:197). Hruschka (2010:103) has suggested that the confusion between kinship and friendship is due to the fact that they are not mutually exclusive relationships, but rather contain many similar and overlapping characteristics that can make distinguishing between them difficult.

While no studies have focused specifically on street involved youth's views of friendship, some authors have theorized about the nature of friendship itself. Coleman outlines how conceptions of friendship can be understood to be tied intimately to class, geographies and lived history (2010:202). Further to this point, Killick and Desai draw on Carrier (1999) who argues that dominant views of friendship in the USA often depend on unconstrained sentiment, something that requires a specific (in Carrier's case middle-class American) concept of the individual. In looking at high school friendships, Hruschka (2009:205) applies the idea of cultural competence to argue "that competence in a cultural domain (in this case appropriate friendship behaviours) must be examined in relation to the specific contexts of use and the scale of social interaction for that domain." Hruschka found that being a 'good friend' amongst a group of U.S. high school students meant successfully meeting the expectations of one's friend, while at the same time achieving one's own personal needs (2009:205,210,217). Hruschka is not alone in pointing out both the fluidity of friendship and the way that friendship can be constructed in distinct ways by specific social groups in order to meet their particular needs (*see also* McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan 2004:825; Killick and Desai 2010:1,8). Ahn (2011) argues convincingly that school children interpret and reconstruct adult conceptions of friendship in order to better fit their own social environment. Ahn found that while adults understood children's friendships as attempts to learn how to become 'proper friends' (2011:294-295), American adult and children's social worlds were fundamentally different and children successfully utilized available cultural concepts that they redeployed in distinct ways in order to fulfill their own political and social needs.

Killick and Desai (2010:1-2) write that while “the study of friendship is haunted by the problem of definition... the most important aspect of friendship to its practitioners [is] that it is a relationship that stands in contrast to other ways of relating.” In other words, friendship is an important concept because we, as social actors, recognise it as a specific form of positive relationship. Sarah Uhl (1991:90) situates friendships as unique forms of relating that are “initiated and ended on a personal and voluntary basis and develop in contractual terms rather than being motivated by social structural factors.” Uhl views friendships as a contract between two actors, and thus not subject to wider “social structural factors” (1991:90). Uhl’s view is argued by Dyson (2010) who sees friendship as providing particular social and economic opportunities to its participants; especially in the case of marginalized populations (see also Karabanow et al. 2010; Klodawsky et al. 2006). Dyson agrees with Bourdieu that “friendship commonly serves as a prime site of social monitoring and social control” (2010:484). In her study of adolescent low-income girls in the Indian Himalayas, Dyson shows how friendships are self-monitored and regulated between groups of friends in ways that often reproduce social norms. Friendship, then, can be understood to be a particular form of relationship that is significant to individuals who participate in it. At the same time, friendship works as a system of social control and monitoring in order to encourage socially approved behaviour. While Dyson’s example also rested upon adult control, Beazley’s work with street children in Indonesia (2002:1667) found that “to remain accepted, an individual child must conform to the expectations, norms and values of the group.” Even without adult surveillance then, there may still be strong social monitoring and social control from within the group itself.

While there has been a movement in anthropology (by Dyson, Coleman, Killick and Desai among others) to avoid discussing friendship in terms of kinship, I was unable to find a specific and explicit definition of friendship. Thus, for my research, I decided to leave room for a definition of friendship to emerge from the emic perspective of street involved youth themselves. While I acknowledge that the resulting definition may not be applicable to friendships between individuals who are not street involved, my approach avoids imposing a definition on the very relationships I am working to understand by interviewing the participants.

1.3.2 Street Involved Youth and their Friendships:

Mainstream ideas and discourses about street involved youth friendships can be traced to historical understandings about youth and their peer relationships. In anthropology, youth has, until recently, often been portrayed as a liminal state between childhood and adulthood (Bucholtz 2002:529). This idea stems from evolutionary psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1905) who famously published a work in two-volumes titled: *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*. Hall's book would become very influential in youth work and social sciences (Hill 2000:173). Hall and his students married dominant psychological and evolutionary anthropological ideas of the era, "explicitly drawing analogies across women, savages, and youths" (Lesko 1996:146). Drawing on recapitulation theory—in which adolescent development and human evolution were thought to mirror each other (Lesko 1996:144-147; Cole and Durham 2007:7)—youth became framed "as not-yet-finished human beings" (Bucholtz 2002:529). Recapitulation theory served to cement the need for adult involvement in the lives of youth in order to ensure their proper

socialization (Cole and Durham 2007:8). Throughout the early twentieth century, anthropological views of youth would draw on recapitulation theory, while also borrowing from western developmental psychology focused on finding a normative “adolescent nature” against which a “deviant” adolescent behaviour could be assessed and evaluated (Cole 2005:891; Lesko 1996:142; Bucholtz 2002:536).

After World War I, ideas about adolescence were influenced by “the golden age of endocrinology” in the U.S. (Fausto-Sterling 2000:170). Assumptions about youth deviancy, risky behaviour and peer dependence came to be inextricably tied to biology as new research about hormones was used as an explanation for—what was often thought to be—the underlying factors of youth unpredictability and irrationality (Lesko 1996:140). Tait has traced the way that books such as Arthur Manning’s (1958) *Bodgie: a Study in Psychological Abnormality* and Cyril Burt’s (1926) *The Young Delinquent* worked to transition understandings of the ‘delinquent youth’ from being rooted in observable anti-social behaviours towards “any number of statistically validated ‘risk’ factors” that are “visible to the competent expert” (1995:127-1229). Lesko (1996:153) has noted that Coleman’s (1961) *Adolescent Society* introduced and solidified ideas that youth were naturally peer centered. Therefore, by mid-century, adolescence came to be understood as a universal and definable biological stage which occurs as children transitioned to adulthood (Cole 2005:891; Cole 2004:573). As Cole and Durham (2007:13) observed “age mediates the biological and the social, providing a powerful symbolic and practical terrain for marking and naturalizing relations of hierarchy and dependency, difference and sameness, as well as patterns of temporality.” Assumptions that adolescence was a natural and definable stage of life contributed to characterizations that youth were

naturally both untrustworthy and unable to develop properly outside of societal (more specifically adult) control (Lesko 1996:140-142; Bucholtz 2002:529; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:233; Kipke et al 1997; Tyler and Melander 2011:802; Dyson 2010:483).

Peer relationships have been described in social scientific literature as both a natural part of teen socialization and a dangerous arena in which peer pressure may lead to devious behaviour (Tyler and Melander 2011:802). This reasoning again draws on recapitulation theory, suggesting that all relationships (and relational goals) should ideally progress towards proper, perfected and ultimately ‘acceptable’ (by adult standards), adult-type relationships (Hruschka 2009:219). This “pathologizing of peer orientation” may “exalt individual autonomy” associated with adults in neoliberal states, while reliance on peers “establishes teenagers as dangerous others, not as individuated adults” (Lesko 1996:153-154). Stereotypes and assumptions of youth have been criticized in anthropology (Lesko 1996; Bucholtz 2002); however, many contemporary discussions of youth in the social sciences and mainstream media repeatedly draw on assumptions developed throughout the 20th century (Cole 2005:892). Perhaps more problematic is the way that these assumptions intensify in discourses about street youth, who are seen to be further removed from adult control.

1.3.3 Male-Female Friendships:

In much of the social scientific literature, affiliations between male and female street involved youth have often been reduced to risk—especially in literature on HIV—and sexual activity, ignoring the way that street involved youth understand their own relationships (Karabanow 2004:44; Tyler and Melander 2011:802,815; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:232; Rice 2010:589; Margaretten 2011:56-57). The problem

with focusing on the sexual characteristics of street involved youth relationships is that it is influenced by developmentalist conceptions of youth (outlined above), re-establishing the need for adult involvement to promote “proper” adult-like relationships (Bucholtz 2002:534). Street involved youth social networks frequently include males and females (Tyler and Melander 2011:814; Margaretten 2011:52; Márquez 1999:5). Studies of street children by Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1998:359) in Brazil along with Beazley (2002:1665) in Indonesia have stressed the value of paying careful attention to the dynamics of gendered identities, gendered strategies and the ways that gender affects the lived experience of the street itself (see also Kovats-Bernat 2006:37). It should not be forgotten that male-female relationships are often non-sexual in nature (Finkelstein 2005:41-49); though they are still experienced in fundamentally different ways than male-male or female-female friendships. Rather than typifying street involved male-female relationships strictly in terms of ‘risky sex,’ some authors have instead put forward alternate views of these relationships. These alternate views are often understood through concepts obtained by interviewing street-youth themselves.

Tyler and Melander (2011:808-809) found that street-youth would often define their relationships through descriptive terms such as “boyfriend, girlfriend, or fiancé.” This shows how rather than seeing their own male-female relationships as deviant places of ‘risky-sex,’ street youth, instead, described these relationships in stable, affectionate, and respectful terms. Studies have found that female-male relationships could offer protection (Margaretten 2011:51), “comfort and security” (Tyler and Melander 2011:808,811) and access to resources for both male and female street-involved youth (Tyler and Melander 2011:808,811; Beazley 2002:1676-1678; Margaretten 2011:51).

These friendships can be understood as a particular strategy which allows access to resources (such as comfort, protection and emotional support) that may not be accessible in other ways. Street-involved youth's understanding and experience of male-female relationships can give us key insights into how such relationships allow street-involved youth to respond to larger socio-political mechanisms in Victoria.

1.3.4 The Street as a Place of Deviancy:

A number of anthropologists have noted the public ire and anxiety generated when children or youth are seen to be 'out of place' on the street. This appears in mainstream and academic literature as anxiety felt by adults over 'misplaced youth'—(Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998:358; Beazley 2002:1665-1666). When writing about the street-children in urban Haiti, Kovats-Bernat discerned that while street-children were often victimized, street-children also demonstrated a "daily resistance to their victimization through considered, cooperative social action that offers the best evidence of their agency and their humanity" (2006:8). While I am not suggesting that the street is a place free of harm or danger for street-involved youth, I do recognise that there are numerous reasons that youth may strategically choose to live on the street. Rather than seeing street-youth as victims of their lived history and location, I believe street-involved youth should be understood as competent social actors living in challenging circumstances.

Some researchers suggest that the move to the street weakens a youth's conventional ties to housed adults, institutions and friends (Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:232). Under this view, it follows that at the same time as youth are weakening their traditional relationships (to housed youth, adults and socially sanctioned instructors) they are also

coming in contact with more experienced street-involved youth. These experienced youth have long term relationships with the street itself and are often thought to be more prone to deviant behaviours (Tyler and Melander 2011:814; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:231). Finkelstein (2005:36) has argued that street youth should not be thought of as deviant, but rather as learning to “conform to a social order with its own distinct identities and peer networks.” Dyson (2010:485) agrees that youth should be seen as accomplished actors who interact in successful ways with their social and physical surroundings, actively developing strategies and habits that become embodied and acted out in daily practice.

1.3.5 The Pathologization of Street Youth:

In social-scientific literature and mainstream media, street-involved youth are often reduced to being members of homogeneous lived histories that include victimization through abuse (physical, sexual or emotional), family dysfunction, poverty, mental illness (such as depression or learning disabilities), intolerance (homophobia or racism), physical illness, social ineptness and/or substance abuse (Karabanow 2004:16,28,44; Karabanow et al. 2010:40; Wingert, Higgit and Ristock 2005:60; Rew 2000:125,130; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:232; Jones, Herrera and Thomas de Benitez 2007:465; Margaretten 2011:48). At times in the literature, street-involved youth are portrayed as the ‘walking wounded,’ akin to social lepers—damaged, best avoided and separated by ‘healthy’ members of society. Street-youth bearing a supposed predisposition to psychological, contextual and physical challenges are then thought to turn to established street youth for instruction (Karabanow 2004:51,53; Finkelstein 2005:36; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:233; Beazley 2003:185; Rice 2010:589). Because the

instruction received by inexperienced street-involved youth is assumed to come principally from their street-involved peers rather than home-based adults or sanctioned educational institutions, their strategies and skills are rendered suspect and dubious in the eyes of dominant society (Karabanow et al 2010:42; Márquez 1999:217). Finkelstein (2005:36) points out “when socialization does not conform to societal norms it is often considered deviant and its adaptive advantages are overlooked.” This is evident in the way that literature about street-peer friendships continually suggest these friendships inevitably lead to increased substance abuse, dangerous sex practices and violence (Smith et al 2007:34,39; Tyler and Melander 2011:802; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:233; Karabanow 2004:42; Beazley 2002:1667; McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan 2004:812).

There is a sense in some academic literature that removing youth from the street (and by extension street-influenced peers) is the first step towards teaching them ‘proper’ social skills, developing ‘healthy relationships’ and providing “youth with the tools and resources necessary to develop into healthy young adults” (Tyler and Melander 2011:816). In other words, just as the street and peer relations are said to continually intensify the deviance of youth, there is a feeling that this can be rectified by stripping away relationships and recalibrating youth back to their ‘proper’ role of learning to be good adults and citizens (Márquez 1999:216).

The pathologization of street involved youth is problematic because it often draws on assumptions of homogeneous youth histories, experiences and friendship groups; neglecting the variety of challenges, experiences and life stories of street involved youth. What is often missed in this reductionist pathologization is the heterogeneous nature of both street-involved friendship groupings (i.e. gender, racialized identity and context),

and their personal histories (Karabanow 2004:55; Tyler and Melander 2011:802; Margaretten 2011:52; Márquez 1999:5). Also ignored is the fact that while street youth have relationships on the street, they often retain relationships with family and friends who are not part of the street culture (Karabanow 2004:3,16; Smith et al 2007:9; Wingert, Higgitt and Ristock 2005:67; Finkelstein 2005:37; Tyler and Melander 2011:803,806; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:245; Rice 2010:589). Assumed criminality overlooks street involved youth who are engaged in formal employment and education and neglects how relationships may be experienced across the socially imposed boundaries between housed populations and street populations (Smith et al 2007:22; Karabanow 2004:40,54; Karabanow et al 2010:47; Klodawsky et al 2006). Further, adult sanctioned relationships (with parents, at-home youth, teachers, healthcare workers etc.) are often incorrectly positioned as inherently positive influences, while street-peer relationships are positioned as negative. In reality, the positive or negative natures of street youth relationships are not dependent on the housed status of the parties involved (Rice 2010:589; McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan 2004:827; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005:245).

1.3.6 The Positive Aspects of Street-Youth Friendship:

Rather than focusing on deviance, there are a number of studies that position street children and youth's peer networks as effective—and often essential—survival strategies negotiated and maintained by the youth themselves (Finkelstein 2005:39,40; Hruschka 2009:206; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010:441; Margaretten 2011:45). By forming and maintaining friendships with established street youth, less experienced individuals have been shown to gain protection (Karabanow 2004:62-63; Karabanow et al 2010:50; Smith et al 2007:38; Tyler and Melander 2011:809,811; Kipke et al 1997; Kovats-Bernat

2006:20-23), support (Smith et al 2007:17; Tyler and Melander 2011:810), access to resources (Finkelstein 2005:41,42; Tyler and Melander 2011:810; Beazley 2002:1678; Beazley 2003:185; Karabanow et al 2010:51), information sharing (Rew 2000:128), recreation (Karabanow 2004:55), freedom from loneliness (Rew 2000:125), instruction and nurturing (Wingert, Higgit and Ristock 2005:69; Jones, Herrera and Thomas de Benitez 2007:468; Tyler and Melander 2011:811; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010:51; Margaretten 2011:51), romantic or sexual relationships (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998:369; Beazley 2003:190; Beazley 2002:1674; Tyler and Melander 2011:808-809; Margaretten 2011:51), friendships that resist dominant norms (Dyson 2010:483-484) and respect (Finkelstein 2005:43; Beazley 2003:188). These studies suggest that street youth relationships should be viewed as a spaces of choice, solutions and successes rather than as a space damned to deviancy and failure (Dyson 2010:482). Despite the fact that previous studies have noted positive aspects of street-involved youth friendships, often these aspects are touched on in passing rather than being the focus of discussion. Further, there are no studies that look specifically at how the positive aspects of street-involved friendships may be perceived, experienced, managed and accessed by street-involved youth themselves. In fact, there are no studies that document what street youth themselves may regard as positive or valued aspects of friendship.

Even though many of the aforementioned studies note positive aspects of street-involved friendships in passing, they do not focus on youth's agency in the negotiation of the relationships that result in such positive outcomes. In addition, many positive attributes have been presented through an adult privileged understanding of friendship and not through the understanding of friendships held by youth themselves. This thesis

looks to give youth a platform from which their own lived understanding of friendship, as well as the process by which friendships are built, maintained and constantly negotiated, may come visible. Allowing youth to talk about exactly what friendship is, and what it offers, in their own lived worlds will aid in creating a proper basis from which street involved youth friendships may be understood in new, more productive ways.

1.3.7 Significance:

While some recent research surveyed in this literature review provide strong arguments for how children, street children, youth and street youth construct their own roles and relationships relevant to their particular situations; what is missing from the literature is an emic perspective of how street involved youth construct, manage and experience their own friendships. Street-involved youth face the constant stigmatisation and stereotyping of their friendships, yet the literature is strangely silent when it comes to how these relationships are perceived and experienced by the youth themselves. Much of the literature ignores the benefits that friendships may allow street involved youth. By seeking to understand the complexities and nuances of street involved youth friendships, and how it is beneficial to street-involved youth's everyday experiences, it may be possible to find ways to focus on these proactive aspects of friendships, while at the same time better understanding actions that have been traditionally been dismissed as deviant.

It has been noted that:

“If anthropology is to offer anything of substance to the global discourse on the rights of children and the difficulties under which many of them are living, then it must be willing to adopt a preferential approach to the study of the specific conditions under which children are nurtured and protected, rather than abused, battered and exposed” (Kovats-Bernat 2006:211)

Rather than looking for an alternative location to find these “specific conditions” of nurture and protection for street-involved youth in Victoria, my own research posits that nurturing and protection is present within the very relationships that have often been suggested to be places of deviance for street-involved youth.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

For this project I am employing two theoretical concepts drawn from anthropological research on friendship among street-involved or low-income youth. The first concept is ‘positive sociality’, which I use to approach street involved youth relationships as friendships with positive and affirmative aspects. Secondly, the concept ‘help’ will be used in order to better understand how youth strategically negotiate their friendships. The theoretical concepts of positive sociality and help allow me to avoid damaging stereotypical stigmatizations of street involved youth friendships. The concepts of positive sociality and help also allow me to approach friendship among street involved youth as agentic and strategically managed affirmative relationships. I believe this conceptual framework also avoids the equally restrictive views of youth friendships as wholly helpful or harmful. Ultimately, I am hopeful that the confluence of these concepts will allow street-involved youth to relate their own lived experience of friendship free from the historic stereotypes and politic-laden representations of street-involved youth that have traditionally dominated accounts in mainstream media and literature in the social sciences.

1.4.1 Positive Sociality:

While conventional conceptions of street-involved youth associations and relationships often position them as deviant, dangerous or risk enhancing, positive sociality focuses on

the affirmative aspects of street-involved youth friendships. While studying friendships among young girls in the Indian Himalayas, positive sociality allowed Dyson (2010:483) to focus on “intimate human relationships, including love and friendship...social bonds that have affirmative dimensions” while avoiding the more traditional focus on “competitive and hierarchical relations.” Likewise, while studying youth in Durban, South Africa, Emily Margaretten (2011:45) focused on youth “interactions with one another as friends, kin, and conjugal lovers” which allowed her to “draw attention to the variability and creativity of youth fellowships.” Positive sociality avoids conventional views of youth as incomplete adults, prone to deviant peer relationships that lead to crime and risk intensifying behaviour as well as other forms of what has long been viewed in social science as “deviance.” In Margaretten’s study of South African street youth, this meant showing “how street youth... ‘stand for each other’ ...not necessarily in violent or coercive formations but in supportive and cooperative companionships” (2011:45). This is not to suggest substance abuse, gang activity, prostitution, violence, theft and other actions that mainstream society often attribute to street-involved youth do not exist; rather, employing the concept of positive sociality assumes that actions which have traditionally been defined as ‘deviant’ are neither the sole impetus nor the inevitable product of street involved youth friendships.

1.4.2 “Help”

I employ the concept of “Help” in order to draw attention to the strategic and reciprocal aspects of friendship amongst street-involved youth, aspects that may help them to survive and cope with the challenges of street life and of living in poverty. While studying street children in Accra, authors Mizen and Ofofu-Kusi (2010:441) defined

“help” as acts of “cooperation, mutuality [and] reciprocity.” Friendship, for the Accra street children, was a way “for the urban poor to live and survive under particular market forms...as the poor are forced to create new ways of living in the face of decimated opportunities” (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010:446). The “particular market form” that “decimated opportunities” was, of course, neoliberalism. In addition, Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi found that friendships among children in Accra are both created and discovered, serving as essential spaces of “assistance, generosity and camaraderie” (2010:446).

Similarly, while studying street-youth in Haiti, Kovats-Bernat found “a system of generalized reciprocity in which the sharing of cash and commodities is presumed... and is tacitly understood by all members of a peer group to be essential to their common survival” (2006:118). By adopting the concept of “help” I allow myself to understand ways that friendship in Victoria may act as a strategy to counter or answer current neoliberal conditions. Moreover, when help is approached through positive sociality, friendships can be envisioned as affirmative strategies that give access to protection, support, companionship, romance, resources and nurturing (Karabanow 2004:62-63; Smith et al 2007:17; Finkelstein 2005:41,42; Wingert, Higgitt and Ristock 2005:69; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998:369). Again, while I am not positioning street-involved friendships as being absent of actions that may be harmful to, or perceived as negative by, street-involved youth, a theoretical framework that draws on “help” and positive sociality allows the affirmative and strategic aspects of street-involved youth friendship to emerge through the voices of the youth themselves (Márquez 1999:6).

1.5 Location Of Study

1.5.1 Victoria, B.C.

This project took place in Victoria, British Columbia Canada. Victoria is the capital of British Columbia, located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, on the west coast of Canada. As of 2010, the city of Victoria itself had a population of 78,057; taking the surrounding capital region into account increases the overall population of the area to 345,164 (www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca). Almost 28 percent (94,921) of residents in the capital region are between the ages of 0-24, while 213,315 are between the ages of 25-64. Victoria has one of the highest costs of living in all of Canada, with a living wage approximated at \$17.31 in 2010 (Herman 2012:8) rising to \$18.73 by 2013 (Albert 2013), which is beyond the reach for individuals who live on the provincial \$10.00 per hour minimum wage. Due to high property rental costs and low vacancy rates, Victoria has recently been rated as one of the worst cities in Canada in terms of rental affordability (Herman 2012:8). The Greater Victoria Coalition To End Homelessness (2013) recently noted that despite the fact that overall vacancy rates have risen over the past few years in Victoria (up to 2.8% overall which is equal to Canadian and B.C. averages) this number does not accurately reflect that the majority of units which are available are located outside of the downtown core (where the majority of services that youth depend on are located) and also that this number does not reflect “affordable housing” rates, which have remained low (0% for two bedroom units under \$700, 1% for one bedroom units under \$700 and 0.09% for bachelor units under \$700). In addition, Victoria’s rate of children in government care (11.1 per 1000 children) is higher than the provincial average (9.2 in 1000) (www.bcstats.gov.ca). Likewise, Victoria has a higher rate of children in “need of protection” (8.5 per 1000 children)—that is, deemed by the state to be neglected,

runaway lost, in an immediately dangerous situation or in need of healthcare (bclaws.ca)—than the B.C. average (6.7 per 1000 children) (www.bcstats.gov.ca).

Added to the difficulties in accessing housing and resources, Victoria has engaged in a concerted effort to “clear away the people facing poverty, homelessness and/or drug issues to make Victoria more attractive” as a tourist destination (Victoria Coalition Against Poverty 2011:2). This exemplifies what David Harvey has identified as the way that “political power therefore often seeks to reorganize urban infrastructures and urban life with an eye to the control of restive populations” (Harvey 2012:117).

1.5.2 Neoliberalism

Neoliberal policy shifts over the past twenty years in B.C. have led to increased poverty among vulnerable youth and their families, while at the same time removing social supports that had previously acted as safety nets for marginalized members of British Columbia’s working poor (Aguiar 2004:107; McBride and McNutt 2007:185-190; Little and Marks 2010:193-194; Keil 2002:594). Social supports that once focused on protecting the livelihood of individuals and families from the “unpredictability of the marketplace” were replaced by neoliberal policies that focused on teaching citizens “to become ‘active’ and entrepreneurial by exposing them to [the marketplace’s] harsh lessons” (Carrol and Little 2001:48).

Neoliberal principles are historically tied to classic liberal economics and political theory which valorizes employment, personal responsibility and hard work (Hall 2011:12; Morgen and Gonzales 2008:224; Harvey 2011: 64-67; Kelly 2001:96-97). These valorizations can be seen as directly oppositional to the dominant stereotypes of

unemployed, lazy, or illicitly employed street youth (Karabanow et al. 2010:42). Most famously, the U.S. and Britain underwent sharp neoliberal shifts under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s (Hall 2011:12; Harvey 2011:7-9; Klein 2008:155-168, 339-368). Liberal ideas of freedom and individuality were extended to corporations and markets, which neoliberal theory believes to be self-regulating. Under neoliberal theory, it is argued that markets must be freed from governmental regulation in order to allow competition that drives profits (Klein 2008:56-66; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008:117). In addition to creating the political and market conditions it desires, neoliberalism often works towards creating the productive citizens it desires (Morgen and Gonzales 2008:231). Under neoliberalism, “economic rationality and self-sufficiency [are] the personal responsibility of individuals and families, and poverty is understood to be rooted in individual deficiencies in motivation, discipline and human capital limitations” (Morgen and Gonzales 2008:220). As neoliberal policies gained influence, they manifested themselves in the “privatization of public services, the elimination of subsidies and the restructuring of welfare provisioning to increase attachment to the workforce” (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008:116). In this way, the neoliberal state works to delegitimize street youth subsistence strategies by removing or decreasing their access to the social systems they have relied on in everyday life (Wingert, Higgitt and Ristock 2005:68,77). Moreover, street youth are also subject to the retrenchment of social services, as they—and/or their families—become enmeshed in a struggling economy with withering safety nets. In fact, the Community Social Planning Council found that:

In 2010, there were 41.5 FTE family development workers providing services to youth and families in Victoria;

between the fall of 2010 and 2011 (the period following the South Island Contracted Services Review) that number was reduced to 12.5 FTEs. Similarly, funding for youth outreach workers was reduced and concentrated; one agency became responsible for providing service to the overall region, with the same number of workers that previously served only the downtown core. Focus group participants noted that, as a result, youth have fallen through the cracks. Extensive waitlists that began in 2010 continue to exist today [Amyot 2013:18]

The report suggests this shortfall is the result of a shift in focus by the provincial government under the Liberals in 2001. Amyot notes that “In BC, per capita spending on social services and housing has declined by \$236 per capita since 2001/2002—a funding shortfall of almost 76 per cent” [Amyot 2013:8]. While it would be inaccurate to see street-involved youth as the ultimate purpose of neoliberal policies, it is evident that neoliberal policies have increased the chances that youth will both end up on the street and, once there, face increasing barriers to transitioning off of the street (Karabanow et al. 2010:41-44).

