

**Constructing Perceived Boundaries: How NIMBY Discourses Create Boundaries of
Exclusion Regarding Safe Consumption Sites**

By

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Abstract

This paper examines urban politics through the lens of NIMBYism within the context of Safe Consumption Sites (SCS). It establishes NIMBYism as an ideology characterized by psychological boundary-making, before analyzing NIMBY discourses in Alberta. It conducts a discourse analysis of the Government of Alberta's Report Socioeconomic Review of Supervised Consumption Sites, as well as the 'Scona Concerned Citizens (SCC) and the Chinatown and Area Business Association (CABA). This dual analysis allows for greater insight into both governmental and citizen-based perspectives on NIMBYism. The discourse from these sources will be grouped within four codes, Dirty, Drugs, Danger, and Contamination, which are adapted from Toft (2014). Findings reveal the Government report's technical language aimed at expertise, with the most prevalent codes being drugs and danger. However, the technical language within the report was undermined by methodological issues including crime measurement biases, confirmation bias, and outcome-reporting bias. In contrast, this paper finds that the SCC and CABA present subjective NIMBY discourse emphasizing contamination and drugs, reflecting a more grassroots perspective.

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Abbreviations

NIMBY – Not In My Backyard

SCS – Safe Consumption Site

SCC – ‘Scona Concerned Citizens

CABA – Chinatown and Area Business Association

Chapter One: Introduction and Significance

Introduction

The landscape of urban politics is more complex than it may initially seem. Land developments are often begot by issues of social justice, where progress versus preservation often clash over what types of land developments ought to be approved, and where. This is all to say that the urban landscape is inherently political. Issues of land development often give rise to further questions of social justice and equity in the urban landscape. In many municipalities, there are groups devoted to supporting or opposing certain types of land developments in certain areas. At the heart of this impassioned resistance lies the fascinating terrain of boundary-making discourses, such as NIMBYism.

At its core, the mantra of NIMBY discourses can be summed up as *not here, and nowhere close to me*. Often, NIMBYism and other boundary-making discourses are intrinsically obstructionist. They are obstructionist both to certain types of land development and to the advancement of social justice causes. This obstruction can be detrimental to society, including when it comes at the expense of the development of safe consumption sites that protect the most vulnerable members of a community. While many boundary-making discourses are rooted in many real and valid concerns about social well-being, they are also a challenge to social justice causes, specifically when they are opposed to critical, life-saving infrastructure. In this thesis, I intend to dissect the obstructionist tendencies within a NIMBY movement, likening NIMBYism to the construction of psychological boundaries around certain types of land developments, such as safe consumption sites. This chapter will begin by addressing this paper's main research question, followed by my hypothesis, and a key definition of NIMBYism.

Research Question

The question that this thesis looks to discuss is as follows: What themes of boundary-making attend specific episodes of NIMBYism in Alberta, relating to safe consumption sites? To answer this question, I will study how NIMBY discourses are constructed in the context of safe consumption sites, specifically analyzing how these discourses create psychological boundaries between the self and the other. To conduct this analysis, I will study discourses that take oppositional opinions towards safe consumption sites, analyzing them for language *otherizes* certain groups of people to attempt to keep a group of people out of a certain area – a characteristic that is inherently NIMBY.

To operationalize this research question, I will be analyzing two different case studies of discourse opposed to safe consumption sites. The first case to be analyzed is the Alberta Government's Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites. This body of discourse will allow for an analysis of the technical language used by a governmental agency to oppose safe consumption sites, further allowing for a discussion as to whether this can be classified as a body of NIMBY discourse. The second case, or rather a collection of cases, will be two social movements in Edmonton, Alberta that opposed the operation of safe consumption sites in the city. Most of this discourse will be sourced from the 'Scona Concerned Citizens group, with supplementary discourse being sourced from the Edmonton Chinatown and Area Business Association. This analysis will allow for the comparison between discourse originating from a governmental body versus discourse originating from social movements. The operationalization of this research will be discussed at further length in the methodology section of this thesis; however, it is important to lay out the basic case studies to provide context for my hypothesis.

Hypothesis

While this study is not experimental in nature, there are still two hypotheses that I would like to define. My first hypothesis (H₁) is that bodies of discourse from both social movements and government documents will create psychological boundaries that serve to “other” and alienate drug users. While this hypothesis may seem to mimic the research question, it is important to clearly define this as a hypothesis for this study, as it provides a rationale for my research question, as well as sets out the basic expectations for the outcome of this study, which I will discuss further within the theoretical discussion of NIMBYism. My second hypothesis (H₂) is that the bodies of discourse from social movements will use emotionally charged language to equate drug use and drug users to criminality. Within this discourse, NIMBY values will be enshrined through the narrative of safe consumption sites *importing* crime into a specific neighbourhood, acting as a *contaminating* force in a neighbourhood. This structure may seem to beg the chicken and egg question of what comes first, the NIMBYism or the rhetoric of contamination. It could be argued that it is the NIMBYism that comes first in the form of a hegemonic ideology. More will be discussed on this idea further on.

Defining NIMBYism

NIMBYism, or “Not in My Backyard-ism” is a movement where residents of certain neighbourhoods oppose types of land use within their neighbourhood. Much of the relevant literature on NIMBYism addresses it as a loosely constructed grassroots movement, stemming from commonalities of not wanting certain types of land use zones in neighbourhoods close to where one lives. I intend to take up the argument of many scholars who concern themselves with equity and social inequality and argue that NIMBYism is inherently political. In recent years,

NIMBYism has been known to interfere with basic living conditions and common decency. Specifically, NIMBYism has been used to oppose safe consumption sites, denying basic human decency to urban area's most vulnerable populations.

I am drawn to this topic for many reasons. I will take this paragraph as an opportunity to write reflexively and add certain subjective critiques to this project. First and foremost, NIMBY discourses may be counterposed to social justice. Much of the discursive language within NIMBY discourses regarding unhoused people or people suffering from drug addiction is dehumanizing. This is something that I am passionate about, in a negative sense. I am passionate about justice and equality for all people, and a movement such as NIMBYism that employs such dehumanizing discursive terms drives me to research this topic. For this reason, I would like to unpack the discourse to understand these movements, so I and other scholars can work to advance just treatment for all. Furthermore, I would like to better understand the inherently political aspects of NIMBY discourse, specifically within the context of my home province of Alberta. My area of focus will be on NIMBY discourses regarding safe consumption sites. I am interested in how NIMBY discourses are present in both social movements and government organizations and how these discourses manifest themselves through discursive language. Theoretical literature on NIMBYism will be addressed in the following chapter, along with a review of the key literature that discusses municipal politics, border studies, and NIMBY movements.

Chapter Two: The Literature

Literature Review

Due to the wide scope of topics that this paper draws upon, numerous concepts ought to be defined and discussed in this literature review. The literature review will be focused on four key topics within this thesis. First, this section will discuss the previously published academic literature on NIMBYism. Second, this review will discuss conceptions of ideology and how NIMBYism can and ought to be classified as such. Third, this section will discuss boundary studies and how academic thought within this field can be applied to the psychological boundaries that NIMBY discourses create and perpetuate. Finally, this section will outline previous academic literature on the topic of safe consumption sites.

NIMBYism

The basic theory behind NIMBYism is that it's a response to land uses that everyone wants, but no one wants on their block (Inhaber 1998, 1). Furthermore, when discussing the theoretical basis of NIMBY, Inhaber (1998) states that the social problems that NIMBY attitudes exacerbate are extensive (1). To illustrate the essence of NIMBY, Inhaber gives the example of a Nova Scotia Mayor who used political leverage to keep a waste management facility out of their community. In this example, the waste then went to a community that had less political and economic power than the community in question, a fact that the mayor of the first community admitted (3-4). NIMBYism has historically been intertwined with racist and homophobic movements. It has been used to *other* certain populations (5), including racialized communities through the process of residential segregation and *keep this neighbourhood white* movements, or homosexual communities, through *keep AIDS out* campaigns.

Furthermore, NIMBYism has been used to oppose social housing movements and homeless shelters, due to an inherent dread of risks (Inhaber 1998, 99). These risks may be present when so-called *outsiders* enter a community. For instance, NIMBYs may fear social housing developments, or safe-consumption sites, due to the perceived risk of *undesirable* people entering a neighbourhood. Furthermore, Inhaber uses the example of the risk perception of AIDS during the AIDS crisis. While AIDS is not desirable, it is not easily transmitted from person to person without blood contact or sexual contact; however, people were ostracized from communities due to the stigmatism of contracting the disease (Inhaber 1998, 99), or perhaps the lifestyle that led to the disease being contracted. This leads to a common discursive theme within NIMBYism of *contamination*. There is a fear that, such as with a disease, certain undesirable people will contaminate a neighbourhood, making that neighbourhood less desirable.

The psychological basis of NIMBYism is not difficult to understand. Let us take Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, which posited the basic needs of shelter and security at the bottom of the hierarchy. When a threat to these basic needs is perceived, humans are rational in resisting this threat, according to Maslow's hierarchy (Inhaber 1998, 11). Therefore, NIMBYs are not acting irrationally in the human sense. The irrationality occurs when these threats are socially constructed and perceived, rather than real, tangible threats. In this case, NIMBY psychology creates a roadblock to solving social problems.

NIMBYism is also often tied to injustice. This is to say that certain groups have the political power for NIMBYism, while others do not. NIMBYism often pushes certain land developments down the path of least political resistance. Therefore, communities with more power for political resistance often will have more power for NIMBY movements. Political theorist Robert Bullard (2001) argues that for this reason, white communities have greater

political power to be NIMBYs than communities of colour (158). In this regard, NIMBYism is tied to injustice – certain groups of people have the power to oppose certain developments, and some do not hold this power.

In academic literature, NIMBYism tends to be presented regarding safe consumption sites (including drug and alcohol consumption), and other social issues. On principle, NIMBYs argue that they are not ignoring the needs and rights of drug users and the socially vulnerable, rather they are merely protecting their community interests currently (Lofaro and Miller 2001, 84). This viewpoint is based on the idea that drug use is absent in communities before the consumption site is built. It is false to say that safe consumption sites would bring drug use into the neighbourhood, which is an argument taken up by many NIMBYs. The drugs are already there.

The *neighbourhood-first* argument is one presented by many NIMBYs. While this discourse may seem more innocuous than the outright denial of welfare and social services, it may be more insidious than it appears. According to Lofaro and Miller (2001), “all narratives “otherize” people who use drugs by letting stand a hegemonic construction of people [labelled] as drug addicts and drug addiction” (88). An important aspect of this definition is the hegemonic construction within the movement. This idea of hegemony will be revisited when discussing NIMBYism and ideology. Furthermore, NIMBYs rely on discursive strategies that demonize people who use drugs, granting the ability for these NIMBY narratives to amass assent (88) on the hegemonic nature of NIMBY discourses.

NIMBY discourses have been studied in jurisdictions where residents oppose the development of legal marijuana dispensaries. Nemeth and Ross (2014) find that marijuana dispensaries are locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) (6) and are zoned and located as such.

NIMBYs fear that medical marijuana dispensaries or sites of sale, as well as other *immoral* land uses, such as safe consumption sites, will disrupt the community's way of life, as well as bring crime to the neighbourhood (7).

Next, I would like to go over two brief ethnographic introductions to the NIMBY phenomenon in action, specifically concerning social housing and the *othering* of groups accessing such housing. First, an ethnographic study of neighbourhood reactions to proposed social housing in Montreal, Quebec, written by Myra Piat (2000), provides an interesting insight into the basis of NIMBYism. While I will not address the entire sequence of events, the main takeaways from the article, specifically the residents' reactions to the issue, are as follows: Firstly, Piat asserts that NIMBY attitudes developed in an era where the deinstitutionalization of people based on social, political, or ability characteristics was politically popular and feasible (127). Piat uses the term deinstitutionalization to discuss people who have been diagnosed with mental illness and need constant supervision who have been removed from long-term stay psychiatric hospitals and instead reside in semi-independent, supervised facilities that are placed within urban neighbourhoods. Communities resist social projects such as welfare housing and group homes, as there is a fear of the *otherness* that this would bring to a neighbourhood (127). NIMBY movements are roadblocks to the full integration of societal groups. According to NIMBYs, certain groups possess an *otherness*, that is not acceptable in certain places within an urban landscape.

Such as the case in Montreal, a similar case was documented by Vincent Lyon-Callo (2001) in the city of Northampton Massachusetts. The aspect of *othering* was heavily featured within the NIMBY opposition's opinions towards social housing being proposed for the neighbourhood. According to Lyon-Callo (2001), residents of Northampton Massachusetts in

1998 described the potential inhabitants of a proposed homeless shelter as “mentally ill, dangerous, chemically addicted, lazy, or as potential criminals and vandals” (183). Immediately, the ugly tropes used by the NIMBY rear their head. These tropes are prominent in lots of NIMBY discourses and will be featured heavily when discussing NIMBY's opposition to safe consumption sites in Alberta.

Certain NIMBY discourses may seem to lack empathy. For instance, Lyon-Callo (2001, 184) states that as opposed to showing empathy to people less fortunate than themselves, certain groups that perpetuate NIMBY discourses may be more likely to attribute homelessness to failures within the homeless population themselves. The opposition to homeless shelters became based on prejudice and selfishness (185). The authors go on to state that NIMBY's opposition to certain developments such as social housing or safe consumption sites tends to be rooted in selfishly created concerns with property values, crime, and unfounded prejudices towards houseless persons (192).

NIMBY attitudes seek to create physical boundaries between a certain group and a perceived *other* in two ways. First, they seek formal restrictions on what and who cannot be placed in a certain area (Maney and Abraham 2008, 67-8). Second, they seek to create social exclusion and isolation through intimidation, isolation, and marginalization (67-8). Boundary making is an important aspect of NIMBYism, as it creates the distinction of *us versus them*, which is central to the *othering* discourse (68). NIMBY groups draw lines of difference along racial, ethnic, and class-based lines. Furthermore, NIMBYism seeks to reinforce the status quo of a neighbourhood (68); it is an inherently reactionary attitude. Before speaking about boundary-making discourses further, I would first like to discuss the academic merits of conceptualizing NIMBYism as an ideology, rather than a loose social movement.

