

Constructing an Urban Drug Ecology in 1970s Canada

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Article abstract

In 1970, youthful researchers carried out participant-observer studies of the drug scene in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. This ethnographic research, prepared for the federal Commission of Inquiry into the Non-Medical Use of Drugs (the LeDain Commission), was part of the commission's extensive series of unpublished studies. The commission, which released an initial report in 1970, one on cannabis in 1972 and a final report in 1973, adopted a broad approach to the issue of drugs and society. This article examines the unpublished studies as examples of social science "intelligence gathering" on urban social problems. The reports discussed the local market in illegal drugs, its geographic patterns and organizational features, the demographic characteristics of drug sellers and consumers, the culture of the drug scene, and the attitudes of users. Unlike earlier sociological and anthropological studies that focused on prisoners and lower-class "junkies" or more recent studies that examine marginalized inner-city populations, the city studies reflected the era's fixation on middle-class youth culture and the addiction-treatment sphere's growing concern with amphetamine abuse.

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In 1970, youthful researchers carried out participant-observer studies of the drug scene in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. This ethnographic research, prepared for the federal Commission of Inquiry into the Non-Medical Use of Drugs (the LeDain Commission), was part of the commission's extensive series of unpublished studies. The commission, which released an initial report in 1970, one on cannabis in 1972 and a final report in 1973, adopted a broad approach to the issue of drugs and society. This article examines the unpublished studies as examples of social science "intelligence gathering" on urban social problems. The reports discussed the local market in illegal drugs, its geographic patterns and organizational features, the demographic characteristics of drug sellers and consumers, the culture of the drug scene, and the attitudes of users. Unlike earlier sociological and anthropological studies that focused on prisoners and lower-class "junkies" or more recent studies that examine marginalized inner-city populations, the city studies reflected the era's fixation on middle-class youth culture and the addiction-treatment sphere's growing concern with amphetamine abuse.

En 1970, de jeunes chercheurs ont effectué des recherches basées sur des participants observateurs dans les milieux de la drogue à Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal et Halifax. Ces recherches ethnographiques, effectuées pour le compte de la Commission fédérale d'enquête sur la consommation non médicale de drogues (Commission LeDain), faisaient partie d'un vaste programme de recherche non publiée. La commission, qui a déposé un rapport préliminaire en 1970, un rapport sur le cannabis en 1972 et un rapport final en 1973, a adopté une approche globale de la question des drogues et de la société. Cet article examine ces études non publiées en tant qu'exemple d'une collecte de renseignements relevant des sciences sociales au sujet de problèmes sociaux urbains. Les rapports traitaient du marché local des drogues illégales, de sa répartition géographique, de ses aspects organisationnels, des caractéristiques démographiques des vendeurs et des acheteurs de drogues de la culture du milieu de la drogue, et du comportement des consommateurs de drogues. Contrairement aux études plus anciennes qui ont adopté une approche sociologique et anthropologique des prisonniers et des « junkies » des classes défavorisées, ou à celles plus récentes qui ont étudié les populations marginales

des villes, ces études reflètent l'intérêt de cette période pour la culture de la jeunesse des classes moyennes et pour la préoccupation croissante des milieux du traitement des dépendances pour l'usage des amphétamines.

The gathering of cultural and geographic knowledge by the state to address social problems such as urban blight or rural underdevelopment was an established practice in the exercise of state power by the twentieth century and had parallels in the exercise of colonialism.¹ It also characterized North America's response to illegal drugs in the 1960s and 1970s.² In previous decades, police drug or morality squads had focused on the socially marginal: Chinese opium smokers and lower-class, inner-city "junkies" who used heroin.³ By the late 1960s the criminal justice and medical systems faced an unprecedented social, legal, and political challenge: most people arrested for illegal possession of hallucinogens were young and from middle-class backgrounds, and most had no prior criminal records. Furthermore, they regarded their deviancy not as a crime, but as a form of protest against a hypocritical, dehumanizing society, and they were not lacking in sympathy from the broader public. In short, the past experience of narcotics, based on the criminalization of "deviants," did not seem to apply to modern hallucinogen use. As argued by drug researcher Mel Green in 1971, drug deviance had become a social movement.⁴

This article examines an aspect of Canada's Royal Commission on the Non-Medical Use of Drugs (known as the LeDain Commission), specifically a series of participation-observation studies carried out on "committed drug users" in five major cities beginning in 1970. It contributes to the growing literature on how experts, politicians, and the media in 1960s and 1970s Canada conceived of "drug problems" and broadens to discussion beyond heroin and cannabis.⁵ The year 1970 was significant because the number of drug offence convictions in Canada, 8,500, represented nearly a tenfold increase since 1967. The body of evidence collected by the LeDain Commission allows historians to explore the objective realities of the urban psychotropic drug scene and the subjective representation of the scene by social science experts. The studies, although fairly extensive, were cited only briefly in the published reports of the commission and for this reason have been

overlooked. Much of the public reaction to the work and reports of the commission focused on cannabis, but the city studies attempted to develop a broader portrait of non-medical drug use. They were supplemented by specialized studies on various drug populations, such as users of amphetamines, hallucinogens, and solvents. A recurring focus of commission inquiry was an apparently new, quickly growing, and alien subculture: middle-class youth who lived or congregated in specific urban neighbourhoods and who expressed their identity by smoking cannabis and/or ingesting LSD as part of the so-called street scene.⁶

Assembling Drug Knowledge

In addition to an intense media and political debate, the issue of the non-medical use of drugs generated discussion within criminal justice, medical, and academic circles. Canada was affected by American drug research, such as surveys on marijuana use by high school and college students. The National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse (NCMDA) created in 1971, released *Marijuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding* in 1972. Deviating from the general aims of the war on drugs, the report urged tolerance and a less coercive response to illicit drug use.⁷ In 1971 the NCMDA concluded the first national survey on illegal drug use, focusing on marijuana. A follow-up study in 1971 identified marijuana as the most prevalent illegal drug, and alcohol as the most heavily used psychotropic drug among young adults. Only a small minority admitted to having tried cocaine, heroin, or hallucinogens. The NCMDA helped institutionalize survey research on drug use, most importantly a national survey on “drug abuse” that began in 1974 and was based on a random sample of America households. Although the study was not longitudinal, it did indicate that young adults were the heaviest users of all drugs and that usage for alcohol and cocaine peaked in the late 1970s.⁸

Research on attitudes towards and use of illegal drugs in 1960s and 1970s Canada was a smaller part of a larger expert, media, and societal interest in youthful “alienation.”⁹ The concerns raised in expert studies had been prompted by more than twenty years of media stories about juvenile delinquency. Drug addiction was one part of the complex construction of juvenile delinquency as a social problem in post-1945 Toronto, and the media, more than expert opinion, played the key role.¹⁰ In the 1960s social scientists and community organizations were enlisted to study and respond to the “generation gap,” the change in values between baby boomers who were in their teens and early twenties, and their parents. In 1966 Ontario Minister of Education Bill Davis established the Interim Project on Unreached Youth (IPUY) to study why so many youth were rejecting mainstream society and its institutions. The population studied included upper-middle-class residents of North Toronto, lower-middle-class residents of southeast Toronto, Toronto youth in provincial training schools and reformatories, and youth habituating Toronto’s Yorkville district. In contrast with previous studies of social pathology that stressed the vulnerability of the poor and working class, the IPUY report *Alienation, Deviance*

and Social Control explained that degrees of alienation increased with social class. Unlike earlier manifestations of deviance, alienation and intergenerational rebellion was a product not of deprivation, but affluence.¹¹