1.5.3 Federal and Provincial Neoliberal Legislation

Historically, while the Canadian federal government has introduced specific legislation that promotes neoliberalism, the implementation of neoliberal policies differs drastically between provinces (Aguilar 2004:107; Keil 2002:578). Federal neoliberal policies have consisted of downloading costs involved in social services and welfare onto Canadian provinces. This downloading includes the removal of restrictive legislation focused on protecting workers, marginalized populations and welfare distribution. At the same time legislation has been passed that allows for the greater freedom of large corporations and businesses (Marontate and Murray 2010:328). This strategy allowed the federal government to simultaneously create freedom for the market while avoiding negative

public opinion associated with social assistance cuts. By downloading responsibility for the distribution of federal transfers, most legislation that directly affects working and poor citizens is enacted at the provincial level (McBride and McNutt 2007:178,183; Young 2008:2).

In 1996, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) policy was enacted at the federal level in Canada, marking a substantial reduction in Canada's social wage transfers (McBride and McNutt 2007:186). This policy reduced the transfer amount sent to provinces and also removed the federal conditions that had traditionally earmarked funds for unemployed or underemployed workers. Between 1993 and 1997 the federal transfer rate for health and social funding was reduced from 4% of the Canada's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to 2.9% of the GDP (McBride and McNutt 2007:186). Similarly, between 1973 and 1996 income stratification grew substantially in Canada, as the richest 10 percent of families saw their income rise from 21 times the income of the poorest families, to 314 times that of the poorest Canadian families. During the same period, Canada's middle class families shrank from 60 percent of the population to 44 percent (Carrol and Little 2001:35). These changes at the Federal level during the 1990s progressively created an environment focused on promoting and extolling the virtues of the successful economic individual, while at the same time removing the safety nets for working, poor and marginalized citizens (McBride and McNutt 2007:184).

At the provincial level, the B.C. Liberals (in power from 2001 through the present) also worked to dismantle welfare in the province (McBride and McNutt 2007:186-187). 2002 brought income assistance reductions, cuts to shelter payments, restrictions to welfare availability and a clawback of child support payments. These legislative changes were

supposed to work towards “encouraging welfare recipients to develop a stronger work ethic and to prove their willingness to work” (Little and Marks 2010:193). Unlike the Ontario government that instituted a ‘Workfare’ program structured to equip individuals with the skills necessary to enter the workforce; British Columbia instead focused on governmental cost-cutting and restrictions on welfare eligibility. These restrictions included a new application procedure that required a documented three week job-search, while also only approving welfare to applicants who had been in the employed in the British Columbia labour market for at least two years (McBride and McNutt 2007:189). These changes to the welfare system clearly were meant to restrict social assistance only to those citizens who have already shown a commitment towards self-managing themselves as a neoliberal citizen. Under the new guidelines, those who received assistance dropped by 25% in 2002-2003 alone (McBride and McNutt 2007:190). Quality or adequacy of job was not taken into account; rather it was the act of employment itself that had been moralized and ritualised through this new welfare system. Low wages and high cost of living were ignored as the state divested itself from responsibility for the growing inequalities in the province.

2003 saw further costs downloaded from the province to its citizens (0.5% increase to sales tax, 50% increase to Medical Services Plan premiums, the unfreezing of post-secondary tuition fees), along with a number of decreases in assistance and terminations of programs which were important to the working-poor in B.C. (such as childcare subsidies, after school childcare programs, employment equity programs, coverage of eye examinations, podiatry, massage therapy, physiotherapy and chiropractic care.) (McBride and McNutt 2007:191).

1.5.4 Neoliberalism, B.C. Families, Homelessness and Youth.

In Canada, the late 1990s and early 2000s were marked by growth in markets and the overall economy. Despite the fact that revenues and markets were increasing, the specific economic conditions of vulnerable British Columbians worsened (Keil 2002:594). Families in B.C. faced “a crippled minimum wage, a lack of guaranteed healthcare insurance, and few workplace protections” (McBride and McNutt 2007:185). During this era of rising costs and dropping wages, welfare payments had dwindled to levels far below the poverty line in British Columbia (McBride and McNutt 2007:190). In 2000, 17.8% of British Columbians who had access to shelter lived below the poverty line, making their status as shelter holders increasingly tenuous. In 2003, a single employable person was eligible for \$6,445 in welfare assistance, which accounted for barely 33% of bare minimum needed to rise above the poverty line (McBride and McNutt 2007:190). Between 1997 and 2003 there was a 22.9% jump in food banks throughout the province, as families and individuals struggled to feed themselves in this new, more hostile, environment (McBride and McNutt 2007:191). During the month of March 2012 Food Banks Canada reported that 96,150 people (29.5% of whom were children) accessed food banks in B.C., this was a 35.7% increase in ten years between 2002 and 2012 (2012:20).

Reductions and restrictions in welfare monies have clearly had debilitating effects on the low-income populations. After seeing a drop in welfare recipients (from 194,905 in June 2001 to 75,837 in April 2005) the Liberal government trumpeted the success of their policies. What the Liberals neglected to mention was that homelessness in Vancouver had doubled between 2002 and 2005 showing that the drop in welfare payments was due

in large part to the fact that many who had relied on support had been effectively excluded from receiving it (Little and Marks 2010:195).

Under new welfare legislation, recipients who do not have a fixed address are not eligible to receive shelter costs (Alexander 2011). In fact, the number of homeless who were not on welfare increased from 15 percent in 2001 to more than 75 percent in 2004. The most marginalized poor in British Columbian society have become unable to access even the most basic social services that they required (Little and Marks 2010:195). McBride and McNutt (2007:191) suggest that homelessness in British Columbia may be under-calculated by as much as 50%, citing the fact that a number of homeless individuals in fact currently are employed, many with full-time positions.

Currently, the push to moralize and responsabilize employment continues as Premier Christy Clark's recently (May 2013) re-elected Liberals rode an economic platform to a surprise victory at the polls. Clark had pushed job training through The BC Jobs Plan as a central part of her platform (largely focused on training youth to work in British Columbia's emerging natural gas sector). Clark suggested that The BC Jobs Plan could be seen as the answer to B.C.'s notoriety as being one of two provinces (the other being Manitoba) with the highest child poverty rate in Canada; a position that B.C. had held in nine of the last ten years under successive Liberal led governments (Hyslop 2013). Lowering wages, restricted benefits and a rising cost of living has created a situation in which many families and individuals simply cannot pay for basic needs even when fully employed. All of these factors increasingly serve to push families, adults and youth to the streets, often to be further managed at the municipal level (Kelly 2001:97).

1.5.5 Street Involved Youth in Victoria

In 2008, A Youth Housing Study for BC's Capital Region gave a "conservative estimate of 616 individual youth" (aged 13-30) whom they deemed as "in need of housing in" Victoria; 543 of these 616 youths were between the ages of 13-24 (Irish 2008:4). In 2012, the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness released a pamphlet that suggested that this number could be assumed to be "on the rise" if Victoria was in line with the "data and trends in other cities like Vancouver—where youth homelessness saw a 29% increase since 2008" (Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness 2012). Alongside the growing number of street-involved persons in Victoria, local legislation has increasingly focused on policing rather than alleviating the poverty and housing challenges faced by street-based populations.

Victoria City council has engaged a number of strategies that are focused on controlling or restricting street-based populations, including disproportionate ticketing for minor infractions in public spaces (such as trespassing and loitering) to perceived and "discriminatory policing practices" (Herman 2012:4-5; see also O'Connor 2012). Legislation such as the "Safe streets" acts (Herman 2012:5) and City bylaws that make it illegal between the hours of 7 PM and 7 AM to sit, kneel or lay on boulevards and medians used primarily by homeless populations (Victoria Coalition Against Poverty 2011:1) are explicitly targeted at making day-to-day life more difficult for homeless populations. Even the physical architecture of the city is changing, as the City works to "beautify" key locations by removing or obstructing areas used prominently by homeless populations with the goal of "discouraging loitering" (Victoria Coalition Against Poverty 2011:1). Klodawsky et al (2006:429) have criticised the "injustice" in such draconian

control measures that “severely restrict and manage the freedom of movement of poor or unemployed bodies, or regulate behaviours in order to promote self-sufficiency.”

In their study amongst the street population living on Pandora Avenue in downtown Victoria, the Victoria Coalition Against Poverty (2011) noted that these initiatives “are clearly an attempt to implement social cleansing.” Likewise, David Harvey (2012) has pointed out how the gentrification of cities is intended to absorb surplus capital, as the very image and experience of the city itself becomes an attraction to be sold through tourism (something Harvey coyly terms “disneyfication”). The City of Victoria (often referred to as the “City of Gardens”) is intimately invested in a lucrative tourism industry, engaging in a concerted effort to move or obscure homeless populations within the city because, (in the opinion of those who enact city legislation) they reflect badly on the carefully crafted image of Victoria that the city would prefer to maintain (Herman 2012:8; Victoria Coalition Against Poverty 2011:2). Street populations are understood by city agents as being net debtors in the city, requiring increased expenditures for policing, property clean-up, repairs for property damage and surveillance. Thus, street involved youth become double offenders in Victoria, as they do not fit the image of the preferred neoliberal citizen while also being seen to mar the efforts to gentrify and sell the city as a tourist destination.

As a place of study, Victoria offers the potential to look at how and why street youth may engage in and negotiate strategic friendships in order to find shelter, resources (such as food, money etc.), protection, emotional support and information (about locations that are safe or not safe to engage in everyday activities). Interviewing street-involved youth in Victoria offers an opportunity to learn how street involved youth understand, engage

in, and experience friendship in a larger political-economic environment that can be understood as hostile to their daily existence.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology used for this study. The first section outlines the population I talked with (street-involved youth). The second section is focused on the recruitment of participants. In the third section, I outline the interview process itself. The fourth section discusses the ethical considerations specific to this project while the fifth section looks at the methodology behind the analysis of the data that was collected.

2.1 Population

Between September 12, 2012 and December 12, 2012, I interviewed eleven street-involved youth from Victoria B.C. Interviews were conducted with six female and five male participants. Street-involvement has traditionally been hard to define, as street-involved youth can be difficult to identify. Often, street involved youth are not perpetual residents of ‘the street,’ but rather are more likely to reside in a variety of locations (Vissing 2007:112-113; Jansson and Benoit 2006:175). Thus the advantage of adopting Perkin’s (2009) definition of street involved youth: “young people who may or may not be homeless and spend some time in the social and economic world of ‘the street’.” Following the approach of other anthropologists such as Raby (2007) and Montgomery (2009), I understand the lived category of youth as socially constructed. Accepting the category of youth as a social construction “recognizes that there is no essential child” (or youth), but “rather, that young people are part of shifting social structures” (Raby 2007:46). In this study, street involved youth in Victoria are understood to be part of larger global political-economic processes (Best 2007:4; Katz 2004:157; Kovats-Bernat 2006:196; Maira and Soep 2005: xxiii-xxiv) while also being products of their local

context and their own individual histories (James 2007:262). Thus, youth are understood to be “speaking as individuals, with their unique and different experiences, and as the collective inhabitants of that social, cultural, economic, and political space” (James 2007:262). For this reason, I borrow and employ Kovats-Bernat’s understanding of street-children in order to see street involved youth as “empowered social *beings* able to construct meaning and effect change in their worlds through economic cooperation, social interdependence, political engagement and resistance, and cultural production and reproduction” (2006:4).

It should be noted that my initial focus for this study was strictly on street involved male youth. Due to slow recruitment and time constraints on my research, it was decided that it would be beneficial for me to include both male and female participants in my interviews. Overall, I feel this was a very good decision. Including female views alongside male views on friendship allowed a richer data set and opened up insights into how youth understand and manage their guy and girl friendships (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4).

2.2 Recruitment of Participants

The Victoria Youth Clinic is an organization that offers health care services and snacks for youth including street-involved youth in Victoria (www.victoriayouthclinic.ca/welcome). Dr. Lisa Mitchell is currently working with youth from The Victoria Youth Clinic in a project that is focused on understanding how street-involved youth (aged 16-21) understand ‘risk’. My research was undertaken as part of a larger study on street involved youth perceptions of health, body and risk conducted by Dr. Lisa M. Mitchell. I was involved in Dr. Mitchell’s project as a paid

research assistant. My duties as a research assistant included transcribing interviews completed between Dr. Mitchell and street involved youth, locating relevant written materials to aid in her project, helping to plan and facilitate the next youth-led (aged 16-26) stage of her project. Later, I was part of the youth social action group “More Than One Street” which was the next stage in Dr. Mitchell’s project.

Within this context, my interview addressed the role friendship plays in the way(s) street involved youth cope with street life, mitigate risks, and seek to stay healthy and safe. For my project, I conducted a one-hour interview with eleven different street involved youths. Using the recruitment criteria of the larger study, all of the youth were street involved and between the ages of 16-21. Participants for my interviews were recruited in two ways: First, by contacting youth (via email, text or phone) who were already participants in some capacity of the larger project and were recruited by Dr. Mitchell (this accounted for seven of the participants); second, by connecting with youth directly during my time at the Youth Clinic (which accounted for the final four participants).

Potential participants were told about the project goals and what their participation would entail; individuals who wished to participate were interviewed at a time and place that was convenient to them. This meant that three interviews were conducted at local coffee shops, two at a neighbouring youth club, two at the downtown location of The Youth Clinic, one at the alternate location of The Victoria Youth Clinic (James Bay), one in a classroom at the school the participant attended, and two in my car. Following the protocol of the larger study, each person interviewed was given an honorarium of \$10.00 cash and a \$10.00 gift card of their choice (London Drugs, Starbucks or Tim Hortons).

The interviews I conducted were the second or third interview with six of the participants, the initial interview with four, and I interviewed one youth who had taken part in focus groups in the larger study, but had not yet been interviewed.

2.3 Interviews

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research strategy that is open ended, but follows a general script covering a list of topics (Bernard 2002:203). By adopting a semi-structured interview approach, I aimed to guide conversation towards my main research questions, while working to avoid restricting possible responses (Vissing 2007:115). The eleven resulting interview sessions provided both a deep data set with varied viewpoints and lived experiences addressing friendships.

I employed what Rubin and Rubin termed “responsive interviewing,” which “relies heavily on the interpretive constructionist philosophy, mixed with a bit of critical theory and then shaped by the practical needs of doing interviews” (2005:30). Responsive interviewing allowed me a level of flexibility in the interview process, while also understanding that “the interviewer and interviewee are both human beings, not recording machines, and that they form a relationship during interview that generates ethical obligations for interviewer” (Rubin and Rubin 2005:30). A constructionist approach allowed me to understand street-involved youth on their own terms, not presuming prior knowledge of the way that street involved youth categorize and understand friendship (Fontana and Frey 2000:647; James 2007:262). While my research does not engage in classic forms of critical theory per se, I drew on principles of critical theory in order to develop open ended questions (see Appendix A) that sought to privilege the participant’s viewpoint rather than my own. This involved generating questions with attention to word

choice, questions that avoid anthropological jargon and paid attention to indigenous typologies—that is, local terminology used by the participants—while avoiding presumptions and existing stereotypes (Ryan and Bernard 2003:89).

Careful attention was paid while generating interview questions to minimize the reinscription of existing stereotypes about street involved youth friendship, while at the same time privileging street involved youth categories and understandings. Responsive interviewing also opened up space for careful reflexivity over the process of the interview itself and the role that I, as the researcher, took in the production of data (Lincoln and Guba 2000:183). After each interview, I carefully wrote down notes about the interview process in order to take time to reflect on the process of the interview. These reflections were useful later during the analysis of data collected. In addition, I have kept a journal of the entire project, tracing interviews, theme development and the emergence of the overall thesis.

Before each interview, permission to record the interview process with an audio digital recorder and record hand written notes was acquired from each participant (Bernard 2002:208). The audio files were transcribed as soon as possible and coded with MaxQDA 11; a qualitative data analysis software. MaxQDA allowed quick and concise organisation and demarcation of the interview data, aiding in the identification of themes, memes and notable quotes for further analysis.

During the interviews, participants were invited to visually depict their friendships by way of social network mapping (McCarty et al 2007), but unfortunately this only occurred in two cases. While youth did not decline verbally, the sketchpad and drawing

tools were left untouched and unused for the duration of the majority of my eleven interviews. It was hoped that allowing street involved youth to visually represent their social networks would open up new venues of friendship to explore, as well as working as a tool that could aid the youth in recalling information about their social relationships (Bernard 2002:238). However, with such a short timeframe, conversations during the interviewing process took focus away from the production of images. It may also have been problematic that I was in close proximity to the participant for the entire interview. Drawing and sketching may be understood as more of an individual activity, and the one-hour interview probably did not allow time for the youth to concentrate on this activity. Future studies would be well served to allow some individual time and space if they wish to encourage social mapping.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Best has noted the importance of recognising the disparities in power between myself—as the researcher—and street-involved youth (2007:12). Street-involved youth are both marginalized members of Canadian society (Vissing 2007:114; Jansson and Benoit 2006:175) and—due to longstanding understandings of youth—largely disempowered due to conventional and socially reinforced age roles (Raby 2007:43-44; Katz 2004:163). Many scholars stress the importance that the researcher acknowledge the power relationships inherent in the process of eliciting information from marginalized populations (Bernard 2002:216; Raby 2007:47; Best 2007:9; Jansson and Benoit 2006:180).

This project was conducted under the auspice of the ethical proposal for the larger study and approved by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of

Victoria. Every attempt was made to protect youth's identity, including the use of pseudonyms (which the youth were given the chance to choose themselves), as well as changing place names, including the names of businesses and locations of notable events, in youth's stories that occurred in Victoria, other provinces, other cities and other geographic locations that youth noted, along with the names of the youth's friends and families. Youth were aware that we would attempt to protect their identity, and were also aware that because of the relatively small size of their social group in Victoria, it was possible that there may be distinguishable sections of their accounts that could be identified by others. Youth were told that they may leave the interview at any time, while still receiving the promised honorarium. In addition, they were assured that their interview was their own, and they could ask for it to be excluded from the record of the research. Youth were given the opportunity to request a copy of the official transcript of the interview to review if they so desired.

I have continued to volunteer at The Victoria Youth Clinic once per week for the past year (beginning in August of 2012) where I serve snacks and spend time with youth who come in to the clinic for various medical related reasons and at times just to 'hang out'. This volunteer work allows me to give back to the population I have worked with, to continue to build rapport and to facilitate a greater understanding of the data produced during and after the interview process (Raby 2007:49-50; Best 2007:23; Fontana and Frey 2000:657-660).

As with many projects, my thesis was subject to both time and funding restraints. One of the resulting limitations of my research was that I was not able to bring my findings back to the interviewed youth before writing this thesis. A focus group, in which youth

could discuss the research I present in this thesis, would have been very beneficial to contextualizing the themes that grew out of the analysis of these interviews. I am still part of a youth social action group formed through Dr. Mitchell's larger project. I expect to present my main findings to this group in the next few months and look forward to hearing how they feel their friendships should be represented in the record.

2.5 Analysis

Once I had transcribed the interviews, I used a grounded theory approach to analyse the transcripts. Grounded theory is:

A set of techniques that: (1) brings the researcher close to informants' experiences; (2) provides a rigorous and detailed method for identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text; and (3) helps the researcher link the concepts to substantive and formal theories" (Bernard and Ryan 1998:607).

A grounded theory approach involved textual analysis and the identification of themes as they emerged from the data about street involved youth friendships (Bernard and Ryan 1998:607,626; White and Marsh 2006:23). This was accomplished by first coding each interview and then using theme identification techniques. While there are a number of theme-identification techniques available, I followed Bernard and Ryan's (2003:102) suggestions and focussed on metaphors, repetitions, transitions, similarities & differences of words, phrases and concepts in the interviews; using MaxQDA 11 in order to employ a type of "cutting and sorting" technique. An initial analysis took place shortly after each interview in order to re-evaluate the interview process, paying particular mind to how the questions that were asked foreshadowed and shaped the data I had received (White and Marsh 2006:39). Using MaxQDA, I first grouped separated specific portions of interviews into codes, and later into larger themes. Themes are essential to the analysis

since “without thematic categories, investigators have nothing to describe, nothing to compare, and nothing to explain” (Ryan and Bernard 2003:85-86). I recognise that there is no single set of conclusive themes to be discovered about street-involved friendships in the collected data and also that themes can be rooted in both the data and in my own *a priori* understanding of such friendships (Ryan and Bernard 2003:85-88; White and Marsh 2006:34-36).

The codes I used in MaxQDA came from both the literature I had reviewed (for codes such as help, protection, share, support, street vs. home-based friends etc.), from my research questions (for codes such as male/female friends, close friends, met friends, neoliberal, police/authorities, positive attributes, negative attributes, no friends etc.) and also from the youth interviews themselves (information sharing, honesty, hurting others/causing harm, play/silliness/activities, property, respect/disrespect, shared experience, talk/listen, drama, gossip, trust, make friends, strong friendships etc.). In some instances, terminology I had identified during my literature review but had not included in my questions emerged through interviews organically (street family is a good example of this). Many of the codes that arose from the interviews were identified because they were stressed by youth as important, were a reoccurring topic within an interview, or were shared across interviews. Certain codes (such as shared experience) arose as a concept rather than exact emic terminology used by youth. No youth talked about friendships as being based on “shared experience,” but rather talked about memories, about how their friends “understood” them and how this understanding let them “be themselves” (a theme that arose late in the analysis of data, drawing from data

that had been split between a few different themes such as close, play/silliness, shared experience etc.).

Where possible, I use youth terminology when presenting themes and codes through chapter three; however, at times youth would express similar concepts through different terminology. In such cases, I adopt theme terminology that serves to outline the predominant ideas that youth had expressed (again, shared experience in a good example of this). Eventually codes were consolidated into thematic categories. Some codes (such as ‘No Friends’) were rich enough and unique enough to stand on their own as themes. Other codes (such as hurting others, gossip, disrespect, negative attributes) were grouped together into larger thematic categories which they fit in naturally. Finally, some codes (such as talk) transcended themes and I made a choice as to which category I would present them in. These types of transcendent codes were the most exciting as they alluded to the underlying matrices that bind the ideas behind these codes and themes into real working friendship (resisting my attempt to break friendship down into artificial categories, which nevertheless is useful as a way to understand the processes and mechanisms behind friendship).

Themes were carefully collected, scrutinized, and compared with each other and with existing literature; including my own recorded ruminations written prior to the interviews. Themes such as “Close/Strong Friendships,” “Street-Family,” “Shared Experience,” and “Talk” were just some of the themes to grow out of the data. Certain themes, such as shared experience, grew inductively out of the data itself as all eleven interviews were analyzed. Others, such as Help, appeared in previous literature (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010), carried through to my interview questions and remained as

helpful concepts during the analysis stage. While the theme of “help” was used to categorise youth experiences, the way that youth envisioned help and the forms it took were themes that grew out of the interviews themselves. Some themes, such as ‘close friend,’ originated in the questions that had been asked, I noted that certain terms were far more readily adopted and deployed than others, suggesting a familiarity with some terms I had used (possibly hinting at a shared meaning in Canadian society). However, even when youth showed familiarity with terms that were presented in the interview questions, ideas such as “protection” were not used or discussed in the way I had originally envisioned. Terms such as “protection” took on new or greatly expanded meanings when youth talked about them.

The themes that emerged from the interview data served to create a theoretical framework that aided in understanding and engaging a wider discussion of the nature and importance of street involved youth friendships in Victoria (Ryan and Bernard 2003:85-86; Bernard and Ryan 1998:607). In the next chapter, I discuss the emerging themes in four overarching categories that include: “Different kinds of friendships,” “How to be a Friend: Characteristics and Enactment,” “The importance of Friendship for Street Involved Youth” and “What is a Friend? Key Attributes and Qualities.” Some themes (such as shared experience) overlapped categories as I worked to understand the meanings and significance of youth’s ideas about friendship. In addition, I attempted to privilege youth’s own wording and emic terminology as much as possible. Chapter 3 focuses on the experience of youth friendships as those friendships are described by the interviewed youth. While I attempted to restrict my intrusion into youth’s accounts, it is

obvious that the very choice of which quotes to include shaped the way that youths' stories will be read in this Thesis.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used for the purposes of this study. I have outlined the population and recruitment of participants for this study. I discussed marginality and vulnerability of street involved youth and have outlined how my research dovetails with Dr. Lisa Mitchell's own study with street involved youth. In addition, I have discussed the interview process and included a copy of the open-ended interview questions that were used in the eleven semi-structured interviews I had conducted. I carefully outlined the ethical considerations of this project and how I have worked to privilege and protect the population that I worked with. Finally, I outlined the method of analysis I conducted while working with the data for the following two chapters. The next chapter looks at how youth talked about and categorized their friendships, focusing on privileging youth voices so that what I hope is an emic view of street involved youth friendships may be made visible.

Chapter 3: How Youth Talk About Their Friendships

For this chapter, the data that was collected through 11 interviews with street involved youth has been organized into four main sections: ‘Different Kinds of Friendship’, ‘How to be a friend: Characteristics and Enactment’, ‘The Importance of Friendship’ and ‘What is a Friend? Key Attributes and Qualities.’

Given the paucity of anthropological research on friendship in general or among street youth in particular, I pay particular attention to youth’s own views on this type of social relationship. By paying close attention to how street youth categorise, differentiate and talk about their friendships we start to understand how street involved youth order their world. The categorizations I encountered in the interviews (close friends, strong friends, street family, street friends, other friends, guy friends, girl friends, acquaintances, friends of friends etc.) make clear what street involved youth mean when they use the word ‘friendship’. In addition, friendship categories give us an indication of what youth value in their daily lives. Understanding youth categorizations gives insight into how friendships may be made and unmade, and why friendships are so important to this particular subgroup of society in Victoria B.C.

During interviews, street involved youth talked about their friendships in various ways and in this chapter I pay particular attention to their terms, labels, and metaphors. Certain words and concepts (such as ‘close friend’) were used in my interview questions and thus, may have been prompts that led youth to use these terms. However, in my analysis I try to make clear when that may have been the case and also to note when youth resisted or redefined terms or phrasings. These categories used by street involved youth make

explicit what youth value in friendships. Youth categorise friendships in relative and agentive ways for their own lived experience; understanding these categories will give insight into that lived experience of life on the street.

Understanding street involved youth friendship through the sections I have outlined above allows the helpful, positive and meaningful experience of friendship on the street to become visible. In this way, as I argue in Chapter 4, we may gain insight into how marginalized populations use processes regularly dismissed, obscured, unnoticed, banal, or transparent in order to destabilize, resist and exist in the cracks in a dominant neoliberal hegemony.