Ideology

Contrary to the belief taken up by many scholars, this paper argues that NIMBYism can and ought to be classified as an ideology. This viewpoint has not been taken up by scholars for two main reasons; first, because NIMBYism has previously been regarded as a social movement, and second, because the concept of ideology is incredibly difficult to accurately define.

However, I choose to define NIMBYism as an ideology for two reasons. First, as we will see in the upcoming sections on the body of discourse, as well as the theoretical definitions of ideology, NIMBYism may not be as loosely constructed as some social movements and fits many definitions of ideology. Second, when a government begins to take up the cause of NIMBYism, it is shifted out of the realm of a social movement and into the realm of ideology.

It is important to ask whether NIMBYism classifies as a political ideology or a political movement. NIMBYism has thus far been discussed as a social movement or an attitude; however, can it be discussed as an ideology? The definition of ideology can be vague, although we may understand the ontological basis of what ideology is. Originally, French enlightenment Philosopher Destutt de Tracy introduced the word to describe the science of ideas (van Dijk 2006, 729). T.A. van Dijk (2006), who provides this information on the study of ideology, provides a more focused definition, discussing ideology as “the foundation of the social representations shared by a social group” (729), or rather, the basis of a shared set of perspectives of a group.

However, there are more nuanced definitions of ideology. There are many competing perceptions of ideology that tend to be based on political ideologies themselves. For instance, Iain MacKenzie writes that each ideology contains an account of how the political and social world order conducts itself, as well as prescribed ways of how these orders ought to organize

themselves (2014, 3). NIMBYism also contains the normative or prescriptive aspect of ideology. Regarding opposition to safe consumption sites, NIMBYs prescribe the way things ought to be, or rather, where things ought to be or ought not to be. MacKenzie (2014) also states that “Each political ideology also contains within it a set of strategies and policies about how to move the current political situation in the direction of its vision” (3). When it comes to NIMBYism, we can see the prescribed policies and attitudes that push the world to where NIMBYs think it ought to be. This can be seen through concerned citizen groups, letter-writing campaigns, or protests.

For this project, I will opt to begin with a definition laid out by political scientist Michael Freedon (1969), which fellow political scientist Iain MacKenzie (2014) describes as *abhorrently vague* (11). In his 1969 work *Ideologies and Political Theory*, Michael Freedon describes ideology as “those systems of political thinking, loose or rigid, deliberate or unintended, through which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the political world they, or those who preoccupy their thoughts, inhabit, and then act on that understanding” (1969, 3). While this definition may come across as long-winded for being an over-generalization, Freedon has grasped an essential concept of ideology, that it is the way that ordinary people organize and take part in political life. NIMBYism can be understood as an ideology regarding Michael Freedon’s 1969 work on ideology, as it is a system of political thinking from which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the world in which they live. Furthermore, NIMBYs use NIMBYism to attempt to exert influence on the world in which they reside, again satisfying Freedon’s classification.

Let us now recall the idea of the hegemonic construction of drug users (Lofaro and Miller 2001) that NIMBY discourses seek to instill in their subscribers and the world around them. There is an implicit nature and worldview that NIMBYs hold, which they believe the rest of the

world ought to subscribe to as well. This implicit nature connects to a Gramscian idea of hegemony or the hegemonic ideology—an ideology that has become so naturalized to its group of adherents that it becomes second nature to them. To NIMBYs, it is simply a way that life ought to be. It is a way in which the world ought to operate.

Theorist Antonio Gramsci believed that ideologies are a way of organizing the populous, allowing them to gain consciousness (Williams 2020, 96). Briefly setting aside the idea of class consciousness, Gramsci's insight allows for further analysis of how ideologies become second nature to those who follow them. Gramsci also noted that ideology is not merely a set of ideas that people subscribe to, but are blocs of thinking innately related to social, political, and economic configuration, having the power to organize the actions and thoughts of the populous (Williams 2020, 96). Yet again, we can see multiple conceptions of ideology that rise to a level of social organization, of which NIMBYism can easily be included.

In this Gramscian analysis, ideological hegemony refers to a worldview that is regarded as a common-sense position that ought to shape the norms and perceptions of society. It is a form of naturalization of a belief. To NIMBYs, NIMBYism is not an idea, rather it is a way that the world ought to operate. It is a way in which the social and political sphere around them must orient itself. In this instance, NIMBYism becomes a hegemon within the view of how the world ought to be. It is not just an idea to follow, but a way the world ought to be organized. When combining Gramsci's conceptions of hegemony and a hegemonic ideology, Lofaro and Miller's (2001) understanding of the hegemonic nature of NIMBY movements, as well as Michael Freeden's (1969) conceptions of ideologies as systems of political thinking, I do not believe it is as much of a stretch to analyze NIMBYism as a form of ideology. Certainly, ideology is still a difficult concept to work with; however, if we understand NIMBYism within the framework of

understanding an ideology, it becomes easier to discuss the discursive elements of NIMBY movements in a more standardized fashion. This is an approach that has not been taken by scholars studying NIMBYism in the past. It is a goal of this project to provide a more nuanced understanding of approaching NIMBYism through this framework.

Border Studies

Since the idea of psychological boundaries is important to this topic, I would like to briefly lay out the theoretical underpinnings behind border and boundary studies, including where this idea of psychological boundaries comes from. Border studies and boundary studies are about place-making. While the thousand-foot view tends to regard border studies as a function of international relations, there are much deeper conceptions of boundary studies that this ignores. Once the territory of scholars of geography, political and social borders have a prime area of political study due to their denotation of difference (Wilson and Donnan 2012, 2).

Borders show differences of many kinds. They may denote differences between states or localities, or any jurisdictional unit. Borders are perceived boundaries. They, in most cases, are lines of imagination (Newman 2017, 5). This is the nature of boundary studies that I am trying to attack – borders are more than just lines drawn on a map that divide states and subdivide nations, they are perceived within the context of how society operates. They delineate right from wrong. They delineate insiders from outsiders; and the *normals* from the *others*. Borders are exclusionary practices that outline who and what is allowed in a certain area. This idea of placemaking makes a certain space more favourable to some while exclusionary to others. All types of boundaries, whether physical or psychological, are exercises of power (Newman 2017, 8). What is the common denominator between a migrant being denied entry at an international border, or a houseless person being removed from a shopping mall? There is a boundary of some

sort that states, whether implicitly or explicitly, that one type of person is allowed here, and the other is not. The removal of the other is an act of political power and subjugation.

There has been a growing academic trend within social and cultural geography, as well as the political study of borders and boundaries, that approaches a border as an imaginary boundary that serves to *otherize* certain individuals within certain spaces. These types of boundaries could include turnstiles in a train station or the zoning lines that subdivide neighbourhoods within a city, demarcating who belongs (i.e., those who live there, visitors, workers) and who does not. It is this framework, of psychological boundaries, that I will employ in this paper. According to Mark B. Salter (2012), everyday life within a state or a jurisdiction brings about questions of boundary studies through the traversing of boundaries, which can be physical or imagined, that coincides with assumptions of who ought to be traversing this boundary, and who ought not to be (739). This is the main underpinning of boundary studies that this paper attempts to discuss; the traversing of boundaries by those who are perceived not to have crossed such a boundary.

Theory of Municipal Politics

I would also like to draw attention to the theory behind using the municipality as a unit of analysis. For many political scientists, the state has become the main unit of analysis. Even if it ontologically makes sense to treat local and municipal government as a subset of political science, it is not always regarded as an important unit of analysis in political science and political theory (Swiecicki 2019, 532). Local government is sometimes regarded as apolitical, and it is hard to pay attention to local government when we live in a world dominated by the state (532-3). Lukasz Swiecicki (2019, 531) goes on to argue that while local government tends to be marginally studied within political science, the problems raised and addressed by local government have political urgency that ought to be addressed by theorists. This is to say that

while local government has been regarded as an afterthought by political theorists, there are inherently political issues being addressed at the local level which ought to have the attention of political scientists – such as safe consumption sites. For this study, the municipality ought to be regarded as an important unit of political analysis.

As Jennifer Steffel (1995) writes, suburbia is political and NIMBYs are its constituents (64). Municipal and provincial governments have viewed NIMBY groups as legitimate movements of direct democracy (65). With NIMBY movements, citizen groups are formed and become politically savvy in directing local governments to make NIMBY decisions (69). In this form, NIMBY groups may act as ideological coalitions within the voter base of municipal politics, encouraging politicians to take up NIMBY positions to court their votes. This reinforces not only the idea that the municipality ought to be a larger unit of analysis but also the concept that NIMBYism can be defined not only as a social movement but also as an ideology.

Chapter Three: The Methodology

The Methodology

To address the complex dynamics within the opposition to safe consumption sites, I have chosen three cases to achieve a breadth of analysis regarding boundary-making discourses and NIMBY attitudes. This section outlines the methodological framework employed to scrutinize the discursive language used in government documents, such as the Alberta Government's Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites, as well as citizen's movements, such as the 'Scona Concerned Citizens' (SCC) and the Edmonton Chinatown and Area Business Association (CABA). The objective is to uncover the key themes and perspectives that shape the opposition to safe consumption sites in Alberta, relating to my research question: What themes of boundary-making attend specific episodes of NIMBYism in Alberta, relating to safe consumption sites?

The Government of Alberta

In Alberta, there are two main subdivisions of discourse relating to safe consumption sites that are exemplified by these three cases. The two subdivisions are government agencies and citizen's movements. The first case which will be analyzed comes from government documents that oppose safe consumption sites; namely the Alberta Government's Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites. This will provide my first subdivision within the discursive language. I intend to analyze this subdivision for the technical language used to oppose safe consumption sites. This technical language is mainly used to oppose safe consumption sites from a viewpoint of economic loss, as well as from the ideological perspective of the current government that long-term wellness over acute harm reduction to combat continued drug use (Government of Alberta 2024b). The panel attempts to present itself as an authoritative, objective, and expert opinion on safe consumption sites, while citizen groups tend

to use emotionally charged, dehumanizing language when discussing safe consumption sites. For example, the Government of Alberta text places more emphasis on what are purported to be crime statistics and economic loss, while citizen's movements focus on the danger that safe consumption sites pose to communities. This is not to say that there is a distinct difference between the two sources, as the Government of Alberta presents some language that is more emotional in nature, specifically when including testimony from town hall attendees.

Citizen groups

The second and third cases that will be analyzed belong to the second subdivision of citizen's movements and organizations that oppose safe consumption sites. For these cases, I will analyze the discourse presented by the 'Scona Concerned Citizens (SCC) and the Edmonton Chinatown and Area Business Association (CABA). The SCC is a grassroots organization based in the Strathcona and Ritchie neighbourhoods in Edmonton that opposes the proposed Ritchie Health Hub safe consumption site. CABA is a business association that has previously opposed safe consumption sites in Edmonton's Chinatown neighbourhood. I intend to analyze the discourse presented by the SCC and CABA for discursive language that uses emotionally charged words to equate drug addiction and safe consumption sites with crime.

The SCC discursive language will be sourced from the SCC's public website¹. Most of this data will be found within letter templates that the group encourages its supporters to send to local elected officials and public servants. The CABA discursive language will be sourced from the court case, *CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017*, which argued for rights to procedural fairness in selecting locations for safe consumption sites. Using these cases will allow for the comparison between discourse originating from a governmental

¹ See: <https://sconaconcernedcitizens.weebly.com/>

body versus discourse originating from social movements. All the discourse body used in this study has been sourced from publicly available websites and government documents.

On the SCC website, letters written to politicians, brochures, and other forms of literature can be found. These bodies of discourse include discursive language used to oppose safe consumption sites based on increased criminality, personal safety, and the degradation of neighbourhood character. The discourse body to be analyzed included letter templates to be sent to Mayor Amarjeet Sohi, Premier Danielle Smith, AHS public servants, the City of Edmonton, former Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Nicholas Milliken, former Minister of Health Jason Copping, City Councillor Michael Janz, and form letters to be sent to Members of Parliament².

Safe Consumption Sites in Alberta

Currently, there are seven safe/supervised consumption sites in operation in Alberta that are overseen by the Government of Alberta. These sites include Grande Prairie; Red Deer; Calgary; Medicine Hat; and three sites in Edmonton (Alberta Health Services n.d.). According to Alberta Health Services, safe consumption sites are part of evidence-based treatment meant to reduce the harm of opioid use, as well as provide mental and physical health treatment to Albertans struggling with addiction. As part of operating a safe consumption site in Alberta, service providers must meet licensing requirements following standards set out by the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (Canada), as well as follow a good neighbour policy, which sets out how the service providers ought to interact with key neighbourhood stakeholders (Alberta Health Services n.d.). The good neighbour policy is a key unit of analysis for this project, as stakeholder

² See: <https://sconaconcernedcitizens.weebly.com/make-your-voice-heard.html>

analysis is a contentious issue within the discourse presented by the ‘Scona Concerned Citizens group.

It is equally important to lay out the stated goals of safe consumption sites, as their aims and importance are often misunderstood, including within the discourse that will be analyzed in this paper. According to Health Canada (Health Canada 2018a) supervised consumption sites³ provide many services to people who use intravenous drugs. Many of these services emphasize providing a safer place to consume illegal substances. Safety is given by providing a safer place to consume illegal substances with sterile equipment and a lesser risk of violence. Furthermore, safe consumption sites also may provide drug testing with fentanyl strips, or testing for other substances that may be harmful for ingestion. Furthermore, safe consumption sites can provide emergency medical care, including overdose prevention and reversal. These sites also provide basic medical care, including wound care, infection care, or STI testing.

Furthermore, Health Canada expects that these safe consumption sites offer education on safer consumption practices or safer sex practices (Health Canada 2018a). These sites also ought to offer counselling or other services on drug use and addictions, including referrals to mental health care and addiction counselling (Health Canada 2018a). Finally, sites ought to provide referrals to primary health care providers, as well as provide access to other social welfare services, including housing, employment, and food services (Health Canada 2018a).

