

Biopower, Disciplinary Power and Surveillance: A Qualitative Analysis of the Lived  
Experience of Drug Users in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

by

Benjamin Scher

A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Public Issues Anthropology

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2020

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

Focusing on the role of police as primary actors in the arena of citizen safety, this thesis examines the effects of police practices on the daily lived experience of drug users accessing a Supervised Consumption Site within a community centre which I refer to as the Hawthorne Resource Centre. This site is located in the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood of Vancouver, Canada. Drawing on Foucauldian conceptualisations of power, the findings of this research suggest that modes of both biopower and disciplinary power are pervasively operative in various realms of the day to day lives of the Hawthorne Resource Centre clients. Evidence of the scalable nature of these modes of power are seen within the internal functioning of the Supervised Consumption Site, outside in the methods of community policing in the Downtown Eastside and in weekly police practices in Oppenheimer Park. As such, my study represents a multi-scalar assessment of how these Foucauldian power structures work at multiple levels and locations in the Downtown Eastside. Additionally, the trauma and stigma within the narratives provided by many of the Hawthorne Resource Centre clients suggests an appreciation by those clients of their lack of social and cultural capital. This understanding shapes how they navigate the distinctly bounded physical neighborhoods of Vancouver. Driven by the narratives of the Hawthorne Resource Centre clients, the findings of this research illustrate the importance of power relations within specific policy interventions and show that a better understanding of power in the context of interventions is crucial for policy-makers.

Key Words: Supervised Consumption Sites, Policing Practices, Urban Ethnography, Foucault, Biopower, Disciplinary Power, Surveillance

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Jennifer Liu for her invaluable guidance and support throughout the planning, fieldwork and writing stages of my thesis. To Jennifer Doucet, my fellow cohort members and the entire Department of Anthropology, thank you for providing an enjoyable and enriching educational experience during my time at the University of Waterloo. I would also like to thank Dr. Shana Harris and Dr. Mark Dolson, my two committee members for providing important feedback and reviewing my thesis.

To the family of Iris Yuzdepski, the Sally Weaver Memorial Fund, the University of Waterloo Faculty of Arts and the Social Science and Research Council of Canada, without your support this research would not have been possible and for that I am sincerely grateful.

A huge thank you to my four siblings and especially my parents for your unwavering support through the challenging moments that arose over the past year and a half.

To the management and staff at the HRC, thank you for welcoming me into your organisation and allowing me to conduct my research in such favourable conditions.

Finally, and most importantly, a huge thank you to all of the participants of this study who with open and candid hearts and minds entrusted with me their knowledge, and with the stories of their lives. During my time in your community you taught me the meaning of selflessness, kindness and empathy and I feel honoured and privileged to have met each and every one of you.

## **Land Acknowledgment**

The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. I would like to acknowledge that these are the traditional territories of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples.

The area comprising the present-day city of Vancouver is located “on the traditional and unceded territories of three Coast Salish First Nations: The Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh” (Wilson, 2014, p4). It has been occupied by these peoples for over 3,000 years with parts of the surrounding coastline having been occupied for over 10,000 years (Macdonald, 1992). Before I discuss the research I conducted in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood of Vancouver, I would first like to acknowledge this space in terms of its colonial land dispossession. As is the case for many settler-colonial cities in Canada, Indigenous people live in impoverished conditions due to the lasting and ongoing impacts of colonialism. As a settler conducting research in the Downtown Eastside, I believe that acknowledging the ongoing effects of colonialism is an important step towards reconciliation. However, I also recognize this is insufficient. Indeed, Indigenous people in Canada continue to be overrepresented both in the Downtown Eastside and in many other forms of social, economic and environmental inequality. As scholars, we must continue to actively conduct research that encourages real discussion within Canadian politics to work towards tangible and respectful reconciliation with Indigenous people.

With this overview in mind, my commentary on the history of the Downtown Eastside as well as many of the topics discussed throughout this thesis are “emblematic of the ongoing land encroachment that the Indigenous inhabitants of this neighbourhood face” (Schatz, 2010, p. 4)

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## **List of Abbreviations**

DTES	Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood of Vancouver
HRC	Hawthorne Resource Centre
VDP	Vancouver Police Department
SCS	Supervised Consumption Site
VANDU	Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users
BCCLA	British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
CDP	Contemporary Drug Problems Journal
BET	Beat Enforcement Team



## **Chapter 1**

### **Public Discourse in Relation to Law Enforcement and Drug Users: Vancouver's Opioid Crisis Through the Lens of Public Issues Anthropology**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a better understanding of how police practices impact the lives of drug users accessing Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) in order to inform a better standard of practice for the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). This project draws on five months of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and focus group discussions with SCS users and SCS staff, as well as two days spent analysing relevant policy documents in the archives of the VPD. Additionally, I attended two International Law Enforcement and Public Health conferences and two Drug User Union Town Hall meetings.

In this chapter, I first situate public issues anthropology in relation to the opioid crisis, and then present a preliminary analysis of the various publics implicated in this study. By focusing on local discourses regarding drug users as well as law enforcement and harm reduction interventions, I suggest that interactions between SCS users and police are influenced by public perceptions. These findings support the argument that in light of the current opioid crisis sweeping across Canada, research investigating the unintended consequences of policing practices is urgent and necessary.

#### **1.2 Public Issues Anthropology**

Borofsky's (2011) definition of public issues anthropology establishes two characteristics crucial to understanding this extension of the discipline:

Public issues anthropology demonstrates the ability of anthropology and anthropologists to effectively address problems beyond the discipline - illuminating larger social issues of our times as well as encouraging broad, public conversations about them with the explicit goal of fostering social change (Borofsky, 2011; quoted from Hansen et al, 2007, p. 128).

First, this definition identifies public issues as being issues of concern and importance to wider society, beyond the discipline and the confines of academia. Public issues anthropology ultimately aims to inform issues of public policy, social justice and contemporary problems through the use of anthropological methods, most notably ethnography. Second, the most important aspect of this definition lies in the manner in which anthropologists address social issues of our time. Despite its relatively low status in the past twenty years in North America, public issues anthropology has been applied with tremendous success in Norway. There, anthropologists are renowned for participating in public debate and their “research-based insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the questions being asked” (Howell, 2010, p. 269). They are valued as public intellectuals, demonstrating and validating the usefulness of a holistic and qualitative approach to public issues. The reasons for this success lie in the way in which Norwegian anthropologists disseminate and convey their research to the wider public. Through their presence on public platforms such as radio, television, news channels and parliamentary debate, they step down from the “ivory towers of academia in order to participate in public debates about current social, cultural, and political issues” (Howell, 2010, p. 296). In response to a recent spike in publicly visible injection drug use (Magnusson, 2018), fittingly, Scandinavian researchers have been the architects of progressive evidence-based drug policies, most notably pioneering the implementation and regulation of SCS (Clausen, 2014; Olsen, 2017; Kammersgard, 2019). As well, the language used in their research is largely colloquial, avoiding academic jargon which might act as a barrier to the public engaging with scholarly work. A key term used to describe this research is “publicly engaged anthropology” (Vine, 2011, p. 339), one that engages the wider public and has the potential to act as an agent of change in the realm of social justice and community well-being by increasing public awareness. As one of the most pressing social issues of today,

the current opioid crisis, killing thousands of Canadians each year, worsened by failing conservative national public policy and misconstrued through surrounding public discourse, fits within the mandate of public issues anthropology.

### **1.3 Overview of the Opioid Crisis in Canada**

In 2018, 4,460 opioid-related overdoses were recorded in Canada, up from 3,996 in 2017 (Statistics, Canada 2017). This number was predicted to surpass 5,500 at the close of 2019, but official year-end figures are yet to be released. The cause for this spike in fatal overdoses was the introduction of a deadly new synthetic opioid into Canada's drug market. Fentanyl, fifty times stronger than morphine (Ciccarone et al., 2017), can have fatal consequences – just the equivalent of four grains of sand can be deadly. Likely due to the ease and low cost of its production, fentanyl was detected in 84% of national overdose deaths in 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2019). As a result, for regular heroin users, it is now difficult to estimate correct and safe doses, greatly increasing the chance of overdose.