3.1 Different Kinds of Friendships:

In order to answer this projects original research questions, it is important to understand how youth conceptualize, classify and talk about friendship. In addition, these research questions sought to understand what street youth see as being important sources of difference in friendship. This initial segment of this chapter seeks to answer both of these questions.

In this section, I describe youth categorisations of close/strong friendships, street family, street involved friendships vs. other kinds of relationships, friendships with guys, friendships with girls, fake friends and acquaintances.

3.1.1 Close/Strong Friendships:

Ideas of closeness were routinely used by youth when discussing their friendships. Youth used such spatial terms in order to distinguish the intensity of friendships, defining which friends were 'close' or even 'connected.' In the same question that the concept of

‘close’ was introduced to the interview, the concept of ‘best friend’ was also suggested. This later term rarely appeared in youth’s answers, suggesting that ideas of closeness held a specific significance to street-involved youth friendships. Defining friendships in terms of strength and connectedness grew from youth’s own characterisations of their friendships. These ideas were used at times to distinguish the intensity of friendships, as well as to identify a smaller group of intimate friends that youth designated as special:

Like, just like, ‘cause I’m not in a high school and I’m not like in, like, huge social groups anymore. I just like, I don’t know, have like a couple close friends that I just always spend my time with. [Dave]

But uh, and you know, just the people that I really, you know, I’m close to and I’m, I trust. ‘Cause I, I don’t really trust very many people. [Tommy]

This may not occur on a person by person basis, but may encapsulate a specific group of friends:

Yeah, it’s more my group of friends and stuff. I wouldn’t say that I am better friends with one over the other. We’re all pretty close so- Yeah. [Anna]

Ideas of closeness could include further categorizations or modifiers such as “close work friends” or “close-ish” friends, showing that ideas of closeness should not be understood to be static or concrete:

I wouldn’t consider them close friends, I’d consider them close work friends but like, we don’t hang out after, after work. [Dave]

... We weren’t even like that close friends, but we just like, we like became close-ish friends and like, like I don’t know- yeah, like, I don’t know. Could call it friends, could call it not friends. On and off friends. He was just like not a nice person, but at the same time a nice person. More manipulative than anything. [Dave]

Ideas of closeness in any particular friendship may not be shared by both friends. This suggests that closeness is not discussed and agreed upon overtly by friends, but is instead understood independently by each friend:

Like we were like best friends but then she just made a whole bunch of like shitty decisions and then, her- he- like who she's like becoming I just can't stand to be around anymore. But like, in her mind we're still really close friends, but in my mind I just don't want anything to do with her at all. [Dave]

Concepts of closeness could, at times, be unaffected by geographic distances:

Um, and I only have, mm, two, uh, three, well, yeah, four close friends. Three of them that I see often over here, uh, one of them just moved away to Grande Prairie. [Emma]

TW: Yeah. Um, so is there someone you would describe as your best friend or closest friend?

Paul: Um, not really anymore. I had one, but they kind of left, peaced out.

TW: Like, they moved away?

Paul: No they still live here, I just don't see her as much.

However, geography or proximity could be a factor influencing who a youth chose to identify as their closest friend at any particular point in time:

TW: Why do you think this relationship is especially close?

Elise: Probably because she's here. (laughs)

TW: Because she's- yeah. Somebody you see every day pretty much and-

Elise: Yeah. Like if, if there was like, all my friends in one room, then she probably wouldn't be the top.

Yeah, um, still mine and Elise's friendship is like, you know, my biggest friendship at the moment, 'til I get back to Saskatoon where, like, all my big friendships are. Elise will always be my biggest friendship because she's the closest to me, but, you know, there's going to be other friendships. [Ryan]

The closeness of friendships might also be influenced by drug use. At one point Matt expressed how the 'closeness' of his friendships was affected by drug addictions that had the potential to both create distance and closeness in his friendships:

But yeah, we d- we keep an eye on each other, but not as much as we should be man. We kind of just, we're all pushing each other away for our addiction almost. Like it's getting, it's gotten to that point. Like you push friends and family away for your addiction, but it, our addiction brings us

closer. And then it could al- also just like bring us at each other's necks. It's both ways. [Matt]

For friendships deemed to be very close, youth talked about a 'connection' or 'connectedness.' These ideas bring with them the idea of linkages and assemblages, of connected bodies devoid of spatial separation even while participants retained their individuality:

Um, I've known her for probably like four years now maybe? Something like that. I don't know, we've just always been like, connected. Just like we get each other. [Dave]

Like if you have different facets of your own personality, you can connect with different facets of other's personalities. [Emma]

When discussing past relationships, Ryan talked about severing or 'cutting' such connections to avoid detrimental aspects of a friendship:

I don't really have any problem, I guess I am though- I don't know, I kind of cut myself off from all the friends. I, I got a little better with that, cutting my friends off. Worse. I don't know what one it is. (Laughs.) Cutting my friends off whenever I f- feel it's not doing good for me. [Ryan]

Youth talked about the process of establishing these connections as work over time.

Conversely, "cutting off" friends suggests an abrupt, clean, absolute break.

For friendships among youth to progressively grow closer it required that a certain level of comfort be established. 'Comfort' in friendships allowed a safe space for youth to genuinely express themselves:

Um, someone who you feel comfortable with, like, letting them stay over at your house. You know they won't like, steal anything or they wouldn't do things like that. And they're just like respectful and they're just not stupid. [Jen]

Like, if I'm not comfortable around someone, then, like, I can't have fun with them, like, if I'm not comfortable around them they're not my friend.
[Dave]

In fact, Emma, Dave and Jen felt that comfort allowed them to 'truly be themselves.'

TW: So, what do you think it means to be yourself?

Dave: To be comfortable and just not really care what comes out of your mouth, and just, just to be.

I'm like, when people first meet m- meet me, I'm like really quiet and like keep to myself and like one, once they're like my friend and like we hang out a lot and like I get comfortable around them then I start acting like myself. Really random and weird... Like, once you get comfortable and, like, I guess the funny side comes out. [Jen]

That close, comfortable friendships enable youth to be themselves is a powerful idea.

This suggests that other forms of everyday interaction required youth to adopt an 'otherness,' to mimic a personality that they were uncomfortable with or to adopt a personal foreignness from self in order to generate space in their interactions.

Youth also discussed close friendships in terms of their strength. Emma stressed that "with strong friendship there's more of a connection, and I think a person should stand by you and be supportive of you." Dave believed that over time, close friendships may grow 'stronger.' Strength, in this sense, seemed to be used in order to define a type of dependability or stalwart connection in a friendship. Friends who were close and felt comfortable could establish connections. Over time, these connections would gain strength and trustworthiness. This type of strength may also bring with it certain special privileges for the participants of the friendship:

I haven't had a lot of strong friendships. You know? I don't really know what it's like. Um, but I think like I've had friends that have, like, talked me like smartened me up, you know? Um and that's someone that I've been in a stro- like, had a strong friendship with. Um, I would consider that strong because I would listen to them. [Emma]

For Emma, a strong friendship meant that you would trust your friend enough to accept their counsel in your life. More than feeling free to ‘be yourself’ you were actually allowing a friend to have a hand in shaping who you were, or who you would be.

3.1.2 Street Family

When talking about her friends, Jane said: “A different terminology for s- friends I used to have when I was homeless, we used to call each other ‘street-family.’” In fact, nine of the eleven youth participants in this study used fictive kin terminology in order to define their relationships with friends. The adoption of fictive kin terminology lends insight into the closeness and connectedness of street involved youth friendships. While fictive kinship terms appear in other areas of society (such as professional sports teams, the Canadian Forces, the RCMP, firefighters etc.) the use of kinship terminology as it relates to ‘street-family’ is both discursively tied to a specific place (the street) and is only used by its own members (as opposed to the above mentioned examples that are often drawn upon by mainstream media, newspaper, magazine and in daily conversation by members who are not included in this fraternity.) Anna explains her own street family:

Um, some of them I knew from before and stuff, and others I met hanging out with some people downtown and stuff. They are people that I were’s- I was introduced to. Stuff like that, hung-out with and over time just we were always together, always enjoyed hanging out with each other, a lot of the same interests and stuff like that and just kind of became like family.
[Anna]

Unlike Anna, who saw a shared history and time together develop into a street-family, Tommy felt that street family can also be born of an important shared ‘dramatic’ event:

A lot of the time though, for me to like consider somebody my, my brother or my sister or family in general, they've got to have, there's got to have been something, you know, dramatic. Something big that happened between us that we were able to overcome or get through and m- move on from right? [Tommy]

The particular fictive kin terminology used by street-involved youth can include referring to friends as siblings:

I have another friend in Edmonton, she moved away... Um, she's older, she calls me little sister. [Emma]

Yeah they're all basically brothers and I consider them as my brothers. They're my, like my street family. So we're all pretty close. Some of them are actually related to each other. [Anna]

Like, my brother, he's, he's not actually my brother, but I call him my brother, I've known him for like ten years, we were in the group homes together. [Tommy]

In addition to siblings, youth talked about more established street-based individuals as concerned parents:

I've got so much street family, you know, street-mom, street-parents, you know, that just, they look out for me and tell me, "look man, don't hang out with these people 'cause they're going to get you in shit and you're g- just going to end up rotting in jail." You know, or, you know, "don't touch this shit, if I ever see you smoking crack I'll kill you," kind of thing... And like I remember one of my street moms, she was a hard-core crack head. She would be spending like eighty bucks and smoking it in one hoot, you know what I mean? Like she'd just torch the shit and she'd be like (mimics lighting a pipe and inhaling sharply), right in front of me and she would, and then she'd turn around and be like, "I ever see you smoking this shit I'll fucking fuck you up." Right, because they know, but they can't help themselves, you know. So they figure that because they can't help themselves, or they, they think that they can't help themselves, they'll do their best to help everybody else, before, before they get into that same situation, right? [Tommy]

Street involved youth's fictive kin relationships show concern for other street-involved youth's well-being. Jane talked about joining her street family in terms that resembled adoption: "...then it got into, 'Oh, I get what's going on at [Jane's] home, she doesn't

have to go home, we'll just keep her.'” Additionally, Anna goes into more depth about the ways that her street family takes a protective role in her life:

Yeah, my, my boys. Um, well my guy friends. We hang out pretty much every day, all day, doing whatever. They make sure that nobody bugs me and stuff. They take good care of me, look out for me, so, basically my brothers. [Anna]

This protective role that Anna expressed is common in street families. As Tommy explains, street family has an obligation of sorts to ensure a youth's well-being. He attributed this to the ‘street code,’ a type of unwritten rules for those who spent time in street culture:

Yeah, well, you know, that- that's just the street code. And that's pretty much everywhere, you know, not everywhere but pretty much. You know, if you're living on the streets and you get in with that family 'cause it is, it's like a family, you know, and everybody kind of looks out for each other and, you know. But if you fuck up, then, you know, that's, that's your problem. But, you know, if like, say some, like, you know, a bunch of people were after me or something and I ran up to my buddies place or, you know, seeing a couple buddies on the street, I wouldn't even have to lift a finger, I'd just be like, “Yo, those guys are beefing, right? And I don't know why,” and they would, they would, they would stand right behind me you know? [Tommy]

Street family embodies idealized notions of help, discipline and protection for street involved youth.

3.1.2 Street Involved Youth Friendships vs. Other Kinds of Relationships.

Youth made clear distinctions between street-family and biological family (or fictive-kin to kin) as well as youth's street-friendships in comparison to their ‘non-street’ friendships. For some youth (such as Tommy and Matt) there was no access to biological family with which to compare their street-family. For others, (such as Anna and Paul) street-family fulfilled needs in their everyday life in a more productive way than

biological family, while also offering a ‘closeness’ that their biological families did not match. Dave struggled to disentangle biological family from friends, expressing both a belief that there was a difference between the two while also suggesting deep similarities. In order to try and understand this similarity, Dave drew on ideas of genetics, closeness and time spent together:

Dave: Yeah, I think it’s, well there’s definitely a difference, but you could consider them all like the same relationship. Depending on like, how you feel towards each other.

TW: What do you think the difference is?

Dave: Just, they are your family, like, genetics. That’s about it. I mean they leave you, like, depending on the situation, you’ve lived with them, like, your entire life so- They’re like pretty close friends. Like family are friends, usually. But like friends aren’t family. But it’s all like the same relationship.

Elise felt that there was a definite difference between family and friends, articulating that family relationships were more important than friendships. For her, family was a static concept, one that was dependable:

They’re my family you know? Like they’re going to be there my entire life. Like, I can’t, I absolutely would not ever choose anyone over my family. [Elise]

In contrast to Elise, both Jane and Paul felt that their relationships with their street-families were ‘stronger’ and more understanding than their relationships to biological families:

Honestly, I think street family is a lot stronger than actual family. Actual family gets temperamental with you. This family doesn’t because you’re all there for pretty much the exact same reason... Everybody in actual family doesn’t go through the same stuff. [Jane]

I choose to come and hangout with my friends who feel kind of more like a family to me, because of the fact that like, my family and I are opposites. Like, the way that I dress and the way that I act and the things that I do, they think are wrong. And the things that they do and the way that they

act and everything, I don't think that it's wrong, but it's just not my lifestyle. So we kind of butt heads on it. So, when I see my friends, it's like, people who actually think like me and do the stuff that I want to do and act like me and it, it just feels more like a family than my actual blood family is. [Paul]

Paul and Jane both expressed a shared experience of living on the street that generates an understanding with their street families that biological family cannot reproduce in their lives. Paul uses the physical and aggressive metaphor of a head-butt when discussing his birth family, while noting numerous intimate connections he has with street-family (they are like him and let him 'be himself').

While both Paul and Elise spoke of having a good deal of contact with their families, it raises the question: What may explain their opposite viewpoints on the position of friendship vs. family in their lives? Where Elise justifies choosing her family over her friendship, Paul rejects "blood" and rather embraces friends whom he sees as fulfilling a more important role and obligation family should fill in one's life. Paul continues to build on this theme:

...My friends know everything. Like, there's nothing that I keep from them, so I just feel a lot closer with my friends than I do with my parents. So, I just kind of think of them as more of a family kind of thing. Because, like, with your family, in my opinion, you should be able to say anything to your family. [Paul]

Paul's friends were 'closer' than his family was. As we had noted before, Paul's friends were 'like him,' recognisable, comfortable, and close. This may give an insight into the difference between Paul and Elise's viewpoints. While interviewing Elise, she talked about her mother being someone she could talk with: "If I, if I do then I just, I kind of keep it to myself. It's more of a, like, I'm going to talk to my mom thing." In contrast,

Paul noted several times his frustration with the inability to have conversations with his father:

Like, your parents, you should be able to go up to them and be like, 'I'm having a rough day, can we sit down and talk?' And it's like, if I do that with my dad, he'll be like "That's and excuse, grow up." And I'm like, "no, it's not an excuse, I had a shitty day and a whole bunch of stuff happened and I want to sit down and talk to you about it." And he's like, "Go do this, go do that" like, "clean your room, do this, you're just making excuses to sit on the couch and not do anything!" And it's like "No, I need someone to talk to right now." [Paul]

Paul has drawn attention to another aspect of friendship that came up when talking to street-involved youth; the idea of 'talk' (to which I return shortly.)

In addition to categorizing street family as separate from biological/nuclear families, there was also a distinction between street friends and other friends:

Like, I have the group of friends that I look at as a family, and that I hang out with every, like, almost every single day and, like, see on a constant day basis, and then I have, like, my friends that I've developed over my whole life, who I like, still talk to and still hang out with, but they're like, they're more f- on the friend stage than the family stage, but they're still like friends, and I'll still like talk to them and stuff. [Paul]

I'd say I'm a lot closer with my street family, just because they're- I see them every day, they know what's going on for me, they're always there for me go through a lot of things together and stuff, whereas my other friends, we, like, anybody else's friends, like, when you go to school you've got s- like, your best friends, the people that you hang out with and stuff, the people that you know just from being in class together. So it's not quite the same connection, but there is a lot of friends that I have that aren't involved in the street that I do have the same connection with as my street family. [Anna]

While Paul differentiates the two categories of friends completely, Anna does allow that she has some friends not involved in street life that she feels share the same "connection" with her as her street family does. In spite of this connection, she also says quite clearly, "I'm a lot closer with my street family," which she then attributes to the regularity of

contact and the knowledge of her personal life that street involved friends possess. For both Anna and Paul, the shared experience of their street involved friends was important to their current friendships. The understanding of what it means to live on the street allowed for a more general emotional closeness and more connections.

Some friendships were categorized by the location at which they were made. Jen made friends both in school and in groups she had been part of during and after her pregnancy, but noted that they “don’t really hang out” (Jen). Likewise, Ryan identified some workmates as friends, but also that they did not spend time together outside of work:

At my work there’s lots of people who, like, you know, try to spark conversation but I try to keep it to a minimum just because it’s at work, I don’t want to put on a, you know, a bad impression. You k- u- give my boss a bad impression you know. And uh, also it’s, just like to keep my work life and, you know, my school life or whatever I’m doing separate from like, my friend life. Like, you know if I, if I run into a work bud, like a work buddy outside of work, you know, I’ll be like “hey,” you know, “let’s grab some beers.” But, like, you know it’s, I don’t sit there at work and talk and hang out and you know. [Ryan]

Dave also separated “work friends” from personal friendships, though he did not dismiss the possibility of a work friend becoming a close friend.

3.1.2 Guy/Girl friendships

Given my initial interest in friendships among male street involved youth, I asked interview participants about their friendships with “guys” and with “girls”. Friendships with guys and friendships with girls were largely seen as distinct from one another, however, there were different opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of guy/girl

friendships. It should be noted that none of the youth I interviewed identified as transsexual, but were either male-identified or female-identified.

One of the pitfalls for guy/girl friendships identified by street involved youth was the fact that close friendships were prone to becoming intimate. This was understood to be a threat to the friendship itself as becoming intimate often meant that youth felt they could not maintain friendships once the intimacy ended (for example, in my interviews only two instances of staying friends after being intimate were cited). In the case of cherished friendships, youth emphasized the need to avoid allowing the friendship to become intimate in order to ensure the friendship was maintained and protected. Youth also suggested how difficult it could be to maintain a friendship with someone whose desire to become intimate could not be reciprocated:

My friend Michael, we were like really, really close and like, we both like, really liked each other, but we didn't want to ruin our friendship. [Jen]

That's why I try not to talk to girls too much, you know, it's kind of like "Hey, I'm good, tired, bored." Because I don't want to sound like I'm flirting or something like that and put off the wrong impression... [Ryan]

Most of the interviewed youth voiced the idea that the tendency for guy/girl friendships to become intimate makes it difficult for male and female street youth to maintain platonic relationships:

Yeah, or like, yeah, like if, whatever, I developed a crush on him, you know, I don't want that. Well no I'm in a relationship I don't want that. (Laughs). [Elise]

Um, well, it was never too much of a problem, it was just kind of, uh, annoying compared to, like, the rest of my friends. Like, uh, wherea- I can go out and hang with my guy friends, you know, and not have a care in the world about really anything, and then I can hang out with Rebecca

and all it would be would be hearing, you know, gossip and, you know (chuckles) you like this girl, yeah. [Ryan]

Mm, one of them I'm seeing tonight for dinner, um, he's the only guy friend that I've had that's like, "I would never have sex with you ever." (Laughs) Um, like there's been- no actually, no there's two of them. One's on Salt Spring, but usually, like, the guys- 'cause I'm kind of a tom-boy, and if I wasn't so used to, like, being in sexual relationships with men, then I would probably just be friends with boys a lot more of the time. [Emma]

Guy/girl friendships were especially troublesome for youth who were in a committed relationship with a boyfriend/girlfriend. An intimate relationship with a partner made it difficult to sustain an opposite-sex friend:

Well no, I, I think it's pretty much the same, like uh, I'm sure there's like some guys out there who feel the exact same, like uh, like Elise she doesn't feel comfortable with me hanging out with, uh, too much girls either. Like, uh, which I think is totally fair, because from how I see it, if she is going off and only hanging out with guys, unless she, like, you know, only has guy friends, which is a different story but, she doesn't. (Chuckles) She, uh, she goes out and hangs out with guys and then, uh, that guy likes her. Then she still wants to be friends after he said, uh, "you know, you know I like you" "Well I'm in a relationship." And then it just kind of leads on, leads on, leads on, leads on. Oh well, she's sticking around after I told her, you know? Maybe there's some hope. And like, that, that's happened to me and a couple of my friends before. [Ryan]

Of all the youth, only Jane and Dave talked about a friendship becoming intimate and returning to a friendship after. For Dave, there was a stretch where the friendship had seemingly ended, only to be salvaged after allowing some time to pass. Jane, however, gave an example of a friendship that crossed over to become a romantic relationship and afterwards returned to a friendship without any ill effect.

And as I- As far as I know, I've kept tabs on the little brother and I've seen the older brother a couple times and we still talk a lot. He was one relationship- his brother was one relationship I actually had. We started dating right after he'd gotten stabbed because we like, cared so much for each other. And he's the only relationship that I have so far that still talks

to me. We ended on good terms. Like, we actually came to the conclusion together, both being y- sixteen, saying that if we aren't together, I still want to be friends with you, like, you're a dope person. [Jane]

For a couple youth, the idea of potential intimacy was not only restricted to guy/girl relationships, but also had an effect on same-sex friendships:

But then it's also uh, the fact that um, uh, well, that girl or that guy in that friendship can like each other. Which can also happen with a guy and guy friendship of course, but, you know, I'm straight... [Ryan]

Jen: And like, she's, she was a lesbian and like, she really likes me. But she knows that, like, she's more like my sister. But she still really likes me. I d-, I feel comfortable with it, I'm like, not like, "Ew, get away from me," it's like whatever.

TW: Yeah, you're not, you don't have any feelings for her at all?

Jen: No. Well I kind of used to, but-

Because, personally, I am bisexual so like, a lot of guys look at me and they're like "huh, I don't know if I want to, like, hang out with that kid, he's different." And I'm like, "Yo, I'm still a person, like, there's nothing different about me." But there's still that, like, I don't have the reaction to it, because I'm willing on becoming friends with guys or girls, I don't really care. [Paul]

While intimacy was a stated concern, youth also noted that guy/girl friendships could be less prone to 'drama' (a term that will be explored in more detail in the next section) than male-male or female-female friendships.

I don't have lot of women friends bec- I prefer not to hang out with girls, um I just don't like how a lot of them act. They, they start rumours they're just evil to each other, backstab each other, they're manipulative and s- like boys, if they have a problem with each other they deck it out, have a brawl or something and that's that. With girls they keep things going, try and ruin each other's lives. It's not something I'm interested in all the drama and everything like that. [Anna]

I've had I think more friendships with girls but they always like, end. But like with guy friends I find it's just- we like stay friends longer 'cause we don't get into like stupid fights like girls do. [Jen]

In addition, guy/girl friendships could also offer protection:

TW: So do you find that your friend, or your friendship with Robert is, is different that your friendship with like-

Elise: The girls?

TW: Yeah, Justine and Bethany and stuff?

Elise: Um, yeah a little bit 'cause he's like, he's definitely more protective over me than Bethany, Justine and Olivia.

Well like, I was mostly hanging out with the guys, we only had, like, a couple girls in the group. And because I was the youngest, all of like the older ones were like, "Oh, got to make sure she's okay. Can't let her get out of hand." [Jane]

Youth also pointed out characteristics specific to guys or girls which could affect the type of friends they could be. For example, Jane suggested that guys were inept at communicating about their emotions:

Um, guys don't talk about their feelings. It's important to some people. When you're in a relationship with somebody or you have a friendship with somebody, you're supposed to be able to tell that other person how you feel, what you're thinking and what you need their help with. [Jane]

Ryan noted different rules of acceptable behaviour in his friendships with girls as opposed to guys. In addition, he also speaks of gender characteristics that make friendships with guys more appealing to him personally:

Like my friendship with a girl has- girls have always been different than guys. Like maybe that's not how it should be but that's how it is and, like um, see I can walk up to one of my guys friends and joke about anything, and not feel, you know, bad about it or, you know? Whereas if I walk up to- if I was to walk up to one of my, like a friend that was a girl and joke about, like, you know, jokingly smack her bum, you know, it's totally different, that's you know out of there, you know. Now I like having fun, I like goofing around so I mainly just have guy friends, you know? You know, just have lots of fun. But like girls, I've always found just talk too much and, not like talk too much, but like too much shit, you know. Whereas like all my, all my guy friends, all we talk about is like zombies. And like, you know, (chuckles) the government and how crappy it is. [Ryan]

Paul and Jane saw friendships with girls as being a more understanding and communicative relationship than friendships with guys could be:

I get along well with girls, because like, I don't know, it's just, they understand better I guess? I don't know. I c- I've never been able to pinpoint the reason. But like, I think it's more of, guys are just, like, guys are more prone to be homophobic than girls are, because girls are like, "oh, I can have a gay best friend," and they're so stoked and guys are like, "Ew, gays." And there's a lot of guys who I am friends with, but I'm definitely friends with a lot more girls. [Paul]

See I think that, that also goes both ways, 'cause let's say if you were to do- if a couple were to get into a fight. The guys are going to go and talk about it, but they're just going to joke about it. The girls are actually going to sit there and get down to it and figure out what's going on in their head and get rid of the problem. [Jane]

Anna, however, felt that friends who exhibited what she saw as guy characteristics, by engaging in 'guy things,' were more desirable for her than friendships that focused on more 'material things' which she associated more with girls:

'Cause like I've always grown up with guys too. I've always liked the guy things like hunting, 4x4ing, dirt biking, fishing, camping all that stuff. I'd much prefer to do those things than go out to the mall, paint my nails, go gossip about things. It's just, I get along with girls that are more like that than the girls that are all like all dolled up and going to the bars and all that stuff, like I prefer doing more, kind of, real life things than material things. [Anna]

Anna draws attention to the fact that characteristics associated with guys or girls were not cemented, but rather exhibited the capacity for slippage. Girls could have or prefer guy characteristics and guys could have or prefer girl characteristics. Anna used gender stereotypes in order to identify who would not be desirable as a friend and then to suggest the characteristics she looks for in a desirable friend. Interestingly, it is the characteristics she feels that she, herself, embodies that are desirable.

Tommy felt that his reputation depended on him carefully managing his friendships with both guys and girls, suggesting that there may be stereotypes of youth who maintain only opposite-sex or same-sex friendships. Tommy's focus on his own reputation and the stereotypes that grow out of the characteristics associated with guy and girl friendships allow us to view the constant negotiation he puts into his friendship group (explored in more detail in the following chapter). Chapter 4 will return to the way that friendships are integral to Tommy's daily quality of life, and as such, must be carefully monitored, assessed, negotiated and managed. The next section of this chapter continues with this theme, exploring the way that youth may be friendly with individuals that they do not feel close too, and do not consider friends.