In contrast with earlier media reactions to juvenile delinquency, much of the discussion of the generation gap, at least on the liberal end of the spectrum, blamed not youth but parents, educators, the media, and society in general for sustaining the conditions that were causing a supposedly unprecedented level of intergenerational conflict.¹² Cloaked in the language of 1960s liberalism, the IPUY report suggested solutions familiar to students of the therapeutic state: recreation programs, individual and family counselling, halfway houses for youth in trouble with the law, and multi-problem services. The report distinguished between the more traditionally deviant youth (measured by sentences to youth facilities) and hippies associated with Toronto’s Yorkville district, noting that the latter were more alienated than the former from their families. The generation gap, in other words, was largely a middle-class phenomenon. Few of the hippies associated in the public mind with Yorkville had ever been charged by the police and as such constituted a new type of deviant.¹³ In the analysis of another academic, “The motivations for the use of marijuana are not distinctly different from the motivations for the adoption of bell bottom trousers.” In other words, generational conflict, not class conflict, was driving spread of illicit drug use.¹⁴

During the 1960s, North American anthropologists and sociologists, like researchers in other disciplines, expanded their field work into the city. Although more scientific and objective and less sensationalistic and judgmental than the press accounts analyzed by Karibo, the work of social scientists had the potential to be used to control deviant populations or subcultures. One of their most common research methodologies, rooted in anthropology, was participation-observation. In the United States, urban ethnographic research developed out of the Chicago school of sociology in the 1930s and influenced academic culture with publications such as Whyte’s *Street Corner Society*.¹⁵

Ontario, because of the size of its population and the existence of the Addiction Research Foundation (ARF), a provincial agency dedicated to researching and treating drug and alcohol problems, was the site of much of Canada’s drug research. One of the earliest attempts by a participant-observer to infiltrate a deviant community in Canada was carried out by the ARF in 1967 and 1968 by anthropologist Gopala Alampur. The research report, *The Yorkville Subculture: A Study of the Lifestyles and Interaction of Hippies and Non-Hippies*, appeared in 1969.¹⁶ By this time, hippies, at least according to media reports, had become a major public order and morality concern for municipal officials across the nation. Many residents of Ottawa, for example, were shocked when hippies began to congregate on Parliament Hill in 1968, smoking marijuana. The police, fearing that the national capital could become a “hippie haven,” responded with arrests. The response of the ARF to the “hippie

problem” was less judgmental, as evident in one of its studies of marijuana use that downplayed its pharmacological effects but stressed the individual and social harm wrought by criminal justice sanctions against youth and young adults.¹⁷

The ethnographic study of Yorkville began by describing the groups and subgroups, including their estimated population size, and seems to have been influenced by the emerging American literature. Alampur initiated his research by renting a “pad” in the Yorkville area. The standard approach of sociological participation-observation was to gain the trust of research subjects, to be “straightforward, honest and cooperative,” and to “both penetrate the scene and to understand it.”¹⁸ Alampur’s place of birth (India), his appearance (beard, hippie clothes, and beads) and knowledge of Eastern religions at a time when North American hippies were fascinated with non-European, non-Christian beliefs helped earn the trust of his research subjects. Additionally, the anthropologist had an apartment in the area where youth could socialize. From this base he attempted to catalogue the “membership patterns, ideologies and attitudes” of three populations: hippies, greasers, and bikers. Interacting with these three reasonably discrete groups were “weekenders”: suburban youth who visited Yorkville seeking drugs, sexual partners, and the general experience. The researcher used a tape recorder and a diary to record conversation in his apartment as well as interviews with social workers, doctors, police officers, and other authority figures / members of the helping professions.¹⁹ The ARF study echoed American studies, such as an investigation of youthful drug users in San Francisco’s Haight Ashbury district. Research there differentiated between middle-class “heads” who consumed LSD, and poor, working-class “freaks” who favoured amphetamines. The former tended to be from stable, middle-class families, and many were either college students or employed in legitimate if low-paying occupations such as artist, craft-worker, clerk, or writer. “Speed freaks,” on the other hand, were poor, transient, and living a quasi-criminal lifestyle.²⁰ By the early 1970s, there was evidence that marijuana use had spread beyond the counterculture. The sociologist Yablonsky, for example, wrote of “Clark Kent hippies,” straight-looking students, and young professionals who consumed psychedelic drugs in private and interacted with, or were inspired by, “real” hippies.²¹

Canada Confronts the Drug Problem

The LeDain Commission was one of the most ambitious social science and medical investigations of Canadian society in the postwar era. It paralleled research that was already being carried out at the provincial level by organizations such as the ARF. Appointed in May 1969, it issued an interim report in 1970, reports on treatment and cannabis in 1972, and a final report in 1973. As Marcel Martel details in *“Not This Time,”* the commission arose from the determination of Health and Welfare Minister John Munro, backed by Prime Minister Trudeau, to gather medical evidence on the recreational use of drugs—legal and illegal. Political momentum had gathered as a result of sensationalist media accounts of LSD use by youth, and more

ambivalent public opinion surrounding cannabis use.²² The commission conducted hearings in several cities across Canada and attempted to reach youth by holding meetings on more than twenty university campuses. It heard oral testimony and accepted 400 formal briefs from police, criminologists, religious bodies, law professors, physicians, psychologists, public health officials, street-level social agencies, and drug users, among others. The LeDain Commission not only held private meetings with various officials and experts in the legal and medical spheres, it also was updated on basic social science research theories, such as the structural-functionalist school of sociology. It authorized surveys of the attitudes and sentencing practices of more than one hundred magistrates and interviews with “straight” middle-class drug users.²³ In order to protect people who cooperated with the commission, such as the adults who were paid to keep a log of their drug use, the commission was granted legal immunity. Most academics and experts from within the “helping professions” who responded to the commission held fairly liberal beliefs, as evident at the hearings at Montreal in 1969. Participants at Montreal advocated liberalization or even abolition of Canada’s laws against marijuana use. J. Robertson Irwin, a psychiatrist who had also written the detailed brief of the Canadian Medical Association, warned that marijuana was a symbol of the larger problem of youth alienation. Many participants who worked with youth, such as Protestant church organizations, urged more emphasis on education and awareness and less on legal sanctions.²⁴

On one level the LeDain Commission records are a time capsule reflecting familiar 1960s popular culture, complete with references to Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman, Tom Wolfe, Frank Zappa, beatnik poetry, and gestalt therapy. But the commission also mounted an ambitious research program, employing or collaborating with researchers and tapping into the growing research capabilities of Canadian universities. As of March 1971 ninety projects had been commissioned or completed. Scientific studies included chemical analysis of street drugs seized by the police. The commission also consulted with leading international experts in the field of non-medical drug use. These included academics such as American sociologist Howard Becker, author of *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, an early “labelling” study.²⁵ Becker took part in one of three major symposia dedicated to causes and context, treatment and law. Another participant was Richard Quinney, one of the founders of critical criminology. The research program also included participation-observation studies of the drug scene in Amsterdam, the amphetamine scene in Toronto, drug use in Canadian correctional institutions, and police drug squads in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal.²⁶