Whilst the opioid crisis is a national issue, as demonstrated in Figure 1, the impacts have disproportionately affected Western Canada. British Columbia (BC) alone accounts for 1,525 opioid-related fatalities, making up 34% of the nation's deaths, despite only 13% of Canadians living in BC (Special Advisory Committee on the Opioid Epidemic, 2018). Further, within BC, a quarter of all opioid-related deaths occur in Metro Vancouver despite only 7.5% of BC's population living in the City (BC Stats, 2018). This rate is significantly higher than in the other 16 regions of the province. In light of these troubling statistics, both the provincial and federal governments have responded by introducing policies to open SCS in high-density urban areas, inhabited by large numbers of at-risk drug users. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood is a prime example of such a policy implementation in Canada. Home to three SCS, ten syringe exchange locations and six overdose prevention sites (Vancouver

Coastal Health, 2019), this neighbourhood has been coined the epicentre of Canada’s overdose crisis (Young, 2019).

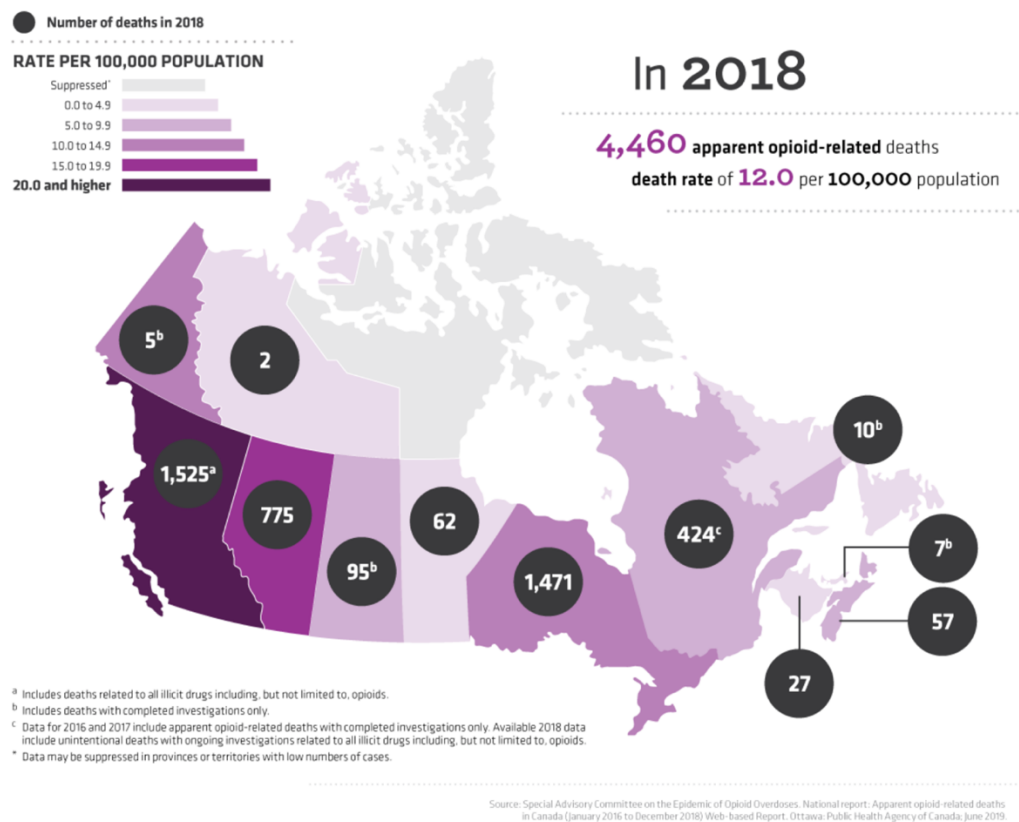


Figure 1: National Opioid Overdose Rates per 100,000 (Special Advisory Committee on the Opioid Epidemic, 2018: p.4)

#### 1.4 Who are the publics of this study?

Here, I identify four key publics implicated in this research: SCS users, law enforcement and the wider community/media. For the purpose of contextualizing local discourse, I evaluate the perceptions of the wider public/media towards drug users and law enforcement. This analysis demonstrates how the interactions between these two publics are shaped by potentially inaccurate perceptions.

#### 1.5 Vancouver’s Perceptions of Drug Use and its Treatment

The citizens of Vancouver, its scholars, press, and governments have been faced with addressing complex health challenges in the DTES since the mid-1980’s when it was declared the “neighborhood carrying the highest rate of HIV transmission in the Western world” (Benoit

et al., 2001, p. 299). Initially, media outlets promoted the notion that individuals with HIV/AIDS should be viewed as culpable for their infection as they had chosen to participate in high-risk behaviours. By reviewing fifty-five newspaper articles, dated between 1980-2000, Woolford (2001) demonstrated how the language used by the media served to create not only a symbolic separation between the ‘infected’ (or at-risk) and the ‘non-infected’, but additionally a physical separation whereby the DTES was imagined to be outside the moral space of the City. In producing and reproducing a tainted symbolic and spatial realm separate from what is deemed as ‘moral’, a new relationship between the DTES community and the general public was constructed. This relationship began to frame all social and political interactions between the DTES community and the rest of Vancouver and continues to do so today.

In an effort to combat these damaging media portrayals, empirical data produced by the BC Centre on Substance Use, the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, the Pivot Legal Society and the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) was published. This was a turning point in improving the media narrative. From news headlines by the Vancouver Sun and CBC, two of the most popular local news outlets exclaiming: “*Welcome to Hell: A walk through the Downtown Eastside*” (Shore, 2008) and “*City on drugs: the dark pull of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside*” (Barker, 2008), practical results and the success of Vancouver’s SCS and harm reduction policies helped change local attitudes. In a November 2019 press release, B.C.’s chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, spoke to the effectiveness of Vancouver’s harm reduction policies:

If it were not for our Province’s various harm-reduction programs, B.C. would not have seen the more than 1,400 fatal overdoses that it did in 2017...the number of overdose deaths would have been closer to 4,500 that year (Lupick, 2018, p. 1).

Today, with not one fatal overdose occurring in any Vancouver SCS, both municipal and provincial governments support harm reduction efforts. In turn, the local media is also

acknowledging the success of these efforts. The same outlets that once attacked these initiatives are now proclaiming: “Vancouver’s Safe Injection Site Successful!” (2016), “From Vancouver to Edmonton: early signs of success in Edmonton’s safe injection site” (2018). For a neighbourhood branded by “an entrenched and visible street drug culture” (Robertson, 2007, p. 299), the proven benefits of harm reduction policies have served to shift public perception towards acknowledging the value of a public health approach to drug use. By basing their policy suggestions and advocacy campaigns on qualitative ethnographic findings, the above-mentioned research institutions successfully translated contentious recommendations into a format accessible to the media and wider public.

### **1.6 Vancouver’s Perceptions of Law Enforcement**

In light of the severity of Vancouver’s overdose crisis, it comes as no surprise that the VPD faces a difficult task. Not only must it police the area lawfully, but it must also be seen as acting appropriately under the scrutiny of the public eye. Reports show that this balance is not being achieved. Rates of public satisfaction towards the police in Vancouver are the second lowest in the country (one place above Winnipeg) when compared to all other major cities in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Only 44% of Vancouver’s residents stated that they were happy with the overall service offered by the VPD, and 48% of Vancouver’s residents felt they would face unfair treatment when coming in contact with a VPD officer (Zussman, 2016; Vancouver Police Board, 2017).

Over the past decade, much of the criticism towards the VPD has stemmed from accusations that police responses in the DTES work to criminalise the symptoms of poverty. The disproportionate application of by-law ticketing is a prime example of such criminalisation. In 2013, a high-profile report from the Pivot Legal Society revealed that 95% of the city’s ticketing fines were administered in the DTES. These fines targeted infractions such as jaywalking and street-vending that ultimately resulted in low-income street vendors

being punished as opposed to addressing the roots of these infractions. In considering these issues, the report presented a strong argument that the VPD was actively ‘mining for crime’ and unfairly targeting individuals based on socio-economic status. Similarly, according to VPD data between 2008 and 2017, 15% of police stop and card cases were carried out on First Nations people when this group only represented 4% of the population. Further, Black people were stopped 5% of the time when this group represented less than 1% of the Vancouver population (Prystupa, 2018).

In recent years many advocacy groups have made efforts to combat this alleged profiling. Most notably in December 2018 the BC Union of Indian Chiefs together with the BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) filed a complaint against the VPD for both the ethnic and socio-economic disparity in stop and card cases in the city of Vancouver. They argued that the VPD statistics constituted clear evidence of institutionalized discrimination. While the investigation was ongoing, a BCCLA representative stated in February 2019:

Poverty is not a crime, homelessness is not a crime, being a person of colour is not a crime, it’s my right as a human being to be left alone to walk these streets. It’s my right to not have police tapping me on the shoulder because of the colour of my skin or the way I dress. (Payne, 2018, p. 1)

The VPD’s response to these arguments was that the disproportionate representation of poor people and minority groups was unrelated to their responsibility to prevent and stop criminal activity, as this responsibility existed irrespective of an individual suspect’s socio-economic or ethnic background. However, recent reports from the BCCLA highlight the continuing disproportionate targeting of poor people and minority groups, arguing that police practices can never be a substitute for the State addressing the social causes of these ‘criminal’ behaviours. Whilst police departments around the country face intense public scrutiny, I believe that public discourse surrounding the VPD is a direct result of their inability to solve the opioid crisis through punitive measures.