Discourse Analysis Framework

To analyze the language presented by these bodies of discourse, I will read the data sources, and code the discursive language accordingly. Following Michael Fairclough’s work on

³ In this paper, I refer to them as *safe consumption sites*; however, the Government of Canada uses the term *supervised consumption sites*.

discourse, there are two main steps to sourcing a discourse: identify the main themes that are represented in the situation; then, identify the perspective from which these themes are represented (Fairclough 2003, 129). This involves creating a coding framework that applies to the specific set of discourses. I have chosen to employ a discourse analysis to achieve a deeper understanding of the nuance of language within NIMBY narratives regarding Safe Consumption Sites. To create my discourse coding framework, I borrow from Toft (2014) and group the discursive language into three categories: *dirty*, *drugs*, and *danger* (793). Adding to Toft's code, I will incorporate a code of my own, that being *contamination*. Toft also discusses the idea of *lexicalization*, which is a "strategy in the linguistic production of deviance among groups or populations" (Toft 2014, 785) where language is added to social conceptions of a certain group to attach or reinforce discursive overtones of deviance. I chose to use Toft's framework as it is easily applicable to understanding the *otherizing* discursive themes used when discussing homelessness and drug use. The parameters of Toft's study are congruent with the parameters of this study. In Toft's case, the study looked at discursive strategies within linguistic representations of homelessness (Toft 2014, 783). Such discursive language was often employed within representations of drug users within the homeless populations, hence, the code *drugs*.

Breaking down these three categories, *dirty* includes references to any types of degradation associated with drug use, including references to degradation of neighbourhood character, and general social disorder such as encampments. *Dirtiness* tends to be associated with unhoused persons, as well as drug users (Toft 2014, 795), and to subjugate them into the background of their existence. For instance, while encampments are characterized as dirty, so too are the people who live in them. However, the inhabitants of these encampments are subordinated to and defined by their physical location, a dehumanizing tactic. Within the code

dirtiness, I intend to include all mentions of social disorder, homelessness, neighbourhood character degradation, and encampments. For example, the Alberta Government report, when discussing social disorder, states that identified disorder “identified included the discovery of human feces and urine on streets and in doorways” (Government of Alberta 2020, 5).

Next, discussing *drugs* – this discursive section includes all mentions of open drug use, needle debris, and other language associated with substance use. This is a key discursive category, as substance use, and addiction are key tenants in *otherizing* certain people. *Drugs* are seemingly self-explanatory to this study and includes mentions of open drug use outside of the safe consumption site, including needle debris and drug paraphernalia. For example: “Non-opioid substance use, specifically methamphetamine use at some sites, increased substantially” (Government of Alberta 2020, iii).

The code *danger* includes any references to personal crime (a crime that involves harm, such as assault or harassment). *Danger* will also include affective danger (including victimless crimes such as vandalism). Drug use and houselessness have often been associated with crime and criminality due to their representation as social actors, such as criminals or thieves, or their representation in relationships with other members of the public, such as the general population, or the police (Toft 2014, 800). *Danger* includes the *danger* to economic prosperity that these sites supposedly pose. Any concerns presented by the Government of Alberta or citizen groups that call into question dangers to economic prosperity will be coded under *danger*. Finally, any concerns presented over lack of public consultation or issues with how sites are operated will be coded under *danger*, as the discourse raised on this issue has to do with the *danger* that safe consumption sites pose to a neighbourhood when there is a perceived lack of due process. As

you will see in the next chapter: "...crime, as measured by police calls for service, generally increased in the immediate vicinity" (Government of Alberta 2020, iii).

Calling on theoretical interpretations of the concept of *danger*, political scientist David Campbell (1998) writes that danger is not an objective idea, it takes meaning from those it becomes a threat to (1). This is to say that danger is in the eyes of the beholder. A subject or object is not innately dangerous, it becomes dangerous when viewed as such. The danger is an effect of interpretation; nothing is per se, *dangerous* in and of itself, yet anything can be *perceived* as dangerous (2). This is a fundamental aspect of building the code *danger*. To NIMBYs, a safe consumption site is *dangerous*, because its clientele is *perceived* to be dangerous.

On this topic of dangers to a community, the code *Contamination* will be similar to the codes *danger* and *dirty*, in that it discusses the contaminating, or infecting nature of drug use in a neighbourhood. Like disease, *contamination* will be used whenever a body of discourse draws on themes of expansion of social disorder (open drug use, encampments, vandalism, and crime) that seemingly seep into the neighbourhood and *contaminate* the once pure neighbourhood. *Contamination* is different from *dirty*, in that *dirty* simply includes messaging of neighbourhood degradation, encampments, or other elements of perceived *dirtiness*, while *contamination* makes mention of this *dirtiness* in the context of its seeping and infecting quality. *Contamination* includes themes such as lack of consultation. As you will see in the next chapter: "Many residents, including those in the immediate proximity to the site, indicated that they had not been properly consulted regarding the potential location" (Government of Alberta 2020, 32). A discourse present within the category of *contamination* can also include the sentiment that a neighbourhood would revert to a time before the improved present (Toft 2014, 801). While this

category could also fall under *dirty*, I will code this sentiment as *contamination*, as it represents the temporally contaminating threat to a community that a long-term safe consumption site would bring, rather than the immediate *dirty* that a safe consumption site would bring to the community.

I chose to include the code *contamination*, as it embodies an active aspect of *dirty* or *danger*. Outside of *contamination*, the codes include a sense of inertia. For example, a homeless encampment (*dirty*) is inert. It exists in a bounded space. However, when a homeless encampment is discussed as moving or expanding, it becomes a *contaminating* force. This is an important distinction that ought to be made to create a greater breadth of analysis. For a simplified view of this framework, see *Table 1* below. To briefly conclude my methodology, once the data is coded, I will present an overall analysis of each case study, discuss the main codes, and overlap between the codes for each case, as well as critically discuss the discourse from each case.

Codes			
Dirty	Drugs	Danger	Contamination
Degradation; general social disorder; encampments; homelessness/unhoused persons.	Drug use, needle debris, substance use.	Personal crime; property crime; affective danger; safety; policing (or de-policing); loss of economic prosperity	Expansion of social disorder (drug use, encampments, general social disorder, crime (personal and property)); the seeping quality of <i>dirty</i> and <i>danger</i> ; lack of consultation.

Table 1: Simplified Codes

To assist with coding, I will be employing software such as MaxQDA. To ensure the accuracy of the upcoming quantitative portion of this project, each code frequency will be analyzed for context before it is counted as part of the discourse. For instance, “needle” which is

part of the code *drugs* could be mentioned with both empirical connotations (for example, needle exchange programs), as well as with negative, or NIMBY, connotations (such as when highlighting the concerns of needle debris). Analyzing each frequency will help ensure the validity of the quantitative portion of this discourse analysis; however, the focus of analysis will be on the qualitative nature of the discourse presented within each document.

The following chapter will analyze the discourse on safe consumption sites within Alberta as presented by the Alberta Government. The chapter will begin by revisiting the themes and codes, as well as their anticipated frequency within the Government of Alberta discourse. These codes will then be broken down quantitatively to show frequency before the overall themes are analyzed qualitatively. Finally, I will critique the methodological choices of the Government of Alberta's study, specifically regarding how they measure crime statistics.

Chapter Four: The Discourse – Government of Alberta

This chapter will contain the first substantial discourse that will be analyzed by this paper; that being the Government of Alberta Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites. In this chapter, I will begin by laying out my initial hypotheses of how the Government of Alberta will employ discursive language regarding safe consumption sites. Then, I will analyze the discourse presented in the report, starting with the Executive Summary, and finishing with the fifth chapter and appendices. Within each subsection, I will break down the discursive language by the codes in my discourse analysis framework: *dirty*, *drugs*, *danger*, and *contamination*. Finally, I will discuss methodological critiques of the Government of Alberta report, before discussing the consequences that the NIMBYism presented in this report has on policy and public attitudes towards Safe Consumption Sites in Alberta.

For the analysis of the Alberta Government report, and consistent with the previously stated hypothesis, the Government report will use technical language to oppose the development of new safe consumption sites or to dispute the effectiveness of current safe consumption sites. For this reason, the expected codes with the highest number of frequencies are *drugs* and *danger*. A point of contrast between Government discourse and citizen group discourse will be between technical, authoritative language and non-technical, emotionally charged language, respectively. It is expected that the government will place the most emphasis on crime (*danger*) and open *drug* use.

Analysis

Code	Frequencies
Dirty (<i>Degradation, Social Disorder, Encampments, Homelessness/Unhoused Persons</i>)	Total: 125
Drugs (<i>Drug Use, Needle Debris, Substances</i>)	Total: 448
Danger (<i>Personal Crime, Property Crime, Affective Danger, Safety Concerns, De-Policing, Loss of Economic Prosperity, or another Economic Loss</i>)	Total: 218
Contamination (<i>Expansion of Social Disorder, Expansion of Drug Use, Crime, Encampments, the Seeping Quality of Dirtiness and Danger, Reverting of the Neighbourhood back to Old Ways, Lack of Consultation</i>).	Total: 56
Total Frequencies	847

Table 2: *Frequencies of Discourse within the Alberta Government’s Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites*

The above table shows the frequencies of each code in the Alberta Government’s Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites (Government of Alberta 2020)⁴. As per this table, the code with the most instances of use in the Alberta Government’s Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites is the code *drugs*. Logically this seems to make sense – after all, the study was regarding the socioeconomic impacts of safe consumption sites, and public concern about drug use was front and centre in the eyes of the review committee. The second most common code was *danger*. This, logically, also makes sense, as danger includes references to crime, affective danger, as well as concerns surrounding the danger to, or loss of economic prosperity. In the sub-sections below, I will outline the main discursive points presented in each

⁴ To find the PDF of the report, see <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460147054>

section of the report, highlighting which codes were prominent within each section, as well as some of the most prominent discursive language that was used. The next subsections of this chapter will break down the discursive language in each section and chapter of the Alberta Government report.

Executive Summary and Chapter One: Background and Introduction (pp. iii. – 3)

The Executive Summary of the review is rather short on discursive language; however, it does set up the basis of the study, as well as the main concerns and viewpoints that will be discussed by the committee. In the Executive Summary, the committee outlines their concerns with the cost of the day-to-day operations of the site, as well as the overall transparency of workers at the site and the people who support the site (Government of Alberta 2020, iii). The committee cites a lack of transparency from site operators, as well as those who support the site. The committee uses the first chapter to outline what is in the scope of the study versus what is outside of its scope. Interestingly, they do not consider other social factors such as homelessness or economic conditions in their *socioeconomic* study. Nor are they considering the merits of safe consumption sites as a harm reduction tool (Government of Alberta 2020, 2). The committee will also not be considering the utility of SCSs to the community.

The study emphasizes perceived economic harm to communities, with the only factors within the scope of the study being crime rates, complaints of social disorder, business impacts, emergency medical services, and needle debris. Of course, this is not a temporal study, therefore, it does not account for any potential reinforcing variables in the community that would have made these issues present before the opening of the SCS; in fact, it potentially ignores them, as previous drug use, homelessness, and other social factors are out of the scope of the study

(Government of Alberta 2020, 1-2). The following will outline the small amount of discursive language present in the Executive Summary and the First Chapter.

Dirty. In the introduction and first chapter, the themes raised within the *dirty* code mainly have to do with concerns about increased social disorder around safe consumption sites. However, the discursive language regarding the general *dirty*ness is rather thin, as this chapter mainly discussed the overview of the study. Importantly, while dirtiness was not an inherent characteristic of the discursive language within this first chapter, it is an underlying theme, as dirtiness tends to be attached to the idea of social disorder, homelessness, and drug use, often backgrounding the persons while foregrounding their environment (Toft 2014, 795).

Drugs. Much of the discursive language in this first chapter revolved around drugs, drug paraphernalia, and needle debris. The committee raised that a substantial concern of the public that would be discussed in the review was the issue of needle debris and other drug paraphernalia. This was apparent as listed as part of the seven particularly noted concerns in the introduction. Beyond needle debris and other paraphernalia, the study mentioned that opioid-related EMS calls increased in the vicinity of the site, as did complaints of non-opioid drug use in the site's vicinity. Examples of this discursive language can be read below.

Needle debris was a substantial issue with many residents complaining about used and unused needles, broken crack pipes and other drug-related paraphernalia being discarded in the vicinity of the sites and in public areas near the sites. (Government of Alberta 2020, iii)

Opioid-related calls for emergency medical services (EMS) also increased in the immediate vicinity following the opening of the sites. (Government of Alberta 2020, iii)

Non-opioid substance use, specifically methamphetamine use at some SCS sites, increased substantially (Government of Alberta 2020, iii)

Danger. Danger features heavily in the executive summary and the first chapter of this report.

While most code frequencies fall under *drugs*, the implied personal and affective danger is a key underlying theme. In the executive summary, the code *danger* includes the implication or perception of danger (Campbell 1998, 1), personal crime, property crime, affective danger, safety, policing (or de-policing), and loss of economic prosperity (danger to economic livelihood).

In the executive summary and first chapter of the report, the main discursive points regarding *danger* were increased crime levels, anecdotes of aggressive and erratic behaviour by the site's clients, concerns about de-policing near the sites, as well as concerns raised about the negative economic and social impact on the surrounding community.

...numerous residents complained about aggressive and erratic behaviour of substance users leaving the sites. (Government of Alberta 2020, iii)

...crime, as measured by police calls for service, generally increased in the immediate vicinity (Government of Alberta 2020, iii)

Evidence suggested a level of "de-policing" near some sites. (Government of Alberta 2020, iii)

It is important to note that the study measures crime by the number of police service calls. This method does not adequately reflect crime statistics, as the number of service calls is an indirect indicator of crime statistics (Government of Alberta 2020, iii). Therefore, it ought to be read critically. This critique, as well as other methodological critiques, will be discussed further on in this chapter. While discussing the indirect measurement of crime, it is interesting to

point out that crime, as measured by police service calls, increased in the vicinity of the sites, the number of police service calls decreased further out from the sites (Government of Alberta 2020, iii).

