

The Social Impacts of Street-involved Youths' Participation in Structured and Unstructured  
Leisure

by  
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THESIS

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### Abstract

Little research has focused on street-involved youths' social relationships. As some scholars have suggested that leisure is inherently social, my research sought to understand whether participation in structured and/or unstructured leisure activities influence street-involved youths' social relationships with other street-involved youths as well with members of the mainstream community. Written in the publishable paper format, this thesis is comprised of two papers, both of which utilize Foucauldian theory. In the first paper, I examine the impacts of street-involved youths' participation in Health Matters, a leisure program for street-involved youths in Ottawa, Canada. In the second paper, I examine street involved youths' unstructured leisure activities (e.g., leisure in non-programmed settings) and their subsequent social impacts. Based on my findings, I argue that street-involved youths use both structured and unstructured leisure to form crucial social connections to make their lives more bearable.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Youths (i.e., those ranging in age from 12 to 24) without homes or safe spaces in which to live have become a growing concern in Canada; indeed, youths represent one of the fastest growing sectors of the street-involved/homeless population (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2012; Kelly & Caputo, 2007). Organizations across the country work to provide and/or connect these youths with appropriate shelter, secondary education support services, support for addictions and mental health, and basic employment skills training (Covenant House, 2012; Operation Come Home, 2010; Youth Services Bureau, 2012). Additionally, several organizations deliver leisure programs to these youths. While some research on street-involved adults' involvement in leisure programs has suggested that participants benefit from enhanced social skills and the formation of social ties with other participants as well as with the broader community (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004; Knestaut, Devine & Verlezza, 2010), researchers have yet to address the potential benefits of street-involved youths' participation in such structured leisure programs. Furthermore, there is a gap in understanding the potential impacts that street-involved youths may derive from participation in unstructured leisure (i.e., youths' leisure pursuits outside of structured programs).

In the two papers that comprise this thesis, I used Foucauldian theory to explore the social impacts of street-involved youths' participation in both structured and unstructured leisure activities. More specifically, I examine the impacts that participation in structured and unstructured leisure participation has on participants' social ties with other street-involved youths and also members the mainstream community. In order to form an in-depth understanding of the youths' leisure behaviours and their subsequent impacts, as well as to build a rapport with potential research participants, I utilized an ethnographic approach. Over a span of 16 months, I volunteered as an assistant staff member twice weekly for a period of four hours with a

structured leisure program in downtown Ottawa, Canada called Health Matters. Health Matters is run by Operation Come Home, an organization that serves urban street-involved and at-risk youths aged 16 to 30. As a result of my direct participation in the program, as well as through interviews conducted with eight of the youths who participated in the program, I was able to learn firsthand about street-involved youths' participation in the structured leisure program, their unstructured leisure activities, and their consequent social impacts.

As I chose to write my thesis in the publishable paper format, my thesis is comprised of four separate chapters. This, the first chapter, is a general introduction to the research I conducted with street-involved youths involved in the Health Matters leisure program; in it, I present a review of relevant literature and my research design. The second chapter is the first of the two stand-alone papers and concerns the social impacts that result from street-involved youths' participation in a structured leisure program. The third chapter contains the second stand-alone paper, which explores street-involved youths' unstructured leisure activities and the ensuing social impacts. In the final chapter, the conclusion, I summarize results from research papers one and two, and provide future research considerations as well as practical recommendations for policy and programming serving street-involved youths in a leisure setting.

Before delving into reviewing the literature and detailing the research process, I will first introduce my personal relationship to this research. As a constructionist, I believe that it is impossible to detach the researcher from the research; hence, I feel it is important to detail how I came to conduct the research contained in this thesis and to acknowledge the "invisible backpack" of privilege (McIntosh, 1989) that I brought to it.

## **My Relationship to the Research**

I grew up as a white, middle-class, heterosexual female on my family's farm in a small town in Quebec, where I lived until I completed high school. My relationship to this research began in high school when I worked as a day camp counselor. The camp I worked for offered day programs to children aged five to 12. While some children at this camp came from very affluent families, half of them came from very low-income families and were granted subsidies that enabled them to attend the camp. The fact that children from varying socio-economic backgrounds could access the same quality of summer programming, in my eyes, ensured some form of equity amongst these children. Furthermore, watching children form friendships that transcended these "differences" and seeing that the children did not seem to differentiate between economic backgrounds was encouraging in my eyes. Unfortunately, however, these types of "integrated" programming and opportunities typically stop at childhood, yet economic disparities and leisure needs remain when children grow into young adults.