## **1.7 Public Discourse and its Impact on Police/Drug User Interactions**

Public discourse plays a major role in shaping interactions between drug users and law enforcement. Dryzek defines discourse as, “a shared way of apprehending the world, which enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts” (Dryzek, 1997, p. 8). Discourse invokes the construction of an essentialist identity of an ‘other’. Thus, constructing an identity is an “act of power, for it excludes other possibilities and forms of the self” (Howarth, 2010, p. 314). In Vancouver, the primarily negative discourse, combined with the public’s pre-disposed beliefs regarding both drug users and the police, has led to preconceived notions about behaviors, values, political and social identities, ultimately influencing the outcome of each interaction. As previously discussed, this was evidenced through the media’s focus on sensationalising their portrayal of the DTES.

Police behavior is significantly influenced by “a citizen’s race, sex, age and demeanor” (Riksheim, 1993, p. 236). Individuals with perceived “lower social status and/or less political power are more vulnerable to police authority and hence, are more likely to be arrested” (Black et al., 1970, p. 238). Thus, for police operating in the DTES, interactions with community members are likely to be associated with preconceived notions of suspicion and danger. Werd (2007) found that in Vancouver, police notions “linking criminality, mental illness and homelessness were a factor associated with being stopped, searched, or detained by police” (Werd et al., 2007, p. 334). With these criteria all prevalent in the DTES, interactions are bound to exhibit complications. Conversely, discourse from within illicit drug using groups showed increased notions of police violence, whether or not individuals in the group had directly experienced violence or not (Cooper et al., 2004). These findings suggest that perceptions of police rely on both individual and collective community experience with police and are influenced as much by modes of policing within a neighbourhood as they are by the individual



treatment of citizens. This collective negative discourse of fear towards law enforcement then manifests in a collective distrust towards law enforcement (Stuart, 2009).

Within the context of opioid overdoses, police distrust has shown to result in drug users being reluctant to call emergency services for fear of prosecution (Latimore, 2017). Relevant literature (see Rhodes, 2006; Rhodes, 2010, Dozier, 2019; Footer, 2019) overwhelmingly supports this, demonstrating that within drug using communities there is a strong perception that officers will act in a prejudicial manner. In 2008, the BC Centre on Substance Use conducted the first quantitative study (DeBeck et al., 2008) examining the link between police interaction and subsequent rates of SCS use in Vancouver. The findings suggested that police practices at the time were a strong deterrent to optimizing the usage of SCS. Instead, policies including stop and card, intense patrolling around the vicinity of the SCS and an aggressive mandate to arrest for drug possession in the City were pushing drug users to isolated locations and in turn greatly increasing the likelihood of overdose. Due to the largely quantitative nature of the current body of academic research in this area, I have chosen a qualitative perspective for my master's thesis - one that has been largely been ignored in the academic literature thus far (exceptions include Hayle, 2018; McNeil, 2019).

## **1.8 Conclusion**

Public issues anthropology provides an appropriate lens through which to examine the opioid crisis. Through the evaluation of local discourse surrounding both law enforcement and drug users, the findings of this chapter suggest that whilst the public and the media have slowly acknowledged the benefits of harm reduction interventions, there remains skepticism towards certain methods of policing. In light of these sentiments and amidst the current overdose crisis in Canada, I believe that cultivating more informed policing practices will result in improved perceptions of police by drug users as well as better quality of interactions between both

groups. In turn, this should bolster public health efforts to promote harm reduction initiatives. By examining the impacts of policing on the lives of drug users, I hope that my thesis can contribute towards a deeper understanding of the relationship between the police and drug users.

### **1.9 Venue of Publication**

I plan on submitting my master's thesis for publication in the Contemporary Drug Problems Journal (CDP). The CDP is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal that publishes multidisciplinary research contributing to social, cultural, historical and epidemiological knowledge and theory concerning drug use and related problems. Social researchers, policy makers and practitioners working in health, social services, public policy, criminal justice and law enforcement are able to contribute to this publication. With its strong appreciation for qualitative methods of inquiry, the values of the journal match both the ethos of socio-medical anthropology and the methods of research I have used in my thesis.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Biopower, Disciplinary Power and Surveillance: A Qualitative Analysis of the Lived Experience of Drug Users in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Canada places second in the world ranking for overdose deaths per million. The past decade's opioid epidemic represents one of the greatest failures of both the 'war on drugs' and the prevailing neoliberal framework governing the Canadian welfare system (Dasgupta, 2018). Although official year end figures are yet to be released, in Canada, illicit drug overdose deaths are expected to surpass 5,500 at the close of 2019, representing an 82.3% increase since 2016 (Fischer et al., 2019). Additionally, over the past ten years, the rate of hospitalization due to opioid poisoning has risen by 53%, placing an additional financial burden of \$3.5 billion on the Canadian healthcare system and emergency services combined (Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2018). While these statistics do not illustrate the lived experience of the victims of this epidemic, they represent a genuine threat to the lives of individuals, families and communities nationwide.

In response to these alarming numbers, harm reduction services, have come to the forefront of both provincial and federal policy responses (Kerr, 2019). Harm Reduction refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimize the negative, health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use and drug laws. This progressive policy stance recognizes that around the world many people are unable or unwilling to stop using illicit drugs. Therefore, keeping people alive and encouraging positive change through a humane and empathetic approach is the priority. Harm Reduction recognizes that in using drugs an individual does not forfeit their human rights nor their commitment to the highest attainable form of health care, social services or legal treatment by the State (Harm Reduction International, 2020). Here,

legal treatment refers to the right to freedom from arbitrary detention based on a moralistic stance by governments, characterized by the mass incarceration of non-violent, low socio-economic and often racialized drug users. Since the 1980's and the U. S's commitment to globally exporting these punitive 'War on Drugs' measures, the harm reduction movement has challenged trans-national policies that for decades have contributed to the exacerbation of drug-related harms around the world. Today, with thirty-nine supervised consumption sites (SCS) currently operating in Canada (Kazatchkine, 2019), this form of harm reduction intervention is the most notable of its kind in Canada.

These sites have proven successful. With both peers and medical professionals on site to respond in the case of an overdose, not one death has occurred in any SCS worldwide. In addition, retrospective studies suggest that mortality rates have dropped by 35% in neighbourhoods where they have been introduced (Small et al., 2011). Despite their effectiveness, many structural barriers exist which impact the ability of those drug users in need of this service to access an SCS. One such barrier is the sometimes fraught relationship with law enforcement (Rhodes, 2009).

Focusing on the role of police as primary actors in the arena of citizen safety, I examine the effects of police practices in relation to the daily lived experience of drug users accessing SCS. Drawing on Foucauldian conceptualisations of power, the findings of this research suggest that modes of both biopower and disciplinary power are pervasively operative in various realms of the day to day lives of the HRC clients. Evidence of the scalable nature of these modes of power are seen both within the internal functioning of the SCS, outside in the methods of community policing in the DTES and in weekly police practices in Oppenheimer Park. As such, my study represents a multi-scalar assessment of how these Foucauldian power structures work at multiple levels and locations in the DTES. Additionally, the trauma and stigma within the narratives provided by many HRC clients suggests an appreciation by these

clients of their lack of social and cultural capital. This understanding shapes how they navigate the distinctly bounded physical neighborhoods of Vancouver. Driven by the narratives of the HRC clients, the findings of this research illustrate the importance of power relations within specific policy interventions and show that a better understanding of power in the context of interventions is crucial for policy-makers.

## **2.2 Background**

### **2.2.1 Demographic of the Downtown Eastside**

Today, the DTES lies between the financial core of the City and the Trans-Canada highway, making it the main point of entry to the City from the East. In terms of its demographic composition, the DTES is more ethnically diverse, male dominated, older and poorer than anywhere else in the City: “males (60% vs. 50%), more seniors (22% vs 13%), fewer children and youth (7% vs 25%), Indigenous residents (14% vs 2%), population living alone (82% vs 38%)” (City of Vancouver Census Data, 2016). In addition, the life expectancy for men in the DTES is 15 years lower than their fellow Vancouverites (BC Coroner Service, 2018). The DTES is thus a clear example of a “geography of exclusion” (Sibley, 1995) being home to those “typically unwelcome in urban spaces” (Sibley, 1995, p. 1). The hardships posed by both the physical and structural environment of the DTES are especially apparent when juxtaposed to the surrounding Gastown, Yaletown and Financial District, some of the most affluent neighbourhoods in the City.