LeDain Commission researcher David McLachlen’s 1971 report on the social characteristics of cannabis users included an extended discussion of “the university scene.” Citing both American and the smaller body of Canadian evidence, the report claimed that students in the humanities and social sciences had the highest rates of cannabis use, eclipsed only by medical

students. Studies reported estimated gender ratios in terms of cannabis use. Whites reported a higher rate than “our Black or Brown brothers,” and smokers were more likely than non-smokers to experiment with or use cannabis. Cannabis users were more sexually liberated and tolerant towards homosexuality (one study reported that “52% of non-users were virgins”). Levels of use rose with the socio-economic background of the student. Jewish students, although more likely to be users, and “chronic” users, were more likely to hold onto their religious beliefs than the typical student cannabis smoker. According to one data source, moderate users were supposedly more likely than occasional users, heavy users, or non-users to maintain a B average. Regional patterns were also reported, with students in British Columbia and Ontario reporting the highest rates of cannabis use, and Quebec the lowest. Community size had a positive correlation with frequency of use. Cannabis smokers also were “more liberal and politically active,” with supporters of the radical left leading the pack. Participants in demonstrations were more likely to smoke pot than non-participants, as were those who attended rallies and teach-ins. One study reported that users were more likely to read the underground press.²⁷

Identifying the Street Scene

The main rationale for participant-observation research on urban drug-use populations was that, unlike prison inmates, suburban families, or university students, they were transient, mobile, and involved in fluid social networks. Many were suburban teenagers who lived with their parents but were unable or unwilling to seek out and use cannabis in their own neighbourhoods.²⁸ In the street scene, married couples, or even “steady” couples, were almost unheard of: researchers noted an emphasis on “short-term liaisons” and that children were “never wanted.”²⁹ Random surveys, such as those conducted on household residents or high school students, were not feasible in these circumstances. Survey research by the LeDain Commission estimated that between 1.3 and 1.5 million Canadians had used cannabis by the spring of 1970 and that the rate among college and university students was 17–18 per cent. A random sample of 1,200 Toronto adults in 1971 indicated that 8.4 per cent had used cannabis in the past year. The patterns were skewed by age: persons between eighteen and twenty-five reported a rate of 30 per cent, while the twenty-five to thirty-five age bracket reported only 10 per cent.³⁰ ARF studies indicated that the rate of self-reported cannabis use among Toronto high school students tripled between 1968 and 1972 to 20.9 per cent. By 1972, in contrast to 1968, there was evidence that cannabis use was spreading from middle-class youth to the working class and from urban to rural Canada. Most smokers of marijuana or hashish, LeDain researchers reported, were moderate users, and most were white males. The ARF Yorkville study had claimed that “drug use is a necessary condition to being a hippie,” but by the early 1970s cannabis habits were spreading beyond the visible counterculture communities.³¹

To study the new drug use, researchers had to find the natural habitat of youth. Urban centres were large and cosmopolitan,

and they permitted the growth of different lifestyles, often in specific neighbourhoods, such as the famous Telegraph Hill of Berkeley, California. Public awareness of “hippie geography” grew from media accounts as well as more academic treatments such as Louis Yablonky’s *The Hippie Trip* (1968). Parks, malls, public squares, beaches, taverns, all-night restaurants, coffee houses, and streets were the natural hang-outs of the young. Ottawa’s scene, for example, was in the shadow of the Parliament buildings, near the National Arts Centre, and in a nearby shopping mall. Street scene populations were constantly in flux and included youth as young as thirteen in the summer and adults as old as thirty-five. In the winter the “scene” moved indoors to taverns and coffee houses. The typical age range was eighteen to twenty-four, and among the non-biker, non-greaser population, males tended to outnumber females by two to one. Late 1960s research revealed that most Canadian hippies were “voluntarily, if temporarily impoverished,” as they came from middle-class homes, and most had at least a high school education.³² Few of them were “cannabis naive” when they left their parental homes. According to Mel Green, most street scene people used marijuana or hashish daily and lived in poor conditions in rented rooms, apartments, or cheap motels. Others temporarily “crashed” with friends, and some slept outdoors in the warmer months. They supported themselves through menial jobs such as dishwashing or through welfare, handouts, begging, small-scale drug trafficking, or prostitution. Many professed to make these sacrifices out of principle, but according to Green, “hippie virtuousness” alone could not make the rough life of the street scene totally palatable. Easing the burden were new services: free clinics, hostels, drop-in centres, and alternative newspapers.³³

A research design report from 1970 stressed that the mandate of the commission required qualitative inquiry into “committed users and urban subcultures.” The approach would be a modified version of classic participant-observation, as conditions of employment mandated that no fieldworkers (FWs) could use any illicit drugs. This would make “field entry” difficult but protect “the credibility of the Commission.”³⁴ Commission researchers ran a pilot project in Ottawa, then provided a training session in the same city for all fieldworkers. Fieldwork involving thirteen participant-observers was to cover Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax in the summer of 1970, a time of year when the visible drug-using population peaked. The cities were chosen so that the research would be regionally representative. The primary concern would be with intravenous users of amphetamines and secondly heroin. Observations on users of other drugs would be recorded but not deliberately sought out. Specific objectives included gathering descriptive information on the setting of drug use, as well as users’ knowledge and beliefs, their socio-economic background, their relations with police, medical, and treatment organizations, and the distribution networks of illicit drugs.³⁵

Specific instructions to the fieldworkers explained how to record information, taking care never to carry notes into the field. They

were to record the name, age, address, and telephone numbers of informants, as well as drugs used or sold, and any "syndicate connections." Keywords and a coding scheme were to help remember conversations, and detailed field notes were to be sent to the commission's Ottawa office regularly for transcription. In certain situations individuals could be interviewed with the aid of a tape recorder.³⁶ The FWs were supposed to have some training in the social sciences, "some familiarity with the drug scene," and no recent employment with "youth-oriented social agencies." In case of problems with the police, each worker was given the contact information for a lawyer who had been retained in each city. The lawyers had been sent bail money in advance. The FWs, who were also given "sensitivity training," were advised to enter the field by making contacts at local youth drop-in centres.³⁷ FWs were required to work late at night and risked investigation by police as well as suspicion and reprisals from suspicious drug users and dealers. As non-drug users who had infiltrated the scene, they were potential targets. One Montreal observer, for example, was ejected from Saint Louis Square because he was a suspected "narc." Summaries of initial reports, which were fairly descriptive, were to be submitted by late 1970. The plan was to add analysis, as well as "conceptual or theoretical frameworks" to the final ethnographic reports.³⁸

A paper co-written by LeDain Commission research director R.D. Miller in 1973 suggested that Canada's urban populations were becoming more tolerant of behaviours such as cannabis use, a sign of the drug's growing "de facto legitimacy." Universities and other institutions were either ignoring or only symbolically responding to illegal drug use, and the courts were resorting to less punitive sanctions against offenders. Clubs, taverns, and other spots in cities such as Montreal and Toronto had emerged as "liberated" territories in the fight for social acceptance.³⁹ As society became more aware of the scale of non-medical drug use, the authors argued, the distinctions between legal and illegal use and users had lessened, especially as alcohol and tobacco were being redefined as harmful drugs. Canada supposedly had fifteen thousand daily users of heroin, two to three thousand regular injectors of amphetamines, several hundred thousand who regularly ingested amphetamines and sedatives orally, an equal number of hallucinogen users, and one hundred thousand adolescents who resorted to volatile solvents such as glue.⁴⁰