My work with youths and families with low-incomes continued after I completed my undergraduate studies at the University of Ottawa when I was hired to work for the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA), a not-for-profit organization. At CPRA, I worked closely with the Everybody Gets to Play™ (EGTP) initiative. Through EGTP, we worked with communities to provide accessible recreation, arts, and sports activities for children and youths in low-income families. Communities worked to mobilize themselves to create either recreational subsidies or sustainable low-cost or free activities so that children in low-income families could take advantage of opportunities available to those living in more fortunate households.

At the beginning of my Master's of Arts in Human Kinetics in autumn of 2010, I had just returned from a year working abroad with youths in Australia and travelling. I decided it was time to start to volunteer once again in the community, so I began researching organizations with which I wanted to volunteer. After searching through programs offered by organizations in the city that served street-involved and homeless youths, I found a program called Health Matters, run by Operation Come Home, an Ottawa-based youth services organization.

While I was glad to find that a program offered to street-involved youths such as Health Matters was offered in Ottawa, I also realized that programs like it were rare in the city, which I quickly learned is a reality tied to government funding constraints. Smith and colleagues (2007) explained that leisure programs for the street-involved are not readily available because “community and social service programs have felt the pressure from provincial government cut-backs, unstable funding and changing government priorities” (p. 7). Furthermore, when I first sought out this volunteer opportunity, it appeared that little had been written (if anything) in terms of assessments of leisure programming's potential benefits for street-involved youths. As such, I decided that this was an area I wanted to learn more about. In particular, I was interested in the benefits of participating in such programs, as I held the somewhat naïve belief that leisure programs promised positive outcomes for youths from all backgrounds. As a result, I applied to volunteer with Health Matters and, after a successful interview, I was invited to become a volunteer. They also invited me to conduct my research with the youths involved in the program once I received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa and, more importantly, had built relationships with program participants. Thus marked the beginning of my ethnographic research with the youths in Operation Come Home's Health Matters program, as

well as the beginning of my passion for volunteering with street-involved youths, an activity in which I continue to participate.

### **Operation Come Home’s Health Matters Leisure Program: An Overview**

Operation Come Home has been serving street-involved and at-risk youths in Ottawa since 1971. According to Operation Come Home’s (2010) Strategic Plan, it was created as a result of an identified need in Ottawa for an organization that would help youths on the streets to “reunite” with their families; today, Operation Come Home continues to reunite youths with their families across Canada and remains the only organization in Canada to do so. In 2002 Operation Come Home opened a downtown centre to provide additional services beyond the scope of the reunite program (Operation Come Home, 2010). Due to street-involved youths’ growing needs, over the years Operation Come Home has offered a number of different programs: distance education through the Achievement Centre; a drop-in youth centre that offers a safe space where youths can access social services and a food bank; an employment centre that provides youths with networking and pertinent skills related to finding work; a frontline outreach program that provides street-involved youths with basic necessities (e.g., food, water and information on youth services organizations); and a housing program that assists street-involved youths in locating and maintaining housing (Operation Come Home, 2012). Created in the autumn of 2010, the Health Matters leisure program is one of Operation Come Home’s newer programs.

The Health Matters program serves youths ages 16 to 30. The program runs four evenings per week, Wednesday through Saturday, from 4:00pm until 8:00pm. For the first half of the evening programming, youths participate in leisure activities such as floor hockey, museum trips, karaoke, soccer, and yoga (Operation Come Home, 2012). The second half of the

evening is reserved for cooking and eating a healthy meal together, during which time board games or cards are often played (Operation Come Home, 2012).

Before I began to volunteer with the Health Matters program, the youths were approached by the lead program staff member to discuss how they felt about having a university student assist in the Health Matters Program, one who would also study the program's impacts. The youths accepted my involvement in the program as a volunteer and a student researcher...with on one condition: I had to participate fully in the program and take part in the leisure activities along them; they did not want a "researcher" sitting on the sidelines with a paper and pen. I gladly accepted this condition.

### **Review of Literature**

The review of literature below provides a brief overview of street-involved youths' participation in leisure activities and their potential social impacts. Importantly, I go into further detail on these topics in the literature reviews presented within the two stand-alone papers, which can be found in the two subsequent chapters (two and three).