### **2.2.2 The History of the Downtown Eastside**

Since the late 1950’s Vancouver’s oldest neighbourhood, the DTES, has been home to the City’s most marginalised individuals. Despite rapid gentrification, this area continues to be characterized by its “high concentrations of injection drug users, mentally ill, homeless, elderly, sex working, unemployed and troubled transient youth” (Hollands et al., 2009) who

survive in what many consider to be the most impoverished urban setting in Canada (Boyd et al., 2017). In order to understand the “time and place” (Jackson, 1985) in which the participants of this study, social services and law enforcement agencies operate, I will first contextualize the neighbourhood’s rich “history of community activism, poverty and political and economic marginalization” (Elliott, 2014, p. 24). These historical factors show how Vancouver, a seemingly progressive and forward thinking global city, has repeatedly been at the epicentre of North America’s most devastating public health crises.

The DTES core of the early 1900’s was part of a booming industrial economy. Home to Vancouver’s city Hall, courthouses, banks, shopping and entertainment districts (Segger, 1974), the DTES exemplified the prosperity promised by capitalism and industrial economics. Situated on the busy Burrard Inlet, the DTES was both a key industrial port and Canada’s most western Canadian Pacific Railway terminus, acting as the point of arrival for both tourists and steamships alike (Campbell, 2009). Fuelling these industries, the neighbourhood was home to Vancouver’s first industrial working-class. With skilled professionals commuting in from more affluent residential neighbourhoods such as Mount Pleasant and Point Grey, the primary sources of employment for residents of the area were in the fish markets, meatpacking plants, metal-working shops, sawmills, the port and railway services (Woolford, 2001).

Despite the years of economic and social stability following the Second World War, the post-war economic depression resulted in the disappearance of the majority of heavy resource-based employment opportunities. With the community now home to a labour force no longer needed, many workers returned to their hometowns with those remaining comprised primarily of sick, elderly and unemployed industrial workers (Woolford, 2001). This time period also saw “the closure of the interurban rail line and the relocation of numerous theatres and shops to the then up-and-coming Granville neighbourhood” (Douglas, 2002, p. 11).

Replacing these legitimate businesses came a ‘sidewalk economy’ of unlicensed street vendors selling second-hand and stolen goods (Douglas, 2002).

In the 1980’s, there was a widespread shift by federal and provincial policy-makers towards neoliberalism, resulting in further socio-economic stress on the DTES. At the national level, following suit with the U.K. and the U.S., Brian Mulroney’s Conservative Party liberalised Canada’s economy through privatizations and free trade policies, whilst simultaneously cutting government spending on social services. Similarly, at the provincial level, the National Democratic Party (NDP) pursued neoliberal reforms in numerous policy arenas, including health, education and social assistance (Teghtsoonian, 2009). As rates of homelessness continued to rise in Vancouver policy analysts and scholars such as MacDonald (1975), documented the imbalance in outcomes for marginalized communities affected by these policies (Cohen, 2006; Teghtsoonian, 2009). Varcoe (2007) described this process as an isolated shift in the paradigm of community whereby “the fundamental elements of community to which every citizen should have access: housing, education, income and social support” (Varcoe et al., 2007, p. 28) were abandoned in a particular location by the state.

In 1987, in accordance with neoliberal provincial policy of the time, the NDP government ordered the mass de-institutionalisation of a majority of the patients of the Riverview psychiatric hospital, located twenty-five kilometres from the DTES. For the neighbourhood, this order resulted in a significant change in the composition of its population. As newly released patients were drawn to the DTES’s tolerant culture and low-cost housing (Brunet-Jailley, 2008), without adequate outreach services in place, the wave of vulnerable individuals became immersed in the easily accessible illicit drug market (Maté, 2010). Despite the local government promising that mentally ill individuals would be supported by outpatient social services, little support was offered. The then Mayor of Vancouver, Larry Campbell, stated in a 2009 publication:

When we de-institutionalised, we promised people that we would put them into the community and give them the support they needed...but we lied...I think its one of the worst things we ever did (Campbell, 2009, p. 89).

Beginning in 1990, a combination of structural factors and the makeup of the population of the DTES gave birth to “Canada’s first open-air drug scene” (Fast et al., 2010, p. 52). A lack of harm reduction services (Strathdee, 1997), the street use of unsanitary needles and the rise of sex work undertaken by people trying to fund their addictions combined to produce an unprecedented co-epidemic of crack cocaine use and HIV/AIDS. In a city otherwise flourishing and expanding in both population and standard of living, this once prosperous neighbourhood displayed “HIV injection rates surpassing those anywhere else in the developed world” (Culhane, 2003, p. 593). Continuing through the 1990’s, the escalation of neoliberal policies - most notably cuts in funding for social housing - resulted in unprecedented numbers of homeless community members with highly visible tent encampments appearing in many public parks in the DTES. These encampments remain in existence to this day.

### **2.2.3 Community Activism**

Over the latter part of the 20th century, amidst the chronic challenges that faced this community, a powerful and cohesive form of political resistance emerged. While outsiders and experts continue to be the dominant voices regarding what should be done to ‘fix’ this community, various activist organisations emerged from within. During the height of Vancouver’s HIV epidemic, the Vancouver Area and Network of Drug Users (VANDU) was formed. With the support of the Pivot Legal Society, the Portland Housing Society (PHS) and the BC Centre on Substance Use, VANDU have, on numerous occasions, successfully lobbied municipal, provincial and federal governments to enact social change over the past two decades.

During the late 1990’s as HIV rates and overdoses continued to rise, VANDU, the PHS, other individual community activists together with local nurses, opened Vancouver’s first



illegal SCS. Operating in hidden back alleys, these sites offered clean, safe supplies and ensured health care professionals were able to respond in the case of an overdose. The illegal sites were successful in reducing overdoses and the spread of infection, with reports stating that in their sole year of operation they supervised over 3,000 injections (Kerr, 2017). At first, these initiatives received significant criticism as policy-makers with ideological values of conservatism (Desjarlais, 1995; Ball, 2007; MacNeil, 2011; Boyd, 2017) failed to evaluate harm reduction policies “against the actual effects of drug-related harms rather than on their consistency with cultural traditions” (Desjarlais, 1995, p. 11).

Citing data generated from their illegal activities to demonstrate the benefits of SCS, these organizations used the Canadian legal system to challenge and reverse the illegal status of SCS in Canada. In 2001, the Supreme Court of Canada granted legal exemption for the opening of North America’s first legally sanctioned SCS in Vancouver. Further, by highlighting lived experience, these groups were also catalysts for policy change with regards to policing, housing and the wider configuration of government funding in the neighbourhood.

More recently, scholars (see Schatz, 2010; Jozhang, 2013; Elliott, 2014; Boyd, 2017) have contributed insightful commentary on how such mobilisations by advocacy groups worked to successfully infiltrate the power hierarchies within the politics of policy making. By challenging and defeating both the provincial and federal governments on policy issues, these groups widened the scope of what constitutes evidence within the production of knowledge, specifically, “who claims ownership and the rights to evidence about the community” (Elliott, 2014, p. 14). Born from the urgency of political abandonment (Liu et al., 2013) these marginal activist groups became recognized as legitimate advocacy organizations and became instrumental in the ideological shift towards harm reduction by laying a foundational blueprint for policy in both the DTES and Canada as a whole (Liu et al., 2013; Elliott, 2014).

## **2.3 Methods**

### **2.3.1 The Fieldwork Site**

My research was conducted at a low threshold site, meaning that it does not enforce abstinence as a condition of receiving services. The site is a multi-purpose facility offering a variety of services (food, clothing, showers, laundry, ID clinic, health care, SCS) to members of the DTES community. The HRC is in close proximity to Oppenheimer Park, the largest homeless encampment in Vancouver. A large number of clients come to the site daily for their basic necessities. Additionally, many park residents are part-time employees of the HRC Peer Worker Program. As a result, the atmosphere is generally convivial and most clients and staff know each other on a first name basis.