In terms of the street scene, sociologists, anthropologists, criminologists, and other researchers often differentiated between cannabis users and others. Hippies, most commonly identified as preferring cannabis, were assumed to be "intelligent," middle class, often college educated, and interested in mysticism, astrology, and Asian religions. They attached prestige to knowledge of philosophy and psychology, they were highly social, and many had a missionary desire to spread the counterculture to "straight" society. Greasers and members of motorcycle clubs (bikers), on the other hand, were less educated, came from working-class backgrounds, and were more likely to engage

in non-drug-related crime.⁴¹ Socio-economic differences were also reported by criminal justice officials interviewed by commission staff. One judge was of the view that "simple possession" offenders "all came from a good home, parents had a good income, they were united, loving parents ... this is quite different than the traditional ... thief in the past. Now there is a great deal of sympathy aroused for those appearing in front of the courts." The judge added that persons charged with simple possession of marijuana and LSD "all have long hair."⁴² Despite an ongoing concern with cannabis, many of the city studies focused on, or gave special emphasis to, the injection of amphetamines. At this time, the possession of speed and of needles and syringes for its injection was not illegal in Canada. As Stuart Henderson explains, in Toronto by the late 1960s speed had replaced LSD as the newest drug threat targeting vulnerable youth, and "speed freaks" were viewed as a distinct and tragic subculture within the larger drug-using community.⁴³ The research was also carried out as LSD was losing its romanticized, positive image as a psychedelic drug.⁴⁴

Halifax

Reactions to drug problems in Canada's Maritime provinces tended to be more conservative than elsewhere in Canada. Nova Scotia doctors, for example, challenged the more liberal elements within the Canadian Medical Association who urged the decriminalization of soft drugs.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Halifax contained a large middle-class and student population and had developed a reputation as an important centre for popular music. According to the LeDain Commission's city study, Halifax's street drug scene centred on Victoria Park, located near the central business district between the historic Public Gardens and Citadel Hill. It was also within walking distance of Dalhousie University and two downtown high schools. The city was in a region of Canada where, according to the LeDain Commission, hashish was more prominent than marijuana. One sign of the emerging presence of drugs was the establishment of a Digger House in the summer of 1969. Initially the Diggers, whose services included a medical clinic, assisted persons with drug problems but later switched to looking after transients.⁴⁶

According to field worker Howie Bloomfield, the Halifax scene in the summer of 1970 consisted of multi-drug users, speed users and heroin users. No contact was made with the heroin users, prompting Bloomfield to question if there was an appreciable scene. A second FW contributed a stand-alone report on amphetamine use. The use of speed, which had first appeared in Halifax in 1967, supposedly peaked in 1969–1970, with up to 1,500 users. The Halifax field reports stressed the link between the growth of local rock music and the drug market: "The older drug users turned on the younger musicians and the younger musicians turned on their younger fans."⁴⁷ Bloomfield offered a "Pied Piper" theory of the origins of illicit drugs in Halifax, crediting a "heroin-addicted folk singer" who introduced the injection of methedrine (an amphetamine derivative) in 1967. According to the more detailed Halifax participation-observation report, the Australian also sold hashish and opened Halifax's first

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“psychedelic emporium.” The club where the singer performed became a meeting place for the new drug users, who included not only university students but also young teachers and working people, “who spent most of their time playing and listening to music, discovering their environment, and talking about how stoned they were.”⁴⁸

The younger street “speeders” who congregated in Halifax’s Victoria Park and near the Lord Nelson Hotel were mainly male high school and university students from middle-class families. Their chief motivations were boredom and peer-group pressure, not philosophical or psychological factors. Speed was more commonly used because it was more available than cannabis or hallucinogens. It was consumed in public washrooms, parks such as Point Pleasant Park, parked vehicles, and rooms in speed houses. Older speeders (twenty-four to twenty-eight years old) supposedly identified with novelist “William Burroughs’ portrayal of the ‘junkie’ subculture.” They were poor and unemployed and obtained money through dealing, theft, and fraud. They did not associate with the Victoria Park group. Although some dealers carried weapons for protection, most of the violence linked to the drug trade involved members of the 13th Tribe and other motorcycle gangs (the latter began importing speed from Montreal). The bikers attempted to monopolize their distribution through intimidation and violence. Multiple drug users tended to be university students who viewed drugs as “agents of social change and also as a means of coping with a depressing society.”⁴⁹

All drug users supposedly viewed the police and the legal system as extensions of “contemporary middle-class morality,” although there were differences of opinion on the harmfulness of amphetamines as compared to cannabis. According to researcher Christopher Murphy, speed users were usually “looked upon with disdain” by members of other groups, who regarded them as violent and untrustworthy. Halifax’s two street-level supportive services, Headquarters (Diggers) and Merri Go Round, were generally not utilized by speed users. Drug users argued that the legalization of marijuana use would lessen the attractions of the more harmful substances, such as amphetamines. The cannabis and LSD markets were supplied by two main dealers, one of whom was independently wealthy and imported drugs solely for status reasons. These were supplied to the street level by low-status dealers, including several at Dalhousie University. The overall supply of drugs increased in the fall and winter, when students returned to university.⁵⁰

Montreal

Although Montreal enjoyed the reputation as Canada’s most “swinging” city, an image it consciously promoted in this period, its colourful mayor, Jean Drapeau, was antagonistic towards hippies, whom he considered “undesirables.” Canada’s Centennial showcase, Expo 67, which became a magnet for the young and drew American rock groups, was viewed as a catalyst for the drug scene. LeDain Commission researchers Réal Aubin and George Letourneau, reporting in 1970, speculated

that media coverage had also helped to “create” Montreal’s new drug scene.⁵¹ Press accounts in 1967 and 1968 indicated that the Montreal police were harassing the city’s four thousand-strong “hippie colony” that stretched between Sherbrooke Street and Pine Avenue. The tension was compounded by the fact that many hippies were anglophone and the Montreal police force was largely francophone. Complaints ranged from petty harassment, to arrests for loitering, to outright brutality. In 1967 mounted police broke up a hippie “be-in” in a Mount Royal Park. These frictions resulted in the formation of civil liberties committee. The situation was little different in Quebec City, where a civic ordinance prohibited youth from playing guitar or sleeping or even standing in public parks.⁵²

The Montreal study was supervised by Denis Gagné of the Criminology Department of l’Université de Montreal, with field workers representing criminology, sociology, anthropology, and social psychology. Participant-observation research for Montreal focused on the use of both soft drugs (hallucinogens and psychedelics) and hard drugs (amphetamines and opiates) by persons between eighteen and twenty-five. The local drug scene, although dispersed, was divided along linguistic and ethnic lines, with the established French Canadian scene associated with carré Saint Louis (Saint Louis Square, a park on Saint-Denis) and Old Montreal, and younger Quebecois hanging out at la Ronde, the amusement complex at Man and His World, Montreal’s Expo 67 site. Most of the latter were teenagers who had free time during the summer months but were too young to be admitted to bars. The scene in Old Montreal centred on coffee houses, discotheques, and boutiques near Jacques Cartier Square and Saint Paul Street. Carré Saint Louis habitués consisted of hippies, poets, artists, leftists, and bikers. The anglophone street drug scene was associated with Milton Park, also known as the ghetto, an area east of McGill University and near Sir George Williams University.⁵³