3.1.4 Acquaintances and Friends of Friends.

Acting friendly could occur independently of actual friendship. Youth talked about feigning friendship with people that they did not necessarily consider friends. Categories such as 'acquaintance' or 'friends of friends' were used by youth when they talked about these relationships. Consider how Jen defines an 'acquaintance':

TW: Yeah? Okay. And then, are there, are there some people that you hang out with that you do not consider friends?

Jen: Uh, just like some people downtown that we know. They're more like acquaintances... It's like we would, like, be with them in public but we wouldn't want them, like, in our home- so.

Acquaintances were friends whom youth 'got along with' but did not express the same intensity of friendship as they did for their 'close' friends. There was not the same type of comfort or established connections with acquaintances as there was for friends. This begs the question: Why spend time with acquaintances at all? Paul and Tommy note that

often it is the case that you do not build personal friendships with everyone in the larger friendship group you spend time with:

TW: Um so are, are there people that you hang out with that you don't consider friends? That you spend time with?

Tommy: Yeah, only 'cause they're hanging out with my friends and I don't want to be a dick and be like "Go away."

Um, there are some people like, friends of my friends that I don't necessarily- I wouldn't consider them friends, just because of how they are, but I'm not going to exclude them just because I'm not friends with them. [Anna]

Being nice and feigning friendship with acquaintances was not always a personal choice.

In some cases, acting friendly with friends of friends was an obligation that a youth felt they must fulfill. Ashleigh talked about the obligation she felt to disguise how she truly felt about her boyfriend Steve's friends:

Now a friend of his comes around and if I don't like her 'cause I think she likes him, then I kind of have to bite my tongue, not say anything mean to her. [Ashleigh]

Acting or feigning friendship was important, not for the sake of the acquaintance you were being friendly towards, but to the friendship that you held in common with the acquaintance. For youth, feigning friendship was not the same as being a fake friend.

As explained by youth, 'fake friends' were people you thought were your friends, but did not, in fact, act in your best interest. The deception could be quite difficult to see through at the time, and fake friends were talked about retrospectively as a basis for ending a friendship. The difficulty in truly understanding who was a friend and who was a fake friend could be troubling for youth. Paul expressed his own anxiety over questioning who was and who was not a friend:

Like, when you start overthinking if your friend is your friend or not. Or like, if this person hates you. You're like, they could hate me! But they might not, but I don't really know because I can't read inside their head and all that kind of stuff. [Paul]

Jen's definition may shed some light on what, exactly, youth mean by 'fake friends.'

And like if I feel like they're just going to be like fake friends, like just you know them but they're- won't be there for you. Like if you needed help or if you just wanted to talk or like, or people who just hang out with you 'cause you have weed... [Jen]

Jen's suggestion that fake friends "won't be there for you... if you needed help" could bring some clarity to why youth so often talked about fake friends in the past tense as ended relationships. Fake friends would reveal themselves when the stakes were high, and by doing so they would give youth a reason to end the friendship. Jen continued to note that trust could define who really was a friend:

Um, mostly my boyfriend and a few of- people that we met like, before, when we were homeless or whatever. Only a few of them that we trust, 'cause like, some, some people you just know and they're not really friends but you call them your friends. [Jen]

Similarly, Anna (a more experienced street involved youth) had learned which friends she could, and which friends she could not, "count on" in a time of need:

I've got a lot of friends downtown and stuff like that, but not necessarily the other people I would count on to back me up if somebody came at me or something like that or, like, or if I needed something to eat or drink or a place to stay or something like that, I couldn't necessarily count on them for that. [Anna]

Youth also talked about friends who cause problems in their lives. 'Problem friends' could be relationships that youth viewed as 'destructive friendships':

Um, well this one guy that I met, when I was like fourteen years old was like basically what like, got me into like drugs and alcohol and like partying and like not going to school and all that crap and that definitely I

would consider that one of my most destructive friendships I've ever had. But like, at the time I was like "Wahoo, this is fun, this is awesome." I mean, I don't regret it ever happening, I just lo- look back at it now and just think, wow, I was an idiot. [Dave]

Emma also talked about a 'problem friendship' she had experienced, one that intensified an eating disorder she was struggling with:

I have this friend, um, who- We, like, we lived together for a while we were both very ill and it was a really bad s- like, had eating disorders. And it was bo- it was a really bad situation, we were not, no conducive to any kind of progressive, positive behaviour, um, ah, we were just able to be by each other while we were in that kind of state. [Emma]

Similarly, Jen talked about how her friendships would sometimes lead her into "bad situations":

...I would, like, go off with random people. They're like, "oh, let's go do this", I'm like, "okay let's go!" And like, heh, just end up in really bad situations... My friend Haley, I like stopped hanging out with her 'cause like, she got me into like, stealing and stuff and ended up, like getting caught stealing twice. [Jen]

Problem friends were not restricted to those who encouraged harmful behaviour. Jen and Tommy (her partner at the time of the interview), both recounted the same story of being betrayed by a couple whom they had thought of as friends, showing that putting trust in a friend can lead to very real and difficult consequences:

I didn't have time to get up here and get the landlord the damage deposit so I gave him four-hundred and fifty dollars, I asked him if he would be willing to, you know, bring it to the landlord and get me a receipt, right? And he's like "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, for sure, for sure." And then he says he'd done it, um, but he forgot the receipt and he asked me to borrow another two-hundred and fifty dollars 'cause, he says, you know, he's got three kids and a wife, you know? And his, his wife's sister was living there at the time too, and he said he was really low on groceries. So I was like, okay, well, you know, I've got extra because I'm not paying my last month's rent here so you know, this guy can go screw himself, I don't care. And then, and then, uh, yeah, so I lend him the money and then I, a week before we were supposed to move in here, I came up just to double-

check and make sure that everything was okay ‘cause I just had a bad feeling right? And I’m glad that I listened to my bad feeling, because I come here and j- and I was like, “Hey, did Joe drop off any, you know, money for the damage deposit for me?” and sh- “saying it was for me?” and uh, she’s like, “I don’t think so, let me look.” As she’s looking for the receipt book, she’s like, “nothing, nothing, nothing, nope, nope, nope.” And so there was nothing. And so I was like, you know, they, they were trying to screw me over, they were trying to make me, make us homeless and, which, we would have lost our son, you know? And, luckily for us, we were on Welfare and we still had another damage deposit we could take out. [Tommy]

Being robbed was a constant concern for youth, but was just one reason to avoid problem friendships. Because problem friends had the potential for so much destruction, youth described situations in which problem individuals were not worth befriending, or even feigning friendships with at all; in fact they were best avoided all together:

Uh thieves, like bringing someone into your own personal space and then them, them stealing from you, or bringing your friend over to another friend’s place, and then, like you don’t want to- like fingers can be pointed at anyone, right? And anyone can point the finger. When we’re living this type of lifestyle, where we’re like, stealing is like part of a- almost a day-to-day thing, kind of, just like, yeah. There’s definitely trouble makers out there, like. There always will be I’m sure. [Matt]

‘Cause, it’s just like, I’ve got too much problems and stress in my own brain, that I really don’t need to pour on someone else. And it’s like, that person probably has stress as well and problems on their brain that like, it would just be a huge mess of problems and stress that I really don’t need right now. [Paul]

Jane: I don’t come down here at all anymore

TW: And why is that?

Jane: I think it’s pointless and there’s too many people who need- have shit going on in their lives, and I don’t need to be affiliated with them

This section looked at a number of categories that youth used in order to categorized and differentiate their friendships. Youth showed a deep understanding and careful negotiation of the friendships in their lives revealing a nuanced, intricate, active and

agentive view of making and maintaining friends. The careful categorization of friendships should be understood as agentive because it allows youth to define their own friendships in a way that they feel they should be seen and understood. In addition, friendship categorizations give a clear indication of what youth value in their daily lives. This agency is often missed in developmentalist views of street involved youth friendships which position them as a natural part of adolescence that carries consequences. These contrasting views of street involved youth friendships will be explored in much more detail in chapter 4.

3.2 How to be a Friend: Characteristics and Enactment

In the previous section I explored ways that youth categorized their friendships. In this section we look at the process of friendship. By looking at how friendships begin and are practiced, we gain insight into why friendships are important (particularly to street involved youth) as well as gaining a better understanding of the reasons for the categories youth used in the first section of this chapter. In this section, we will look at how street involved youth talked about how friendships began, how they were maintained, how shared experiences played a pivotal role in the creation and understanding of friendships, and the centrality of ‘talk’ in friendships. In addition, we will briefly touch on ways that friendships may end or be avoided by street involved youth.

3.2.1 Shared Experience

When I asked Ryan “What is it that makes someone a friend?” he eloquently identified “memories” as being the initial and concrete marker of friendships:

Things that make a friend are like, in my opinion, would be like a memory. Like, you know? Like all the th- everything that I know that

made my friendships so far have been like that one day, you know? Like, uh, my best friend back in Saskatoon, we became best friends because we got really, really, really drunk at a party and, uh, yeah. [Ryan]

When asked for examples, Ryan recounted stories of how he had met Carlo and Norman, both friends from his past:

Well yeah, like um, uh, with me and Carlo, like that's my Mexican best friend, (laughs) he um- Me and him met actually originally in school but our first time we hung out was at a party that, uh, we were both invited to and then we just kind of took off and we were kind of the only ones there that didn't have a girlfriend. Or I guess, none of us really had girlfriends or boyfriends when we were in grade nine, but that was kind of what it was. It was just kind of, everybody was making out, we were the only ones that didn't, we went outside, we had a cigarette and, it was a drunken cigarette, I don't even think I smoked it. And we just talked and found out we had a lot more things in common. [Ryan]

We got freshied together...Like you, uh, just start high-school and you're the seniors at that high-school get their paddles ready and they spank you with them, they throw you their eggs and get you drunk and so that's what happened, it was with him and uh, it was a crazy night and like we were singing songs together and like drunken in the back of a van with our asses sore from the paddle and eggs all over our hair with make- like, make-up all over our face [Ryan]

Likewise, when Dave started talking about friendships that were important to him, he started by explaining the memories he had of the friendships initial meeting:

The first one would be John and how did we get to know each other? We met like through friends of friends, we were like in a, like, big party scene I guess. Like the whole party scene, we were all like sixteen years old. And we just kind of, just like, we had like the same interests and stuff, so we just started like hanging out. We started dating for a while but that didn't work, at all. And then, after that we were just kind of like not friends at all. Like we didn't even talk to each other. And it was k- it was really shitty. Like pretty shitty, yeah. And, but then after a while we like started going to the same school, so we started, like, getting back in touch with each other and now we're just like best friends. [Dave]

Um, Brittany? Uh, how did we meet, again like friends through friends of friends and like, the party scene and stuff. [Dave]

Memories create an anchor of sorts. Once such an anchor point had been established, time spent together created a shared history of experiences together.

I met him when I was like, probably thirteen years old and- it's just like, we met at s- like, such a young age and like grew up through this whole scene together and then just like feeling from going from like being at the bottom of some social network to going like all the way up to the top, just like, being there for each other all the time. [Dave]

Yeah, I have my friend Robert who's in Saskatoon, we, we went to high school together. Well high school, middle school, whatever. And we like, we hung out basically every day and we're still friends to this day and we still talk, we still, yeah, I would consider him one of my best friends too. He's in Manitoba. [Elise]

The guy and me had been friends for like five or six years, and I had known him all through high school, the two of us were the same kind of people, we were like quiet, shy people and when we grew up, we finally realized who we wanted to be and like became ourselves and everything. And we'd done the whole change together and everything. Like not together a hundred percent 'cause he was in a different school, but like, we changed and then met up again and got to know each other. [Paul]

Like, my brother, he's, he's not actually my brother, but I call him my brother, I've known him for like ten years, we were in the group homes together... because we grew up in the same group home together and we're, you know, it was so long ago. We weren't even really that close, I mean, we were kind of close, you know, we hung out a little bit and everything but I, I think it's mostly just because we didn't get along then and then we see each other now and it's like, almost fate and now we're just like this. You know, we're tight, you know and so it just kind of worked out that way I guess. [Tommy]

Common experiences or backgrounds could also work like a memory, creating a shared experience that acted as an anchor for the friendship:

Well when I was in my crack addiction, my crack cocaine addiction, I, um met hi- Uh, I met him about a year and a half ago through my other buddy that I don't really consider my buddy much anymore. He's had a kid and he's off doing his own thing. But, uh, I don't know, he, he just moved into the city and he had no family. It's once you get to know me, it's like the connection of kids who don't have family. [Matt]

Matt associated this particular friend with other important parts of his own past, notably being a street youth without parents.

Shared experiences could create bonds that were strong enough to allow a friend to overlook or forgive actions that may otherwise have caused a friendship to end:

Oh there's plenty I'm sure. Like my, I don't know, my closest friend is just so disrespectful to- in every way possible. And yet he's like my best friend, but like he's going through a hard time himself. I know he doesn't mean it. I know he's just withdrawing and he's just going through, yeah. He's going through a hard time too. [Matt]

The intensity of friendship often corresponded to the amount of time, shared history and comfort that characterised the friendship. Shared experience also helped street involved youth to categorise friends. Categorical terminology that we have explored previously, such as street family, close work friend, best/closest friend, street friends, other friends etc. all draw on where the friendship was initiated, where the friendship is regularly practiced and how close the friendship had become. For street-involved youth, experience of street involvement was an important part of their closest friendships:

But I met a lot of nice people and like, people travelling into the city, people leaving the city, people just like come and go and I don't know. They're all really interesting people. Like, the people you meet on a regular day basis on the street who have houses and just like live their life on a day-to-day basis, they have so much stuff that they just take for granted I guess, kind of, and then people who don't really have anything, you just get to know them so much better. Like, when I meet someone, like, on the side of the road and I talk to them for- I knew in high school or something like that it's like you only talk about certain things. But then when you meet someone, when you're like both living on the streets or something, or like you were- used to live on the streets and they live on the streets, you just have so much m- like it I guess it's like a connection maybe? But like you just get, I've gotten along with so many more people. [Paul]

All, all of my friends that I've ever, you know, actually been able to call my friend, either do live on the streets, even right now, or they have for a long time for the past. 'Cause I, I find that people that, that don't go through that experience I find I can't stand being around them. Because they don't understand what it is to not have anything. You know? And they don't, they don't understand what it is to have to fend for yourself and have to eat out of the garbage cans when you're starving, you know? Like, I know people that are like they, they, they get a little tiny rip in their sweater and they're like, "Oh my god, I have to buy a new one." And they throw it in the garbage, right? And it's like, do you know how many homeless people would have killed for that sweater because they're freezing right now? ...Like it's just, people don't think. They don't have the same mentality and they don't have the same thought process that people do when they live on the streets and they go through all the trials and everything you go through when you're on the streets. I mean, you talk to any homeless person, and they'll probably tell you the exact same thing. You know? And they'll probably have had a lot of the exact same experiences as well. [Tommy]

Youth often talked about the fact that their friends 'got them', how they could 'be themselves' around their friends, about the activities and memories they had shared with their friends and the difficulties that they had gone through with their friends. Friendship, in this sense, was a shared history of experiences; a relationship that had been forged as friends lived closely on a day-to-day basis. .

3.2.2 Talk:

Whether talk was an activity, a way to start a friendship, a way to manage and maintain a friendship, a way to help a friend, or a way to harm/end a friendship; talk has an important role in street involved youth relationships.

Youth often cited "talk" or "talking" as an activity that they engaged in regularly with friends:

...It just felt like I was like, I could do anything, and just camping out on the beach, like, having a campfire. And we like all took it so our mind

was like in this state where we were like getting so deep into conversations. [Jen]

I don't know, we talk about everything. Life, what's going on, our plans, trips that we want to take- um, yeah. [Anna]

That kind of stuff and it's just talking and talking and talking. I don't r- I don't think I ever, I don't- No, I don't really ever do anything with my friends. Like, uh, it's just long conversations and all that stuff, and like card-games... [Ryan]

Talk was part of the everyday act of being a friend. Alternatively, youth would also identify a lessening or breakdown in 'talk' when friendships ended:

Dave: More of just like fading away. Just like, we're like, different people now, so we just don't talk and just fade away.

TW: Right. So fade away, that's like over a long period of time, just hang out less?

Dave: Yeah, over a long period of time. Or even, like, a shorter period of time. Just like, stop talking to each other. And like, I've like filtered out a lot of my friends, just like, I've just stopped talking to them just 'cause they're not the kind of people I want to be with anymore.

There's maybe one or two of them that I still keep contacting just to be like oh hey, how's it going? Not like they're really my friends anymore, you know? ...it's just kind of like you stop talking, get out of contact and it's like good-bye. [Elise]

Like I said, because I transition faster, I quit talking to people a lot faster... So, I go through friends a lot. There's probably about a hundred people on Facebook I don't know... Just 'cause I randomly quit talking to them. [Jane]

Yeah, just sort of, it doesn't end badly, you just stop talking. [Jen]

Yeah, like um after he did that, you know, I stopped, I stopped talking to him for a little bit. [Ryan]

The social practice of talk between friends was essential to building and 'doing' friendship. Talk between friends was different than typical daily interactions or conversations. The type of talk that youth were mentioning required the participant to

feel a certain amount of comfort, mutual support and dependability in a friend who was eager to listen to them:

Someone I can just, like, be completely myself with and just like, flowing conversations or- don't even have to- the conversation doesn't even have to flow or- um, I don't know. I don't know how to describe it, it's just, like, a friend. [Dave]

Um just like that closeness of being able to pull someone aside and be like, "I'm having a rough day, I need to talk to you" and not have them be like, "oh, well I'm doing this right now so come find me in half an hour" or something like that. It's just the fact that you always have someone to rely on. [Paul]

Well, (clears throat) it's basically just like, I'm upset, I can talk to her, she's upset she can talk to me, you know, like, we don't judge each other we can open up about anything and like, it just, it's easy you know? It's not like an awkward friendship. We can joke around, we can whatever. [Elise]

Um, with mine and Elise's friendship, from how I see it, I can talk to her about everything and she'll listen. And so that's like, I c- I won't look for that in anybody else. I won't need too, you know, I'll find that in her every time... [Ryan]

Talk was more than just a way to 'do' friendship; it was also cited as helpful and important in youth's life, even therapeutic:

And like if anyone has having a rough day, you could go to the other person and be like, hey I'm having a rough day, and I've never felt like I could do that to my parents, because there was like a part of my life that I just keep from them that they don't even know about. And, my friends know everything. Like, there's nothing that I keep from them, so. I just feel a lot closer with my friends than I do with my parents. [Paul]

I know that with my boyfriend every now and then he, he gets really depressed and like he has suicidal thoughts and I am definitely- I help him get out of that. Like, I don't want him to be there in that state... Oh yeah, he's got friends back in Saskatoon and one friend here that he can talk to about anything and, yeah. It helps him out definitely. [Elise]

Like, I went to treatment and it- they said always, like, like express how you feel and never hold back. And it's true man, never. It, it's just stupid not to talk about how you feel. It makes sense. [Matt]

An important part of talk was listening, being able to hear and care about what you are hearing was regarded as essential to being a good friend.

TW: What are some things that you do for people that make you a good friend?

Jane: I listen. A lot of people don't do that anymore. They actually take the time out of your day to listen to what's going on in somebody else's life and quit thinking about yours for thirty seconds.

For youth, talk is important to the creation of friendships, maintaining friendships, enacting friendship and ending of friendships.

3.2.3 Why friendships end or are avoided.

This section will explore the reasons youth gave as to why friendships may end or were undesirable in the first place. One word repeatedly used by youth was 'drama'. Drama always carried negative connotations and was viewed as dangerous, damaging and undesirable:

It was a lot of aggression in that, in those groups of kids here in Victoria. A lot of aggression and a lot of dramatic, um, I don't want to say idiotic, but, just a lot of- and I don't want to say drama, because I hate it when people say "Yeah, it's, it's so much drama!" Um, but, a lot of dramatic instances that weren't w- worth any, like, anything concrete. I d- it's hard to explain, but it's like, when you get into a fight because so-and-so said something-something about what-and-what, like, it's- there's no, there's no real argument there and it- it's, that's what, that's what a lot of kids live off of. They're like, they get up in the morning, they spend their whole day trying to find pot and cigarettes, um, and they get into fights. Whether it be fistfights or something that you can- 'Cause you- your mind needs to have- You need to grow somehow. You need to put your effort into something and so I think these kids become frustrated and it- Yeah. That kind of life is all consuming. It's really scattered. [Emma]

I know so many people down here and everybody just tries to get everybody involved in drama. Everybody else's problems that aren't their problems [Jane]

My friend Renee, she's not my friend anymore 'cause she's just, like, starts too much drama and I didn't, I don't like drama... And then I just, eventually just stopped talking to Renee 'cause she's just a drama queen. [Jen]

Youth defined 'drama' as being actions that often led to conflict or made other's lives difficult:

Um, people fighting. Girls fighting over boyfriends and stuff like that. Um, yeah. Just kind of more like high school type things. Things like people starting rumours and all this, and stuff. Like, I don't like believing somebody, just because somebody says that something went this way, like, I like to get all sides of the story, to make sure that I'm not thinking one way about somebody when actually that never happened that way. The other person just wanted them to b- me to believe that so that I wouldn't hang out with the person or I would dislike the person because of that. [Anna]

TW: When you say drama is there- what, what exactly does that mean?

Jen: Um, she just likes, she has a really loud mouth. She'll like say things to people are like completely unnecessary and rude and it's like- don't, like, you're so mean. Like she came up to this girl in, when I was going to high school in Winnipeg, this girl like got a haircut and like, she was like "No offence but your haircut is really bad, it makes you look so ugly." And I was like, I was like, "holy!" Like, "that's so mean," and like, she's like, "I just didn't like her."

TW: So drama's kind of like making people upset and that kind of thing.

Jen: Yeah, like stirring, making people's lives difficult.

Just like how people 'cause beef over nothing. Just like the smallest thing, they'll start a fight over and it'll become like this huge, big thing that, it's like, two people get into an argument and two people start to hate each other and then a whole bunch of people just start, like, coming in from the outsides and being like, we're going to jump into this argument just cause we can. And it's like, whenever that happens, I usually step out. I'm like, I don't want to be a part of this, I'm not going to put myself in someone else's drama that I have nothing to do with, so I just step away, but like, I don't know. It's a problem, but when something happens to me, because then everyone steps in and I'm like, I didn't want this to happen. [Paul]

Not a single youth talked about willingly taking part in drama. In fact, there was a sense that staying away from drama was desirable and could earn you respect and a good reputation:

A lot of people took my side on it and was like, why would you do this to Paul, like, he's like, 'cause I don't exactly have a bad reputation, I haven't really caused any drama with anyone or done anything. Like, I'm a very peaceful person. I don't 'cause shit like other people do, I'm not a disturber. And so everyone was like why would you do this, like, why did you do that to him? You guys were best friends and he- you had no reason to do it to him and so a whole bunch of people took my side over his and now he's kind of gone. [Paul]

I've gotten really good with staying out of peoples problems. I'll give people advice and things like that, but other than that I've, I've got no enemies. Like there's nobody that really, nobody has any grudges with me really, because I'm good at staying out of where I don't belong. I'll help people out with things and stuff like that, but I'm not going to like go after somebody because like, one of my friends is having a problem with someone and they're like "Oh this person is doing this" and stuff. It's like I'm not going to step into their business, I'll try and help them resolve the situation... [Anna]

3.3 The Importance of Friendship

This section explores how important friendship was in the daily lives of the street involved youth interviewed, including their thoughts on life without friends and the ways that friendships are helpful.

3.3.1 Life Without Friendships

During each interview, youth were asked what they felt their life would be like if they did not have any friends. Their responses gave, perhaps, the greatest insight into why friendships are important to street involved youth.

Oh it'd h- be horrible. I don't know what I'd do. It would be like, like the worst thing ever, I would be so alone... I can't even imagine. I'd probably

get like so depressed and like be put in a psych ward, I don't know.
[Elise]

I'd just, I, I'm a very co-dependant person kind of. Like I rely on other peoples company, I can't be alone. I don't like silence that much, so it's like even when I'm by myself hanging out on my own I will talk out loud sometimes, 'cause I'm like, "Yo, it's just too quiet right now," it needs to have an, an- to make it feel like there's another person there, but there really isn't another person there, I'm just talking to myself... Because like, and also, I just don't think people should be alone all the time. I don't think it's right. [Paul]

Horrible. That's how you end up completely lost. And alone and not knowing what to do, and doing drugs and not having friends to pull you other- out of it. That's how you die... You can't live without friends. Doesn't matter if they're good friends or bad friends; you can't live without having some sort of relationship with people. We were all put on this earth together for a reason. [Jane]

It would be lonely. 'Cause like, when you're homeless your friends are like your home... Like, if you were homeless and had no friends it would just be pointless. You would just be like wandering the streets and like, sitting by yourself and like, not talking to anyone. But, like, when you have friends you like camp out together and like, you have fun and you got each other's backs, like if you need something they'll be like "oh, I have this" or like, if you don't have like food or anything and they do, they will give you some. [Jen]

Uh, well, it'd be so depressing. Like, trying to take on Victoria without friends... [Matt]

I'd probably end up going crazy if had to be homeless with no friends. Because ninety-nine percent of the time my friends and the people who, you know, helped me out, or I help out and like, you know, I got your back, you got mine sort of thing, you know, if you don't have that then you're kind of, you're all on your own. And if you're all on your own then, you're fucked. [Ryan]

It'd be horrible. It'd be so lonely and cold and, you know, just having nobody. I, I couldn't imagine what it would be like. I- because I've always had friends on the street. [Tommy]

Of all the youth I interviewed, only one—Ashley—said she had only one friend.

Ashley believed that her drug-use restricted her ability to make friends and she was

fearful of relationships turning violent or dangerous. Steve, whom Ashley had identified as her only “friend” offered her protection and companionship.

3.3.2 Help.

Youth talked about the ways that “help” from friends could mitigate or lessen the hardship that they experienced on the street.

Yeah, definitely, I, like, step out of my way to help my friends definitely. I will like usually always go out of my way. Well, I wouldn't even, like, consider that going out of my way. Just like, I want to help my friends.
[Dave]

I try to be helpful in situations, I try to always be there for my friends if they need a place to stay and I have a place I try and give them a place to stay. If they don't feel safe I'll go leave and go somewhere with them so that they don't have to be in a situation that they don't want to be around. Um, just try and basically do everything that I can to help somebody out.
[Anna]

It, like, when I'm hurting, my friends always manage to come up with something, like, either- yeah come up with something, either food or marijuana or it's alcohol or a gaming system we can all game at or watch TV, have a conversation to start with, I don't know. At times we, yeah, you can't really- yeah. We all help each other out. We ride together, we die together. We get high together, we drink together. What's mine is yours. [Matt]

Part of friendship was “looking out” for each other. While “looking out” was a phrase I used in my interview questions, it was readily understood and used by youth. From their perspective, “looking out” was more than being vigilant of danger that may affect friends (as it was originally conceived of for the interview questions); it meant “looking out” for their friends' best interest, acting in a nurturing manner.