### **2.3.2 Methodological Approach**

This study was mainly ethnographic, making use of a range of qualitative approaches. These include, in the first phase: (1) analysis of VPD policy documents; (2) attending and speaking at professional public health and policing conferences; and (3) attending drug user union meetings. The second phase was much more focused. It comprised five months of ethnographic fieldwork at the HRC, including (1) non-participant observation; (2) focus-group discussions with SCS users; and (3) one-on-one semi-structured interviews with site staff, including peer workers, case planners and nurses. The choice to adopt such a varied approach was based on the insights of Malina (2011), who stated “mixed method research employs various anthropological approaches iteratively or simultaneously to create a research outcome stronger than methods used individually” (Malina, 2011, p. 61). The decision to attend various conferences and drug user union meetings was based on the recommendation of Punch (1998) who explained that when an ethnographer enters a new environment, a varied qualitative approach that observes both individual behaviours as well as institutional settings “is an

excellent way of gaining insight into social processes...of that culture or sub-culture” (Punch, 1998, p. 129).

I began my fieldwork as a summer intern, enabling me to build rapport with clients prior to commencing the focus groups. As I was an employee during the initial fieldwork phase, I verbally informed clients that I would be doing research and that I was going to be holding focus groups at a later stage. As a result, I did not record any early conversations without the consent of my participants. During my internship, only general observations for the purpose of shaping my own understanding were recorded in my field notes.

In the final month of fieldwork, having completed my internship, I moved on to conduct six five-participant focus group discussions, meeting a total of thirty participants overall. The total participant group was made up of twenty-seven men and three women, twenty of whom self-identified as White, eight as First Nations/Metis/Inuit, two as Black and one as Hindu. Ages ranged between 25 and 75 years. In gathering participants, I used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Bernard, 2006). Prior to arriving in the field, I developed a focus group protocol of five open-ended questions. This question list was approved by both the University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics as well as the management of the HRC.

Focus groups ranged between 32-56 minutes in length. Johnson (2003) demonstrated that when pertaining to marginalized populations, who have often experienced tension with authority, focus groups are appropriate and successful in making participants feel comfortable, shifting the power dynamics of the traditional one-on-one interview (Anyan, 2013) and ultimately allowing for the appreciation of “real time interactions and reactions” (Bernard, 2002, p. 715). The speed and dynamism (Morgan, 1998) of these focus groups allowed me to gather a variety of perspectives in a short length of time. I also carried out fifteen one-on-one interviews with staff comprising management, resource workers and harm reduction nurses. The staff participant group was made up of ten women and five men. Logistically, I was

permitted to interview staff during their breaks which restricted interviews times to between 6-17 minutes.

I conducted each interview/focus group in a private room, away from other clients or staff, which allowed me to accurately record the sessions; and more importantly allowed the participants to be more open in their discussions (Bernard, 2002) than they might otherwise have been. I transcribed each recording using Wrely Software before thematically coding each transcription. To protect the anonymity of my participants, I referred to approximate ages only in my data collection and used a variety of pseudonyms for each participant.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.4.1 Biopower, Disciplinary Power and Surveillance**

In the course of this research, Foucault's insights about modern power were reflected in various aspects of the HRC clients' day to day lives, thus providing a useful lens through which to analyze the resulting data. In his 1977-1978 lecture series: "*Security, Territory, Population*" (Foucault, 1977) Michel Foucault identified three fundamental forms of power at the disposal of governments: sovereign power, biopower and disciplinary power; it is the latter two that are of relevance to this paper.

The concept of biopower lies in a specific mode of rationality: state control is maintained by promoting life, as opposed to instilling the fear of death. Examples of this are free health care and legally enforced public safety measures such as seatbelt usage and driving speed limits. Through the calculated increase of state presence within the lives of the population, societal mechanisms of control evolve. This is unlike the monarchies of seventeenth century Europe which used violent sovereign power to exert control and prevent rebellion (Oksala, 2013). Dean (2010) explains that:

Biopower is concerned with matters of life and death, with birth and propagation, with health and illness, both physical and mental, and ... the optimization of the life of a population ... the social, cultural, environmental, economic and geographic

conditions ... the family, with housing, living and working conditions, with what we call 'lifestyle' ... and the standards of living (Dean, 2010, p. 119).

Indeed, the techniques of biopower "control, monitor [and] optimize" (Foucault, 1978, p. 136) the health of the population, and thus the population's economic productivity.

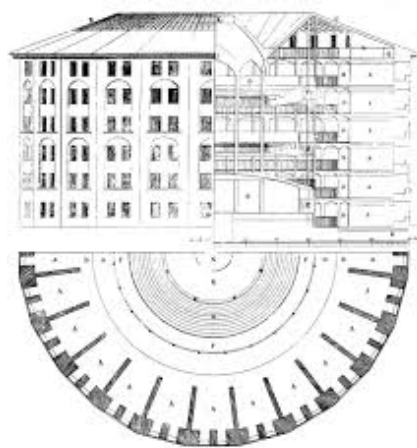
Disciplinary power, a force which is exerted in modern nations, is used by government institutions to inculcate the psyche of the populace with knowledge of how to behave and a corresponding fear of punishment should those behaviours not be followed. These institutions include schools, prisons, hospitals, police, the military and others. The efficacy of these modes of power lies in their ability to instill a perceived omnipresence of an institution's gaze into the lives and actions of those under its responsibility. Disciplinary power is strongly linked to Foucault's formulation of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1980) which asserts that it is these institutions that create and disseminate the knowledge and tools for the population to interpret the world around them. In turn, control over the population is achieved through training people how to think and behave in accordance with a set of homogenous morals and values (Foucault, 1977; Dean, 2010).

Biopower and disciplinary power hold the dual potential to be both productive and destructive by holding the possibility to equally control and optimize behaviours and outcomes in society. For example, the enhanced health of populations and maintained civility within governmentalized Western society demonstrates this. Foucault urges us to not interpret these power structures as necessarily insidious or oppressive and suggests that these varying apparatuses of control are not necessarily coordinated but are an open-ended "cluster of relations" (Driver, 2002, p. 116) that come together in particular sites and settings. At its essence, the effect of both of these power structures on society is that biopower is mobilised "to manage the population and ensure a healthy [and thus productive] workforce" (Foucault, 2003, p. 239), whilst disciplinary power controls behaviour and societal norms with economic productivity in mind.

## 2.4.2 Disciplinary Power and Panoptic Surveillance

At its core, disciplinary power is enacted by pervasively regulating time, space and behavior through surveillance. As such, the panoptic framework exemplifies how the concept of surveillance is essential to disciplinary power. My research identified panoptic surveillance in both the physical design of SCS and in police practices in the DTES.

The panopticon is an institutional building envisioned by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1791. Bentham's idea was later adopted by Foucault when he introduced the design into his theory of disciplinary power as a metaphor for social control. As seen in Figure 2, the panopticon is a prison design in which the inmates' cells are ordered in a circle with a central observation tower located at the center looking out over them.



*Figure 2: Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon Design (1791)*

Accordingly, while one guard in the tower is able to see into all cells at any given time, the inmates are unable to see whether they are being observed or not. The success of this design functions on the premise that the inmates will accordingly self-regulate their behavior due to the threat of constant observation (Crampton et al., 2016). Foucault has gone on to apply this theory to speed cameras, random police checks and employee drug testing etc., arguing that their existence indicates a panoptic society in which the potential of being caught ensures that

individuals regulate their own behavior to that of the ‘ideal citizen’ (Mckinlay et al., 1998). As my research will show, this mode of surveillance is present inside the SCS, in the wider community of the DTES and outside of the neighborhood. This is worthy of note because as my findings demonstrate this form of power can lead to distrust of the observer by the observed individual and risks rendering policy interventions less effective.

## **2.5 Analysis**

During the course of my fieldwork it became apparent that biopower and disciplinary power are operative in a variety of ways in the DTES, often having meaningful effects on the daily lived experience of the HRC clients. During my fieldwork I observed the pervasive nature of these power assemblages and saw how both the SCS and policing practices intersect with the often unsuccessful but common goal of re-shaping deviant drug-users in line with the normative values of biopower. Alongside these operations, life in Oppenheimer Park demonstrates that there is still opportunity for political resistance, even by region’s seemingly most powerless citizens. At a high level, social and cultural capital continues to be perceived by HRC clients as a way for both police and the wider society to establish bounded spaces excluding the visibly marginalized. This is a further example of the exertion of disciplinary power by the State. As I discuss the data in more detail below, my aim is not to critique, but to highlight and interpret how these forms of power shape the lives of the HRC clients.