The multiple-drug scene was monopolized by cannabis and other hallucinogens. Surveys by the Office for the Prevention and Treatment of Toxiomanias and other organizations indicated rising interest in drugs among Quebec high school and university students in the late 1960s. Journalists also stressed this pattern in media accounts. Carré Saint Louis had been a gathering place for youth before the drug “explosion.” Supported by the federal government, a community animation project called the Village included a drop-in centre, a coffee house, a community newspaper, and a printing cooperative. The area remained mainly French Canadian, although anglophones and Greek, Italian, and Portuguese Canadian youth were also present.⁵⁴ Hashish was the hallucinogen of choice in Montreal by 1970, and according to Marc Leblanc drug use had ceased to be an exclusively hippie activity. Centre-town was the meeting place of both occasional and regular drug users, as well as “delinquents, homosexuals, prostitutes, but also citizens looking for amusement and recreation.” Each category of drug user had its preferred meeting places, and most were either public spaces such as parks or in low-rent districts. For adolescents, drugs were

more of a pragmatic social lubricant than a conscious means to social rebellion.⁵⁵

The McGill University ghetto also had a speed scene, although amphetamines supposedly remained less popular in Montreal than elsewhere, and more popular among anglophones than francophones. According to Leblanc, amphetamine users were “a small island amid a sea of multiple drug users.” American draft dodgers added to the mix; according to FW Ed Marchuk, most “speeders” in the area were from the United States. They also valued intra-group status and expressed some concern if members engaged in risky practices such as sharing needles and syringes. The West End, associated with wealthy, upper-middle-class “drug-oriented individuals” was reported to be the drug distribution centre for the Montreal area and included heroin addicts (the latter were supplied by organized crime). The trade was dominated by soft drugs supplied by anglophone importers. The West End scene was located in cafes, discotheques, and apartments. Its habitués were older than those in carré Saint Louis, and the gender balance was less skewed in favour of males.⁵⁶

Greater Montreal also had a number of suburban scenes, and LeDain researchers examined the municipalities of Verdun and North Montreal. Claude Bussiere noted that Verdun, although close to downtown Montreal, was isolated physically from the larger city by a canal on the north and industrial and railway land uses on the eastern border. Verdun was considered an older but stable blue-collar community and contained many multi-family residences. The eastern section of the municipality, which was 80 per cent francophone, was more disadvantaged in income, education, and quality of housing. The local francophone street drug scene was limited and based on a municipal park, a pool room, and the apartment of the chief dealer. Most of the thirty-nine young male “clan members” identified were born and raised in Verdun, and all reported that drug use was a fairly new activity. There was little interaction between the francophone and anglophone drug scenes. Bussiere’s research discovered suppliers who lived outside the community and a number of bikers. The latter were “enforcers” in the retail trade and abstained from all drugs except alcohol. Of the core group, aged eighteen to twenty-three, all but one were male. Some were students who lived with their parents, some maintained jobs, while others sold drugs or were unemployed. Their drug of choice was hashish, supplemented by amphetamines and hallucinogens. The FW concluded, “The scene cannot be described as counter-culturally motivated; rather it was primarily a means to pass time and escape boredom during the summer months.”⁵⁷ Even this small group, as well as its “satellite” members, could be further classified as either “heads” or “freaks,” and Bussiere observed the formation of cliques. Perhaps reflecting the size of the community, or the low-level nature of the group’s activities, the FW noted a “compromise” with straight society. In addition to the park scene, Verdun had a smaller group of users (the “Ile group”) who interacted with outsiders and who preferred hallucinogens and amphetamines.⁵⁸ The detailed report on the Verdun

drug clan suggested the compromises through which youth drug culture was tolerated: the police, the pool room, owner and local YMCA staff were aware that clan members used illicit substances but did not bother the youth if they were discreet in their activities.⁵⁹

Michel Gaussiran’s participant-observation study was of Montréal-Nord, an autonomous municipality on the northeastern section of Montreal Island. This was a prosperous suburban municipality of families and children, including teenagers. Like Verdun, it is now a borough of Montreal. The scene in this francophone suburban community, of which the FW was a resident, was small scale and more middle class than Verdun’s. Most members of what researchers called “the clan” either had jobs or were students, and their favourite pastime other than consuming drugs was “hanging out” and listening to music. Their friendships predated their drug use for the most part. Participants saw themselves as “outsiders” but not as criminals and rejected conventional society, with its emphasis on competition, materialism, and individualism. They distrusted the police, attempted to maintain a low profile with their activities, and stressed “responsibility and honesty in all their business transactions.” The young males observed passed most of their time in silence or in listening to or playing music. Reading materials on hand were more of the intellectual or activist variety, such as the writings of Mao or Quebec radical Pierre Vallières. Drugs were viewed as a vehicle for gaining “introspection and self-discovery.” Cannabis was the preferred substance, followed by LSD, and consumed daily.⁶⁰ A follow-up report in 1971 suggested the fluidity of such informal suburban groups, in that the “clan” supposedly had ceased to exist.⁶¹

Downtown scenes were populated by former suburbanites, or summer refugees from suburbia, but communities such as Westmount contained their own self-insulated scenes with few connections with the outside. Middle-class youth were loath to sever all ties, especially economic, with their families. Marchuk reported that most speed users were middle class in background but that the core group, which lived or gathered in rooms on Alymer Avenue, sold drugs, or engaged in shoplifting, “rip-offs,” and prostitution in order to survive. Transients tended to be on the scene for no more than two weeks at a time. Speeders rationalized their habit either as meeting emotional needs or as a rejection of straight society. Although some intra-group violence was noted, more common was violence between speed users and bikers, who were attempting to control distribution.⁶²

Aubin and Letourneau classified the drug scene as supposedly consisting of “straights,” “freaks,” “hip-mods,” and “heads.” The straights did not reject the mores and goals of the larger society and did not see themselves as marginalized but used drugs to improve their “social roles.” The term *freaks* was used in a manner similar to the Toronto studies: unemployed, regular drug users who viewed themselves as deviant. Hip-mods were not in total rebellion against society and attempted to live the “youth subculture” lifestyle as depicted in the media that was based on

consumption and enjoyment. Their drug use was more hedonistic than political. The so-called heads were more instrumental in their drug use, seeking “heightened awareness and [an] alternative to ‘straight’ society and the status quo.”⁶³ Aubin and Letourneau argued that French-Canadian youth were relatively new to the drug scene and as such did not match the categories above. Most aspired to the hip-mod lifestyle, which translated into “having fun.” Multiple drug users, according to these FWs, were often superficially interested in astrology, the occult, and mysticism and expressed values such as “love, peace and freedom.” Many supported the idea of “dropping out” of society and forming communes.⁶⁴ Participants in the Montreal scene generally were distrustful of police, the courts, politicians, and hospitals, and other supportive services. The legal system was viewed as largely arbitrary, favouring the wealthy and biased against youth. Some youth resorted to “revolutionary” language. Those in the carré Saint Louis were somewhat knowledgeable about provincial politics (where the key issues were provincial rights and Quebec separatism), and most shared “leftist political values.”⁶⁵