Contamination. Like the other codes within this first section, the discursive language surrounding contamination is rather short; however, there are two instances of *contaminating* language being used by the review committee. In the first instance, the committee shares the major concerns that the “SCS have had a negative social and economic impact on the community” (Government of Alberta 2020, iii), a concern that was raised by some members of the public. Furthermore, the review committee formulated two questions for attendees of public town hall meetings that were held as part of this review. The questions were:

How do you think the SCS has impacted your community, either positively and negatively? What do you think are the solutions to negative impacts? (Government of Alberta 2020, 2)

These questions were posed to all attendees of the town hall attendees (2020, 2), and not posed in sequence. Perhaps it would make sense to pose questions such as these in sequence, where the second question was asked if the respondent answered that the SCS has had a negative impact on their community; however, being that both questions were posed to all attendees, it shows an underlying assumption that SCS has a negative impact on a certain community. This question allows any negative aspects of a community to be attributed to the SCS.

Section Two: Albertan’s Concerns (pp. 4 – 7)

According to the review committee, the data sources (town halls, online surveys...) show that Albertans' concerns regarding safe consumption sites fall into these main categories: Public safety, general social disorder, consultation/communications issues, appropriateness of current response, concerns with access to treatment, homelessness, economic impacts on property and businesses, and concerns with site operation. A large amount of discursive language can be found in this section, with the emphasis being placed on Albertan's security concerns around public safety and public drug use. For this chapter, *dirty* includes general social disorder and homelessness; *drugs* includes concerns with access to treatment; *danger* includes public safety; and *contamination* includes concerns with consultation/communication issues and economic impacts, as well as concerns over the operating standards of the site and their potential impact on the surrounding community.

Dirty. The main theme within code *dirty* has to do with homelessness, encampments, and general social disorder. According to the committee, general social disorder includes "forms of social disorder that do not constitute criminal behaviour" (Government of Alberta 2020, 5). There is an overlap between general social disorder within *dirty* and other codes, such as *drugs*. For instance, the committee views needle debris as a general social disorder; however, this paper includes needle debris within *drugs*. The main discursive language that lies solely within general social disorder has to do with general dirtiness associated with social disorder.

Other general social disorder matters identified included the discovery of human feces and urine on streets and in doorways (Government of Alberta 2020, 5)

Other issues coded as *dirty*, include references to homelessness. Even though homelessness was discussed as outside the scope of the Socioeconomic Review of Safe

Consumption Sites, homelessness often came up as a general concern of the public, as well as of the review committee. It was not always mentioned in a negative context, as the committee often discussed the issues of homelessness as inextricably tied to drug consumption. While professionals and observers may link the ties of homelessness and drug addiction to external socioeconomic factors, opponents of the site linked the location of safe consumption sites to the location of homeless encampments.

In the minds of many citizens, the appearance and especially the location of tent cities was linked to the location of SCS. (Government of Alberta 2020, 6)

On the issue of homelessness, many of these sites are in areas where homelessness was already a present issue. As previously mentioned, the review committee views homelessness and other socioeconomic issues as out of the scope of the study (Government of Alberta 2020, 2). There is a cause-and-effect question here, given that the review committee does not view homelessness as within the scope of the study, it ought not to be viewed as a negative impact of safe consumption sites. Furthermore, with this study not taking temporal factors into account, it is difficult to perceive the effect of safe consumption sites on levels of homelessness in the neighbourhoods in which they are located. Some presenters noted that it was because of the pre-existing level of drug use within those neighbourhoods (Government of Alberta 2020, 7) that decided to locate the SCS at that site effectively. Not recognizing that certain neighbourhoods were already in a poorer socioeconomic state shifts undue blame onto safe consumption sites, which become a scapegoat for other community issues.

Drugs. The main theme within this code has to do with discarded needles and other paraphernalia debris. Of course, needle debris is a valid concern regarding safe consumption

sites, as it was a major issue “cited by both opponents and supporters of SCS” (Government of Alberta 2020, 5). The purpose of this section is not to argue that the concerns around needle debris are not valid. Regardless of someone’s viewpoint on safe consumption sites, no one is arguing that needle debris is an *innocuous side effect*; of course, it ought to be addressed, but needle debris is inherently a *side effect* of these sites. Therefore, the solution to needle debris ought not to be to shut down the sites, but rather to improve needle clean-up programs or needle exchange services. The goal should be to mitigate needle debris, rather than punish the distribution of said needles, or those who use them.

The committee does not present many solutions to mitigating needle debris, save for the *stop distribution* narrative. This seems rather counterintuitive, as stopping the distribution of clean needles would cause the repeated use of needles and an increased spread of disease. Furthermore, many of the sites in question have teams that perform needle cleanup, as most of these sites originated as needle exchange programs (Government of Alberta 2020, 5). Overall, needle debris is a factor that opponents of the safe consumption sites cite many times throughout the review, using discursive language about the *danger* and *dirtiness* of *drugs* (and paraphernalia) to otherize site clientele. Some of this language in the second section can be read below.

Few sites currently act as full-fledged needle exchanges (in the sense of exchanging one-for-one) and instead simply distribute clean needles. (Government of Alberta 2020, 5)

Both town hall meetings and online surveys both reported the risk of “needle pricks” (needle-stick injuries) as a significant concern. (Government of Alberta 2020, 5)

Danger. In the second section, the code *danger* had mainly to do with the issues of public safety and potential economic loss that businesses near the site may face. Again, it is not the intention of this project to argue that issues of public safety are based on unfounded concern; however, the

issues of public safety cited to the committee often revolved around a *perceived* lack of public safety or used criminalizing language to otherize the clientele of the sites. The concerns listed included general safety for people living and working near safe consumption sites, the influx of drug users and drug dealers to neighbourhoods where the sites are located, as well as concerns over de-policing near sites, as well as concerns about a loss of economic prosperity from business owners near the sites (Government of Alberta 2020, 4-5).

To support [drug users] use, many turn to marginal or criminal activities to pay for their drug supply. Typically, those activities range from panhandling to theft, robbery, fraud, prostitution or the secondary distribution of illicit substances. (Government of Alberta 2020, 4)

Persons selling drugs—drug dealers—will also engage in crimes such as assault or intimidation to collect debts incurred by drug users. (Government of Alberta 2020, 4)

Since street crime is typically highly visible, residents become aware of its occurrence and are concerned about its effect on their safety and quality of life (Government of Alberta 2020, 4).

Residents at every location informed the Committee that the SCS sites act as a “magnet,” attracting persons who are addicted to substances (Government of Alberta 2020, 4).

...increased concentrations of drug users also attract drug dealers who, in turn, attract more drug users. SCS, therefore, are assumed to geographically concentrate the street-level drug market and other criminal activities. (Government of Alberta 2020, 4)

...exemptions to the legal possession of illicit substances at the SCS resulted in a lack of law enforcement in areas adjacent to the sites. (Government of Alberta 2020, 5)

... [after using methamphetamine] drug users frequently exhibited erratic and aggressive behaviour upon exiting a site (Government of Alberta 2020, 5).

The location of most existing SCS sites was perceived by many as having an impact on local property values and business income. (Government of Alberta 2020, 6)

Business owners also indicated that the overall level of crime and social disorder had a direct effect through property theft and an indirect effect through the reluctance of customers to visit the area through fears of victimization, harassment and one’s general personal safety. (Government of Alberta 2020, 7)

The committee mentions that the relationship between drug use and crime is generally accepted by the committee; however, it is recognized that not all drug users or site clientele fall into this category (Government of Alberta 2020, 4). Similarly, the study mentions that many drug users fall into the category of economically marginalized persons (4) and may turn to illegal activities to fund their addictions. This discursive language that regards drug users as criminals is part of the lexicalization of drug users and addicts as criminals (Toft 2014). This lexicalization further contributes to the notions of *contamination* that will be addressed in the next paragraph.

Contamination. In the second section, *contamination* mainly referred to the perceived lack of consultation that community members received regarding the placement of safe consumption sites.

...the Committee heard numerous times that the consultations were either not carried out as claimed, were incomplete, or were not within the common notion of what constitutes reasonable consultation. (Government of Alberta 2020, 5).

The concern over a lack of consultation begs the question: what does consultation truly entail? According to Health Canada (2018b), a consultation report must be included in the application to open a safe consumption site⁵. This consultation report must include a description of consultation activities that have taken place, the promotional materials, or advertisements for these consultations, as well as the results and feedback of said activities (Health Canada 2018b). Consultation activities can include open houses, surveys, having an active website or email account, holding informational meetings, making presentations at community association meetings, as well as going door-to-door or distributing flyers (Health Canada 2018b).

⁵ See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/supervised-consumption-sites/apply/before-you-start.html>

Importantly, there are no set regulations that concern what constitutes consultation. The site will be approved based on whether Health Canada perceives the materials submitted to be adequate. Often, consultation is misinterpreted, as those who oppose safe consumption sites feel that their community was not consulted with before the opening of the site, or that more consultation ought to be required to open a site (Ziegler, Wray, and Luginaah 2019, 109).

Furthermore, certain *contaminating* themes within drug use and paraphernalia were included to reinforce the *contaminating* nature of addiction. Recalling the concerns over needle debris within the *drugs* code, one prevalent fear regarding needle debris was the fear of HIV or other diseases that may be spread through needle use. There was a significant concern that needle debris would pose an HIV or Hepatitis risk to the community in which the site is located (Government of Alberta 2020, 5). Needle sharing does increase the risk of bloodborne diseases such as HIV or Hepatitis, and therefore should be a testament to increased needle exchange programs. However, when posing this concern as a *contaminating* concern to the community, this discourse reinforces the theme that safe consumption sites are a *contaminating* force within a community. The following section will address the application of Albertan's concerns within the general and site-specific issues that the Government of Alberta report addressed.

Section Three: General Issues Assessment (pp. 8 – 23)

While the previous sections presented general NIMBY discourses regarding safe consumption sites, the following sections will address more specific NIMBY discourses presented when discussing general and specific NIMBY discourses raised in the Government of Alberta report. To reduce repetition, this section will mainly include quotes and examples of discursive language, rather than analysis. The only analysis presented in this section will be any

analysis that is distinct from that which has already been presented in Section Two of this paper. Furthermore, section two placed a heavy emphasis on the cost of operating safe consumption sites, including implementing a *cost-per-unique client* model. This focus on economic cost seems to downplay the importance of saving human lives in the operation of safe consumption sites.

Having examined the available cost data, it was concluded that a full audit and financial review of the sites would be reasonable. (Government of Alberta 2020, 22)

Certain quotes within this section encompassed all four discursive codes, showing the overlap between all codes in using language to otherize safe consumption site clientele.

As one Edmontonian wrote, “We have seen overdoses behind our building. We found used syringes on the sidewalk and back alley. We have seen encampment along the sidewalk on 105A and 100 Avenue. Homelessness is the biggest issue in this area, as having three injection sites in one small area is killing businesses. (Government of Alberta 2020, 8)

Dirty. In this section, the code *dirty* is used mainly to discuss issues with homelessness; however, there were certain discursive themes were used to draw other socioeconomically disadvantaged people into the same circle as drug users. For instance, homelessness was a key theme within *dirty* that was used to discuss other social services outside of safe consumption sites. In some cases, such as the quote below, other social services, such as shelters, were also blamed for potentially attracting more drug users, or rather importing more crime into a community (*contaminating*).

While sites are selected because of a perceived pre-existing social need, it is also the case that the sites and other associated social services nearby likely serve to further attract drug users. (Government of Alberta 2020, 9)

Drugs. In this section, the concerns raised around drug use are like the concerns raised by the committee in the previous section. For this reason, I will avoid providing analysis for each quote unless there is new analysis that ought to be brought forward. Many of these quotes simply exemplify the concerns brought forward by the review committee, as well as the NIMBY aspects of opposition to safe consumption sites.

During the site reviews, it became evident to the Committee that a significant amount of drug use and illicit drug dealing continues near SCS sites. (Government of Alberta 2020, 8)

...residents noted large numbers of needles and other drug-related paraphernalia including glass pipes (sometimes shattered) being discarded in public places. Needles were reported as occasionally still in their original packaging...residents were particularly concerned about the possibility of either themselves or their children being accidentally pricked by a used needle or cut by a broken pipe. (Government of Alberta 2020, 12)

Some residents noted that, occasionally, needles appeared to have been strategically placed to enhance the likelihood that someone might stick themselves. (Government of Alberta 2020, 12)

An important note on this above quote – there was no extra context provided for where this story came from. It is merely an anecdotal point that was gathered either from testimony in a town hall meeting or an online survey. Therefore, it does not make sense to include it in the section of the report that is being used to raise concerns about needle debris. This discourse merely serves to vilify drug users and site clients, painting them in a malicious light. This discourse of criminalization of drug users increases the sense danger that passersby may perceive.

Danger. The main points raised in this section had to do with increased levels of *crime* in the areas surrounding the safe consumption sites. According to the committee, Red Deer experienced a 47% increase in emergency calls; Calgary experienced an 18.6% increase in service calls in the 250 m radius around the site; Edmonton experienced a 1.3% decrease in service calls in the 250 m radius around the site; Grande Prairie experienced a 10.7% increase adjacent to its mobile overdose prevention site; while Lethbridge saw no substantial increase in service calls; however, did see a substantial increase in reported crimes near the site (Government of Alberta 2020, 14-6). Overall, calls for service increased disproportionately in communities near safe consumption sites, with the exception being Edmonton, which saw a moderate decrease in calls for service (Government of Alberta 2020, 15 (Figure 6)). There is, however, an issue with measuring crime with the *calls for service* indicator. This will be discussed further in this chapter's discussion section. More examples of *danger-coded* quotes will be included below.