You just look out for other people. Like, I had multiple friends who were into drugs. Every time I see them, I say “hey, how's it going?” [Jane]

They take care of me as If I was their family and stuff like that. Look out for each other. Help each other out with things that they need. Help each

other through hard times. Hang out... I try and look out for them and stuff, like, if a situations getting a little out of hand I try and take them away from it and stuff. Be like, hey, um, maybe we should change location or something like that or, try and talk them down if they're intoxicated and starting to get a little over the top. A little heated with somebody or something like that. [Anna]

Looking out for each other was motivated by a desire to promote the best for their friends including reminding friends about appointments and taking care of a friend as if they were family.

3.3.3 Support

Support could mean sharing shelter:

Hmm, um, in Saskatoon I was living with some roommates and randomly they decided to kick me out, so I had nowhere to go so I just posted on Facebook, I was like, anyone need a room-mate? And like, I'm homeless. And they're like, my friend Leon was like, come live with me, like I don't have an extra bedroom but we can turn the living room into a bedroom, you know? And like he just helped me out like that you know. And then every now and then Olivia would be like, "well you can come live with me, you know, you don't even have to pay rent." [Elise]

I've been really open to people, um, like coming and staying with me, coming living with me. Um, when I had my own apartment in Victoria, here in Victoria, and (clears throat) a lot of the, like, the lot of the people that I invited in, it was from that, the unfortunate group of youth. Um, that I just thought needed a chance. [Emma]

Support also meant emotional support or 'being there' for each other:

For example Bethany right now, she just, her boyfriend dumped her right? And I'm like with her every second of every fricken' day, like, trying to support her and make her like, happy. Take her mind off James you know? And like, I try to make her laugh and like, I don't know, I think I'm really supportive with my friends and stuff and like, like when they are like on drugs I'm like, "No!" I don't like freak out, I'm just like, come-on. [Elise]

Um, so if she comes to me then I, I'll listen to her, um, an- yeah, I think wha- with strong friendship there's more of a connection, and I think a person should stand by you and be supportive of you, but, to just be a

friend, I think, a real friend um, just the, the respect and just the, the support, I think. [Emma]

Yeah like, no matter what I'd do she'd like still be there for me. And it was really nice. [Jen]

3.3.4 Information Sharing:

Another part of helping friends included sharing important information with them, including warning them about situations or people to avoid:

Yeah if there's been like, somebodies heard something about something is going to go down in a place, or something like that. Or somebody is going to be there that they didn't get along with and stuff like that. Try and help keep each other out of the situations where something bad might happen... And if they're a really good friend and I can't control whether they're doing the drugs or not I'd still want to, maybe, help warn them that there's cops around or something like that. It's kind of just a street thing. If there are cops around, everyone's like, "Yeah there's six-up down there" or something like that. [Anna]

I remember there being a couple times where friends who are on probation or, I remember people always being like, "Oh, oh, this is going on downtown, get that person out of that area." [Jane]

Uh, definitely, like, I've hung out with drug-dealers that give me tips on just who to trust, who not to tru- who not to trust. [Matt]

Youth also talked about offering friends advice based upon their own street experiences:

Um, well, like with, with Olivia, she's really like hopped up on drugs all the time. So, if I see her and she's on drugs, I don't really say anything, I'm kind of just like ffft, bummer, you know? But like if we're actually in a conversation I will bring it up. Like not every time, maybe like once every two weeks. And I'll just be like, "listen, like, for your own safety I'm worried about you, you know? Like I don't want to you all the sudden overdose and be in the hospital and whatever," and she's like "Yeah, I know." [Elise]

Usually I just try and give them advice. Just like let them know that I'm concerned about what's going on, 'cause it's like, it's not like you can make the choice for them to do, or not to do something. But you can try

and tell them like, hey I don't think this is necessarily a good idea and stuff. [Anna]

Sharing information with friends showed a genuine concern for friend's well-being and safety. Friends preferred to keep their friends out of difficult situations, and to offer advice in an effort to make their lives better.

3.3.5 Health and Well-Being.

Looking after the health and well-being of friends was a common practice for street involved youth. This could include monitoring the physiological health of friends, assessing the impact of their personal choices, or even in emergencies offering medical aid:

Yeah, one time, um, she had just done like a bunch, I don't even know what type of drug it was, and she was just like throwing up and throwing up so I had to like, be there for her you know? I had to like put her in the shower and like carry her to bed and like I, I eventually did call an ambulance because I just said no, you know what? This is ridiculous. She was asking me not to but I was like, "No, this is ridiculous, I'm not letting you, you're throwing up stomach acid"... [Elise]

Yeah, they were doing CPR and- on me until the ambulance got there. And then I, I remember flat-lining in the hospital. Yeah, that sucked, never want to hear that noise ever again. [Jane]

Like, whenever I'm sick, my friends always try and get me to go up to my parents place or go to a friend's place that's inside and stuff. Make sure that I'm resting as much as possible and stuff. Make sure I'm eating properly. And go to the doctors even if they're being stubborn, they don't want to go... Or like, I don't know. Or like take them there and be like, okay, if you're not feeling better by this day I'm taking you to the doctors and stuff and like, it depends on how bad it is. If it's just like a cold or something then it's not a big deal. But, like, if it's consistent and gets worse and stuff like that, try and make sure that everybody's okay and stuff like that. [Anna]

We actually keep an eye on each other, not as much as we should be, 'cause my, my buddy is started getting back into hitting the needles. And he's just haggard as hell. And it, w- we've all kind of gone off the railing.

We, we really should be watching out for those needles, that's just so freaking stupid... I've been keeping an eye on, like the washrooms he goes into and like how long he takes, like, I told him I'd hit him if he, if he thought about picking up the needle. His mom overdosed from using needles too, and my mom did too, that's why I've never touched a needle. And I never will for my entertainment. That's just so disrespectful to my mom. [Matt]

Looking out for each other's well-being could be accomplished through something as simple as making comments about your concern or could take a more proactive form, such as Jane's friends performing CPR on her, keeping her alive until an ambulance arrived after a drug overdose had caused her to go into cardiac arrest.

3.3.6 Resource Sharing

Friendships were relationships in which resources could, and should, be shared:

I have multiple people I used to be friends with when I was homeless, every time I see them it's like "Hey, how's it going, I have an extra three bucks, here, have it." [Jane]

Like, I'd much rather spend my money helping out my friends than spend it on myself. [Anna]

In addition to sharing money, youth share important resources such as food, cigarettes and other goods with friends:

Um, yeah like at our old apartment building this guy who used to live next door to us, he worked at Mac's and he would bring us like food and- like all the time. 'cause like I was pregnant; he'd bring me like so much like goodies. [Jen]

I don't know, whenever like me and Ryan have money 'cause she, she is in Spectrum but, her money always goes like that (snaps fingers) and me and Ryan both have a source of income so, we have a little bit more money than her. So if she's hungry or something we'll buy her food, or we'll buy her a pack of smokes or like, just help her out you know? [Elise]

Mostly my closest couple friends near me that I walk around with on a day-to-day basis... I don't know, they- whenever someone's (sic) doesn't

have something and someone else does that's close to us, they'll use all of that to help our friends out. [Matt]

Because I'm a very generous person, if I have something that I don't really necessarily, you know, absolutely need at that time, and I know somebody else that, that can use it more than I can, then I just give it to them, you know. I don't expect anything back. [Tommy]

As I found out during my interviews, youth talked far more about 'sharing resources' than 'giving resources.' Friendship did not entail an obligation to give but rather friends shared because they genuinely wished to help each other out, even if they could not afford to give away the small amounts of resources that they had.

I share it. I never give it away. I don't, I can't afford it. I'm a very cheap human being. [Jane]

Um, if they're having a bad day and they need a cigarette, I'd give them cigarettes or buy them something to eat if they're hungry, um, really depending on the situation and stuff, I'll try and do as much as I possibly can to help. Like, I'll do, like, I won't give absolutely everything I have, I'll make sure that I'm okay, but other than that, anything that I can do for my friends and stuff I will. 'Cause like I know what I need to survive and stuff like that, like be healthy and safe and everything like that. And so, if I've got more than I need and I can help somebody else then I'd love to do that, then keep it for myself. [Anna]

TW: Yeah. What if somebody comes and asks you for like money, and you don't have much?

Jane: Mm, depends on how much you have. But more than likely I will. And if not then I'll go get something and split it.

Even when youth had little resources, they looked for ways that they might stretch the resources enough to share them with friends rather than leaving friends with nothing.

3.3.7 Protection:

Helping friends also included protecting them. This could be done by watching out for their well-being:

You could always trust me to, you know, watch your back right? I don't know, sometimes I like there's, there is this one lady friend I have, her name is Wendy. And yeah, sometimes she goes on a nod and you know I'll sit with her, and I'll watch her, you know, I'll make sure nobody sits beside her and steals her things, right? [Ashley]

They make sure that nobody bugs me and stuff. They take good care of me, (chuckles), look out for me, so basically my brothers, so, yeah... Um, uh, make sure nobody bothers me, people don't harass me downtown and stuff like that. People aren't doing hard drugs or things like that around me. Um, it's basically like an older brother would do to a younger sister, like, make sure there's no creeps trying to harass their little sister and stuff like that. [Anna]

Part of protecting each other could also include ensuring that a friend did not have to face violent conflict. Strategies for this included 'backing up' a friend or getting them away from the conflict:

Like, it won't just be one kid standing there trying to defend themselves, it will be like a kid with people like backing him up and they'll all be like, it's not just going to be him, like, it's like when you see in TV shows, that one kid getting bullied and then all their friends show up and they're like, "Hey, if you're going to through him, you've got to go through us first." It's like that that kind of a mentality. It's like a kind of like a pack mentality like with wolves and stuff, but we're humans. [Paul]

Um it would be different with each person, depending on how they're, how they react to different things and stuff, 'cause like each of my friends are different. Some of them you can just be like come-on, like just drag them away and it's like, oh, whatever and stuff and other ones you have to be a little smarter about how you handle the situation in order to help it. And then sometimes there's just nothing you can do, just like, okay well, you keep your distance from the situation and that's all you can do. Let them do their thing and hope for the best. [Anna]

But, you know, if like, say, some, like, you know, a bunch of people were after me or something and I ran up to my buddies place or, you know, seeing a couple buddies on the street, I wouldn't even have to lift a finger, I'd just be like, "yo, those guys are beefing," right? And "I don't know why" and, they would, they would, they would stand right behind me you know? [Tommy]

In fact, youth noted that they often used such strategies to avoid violent situations:

I'll help people out with things and stuff like that, but I'm not going to like go after somebody because like, one of my friends is having a problem with someone and they're like "Oh this person is doing this" and stuff. It's like I'm not going to step into their business, I'll try and help them resolve the situation and stuff like that. [Anna]

I don't believe in violence, I don't believe in, like, fighting for no apparent reason, like, if someone hits a friend of mine, or hits me I will probably get involved and probably fight, but like, if someone's just coming up to me and trying to start a fight over nothing, I'm going to be like, "Yo, back down, like, I'm not going to fight you over stupid things." And so a lot of people know that, and I will just step back and be like, calm down. [Paul]

There was, however, a reticence to protect someone if they were the cause of the problem in the first place:

... That's a little bit more of a sketchy kind of thing for me, because guys tend to pick trouble. You know, and so I'm always, like, really cautious about back- who I back up and stuff, you know. If, if, if I know that they're the kind of person that would start shit, I'd be like, you know what? You started this. It's not my beef. You know, like, it's not my problem. You know. But, at the same time, I, I, I would try to like- I would still stand with him and be like "Look, you know, let's talk about this, let's work something out," right? And if that wasn't possible then, you know, I guess he's kind of on his own. I'm not putting myself in harm's way because he fucked up. [Tommy]

No, I, I've usually been pretty good to stay out of situations like that. Like I said, I try not to get involved with things that don't concern me, and stuff like that. Like, I'm not going to get pulled into backing somebody up if they actually screwed up. [Anna]

There was a strong consensus among the interviewed youth that more established street involved youth, especially males, should protect younger females on the street.

... Some of the younger girls I know that have gone on to kind of being on the streets and stuff, 'cause they've had troubles at home with their families and things like that and got kicked out and something like that and try and help them out, try and make sure that they don't go off to the wrong parts of town or hang out with people that could be bad influences on them. Um, try and help them get off the street if possible, if they're newly onto the street. [Anna]

Well like, I was mostly hanging out with the guys; we only had, like, a couple girls in the group. And because I was the youngest, all of like the older ones were like, “Oh, got to make sure she’s okay. Can’t let her get out of hand.” [Jane]

Well it depends on the situation. For females, I don’t have to know them from Adam. If, if I see some dude like, I don’t know, harassing some chick or, you know, she’s physically, or even actually saying to him “Leave me alone!” You know? And he’s not, then I just, I h- I can’t stand it. Something inside me just freaks out and I’m just like, “Hey buddy, lay the fuck off!” And then I usually end up knocking him out. [Tommy]

Both Ryan and Tommy offered examples of intervening to protect young women facing sexual harassment. In addition, young women acted to protect each other from unwanted male advances:

Well like, when I’m with like, this was back in Winnipeg. I had, like, a lot of girlfriends and like when we were with each other, like, a bunch of, like, guys would like hit on us or like try to get us to go with them somewhere and we would be like, “Oh no, we’re, we’re going to go do this together” and like, just steal each other away from them. Or like, if a guy like, is being creepy and you just like, be like, “help” and they like, go and steal you away. [Jen]

Similarly, young women could act to protect men from violent situations:

Like I’ve had my friends, like there’s somebody, um, when I, when my-one of my friends was drunk and we were down town, uh, there was this one guy and his dog and he started be- beaking off to uh, some other guy and (chuckles) and he decided that he was going to join in and they’re full on like backing this random stranger up and stuff and I’m like, trying to get him to come, like okay, no. It’s like trying to talk to him and get him to like, “okay, come-on, no, let’s just, let’s leave or something like that.” Not, trying not to get him involved in somebody else’s argument. Stuff like that. [Anna]

For street involved youth, being friends included helping each other by supporting each other, by sharing information and resources, by looking out for each other’s health, well-being and safety. Youth did not position these practices as personal or individual survival strategies, but as something they did because they wanted the best for their

friends. These were the actionable parts of street involved youth friendship; they were the representations of being what a good friend.

Now that I have looked at how friendships are categorised and expressed by street involved youth, I turn to the question, ‘what is a friend?’ In the next section, I describe what youth saw as the main attributes and qualities of a friend and draw attention to the figure of the ‘idealized friend’ who embodies the desirable attributes that youth look for in their friendships.

3.4 What is a Friend? Key Attributes and Qualities

Youth in this study identified key attributes of friendship including talk, a feeling of shared experience and mutual understanding, honesty, trust, acceptance/non-judgement and respect. These desirable characteristics were recognised in youth’s reputations. Having a good reputation was incredibly important, and a youth’s reputation needed to be continuously maintained, protected and proven. Because talk and shared experience have been discussed in previous sections of this chapter, this section will deal with the remaining key attributes identified by youth.

3.4.1 Honesty:

When youth were asked to identify what makes someone a good friend, one prominent answer was “honesty.”

I don’t know just- it, it honestly is mostly honesty. And like respect and like I would say independence as well because I don’t want to be hanging around with someone all the time that just depends on me you know?... For me, yeah, it would definitely be like, like why I’m friends with Bethany is because she’s completely honest with me, she doesn’t lie to me. She, well, when I first met her she was really, like, closed up and like, whatever, and I thought it was kind of funny, so I just started like talking

to her and then (clears throat) I don't know just- it, it honestly is mostly honesty. [Elise]

Just helping you out by- Just being straight honest and telling you what's up I'd say. Yeah, your, your word pretty much. [Matt]

Likewise, when asked what made her a good friend to others, Jen noted her own honesty.

Um, I don't know, I just, like, I'm honest with them... Like, if like someone, like, does something to like piss me off, I tell them I don't just like hold it in, like, hold a huge grudge over it- like it's dumb. Might as well just tell them and like see if they did it on purpose, or like, what's, what they have to say about it. [Jen]

The desire for honesty in friends made clear the fear of deception that each potential friend represented. As Jen shows us, it could also work to ensure open channels for talk which could offer verbal assurance of a healthy relationship. This allows insight into why being honest is an important part of a youth's reputation. While deceit may offer certain short term benefits, it would stand to reason that in the long run, a reputation for honesty would allow greater, deeper, more edifying friendships for a youth. It would also promote comfort in the friendship which has been shown to be essential to the creation of close friendships.

3.4.2 Trust

Another prominent answer to the question of what attributes were important in friendships was 'trust.' Like honesty, trustworthiness reduced the chance of deception and increased feelings of comfort and dependability in incredibly uncomfortable and undependable living conditions on the street.

TW: Okay, um, so what do you think makes someone a friend? What do you think the most important friendship would be?

Ashley: Uh, the trust.

TW: The trust?

Ashley: Yeah.

TW: Okay.

Ashley: And just helping each other out, with asking for nothing in return

Somebody that you can be yourself around, that you can trust, um, they'll be there for you when you need them, you can get advice for things, um, help you either get in contact with somebody that can help you out with things or talk to you themselves. Uh, somebody that will keep you safe and help you keep on the right track. [Anna]

Trust is like everything. It, like, shapes how you feel about a person. Like, if you can't trust someone you, like, don't really want to be around them because you don't know what they're going to do, or if they'll like, do something negative in your life. [Jen]

But uh- and you know, just the people that I really, you know, I'm close to and I'm, I trust. 'Cause I, I don't really trust very many people. [Tommy]

As Tommy notes above ("I don't really trust very many people") trust could be somewhat rare and was something that was not easy to find in a friendship. Youth cautioned that 'trust' was something that could easily lead to being hurt if one was not cautious with whom they trusted. There was also a sense that after trust had been betrayed a few times, it was more difficult to trust people in the future.

TW So what do you think, um, so would you say that Wendy's a, like a good friend? Is she, is she someone you trust?

Ashley: Uh no, I don't trust anybody. No she's, she's ripped my boyfriend off for fifty bucks before. It wasn't me, but it was my boyfriend you know, but still. He's close enough it may as well have been mine... So I like her, but I don't trust her.

I've reached the point where it's just like, I don't really trust anybody else anymore. Gone through enough shit that I don't need to trust anybody anymore. [Jane]

Um, it's kind of hard, 'cause there's like so many people and they like all say stupid things. Just har- kind of hard to know who to trust. Especially like, in a place like downtown, because there's so many people there. [Jen]

I just know for next time not to trust this piece of shit. You know?... But yeah, ever since then I've had a really hard time trusting people. It's not the first time I've had somebody gain my trust and then rip me off. But, you know, it was the first time that it was, you know, my 'best friend,' air quote, you know. [Tommy]

You know, like, um, it can end on bad terms if you just break that trust. Like, uh, see I'm not going to be hanging out with James anymore. Because he broke that trust, he- you know, he didn't have that respect that he should have had for me as a friend, you know? And, uh, see and I think that one thing that should end a friendship is, you know, like over- like, you know, using your friend, like, you know? [Ryan]

Putting trust in someone was reserved for close, established friendships; however even this was not enough to avoid deception all together. Trusting someone allowed you to let your guard down, to establish a more close and comfortable relationship. Yet, it opened up the possibility that the trust could be betrayed, often with harmful emotional and real world consequences.

When it came to trust, reputation was again of great importance. A history of trustworthiness and honesty could earn a youth a good reputation. Trust, like honesty, was a characteristic of the idealized friend; it was not always realized in youth's actual friends. When a youth recounted experiences of deception from someone they had thought was a friend, they talked about feeling hurt, betrayed and a sense of loss that could affect their ability to trust friends in the future.

3.4.3 Acceptance and non-judgement:

“Acceptance” was a positive and important characteristic in their friendships:

Like, yeah, accepting, levelheaded, intelligent, um, open-minded, um, I don't know, I think that's all I got for now. [Dave]

Acceptance, to Dave, was often a personal choice – but was important if the friendship was to become ‘close.’

Um, I definitely think that certain people are more accepting than others, but it- um, but like two people together, like, two people who aren't accepting of other people could be like close to each other because they're like accepting of each other. [Dave]

Acceptance meant allowing a friend space for personal expression, this included being non-judgemental. As we had seen in the previous section, being comfortable enough to be yourself was essential if a friendship wanted to attain closeness:

Like you feel like, they're like, not judging you. That's one important thing about a friend too. [Jen]

And I don't judge people if I don't know them. If you're respectful to me I'll be respectful to you. [Anna]

Paul talked about the judgement he had received in the past, suggesting that breaking from accepted societal norms can lead to judgement. For Paul, judgment is the result of not understanding a person or their history:

And it was just like because of how I acted and because of how I looked and who I am they were like judging me just because I was different. And it's like, no, you don't judge someone, you get to know them and be like why are you different? Why are you this way? There's obviously reasons that made you like this. You don't just sit there and be like "That kids a freak, he dresses differently!" It's like, "why do you dress differently? What is the thing that makes you want to do this?" [Paul]

Most youth touched on judgement, or non-judgement, as affecting friendships either positively or negatively. When asked what makes her a good friend, Jen identified the fact that she does not judge others as a quality she can bring to a friendship:

Well like, if they just want to talk about their problems, I'll like listen to them and like try to say what I think would help. And I don't like judge them or anything. [Jen]

Being judged by others created discomfort and dislocation; leaving youth to feel isolated. Judgement was, after all, an attack on a youth's ability to feel comfortable and 'be themselves.' Judgment, drama and gossip were attempts to impose characteristics and identities on youth against their will, obscuring how youth understood themselves.

If you guys actually knew me, you would know I like, I haven't never hit anyone, never got in a fight, I'm not a violent person and like some people just like believed him and I was like, you guys don't even know me. You're just taking what he said. [Jen]

3.4.4 Respect

Being respectful of others meant recognising in others a shared desire to be treated fairly and kindly. In addition, one showed respect by understanding and practicing socially sanctioned behaviour. Being respectful meant doing no harm to others while also affirming the other's right to be and express themselves as they saw fit.

Respect in my mind is the fact- is that phrase that everyone uses, "do to others, what you want done to yourself." That's, like, a main thing that I live my life by. And I think that's like, a large amount of respect, because like if you don't want to get treated like crap, then don't treat people like crap, and I think that's how people should treat their friends... And like, same with like screwing someone over in the long run or like stealing someone's stuff, or like any of that kind of stuff. That's just, like, what friends don't do because they wouldn't want their other friend to turn around and do it to them. [Paul]

Um, respecting who you are as a person. Your choices, you don't necessarily have to agree with a person's choices to respect them, respecting, um, a- all of their character. Respecting, maybe not- well maybe not respecting all of their character, there's more acceptance in there but fundament- when it comes to respect I think, just fundamentally respecting a person's individualism. [Emma]

With my friends it's just always, we've all respected each other for who we are, not really cared if someone looks different, if someone dresses different, does that kind of stuff. We all just like, are together, and we all understand each other and have a mutual respect kind of thing. [Paul]

Tommy continued on with some examples of what respect means to him:

I would say I don't know, some simple examples of respect and disrespect. You come over to your, your friend's house or whatever and, you know, you don't take your muddy shoes off. You don't, you know you just kick them up on their coffee table. You know, you don't clean up after yourself, you know. They off you something to eat and you slop it down and make a huge mess and you don't even clean up your dishes. You know, something, you know, people that are like that. Or, or, or, even,

you know, s- not even as big as that. Something like, you're walking down the street and buddy like bumps into you, totally on purpose. You know, it wasn't an accident. It wasn't like he was, you know, turning around and he didn't see you. Like, you know, he's like walking towards you, you're walking towards him and he veers into you kind of thing, you know? Like that's completely and utterly pointlessly disrespectful... You know, like, what's the point to that. But, I don't know. Like I said, it's a vast kind of subject. I just, people with common sense tend to be more respectful. People without common sense, or that, they do have common sense, they just don't use it, those, they tend to be more disrespectful. That's just what I found. [Tommy]

Anna's definition referenced how her friends showed respect to her during her pregnancy:

Um, it's like knowing when things are okay and stuff, I guess. Like, respecting peoples boundaries, and their opinions on things. Like, with my friends, like, they respect the fact that I don't do drugs that I'm not drinking and stuff like that. And that I don't want to be around that. And if, like, if my drugs- or if, blah, if my friends are doing drugs and stuff, they're respectful enough not to touch me and things when they're doing them, so that I don't get a contact high from it. So, therefore, it's not going to hurt my child. [Anna]

For Tommy, respect was so important that he had the word tattooed on his body:

You know? Those are real friends. People that, you know, they help you along and they don't steal from you, they don't, you know, mislead you or misguide you. You know, stuff like that. Just honesty. Really, that's what it's about; honesty and respect. And honour. I have, actually, on my shoulders in Chinese calligraphy, I have respect and honour tattooed... Definitely, yeah. And words, you know, a- they're not even just words, they're a part of life that I live my life by, you know? I mean you can't get anywhere if you're, you know, a piece of shit and you have no respect or honour for anybody or anything, you know, you're not going to get anywhere. You know? [Tommy]

Part of acting respectfully included respecting the property of others.

Like it, I don't know, if you put a roof over your head and then, then they steal from you and then there's one person you don't ever, pretty much n-yeah. Like fucking, that's just disrespectful. [Matt]

I would have them come and stay and they'd either trash it or be totally disrespectful or just couch-surf and not do anything with their life... She ended up, like, doing a bunch of coke with her boyfriend in it and totally like going th- like, not going through all my stuff, but just like trampling all over all my things like they were hers and she didn't care about it. She'd like rearranged the whole place and like, just treated it like was just totally her space, not like she was staying there. Um, ended up like, leaving the place in a total disaster. So much that I had to have my mother come and help me clean it, like for two days. Um, ah, sh- yeah. She'd like alter my clothing to like fit her properly sort of thing? Like that kind of thing. Like, you know, breaks my stuff. Stuff like that. It just felt like a total, um, um, uh the word that I'm looking for is on the tip of my tongue and it's very common. I felt invaded. [Emma]

Because it was only a one bedroom place, and uh, you know, he would leave his blanket flailed everywhere and all his crap, you know, and his backpack. And, you know, so I told- I just said "Look dude, I've told you how many times now, you know, you need to clean up after yourself. Jen and I aren't going to do it for you all the time, you know. We shouldn't have to. You're in our house." [Tommy]

Here, respect signals that a youth understood the street code of conduct and would allow youth their own right to self-expression.