The final report on the Montreal drug scene by Marc Leblanc, submitted in 1971, was a detailed document of 500 pages. Drug use among Montreal youth, according to Leblanc, was part of a continuum of social revolt that ranged from political terrorists and biker gangs, to traditional delinquents, to defiant students, and bohemian artists. Drug users almost universally distrusted the police as well as traditional treatment services.⁶⁶ Leblanc’s study was not only detailed (for example, containing a detailed typology of various drug users), it was also well organized and informed by theory. It argued that media representation of illicit drug issue in the period 1967 to 1969 was a major reason for its popularity among youth. It also cautioned that a focus on speed and other hard drugs did not really reflect the broader Montreal scene.⁶⁷

Toronto

Toronto’s hippie scene, both real and imagined, has been explored in detail by Stuart Henderson. Much of the typology for studying “the scene” in Toronto was laid out by the media and in previous studies, notably the Smart and Jackson report of 1969, based on the research notes of Alampur.⁶⁸ FW Mike O’Neil in 1970 located the Toronto speed scene north of Bloor Street, east of Avenue Road, south of Dupont Street, and west of Howland Street.⁶⁹ In close proximity to the University of Toronto, Rochdale College, and Yorkville, the area contained nine known “speed houses,” free medical clinics, and cheap rooming houses. This thirty-six block area contained not only a sophisticated amphetamine scene, but also networks of heroin and barbiturate users. The main players were Toronto natives, American draft dodgers, and transients, notably from small-town Ontario and the Maritimes. Most were unemployed, and many were “speed freaks” who injected up to one gram a day in two or three injections. They were described as lower middle class or “upper lower class” in background and basically hedonistic in orientation. The FW rejected the idea of speed users as a

“counter-culture.” Rather they were a “parallel culture.” Members of the scene reportedly carried guns and resorted to threats and violence. A smaller group of “hip” heroin users (younger than the traditional users) consumed from one capsule of heroin every four days to up to four a day. O’Neill estimated that greater Toronto contained seven to fifteen thousand speed users. His initial report also described the typical cycle of a speed trip or “run.” Although amphetamine possession was not illegal, “freaks” were afraid of the police, largely because of experience with illegal activities and interaction with heroin users.⁷⁰ In 1970, *Time* magazine had dubbed Toronto “the speed capital of Canada.”⁷¹

McLachlen’s 1972 participation-observation report on the Toronto scene was particularly detailed and contained information that would have been of considerable interest to the police, such as the source of the city’s amphetamine supply and the addresses of speed houses. It also revealed that dealers sold more than one type of drug and that clients were often multi-drug users. Study no. 7–13 mentioned other drugs and noted the existence of a “large cannabis scene, heterogeneous and non-cohesive, centred in the suburbs and downtown,” but it concentrated on downtown speed, barbiturate, and heroin users.⁷² Informant M discounted the rumour that the amphetamine was still being manufactured in the Toronto area, naming Detroit and Buffalo as the source (this individual also repeated a number of urban myths common in the drug underground). In contrast to the less-structured speed market, “junk” (heroin) supposedly was in the hands of organized crime, its supply controlled by a handful of importers who wore long hair and bell bottom pants and who paid between \$650 and \$1,100 a pound. M, who described himself as a “distributor” who avoided small quantities, estimated that fifty pounds of speed a week arrived in Toronto and was distributed through a pyramid structure of dealers. The supply was “cut” with other substances such as corn starch and baking soda by the time it reached the street, where it was sold by both male and female dealers. Street sales supposedly were extending to younger, suburban youth attracted to the downtown scene.⁷³ The report explained that dealers operated mainly from speed houses (rented houses or rooms and that the person paying rent exercised the most authority). Each speed house usually also housed at least one heroin dealer. “Ian” reported that dealers initially allowed clients to inject the drug on their premises but were beginning to prohibit the practice. Where “works” were available, sanitary practices were minimal, risking the spread of hepatitis and venereal disease. The researcher was present during drug numerous transactions.⁷⁴

The amphetamine report suggested the fluid and seasonal nature of the larger Toronto illicit drug world by the early 1970s. As the number of younger, suburban participants and transients fell, the Yorkville strip “virtually closed” for the winter, and the street drug scene shifted westward along Bloor Street to as far as Avenue Road. Informants suggested that the establishment of adequate supply chains in public schools kept suburban

youth from entering the inner city. The seasonal absence of suburban youth meant less money for the illegal street scene. Transients dispersed back to Western Canada, the Maritimes, or the United States. Analyzing the remaining core of committed speed dealers and users, the participant-observation study concluded that they were “self-destructive, violent, and selfish.” Most were over twenty-one years old, had a record of recent arrests, and had been involved in drug “rip-offs.”⁷⁵ In general, the Toronto speed freaks interviewed or observed, other than rejecting notions of personal responsibility or delayed gratification, were apolitical. They viewed themselves as the elite of the drug world and regarded conventional wisdom on illegal drugs as media “propaganda.” Supportive services such as free clinics and psychological counselling were ignored, mocked, or used for purely instrumental purposes, such as acquiring vitamins. M reflected a more intellectual or philosophical approach to the connection between illicit drugs and youth culture, lamenting that “the cultural roots of the alternative culture began to corrode and die.” In his view, many participants had moved or were in the process of moving to rural areas: “They get away from the cities because they are decaying and dying and you have to go to the country where it is clean.”⁷⁶

Winnipeg

According to field worker Joy Woolfrey, the use of hallucinogenic drugs in Manitoba’s capital had been unknown as late as 1966. The small heroin-using community had been fairly closed to outsiders. Other drugs were pioneered in the early hippie period by “art students from Toronto,” American draft dodgers, actors, university dropouts, and musicians. Initially the scene had been small scale and amicable, and young transients used the services of the local Digger House as a “crash pad.” Media coverage of “flower children” attracted “young and bored adolescents,” which led to police attention and a riot in Memorial Park and some downtown vandalism in the summer of 1967. Initially drug consumption in the hippie milieu was “largely symbolic,” but as adolescents joined the scene, drugs became the centre of activity. This resulted in a larger, more diverse market with increased incidence of fraud, threats, and violence. Police harassment resulted in the arrest or departure of most of the original “opinion leaders” and an outward migration to the suburbs, where new drug “cliques” took shape.⁷⁷

Winnipeg was particularly busy in the summer of 1970, which coincided with provincial centennial celebrations. The initial summary of the city study concluded that heroin use was limited and that hashish was very popular in Winnipeg. Marijuana was in high demand but often difficult to obtain, and pill-based speed more popular than the injected variety. Demand for LSD supposedly was related to the availability of cannabis. The city’s downtown scene was reported as focusing on Memorial Park, but the dispersed geographic layout of the Manitoba city also produced a number of suburban scenes. There the youth were mainly middle-class high school students. The Winnipeg city study portrayed several largely marijuana-driven street groups, including bikers, greasers, transients, and rock musicians.