First, it is important to establish working definitions for leisure, leisure participation, street-involved youths, and the mainstream, prominent terms for my research. Leisure is conceptualized as a state of mind (Neulinger, 1981; Godbey, 2008). Based on that definition, within this thesis, I use "leisure participation" to describe involvement in activities (social or solitary, formal or informal, competitive or non-competitive) that are "freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, and inherently satisfying" (Smale, Donohoe, & Pelot, 2010, p. 16) and that generate feelings of wellbeing for the participant(s) (Smale et al., 2010). Leisure participation concerns those activities classified as "positive" (e.g., art, basketball, reading) as well as potentially "negative" or "deviant" (e.g., drug use and alcohol abuse). Since my research examines street-

involved youths' leisure pursuits, I must also clarify what I mean by "street-involved youths." While a variety of terms exist to describe the different subgroups of individuals who live or spend portions of their lives on the streets (Kelly & Caputo, 2007), the term "street-involved youths" was the best fit for my research. This term refers to youths "who spend considerable amounts of time on the street, who live in marginal or precarious situations and who participate extensively in street lifestyle practices" (Kelly & Caputo, 2007, p. 728), which is a fitting depiction of the individuals with which I conducted my research. Included in this definition are youths who use emergency shelters and homeless services, individuals who sleep on the street, those persons who stay in locations that are not suitable for human tenancy, and/or those persons who move continuously from couch to couch (Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009; Operation Come Home, 2010). The term "youths" specifically refers to individuals between the ages of 16 and 30, which is the age range for those who are eligible to use services at Operation Come Home. Finally, the term "homeless" is used in this thesis in place of "street-involved" in cases where the authors of the literature upon which I draw used homeless as the noun to describe the population of individuals with/on whom they conducted their research. In other words, "homeless" and "street-involved" are interchangeable terms within this thesis. The term "mainstream" will refer to the prevalent values, ideas, attitudes and practices that are understood to be the norm and/or conventional and that reflect the 'majority' of a society or group (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). Mainstream can be used as a noun, as well as an adjective (e.g., one can belong to mainstream; or something may be characteristic of mainstream) (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012).

### **Profile of Street-Involved Youths**

Since 2003, the number of youths without homes has been increasing (Operation Come Home, 2010); nevertheless, it can be difficult to account for the total number of youths on the streets, as many youths may lack housing but choose to stay in areas outside of shelters; these youths are considered the “hidden homeless” (Miller & Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2009). The Alliance to End Homelessness, an Ottawa-based non-profit organization, reported a 27% increase in the use of adult shelter beds by youths in 2008; however, Operation Come Home (2010) claimed the actual figure was much higher because many youths have reported feeling uncomfortable and/or unsafe using adult shelters and alternatively choose to stay with friends (“couch surfing”) or sleep “in the bushes” as they felt safer there than in the adult shelters. Smith and colleagues (2007) have reported that street-involved youths tend to be nomadic; they frequently move from location to location, which includes but is not limited to abandoned buildings, hotels, friends’ couches, tents, cars, squats, and on the streets. Indeed, frequent moves and uncertain areas for shelter add to the instability street-involved youths experience.

There are a number of prominent risks and factors that further complicate street-involved youths’ lives. Operation Come Home (2010) reported that 85% of youths on the streets have not completed high school; as such, education as well as employment skills are weak points for these youths. Youths on the streets are also more likely than housed youths to have substance abuse problems (Krusi et al., 2010; Operation Come Home, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 2004), as well as to have negative encounters with law enforcement (Haley & Roy, 1999; Operation Come Home, 2010). Operation Come Home (2010) reported that roughly two-thirds of male youths and just over one-third of female youths on the streets in Ottawa spent time in correctional facilities prior to their time on the streets. Youths also report negative relationships

with law enforcement, such as being treated as criminals for being homeless (Operation Come Home, 2010). Mental health problems are other stressors in street-involved youths' lives, with many youths left undiagnosed (Haley & Roy, 1999; Operation Come Home, 2010). When mental health problems are undiagnosed, they are consequently left untreated and can intensify through drug and/or alcohol experimentation and/or abuse (Haley & Roy, 1999). Apart from mental health issues, many youths on the streets also suffer from physical health ailments, including sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (Haley & Roy, 1999). Furthermore, in Ottawa specifically, rates of teen pregnancies are increasing amongst street-involved youths. Many of these mothers are left with complete responsibility for their children and numerous young mothers suffer from mental health issues, particularly post-partum depression (Operation Come Home, 2010). The younger a mother is when she has her first child, the more likely it is that she will have additional pregnancies (Operation Come Home, 2010), which may make leaving life on the streets even harder.

Reasons for living on the streets and leaving home vary significantly between youths, though the main cause is typically family conflict (Operation Come Home, 2010). Smith and colleagues (2007) conducted surveys with over 700 youths across British Columbia and found that a high proportion of youths reported having been kicked out of home, and even more youths reported having run away because they had no other choice. Family violence as well as physical and sexual abuse are common motivating factors for youths to leave home (Smith et al., 2007).