When taken together, honesty, trust, acceptance and respect were all taken into consideration when youth assessed potential friends. By looking for these traits in potential friends, youth hoped to avoid deception and protecting themselves. In addition, youth tried to emulate the idealized friend in their own friendships, aligning themselves with these traits consciously.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the way that street involved youth categorize their friendships, begin, maintain and end their friendships, are helped by friendship and their view of an ideal friend. I argued that allowing youth to define their own friendship is essential to both our understanding of friendship as well as allowing youth friendship to escape from

the stifling stereotyping that has largely been imposed upon these relationships by adults (a theme that I discuss more fully in the following chapter). Listening to what street involved youth are saying about their friendships may work to legitimize what has been made delinquent through dominant political-economic and developmentalist discourses. Youth voices make visible the ways that friendships may mitigate the structural harm and suffering that so often accompanies a neoliberal socio-economic order. In chapter 4, I will take up the arguments I started here to show the importance of friendship for street involved youth during neoliberal times in Victoria, B.C.

Chapter 4: Significance of Street Involved Youth Friendships.

In the first four sections of this chapter, I return to existing literature on street youth to analyse the perspectives on friendship that emerged during the interviews. In the first section, I revisit how street involved youth friendships are commonly framed and talked about in developmentalist discourses. Next, I show how youth's accounts of their friendships respond to developmentalist narratives, often by rejecting, resisting and sometimes reproducing such discourses. Section Three revisits the earlier discussion of how dominant neoliberal political-economic paradigms have affected street involved youth's lives and ways that their friendships are conceptualised and discussed. Section Four explores how youth's perceptions and practices of friendship are affected fundamentally by these dominant societal discourses; even as youth navigate and survive the difficult political economic realities of both living in poverty and spending time on Victoria's streets.

In section Five through Seven of this chapter I suggest how youth perspectives on friendship offer a means of re-thinking developmentalist and current political-economic policies in new and productive ways. Rather than positioning youth's accounts of friendship in the context of established developmentalist ideology (as is done in previous sections), this section looks to explore how youth's accounts can serve to reimagine categories such as youth, friendship and developmentalism itself. Section Five argues that youth friendships are agentively and expertly managed, negotiated and assessed by street involved youth. This is then used as a new way to think about street involved youth and their friendships as youth successful negotiation and enactment of friendship works to create relationships that allow them to exist in meaningful ways as they navigate

the daily political-economic climate they live in. This section includes a consideration of the conflict and tension that exists around the struggle to define and control how street involved friendships may be understood and acted upon.

Finally, section Eight looks what youth meant when they suggested friendship allowed them to “be myself.” This section outlines what youth meant when they talked about being themselves and the insight this offers about the nature of street involved youth friendships. The discussion then turns to looking at what we may understand about meaningful friendships that let street involved youth become visible and “be themselves” and what this allows us to understand about street involved youth friendships.

4.1 Developmentalist Discourses and Street Involved Youth Friendships.

Developmentalism is the dominant way of thinking about and understanding street involved youth friendships. Often, adults and experts understand and talk about street involved friendships as unhealthy relationships that encourage delinquent and unlawful behaviour. In fact, street involved youth themselves, in addition to their friendships, are often represented as dangerous, violent and deviant. Bucholtz has pointed out that as a legacy of recapitulation theory, youth tend to be seen as “not-yet-finished human beings” in need of adults who may “guide adolescents into full cultural membership,” an approach that often “obscures the more informal ways in which young people socialize themselves and one another” (2002:529). Under this view, youth must be carefully managed in order to ensure the continual health of society itself (Cole and Durham 2007:8). In the case of street involved youth, adult and specialist involvement is assumed to be absent, leaving untrained, “non-expert” youth in charge of their own lives, futures and relationships. In her work with Indonesian street children, Beazley argues that

because of their assumed distance from adult supervision, “these children are seen to be committing a social violation” and as such are “stigmatised and presented (by the state and media) in a derogatory and negative light as work-shy, drug-crazed, antisocial delinquents” (Beazley 2003:182). Adult, specialist and state anxieties about street youth in Canada follow similar developmentalist logic. Like the street children that Beazley researched, street involved youth in Victoria are also often positioned as “delinquent runaway thugs” or “abandoned victims” (2002:1666) who lack the necessary parental and adult control and direction in their lives.

These discourses are taken up elsewhere as well, for example Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt have argued:

Running away and living on the streets profoundly affects adolescent social development. It weakens ties to supervising adults at home and at school, weakens or severs ties to school and neighbourhood friends, and establishes unconventional ties in the street culture. [2005:232]

For Tyler and Melander:

Social networks that include other homeless youth are more likely to engender risk because of the high rate of substance use, delinquency, and risky sexual behaviours found among these individuals [2011:802]

And finally, Rice has argued:

Typically, the culture of adolescent homelessness has been described as largely filled with problematic influences, and the risk-taking behaviours of homeless young people have been thoroughly documented. Of particular concern is that engagement with these problematic peers, primarily other homeless young people, has repeatedly been shown to be associated with increased HIV risk for homeless young people [2010:589].

These three examples pulled from a larger selection of work clearly illustrate the tendency amongst researchers who work with street involved youth to consciously or unconsciously draw upon developmentalist discourses when discussing street involved

youth relationships. It is often thought that inexperienced street involved youth are corrupted by their more experienced street involved peers who replace home-based adults or sanctioned educational institutions, making all strategies and skills youth learn dubious in the eyes of dominant society (Karabanow et al 2010:42; Márquez 1999:217).

Troubling in works and studies that draw on such discourses is the almost complete lack of youth's own voices.

In their study of street youth in Winnipeg, Wingert, Higgitt and Ristock suggest that “males are more likely to become homeless after being kicked out of their homes due to deviant behaviour, while females, especially those who have been sexually abused, are more likely to run away” (2005:58). While this may be true, it also rephrases a developmentalist view that reduces both homeless female and male youth to homogenized histories of delinquency and victimization. McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan express a similar developmentalist ideology when discussing male and female homeless youth. They argue “that compared to relationships with males, friendships with females provide more social control, fewer opportunities and less motivation for offending and may therefore discourage crime” (2004:805). The authors go on to suggest that:

Homeless or street adolescents' involvement in crime, on the other hand, resembles the levels of other serious youth offenders (gang youth, for example). Street youth also have heightened exposure to criminal motivations and opportunities, and freedom from the control emphasized in theories of offending. As a result, these two data sets allow us to examine the association between friends' gender and offending for a wide range of adolescents. [McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan 2004:807]

Implicit in this argument is that fact that street involved youth (in this case, specifically male youth) are by nature deviant (gang-like) in their pursuit and participation in criminal activities. This exposes another truth that is apparent in developmentalist literature, the

idea that deviancy is assumed to be heightened for male street involved youth. This particular assumption led McCarthy, Felmlee and Hagan to suggest that certain male friendships consisted of “anxiety ridden youth who engage in exaggerated displays of masculinity: including verbal taunts, and planning, committing, recounting and exaggeration of delinquent and criminal acts” (2006:808). It is this specific tendency and aptitude to deviancy that is often understood to be the problem that adult specialists should endeavour to cure in street populations.

Lesko has addressed the problem that is encountered when developmentalist paradigms influence researchers:

to disavow the racist and classist attitudes of the new experts of the late 1800s but to continue to use their assumptions and conceptualizations, despite noble intentions, perpetuates their regime of truth. The interconnections between regulation of behaviour and knowledge construction and use in the social sciences and in education are central to Foucaultian theory. Thus theories must be seen as part of interactional social practices, with particular effects in and on the ways in which adolescence and adolescents exist and mean. From this perspective, retheorizing is crucial to the construction of new social practices in and outside of schools. [1996:141-142]

In this thesis I repeatedly argue that the “retheorizing” that Lesko advocates for is best done by looking to privilege the emic understanding of friendship that comes from street involved youth themselves. Youth are in the best position to challenge the developmentalist “regimes of truth” that have come to characterise and define how street involved youth friendships may be understood to “exist and mean.” Karabanow has noted the absence of “a focus on the street youth him/herself and on the ways he or she understands, perceives and makes sense of day-to-day street life” as being absent from

work that continues to highlight “dimensions of street subculture, often signalling the so-called deviant and delinquent nature of street living” (2004:46).

For this reason, as I argued in chapter 2, I have framed my analysis through the lens of positive sociality in order to avoid viewing youth as incomplete adults who are prone to deviant peer relationships that often lead to crime and risk intensifying behaviour as well as other forms of, what has long been viewed in social science as, “deviance.” By viewing street involved youth friendships in this context—like the South African youth in Margaretten’s study—youth in Victoria can be seen to “stand for each other... in supportive and cooperative companionships” (2011:45). Help (as discussed in the previous chapter) may be understood to replace deviance as an expected and regular part of street youth friendships. Rather than teaching and encouraging deviance in other youth as is assumed in developmentalist discourses, my research shows that youth often engaged in nurturing and positive relationships with both established street-involved youth and newcomers to the street. These types of relationships are often obscured or missed when research starts or borrows from longstanding developmentalist assumptions that presuppose such relationships as a ‘problem’ that ‘intensifies’ deviance rather than as a ‘solution’ to navigating a daily existence of street involvement.

Bucholtz has rightly identified that:

It is a commonplace of much research on youth cultures and identities that the youth category lacks clear definition and in some situations may be based on one's social circumstances rather than chronological age or cultural position... Such classifications, of course, are often strategic and contested. Labels like child soldier, teenage mother, and youth violence are socially meaningful, authorizing the interpretation of biological chronology in social terms that may shift according to sociopolitical circumstances. [2002:526]

Much of the “socially meaningful” discourse that Bucholtz is talking about here is borrowed from established developmentalist paradigms. Rather than looking at the circumstances, types of categorization and emic representations of street involved youth culture; researchers assume an “unproblematic youth” type against which to measure street involved youth. Lesko has pointed out that this “unproblematic youth” is non-existent, but rather exists only as the opposite of what had been arbitrarily identified to be problematic and delinquent youth populations (Lesko 1996:141). The problem with the ‘unproblematic youth’ assumption is that it necessarily places specific forms of youth friendship as a problem to be solved, rather than looking at such friendships as real, agentive solutions to larger socio-economic problems in Canada. It is easier to suggest that youth need to be reabsorbed and properly socialized while obscuring and absolving prominent political-economic systems that are at the root of youth poverty and street involvement in the first place.

Looking at street youth through a developmentalist lens obscures the careful maintenance, astute assessment and constant negotiations that street involved youth expertly display on a daily basis through their friendships.

4.2 Youth Voices and Developmentalist Discourses

While this section does not put youth in direct conversation with developmentalist discourses (that is, they were not asked to respond directly with developmentalist narratives), it does show an incompatibility between how youth talked about their friendships and the assumptions implicit in accepted developmentalist thinking.

As we have previously established, there is a line of reasoning in developmentalism that perceives street involved youth friendships as being inherently prone to deviance and delinquency. In contrast, youth talked about choosing the activities they engage in with friends, which included avoiding activities that they do not wish to be involved in.

I don't know, I normally just hang out with them, we go walk around or whatever. It- it's, it's weird because they all do, like, drink or smoke pot or whatever and I don't do that, so it's like, when they're doing that, and if I am hanging out with them while they're doing that, it's like, just awkward for me. So I just, like, leave. But then I don't know, if they're sober, whatever, then I'll hang out with them and we just like go to a movie or like go shopping or whatever. [Elise]

Elise has clearly articulated her ownership and agency in her friendship. Elise is not prisoner to certain behaviours (drinking and smoking pot) that are cast as suspect in Canadian society; but rather specifically chooses to spend time with friends only when they are not engaged in activities with which she does not wish to be associated. Here, Elise exhibits the ability to negotiate specific types of behaviour that she is uncomfortable with, while still maintaining ties with friends. Likewise, when I asked Paul if he had experienced peer pressure, he assured me that this rarely has occurred:

A certain group of people will walk up, who is friends with a friend of yours and then they will come and sit down and then, like, do whatever they do, and so you'll be sitting beside it, but like, it doesn't really take you to the part where like, you don't want to be there, because I don't want to be, like, smoking it or whatever, because I still have the chance to say no. So if it gets passed to me, I still have the chance to say no. So if it gets passed to me, I just like, no, like no and then they all understand, and they're like "Okay." And then they just keep passing it around themselves, so it's like, to a point it's getting you to where you don't want to be, but at the same time it's not crossing that line. [Paul]

While some youth talked about ways that their friendships opened doors for them to engage in dangerous or risky behaviour (notably Emma, who talked about how easy it

was for her to access drugs while street involved); far more often youth echoed Ryan who felt that a friend should be "...always willing to do something helpful, but positively good for that person if you can... and you know, always be positive and keep the other person going up, you know? Don't put them down."

Rather than being relationships of deviancy, friendships could work to protect youth from 'unlawful' and 'risky' behaviour:

My ex-boyfriend who wasn't really my boyfriend at the time, um, uh like he was the person that called my MDMA dealer and told them not to sell to me anymore. [Emma]

I went up to her, I said, "Hey, I heard some shit, you know, is it true?" And she's like, "Yeah," and I'm like, you know, I just asked her why. And she said to me, "Because it makes me feel better. Because, I don't have to think about all this other shit." And then, you know I, I tried come- I tried helping her come up with different ways to do that without, you know, smoking meth... [Tommy]

Trying to make sure that they're not going off and hanging out with people that are like dealing drugs, that they're not going to get either into those drugs or be manipulated into holding the drugs, being the middle-man or start selling the drugs for the person. Um trying to help make sure that they don't like, do things that are going to get them arrested, or harm themselves. [Anna]

Youth also talked about helping youth who were either transient and new to town, or new to the street all together:

It's like pretty much anybody, like, even like the older people that I, like older street family that I have and stuff like that. If they see younger girls and things like that on the streets, they're like, "well what are you doing here? Like, this isn't a place for a younger person to be." Trying to figure out why they're there and stuff and get them off the street as quick as possible. So that they're not, like, pushed into drugs or stuff like that. They're not going to get abused or something like that. [Anna]

The absence of these types of supportive and nurturing behaviours from many accounts of street involved youth is best understood when it is looked at in terms of friendship

configurations. As we have noted, youth friendships are often considered through recapitulation theory which positions them as incomplete adult type relationships. Thus, street youth friendships are misconceived as inadequate adult relationships rather than recognizing that they may be expertly conducted youth attachments. Research that is based (knowingly or unknowingly) on assumptions that originate in recapitulation theory may miss the opportunity to understand these friendships as anything other than inept and deviant.

Based on her study of elementary aged children in the U.S., Ahn (2011) concluded that adult and children's social worlds are fundamentally different. While parents felt that their children were still learning how to be true and proper friends, Ahn observed children successfully utilizing available cultural concepts which they expertly redeployed in distinct ways that optimally fulfilled their own political and social needs (2011:294-295). Ahn shows that:

“Friends” are one of several social categories children utilize for their immediate social goals. If caregivers provided the concept of friendship charged with groupness and niceness in terms of making an idealized world where everyone is welcomed and included, children, realizing that the idea of groupness and the use of polite language and behaviors are not effective ways of gaining access to games and protecting interactive spaces, instead creatively appropriate the concept of friendship introduced by adults to address the concerns of their peer world. [Ahn 2011:300]

Ahn goes on to show how children will name others as friends or non-friends in an effort to gain access and control of toys, games and alliances. Likewise, Finkelstein (2005:36) has argued that street youth's strategies should not be thought of as deviant, but rather as learning to “conform to a social order with its own distinct identities and peer networks.” Dyson (2010:485) agrees that youth should be seen as accomplished actors who interact

in successful ways with their social and physical surroundings, actively developing strategies and habits that become embodied and acted out in daily practice. Following Finkelstein and Dyson's assertion that youth be seen as agentic and successful actors in their own domain, I argue that friendships are relationships that allow youth a healthier, more meaningful and more emotionally fulfilling existence in the demanding social and economic conditions in which they live.

To illustrate how youth agentially and successfully negotiate their friendships, it may be helpful to consider the difference between developmentalist and youth ideas about friendships between guys and girls, as well as the role of friendship during situations that threaten conflict. As I noted in chapter one, in both social scientific literature and for many in Canadian society, affiliations between male and female street involved youth are seen only or principally in terms of risky sexual activity. To some extent, youth reproduced this viewpoint when talking about their guy/girl friendships:

Also it's like, for me, I can't get as close to a guy as I can to a girl because in my opinion guys can't really be friends with girls or vice-versa because it just turns into "oh I'm in love with you," you know? So I kind of, I keep my distance from guys like that, just 'cause- Like with Robert I don't, I try not to get too close to him just 'cause, like, I don't want him to all the sudden have a crush on me or something, you know? 'Cause it just ruins the relationship. [Elise]

Yeah, for sure, I, I, I have lots of good friends that are girls that I'm, the only relationships we're in is a friendship, you know? But it always, I don't know, it, it, it, the guy always wishes that it goes, that it would go further. But that's just a guy thing, you know? Guys always want to get in the pants right? (Laughs) You know, at least at this age, I don't know. I mean, you can't say that you've, you know, never hung out with a girl that, you may, even though you may just be friends and that's all it's ever going to be and you know that, but you can't say you've never wished that it would go further, right? I mean maybe you can, or other cer- specific people can, but I can't. (Laughs) You know? And I know a lot of other guys that really can't. It's just a natural male thing to do, you know? And

it's even, it even says that in the Bible that we're- men are here to reproduce as much as possible and keep the blood lines going, right? And the women are there to maintain that bloodline and whatever, right? I mean, 'cause it- in nature, if you think about it in nature, 'cause we are all animals, I mean, we're mammals right? But in nature, a lot of the time the, the male animal, or whatever, will get the female pregnant and then, you know, you'll never see the male again, he'll be off getting other females pregnant right? And they have to deal with the cubs or, you know, babies. And, you know, raise them and teach them and whatever. It's kind of the same with humanity; it's the same kind of way, except we're just more fucked up (laughs). [Tommy]

Both Tommy and Elise expressed the idea that most female and male relationships inevitably involve a strong natural sexual attraction. Tommy draws on his interpretation of two distinct historical philosophies—the Bible and Darwinian evolution—to justify the nature of irrepressible male sexuality. Tommy's view seems to reinforce developmentalist models of risk that suggest that sexual attraction is the essence of guy and girl friendships, showing just how pervasive these narratives have become in religious, scientific and popular discourses. The problem with focusing on the supposed sexual nature of street involved guy and girl friendships is that it often is used to re-establish the need for adult involvement in order to promote 'proper' adult-like relationships or to monitor behaviour considered risky by adult standards (Bucholtz 2002:534). Focusing only on the 'risk' that is thought to be naturally present in these relationships obscures the ways that youth create, engage in and enjoy different types of guy and girl friendships that are free from such hyper-sexualized narratives.

Certain scholars have pointed out that street involved youth social networks frequently include both males and females (Margretten 2011:52; Márquez 1999:5) and that these relationships are often non-sexual in nature (Finkelstein 2005:41-49). Youth used a number of strategies in relationship building in order to release specific friendships from

such strongly loaded conceptions that served to naturalize sexual activity in male and female relationships. The most prominent way youth accomplished this was by adopting other youth as fictive kin. Street family (as outlined in the previous chapter) was a common discourse that youth drew upon when talking about their friendships. Positioning someone as a family member could work to de-sexualize them, firmly placing the youth into what is (in Canadian society) a widely understood non-sexualized relationship. Talking about close friends as ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’ was a way to firmly outline the nature of their relationships while also controlling how their relationships could be conceived and understood by the friendships participants as well as by outsiders. Anna talked about her “boys” in terms of “brothers” who would protect her and look out for her. She also, at times, positioned herself in a mothering role to her male friends, one in which she nurtured and looked out for them. By positioning her guy friends as family, Anna was able to draw on strongly held cultural taboo’s about incest, allowing her to control how others thought of her relationships and separating them from dominant discourses about risky youth sexualisation. Instead, the relationships between Anna and her male friends become nurturing and protective affiliations.

Anna also desexualized her friendship with her “boys” by invoking Canadian conceptions of gender identity and gender specific activities. During our interview, Anna told me why she preferred having male friends:

‘Cause, like, I’ve always grown up with guys too. I’ve always liked the guy things like hunting, 4x4ing, dirt biking, fishing, camping all that stuff. I’d much prefer to do those things than go out to the mall, paint my nails, go gossip about things. It’s just, I get along with girls that are more like that than the girls that are all like all dolled up and going to the bars and all that stuff. Like, I prefer doing more, kind of, real life things than material things. [Anna]

Here, she positions herself as “growing up with guys” and “liking guy things.” In effect, she can position herself as ‘one of the guys,’ which would theoretically allow her to partake in a relationship that mimic’s what is understood to be guy friendship, effectively escaping the more loaded guy and girl friendship type.

Tommy talked about the importance of carefully maintaining the number of girls and guys with whom he spent time:

...If you have too many fr- like, s- like a whole bunch of friends that are just girls and, you know, you just have a few guys, and say y-, you know, being a guy yourself, you know, people are going to think you’re a player. You know, that you’re a slut, you know, a man whore or whatever. You know? And it just gives you a bad reputation. But then if you have, you know, only guy friends they think you’re, you know, a gangster or, you know, I don’t, it’s hard to explain. But, I don’t know, I try to make it even, really. You know, have kind of, you know, the same amount of friends whether their boy or gi- you know male or female. Um, so then that way, you know, I cover my ass too right. Because nobody can make accusations about me. I al- and I never hang out with other girls one-on-one, you know? There’s always other people around so that that girl can’t go and, like, “oh he tried-” you know, you know, say I piss her off one day and she goes to Jen “Oh he tried to fucking sleep with me and everything.” And then that causes a huge problem for me and Jen and it’s not even true, right? Like that’s happened to me before so I’ve learned to kind of cover my ass and learn, you know, be careful who I hang out with. You know? Especially, you know, one on one, by myself with nobody else around that can vouch for me. [Tommy]

Not only is Tommy attentive to the ways that his friendships (and by extension, himself) may be talked or thought about, he seeks to mitigate any negative connotations by managing the number of guy and girl friends that were around him. Through this relational strategy, Tommy works to protect his reputation from both damaging developmentalist stereotypes and from negative street involved social stereotypes. Rather than simply explaining why such stereotypes are not applicable to his own

friendships, Tommy uses the act of friendship to avoid such damaging definitions (“No one can make accusations about me”).

It should be noted here that both Tommy and Anna are expressing heteronormative ideas about gender and sexuality. These perspectives and the associated strategies may not be reflected in, or used by, the larger street involved youth population in Victoria, particularly since that population includes a significant portion of LGBTQ youth. Indeed, a significant area for future research would be to address how LGBTQ youth view friendship, including diverse kinds of guy and girl friendships. My purpose here is to focus on how youth strategically use stories and roles that they understand in order to expertly manage their friendships. At times, this includes (as Anna has shown above) the ability to break down and reassemble those stories in very strategic and insightful ways.

The act of friendship becomes, in itself, a solution to the damaging stereotypes about street involved youth friendship. Tommy shows a clear understanding of the way that street involved youth friendships are often typified and responds by identifying ways in which to avoid or escape such stigmatizations through expertly managed friendship groups. This careful maintenance of male and female friendships helps Tommy to avoid such troublesome labels while also maintaining control over his own reputation. This deeper level of friendship management shows just how intricate street involved youth friendships can be and the level of expertise and understanding that youth draw upon while managing their everyday relationships.

A final strategy youth used to establish the merits of guy-girl friendships was to draw focus on the positive aspects of such a friendship. Anna and Jen mentioned that these types of friendships were less prone to drama than girl-girl friendships. Others talked

about the protective aspect of these friendships. Anna described how she looked after her “boys.” Matt felt that guys needed a “solid girl” who could keep them “clean”. Elise felt that “guys are more protective over girls.” Focusing on the protective and nurturing aspects of guy and girl friendships may act to reframe friendships as relationships that work to insure well-being rather than risk. While this does not exclude sexual activity from these relationships (Matt was specifically talking about a “solid girl” he had been in a relationship with in the past), it counters the assumption that these connections are always ineffectual, problematic and risky with evidence that they have helpful, protective and positive aspects.

A second developmentalist discourse that is regularly drawn upon when discussing street involved youth friendships involves their assumed predilection towards violence. Often, friendships among street involved youth are presented in existing literature and dominant mainstream media as dangerously violent and burdened by regular conflict (Karabanow 2004:42). In fact, although I asked youth about both types of interaction there were far more stories of youth helping their friends avoid violent confrontations than there were of friends pulling youth into unwanted violent confrontations.

Of all the youth I talked too, only Raven and Tommy talked about experiencing a significant amount of violence in their lives. For Raven, this violence could come from anyone at any time, often as a result of outstanding debts or suspected theft. This was one reason that Raven gave for the fact that she had only one friend. Raven’s story was unique among the youth I interviewed, and her situation was quite dire. Being addicted to heroin while working and living on the street and receiving no social assistance meant Raven felt distrustful and apprehensive about contact with others. Even so, Raven noted

that the one friendship she did have—with Steve—was both protective and helpful in her current situation.

Although Tommy mentioned violent situations in his past, he responded to my questions by stating: “I don’t really like to brag about my violence and stuff. The times I’ve hurt people; I don’t like to hurt people. So I, I’d rather not focus on that kind of stuff.” From his perspective violence was usually a last resort, and while it did exist on the street, there were ways to avoid it much of the time.

One such way to avoid conflict was through friendships. Elise recounted how she had helped Bethany avoid conflict in the past. In fact, Elise outlined how her friendship helped to lessen the violence that Bethany had engaged in:

She’s a very, like, angry person and she likes to fight a lot. And like, if someone’s like even giving her the wrong look, she’s like, “you want to fight?” Like, so like, multiple times I’ve had to, have been, like, “Shut-up! Let’s go!” [Elise]

Several of the interviewed youth described helping friends avoid violent. Anna told me how she would pull her “boys” away from possible conflicts. Both Tommy and Paul talked about situations in which youth would “stand up” for their friends in a show of solidarity that resolved a conflict before it became physical. It is possible that these strategies were more prominent in Victoria than elsewhere, both among the particular youth I spoke with (those who frequented the youth clinic), or because the population of street involved youth is smaller in Victoria than other major city centers and as a result, most street involved youth in Victoria know or know of each other. Regardless of whether this practice is widespread among Canadian street involved youth or not, it

shows agentic and practical strategies originating in youth friendships that clearly help youth to avoid conflict.

It can be said, then, that street involved youth friendships do not homogeneously follow patterns of delinquency that are harmful to youth. Rather, our understanding of how street involved youth friendships exist and what harm or help these friendships offer youth becomes richer once we listen to youth's own experiences and understandings of these relationships. Understanding a more nuanced form of street involved youth friendship will allow future research to avoid the pitfalls and dangerous stereotypes that have dominated the way that street involved youth have been represented in previous work. In addition, it will open up new ways in which street involved youth and their friendships may be considered, studied and thought about. By reassessing how street involvement and youth have traditionally been situated under developmentalist discourses, a new, more agentic and less reductive youth actor can emerge to deepen our understanding of what it means to be a street involved youth in a neoliberal city.