Others were “Indians,” “university students,” and “sophisticates.” Greasers tended to live in downtown rooming houses but most bikers resided in the suburbs. The First Nations scene clustered along the downtown bars on Main Street.⁷⁸ Reports noted that musicians were almost exclusively male, while male bikers tended to be between twenty and thirty and “biker chicks” as young as fifteen. As in other communities studied, females were more represented among the ranks of “weekenders” and “teenyboppers.”⁷⁹

As in other cities, a number of the “scenes” were linked to social agencies or institutions. One revolved around a free clinic and drop-in centre supervised by the Committee Representing Youth Problems Today (CRYPT), founded by medical students and assisted by medical professors.⁸⁰ Number 17 Edmonton Street, located in an older house a few blocks from the provincial legislature, was originally a co-op for university dropouts. It soon became a refuge for U.S. draft dodgers and “runaways,” with a constantly fluctuating population. From various backgrounds, the residents were young and alienated from mainstream society, including “rehabilitation institutions” and mental health services. Their drug use, according to the FW, was a consequence of their alienation, as well as a source of social prestige. Chores and cleanliness were equated with “women’s work” and middle-class values. Daily activity included talking, smoking cannabis, listening to music, begging, and performing odd jobs. Many had experienced “dramatic confrontations” with parents or police over drugs. Cannabis, alcohol, and LSD were the most commonly used drugs at “17,” but the reasons for using them varied. Cannabis invariably was shared, and residents who were more committed to the counterculture, or more educated, sought out more detailed information on drugs and their effects. Knowledge of speed was limited and of the effects of LSD, vague.⁸¹ Residents had an ambivalent relationship with CRYPT, the organization spearheading much of Winnipeg’s youth outreach initiatives at this time. Funded by government, CRYPT was mandated to work with both the Children’s Aid Society and the police, and its workers employed “psych” approaches that were often resented by clients. On the other hand CRYPT staff and volunteers did not view drug use as inherently pathological.⁸²

Simcoe Street was described as the nucleus of a larger membership, which included dealers, university students, and “sophisticates.” Although the house outwardly resembled an orderly middle-class residence, its residents were heavily involved in the local drug trade, and one of the “tests” of admission was “sophisticated knowledge of counterculture ideology.” Residents were fairly well educated, and most were engaged in conventional employment “in a creative” capacity, and neither begging nor stealing was condoned. Their political views were not revolutionary but critical, especially of the police and legal system. Simcoe Street residents believed that the idealistic hippie era had ended. They used drugs not for ideological reasons and exhibited little concern for those outside their peer group; drugs existed for pleasure. Attitudes towards speed and heroin

were somewhat negative, and the heroin and cocaine trade were considered to be in the hands of organized crime.⁸³

A follow-up study of the Winnipeg scene in 1971 was based on interviews of a small number of original participants. The research suggested an expanding degree of drug knowledge and more openness to heroin. The researcher described the social attitudes of the small number of regular users as those of “losers” but noted that some of them aspired to a more comfortable, consumer lifestyle. The second round of interviews raised the issue of whether or not personality was a key trait in determining speed use. The 1971 report also discussed an interview with Winnipeg’s police chief, who, like most law enforcement officials, argued for a direct connection between crimes against property and drug use, and who considered cannabis a gateway drug that lead to narcotics.⁸⁴

Vancouver

By 1970, Vancouver was already associated with the illegal drug world, the results of decades of press, police, and expert pronouncements. The city also became identified as a major location for the West Coast counterculture. Marijuana was mentioned in the late 1950s by the Narcotic Addiction Foundation of British Columbia as an experimental drug for “aspiring artists,” and by the late 1960s it was preferred over hashish.⁸⁵ Echoing his counterparts in Toronto and Montreal, Vancouver’s Mayor Tom Campbell announced his antipathy to hippies, whom he accused to trying to “destroy Canada.” The police responded by arresting hippies for loitering and charging those who passed marijuana joints around as “traffickers.” Vancouver was a favourite destination of transients, who by the late 1960s and early 1970s were joined by a new group: young Canadians hitchhiking to the West Coast. Starting in 1967, Vancouver was identified as Canada’s hippie capital, and the Kitsilano Beach area “Canada’s Haight Ashbury.”⁸⁶

The geographic manifestations of the drug scene were Gastown in the downtown, 4th Avenue near Arbutus, and 7th Avenue (the latter locally known as “Chemical Avenue”). Drug dealers on 7th Avenue were described as “active proselytizers.” The Gastown scene studied in the summer of 1970 centred on area pubs, notably the Alcazar, Traveller’s, and Gastown Inn beer parlours. Given that the minimum legal drinking age was nineteen, this meant that the youth associated with Gastown were slightly older than other downtown scenes. Gastown, although near the central business district, was a low-rent area that shared many of the characteristics of skid row. LeDain researchers also noted a transient drug scene associated with the Stanley Park Zoo. Members of the Gastown pub scene lived either in a federally sponsored hostel in local armouries, “dirty, dingy cheap hotels” in downtown areas, or older houses that were often reduced “to shambles within a short time.”⁸⁷

According to one field worker, many young summer transients were attracted to Vancouver not by drugs, but the weather, lifestyle and “easy welfare regulations.” Their “ritualistic” drug consumption focused on marijuana, hashish, and LSD. Their goals

were described as status oriented to be associated with “now people doing now things.” “Non-ritualistic” consumers were not in school and were jobless “semi-permanent” transients. Their drug use was more open ended and their socio-economic backgrounds more disorganized. Stoddart noted that the staff of the Alcazar initially were sympathetic to their young customers, with drugs being smoked openly in the beverage room and injected in the washrooms. Summer transients preferred “mind trip” hallucinogens, whereas semi-permanent users also resorted to “body stones” induced by heroin and speed. A set of folk beliefs guided use of the former, suggesting that they had become a manifestation of lifestyle more than an act of rebellion. There was also an aura of “social responsibility” to the pub scene, which included anti-speed messages and concern for individuals who suffered “bad trips.”⁸⁸

Another Vancouver field worker reported on low-level street dealing of marijuana and hashish, some of which took place inside beer parlours. Most Vancouver area high schools supposedly had their own dealers. The highly visible street dealers of 4th Avenue were described as “landmarks and tourist attractions.” Seventh Avenue bustled with drug sales from early afternoon until late at night. Dealers supposedly took orders from passing cars. Most of them were young and possessed little capital. Police patrolled these areas but supposedly were “scorned and laughed at,” although the risk of arrest was high. Street dealers either were arrested, moved on to sell from a house or pub, or left the city. Street dealing was described as a temporary and precarious “avocation,” one level above pan-handling. Rip-offs, threats, and violence related to drug debts were not unknown, and the ultimate safety of dealers depended on their status on the street. Pub-based dealers were more passive and discreet (unlike their customers). Dealers professed a professional ethical concern for the quality of their products but disavowed any responsibility in event of a “freak out.” They reported a preference for older, more experienced customers. Some professed to be motivated by social or philosophical goals, but most simply wanted money. The public scene was described as a blatant example of a general trend across Canada, where young people sought illicit drugs in beer parlours, coffee houses, and restaurants. Darrough also reported that the Jericho Armoury hostel, until it was closed by the police and Department of Defence, was ideal for the injection of drugs because of its physical layout.⁸⁹

The Vancouver participant-observation study can be supplemented with other LeDain Commission sources. A lower court judge reported that soft drug offenders, who had been unknown in the Vancouver courts until the late 1960s, “could come from any class, not necessarily involved with the criminal element, usually young and often with no criminal record.” Most of those charged with possession of marijuana were young, “emotionally immature ... hippie types and those members of the drop-out society ... We also have a group of pseudo intellectuals.” The magistrate stated that traffickers tended to be older and more involved in criminal enterprise, and that

those charged with heroin possession were “unstable ... of limited education and intelligence” and older than the typical cannabis offender. LSD users came “from all walks of life” and were described as thrill seekers “not normally from the criminal element.”⁹⁰ A second Vancouver magistrate reported that 90 per cent of those charged with possession of marijuana were under twenty-one. Those charged with possession of LSD had the same profile. Heroin users, in contrast, were older, unskilled, mostly male and more likely to be involved with criminal activity. Magistrate Moffet estimated that 50 per cent of those charged with possession of marijuana were “hippies and pseudo-hippies.”⁹¹

Drug Skid Row?