The Committee heard specific complaints relating to panhandling, receiving inappropriate sexual comments, unwanted touching and general harassment. Residents also reported increases in what they referred to as "strange," "aggressive" or "bizarre" behaviour by individuals who appeared to be intoxicated... Many community members assumed that those individuals were either attracted to the area by the presence of the SCS or were site users. (Government of Alberta 2020, 13)

The Review Committee was told of decreases in sales volume as customers were deterred from visiting some establishments, businesses relocating to other parts of the city and, in extreme cases, of bankruptcies. (Government of Alberta 2020, 22)

Regarding decreased volumes of sales and economic downturn in the areas adjacent to safe consumption sites, this situation is akin to the analogy of the chicken and the egg. Did the opening of these sites induce the economic downturn that the communities are facing, or did these communities face an economic downturn prior to the opening of the sites? Economic

downturns can be linked to other socioeconomic issues, such as homelessness and drug addiction. So, it is important to recognize that an economic downturn is not necessarily a symptom of opening safe consumption sites. As the review committee states, “locating SCS in neighbourhoods already experiencing social problems may be exacerbating the issue, or the sites may simply be highlighting existing social malaise” (Government of Alberta 2020, 22).

Furthermore, the committee goes on to admit that there is little correlation between the percentage of businesses in operation relative to 2015 and the opening of the sites (Government of Alberta 2020, 23). Since the committee does not point to a correlation between the number of businesses in operation before the opening of the SCSs, the previous quote on decreasing operations of businesses near these sites ought to be read critically. The question of whether SCS sites create or exacerbate social problems will also be discussed in the following paragraphs on *contamination*.

Contamination. Like the final quote in the *danger* code, the committee was faced with the question of whether safe consumption sites are causing economic harm to the surrounding communities, or whether the economic harms were already present before the sites opened. This attacks whether these sites are a *contaminating* force or rather are a factor that works to mitigate the already existing socioeconomic problems.

For the Committee, a crucial question was whether the location of SCS serves to exacerbate an existing social problem, or minimize the problem or, perhaps, has little to no effect. (Government of Alberta 2020, 9)

Section Four: Site Specific Issues (pp. 24 – 33)

This section includes an analysis of issues specific to each safe consumption site (Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Calgary, and three sites in Edmonton). Similar to the previous section, new analysis sections will only be introduced when there is a discursive theme that has not previously been analyzed.

Dirty. In this section, there were not many new discursive themes presented. The main themes were consistent with the previous section, making mention of the issues faced by each site, including encampments, homelessness, public urination/defecation, and general social disorder. However, an important discursive quote came from a first responder in Medicine Hat, who stated that addiction is accompanied by crime and a certain lifestyle that brings social disorder to a community (Government of Alberta 2020, 33), thus equating addiction with criminality. This discourse is consistent with the lexicalization of drug users and addicts as criminals (Toft 2014), effectively tying together the codes *dirty* and *drugs*.

Drugs. The issues raised concerning drugs within site-specific issues did not differ significantly from the previous sections. These issues included finding used and unused needles in public areas in Lethbridge, or fears of members of the public being harmed by used needles left in public places (Government of Alberta 2020, 26-7). However, two unique discursive tones were specific to certain safe consumption sites. For instance:

It is also believed by many members of the community that [Lethbridge Safe Consumption Site] staff actively contribute to the problem of drug use. (Government of Alberta 2020, 25)

Further to this discourse, one Grande Prairie community member stated, “This is not harm reduction, this is harm production” (Government of Alberta 2020, 29). In these quotes, we see another main discursive theme, that safe consumption sites enable drug users, or exacerbate already existing drug use problems, rather than mitigate them. This is a common theme and a common misunderstanding around harm reduction. It is a key negative theme of anti-safe consumption site, or NIMBY discourse that argues that drug users will not stop consuming drugs if they are given a place to consume them (Ziegler, Wray, and Luginaah 2019, 109).

Furthermore, in Calgary, the committee became aware of a worker at the Safeworks SCS who was involved in trafficking narcotics, which is an extremely concerning revelation (Government of Alberta 2020, 28). Even though this is a concerning event, we ought to consider the base rate fallacy. While it is unfortunate that this occurred, it should not be relevant to a study of the socio-economic impacts of all SCS in Alberta. This is not an across-the-board issue and including it as relevant information to this study treats it as such.

Danger. Discursive themes of danger in the site-specific analyses were very similar to the discursive themes presented in the previous sections. Such themes included concerns about criminal activity around the sites, the belief that a de-policed *safe zone* existed around the sites where criminal activity could occur unincumbered, concerns about public safety, as well as concerns about economic loss to businesses near the sites.

...many residents believe that there is a “safe zone” for open drug use, trafficking, prostitution and related criminal activity around the Lethbridge SCS site. (Government of Alberta 2020, 25)

The Review Committee also heard that there was significant talk of vigilantism within Red Deer. (Government of Alberta 2020, 27)

...because of the high rate of crime in the area, some drug users at the SCS were arming themselves with weapons in [self-defence]. (Government of Alberta 2020, 27)

Safety outside of the SCS is of concern, especially given that we carry narcotics. [The] area is poorly lit, and feels generally unsafe.” A police officer wrote, “The area is unsafe to respond to alone. I have stopped vehicles in the area and have been surrounded by people. Nothing violent ever happened, but it was clear intimidation tactics. (Government of Alberta 2020, 27)

Many retail establishments, which are best described as “mom and pop operations”, have reportedly had to close, since customers no longer feel safe going to the [downtown Edmonton]. (Government of Alberta 2020, 31)

On this note, it is important to discuss the issue of economic viability and business closure in downtown Edmonton, specifically in the Chinatown area. Let us not negate the fact that the Chinatown community had been struggling economically prior to the opening of the SCSs in the community. Recalling the measures of new businesses, we see an increase in new businesses in the 250 m radius around the current safe consumption sites (Government of Alberta 2020, 23). This shows that the economic viability in the Chinatown area is increasing compared to 2015 and the opening of safe consumption sites.

Contamination. Regarding *contamination*, the main discursive language had to do with a lack of consultation with the surrounding community members. Lack of consultation was first brought up concerning Red Deer’s overdose prevention site (OPS), as an OPS is different from an SCS, as it is a temporary facility and as such, does not require community consultation.

An OPS can typically be set up by the province in a matter of weeks, because it does not require community surveys or consultations, like SCS do. (Government of Alberta 2020, 27)

Lack of consultation was also brought up regarding the Medicine Hat location, as residents raised concerns over how consultation took place.

Many residents, including those in the immediate proximity to the site, indicated that they had not been properly consulted regarding the potential location. Community representatives appearing before the Review Committee described the overall process as a “disingenuous consultation” and a “one-way conversation.” ...consultations were described as hurried and misleading...one submission to the Review Committee noted that despite claims by the operator, letters of support solicited for the operation were for the service, not the location. (Government of Alberta 2020, 32)

Recalling Health Canada’s (2018b) guidelines for community consultation, the site would not have been approved by Health Canada for its exemption under Section 56.1 of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*⁶. Consultation does not necessarily mean going door to door and talking to every resident. There is a process set out by the Government of Canada for these consultations. If the process is not followed, the site does not get approved. Since Health Canada approved the site, it would have satisfied the requirements for consultation. Therefore, to say that consultation did not occur or was misleading is likely a perception of the process, and not representative of the rigour in which consultation was undertaken.

Section Five: Saving Lives and Reducing Harm and Considerations, plus Appendices (pp. 34 – 43)

The final section of the Alberta Government Report includes the fifth chapter, as well as the appendices where the committee makes its recommendations to the provincial government. As this section acts as a conclusion to the report, there are fewer instances of NIMBY discursive

⁶ Consolidated Federal Laws of Canada, *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. 2023. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-38.8/page-7.html#h-95171>.

language present. The main points in this section had to do with drug use and issues with consultation; therefore, most themes will fall under *Drugs* and *Contamination*. However, before analyzing these codes, three interesting quotations did not fully fit within any of the four main codes within this framework. These quotes were both positive and negative, illustrating solutions for consultation issues, poor policies that would discourage the utilization of safe consumption sites, as well as the consequences of this NIMBY discourse on access to harm reduction in Alberta.

In this first quote, the review committee recommends that the province institute its own requirements, further to those of Health Canada, for sites to receive provincial funding. These requirements may include independent consultations with local business owners that are less ambiguous than Health Canada's regulations for consultation. Should this recommendation be implemented, there may be less confusion or controversy around the consultation of local stakeholders, thereby diminishing this avenue of NIMBY discourse.

While Health Canada issues the exemption, nothing restricts the province from imposing additional requirements for a site to obtain provincial funding, such as having an independent entity do the consultations rather than the site applicant, who is often seen as having a conflict of interest. (Government of Alberta 2020, 36)

This second quote includes a policy recommendation to the Government of Alberta that calls for identification to be provided to the site operators before clients can access the site. This would help the site operators count the number of unique users per day, a statistic required by Alberta Health Services (Government of Alberta 2020). However, proponents of harm reduction policies have argued against this policy, as “the requirement to provide a health-care number could increase barriers to the sites and increase the risk of overdoses” (Germano 2022). It should

be noted that this recommendation was put into law by the Alberta Government, taking effect in January 2022 (Germano 2022).

...it should be a requirement for all SCS clients to provide appropriate identification.
(Government of Alberta 2020, 37)

Finally, this third quote has implications for the future of safe consumption sites in Alberta. It shows the consequences that NIMBY Discourses may have on the access to harm reduction and treatment in Alberta. This quote is important to include, as it exhibits the repercussions of NIMBY discourses. The quote has to do with the recommendation to pause the opening of a safe consumption site in Medicine Hat, as well as in Calgary Forest Lawn.

Based on consultations and statistical analysis, the Committee is of the view that there is no immediate need for a SCS site in Medicine Hat or the mobile site in Forest Lawn, Calgary. (Government of Alberta 2020, 38)

Drugs. The Committee's main concerns—and their subsequent recommendations—regarding drug use fell under four categories: the efficacy of safe consumption sites in preventing deaths, needle debris, methamphetamines, and drug trafficking/other illegal activities occurring outside of the site.

Throughout the entirety of the report, “the biggest issue that impacted communities was needle debris” (Government of Alberta 2020, 38). Concerns about discarded needles and other drug-related paraphernalia were the main concern brought forward by many community members, and it was the main issue highlighted throughout the report. Further issues included issues of increased drug trafficking near the sites. As the committee mentions, “Drug traffickers appear to be openly conducting their business unabated near the sites, due to a burgeoning client base” (Government of Alberta 2020, 35).

The committee also raised the issue that the number of opioid-related deaths across the province remained unchanged as compared to the opening of the safe consumption sites. There are a couple of important elements to this narrative that ought to be discussed. First, the fact alone that no deaths have occurred at a safe consumption site proves that these sites are working. As noted by the report, there have been many *adverse events* at sites across Alberta; however, there have been no deaths. This is testimony itself that safe consumption sites are an effective tool for harm reduction. This also neglects the fact that opioid use has been on the rise since 2015 (see: Figure 1).

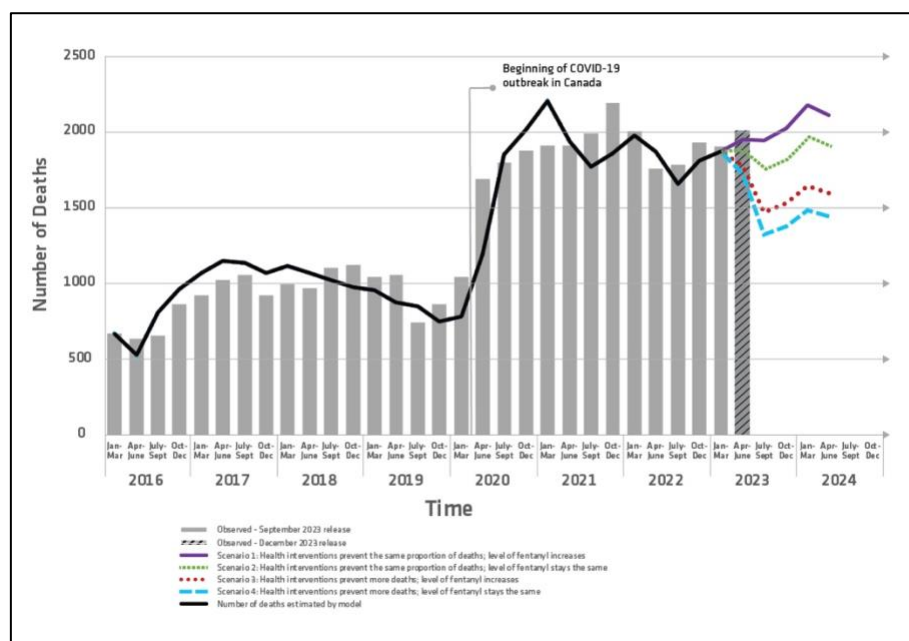


Figure 1: Public Health Agency of Canada. Modelling opioid-related deaths during the overdose crisis (Public Health Agency of Canada 2023).

The goal of safe consumption sites is to save lives onsite. They are one pillar of a complete approach to drug treatment. It is disingenuous to argue that, across the board, opioid deaths should have gone down, being that it is known that not all users utilize safe consumption sites. Furthermore, when the recommendation of the committee is then to not build more safe consumption sites, such as Medicine Hat and Calgary Forest Lawn (Government of Alberta

2020, 38), this argument becomes even more ludicrous. If the standard of whether safe consumption sites are effective or not lies in the overall number of opioid deaths in the province, and the current safe consumption sites have had zero deaths occur at the sites, then the logical policy approach would be to open more safe consumption sites.

The Committee's investigations indicate that while there have been no deaths reported on-site, deaths due to opioid overdoses are unabated, both within the immediate vicinity of the SCS sites and elsewhere. (Government of Alberta 2020, 34)

Finally, the Committee raised concerns about the consumption of non-opioid substances, such as methamphetamine, in safe consumption sites. In theory, methamphetamine use is not congruent with the purpose of safe consumption sites, as safe consumption sites were opened to attempt to tackle the opioid crisis.

The SCS sites were mandated to respond to the opioid crisis; however, they are responding to methamphetamine use up to 50 per cent of the time in some locations. There is a significant requirement for a different strategy to respond to methamphetamine use. (Government of Alberta 2020, 38)

Unless the SCS sites can effectively mitigate the negative social consequences caused by amphetamines, they are, as one resident noted, little more than "government-supported crack houses." (Government of Alberta 2020, 34)

Danger. Regarding danger, the final concerns raised by the committee had to do with the de-emphasized role of law enforcement, as well as increased criminal activities around the site. The committee raises concerns about the lack of an integrated approach to SCS between operators and law enforcement. This lack of integration, as argued by the committee, leads to a lack of cooperation, a higher workload on first responders, as well as further de-policing (Government of Alberta 2020, 36).