4.3 Neoliberal Discourses and Street Involved Youth Friendships.

As I discussed in Chapter One, struggling families, high costs of living, restrictions and cuts to social assistance and difficulty in obtaining well-paid employment affect the well-being of street involved youth (Karabanow 2004:34; Wingert Higgit and Ristock 2005:68,77, Penhorwood 2012; CIBC 2013). After being excluded from the traditional workforce and visible on the street, youth are stigmatized in dominant neoliberal ideologies as 'lazy', 'unmotivated' and 'deviant.' Since neoliberal beliefs hold that "economic rationality and self-sufficiency [are] the personal responsibility of individuals and families, and poverty is understood to be rooted in individual deficiencies in

motivation, discipline and human capital limitations” (Morgen and Gonzales 2008:220), street involved youth are seen to be perpetrators of their own poverty, marginality and living situations.

While working with the homeless population in the Toronto, Steve Gaetz and Bill O’Grady noted that:

Neoliberal theories have entered popular culture and have provided a popular, if problematic, narrative for explaining why some people succeed and others do not, and underlie a belief that social issues such as poverty, unemployment, addictions and mental health are personal, individual and private issues, best addressed by individuals and families, rather than government or the broader society. [Gaetz and O’Grady 2013:245]

The effort to responsabilize youth for their own poverty successfully shifts focus from the growing data (as presented in Chapter one of this thesis) suggesting that youth poverty is rooted in dominant Canadian political-economic ideologies and realities rather than in youth themselves. Once the individual is positioned as the responsible party, it is far easier to justify ways in which street involved youth can and should be policed, disciplined or supervised (Kelly 2001:98). Karabanow *et al.* have pointed out that “Politically, there has been a drastic movement throughout developed and developing nations towards individualism, self-help, and tough-on-crime punishment portfolios” (2010:40). Rather than understanding the way that the current dominant political-economic ideology in Canada contributes to increasing youth unemployment, street involved youth have become identified as deviant, untrustworthy and in need of control (often through policing) simply by the fact that they are street involved (O’Grady, Gaetz and Buccieri 2013:337). Because of this label, strategies that youth use in order to survive are also subsumed under the same blanket of ascribed deviant or delinquent intent

as street involved youth themselves (Karabanow et al 2010:44). This idea of criminality is passed on to affiliations that the youth engage in, as O'Grady and Gaetz outline:

‘They’ are not interested in getting jobs or going to school. ‘They’ flout laws and disrespect authority. ‘They’ readily take advantage of handouts. Moreover, there is an implied contagion effect: that by grouping such people together, there is the potential for the destructive ideas and values that underlie poverty to spread not only outwardly, but between generations, as well. [Gaetz and O'Grady 2013:246]

In the same way that youth's survival strategies and affiliations become suspect, even their realm of existence becomes suspect, as neoliberal capitalists look to colonise and absorb capital from every street and avenue of the neoliberal city while reserving what was formally understood to be public or common spaces for the use of proper neoliberal citizens (Klein 2008:291; Harvey 2012:28-29,30; Kelly 2001:98). In this environment, street involved youth are seen to be “out of place” and thus are “committing a social violation, by transgressing that which is considered to be appropriate behaviour” (Beazley 2002:1666). This transgression makes youth visible as vagrants and deviants, creating a situation in which youth must be policed. Even more importantly, their very friendships, visibility and affiliations become something that warrants police attention:

This can be seen in the percentage of participants who received tickets for drinking in public (23%), hanging out with friends in a public place (21%), sitting in the park (14%), using drugs in public (13%) and sitting on a sidewalk (8%). Several of these tickets were also a result of the survival strategies of these young people, such as choosing to sleep in a public place (10%), which is often done for protection, and earning money through panhandling or squeegeeing (10%). [O'Grady, Gaetz, Buccieri 2013:345]

In the Toronto study mentioned by O'Grady, Gaetz and Buccieri, 21% (51 individuals, over one fifth of youth surveyed) of the participants (N=244) had been ticketed for “hanging out with friends in public places” (2013:345). While I was unable to find a

similar study or numbers from Victoria, various off the record conversations with both street involved youth and front line workers expressed concern over the type of social profiling that seemed to exist in the city. This social profiling and the policing of the very affiliations that are critically important in street involved youth's daily survival is, obviously, very troubling. It is important that the role that friendship plays in youth's daily lives be taken into account when considering such dangerous and targeted policies.

4.4 Friendships and the Political-Economic Realities in Victoria, B.C.

Yeah, definitely, I, like, step out of my way to help my friends definitely. I will like usually always go out of my way. Well, I wouldn't even, like, consider that going out of my way. Just like, I want to help my friends.
[Dave]

Dave's comments about "help" echoes Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi findings among street children in Accra where friendships made it possible "for the urban poor to live and survive under particular market forms...as the poor are forced to create new ways of living in the face of decimated opportunities" (2010:446). Among the youth I interviewed, friendship was about more than just ensuring each other's survival; there was also an emotional desire to be helpful for the sake of making each other's lives better. Emma said, "I look out for people a lot. I'm very compassionate and I try to be very empathetic. And I like to help people and I like the positive outcome. I like seeing people happy." This desire to see friends happy shows how street involved friendships not only allow access to resources, but also serve an emotional and supportive role in youth's lives. Friendships provide meaningful and emotional relationships that may not be available to street involved youth elsewhere. Youth often talked about being "close" with their friends, and forming "connections" with them. This type of communal discourse was an obvious departure from the individuated neoliberal citizen who is so

widely promoted in contemporary Canadian society. Jen talked about the emotional and material support that was shared communally in such relationships:

But, like, when you have friends you like camp out together and like, you have fun and you got each other's backs, like if you need something they'll be like "oh, I have this" or like, if you don't have like food or anything and they do, they will give you some. [Jen]

Returning to Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, we again find similarities between the street involved relationships they described in Accra as essential spaces of "assistance, generosity and camaraderie" (2010:446). In Haiti too, friendships among street children were described by Kovats-Bernat as offering "a system of generalized reciprocity in which the sharing of cash and commodities is presumed... and is tacitly understood by all members of a peer group to be essential to their common survival" (2006:118).

In contrast to the dominant neoliberal preoccupation with responsabilizing citizens who are impoverished, youth did not express concern over why specific youth would be without a resource or why a youth would require support; nor was there a moralizing of the way in which a youth had chosen to use their resources. It is not clear whether such gifting and sharing can be understood to be an alternative economic system nested within the larger capitalist system in which youth live. Rather, youth wanted to help friends to avoid experiencing the effects of poverty and the harm of being dispossessed as much as possible.

I don't know, whenever, like, me and Ryan have money 'cause she, she is in Spectrum [a job skills program] but, her money always goes like that (snaps fingers) and me and Ryan both have a source of income so, we have a little bit more money than her. So if she's hungry or something

we'll buy her food, or we'll buy her a pack of smokes or like, just help her out you know? [Elise]

While talking about alternate systems of exchange, Graeber noted that Mauss believed:

The origin of all contracts lies in communism, an unconditional commitment to another's needs, and that despite endless economic textbooks to the contrary, there has never been an economy based on barter: that actually-existing societies which do not employ money have instead been gift economies in which the distinctions we now make between interest and altruism, person and property, freedom and obligation, simply did not exist... [Graeber 2004:17]

Graeber goes on to argue:

Before Mauss, the universal assumption had been that economies without money or markets had operated by means of "barter"; they were trying to engage in market behaviour (acquire useful goods and services at the least cost to themselves, get rich if possible...), they just hadn't yet developed very sophisticated ways of going about it. Mauss demonstrated that in fact, such economies were really "gift economies." They were not based on calculation, but on a refusal to calculate; they were rooted in an ethical system which consciously rejected most of what we would consider the basic principles of economics. It was not that they had not yet learned to seek profit through the most efficient means. They would have found the very premise that the point of an economic transaction—at least, one with someone who was not your enemy—was to seek the greatest profit deeply offensive. [Graeber 2004:21]

Youth themselves expressed the view that gifting was not a necessary obligation if one hoped to maintain a friendship:

I don't have to try to keep these people around, like, they're my friends because they're my friends. I don't have to like, be like, "oh my god have this! Oh my god have this! Like, take this! Have this!" Because I want you to stick around, it's like, no, we can just sit there and hang out and do stupid things and we will laugh and that's what will make us friends, not me, like giving away things and all that kind of stuff. [Paul]

Reciprocity and gifting are not required in friendships, however offering help is most definitely moralized by street involved youth which may well act to serve the same purpose. In practice, street youth friendships recognise (as Mauss did) that "the mere

pursuit of individual ends is harmful to the ends and peace of the whole, to the rhythm of its work and pleasures, and hence in the end to the individual” (2011:75).

If neoliberal policies enacted provincially and federally have created a political-economic climate that can be seen to make street involved youth’s lives more difficult, friendships should be understood to offer both an easement and escape from those lives. In this sense friendships create a ‘space’ in the political-economic landscape in which youth may spend moments apart from the pressures of daily street involvement:

[A good friend is someone who helps] you out when you have nothing. Not a roof over your head. Lending you bus fare and like, uh, giving you one out of your two smokes that you have left, you know... Uh, it’s good karma just l- letting someone feel good just for like seven or eight minutes, then they don’t- then they don’t have to worry about it kind of thing. [Matt]

4.5 Street Involved Youth as Experts.

Previous sections of this chapter have outlined the impact that developmentalist and neoliberal ideologies have on street involved youth friendships. I have also outlined ways that youth have resisted these ideologies and have sought to manage the way that their friendships may be defined or thought about. In this section, I pick up on an idea I had mentioned earlier; that is, the expertise that street involved youth show in how they manage, negotiate and assess both potential and established friendships. The expertise youth show exhibits a deep understanding of the political-economic landscape that they live in. Their ability to identify who is, and who is not, a beneficial friend in their lives also exposes the inadequacy of dominant development ideologies that position street involved youth as inevitable victims of delinquent friends. This section looks in depth at

the competency youth exhibit in their own relationship, quite apart from adult intervention, and how these friendships serve a positive role in youth lives.

Repeatedly during interviews, I was struck by the level of expertise street involved youth expressed when talking about their friendships. Youth showed that they were constantly, proactively and positively assessing who they did and did not wish to ‘hang out’ with. Ultimately, youth showed preference for their “street family” and street involved friendships over their other friendships:

I hang out with every, like, almost every single day and, like, see on a constant day basis [Paul]

I’m a lot closer with my street family, just because they’re- I see them every day, they know what’s going on for me, they’re always there for me go through a lot of things together and stuff... [Anna]

My closest couple friends near me that I walk around with on a day-to-day basis. [Matt]

In fact, youth proved very proficient at categorising their relationships into knowable and logical groupings. This careful consideration and categorization of friends and potential friends was purposefully and carefully considered. For example, work friends (mentioned by both Dave and Ryan) were experienced, talked about and understood in fundamentally different ways than street involved friends were. Likewise school friends who were not street involved (as categorised by Paul, Anna and Jen) did not carry similar expectations nor were they practiced in the same way as street involved friendships were. Youth even understood subgroups of street involved friends (such as acquaintances), which showed a careful consideration of how to navigate the multitude of risks and rewards in friend-making.

The level of experience and acuity that youth drew upon while assessing their friendships is evident in the speed by which friendships could be quickly assessed and categorized:

Um, with me it's like, 'cause I don't have very many friends right? So when, when I do make a friend it's like, if I know they're going to be a good friend then it happens really quickly, like, I'll meet them, then we'll talk and then we'll become best friends or something you know? But if like I meet them and we talk and I don't like them, then I'll just be like "Pfft, see you later". [Elise]

This assessment included a careful consideration of the costs involved in maintaining or engaging in a friendship versus the possibility of being deceived or harmed by a friendship:

Like, see I think anybody can be a good friend. But, like, not everybody wants to be a good friend. Like, I don't always want to be a good friend. Like, there's some people I will always try to be a good friend. Like, the best friend I can be, like, but like, like I said, with people like David down there, which is one of the nicest guys I ever met, which is why it's so hard to see him all the time. Like, I can't be a good friend to him, I can't listen to him talk about his feelings and, like, or you know, because it's just like, it's sad and it hurts and it just makes me depressed. And no matter how hard I try or anybody else tries, it's only him that can change what's happening with him. Sometimes I choose to not be that really good friend that's all about his friend and puts his friend, you know, before him. [Ryan]

It's a moral standing and you got, you gotta kind of pick and choose who you give, you give your respect to, because if you give your respect to somebody who is not, I'm going to say worthy of it, you know, they're just going to take it, take advantage of it and take it for granted and, you know, you're going to end up fucked over in the end. You know, because you trusted and you respected this person and they took it and ran with it, you know? [Tommy]

In contrast to dominant narratives that present street involved youth friendships as risky and deviant, youth did not continue friendships that had harmed them in the past. In fact, youth had specific categories such as 'fake friends' in order to identify individuals who

had betrayed or harmed them in the past. Emma identified a fake friend who left her feeling “invaded” by taking advantage of her hospitality and becoming increasingly disrespectful of her home and belongings. Jen and Tommy recounted how a friend had betrayed them by stealing their damage deposit. Ryan discussed ending a friendship when a friend lied to him. Dave allocated a whole group of past friends to the category ‘fake friends’:

My friendships back then were a lot more fake and like, more- I don't know. Just a lot of people just, like, weren't really my friends. I was just like around them, but like, we weren't really, we were, like, not close.
[Dave]

The common thread in these stories can be found in their tense; that is, they were all talked about as occurring in the past. The notion that youth are incapable of constructing positive friendships is established and supported by suggesting they are subject to repeatedly practicing deviant or risky friendships. Youth's ability to reject, cut off and remove themselves from friendships that they understood to be causing them harm proves their ability to maintain productive and positive relationships.

Youth's success in making and managing friendships also exposes what has been a problematic dichotomy of valuation for defining youth relationships. While street involved friendships are often talked about in social scientific literature as either ‘good’ or ‘deviant,’ youth understood friendships in a far more complex and nuanced way.

There's like a couple of them, but it's like, I think that's what happens when you li-hang out in a big group, is like you can't be a hundred-percent friends with everyone, there's some people you're goin- there's going to have certain problems that you just don't like, but- I mean like, even the people who like, I don't like a hundred percent, I still have some respect for, because there's cool traits to them, but then there's also those

annoying traits, so then you're just like it's kind of iffy but, I don't know.
[Paul]

Rather than categorizing friendships as fully good or fully deviant, Paul assesses and considers potential friends in a far less draconian way. Paul categorizes the potential for friendship on a scale, assessing both "cool traits" and "annoying traits" as he considers the acquaintances candidacy for friendship.

Youth also noted that friends who acted in undesirable ways were not necessarily defriended, but could remain friends if the relationship had grown 'close' and 'strong' enough.

Like I said, mine and Carlo's friendship is diff- it was different which is why I consider him my best friend, right? Like, we've fucked up so many times in our friendships that it doesn't even fucking matter, like (chuckles). He could throw me off the fucking bridge and chances are he'd- we'd end up shaking hands after. [Ryan]

So I still call her my friend, because I'll still accept her with open arms, even though she does these things. I may not, I may have given up trying to help her. I may have given up trying to give her advice, um, 'cause I think sometimes in friendship, like, you don't always need to give advice. And I think fundamentally, like, a friend should just be someone who accepts you openly and respects you as a person. [Emma]

Ryan's example shows the importance of shared experience and history for youth as they weighed and assessed their friendships. Emma recognises that her friendship has changed, but still felt invested in this friend regardless of their differences. It is important to recognize the nuanced way that Emma can "accept" her friend and "respect" her regardless of their current differences. This idea of friends allowing youth to "be myself" is something that will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

When youth talked about fake friends or ending friendships it was often the result of past deception (most often through 'drama,' gossip, spreading rumours, lying, and

stealing). Deception was a constant concern for youth and could exist even in friendships that the youth themselves had previously viewed as positive and productive:

I thought like, James was going to be like one of my best friends ever, until like, you know, he kept things from me and you know. And that, that stuff just hurts and it's uncalled for and, uh, I don't take that in a friendship, it's just not something I felt like dealing with or I would get into. [Ryan]

Unlike other forgivable offences, deception was dangerous enough to end a friendship outright (or at least to merit a deep reassessment of a previous friendship). Deceit worked to make friends ultimately unknowable and thus untrustworthy and dangerous. A deceptive friend could cause extreme hardship in a youth's life, sometimes at the cost of other friendships or even their possessions. Theft was a major concern for youth who stood to lose everything to a deceitful friend. As Jen recounted: "They took my bag and everything I owned was in there 'cause I was, like, on the streets at the time." The cost of "everything" that a youth "owned" is obviously a very high price for falling prey to deception, which is why youth guarded so vigorously against it. Yet, even with the constant threat of this level of betrayal, youth still engaged in friendships. This is testament to the level of help and meaning that friendships offered in a youth's life, the risk of deception would not outweigh the benefit received by engaging in friendships.

Instead, youth were well practiced at constantly reassessing friendships and adjusting relationships depending on how the friendship affected them:

Like we were like best friends but then she just made a whole bunch of like shitty decisions and then, her- he- like who she's like becoming I just can't stand to be around anymore. But like, in her mind we're still really close friends, but in my mind I just don't want anything to do with her at all. [Dave]

I, I got a little better with... cutting my friends off whenever I f- feel it's not doing good for me. [Ryan]

Youth did not perceived destructive acquaintances as friends, but would move to protect themselves by disassociating from harmful friendships. Dave was very clear about the way in which he understood and categorized former friends when he said "I've, like, filtered out a lot of my friends, just like, I've just stopped talking to them just 'cause they're not the kind of people I want to be with anymore." Likewise, youth paid attention to others reputations and a history of engaging in deceptive or harmful behaviour met with strong disapproval:

The only time that it's dangerous here, anyways, in Victoria, is if you make it dangerous for yourself. If you're dumb and you piss people off and you're ripping people off and you're, you know, abusing women or, you know, you're a goof and you fucking sexually molest little kids or like, you know? I- something like that, you know? Or, you know, you're selling bad drugs to little kids or something, you know, like some like thirteen year-old comes up and you sell him heroin or something, you know, you're going to get your face stomped in for sure. You know? But, I mean, if you're just doing your thing and, you know, you're not hurting anybody you're not getting in peoples way, you're not ripping people off or pissing people off, you're fine; you have nothing to worry about.
[Tommy]

For Tommy, causing harm to others was something that was not tolerated on the street.

This type of internal group discipline illustrates the strong biases against deceptive and harmful behaviour that exists in street involved youth circles. Listening to the strong and violent reprisals that Tommy suggested awaited individuals who were known to engage in such activities suggests that regular friendships would not be built upon such enterprises. Rather, youth looked to cultivate and promote a positive reputation, one that could ensure they would receive help in difficult situations:

A lot of people took my side on it and was like, why would you do this to Paul, like, he's like, 'cause I don't exactly have a bad reputation, I haven't really caused any drama with anyone or done anything. [Paul]

I had that almost right away when I moved here, which is really a, a rare thing to get because you know, a lot of, a lot of the t- you have to, you have to be around for a little while first right? And earn that kind of respect? You know? Show people that you're not a piece of shit before they'll actually stand up for you and shit. Because you don't, you don't want to stand up for somebody that's, you know, causing problems and then coming to you and saying, "Oh my god I don't know what to do, I didn't do anything to them!" Right? [Tommy]

Honesty, trust, acceptance and respect (discussed in the previous chapter as the 'idealized friend) were all taken into consideration when youth assessed another youth's reputation.

The idealized friend was a model meant to protect youth from friendship deception, false friends and problem friends. This was why youth would keep friendships that did not fully realize the idealized friendship they often talked about. Shared experience could lessen the threat of deception and betrayal, meaning that friends did not have to meet such a stringent standard in order to be a safe, comfortable and meaningful relationships. While working with U.S. high school students, Hruschka observed that being a 'good friend' often meant successfully meeting a set of expectations while at the same time achieving one's own personal needs (2009:205,210,217). Youth did not talk about friends in terms of how they could fulfill their own 'personal needs', but rather talked about how friends helped them avoid harm, loneliness and misery. This is not to suggest that friends were not thought of as a way to fulfill an individual's personal needs, but rather, proactively wanting the best for your friend was instrumental in keeping youth fed, sheltered, happy and safe. In fact, when given the chance, youth talked about how friends helped each other, looked out for each other and comforted each other more often

and in far more detail than they recounted the harm and deviance that they had experienced at the hands of fake friends.

A number of other researchers have presented similar findings, suggesting youth's peer networks can be understood as effective (and often essential) survival strategies negotiated and maintained by youth themselves. In her work with street kids in New York, Finkelstein found that:

Street kids are often thought of as living in disorganized misery, where they are characterized as psychologically damaged, unable to form relationships, and destined for social, emotional, and economic failure. However, research on street children in Brazil found that they actually form supportive networks, coping strategies, and meaningful relationships, outside the control of the adult world. [2005:40]

Likewise, Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi have pointed out that:

While it is now noted from time to time that in taking to the street children develop complex understandings of street life and that they negotiate its vicissitudes and hazards, both physical and moral, in ways that are adroit and purposeful, less evident are the collective forms that street living can take and the relations of cooperation and reciprocity that are commonly, indeed necessarily, involved. [2010:442]

Clearly, youth are experts at creating, negotiating and navigating their own friendships in particular ways under difficult circumstances. Youth expertise at creating and maintaining their own friendships begs a retheorization of established and accepted developmentalist theory.

4.6 Youth's Friendship Expertise in Response to Developmentalism:

As has been suggested in the previous section, by assuming deviance, criminality or ineptitude in street involved youth friendships, we overlook how street involved youth demonstrate their expertise in negotiating, maintaining and managing their own

friendships in positive and meaningful ways. Developmentalist discourses, which rely so heavily on recapitulation theory, lead to an assumed delinquency amongst street involved youth, one that reifies adult privilege and has traditionally accepted adult definitions and conceptions of street involved youth friendships. Somewhat surprising is the fact that youth themselves understand these dominant developmentalist perceptions and understand well the difficulties that such ideas cause for them:

I tend to forget that the normal population, I guess, of Victoria, like the people who walk down the street on a regular day basis and who haven't seen this side of the lifestyle, sometimes can get scared of it and they think that the people are all like mean, and all that kind of stuff and so they kind of back away a little bit and get a little, like, shy and all that kind of stuff. So sometimes I bring my friend, like, my other friends around to this group, but then, sometimes they get scared and they're like, I don't know what to do, like, I don't know what to say, I don't know if I should, like, push boundaries or like step on peoples toes, like I don't want to cause a problem and stuff, so sometimes it gets weird, so sometimes I just go hang out with them on their own and then them on their own, but sometimes I'll bring them together and people will actual click. And like, I've had friends from, like, high school and stuff that have gotten to know people down here and have become friends. And I've had some that have come down here and just been like, "I can't do this." And so I just don't come back with them. [Paul]

This observation by Paul is important in three respects. First it shows how easily Paul can cross what some specialists have considered boundaries maintaining friendships with both housed and street involved friends simultaneously. Recall, for instance, that Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt have argued that "living on the streets profoundly affects adolescent social development. It weakens ties to supervising adults at home and at school, weakens or severs ties to school and neighborhood friends" (2005:232). Second, it shows that Paul is well aware of how his street involved friends are perceived as dangerous by "the normal population... of Victoria." Finally, it shows that the difficulty Paul faces when trying to bring his two friendship groups together is a direct result of

developmentalist rhetoric itself which has for decades worked to define and stereotype street involved youth.

Because street involved youth and their friendships have been so heavily portrayed in specific (and interested) ways youth without connections to the street, as Paul suggests, “get scared... don’t know what to do... [or] say... it gets weird.” The dislocation that youth who have not been street involved feel illustrates how such paradigms may become barriers when they are repeated, reproduced, and widely disseminated and absorbed.

Clearly, the street involved youth who participated in my research did not experience or think about their own friendships in the same way that has traditionally been the purview of developmentalist theory. While I do not suggest that street involved youth friendships are completely devoid of risky or unlawful behaviour (indeed they are not), I do feel that a rethinking of these relationships is merited, if not essential for the well-being of street involved youth. Assumptions that have served to cordon off such friendships as harmful and deviant, (perhaps hoping that the isolation will encourage the reintegration of street involved youth into mainstream society) frequently overlook and negate the positive aspects to be found in such friendships. The research I have thus far presented suggests that a rethinking of how street involved youth friendships have traditionally been understood is greatly needed. In addition, my research definitively shows that social programs and policies that are based on developmentalist assumptions of youth deviance require reassessment and readjustment to reflect youth’s own expertise and agency and the way that friendships play important roles in their daily survival and wellbeing. The next section explores how neoliberal policies may also be reassessed and reimagined as they pertain to street involved youth friendships.

4.7 Street Involved Youth's Friendships and Political-Economic Contestation:

Street involved youth friendships help to ease youth's daily experience of living in a neoliberal city that marginalizes them in various ways. It is the very strategy of friendship that is also at times subjected to intense scrutiny and policing by the neoliberal city, province and state. As mentioned above, even the very act of being with friends is, at times, policed and ticketed. It is apparent that the attempt to ticket street involved friendships indicates at least a rudimentary understanding of the usefulness and important role that friendship offers street involved populations. Karabanow *et al* have outlined street involved group dynamics as distinctly un-neoliberal (and in fact un-capitalist) in nature:

In some ways, youth participants characterized their culture as 'collective'; people use their gifts or talents to make money throughout the day, and when they are done they return to an agreed upon location and determine what they can do with the money they have acquired. Sometimes individuals work for themselves, but 'crews' often pool their resources to ensure that everyone (dogs included) is fed, watered, and taken care of (e.g., has necessary medical supplies, able to get new footwear, etc.). [2010:51]

Gaetz and O'Grady have pointed out that it is not unexpected that marginalized groups such as street involved individuals who are "socially, economically and spatially" separated from resources and spaces that are available to other citizens of the city would, in turn, develop their own strategies and institutions in order to compensate (2013:252).

Appadurai argues that "minorities and majorities are recent historical inventions, essentially tied up with ideas about nations, populations, representations and enumeration which are no more than a few centuries old" (2006:49). While street youth are an economically marginalized population rather than a true minority (although many

minorities such as Canada's indigenous peoples and members of the LGBTQ community are disproportionately represented among street involved youth) in practice they are perceived and responded to by governments in a similar manner. Appadurai goes on to write:

The first step toward addressing why the weak, in so many ethnonationalist settings, are feared, is to go back to the "we/them" question in elementary sociological theory. In this theory, the creation of collective others, or them's, is a requirement, through the dynamics of stereotyping and identity contrast, for helping to set boundaries and mark off the dynamics of the we. This aspect of the theory of the scapegoat, the stereotype, and the other grows out of that brand of symbolic interactionism that was made explicit in the works of Cooley and Mead, but it is also entirely central to the core of Freud's understanding of group dynamics, including his classic essay on the narcissism of minor differences. [Appadurai 2010:50]

In these terms, the proper, normalized, neoliberal majority must in necessity identify a non-neoliberal minority in order to justify its majority status. As soon as this minority is made visible, it is feared, scapegoated and blamed for the ills that seemingly afflict the majority. In this way, the majority can suggest that it is those living in poverty that are responsible for dragging down the entire states economy. Rather than pointing at the system for systemic failure, impoverished populations and the institutions they depend on serve to be the problem. This makes suspect welfare, social programs, street involved populations themselves and even street involved friendships. In such a way, intensive paradigm building over the past thirty years after the neoliberal shift under Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and (closer to home) Brian Mulroney have served to completely delegitimize and responsabilize citizens who do not reflect a now deeply engrained neoliberal citizenship. Thus victimization becomes deviancy, and dominant

political-economic ideologies escape blame and responsibility for failing the citizens it purports to serve.