### **2.5.1 The Panopticism of SCS**

All SCS follow a near-identical design that resembles the panopticon as a means to enforce sites rules in relation to drug consumption (Watson et al., 2013). To allow one person to monitor alone (like the prison guard), the nurse’s station is situated in the middle of a medium sized room directly facing open consumption booths along the other side of the room. Each booth is equipped with a large mirror, allowing one to two health professionals to monitor

the consumption practices of each drug user at any given time. Additionally, each booth has its own light controlled by the nurse, to ensure that the drug user is always visible. During my fieldwork, a significant number of clients would collect clean syringes and inject on the sidewalk outside of the facility rather than consuming within the SCS. This is because SCS rules and methods of supervision ultimately ignore and undermine “many of the distinct social or cultural norms and dynamics embedded in the injection drug user’s world” (Fischer, 2004, p., 360; Grund et al., 1996). For example, many clients preferred alternative practices such as injecting directly into the jugular vein, an extremely dangerous practice forbidden within the SCS. Further, behaviors required by SCS were referenced in other ethnographic accounts (see Fischer, 2004; Watson, 2013) of SCS in the DTES with users being made to wait in ‘chill rooms’ before and after consumption where they are given information concerning treatment centres and further harm reduction strategies. From entering the SCS to departing post consumption, users are controlled and recorded (Watson, 2013). Although the HRC did not have its own post-consumption chill-rooms, there was evidence of the presence of both biopower and disciplinary power working in conjunction with the aforementioned panopticon design of the SCS at the HRC as discussed below. It is possible that these techniques of power are having an opposite effect to that intended if users are choosing to use in proximity of the site to avoid adhering to the rules.

Additionally, the threat that police can be summoned by the HRC staff at any moment underpins the user experience. Although HRC staff would only call for police assistance in “extreme cases” (HRC Staff), the criteria for such that constituted an extreme case was ambiguous, leading to the underlying constant threat of police intervention. During my five months of fieldwork, police assistance was requested to the HRC approximately once every two to three days but only one of these calls was to deal with something happening in the SCS. The low number of requests for police to attend the SCS was not mirrored by user perception.



When asked if police ever enforced the SCS rules, Matthew, a White HRC client, stated “yeah, not constant, but they can watch through the cameras and they are definitely on speed dial, so you can never actually tell when they are watching or gonna show up.” (Matthew, White, 34). This finding shows that the staff’s ability to mobilize disciplinary power through the threat of police is used to underpin the public health teachings of biopower which promote and ensure safe injecting practices. This description of the internal functioning of the SCS supports the work of Fisher (2004) and Watson (2013) who similarly offer important insights into the underlying power relations at play within the SCS. Although ‘harm reduction’ is the official motive of the SCS, both biopower and disciplinary power are configured productively to re-shape drug consumption to be safer, notwithstanding they are being mobilised in a repressive fashion. Moving forward, I will demonstrate how the data show that these power structures exist beyond the SCS reaching into the community level. Much like within the SCS, the threat of police remains present once out in the neighbourhood.

### **2.5.2 The Panopticism of ‘Community-Policing’ in the DTES**

The DTES is identified by the VPD as District 2 (Strike, 2019). Within this area, at any given time, four groups of officers known as ‘The Beat Enforcement Team’ (BET) carry out simultaneous vehicle patrols in the neighbourhood. The DTES is the most heavily patrolled neighbourhood in Vancouver (McNeil, 2019) and is also home to VPD offices with dozens of patrol cars parked outside. Due to the heavy police presence, as soon as they step outside the HRC, clients remain under the perceived pervasive gaze of the police, similar to that of the nurses in the SCS, further evidencing the panoptic ideology underpinning the modes of control adopted by the SCS and the police.

In a September 2019 press release, a VPD spokesperson stated: “the mandate of these officers is to be a visible police presence, to conduct patrols, to disrupt criminal activity, to help maintain order and to lend a helping hand to people in the community.” (Strike, 2019, p.

1). The following section will demonstrate how participants perceive this mode of ‘surveillance policing’ (Loftus, 2012).

To restate, Foucault’s use of the panopticon centres on three assumptions: “(1) the omnipresence of the inspector, ensured by his total invisibility; (2) universal visibility of objects of surveillance; and (3) the assumption of constant observation by the watched” (Manokha, 2018, p. 226). Participants recognized this, as shown by Cal:

I mean the police are everywhere here. They are usually parked out front of places, often with nobody in it. But that makes people think twice about punching somebody in the face when they see a cop car sitting there. You never know when they're going to walk out and catch you. I think a lot of times that's how they utilize their resources. It's intimidation. (Cal, White, 34)

Cal was not alone in expressing an understanding of these supervisory policing practices and overall participant perception reflected the reality of VPD practices (Collins, 2019). In recent years, research has shown that police presence near an SCS was a significant barrier to drug users accessing services at the site (Macneil, 2019). Public health officials recommended that police immediately put a stop to patrols in the vicinity of SCS and only attend an SCS when called by the staff. Despite following this recommendation, there is still a significant police presence all over the DTES, including at its parks, shelters and community centres:

Yeah man and it feels like there are more cops now than ever. When you drive over the Cambie Street Bridge and see all the cops, just looking down at how many cop cars there is. Man, that made me shit a brick. I’ve never seen something like that before. (Brandon, Indigenous, 40)

John and Rick re-emphasize this sentiment, expressing that “there is always one parked outside Samaritan house, always, always” (John, White, 45), “not so much here (the HRC) but the Carnegie (DTES community centre), the 44 (DTES shelter), there are normally always cops watching by Main and Hastings” (Rick, Indigenous, 55).

These testimonies of surveillance are well-defined acknowledgments of the mode of community-policing that individuals are subjected too. However, not all Vancouverites experience this style of policing (Demers, 2007). Whilst Foucauldian scholars accept that we

live within a panoptic society, this intense style of monitoring which mobilises fear is reserved for “the poor, the powerless, and those who lack resources to dissemble and avoid surveillance” (Manning, 1989, p. 209). By identifying disciplinary power within this context, the question as to who is being watched and why is answered, it is those who deviate the most from the productive teachings of biopower.

As important as it is to identify the theoretical foundation of these policing practices, the actual impact within the community must also be explored.

I don't do anything to get in trouble but they still want to follow me. You know, I just don't like it when they're sitting there in their car and they just stare at me. If you have a problem with me, come up and talk to me. I'm human, don't just sit there and stare at me (rest of focus group: Exactly!). (Brad, White, 62)

Brad's divulgence of feeling dehumanized was echoed by many participants. Indeed, criminological literature suggests that police surveillance with limited interaction creates a sense of distrust and opposition between the police and the marginalized community (Daniel, 2016). Brad's statement gives a glimpse into the ways in which the continual surveillance of both legal and illegal activities affects those who are on the receiving end of the State's gaze, creating a sense of disrespect and distrust.

### **2.5.3 Oppenheimer Park**

It is a sunny Thursday afternoon in the DTES. The communal area of the HRC is busy with people playing cards, reading and enjoying the last bowls of granola left from earlier that day. As I congratulate Rick, a client who had just beaten me in a game of backgammon, I hear a high-pitched scream coming from the front desk. I cautiously walk over and join staff who are crouched down next to a young woman named Nicole who is lying on the ground. She is inconsolable, hysterically crying and screaming, “It's gone! They've taken it all, everything!”. After a few minutes, she slowly sits up, leaning back against the pillar of the front desk. As a staff member brings over a cup of tea, Nicole explains that she had an outreach appointment

and was only able to get back to her tent by 11:15am. At that moment, the three staff members immediately display a common understanding of the situation. They shake their heads, “I’m so sorry, they should at least wait until people are back” expressed a nurse who had come out of the SCS to console Nicole. As she continues to sob, an outreach worker calmly states “We’ll help you sweetheart, come to the back and try some stuff on”. This ethnographic vignette describes an event which took place during my first week of fieldwork. It was the first time that I witnessed the aftermath of the weekly ‘clear out’ of Oppenheimer Park.

In 2008, hundreds of people from Vancouver’s homeless community arrived to protest the ticketing of homeless people sleeping in parks throughout the city. It was at this time that Oppenheimer Park became known as ‘tent city’ (Aoki, 2012). Since then, the municipal government has continually attempted to relocate park dwellers into housing units. In the interim, precautionary weekly ‘clear outs’ have been imposed to remove fire hazards in advance of a total removal of the encampment. Nevertheless, today Oppenheimer Park is home to Vancouver’s largest homeless encampment (Woodvine, 2019) with over 150 people living there, some awaiting housing and others refusing to live in the neglected housing options presented to them in the City’s underfunded single room occupancy facilities (SRO).