De-emphasizing law enforcement also undermines the public's respect for the rule of law. Many citizens have become so jaded that they no longer call the police when they see a crime taking place or when they are victimized. (Government of Alberta 2020, 36)

"SCS is [a] constant work load. Not only at the site but the foot traffic to and from the site has caused call increase as the crimes around the SCS is people fuelling their habits." – First Responders' Survey (Government of Alberta 2020, 35).

Contamination. The Committee made conclusions that fall within this NIMBY discourse of *contamination*. Among these conclusions, the main themes have to do with mitigating potential negative or contaminating effects on local communities and the exacerbation of current social problems. Certain conclusions made by the committee claimed that safe consumption sites exacerbate existing social problems in certain areas.

...current practices exacerbate existing social problems and encourage a higher concentration of drug users and trafficking within those areas. (Government of Alberta 2020, 35)

...assuming SCS sites are to remain an option (which is not a question the Review Committee was asked to address), is there a better implementation model that might reduce the negative impacts on the local community? (Government of Alberta 2020, 34)

However, according to the statistics mentioned in the report, this is highly contestable and therefore should not be discussed as a foregone conclusion. Referencing business statistics, there is little to no correlation between the number of businesses in operation and the location of safe consumption sites (Government of Alberta 2020, 23). Furthermore, looking at the Public Health Agency of Canada's model of opioid deaths (Public Health Agency of Canada 2023), it is abundantly clear that increases in opioid use and overdose deaths are an issue across the country. Therefore, it is difficult to corroborate whether safe consumption sites cause an increase in the concentration of opioid deaths. Even beyond this, there have been zero overdose deaths in Alberta's SCSs. So, if there has been a marked increase in drug use in the area surrounding the

SCS, there should also be a decrease in the number of deaths from overdose, due to the life-saving services that the sites provide. Finally, crime statistics were measured by the number of emergency service calls to locations around safe consumption sites. This is a poor measurement, as this is an indirect indicator of crime, and is being used to misrepresent an increase in crime statistics (Livingston 2021, 2).

The final *contaminating* theme that was presented in the concluding remarks of the committee contains a textbook summary statement that encompasses the attitudes of NIMBYs. The committee states that “Most people who spoke to the Review Committee, including those in opposition to the sites, expressed concern for their fellow citizens who were struggling with addiction” (Government of Alberta 2020, 36). This is the basis of what NIMBY is. The respondents sympathize with the person suffering from addiction. They want them to seek help; however, that help cannot be located anywhere near their neighbourhoods. They want people to find help, just not in their backyards.

Methodological Critiques

There are many aspects of the Alberta Government report methodology that could be critiqued; however, this section will focus on two main points: crime measurements and inherent biases. The committee states that they are measuring *crime*; however, as previously mentioned, crime statistics were measured by the number of emergency service calls to locations around safe consumption sites, which is an indirect indicator of crime, and is being used to misrepresent an increase in crime statistics (Livingston 2021, 2). Furthermore, the report also measures *crime* by levels of public perception of crime. There is a rather large body of criminology literature that demonstrates how people tend to overestimate crime-related issues in their neighbourhoods

(Livingston 2021, 2). Therefore, the conclusions that the committee came to that SCSs increase crime are largely unfounded and based on poor and indirect indicators of crime.

Beyond inaccurately measuring crime statistics, the report also exhibits many biases, including outcome reporting bias, measurement bias, and confirmation bias within its methodology (Salvalaggio et al. 2023, 3). Outcome reporting bias was engrained in the report from its genesis, as the stated aim of the report was to *minimize the adverse social and economic impacts of existing safe consumption sites on local neighbourhoods*. Furthermore, the *merits of SCS as a harm reduction tool* were backgrounded as outside of the scope of the study; therefore, the study risked outcome reporting bias from its genesis, as it already assumed that sites had negative impacts on neighbourhoods (Salvalaggio et al. 2023, 3).

The report also shows measurement bias as it negates the use of methamphetamine as a valid use of the SCS, while also downplaying oxygen as a lifesaving intervention, showing that the panel had a bias towards two important factors that were thus ignored (3). Furthermore, measurement bias also includes the indirect and imprecise reporting of crime statistics as mentioned above. The report includes many instances of confirmation bias, as it does not present a balanced viewpoint of the issue, including emphasizing anecdotes that support the Kenney Government's⁷ viewpoint on safe consumption sites (3). This can be seen through the presentation of healthcare experts, as “the report references healthcare professionals who perceive SCS as “unethical” (p. 24) yet discredits other healthcare professionals for (correctly) citing evidence of minimal risk of injury from discarded needles (p. 5)” (Salvalaggio et al. 2023,

⁷ At the time that this report was published, Jason Kenney was the Premier of Alberta. At the time this paper was written, the Premier is Danielle Smith.

3)⁸. Finally, the report shows a strong amount of confirmation bias. While the report purports to find significant negative impacts due to safe consumption sites, the validity of these impacts cannot be corroborated due to the absence of a strong methodology (Salvalaggio et al. 2023, 3). Since there is a large discrepancy between popular academic literature on safe consumption sites and the Alberta Government report, there is a high risk that the report includes a large amount of confirmation bias (Salvalaggio et al. 2023, 3). These methodological issues play an important role in discussing the consequences of NIMBY discourses.

Discussion

NIMBYism can be seen in the Government of Alberta report through many different themes. Recalling that the highest frequency code was *drugs*, followed by the code *danger*, the main NIMBY themes within this report fell within themes of open drug use, needle debris and other drug paraphernalia, as well as personal crime, affective danger, and safety concerns. Recalling the question of boundary-making themes that this paper attempts to address, it is now possible to position these themes within the idea of boundary-making discourses. The main themes within these two codes were as follows: for drugs, the main themes had to do with needle debris and methamphetamine use; for danger, the main themes had to do with aggressive behaviour of site clientele, concerns of de-policing near the site, increased criminal activity, the influx of drug dealers, and the danger of economic loss to nearby businesses.

In these themes, the boundary-making discourses become clear. As previously mentioned, borders denote differences. Borders denote who should be in an area, versus who

⁸ See: Government of Alberta, 2020: Page 24: “*The Review Committee also heard from some **medical professionals that they would not work in this place as it is ‘unethical’**”; and page 5: “*In several town hall meetings, presenters who **identified themselves as medical professionals minimized the risk of contagion of hepatitis or HIV, if a child or someone else was accidentally injured by a needle**”.**

should not be; they separate the *normals* from the *others*. They delineate right from wrong. When the Alberta Government report raises concerns with safe consumption sites, they are denoting who is in the right, and who is in the wrong. The needle debris that is mentioned so often as a major concern is left by people who *do not belong* in a certain area. When a person raises concern with perceptions of safety due to a safe consumption site being in their neighbourhood, they are raising the concern that the *other* will somehow bring them harm. The *other* makes them feel unsafe. De-policing, then, is a concern, as the police provide a buffer between the *normals* from the *others*. The police are there to protect who *belongs* from who does not. Finally, the economic threat to local businesses comes from the *other*. The concerns of economic loss were not there before the opening of the SCS; however, now that a group of *others* are located near a business, there is a threat to economic prosperity. Now, judging from the stagnant number of businesses reported by the committee, this threat is largely unfounded; however, it is caused by the *other*, a perceived group of people who do not *belong* in a certain area.

There are consequences to these NIMBY discourses. These NIMBY discourses prompted the committee to decide that there is no need for new sites in Medicine Hat or Calgary (Government of Alberta 2020, 38). Now, let us recall for a moment some facts. The first fact: there have been no deaths at safe consumption sites in Alberta (Government of Alberta 2020, 18). The second fact: the opioid crisis and the overdose crises are likely going to continue to grow, as modelled by the Public Health Agency of Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada 2023). These NIMBY discourses have prompted the Alberta Government to pause the construction of new, lifesaving safe consumption sites. This is a consequence that is going to cost the lives of many Albertans.

The fatal consequences are already visible. According to the *Globe and Mail* (Smith 2024), in the first ten months of 2023, Alberta experienced 1,692 fatalities, mostly due to opioid use. If these numbers hold, Alberta is posed to break an annual record for drug-related deaths. Again, no deaths occurred in safe consumption sites. Experts argue that the deadly xylazine-opiate cocktail can be remedied by providing a safer supply program; however, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith has repeatedly refused to implement such a policy (Smith 2024). Again, the province is doubling down on a poor argument. Contrary to the arguments made by the Province, safe consumption sites and safe supply save lives. The argument that since opioid use continues to rise, therefore safe consumption sites are not effective is made in poor faith. People are already dying because of this policy. Clearly, the *Alberta Model* is not working. Furthermore, when the Government of Alberta attempts to present itself as an objective expert on this topic, the discourse that is then presented empowers other social movements that embody NIMBY characteristics—such as the SCC, which will be discussed in the next chapter—that then further have run-on consequences for the future operation of safe consumption sites in Alberta.

In the next chapter, themes of NIMBY discourse from two citizen-based groups, the Scona Concerned Citizens and the Chinatown and Area Business Association, will be analyzed. The discourse presented by the ‘Scona Concerned Citizens draws on the conclusions presented by the Government of Alberta report, thus illustrating the consequences of NIMBYism that the Government of Alberta report entails.

Chapter Five: The Discourse – Citizen’s and Social Movements ‘Scona Concerned Citizens’⁹

To begin this chapter, I will present my hypotheses for how citizen-based movements employ NIMBY discourses toward safe consumption sites. I will begin by analyzing the four codes and how they are presented in the ‘Scona Concerned Citizens’ discourse. Then, I will analyze how the four codes are presented in discourse from the Chinatown and Area Business Association. Finally, I will discuss how the NIMBY discourses in the Government of Alberta report from the previous chapter influences the discourse of these social movements and the further consequences of such NIMBY discourse.

Contrary to the Alberta Government Report discourse and consistent with the hypothesis set out in this paper, it is expected that the discourse from the citizen groups, such as the ‘Scona Concerned Citizens and the Chinatown and Area Business Association will contain more emotionally charged language, thereby placing the most emphasis on the *danger* and *contamination* codes. However, it is also expected that the *drugs* and *dirty* codes will be heavily featured, though not in the same way as featured in the Alberta Government report. The emphasis within these codes will likely be on the contaminating and dangerous nature of these codes.

⁹ See: “SCONA CONCERNED CITIZENS.” n.d. SCONA CONCERNED CITIZENS. Accessed May 4, 2023. <https://sconaconcernedcitizens.weebly.com/>; “Make Your Voice Heard.” n.d. SCONA CONCERNED CITIZENS. Accessed January 18, 2024. <https://sconaconcernedcitizens.weebly.com/make-your-voice-heard.html>; P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton, 2023 ABESDAB 10064. 2023. Edmonton Subdivision and Development Appeal Board.

Analysis

Code	Frequencies
Dirty (<i>Degradation, Social Disorder, Encampments, Homelessness/Unhoused Persons</i>)	Total: 156
Drugs (<i>Drug Use, Needle Debris, Substances</i>)	Total: 167
Danger (<i>Personal Crime, Property Crime, Affective Danger, Safety Concerns, De-Policing, Loss of Economic Prosperity, or another Economic Loss</i>)	Total: 276
Contamination (<i>Expansion of Social Disorder, Expansion of Drug Use, Crime, Encampments, the Seeping Quality of Dirtiness and Danger, Reverting of the Neighbourhood back to Old Ways, Lack of Consultation</i>).	Total: 440
Total Frequencies	1,039

Table 3: Frequencies of Discourse from the 'Scona Concerned Citizens

While *contamination* was an adaptation of Toft's (2014) discourse analysis framework, it has become a main point of analysis for this framework. It was featured in the Government of Alberta's Socioeconomic report on Safe Consumption Sites; however, as the above table shows, it is by far the most prevalent code within the discourse presented by the SCC. This code being the most prevalent helps illustrate the NIMBY ideology that underpins the SCC's dogma. The concern of NIMBYism is rooted in protecting their neighbourhood, or a certain spatial area. To the SCC, opening an SCS will lead to the *contamination* of the neighbourhood's character, by inviting *others* in. The seeping or expanding quality of *contamination* is the main threat that NIMBY citizen-based groups, such as the SCC, are concerned with. For this reason, *contamination* becomes one of the most frequent codes within the discourse.

Another element of *contamination* that was more prevalent within the SCC discourse is the concern that opening a safe consumption site would cause a neighbourhood to revert to a

time before, or back to its old character. As mentioned previously, this is a discursive element that is mentioned in Toft's (2014) original framework, which he codes as *danger*; specifically, the danger that a neighbourhood would revert to a time before the improved present (Toft 2014, 801). I chose to code this sentiment as *contamination*, as it represents the temporally contaminating threat to a community that long-term safe consumption sites pose. Alternatively, to other forms of contamination, which emphasize the spatial contamination of safe consumption sites, this theme emphasizes temporal contamination. It is often used in the context of a neighbourhood that had recently undergone revitalization. In this instance, NIMBY groups are concerned that the *contaminating* qualities of a safe consumption site will reverse the revitalization efforts that their neighbourhood had previously undergone. This theme is important to include within *contamination*, as it shows a tension between spatial and temporal contamination.