While much literature about street-involved youths has examined reasons why these youths are without homes as well as their addictions and health ailments, there is little information available about street-involved youths' social relationships. Existing literature on homeless adults depicts these individuals as socially isolated and detached from mainstream

society (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010). Literature concerning street-involved youths, however, shows conflicting views about their social networks. Some authors have argued that street-involved youths are isolated and disaffiliated from society (Haley & Roy, 1999; Miller & Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2009; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Miller and the Canadian Policy Research Networks (2009) suggested the detachment from society is in part due to behaviours adopted by those on the streets that are in conflict to mainstream values and norms. Similarly, Haley and Roy (1999) wrote that “over time, these teens become increasingly detached from their families, the educational system and society, and adopt a street-involved lifestyle that compromises their personal development, and physical and mental well-being” (p. 381). On the other hand, other authors have suggested that street-involved youths’ social networks are both strong and key sources of support for them (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Smith et al., 2007). Nevertheless, according to the literature, it is in the youths’ best interest to leave their lives on the streets; in order to do so they must form connections to the broader community (Haley & Roy, 1999; Health and Welfare Canada, 1993; Operation Come Home, 2010). As Richard Hooks Wayman, a Senior Youth Policy Analyst for the National Alliance to End Homelessness in the United States suggested, “the key to ending homelessness is to build natural connections back into the community” (Operation Come Home, 2010, p. 19); which can be accomplished by meeting street-involved youths’ employment, education, emotional, and social needs (Operation Come Home, 2010). As leisure activities, particularly structured programs, have been identified as being inherently social (Kelly & Godbey, 1992) and able to assist homeless adult to form social connections (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010), it is important to explore if these potential social impacts are the same for street-involved youths.

## **Leisure Programming for Street-Involved/Homeless Individuals**

Leisure programming for street-involved individuals has only existed since the 1980s; in fact, it is only since the late 1980s that more social interest has been directed towards street-involved populations (Dawson & Harrington, 1996). The United Nations proclaimed 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The United Nations stated that in declaring this year, additional efforts would be made to address the serious issue of homelessness in developed countries; this meant strengthening national economic and social development as well as finding means of improving the existing shelters and under-privileged neighbourhoods of those living in low-income (United Nations, General Assembly, 1982). The United Nations' declaration went farther than simply creating goals to improve shelter by declaring that housing was more than simply shelter and should be considered within a community context that supplies community facilities and services for all members of society, homeless or inhabited (McLaughlin, 1987). Included in these services directed to the homeless were increased opportunities for leisure and recreation. In the years following the United Nations' declaration, leading into the 1990s, the idea of providing social services to homeless populations became more common in both Canada and the United States (Dawson & Harrington, 1996).

Throughout North America programs for street-involved populations have become more popular; however, only few researchers have studied the potential social impacts of these programs (e.g., Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010); and furthermore, authors have suggested that research would be strengthened with direct input from homeless and street-involved persons themselves (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004). The two stand-alone research papers in this thesis are meant to address both of these concerns, but focus specifically on street-involved youths, a group about which there is a particular paucity

of literature. In fact, youths on the street have expressed that they do not identify with the adult homeless population, which they often perceive as hopeless (Operation Come Home, 2010). As such, “the nature of the programs and services should differ substantially when serving youth[s] as opposed to adults” (Operation Come Home, 2010, p. 10). Importantly, however, there remains little understanding of street-involved youths’ leisure participation.

### **Epistemology**

For the research presented in this thesis, I used a constructionistic approach to look closely at inner-city street-involved youths’ in Ottawa’s leisure activities and the subsequent impacts on their social ties. For constructionists, meanings are created through the interactions between human beings and the world in which we live (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism maintains that truth in society is constructed through a social group’s common understandings of reality (Crotty, 1998). As such, constructionists view meaning as produced, which allows for variations in truths (Crotty, 1998); this permits researchers to explore variable understandings of reality for different groups and individuals in society. Such an approach can account for the fact that individuals within the same social group (e.g., street-involved youths) can have widely varying experiences of the same phenomenon.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I engaged with a Foucauldian theoretical framework in order to utilize his concepts of modern power and discourse, which I felt were particularly applicable to the research at hand.

#### **Modern Power**

Foucault’s (1980) concept of modern power encourages individuals to pay attention to powers found in everyday interactions and to look at the impacts of exercises of power; he argued that only then can we “grasp the basis of social order and the active part played by

individuals” (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 295). When analyzing relationships of power in society, Foucault (1980) was not interested in labeling these forms of power as good or bad, but was instead interested in studying the relationships between these exercises of power:

Let us not, therefore, ask why certain people want to dominate, what they seek, what is their overall strategy. Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc. (Foucault, 1980, p. 97)

Foucault (1980) sought to understand how relations of power influence individuals’ behaviours and actions within society. Furthermore, Foucault (1980) recognized the power of human liberty, and the opportunity for all individuals to exercise personal autonomy over their actions within society (Veyne, 2010); as such, individuals at all times have the option of resisting these powers. The concept of modern power is relevant to my research as it helps to identify relations of power in society that may exist among street-involved youths, and between these youths and the mainstream community; identifying these relations of power can help me to understand the consequent impacts on youths’ leisure behaviours and their resulting social relationships.