The weekly ‘clear-out’ at Oppenheimer Park takes place every Thursday at 11:00am when City workers, firefighters and the police enter the park to inspect each tent. During an inspection, if a personal possession is deemed to be a fire hazard it is confiscated and thrown into the back of a dump truck. If residents resist, they are threatened with arrest and large fines. Additionally, if residents are not present at their tent, City workers are permitted to confiscate any possessions they deem hazardous. The classification as to what is hazardous is left to the discretion of these workers and it is applied arbitrarily as exemplified in Nicole’s experience. She returned from a housing appointment to discover that her tent and all of its contents (which comprised all her possessions) had been confiscated and destroyed. When searching for

answers, she was dismissed by VPD officers and told that they did not have any information regarding her possessions. Nicole was left confused as in her view none of her possessions represented a fire hazard.

In a May 2018 VPD press release, a police representative justified these practices, citing legitimate concerns over health and safety:

We remove flammable material and other items that might be combustible. Campers must keep paths clear and maintain wide separations between tents to minimize fire hazards and ensure safe entry and exit into the park in the case of an emergency. Additionally, campers cannot have secondary tents for storage. We try to limit the amount of disruption to campers. Everything we do is just for safety. (Mussett, 2019, p. 3)

However, these concerns fail to recognize the local knowledge's of park residents, some of whom have lived in the park for over ten years. For example:

Each week the different emergency services come around each tent showing us a list of rules. I'm looking at it and you can't have this or this or this? You're not allowed to have open flames; you're not allowed to have a mini-generator for light. Okay, but how are we supposed to stay warm right? It's as if we don't matter. And anyways, we have lived here long enough. It is just common sense you don't have an open fire in a nylon tent! (Jack, White, 36)

Jack's comments demonstrate expertise and an understanding of the ethos behind the city's 'clear outs'. Jack possesses the 'local knowledge', which Geertz (1983) described as a relatively organised body of thought based on immediacy of experience. Furthermore, Van der Ploeg's (1993) conceptualization of 'the art of locality' emphasized the value of spatially specific practices, which we see in Jack's description of safety awareness employed to survive in Oppenheimer Park. The regimented weekly checks, strict rules and the reinforced threats of punishment from authorities again demonstrate an alignment with disciplinary power that conditions the residents of the park to adopt certain behaviors desired by the State. Brandon acknowledges this, stating "they treat us better; they have respect for the guys in the camp who behave." (Brandon, White, 28).

Thus far, presentation of the relationship between police and park residents is characterized in terms of oppression and unwarranted surveillance. Although this analysis is borne out in the everyday lives of park residents, Foucault provides an understanding of the ways in which sites of disciplinary power intrinsically point towards opportunities for resistance; an understanding distinct from that of the State being the sole source of power (Watson, 2000) and providing an example of the productive side of disciplinary power. While waiting to be relocated to an SRO, John demonstrates how this resistance is possible, deliberate and empowering amidst these oppressive weekly acts:

On Thursday they will all be over here. I'm telling you! It would be a good idea to start packing your stuff now because if you don't, on Thursday morning, you're not going to have that opportunity, you're going to lose everything. They're coming in here with bulldozers and they're going to put everything onto that fucking cement and they're going to put it in dump trucks and drive away. Anybody who refuses is just going to get a \$1,500 fine and that's the law. It's been that way for fucking forty years. Five years ago, they said to the people in tent city that we would be getting housing by 2018. Now its 2019. Not one person's got a house. So, what's going on? For me it's really a silent protest. I'm going to live here until you give me a key to a place. Until then you can blow me. I have a right to have a roof over my head and if all I can afford is a tent then this is where I will live. (John, White, 45)

Here, John vocalizes how he 'protests' the lack of social support that tent city residents receive. Despite the population facing overwhelming marginalization and vulnerability that would typically suggest a lack of power, various participants felt empowered by the situation and interpreted their decision to remain in the park as an active act of protest. Although onlookers may perceive park residents as impotent, their refusal to be displaced to a new area or to an SRO within the DTES may signal a shift or at least resistance in the power dynamic. Despite the best efforts of municipal government to evict residents, the homeless occupation of Oppenheimer Park demonstrates how power is not inherently hierarchical but rather a productive force that can inspire resistance, even from society's most unsuspecting actors.

#### **2.5.4 Stigmatization, Social and Cultural Capital**

On the last Wednesday of each month, most HRC clients receive their welfare and/or disability cheques. Over the next few days they spend their money and the HRC is usually quiet. It is the end of August, and the Monday before welfare day. I unlock the front doors for 9:00am opening, and summer heat rushes into the air-conditioned reception area. As I begin welcoming the first few clients, Brad, a man in his 60's approaches me. After some small talk, he explains to me that this particular welfare day will be different because he plans to spend his welfare cheque all at once. I immediately assume that he is going to be spending it on drugs, alcohol or a hotel room for a few nights, which I understand from some younger clients to be common practice. I am mistaken. This month, Brad has to go to the vet to get his pet rabbit's tooth fixed. This procedure is going to cost upwards of \$400. The morning of the procedure, Brad approaches me again, this time in a full three-piece suit with his hair gelled back. I tell Brad that he looks great and ask why he has chosen this particular outfit. Brad explains that on his last trip to the vet as he ventured outside of the DTES into Kitsilano, an affluent suburban neighborhood, he noticed that people moved away from him on the bus and gave him dirty looks. Brad tells me that as he got off the bus, police approached him and interrogated him on his activity. Brad was carrying his rabbit in a basket and when stopped by the police, he was asked to 'tell the truth' about where he was going. Despite carrying his rabbit, the police deemed it unbelievable that a homeless man would be taking his rabbit to a vet outside the DTES. His choice of outfit this time is to avoid repetition of this embarrassing, unnecessary and time-consuming past encounter. Brad explains that he had spent the previous day visiting various clothing drives in the hope of acquiring a well-fitting suit. He had even bought second-hand dress shoes in an attempt to blend in and avoid any police attention during his trip outside of the DTES.

Brad's adjustment of his appearance illustrates his perception of the need to fit in with those outside of the DTES to avoid detection and intimidation by both the police and the people on the bus. In his past encounter, the behavior of the police as well as those on the bus can be understood by applying the concepts of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993), which Brad was perceived to lack. For Bourdieu, capital determines whether an individual can truly occupy a space. Social capital refers to the interpersonal relations, shared sense of identity, norms, values and understanding possessed by the residents of a given neighbourhood – thus the foundation for mutual trust (Jacobs, 1961). In contrast, cultural capital refers to the non-economic resources that enable social mobility including knowledge, skills and education (Bourdieu, 1993). These two forms of capital often merge together as individuals naturally discern visibly attainable markers of capital in order to quickly determine the social status, intentions and ultimately spatial belonging of those they encounter. Examples of such markers are appearance, speech, mannerisms and visible habits. Functionally, capital excludes those who are unable to fulfil the socio-economic requirements of a space. This exclusion can manifest through legal mechanisms such as anti-homeless laws or de facto by their own feelings of exclusion and stigmatisation (Bourdieu, 1993).

I was not there to witness the interaction between Brad and the police officer, therefore, this analysis is centred upon “reported speech” (Parmentier, 1994) – a dialogic interaction from another time or speaker. Thus, in this instance I cannot extend my assumptions as to the officer's perception of capital. In order to bridge the gap between what Brad is reporting and how the officer interpreted the situation, the intermediary concept of ‘interpellation’ (Althusser, 1971) is useful. For Althusser, interpellation is the process whereby an individual identifies intelligible markers of another individual's capital, “in turn transforming them from a uniquely embodied individual to a socially intelligible subject” (Stevenson, 2014, p. 160). This



intelligible subject is frozen into a pre-configured social position of identity – always already based on an assumption or prejudice. Such interpellation is often experienced as alienating:

To interpellate, then, is to put someone in his or her place by conferring a social identity, a subject position, and thus, intelligibility...so to interpellate someone is to assign a social essence, to see someone as a problem, as a criminal, as a drunk...and by so, seeing to fix a social identity” (Stevenson, 2014, p. 161).