While street involved friendships can be understood to serve in some respects as a response to the difficulties brought on by neoliberal policy shifts, they have also made street involved populations easily targetable by cities that wish to institute an aggressive stance against homeless populations. Rather than looking to street involved friendship as a productive relationship that helps to promote well-being among street involved individuals, often the gathering of street involved individuals draws the notice and ire of controlling interests in the city. Finkelstein has pointed out “when socialization does not conform to societal norms it is often considered deviant and its adaptive advantages are overlooked” (2005:36). Thus, street involved youth friendships can be understood to be both a response to the neoliberal city as well as a perceived threat that is often targeted by such interests.

It is the very definition of the way in which street involved youth friendships are made visible that is at debate. As I have noted above, street involved youth negotiate and actively categorise their friendships in agentic ways in order to create and control their own definitions of friendship and how they wish the relationship to be understood. I have also argued that neoliberal interests and developmentalist discourses similarly work to define street involved friendships in specific ways for particular purposes. It is this very dispute over definition and the ability to control how street involved youth and their friendship may be perceived once visible that becomes the theoretical ground of contestation.

It is at this point that I would like to return to the anthropological literature about friendship that was explored in chapter 1. Recall that Uhl viewed friendships as a contract between two actors and thus, as not subject to wider “social structural factors” (1991:90). It is evident from the youth with whom I talked that they identify different types of friendships, some of which clearly cut directly along social structural lines. For this reason, Dyson’s (2010) view may have more credence: that friendship can provide particular social and economic opportunities to its participants, especially in the case of marginalized populations. While help is obviously important to them, it is not an overtly stated goal of street involved youth when they are given the opportunity to talk about their own friendships. Furthermore, if friendships were strictly about accessing social and economic opportunities, would it not make sense to enquire why youth did not spend more time focusing on close relationships with housed individuals rather than their street family (for the obvious fact that there would be a greater store of resources and perhaps better opportunities)? It is apparent that there is more to consider than what Dyson has suggested, at least in terms of street involved youth friendships. What is missing from Dyson’s assessment may be the ways that friendships enable individuals to engage in meaningful and compassionate unions that offer acceptance and the opportunity to be made truly visible on their (youth’s) own terms.

When writing about street children’s “street relatedness” (termed ‘street family’ in this thesis) in Durban, South Africa, Emily Margaretten focused on “the everyday ties of social belonging, to the spatial and temporal configurations of relatedness that make street survival a meaningful possibility for youth” (2011:45). This “meaningful” street belonging as survival that Margaretten identified, I believe, is key to understanding street

involved youth's friendships in Victoria. This meaningful street belonging was expressed by the youths I interviewed as "Being yourself," the topic of the next section in this chapter.

4.8 "Being Yourself"

The youth in my research often discussed friendship as being a relationship in which they felt it was possible to "be myself." When youth talked about being themselves, they were not discussing *who* they were (in the sense of identity), but rather were pointing out why and how they required a specific relationship that offered them the opportunity to be themselves. In this sense, I am not engaging the topic of identity formation, nor will I be engaging with the psychology or developmental literature that deals with identity formation. My research did not look at how youth built or maintained their individual identities but, rather, investigated street involved youth friendships and their importance to street involved youth. What came out of the data, was a sense that friendships allowed youth to 'be themselves' rather than 'build themselves.' Rather than thinking about the way that street involved youth friendships affect (or do not affect) identity building for youth (as is often the case in developmentalist literature), youth instead talked about how friendships allowed them a sense of freedom, safety and acceptance in making their own selves visible.

Metaphors of closeness and connection that youth used when discussing their friendships hinted at the communal and rewarding relationship that friendship can be for street involved youth. These types of metaphors stand in stark contrast to the liberal preoccupation with the individual. When I asked Dave what it meant to 'be himself,' he answered: "To be comfortable and just not really care what comes out of your mouth, and

just, just to be.” Dave did not talk about building identity, but rather touches on the freedom to exist without restraint; the freedom to exist as someone visible, unfettered and on his own terms. It is the context of existence that is so stunning, the simple assertion that Dave can “be” in his friendship, as opposed to ways he cannot in other areas of his daily life. It begs the question, what would happen if Dave did not enjoy any friendships? If there was no relationship in which he could just “be?”

Being yourself was not about building an identity as much as it was about having an outlet to be made visible as you already understand yourself to be. Even talking about being oneself could be liberating, as was evident in the paralinguistic shift that manifested in Jen when she told me:

I’m like, when people first meet m- meet me, I’m like really quiet and like keep to myself and like one, once they’re, like, my friend and, like, we hang out a lot and, like, I get comfortable around them then I start acting like myself. Really random and weird... Like, once you get comfortable and, like, I guess the funny side comes out. [Jen]

Jen, who had been quite quiet and reserved during much of the interview opened up and became more animated when she talked about being herself. Her body and mannerisms exhibited the true enjoyment she was referencing of a cherished friendship that offered freedom and escape from what is often a restrictive and stigmatized existence.

Unlike identity building, “being yourself” was only possible when you were with others. When youth talked about being alone, they talked about boredom, which was often associated with the absence of friends:

For me, personally, boredom is just like, sitting on a bench. Or sitting somewhere, just staring off into nothing. And like, me- for me, it’s mainly like, retracting back in my brain and just like going over stuff in my head,

because I don't know what to do. And I'm like, there's nothing to do, I'm just going to sit here and think about stuff. A lot of the time when I start to think about stuff, I will over-think things and that's not good. And so that's also where people help, because if I'm around people, then I don't have that chance to overthink things and I can't do that. So, it makes it-my life a lot easier. [Paul]

That's the whole reason why I was like always ended up out on the streets doing things. 'Cause I would just be bored, I'd be like, I can't stay home, I'm bored, I want to go out and like do things and meet people... You just feel like nothing. Like you want to do something but you have nothing that you feel like you are interested in doing. [Jen]

Friendship and being yourself was a relational process for the youth I talked with. In this sense, it could only occur in the total comfort of a close friendship. The ability to receive support, unmask one's feelings and to feel comfortable enough to be oneself without fear of reprisal were all important to street involved youth. A close friend made one knowable, allowing visibility through closeness and established connections. For Dave, being yourself and the definition of friendship were interchangeable and difficult to pull apart, it was an expected and fundamental part of how he perceived a friend:

Someone I can just, like, be completely myself with and just like, flowing conversations or- don't even have to- the conversation doesn't even have to flow or- um, I don't know. I don't know how to describe it, it's just, like, a friend. [Dave]

Being yourself was possible only with others that you trusted and knew well:

Well, being myself around friends just shows that like, they're not judgemental you know? 'Cause I am kind of crazy all over the place. And someone who can put up with that is probably a good friend, you know? Like, I don't know. Yeah, I know if someone doesn't like me for who I am and wants me to change, I just tell them to get out my life. Like, it's really not worth it. [Elise]

In this sense, close friendships could be assessed through their ability to truly allow a youth to be visible without reprisal or judgement. The act of being yourself occurred

after requisite trust, shared experience, comfort, closeness and connection had established a strong friendship.

When I think of something positive then it's just, like, being able to share everything, being able to share, like, being comfortable with a person enough that they can see all sides of you, and you're comfortable and you're okay with it. Um, just the, yeah, basically comfort and openness with a person. I think that the stronger your- the friendship, the more open you are. [Emma]

During the interviews, I did not get the sense that this process followed a particular timeframe, but was situational; it could be almost instantaneous or it could develop over a very long period of time. What was necessary was responsiveness in a friend, a way to know that your friend prioritized you in their life and wanted the best for you:

Um just like that closeness of being able to pull someone aside and be like, "I'm having a rough day, I need to talk to you," and not have them be like, "oh, well I'm doing this right now so come find me in half an hour" or something like that. It's just the fact that you always have someone to rely on. [Paul]

Always having someone who was reliable while spending a lot of time on the unpredictable streets of Victoria would be desirable for youth. Becoming visible in truly meaningful and edifying ways, likewise, would be desirable for youth who experienced separation, stigmatisation, indifference, surveillance and discipline in their everyday lives.

4.9 Chapter Summary:

In this chapter, I have discussed ways that established narratives in developmentalist ideology fail to accurately portray how street involved youth perceive and experience their own friendships. In addition, I have traced how neoliberal and political-economic processes in Victoria act as the impetus and also an area of resistance for street involved

youth friendships. By sharing examples from interview data, I established that street involved youth should be understood to be experts at making and maintaining their friendships. It was also suggested that future studies and policy decisions would be enriched if they were to consider how youth understand their friendships and the important role that these relationships fulfill in youth's lives. Finally, I discussed what "being myself" meant to street involved youth, and how it allows a glimpse into the fundamental meaning and fulfillment that street involved youth friendships allow to what is an overly stigmatized and marginalized population in Victoria.

Street involved youth friendship, while traditionally positioned as problematic, is unquestionably a source of help, meaning, nurture and enrichment for street involved youth. Conversely, existing political-economic and developmentalist theory can be understood to regularly make street involved youth's lives more difficult. By considering street involved youth's own understanding of their friendships in the context of such theories, it should be possible to soften the edges of harm that currently affects street involved youth on an almost daily basis. Rather than seeing street involved youth friendships as a prison of dissent, iniquity and deviance, I instead advocate here for a more adequate characterisation, one that was suggested to me by Jen.

When you're homeless your friends are like your home... Like, if you were homeless and had no friends it would just be pointless. You would just be like wandering the streets and like, sitting by yourself and like, not talking to anyone. But, like, when you have friends, you like camp out together and like, you have fun and you got each other's backs, like if you need something they'll be like "oh, I have this" or like, if you don't have like food or anything and they do, they will give you some. [Jen]

Coleman pointed out that conceptions of friendship can be understood to be tied intimately to class, geographies and lived history (2010:202). It is illogical, then, for

definitions of street involved youth's friendships, to be directly affected by policy that originates from a middle-upper class adult understanding of friendship. In agreement with Coleman, Beazley believed that:

Children in the city of Yogyakarta, central Java, have developed 'geographies of resistance' in order to survive (see Pile and Keith, 1997). These geographies have included the appropriation of 'urban niches' within the city, in which they can earn money, feel safe and survive. [Beazley 2003:182]

Similarly, marginalized street involved youth in Victoria have become experts in navigating, negotiating and developing friendships as a metaphorical geography of resistance, one that lay beyond the reach of the city, province and country which continually looks to delegitimize such relationships.

'Being themselves' is a geography outside of such controls, free from the structural harm youth experience on the streets of Victoria. Friendships are a metaphorical home for marginalized youth who spend much of their time without access to or outside of homes. It offers protection, help, care, meaning and visibility to a neglected, eschewed and stigmatised population. And even as the state works to remove more social supports and blame victims for their victimization, youth have expertly constructed a house in which meaning and acceptance is still available to them.

While I started this study hoping to gain insight into how friendship could be understood and defined, I am not sure that such was achieved. Instead, what was clearly shown was the resourcefulness, expertise and acuity present in the youth I talked to which allowed them to escape the structural harm they experienced daily through a banal and largely unstudied (in anthropology) relationship that could become a shelter for them

in day to day life. This stresses how important it is for anthropologists to be attentive to everyday, mundane interactions and how seemingly invisible relationships can allow a meaningful and desired social visibility. Anthropology has a particularly important role to play in the study of friendship; both because of anthropologist's tendency towards reflexivity and because of the central role friendships play in ethnographic research. If we as anthropologists have been guilty of using friendship in order to study kinship as Paine (quoted in Coleman 2010:197) suggested, perhaps it is time to reconsider how friendship can tell us much about what it means to be human, especially in complex and challenging circumstances.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarize my conclusions and address my initial research questions. The youth I interviewed talked at length about the important and positive aspects of their friendships. The way that youth talked about their friendships during interviews raised questions about the accuracy of dominant discourses of street involved youth friendships that regularly appear in social scientific literature and the wider media. Youth proved that their friendships work to alleviate the difficulties and stresses that current political-economic ideologies and policies in Victoria have intensified in their lives.

Once I have summarized my conclusions, I next close the chapter by outlining possible areas of inquiry for a future study of friendship in anthropology.

5.1 Research Questions

My research for this thesis focused on three key research questions: 1.) *How do street involved youth conceptualize, classify, talk about and enact friendship?* 2.) *What do street-involved youth see as being important sources of difference in friendships?* (e.g. gender, age and street knowledge among other things); 3.) *What do street-youth see as being the important aspects of friendship?* (e.g. companionship, assistance/protection, access to resources).

5.1.1 Question 1: How Do Street Involved Youth Conceptualize, Classify, Talk About and Enact Friendship?

This research question was largely addressed in the third chapter of my thesis, which outlined ways that youth categorized and classified friendships. These classifications reflected important distinctions of meaning for street involved youth. Youth largely

classified friendships by the location at which friends were met or regularly experienced (i.e. street family, street friends, friends from high school, work friends, friends from a certain city or province). Street family and street friends were identified as the most important friendships in youth's lives due to the role that they played in the health, well-being and enjoyment of youth on a day-to-day basis. Youth defined these friendships as "close", "strong", "comfortable" and as "family" (ex. "brother", "sister", "mother", "street family", "street parents" etc.). Youth also further categorized friends, potential friends or ex-friends in specific ways (for example, street family, friends-of-friends and fake friends.)

Understanding the fundamental way that street involved youth categorized their friendships allows an understanding of what is important to youth in their lives. Street involved youth friendships mirror youth's daily experiences of street involvement. The strong metaphors youth use when distinguishing their closest friendships speaks to the emotional and physical importance of these friendships. Stronger metaphors, for example Jen comparing friends to a 'home,' show an even deeper meaning of friendship for street involved youth. For friendships to be "like your home," in a population that is largely excluded from personal property and adequate housing is perhaps the best indicator of the powerful window that friendship offers into a person's lived experience and worldview.

5.1.2 What Do Street Involved Youth See as Being The Important Sources of Difference in Friendship?

Youth distinguished between their friendships in a number of ways. One dominant identifier was gender, which both served to distinguish specific friendships (guy friends

or girl friends) and also to identify a type of friendship that was understood to have the potential to become problematic (because of its perceived tendency to intimacy—a view that also exists in a wider Canadian context and which meant these relationships must be carefully managed in strategic ways by youth). This was where youth really exhibited their agency. Youth expertly managed many different types of friendships in proactive, versatile and nuanced ways.

Youth also spoke about how memories could often serve as a foundation point for friendship, an identifiable shared moment that friendship could progress from. Sharing experiences and having similar histories (such as street involvement) were highlighted as being important to feeling comfortable and understood by friends. Often these friendships progressed as more and more memories were experienced and shared by youth. Most importantly, friendship (especially “close” friendship) opened up the opportunity for youth to be themselves, becoming visible on their own terms while experiencing positive and meaningful emotional connections with their friends. This stood in stark contrast to the way that street involved youth often become visible in public spaces as being out of place on the street, as existing outside of adult control, as being delinquent or problematic. In friendship, youth had a measure of control over *how* they would be made visible, in a way that was not available to them in their everyday lives. Youth’s most cherished friendships were distinguished from other friendships (such as friends-of-friends) by their closeness, strength, comfort and, in some cases, longevity.

5.1.3 What Do Street Involved Youth See As Being The Important Aspects of Friendship?

Youth identified a number of important aspects in their friendships. Echoing the descriptions of protection, support, companionship, romance, resources and nurturing found among street youth and street child populations in other research (see Karabanow 2004; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010; Margaretten 2011; Finklestein 2005), the youth I interviewed talked about their friendships as important sources of help. In fact, friendships were so important that youth found it difficult to imagine surviving on the street without friends.

Youth also outlined the concept of an idealized friend, suggesting the desired traits that a potential or proper friend should possess (such as honesty, trust, acceptance and non-judgement). The idealized friend was someone who exhibited characteristics that assured youth they would not be the victims of deception or harm. The idealized friend did not engage in drama or harming others but instead allowed a youth comfort, safety, help, visibility and the opportunity to be themselves.

5.2 Additional Findings

In addition to the stated research questions for this thesis, I had two additional goals I wished to address over the course of my research. The first was to suggest how friendship may be studied and understood in anthropology by laying some rudimentary groundwork for an “anthropology of friendship.” I believe that I have accomplished this by identifying a way that friendship may be studied and moved from the banal to the visible. Identifying how friendship ‘works’ for a specific population; how it is talked about, experienced and understood, both by its participants and by outsiders, works to

bring what has traditionally been an obscured and understudied relationship into focus. Once friendship becomes visible, so too does friendship's importance and friendship's essential role in the lives of its participants. From this realization, it becomes clear that friendship is empowering, and conversely it may also be a relationship that those in power look to coopt, control or stigmatize. In addition, I have shown the incredible complexity of friendship and suggested that it is intimately tied to the participants who agentively and expertly construct and negotiate it. These intimate ties between the participant of a friendship and the form and structure of friendship that results, stresses the importance for researchers to study friendship *in situ* and the indispensable value of including emic perspectives.

My second goal was to identify aspects of street involved youth friendships that may be missed or obfuscated by views that have largely been dominated by developmentalist and neoliberal ideology. While dominant discourses surrounding youth as incomplete adults (see Bucholtz 2002; Lesko 1996) and street youth's inclination to deviance (see Karabanow 2004; Kovats-Bernat 2006; Beazley 2002; Beazley 2003; Finkelstein 2005) had been deconstructed and critiqued, street involved youth friendships had yet to receive similar treatment. At a time when street involved friendships are increasingly being targeted as problematic and deviant relationships in need of policing (see Gaetz and O'Grady 2013; O'Grady *et al* 2013; Karabanow *et al.* 2010), it is more important than ever to seek out youth experiences and understanding of such important (and targeted) relationships. Through the interviews I conducted, it became clear that friendships were integral to youth's daily concerns and that youth spent substantial time and energy on these relationships. The insights that youth gave about their friendships allowed a critical

re-assessment of developmentalist discourses about youth, youth agency and youth friendships. Such discourses were shown to be far too restrictive, privileging and valorizing adult-type relationships while largely ignoring youth strategies, expertise and experience of their friendships. Likewise, youth's accounts of their friendships stressed the important role friendship plays in ensuring street involved youth's health and well-being (physiologically, emotionally and mentally).

5.3 Towards an Anthropology of Friendship

To close this chapter, I would like to explore ways that anthropology may continue to build upon the rudimentary groundwork I have presented in this thesis, as I suggest some potential directions that would be of interest to an “anthropology of friendship.” My work for this thesis focused on the positive sociality of friendship among street involved youth (a marginalized and strongly stigmatized social group) in Victoria, Canada. Future work could build on (and contextualize) what I have presented here by focusing on friendships in different locations, among different social groups and among different social classes. The last suggestion here is of particular interest to me, as it opens up considerations of how friendships are practiced under different levels of poverty and affluence—what do friendships offer and how are they practiced under these very different circumstances? Do different levels of affluence produce different expectations or obligations? Can friendships exist across unequal power relationships, or does it require participants to somehow ignore or subvert disparities of power in some way?

A good departure point for the study of friendship may entail a look at how street involved youth friendships are understood and practiced in different cities and nation-states; comparing such friendships to the friendships that I studied in Victoria. Perhaps a

look at how friendships work among older street involved populations. How does friendship work in areas in the world where states may be more hostile or disengaged from the study population; a question that has been explored in part by Margaretten (2011), Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2010), and Kovats-Bernat (2006). Would extreme situations such as natural disasters, warfare, particularly destructive political regimes etc. change the practice, obligations or form that friendship takes (and if so, in what ways)? Is there a situation in which friendships may become too difficult to engage in or maintain? For example, in her study of male youth friendships in an inner-city high school in the U.S., Way (1997:715) found that during their high school years, teenage males became increasingly distrustful and distanced themselves from their male peers; many giving up male friends all together. Way considers a number of explanations for this and comes to the conclusion that her own sample may not be representative of other high school male youth and is likely a product of prejudice, racism, structural harm and rampant homophobia that her sample experienced (Way 1997:717). Way's conclusion underscores the importance of paying careful attention to the particular context in which friendship is constructed, showing that social dislocation may serve to cause great difficulty in constructing a viable model of friendship. Despite this difficulty, Way (1997:703) showed that many of the male youth she talked with yearned for close male friendships which could exist outside of the fear of betrayal, theft, distrust and violence that they harboured.

During her work in Andalusia, Sarah Uhl challenged the assumption that women kept no non-kin friendships but were "prohibited from forming non-kin ties because of moral restrictions on 'place' and because of the constrictions of ties to the domestic group after

marriage” (1991:90). Contrary to this assumption, Uhl found that Escalenses women did indeed have friendships (often with neighbouring women). She concludes that:

Adult female friendship stands Janus-faced: on the one hand, it is taken for granted; on the other, it is concealed and disguised—incompletely reified, but no longer fully perceived by the consciousness that has created it. [Uhl 1991:101]

Uhl’s work suggests another avenue of inquiry: are there other instances in which those who are supposedly excluded from friendships work to escape such exclusion? How, and why, may friendship be obfuscated? or how and why may people be perceived to be excluded from friendships? Are there situations in which those in positions of power may try to coopt or control friendships—O’Grady, Gaetz and Buccieri (2013) have definitely hinted at such an attempt in Toronto—in order to exclude certain populations from friendships?

In my thesis, I have started to outline how neoliberal processes are often deployed to control or discredit friendships and, in contrast, how friendship can act to resist neoliberal processes. This, I believe, is something that could benefit from a theorization that fully explored the interplay between these two forces. My research suggests that friendships may work more in line with communal systems of exchange (as gift economies: see Mauss 2011; Graeber 2004), rather than as a neoliberal debt relationship between creditor and debtor (Lazzaratto 2012). Perhaps friendship (or at least street involved youth’s friendships) can be understood as a form of counterpower against dominant forms of relationships sanctioned and promoted by neoliberal states. This would definitely explain the high levels of anxiety apparent in neoliberal policies focused on discrediting,

controlling and policing the friendships of street involved youth. David Graeber has suggested:

That counterpower, at least in the most elementary sense, actually exists where the states and markets are not even present; that in such cases, rather than being embodied in popular institutions which pose themselves against the power of lords, or kings, or plutocrats, they are embodied in institutions which ensure such types of person never come about. [Graeber 2004]

While I do not suggest that street involved youth relationships are devoid of politically motivated power struggles, I do contend that certain aspects of the idealized friend (avoiding youth who cause drama, avoiding gossip etc.) suggests that friendship could act to enforce ideas of equality.

Finally I would suggest that cyber friendship is an integral and important area of study that would benefit from an anthropology of friendship. Sites that focus on friendships and peer-networking (like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and previously sites such as Friendster, MySpace etc.) have become among the most successful websites on the Internet. The incredible proliferations of online video games and massive multiplayer online gaming environments suggests virtual forms of friendship complete with their own obligations, rules and norms. Several of the youths that I worked with told me they were in contact with friends who lived across the country on an almost daily basis, something that would not have been possible in the same way before the rise in social-networking. An anthropology of friendship could offer new ways of looking at such cyber relationships and the phenomenon of how the internet makes it possible for friendships to flow across borders in order to build real and specific types of friendships (globalized friendships?)

To conclude: friendship has been sorely under-theorized in anthropology. While at times it has been identified as requiring anthropological attention (see Desai, Amit and Killick 2010) there is still much work to be done in order to bring about an anthropology of friendship. My findings, based on the interviews with eleven street involved youth, show that far from being relationships that promoting deviancy, youth's accounts identified friendships as being important relationships that offered mutual and meaningful existences, help, health and well-being. Friendships acted as a response to—and at times an escape from—the daily pressures of poverty and street life in Victoria.

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Appendix A: Friendship Interview Questions

I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me. I am particularly interested in understanding how youth build, experience and maintain the relationships in the context of street life. Today I would like to start by learning a little more about you and then hear your ideas and experiences of friendship. Don't hesitate to tell me if my question is not clear or if you want to know why I am asking this question. As I mentioned before [during review of the consent form], you should tell me only what you feel comfortable talking about and you can decide to not answer a question. Before I start, is there anything you'd like to ask me?

1. I know you've already been interviewed by Lisa, so I'll ask just a few introductory questions. What is your current housing situation? How are you supporting yourself? Have there been any changes in your life since your last interview?
2. Take me through an average day in your life. How would a regular day generally play out?
3. Is there a person or group of people that you are spending a lot of time with these days? Is it your choice to spend this time with them?
4. Are there other people that you are spending time with? How would you describe your relationship with these people?
5. Are there some people that you hang out with that you do not consider 'friends'?
6. What do you think makes someone a friend? What do you think is the most important part of friendship?
7. Are all of your friends also spending a lot of time on the street? Do you have friends who are not involved with street life?
8. What are some of the things you like to do with your friends? Can you give me an example of a time you had a great day with your friends?
9. Is there someone that you would describe as your "best friend" or "closest friend"? Can you tell me a bit about how you came to know this person? How would you describe this relationship? Why do you think this relationship is especially close?
10. Are your friendships with women different from your friendships with men?
11. Do you consider yourself a good friend to others? What makes you a good friend to others?
12. Do you find it relatively easy or hard to make new friends? Why is that?
13. Have you had a friendship end on bad terms? Why do you think this happened?
14. Do your friendships make your life easier? Can you give me an example? Follow up questions:

- a. Do you and your friends look out for each other? What are some of the ways this happens? Can you tell me about a time when you and your friends looked out for each other?
 - b. Do your friendships help you stay safe? Say, if you are partying or getting high?
 - c. Have they helped you when you are sick?
 - d. Has there been a time where a friend tipped you off about trouble so that you could avoid it?
 - e. How do your friends support you when you are having a bad day?
 - f. What sorts of things do you do to help out your friends?
15. Have you ever had friendships that cause problems in your life? Can you think of an example? Follow up questions:
- a. Have you ever been pulled into a disagreement or a fight because of a friendship?
 - b. Have you had to share something when you couldn't afford to?
 - c. Have you had to back up a friend when you knew they were wrong?
 - d. Have you ever been treated badly or hassled by anyone because of a friend or group of friends you are with?
 - e. Have you ever had to choose between friends?
16. Does being without a good place to live put stress or strain on your friendships? For example, have you had to couch surf at a friend's place?
17. What do you think it would be like to be on the street without friends?
18. Do you ever act friendly around people you do not necessarily like? Why?
19. Do you have any friends that make you feel like you have to change or be careful about what you say? Can you tell me about that? Do you feel like you can "be yourself" around your friends? What does it mean to "be yourself"?

Thank you.
Honourarium and receipt.