### **Discourse**

Foucault did not believe in absolute truths, since human facts are not formed naturally, but rather become accepted as “truth” by society (Veyne, 2010). Because individuals cannot control time or truth, Foucauldian (1971) theory describes discourses (i.e., the accepted truths and norms in society) as varying over time. Thus, “truth [in a Foucauldian sense] is reduced to *telling the truth*, to saying whatever conforms with what is accepted as the truth” (Veyne, 2010, p. 14). Mills (1997) clarified that “Foucault is not interested in which discourse is a true or accurate representation of the ‘real’ ...rather he is concerned with the mechanics whereby one

becomes produced as the dominant discourse” (p. 19). Dominant discourses are those supported by institutions, the state, and the population in general, while “other” discourses may be treated with suspicion and rejected by the majority of society (Mills, 1997). Foucault’s concept of power, therefore, is central to the formation and acceptance (or rejection) of discourses because it is through relationships of power within society that certain discourses are credited as dominant and as reflecting truth, while others are not (Mills, 1997). Furthermore, Foucault (1971) warned that discourses may influence individuals’ actions and behaviours, as within each discourse there are accepted standards of how one should behave. Hence, by applying Foucauldian theory to social research, one can gain an understanding of what drives individuals’ actions and behaviours within society. In order to gain access to such actions and behaviours, I conducted ethnographic research.

### **Methodology**

For over 16 months, I conducted ethnographic research through volunteering with the youths involved in Operation Come Home’s Health Matters leisure program. Bernard (2013) explained that ethnography is both a verb as well as a noun: “it’s the process of collecting descriptive data about a culture and it’s the product of all that work” (p. 310). As a process, ethnography involves the immersion of the researcher in a new and different cultural setting in order to participate in the lives of those being researched as well as to learn from these individuals (Jones, 2010); these “learnings” become field data. With these data, the ethnographer may then reflect upon the others’ social world, and produce a representation of the research subjects’ lives within a specific context (Jones, 2010). In this way, ethnography is said to “produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives” (Tedlock, 2003, p. 165).

Conducting ethnographic research with a marginalized group such as the street-involved has numerous strengths when compared to other approaches to research, such as administering surveys. I believe there to be three key benefits to carrying out an ethnography with street-involved youths: first, an opportunity to learn about the community from members' points of view (Magee & Hurliaux, 2008; Tedlock, 2003); second, it can create an avenue for marginalized voices to be heard (Ellis, 2004); and third, it can allow for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the research participants' lives (Angrosino, 2007). Certainly, ethnographic research allows the researcher to "participate in the lived experience of the people under study, and not simply to observe it from a detached position" (Angrosino, 2007, p. 22).

By fulfilling the youths' requirement that I fully participate in all programming, I had the opportunity to participate in their lives. Throughout my volunteering with Health Matters, I was fortunate to meet approximately 100 unique street-involved youths who attended the evening program. Among these youths, there was a close-knit group who called themselves "The Regulars"; these youths spent four nights per week together, experienced highs and lows together, and enjoyed a meal they prepared collectively. I was grateful to have been a part of these bonding experiences with the youths (albeit only two nights a week), to have shared stories of our private lives, hugs and high-fives, and both tears and laughter. After my first 12 months with Health Matters, one youth told me she felt we had known each other long enough to have formed long-term memories and personal jokes together; she also told me that I was on the list of people that she loved. Indeed, I did not sit on the sidelines of the Health Matters programs or the youths' lives.

While I was immersed in the Health Matters program with the youths, this involvement in their lives did not extend beyond program hours. In accordance with Operation Come Home,

meeting or spending any time with the youths outside of the program would violate issues of privacy for the youths as well as violate appropriate volunteer conduct as outlined in the Operation Come Home volunteer manual. Through my 16 months of immersion in the leisure program and the semi-structured interviews I describe below, I did, nevertheless, learn a great deal about the youths' leisure participation as well as their social relationships outside of the program.

### **Methods**

I used two methods of data collection for my research: semi-structured interviews with the youths involved in the Health Matters leisure program and participant observation. I also attempted photo elicitation; however, as I discuss below, I eventually abandoned this data gathering technique.