As Stevenson explains, perceived capital acts as the basis by which one can interpellate an individual. The individuals’ recognition of capital demonstrates that capital and interpellation work together in a form of twin dynamic. This is especially true in the context of being detained and questioned in a ‘nice’ neighbourhood. During Brad’s experience of being apprehended by police and stigmatised on the bus, the police officer’s recognition of capital and subsequent interpellation was clearly present. Brad’s story was not the only example of this:

I’m no different from people here, I just dress better. I like to say I’m a classy bum and I noticed cops treat me a little different because I’m dressed a little nicer. (Michael, Indigenous, 30)

Although there is humor in how Michael refers to himself as a ‘classy bum’, Rick’s experience below demonstrates the extreme effect of inappropriate deployment of the police’s disciplinary tools:

Yeah, I used to live over Sigma Square. It's near the Granville Island area (trendy, touristy, boutique shopping district of Vancouver). One night I went to go pick up some milk, I mean I did that sometimes, it was night-time and it was pissing it down with rain. I was walking home, and a cop fucking threw me to the ground. He held me there. It’s pissing it down with fucking rain right, like cold slushy rain. He held me there for fucking like an hour. He told me, hey, your kind doesn’t belong here. I was wearing my fucking painting outfit at the time, on my way home from work. My kind doesn’t belong here? What is that supposed to mean? I said to them I just live up the fucking street here. After that I normally just stayed in at night. So yeah you can see why I feel the way I do. (Rick, Indigenous, 55)

In his focus group, Rick explains that this interaction occurred after work, having finished for the day at his first job since being released from prison. The treatment he received at the hands of the VPD made him feel completely despondent about his position in society. Although this

type of police treatment is not typical, when moving between different neighbourhoods, many of the HRC clients said that they experienced increased violence and hostility when interacting with the police outside of the DTES, once again demonstrating the the power of perceived capital:

Well I've actually found that it's safer for us to down in this area [DTES]. If we step out of like the DTES the cops will shit kick us. Because if we are found in like a good neighbourhood, they are going to pick us out like you don't belong here. (Brodie, Indigenous, 38)

Young (1995) suggests that those experiencing a traumatic event at the hands of the police will as a result question their position in relation to the interpersonal and structural relations that define who they are as both individuals and citizens. Further, Jauregui (2013) argues that the psychological damage caused by traumatic interactions with law enforcement is exacerbated due to the social implications of each interaction.

During the focus groups, many participants including Rick, were able to immediately recall past trauma when contextualizing their perceptions of the police. Rick for example was apprehended during a mundane, routine activity - going to the store to buy some milk – which forced him to re-negotiate how he navigated his neighborhood. As the various anecdotes show, many HRC clients recounted their experiences with the police both inside and outside of the DTES in ways which highlight how forms of stigmatization cause their perceived lack of capital. The data from my focus groups supports the existence of a cognitive framework shared by the HRC clients. Sociologist, Forest Stuart (2009), refers to this as 'Cop Wisdom':

a guide for processing information and making strategic decisions even when police officers are not yet physically present...Cop Wisdom provides the foundation for residents' efforts to evade, deflect and otherwise contest unwanted police contact (Stuart, 2009, p. 7).

Cop Wisdom encompasses the stories of HRC clients that have been presented throughout my research. The pervasive impact of disciplinary power is exemplified in its ability to compel HRC clients to alter their appearance and navigate the City in accordance with their

perceived social and cultural capital. Beyond the realms of supervision at the SCS, both in Oppenheimer Park and outside in the wider community, my research demonstrates the ways in which marginally housed drug users adapt their behavior and presentation to reduce the impact of their perceived lack of capital by both the VPD and the general population of Vancouver.

## **2.6 Implications**

Applied anthropologists argue it is imperative to link ethnography and theory to appropriately inform policy options to reduce structurally imposed suffering. The accounts gathered during my fieldwork seem to suggest an irreversible distrust in police and their practices. However, I believe there is a significant and important opportunity to take positive steps to overcome the reciprocated hostility between drug users and police. During the focus groups, I was encouraged to hear HRC clients repeatedly state the importance of acknowledging that there are a few officers in the community who are polite and show genuine concern during interactions:

I've been homeless in the alleys for two years. I interact with them several times a day because they're driving through the alleys and they often stop and look at their screens and obviously they get all the information about me but then they take time to talk to me, you know, they're concerned, so I feel a lot of compassion from them. I know as a community the relationship is negative. But from my perspective it has been positive. (Michael, White, 37)

The impacts of these positive interactions are clearly significant and lead me to believe that meaningful change is possible. In a wider sense, I believe that more humane police practices that recognize the social suffering that they are a part of, could be the key to changing community perceptions towards the police and giving policy interventions a better chance of success. Too often, policy-makers search for quick interventions to remedy visible and urgent social problems. This approach puts an emphasis on statistically measurable outcomes such as the number of drug overdoses reversed, park residents housed, or fire hazards removed from the park. However, in times of crisis, such interventions are often implemented without paying

close enough attention to the power relations at play. Indeed, rarely are the perceptions of the impacted community taken into consideration in the process of policy-making.

Slowing down and paying closer attention to the relationships and power relations implicated in a given policy intervention will help us determine whether specific policies, such as the ones spoken to in this thesis, address the underlying causes of complex problems or whether they are simply ‘quick fixes’, ill-equipped to provide meaningful long-term solutions.

By identifying the modes of biopower and disciplinary power present in everyday lived experience of the HRC clients, this thesis contributes towards a deeper understanding of both the productive and destructive aspects of disciplinary power in the context of the DTES experience and provides evidence-based implications for policy-makers and the police. By highlighting the scalable and pervasive nature of the various power relations – of disciplinary and biopolitical enactments of power - that shape the lives of the HRC clients, I emphasize the need to take seriously the perceptions of the community of drug users; indeed, these should be a primary consideration in the design, evaluation and implementation of harm reduction and policing policies.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Based on the narratives of the HRC clients, I suggest that biopower and disciplinary power are pervasively operative within the internal functioning of the SCS, outside the SCS in the methods of DTES community-policing and in the weekly police practices in Oppenheimer Park. As well as illustrating the negative effects of these power structures, my research also illustrates the productive capabilities of disciplinary power in acting as an enabler of resistance by the marginalised residents of the DTES. Importantly, the narrations of trauma and stigmatisation expressed by the HRC clients suggest that these individuals are acutely aware of their lack of both social and cultural capital when exiting the confines of their own neighbourhood. Their recognition of this lacking and the unintended distrust felt by

the community towards the police underpins the importance of continuing to study the power relations present within interventions designed to better the lived experience of the urban poor, as well as the risk of ignoring the impacts of these forces when developing new policies and evaluating current interventions. In the name of health, safety and public order, the HRC clients are being surveyed and intervened upon in various scalable ways. From the perspective of the police, public health officials and the general public, it may appear that these policies and interventions are distinct. However, with similar modes of power being mobilised, these interventions are linked in the way in which they impede on peoples' self-conscious experience of liberty and autonomy. The analysis I have presented in this thesis highlights the opportunity for those vested in the health, safety and environment of the urban poor to intervene in ways which are more humane, respectful and collaborative than current interventions.

## **Appendix A**

### **Research on Vulnerable Populations**

Van Wijk (2013) asserts that both (1) persons who cannot provide informed and voluntary consent, and (2) those who face social or legal stigmatization due to their given activity or identity should be considered as vulnerable (Van Wijk, 2013). Additionally, the “Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside” (Neufeld et al., 2019) is a report developed by local community stakeholders to outline best practices for researchers coming into the community. By adopting the guidelines set out in this report and by including participants who matched part (2) Van Wijk’s definition of a vulnerable population I was able to: (1) build rapport with the participant group before starting interviews; (2) pass internal ethics approval from the host organisation; (3) collaborate with both the organisation and the participants in developing research questions; and (4) in the spirit of reciprocity I will share my findings with the participants and the host organisation (Neufeld et al., 2019).

## Appendix B

### Power Imbalances in Methodology

I recognize there were power imbalances within my research methodology and both the fieldwork stage and the interviews were filled with uncomfortable moments of intrusion, stereotyping, cultural confusion and insensitive revival of trauma. An example of this came in my second focus group when Rick, an elderly Indigenous man stated mid-focus group:

Well you didn't explain this was going to be about the pigs (police), and no, I didn't read your information sheet, I just need the 20 bucks. They've busted me, many of the friends I associate with and many of the people in this room, so yeah we're going to get upset, they (the police) can go and fuck themselves. (Rick, Indigenous, 55)

Rick's motivation for participating in my focus group was clearly monetary, which could be seen as problematic. Scholars in the field of addiction and drug use (see: Brody et al., 2005; Grady, 2005) have argued "payments can serve as an undue influence for drug dependant individuals because of their compulsion to buy drugs...impairing the ability of drug users to fully evaluate the risks of research participant" (Fry et al., 2006, p. 24). Some scholars interpret this practice as unethical as it highlights the coercive nature of interviewing vulnerable populations. However, I believe despite the monetary motivation, Rick's input remains valid as it reflects the reality of his lived experience. To me, "it seems obvious that vulnerable research participants be compensated for their time, especially since the researcher [I] will be likely compensated to a much greater extent through future salary or awards" (Head et al., 2009, p. 337).

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