Dirty. Within the letters, petitions, and brochures that can be found on the 'Scona Concerned Citizens' website¹⁰, *dirtiness* is present; however, not to the same extent as themes such as *danger* or *contamination*. Many of the mentions of *dirtiness* are mentioned in conjunction with the contaminating nature of safe consumption sites, or other social services. Therefore, while there are 156 frequencies of *dirty* discursive themes, many of the main examples that I will analyze will fall within the code *contamination*. That is not to say that the SCC does not emphasize *dirtiness*; however, it is usually emphasized in conjunction with mentions of

¹⁰ All documents referenced have a corresponding reference in the reference list. Furthermore, newer, or updated documents can be found on the SCC website. See also: "Make Your Voice Heard." n.d. SCONA CONCERNED CITIZENS. Accessed January 18, 2024. <https://sconaconcernedcitizens.weebly.com/make-your-voice-heard.html>; and: "Additional Letters." n.d. Google Docs. Accessed January 18, 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1u2eU_2cGWa3xsojsZ35qpLaUlykYd6RgUrupwgD1hzE/edit?usp=sharing&usp=embed_facebook.

contamination. For example, the SCC mentions that they “already have the Mustard Seed Homeless Shelter across the street from the proposed “safe injection site”, and this has already increased the crime rate in the area” (**January 14th Letter to Premier Smith**). This proposed use will be a magnet for drug dealers to the area”. With this quote, we can see the mention of *dirtiness* through the mention of homelessness and homeless shelters; however, it is mentioned in the context of neighbourhood contamination. This is the case for many of the lexical themes that the SCC uses to discuss *dirtiness*.

Drugs. The main discursive themes that are presented by the SCC have to do with the contaminating nature of the safe consumption site, and therefore will be analyzed within the *contamination* code; however, there were many mentions of drug use, specifically within the lexical devices that the SCC uses when referring to the safe consumption site. The SCC attempted to avoid referring to the SCS as a *safe consumption site*, instead referring to it by other names that dropped the word *safe*. These included “Overdose Site”, which was used three times; “Drug Consumption Site”, which was used 18 times; “Street Drug Consumption Site”, which was used six times; “Illegal Drug Consumption Site”, which was used 40 times; and “Injection Site”, which was used 22 times, bringing the total frequency of the usage of alternate names for the SCS to 89.

When discussing the process of lexicalization and the use of linguistic techniques *other* certain populations (Toft 2014, 785), deviant meanings can be attached to certain subjectivities to reinforce the cognitive understanding of the intended audience (786). In the case of the SCC, the use of repetition is a linguistic device used to adapt and reinforce the way that the reader understands the function of safe consumption sites. When the SCC continuously refers to a safe

consumption site as an “Illegal Drug Consumption Site”, or a “Street Drug Consumption Site”, they are emphasizing the illegal nature of drug use, thereby reinforcing the *otherness* of the site’s clientele. When discussing the SCS and its clientele in this way, the SCC is playing into narratives that value “*addicts* by the presentation of addiction-as-sin and addiction-as-disease metaphors” (Toft 2014, 798).

January 3rd Letter from Resident to Premier Smith: [drug users] would walk our streets and alleys, interacting with area residents and visitors. The area would subsequently become an obvious destination for dealers of illegal substances seeking new clients, bringing a criminal element.

Jan 5th Letter to Premier Smith: Now you wish to add an illegal drug consumption site...it was pretty clear that there is nothing in place to address the issues that will be caused by this illegal drug consumption site.

Letter to Premier and Ministers Outlining Solutions: As a taxpayer, I object to my tax dollars being spent on overdose sites...

SCC Brochure: Help keep illegal drugs out of our neighbourhood.

Danger. Much of the presented discourse that called upon themes of *danger* discussed both the economic concerns of the businesses and residents near the proposed SCS, as well as concerns of increased crime rates and vandalism that residents feared an SCS would cause. The main concerns espoused by the SCC have to do with economic concerns on the nearby businesses. For instance:

Jan 11th Employee Letter to Minister Milliken: My concern is that the impact on the surrounding businesses outweighs the positives of *this address*.

Furthermore, concerns about danger are presented when discussing illegal activity around safe consumption sites, such as vandalism, theft, the purchase of illegal drugs, and other forms of crime.

Letter sent by a Concerned Citizen to Premier Danielle Smith: *Since the June opening of a similar facility a block away, many of us have already had firsthand experience with increased crime, encampments, vandalism, social disorder, and other problems jeopardizing our safety and our property. We feel this small area in Old Strathcona should not have to endure even more.*

P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton: *...activities occurring at a safe injection site you have people who are engaging in what is otherwise an illegal activity - the purchase and possession of illegal drugs.*

Letter from Concerned Resident – Especially Safety: “A health hub/injection site brings a whole new level of dangerous people and social disorder.”

Contamination. The largest code within the SCC discourse fell within the code *contamination*.

This is understandable, as the main point of view from the SCC has to do with the protection of their neighbourhood from an external force. Calling back to David Campbell’s (1998) theories of danger, the subject that is viewed to be dangerous is not innately dangerous, it is merely regarded as dangerous by those to whom it becomes a threat (1). This theory can be seen through the SCC’s views on an SCS as a contaminating threat. The placement of an SCS in their neighbourhood is a danger to them, as it risks *contaminating* their neighbourhood. While an SCS is not a danger in and of itself to the SCC, the factors of *contamination* that will beget the SCS are dangerous.

In a textbook NIMBY statement, one letter states that safe consumption sites cause devastating damage to local neighbourhoods, and the clustering of social services amplifies this damage. They then go on to state that “While those addicted to drugs need help, it should not be provided without consideration of the impact on others” (**Jan 15th Letter to Minister Milliken**). This statement succinctly summarizes the mantra of NIMBYism, which, as stated before is *not here, and nowhere close to me*. Usually, NIMBY groups will not claim objection to whatever land use they are opposed to; however, they will object to the location where the service or land

use is located. This quotation, then, succinctly illustrates the NIMBY ideology that is the basis of the ‘Scona Concerned Citizen’s opposition to safe consumption sites.

Similar to this quote, the SCC perceives other social services, such as homeless shelters and soup kitchens, as *contaminating* forces, as they include repeated attacks on The Mustard Seed¹¹ in their neighbourhood:

Jan 10th Letter to Minister Milliken: “Since the recent opening of the Mustard Seed, 81 Avenue has changed significantly. I fear the state of our community will only worsen with the addition of the Community Health Hub.”

Letter to Michael Janz: “Since the Mustard Seed opened there has been a marked rise in break-ins in the neighbourhood.”

More Appropriate Location Letter: “However, since the more recent addition of the Mustard Seed permanent shelter, I have become aware of a greater number of break-ins and acts of vandalism in my condominium building as well as in some of the surrounding businesses.”

January 10th Evan Romanow Letter: “Since the recent opening of the Mustard Seed, 81 Avenue has changed significantly. I fear the state of our community will only worsen with the addition of the Community Health Hub.”

Beyond repeated attacks on other social services, the SCC letters also call into question the efficacy of other sites in the city, including sites operating in Edmonton’s Chinatown neighbourhood, citing that they “already know what a disaster Boyle Street created in the Chinatown Community” (**Jan 5th Letter to Premier Smith**), stating that they do not want their neighbourhood to become another “Chinatown disaster” (**Letter sent by a Concerned Citizen to Premier Danielle Smith**). The main theme that these quotations draw on is the fear that the character of their neighbourhood will be *contaminated*, effectively degrading, or destroying their neighbourhood. The statement was made by the SCC that a safe consumption site is a

¹¹ The Mustard Seed is an organization serving Alberta’s major cities, providing shelter, food, and social services for homeless populations. For more information, see: <https://theseed.ca/>.

contaminating factor, as it is not compatible with the character, nor amenities of the neighbourhood (**January 3rd Letter from Resident to Mayor Sohi**). These themes can further be seen through the following examples:

Jan 14th Letter to Premier Smith: “A “Safe Consumption Site” to enable “People who use intravenous Drugs” cannot be the way to go. Rehabilitation, yes. Undermining an existing community? No.”

Letter from Concerned Business Patron: “Please stop the degradation of this avenue.

Letter to Premier and Ministers Outlining Solutions: “Mentally sound, responsible adults do not put illicit drug consumption sites next door to children’s activity centres, near daycares and near senior’s residences. The Alberta Government should be distancing themselves from the Boyle Street Association (who insist this location is acceptable) – not funding it.”

Letter to AHS re: Zoning: “I have a simple question for you as the enabler for the consumption of illegal drugs. Why has there been no public consultation?”

January 3rd Letter to Jason Copping: “If approved, this development would invite people to our neighbourhood to consume illegal substances. Once impaired, they would walk our streets and alleys, interacting with area residents and visitors. The area would subsequently become an obvious destination for dealers of illegal substances seeking new clients, bringing a criminal element.”

P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton: “The negative impacts of the development upon the subject location must be considered and whether the neighbours should be asked to live with these impacts.”

P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton: “The opening of the Mustard Seed facility nearby, providing “advocacy, employment and housing supports” as well as meals, has led to an obvious increase in crime and social disorder in our community. Adding a SCS facility that will draw illegal drug users from other areas will further increase these problems.”

The SCC also calls on current issues of open drug consumption in the neighbourhood, stating that they “can attest to an increase in open drug use, homeless encampments and general social disorder already affecting this neighbourhood” (**January 9th Letter Re: Proximity to Schools**). It would seem to make sense that if there is already a problem with open drug use, this

neighbourhood would be a prime site for a new SCS. To support their argument that safe consumption sites bring crime into the neighbourhoods in which they are located, the SCC cites the Alberta Government report that was analyzed in the previous chapter. They state that most studies done on SCS efficacy are done in Seattle and Vancouver, not in Edmonton (**P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton**).

However, it is important to recall that, as Livingston (2021) and Salvalaggio et al. (2023) point out, the Alberta government study was riddled with methodological errors and confirmation bias. The Alberta Government crafted a study to reinforce their position. There is nothing unique about Alberta where safe consumption sites perform differently than in Seattle or Vancouver. Drug users do not behave differently in Alberta than in Seattle or Vancouver. Simply, it is the error in which the Alberta Government measures its crime statistics that is different. Yet again, this is the consequence of these NIMBY discourses. Groups such as the SCC are empowered by them. Yet, it is not clear as to whether the SCC's position would sway based on these erroneous measurements, as the group does mention in the court case **P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton**, that statistics do not matter, perception matters.

Chinatown and Area Business Association

Including the Chinatown and Area Business Association (CABA) will provide an interesting intersection between a citizen's movement and a government agency. While chartered by the City of Edmonton to represent the business interests of the Chinatown area, CABA is primarily made up of citizen representatives of business groups. This intersection will provide an interesting intersection between technical and emotionally coded language. Since the majority of the CABA discourse will be sourced from a federal court case (*CHINATOWN & AREA*

BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017)¹², it is expected that most of the discourse will be more technical. Furthermore, since the main concern of CABA is procedural fairness in choosing locations, it is expected that the emphasis will be on *contamination*, due to the fear of multiple safe consumption sites in one neighbourhood contaminating and degrading the neighbourhood.

Notably, there is much less discourse available for this case, as for the most part, this case was argued over procedural fairness. However, the inclusion of this discussion regarding procedural fairness will bolster the analysis of the code *contamination*, and therefore, it is justifiable to include it in the analysis.

Analysis

Code	Frequencies
Dirty (<i>Degradation, Social Disorder, Encampments, Homelessness/Unhoused Persons</i>)	Total: 0
Drugs (<i>Drug Use, Needle Debris, Substances</i>)	Total: 27
Danger (<i>Personal Crime, Property Crime, Affective Danger, Safety Concerns, De-Policing, Loss of Economic Prosperity, or another Economic Loss</i>)	Total: 9
Contamination (<i>Expansion of Social Disorder, Expansion of Drug Use, Crime, Encampments, the Seeping Quality of Dirtiness and Danger, Reverting of the Neighbourhood back to Old Ways, Lack of Consultation</i>).	Total: 47
Total	83

Table 4: *Frequencies of Discourse from the CABA Federal Court Case*

¹² *CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017* No. T-1764-17 (Federal Court of Canada 2017).

Drugs. While there were 27 mentions of drug-related discourse within the CABA court case, there were minimal discrete mentions that did not involve other aspects of danger and contamination. Furthermore, the drug-related discourse from the CABA tended to mirror previous discursive themes from either the Government of Alberta or the SCC. Commonalities had to do with needle debris and open drug use. For this reason, I will not be including any distinct quotes here; however, the drug-related discourse was still prominent, specifically regarding needle debris and open drug use.

Danger. The *danger*-related discourse from the CABA mainly has to do with perceptions of safety within the Chinatown neighbourhood. As one resident noted, "...having three sites in the neighbourhood means the perception of safety is lower and that businesses may not be as busy in the evenings" (Mertz 2019). Theories of danger teach us that danger is not an objective idea; it takes meaning from those it becomes a threat to (Campbell 1998, 1). For this reason, danger is highly dependent on levels of perception.

This understanding of danger, it is easier to understand the viewpoint of the CABA. Paragraph [7] of the Judgement and Reasoning from *CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017*¹³ states that the CABA's purpose is to promote the area's economic interests. It then makes sense that the CABA perceives safe consumption sites to be a danger to the area, as it is perceived to pose an economic threat to the nearby businesses. The CABA promotes a form of economic NIMBYism, where they are not concerned with the operation of the SCS itself, rather the location of the SCS poses a perceived threat to the economic vitality of the neighbourhood. Taking this into consideration, the federal judge ruled in

¹³ See "Rulings and Judgement" *CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017* No. T-1764-17 (Federal Court of Canada 2017).

Paragraph [85] of the Judgement and Reasoning that “CABA should not be granted public interest standing, the Attorney General argues, because its interests are purely commercial and its concerns are”, effectively branding the complaints as economic NIMBYism, and setting a precedent for who deserves procedural fairness regarding the placement of an SCS. Furthermore, the court ruled that third parties are not entitled to procedural fairness¹⁴. According to this ruling, being a commercial industry near the proposed SCS does not constitute grounds for public interest standing and increased consultation, a legal precedent that is relevant to the issues raised by the SCC.

Contamination. Being that the concerns raised by the CABA had to do with a perceived lack of consultation. The CABA contended to a federal court that it was not properly consulted about the number of sites that were in the Chinatown area, as well as claimed that the number of sites in the area unfairly burdened the community (Mertz 2019). Paragraph [3-5] of the Judgement and Reasoning from CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017¹⁵ states that the CABA is not opposed to safe consumption sites; however, they contend that as representatives of the community, they ought to have been consulted before the development of the sites. However, it was argued that Health Canada did not violate procedural fairness rights, as the minimal requirements for procedural fairness as set out by Health Canada were reasonably met. The court ruled against the CABA, deciding that third parties are not owed special procedural fairness under Health Canada’s *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*.