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The semi-structured interview participants included eight youths who regularly attended (i.e., at least twice weekly out of four days per week, for a minimal duration of two months) Health Matters at the time of interviews. Throughout my sixteen months of data collection, during any given month there were roughly 15 to 20 youths that would regularly attend the program; the regulars changed at various points in time for different reasons. The research participants I interviewed included two female and six male youths, which is representative of the fact that the majority of street-involved youths are male (Covenant House, 2012). After I had spent 10 months volunteering with the program, I approached youths to ask if they were interested in participating in the research; at this time, most of the youths were comfortable with my presence and I had developed trusting relationships with many of them.

The majority of youths were eager to participate in the research and many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak candidly about the program and their lives. In addition, some of the youths said that they wanted to “give back” as a way to help me because they appreciated my avid volunteering with the program. Nevertheless, despite this initial enthusiasm, some youths that I had approached are not included in this research for varying reasons: Two youths, for example, expressed interest in participating in the research. When given the consent form to read over and sign, however, these youths were nervous and/or uncomfortable with signing their names; one of these youths requested that I sign the form for him, and I explained that, unfortunately, such an act would be a breach of ethics and, as such, could not do that. Some other youths who expressed interest in participating in the research stopped attending the program. I would occasionally see these youths in other settings in the city and they noted numerous reasons why they had stopped attending the program: a death in the family, troubles with the law, enrollment in adult high school (and consequently not enough time for Health Matters), a temporary move from the city to attend rehabilitation treatment, and one youth discussed a relapse in substance abuse, which caused her to avoid the program when she was heavily using drugs. The same issues that prevented them from participating in the program prevented them from participating in interviews.

For those who did participate in interviews, the University of Ottawa’s requirements for the ethical conduct of research on human beings were fulfilled prior to the interviews’ commencement. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the eight research participants. While semi-structured interviews have some degree of structure, these interviews differ from the structured interview, which aims to collect precise data to explain behaviours and actions (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Semi- and unstructured interviews are instead used to attempt to

“understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 706). I conducted the interviews one-on-one with the youths in a private room in the Operation Come Home building during the leisure program’s hours. The length of the interviews was between 25 and 45 minutes.

Examples of interview questions included: (1) Why do you participate in Health Matters? (2) Have you formed any relationships through participating in Health Matters? (3) Has participating in Health Matters impacted your daily life either for the better or worse? If so, how? (4.a.) What types of leisure activities do you participate in on your own time (i.e., unstructured leisure, outside of the Health Matters leisure programming)? (4.b.) Who do you do these activities with? Are these the people you would like to be doing activities with? (5) Do you participate in community events around the City of Ottawa (e.g., festivals, gyms, parks)? If not, why don’t you do these activities? (6) Do you feel like you are a part of the mainstream community in Ottawa? Why or why not?

After completion, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and then gave the transcripts to the youths for their approval. I told the youths that they could alter or omit information they felt was necessary to accurately depict what they said. I gave all interview participants a twenty dollar gift certificate to a local clothing/food store, Giant Tiger, as a thank you for their contribution to and participation in the research.

Due to the close relationships I had formed with the youths prior to the interviews, the interviews were very relaxed and candid in nature. During the interviews, the youths shared personal stories and frank opinions about the way they viewed relationships within the community as well as their personal relationships with program staff and other street-involved

youths. A genuine level of comfort and trust had developed through my volunteering and so by the time I sat down to interview the youths, it was easy to ask probing questions when necessary (e.g., if they struggled to remember leisure activity involvement). In addition, my familiarity with the youths meant I already knew which youths were involved in which activities through informal conversations during program hours, which thus allowed me to ask questions related to issues such as drug and alcohol use. All in all, the interviews were comfortable and laid-back; some youths sat and ate with me while we conducted the interviews, and one youth even broke into song mid-discussion.

### **Participant Observation**

I used participant observation to complement the semi-structured interviews and to create a more detailed understanding of the youths' social relationships. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) explained that ethnographers engage in participant observation through "systematic observation in the 'field' by interviewing and carefully recording what they see, hear, and observe people doing" (p. 2). The participant observation was informed my theoretical orientation as well as my review of literature. As such, I looked for issues of power and discourses that concerned leisure and street-involved youths' social relationships. I tried to mainly focus on what youths discussed as being their leisure outside of the Health Matters program, their social relationships with other youths and program staff, their views of the mainstream, and their relationships and interactions with members of the mainstream.