The emphasis on the street scene was a limited focus and shared a similar pitfall with oral history in that it attempted to construct a larger social reality on the basis of individual or small group observations. In a 1971 LeDain Commission report on amphetamine use, Mel Green revealed a fundamental flaw in the research design of street scene participant-observation studies. Time had been limited, so field workers tended to concentrate on obvious downtown scenes, skewing research results. Hard-core street scene habitués were older and less middle class than the average illicit drug user and were more likely to come from troubled or “broken” homes or foster homes. Like skid row alcoholics, they were not always the most reliable interview subjects. LeDain field workers had focused on unemployed speed injectors or downtown dwellers who tended to work in blue-collar or service occupations such as general labourer, taxi driver, restaurant kitchen staff, or go-go dancer. Middle-class speeders were less likely to possess the “street survival skills” to survive in the inner-city scene. Green concluded that amphetamine users with jobs were “less likely to come under commission observation.”⁹²

The media and even the RCMP had constructed marijuana use as middle-class deviancy, which threatened the status quo.⁹³ Yet hallucinogens, the main drugs of hippies and youth influenced by hippies, were not always the focus of the city studies. For practical purposes, the study of Montreal’s “amphetamine ecology” was concerned with the transient, cosmopolitan downtown, which contained pockets of university students, the unemployed, the poor, and transients. O’Neill’s follow-up monitoring report on Toronto, based on field notes recorded in late 1970 and early 1971, revealed the partial and tentative nature of the commission’s knowledge of the city’s drug scene. For example, he mentioned that there was vague knowledge of a heroin scene in the Regent-Jarvis area, but no viable way to enter the field in this neighbourhood. O’Neill also noted reports of “flash houses” in York, Scarborough, and Islington, as well as East York. He cited a recent ARF report that described “drug skid rows,” pockets of concentrated drug use in several neighbourhoods of the Toronto area. The 1971 report on Toronto contrasted with earlier accounts that had attempted to portray a complex scene at least partly motivated by counterculture idealism. The “winter group,” which had drifted away from Yorkville

to Bloor Street West, was described as “tough” and having criminal records, little group loyalty, and few legal sources of income.⁹⁴ Toronto study 7–13 also suggested another problem with inner-city drug research, as an informant suggested that users had been less than honest in their responses to ARF surveys. “T” explained that informants would “tell them anything they want to hear,” especially in the case of surveys that paid for cooperation.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Official statistics confirmed many of the qualitative observations of LeDain Commission participant-observation researchers. One was that few of those charged with either trafficking or possessing cannabis had prior criminal records. Heroin users and traffickers, in contrast, were likely to be known to the police and have been convicted of at least one offence. The typical cannabis offender was also young, usually between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one.⁹⁶ Social scientists offered many theories to explain the growth of illicit drug use in the late 1960s. In the words of sociologist Lynn McDonald, young cannabis users were not motivated by economic deprivation or class conflict; many came from families with good incomes, high levels of education, and considerable leisure time.⁹⁷ The various medical, psychological, and social theories notwithstanding, the interim report of the LeDain Commission (1970) had concluded that the main reason Canadians resorted to marijuana was enjoyment.⁹⁸

Returning to the issues raised at the opening of this article, how did the city studies influence the state’s response to the drug problem? Two qualifications can be made. Although both the RCMP and the Department of Justice had opposed the appointment of the commission, the five city studies were a narcotics officer’s dream, especially if combined with field notes and the names and personal details of persons observed. Yet the commission and its researchers had been promised immunity from prosecution.⁹⁹ The LeDain Commission was an exercise in state knowledge gathering, as well as a justification for the expansion of the expert-guided therapeutic state. Much of the general information in the city studies was probably already known to RCMP and municipal police drug squads. The second qualification has to do with the reasons the participation-observation studies were undertaken in the first place. Aside from intellectual curiosity and academic networking, LeDain researchers were motivated more by sympathy than punitive intent. This reflected the critical spirit of sociology, criminology, and legal studies in the early 1970s, influenced by cultural relativism. Although the chair and other members were aware of the public’s ambivalence towards illicit drugs, the commission adopted a broader pharmacological definition of drugs that included alcohol, prescription medicine, caffeine, and tobacco, even if its emphasis was on cannabis and LSD.¹⁰⁰ Much of the spirit of the commission was liberal, seeking to lessen the legal burdens on persons, particularly first-time offenders, most of whom were young. Leblanc’s detailed report on Montreal, for example, expressed concern about LSD and amphetamines, but questioned whether Canada could continue to criminalize

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the possession and use of hallucinogens. The supervisor of the Montreal projects, Denis Gagne, was an exponent of so-called “new criminology.”¹⁰¹ In 1972, the commission recommended that simple possession of marijuana be decriminalized. Federal Health Minister John Munro refused to act but promised that first offenders convicted of simple possession would no longer be sent to jail (in fact, this change would affect only a fraction of those convicted).¹⁰² The Department of Health and Welfare was moving in the other direction in the case of speed. Despite their limitations, the city studies and supporting research within the archive of the LeDain Commission offer a vivid snapshot of not only the geography and culture of urban drug use in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but also the priorities of social science researchers who helped construct the “drug problem.” That problem was portrayed largely as a downtown phenomenon. The scenes as reflected in the city studies were a network of “transgressive spaces,” consisting of skid-row zones, entertainment districts, university neighbourhoods, and public parks, with suburbs functioning as a source of consumers.¹⁰³

Notes

- 1 Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York: Humanities, 1973).
- 2 Nancy D. Campbell and Susan J. Shaw, “Incitements to Discourse: Illicit Drugs, Harm Reduction and the Production of Ethnographic Subjects,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 4 (Nov. 2008), 688–717.
- 3 Catherine Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession: Illegal Drug Use, Regulation and Power in Canada 1920–1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).
- 4 Mel Green, “Cannabis Use,” study no. 97–11, LeDain Commission, 26 Nov. 1971 (unpublished research paper). Unless otherwise noted, all references to research studies in this article are from this series.
- 5 Major studies include Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*; Erika Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD from Campus to Clinic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Dyck, “The Psychedelic Sixties in North America: Drugs and Society,” in *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties*, ed. Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Greg Kealey, 47–63 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Stuart Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Marcel Martel, *“Not This Time”: Canadians, Public Policy and the Marihuana Question, 1961–1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).
- 6 John J. Prince, “A Statistical Analysis of Drug Offenders Brought to Trial in Canada from 1967 to 1970,” project no. 37–4, Aug. 1971, 5. The classic study on the history of the debate to decriminalize “soft drugs” during this era is Martel’s *“Not This Time.”*
- 7 A policy overview was presented in Lana D. Harrison, Michael Backenheimer, and James A. Inciardi, “Cannabis Use in the United States: Implications for Policy,” in *Cannabisbeleid in Duitsland, Frankrijk en de Verenigde Staten*, ed. Peter Cohen and Arjan Sas, 179–276 (Amsterdam: Centrum voor Drugsonderzoek, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1996).
- 8 Ibid.
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