¹⁴ See “Rulings and Judgement” CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017 No. T-1764-17 (Federal Court of Canada 2017).

¹⁵ See “Rulings and Judgement” CHINATOWN & AREA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION v. AGC et al 2017 No. T-1764-17 (Federal Court of Canada 2017).

Discussion

The discourse presented by the SCC and the CABA is heavily laden with NIMBYism. Consistent with my hypothesis, the SCC used more emotionally charged discursive language when discussing safe consumption sites. Alternatively, to the Government of Alberta report, which attempted to paint itself as a report of objective expertise, the SCC did not give any pretense of objectivity. Instead, the SCC embraced their subjectivity, using language to *otherize* SCS clientele. The main themes that the SCC presented fell within the code *contamination*; however, there was also a heavy emphasis placed on *drugs*. One of the main discursive tools that the SCC employed was the repetitive re-naming of the SCS to emphasize the illegal nature of drug use. By attempting to avoid referring to the SCS as a *safe consumption site*, the SCC removes perceptions of *safety*, instead emphasizing perceptions of illegality. The labels that the SCC applied to the safe consumption sites included “Overdose Site”, which was used three times; “Drug Consumption Site”, which was used 18 times; “Street Drug Consumption Site”, which was used six times; “Illegal Drug Consumption Site”, which was used 40 times; and “Injection Site”, which was used 22 times.

When stating that the SCC embraces their subjectivity, I am trying to convey the type of knowledge they claim or the epistemological foundations of NIMBYism. When defining NIMBYism as an ideology, I am avoiding the greater debates about the roots of ideology. Namely, I will attempt to avoid discussing whether ideology is rooted within real knowledge, whether NIMBY ideology is a form of false knowledge or a veil for the dislike of a certain group. When I previously discussed ideology, I discussed NIMBY ideology within a Gramscian lens, regarding it as a hegemonic belief that NIMBYs hold—and so to believe that others should hold. Breaking from other Marxist viewpoints on ideology that discuss ideological processes as

formed by a false consciousness (Pines 1993), for the SCC, NIMBY ideology is not guided by any false consciousness. Rather, NIMBY ideology is rooted within their subjective, place-based point of view.

The SCC roots their knowledge in place-based observation. Many of the accounts described in the letters written to government officials discuss firsthand experiences and observations. Furthermore, the group states that many studies measuring the efficacy of safe consumption sites are conducted in Seattle or Vancouver, not Edmonton (**P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton**). There is no objective reasoning to state that an SCS would have less efficacy in Edmonton than it does in Seattle or Vancouver; however, the SCC derives their argument against an SCS in their neighbourhood based on their real, place-based observations. These observations and the SCC's knowledge base are subjective. The group takes no pretense of being an objective and authoritative source as the Government of Alberta does. They instead embrace this subjectivity through objective, firsthand, and place-based observational knowledge.

The SCC also emphasized the contaminating effect of a safe consumption site. The SCC perceives a site as a danger to their neighbourhood, as it risks *contaminating* the character of the area. While an SCS is not a danger in and of itself to the SCC, the factors of *contamination* that will beget the SCS are dangerous. Simply put, the SCC views an SCS as a force that will degrade the surrounding neighbourhood. As one business patron puts it "Please stop the degradation of this avenue" (**Letter from Concerned Business Patron**). While the SCC emphasizes the illegality of the drug consumption that occurs at an SCS, the underlying danger perceived by the SCC has to do with the *contamination* that they believe would occur in their neighbourhood, should a site be opened. The SCC emphasizes the perception of danger and contamination from

the opening of a site. Even when presented with statistics that reinforce the fact an SCS does not *import* danger into an area (or *contaminate* an area with said danger), the group stated in the court case *P. Golec et al v Development Authority of the City of Edmonton*, that “The statistics do not matter. Perception matters”.

The other citizens’ group, the CABA, took a slightly different focus on opposing safe consumption sites than the SCC did. The CABA focussed on *contamination* as well; however, this focus was on the lack of consultation that the CABA received before the opening of the three sites in downtown Edmonton. The discourse that the CABA presented had to do with a perceived lack of consultation and procedural fairness, as well as economic NIMBYism. The CABA contends that as representatives of the community, they should have been consulted as a means of procedural fairness; however, it was decided by a federal court that Health Canada did not violate the CABA’s procedural fairness rights. The CABA also exhibits forms of economic NIMBYism, as they argue that multiple sites located near one another pose a perceived threat to the economic vitality of Chinatown.

The CABA discourse provides an important breadth to the analysis of NIMBYism. Unlike the Government of Alberta, or the ‘Scona Concerned Citizens, the CABA emphasizes economic NIMBYism. Economic NIMBYism is an alternate form of NIMBYism that emphasizes the protection of economic interests within an urban area. Cities have long been desirable for their ability for robust business development, as opposed to rural areas (Been 2018, 219). Cities have been considered centres of growth, where land use planning is geared towards the interests of economic growth (219). Therefore, if there is a perceived threat to economic growth, the coalition of economic elites who seek to protect the interests of economic growth (Been 2018, 219), will attempt to defend it, often through discursive forms of NIMBYism. The

Chinatown and Area Business Association then justifies their economic NIMBYism by arguing that they are defending the economic interests and economic vitality of their neighbourhood.

Analyzing the discourse from two separate citizens' groups and movements allows for a discussion of the breadth of NIMBY opposition to safe consumption sites, as well as a contrast to the Government of Alberta's report on safe consumption sites. While the Government of Alberta attempts to take an objective and expert, or technical, opposition to safe consumption sites, the SCC, a citizen-led group, opposes safe consumption sites from a subjective point of view, painting them as a contaminating force. Alternatively, the CABA, a group representing businesses in a certain area, opposes the development of safe consumption sites based on a lack of consultation and perceived violation of procedural fairness rights. NIMBYism is seen in many different facets of these sets of discourse, presenting more benignly when arguing violations of procedural fairness, presenting as economic NIMBYism, or simply presenting as unabashed Not In My Backyard-ism. Whether it is a citizen-led group or a group of businesses, NIMBYism is present in opposition to the development of safe consumption sites in multiple ways.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This paper attempted to analyze NIMBY discourses relating to safe consumption sites in Alberta as presented by the Alberta Government's Socioeconomic Review of Safe Consumption Sites and two citizen-based movements, the 'Scona Concerned Citizens and the Chinatown and Area Business Association. To analyze the discourse presented by these groups, this paper adopted a coding system from Amoshaun Toft (2014). Toft's code incorporated discursive language into three categories: *dirty*, *drugs*, and *danger* (793). Adding to Toft's code, I incorporated the code *contamination*, which I used whenever a body of discourse draws on themes of expansion of social disorder (open drug use, encampments, vandalism, and crime) that seemingly seep into the neighbourhood and *contaminate* the once pure neighbourhood.

The theoretical mantra of NIMBY discourses can be summed up as *not here, and nowhere close to me*. NIMBY discourses are incredibly prevalent when debating urban land usage and land developments, specifically safe consumption sites. NIMBYism has been used to oppose land developments such as safe consumption sites due to an inherent dread of risks that are associated with *outsiders* entering a community where they are *others* (Inhaber 1998, 99). A common discursive theme present when discussing fears associated with NIMBY movements is that of *contamination*. There is a fear that, such as with a disease, certain undesirable people will contaminate a neighbourhood, making that neighbourhood less desirable. The fear that precedes NIMBY discourses stems from an idea of *danger*. Political scientist David Campbell (1998) writes that danger is not an objective idea, it takes meaning from those it becomes a threat to (1). *Danger* is an effect of interpretation; nothing is *dangerous* in and of itself, yet anything can be *perceived* as dangerous (Campbell 1998, 2). To NIMBYs, a safe consumption site is *dangerous*, because its clientele is *perceived* to be dangerous.

In the first chapter of this paper, I introduce key concepts of this paper, including my research question, hypothesis, and the significance of studying NIMBYism. The second chapter went on to review the relevant literature on the topic of NIMBYism, as well as literature on ideology and border studies. I intend to connect the boundary-making themes of NIMBYism to the theory of boundaries in critical border studies, which I will address in this conclusion. The third chapter outlined the methodology of this discourse analysis, while the fourth and fifth chapters outlined the NIMBY discourses as presented by the Government of Alberta, the 'Scona Concerned Citizens, and the Chinatown and Area Business Association.

In the fourth chapter, NIMBY discourse was presented by the Government of Alberta through many different themes. The most prevalent code was *drugs* followed by *danger*. The main NIMBY themes within this report fell within themes of open drug use, needle debris and other drug paraphernalia, as well as personal crime, affective danger, and safety concerns. The Government of Alberta attempted to present itself as an objective, expert, and technical opposition to safe consumption sites. These discourse themes exemplify boundary-making discourses. In critical border studies, it is a common understanding that borders denote differences. They denote who should and who should not be in an area. They delineate right from wrong, and *normals* from *others*. When the Alberta Government report raises concerns with safe consumption sites, they are denoting who is in the right, and who is in the wrong. Needle debris is left behind by those who *do not belong* in an area. When a person raises the concern with perceptions of safety due to a site being in their neighbourhood, they are raising the concern that the *other* will somehow bring them harm. Concerns of de-policing around sites are then amplified, as the police provide a buffer between those who belong and those who do not.

It is important to note that the Alberta Government report contains many issues regarding its methodology. The first of these issues is the measurement of crime. The committee purportedly measures crime by the number of emergency service calls to locations around safe consumption sites, which is an indirect indicator of crime, and is being used to misrepresent an increase in crime statistics (Livingston 2021, 2). Furthermore, the report also measures *crime* by levels of public perception of crime. There is a rather large body of criminology literature that demonstrates how people tend to overestimate crime-related issues in their neighbourhoods (Livingston 2021, 2). Beyond the inaccurate reporting of crime statistics, the report also exhibits biases, including outcome reporting bias, measurement bias, and confirmation bias (Salvalaggio et al. 2023, 3). Outcome reporting bias was engrained in the report from its genesis, as the stated aim of the report was to *minimize the adverse social and economic impacts of existing safe consumption sites on local neighbourhoods*. The report also shows measurement bias by negating the use of methamphetamine as a valid use of an SCS, while also downplaying oxygen as a lifesaving intervention (Salvalaggio et al. 2023, 3). Finally, the report includes confirmation bias by not providing a balanced viewpoint on the issue. For instance, the report emphasizes the voices of healthcare professionals who oppose the sites, while downplaying healthcare professionals who support the sites.

Alternatively, to the Alberta Government report, the NIMBY discourse presented by the SCC and the CABA takes a more subjective view of safe consumption sites. Unlike the Government of Alberta, these organizations take no pretense of being objective and authoritative voices. They instead take a subjective view, painting safe consumption sites as contaminating forces. The SCC used emotionally charged discursive language, embracing subjectivity, and using language to *otherize* SCS clientele. The main themes that the SCC presented fell under the

code *contamination*; however, there was also an emphasis on *drugs*. A discursive tool that the SCC used was the repetitive re-naming of safe consumption sites to emphasize the illegality of drug use and to remove perceptions of *safety* from the sites, by referring to the sites as “Overdose Sites” or “Illegal Drug Consumption Sites” among others. The SCC also emphasized the contaminating effect of a safe consumption site, citing the fear of neighbourhood degradation that a site would cause. Again, boundary-making themes of who belongs and who does not belong are prevalent. To the SCC, SCS clientele are outsiders in their neighbourhood. They are *others*. The SCC uses discursive language to create boundaries as to where SCS clientele should not be. Another citizen-based group, the CABA, takes a slightly different focus on the issue. While the CABA also focused on contamination, their emphasis was on the lack of consultation that they received before the opening of three sites in downtown Edmonton. The discourse that the CABA presented had to do with a perceived lack of consultation and procedural fairness, as well as economic NIMBYism. The CABA simply argues that having multiple sites in the Chinatown area is bad for business, presenting as economic NIMBYism, or simply unabashed Not In My Backyard-ism.

NIMBYism is a form of ideology that employs themes of boundary-making in creating boundaries of exclusion. Border studies and boundary studies are about place-making. The themes presented by the NIMBY discourses rely on place-making by delineating who belongs in certain neighbourhoods and who does not. Furthermore, borders are lines of imagination (Newman 2017, 5). They rely on perceived or imagined lines that segment a city. Similar to the idea of perceived danger (Campbell 1998), these imagined lines are given meaning by who perceives them. Therefore, if a group representing NIMBY ideology perceives there to be a boundary delineating who belongs from who does not belong, the logic remains that the same

group would perceive a certain danger presented by those who do not belong. In this way, NIMBY discourses use discursive themes to create boundaries. They establish an imaginary border, defining who or what belongs in a community and who or what does not.

Understanding NIMBYism through the lens of boundary-making and otherizing is significant, given the consequences of NIMBY discourses. It was the goal of this paper to create a better understanding of the discursive themes present in opposition to safe consumption sites in Alberta. Alberta, like the rest of Canada and many other states, is in an opioid epidemic (Public Health Agency of Canada 2023). NIMBY discourses presented by the Government of Alberta prompted the government to decide that there is no need for new sites in Medicine Hat or Calgary (Government of Alberta 2020, 38). Recalling that there have been no deaths at safe consumption sites in Alberta (Government of Alberta 2020, 18), and the fact that the opioid crisis and the overdose crises are likely going to continue to grow, as modelled by the Public Health Agency of Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada 2023), the consequences of NIMBY discourses are fatal. In the first ten months of 2023, Alberta experienced 1,692 fatalities, mostly due to opioid use; with these numbers, Alberta is posed to break an annual record for drug-related deaths (Smith 2024). The last available data for drug poisoning deaths in Alberta, the last eleven months of 2023, shows that 1,841 Albertans died of a drug overdose (Government of Alberta 2024a), marking a record number of overdose deaths in the province. Even though there have been no deaths at safe consumption sites in Alberta, the Alberta Government has stated that no new safe consumption sites are warranted in Alberta (Government of Alberta 2020, 38). 1,841 Albertans died of a drug overdose in the first eleven months of 2023. Zero Albertans died in a safe consumption site.

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