My participation in the program as a volunteer meant I participated in the scheduled evening activities along with the youths, including activities such as floor hockey, basketball, museum trips, games nights, as well as meal preparation and sitting down and eating together as a group. Through active participation I learned a great deal about the youths' leisure

participation, social relationships, and connections (or lack thereof) with the mainstream community. I recorded field notes on observations and learnings within one day of each volunteer shift; specifically, I took notes on observations of the youths' social relationships and their feelings of connection (or disconnection) between themselves and the mainstream community. Feelings of connection were observed through watching interactions amongst the youths and between staff and youths during program hours, as well as witnessing how youths spoke of their social relationships outside of the program, including relationships with other street-involved youths and relationships in the mainstream (e.g., such as relationships with law enforcement). I also took notes on the activities the youths discussed participating in during their leisure time outside of Health Matters.

### **Photo Elicitation**

I attempted to use photo elicitation as a catalyst to fuel interview dialogue, but as I will explain in this section, issues arose that caused me to abandon this method. Put simply, photo elicitation uses participants' photographs as a means to help stimulate dialogue in interviews and provides an avenue to acquire information on environments researchers might not typically have access to (Castleden, Garvin, T., & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008), such as the youths' unstructured leisure activities. Furthermore, photo elicitation encourages communication through forms other than simply talk and text (Castleden et al., 2008). In order to stimulate conversation during the interviews, I asked participants to take photographs of what constituted leisure for them as well as photographs relating to the topic of social inclusion and ties to the community.

Photo elicitation is typically used to create social change and can provide an avenue for personal empowerment among marginalized groups through efforts to create positive change in communities (Castleden et al., 2008). This method has been used successfully with homeless

populations in the past. For example, in a 2008 study that looked at homeless adults and their everyday realities in Toronto, photo elicitation was used to engage men and women from this marginalized population in developing an in-depth description of their everyday experiences (Halifax et al., 2008). Through photo elicitation, participants were able to identify their own research interests and concerns (Halifax et al., 2008).

I provided disposable cameras to the youths that had expressed interest in participating in interviews approximately three weeks before their scheduled interview. I then intended to have the photos developed once the youths returned the disposable cameras. In the end, only two out of eight participants returned their cameras to me. There were a number of issues that stood in the way of youths finishing this photographic project: one youth requested he do his interview with me before he served a jail sentence, which created a time constraint that prevented him from completing his photography; one youth felt overwhelmed with the task and asked to opt out of taking photos; one youth said he did not have time to complete the task; and three youths did not feel comfortable with this task (e.g., one said he feared he would lose the camera). In retrospect, while I realize that photo elicitation with youths who are already overwhelmed in numerous areas of their lives was ambitious, it was not a complete failure; there were youths who did not hand in a camera, but who nevertheless did take some preliminary photographs and mentioned in their interviews that the photographs they took helped to jog their memories during the interviews, which is what the photos in photo-elicitation are meant to do. I believe that the cameras the youths received also allowed them to feel some ownership over the study; soon after the cameras were dispersed youths showed an avid interest in the research, frequently asking me about my findings and how the project was coming along. Regardless of whether or not the youths completed photo elicitation, eight of them participated in semi-structured interviews.

Upon completion of the interviews and participant observation, data were analyzed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.

### **Analysis**

Data analysis involves the process of moving from raw data to evidence-based interpretations through the extraction of meanings, implications and patterns from the data utilized (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In line with my chosen theory, I used Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (1978) to tease out the discourses present and the relations of power at play that shape street-involved youths' realities and thus affect their leisure choices (both structured and unstructured) and their subsequent social relationships. In the following section, I first describe discourse analysis. I then elucidate the importance of considerations of context and researcher assumptions in the analysis process. Finally, I outline the key steps I took in conducting this form of analysis.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is used to study social issues and power relations within society. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) argued that “social questions are... in part questions about discourse – for instance, the question of power in social class...is partly a question of discourse” (p. vii). For example, Edwards, Skinner and Gilbert (2002) wrote that FDA involves studying prominent discourses in society, examining “who” is listened to in these discourses, what the hidden agendas include, and then looking at how these discourses become widespread and determining both why particular discourses are said to be necessary and from whom these are deemed discourses. As a form of analysis, then, FDA can help to understand how and why people behave in the way that they do. The product of FDA “identifies and names language processes and social practices that people use to construct their understanding of social

life, that necessarily serves either to reproduce or challenge the distribution of power as it currently exists” (Edwards et al., 2002).

When utilizing FDA, it is crucial that the researcher does not remove the textual content from its original context, as doing so could cause the text to lose its core meaning (Van Dijk, 1994). Researchers must also remember that any text will only ever portray a partial reality; further, they must also be aware of unsaid assumptions (Given, 2008; Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough (2003) argued that in discourse analysis, “meaning-making depends upon not only what is explicit in a text but also what is implicit – what is assumed” (p. 11). Part of the researcher’s role is therefore to uncover these assumptions, because what is “said” always rests upon those things that are “unsaid” (Fairclough, 2003). Uncovering assumptions also involves uncovering the specific meanings attributed to the specific words and language used by the participants themselves so that there is a sound understanding between the participants and researcher (Given, 2008).

I stored all of my interview transcripts and field notes in Microsoft Word documents. I filed all data consecutively, according to date, for ease of use and efficiency. Once I had completed and organized all data files, I scanned and re-read all texts in order to familiarize myself with the data; this was my initial step in identifying prominent discourses in the data (Dey, 1993). I analyzed the interviews and field notes vertically, that is, one interview transcript and field note after another in order to find issues of power relations in society and between and among street-involved youths and the mainstream community, and transversally, that is, in order to compare findings between interviews and field notes (Jiwani & Rail, 2010). The data were then coded (i.e., labelled) to reflect the power relations I identified. I identified power relations through reading through the interviews and field notes and trying to uncover relationships

amongst the youths and between the youths and the mainstream, and then I looked to uncover if there were any issues of power in these relationships. For example, did the youths discuss feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable because of the presence of others in certain public spaces? This could suggest a relationship of power where power is being exercised by someone in a way that made the youths feel unwelcome. After I coded the data, I analyzed the prominent codes to tease out the discourses that influenced street-involved youths' behaviours in both structured and unstructured leisure activities as well as relationships formed both among the youths and among members of the mainstream community.

### **Thesis Format**

As I chose to write my thesis in the publishable paper format, what follows are two distinct "stand-alone" papers. In the first paper I discuss street-involved youths' participation in the Health Matters leisure program; I explore their participation's social impacts through the use of Foucauldian theory. In the second paper I present street-involved youths' unstructured leisure activities and, once again through a Foucauldian lens, investigate these leisure behaviours' social impacts. Together, these papers make a strong contribution to our scholarly understanding of street-involved youths' leisure lives.

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The Social Impacts of Street-Involved Youths' Participation in a Structured Leisure Program

### Abstract

Street-involved youths are one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population across Canada (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2012). Due to this population's growth, additional programs and services have been implemented in organizations that serve these youths; in some cases, these services include leisure programs. In this ethnographic study, I used Foucauldian theory (Foucault, 1971, 1984) to examine the social impacts of street-involved youths' participation in a structured leisure program. My findings suggest that structured leisure activities help to facilitate social ties between the youth participants as well as the youths and program staff/volunteers. Nevertheless, I found that structured leisure does not necessary assist the formation of relationships between street-involved youths and members of the mainstream community outside of the program. These findings complicate our understanding of structured leisure's potential benefits for street-involved youths.

There are an estimated 150,000 youths who are currently without a home across Canada (Krusi et al., 2010). In 2009, youths aged 16 to 24 years old used 411 beds in homeless shelters in Ottawa, the nation's capital (Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009), and in 2010 this number rose to 512. Sadly, these figures underestimate the *total* number of street-involved youths<sup>1</sup> in Ottawa, as it does not take into account youths who sleep on the street, stay in locations that are not suitable for human tenancy, or who move continuously from couch to couch (Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009). The increasing number of youths on the streets of Ottawa (Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009) has led to the development of numerous programs and services available to this marginalized population. Despite the breadth of programs available, their potential benefits remain poorly understood.

Research has shown that in the last three decades social service providers have begun to identify the value of providing leisure<sup>2</sup> activities and programs for both short and long-term street-involved peoples. Such experiences enrich their daily lives and provide a sense of stability (Harrington & Dawson, 1997; Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010; Ward, 1992; 1995). Research to date has depicted how such programming for street-involved populations can help them to improve their well-being (Harrington & Dawson, 1997), enhance their intrinsic motivation (Usborne et al., 2009), and help them to gain a sense of empowerment (Ward, 1992). There is, however, a gap in the literature within the realm of street-involved youths' participation in structured leisure activities. The scholarly community has a limited understanding of what social impacts the leisure activities have on youths, particularly in terms of impacts on feelings of social inclusion and social ties to the community. According to Kelly (2009), community ties and social trust assist in helping youths to become engaged and actively participate in society, whether through volunteering, voting, or community service. If programs aimed at helping

street-involved youths are to successfully support youths in transitioning into housed adults with strong social skills and networks, it is imperative to understand the role that structured leisure programs and activities play in youths' achievement of such goals. As such, my research sought to understand what contribution, if any, structured leisure makes to street-involved youths' sense of attachment to their community as well as their feelings of social inclusion. A Foucauldian (1971; 1978; 1980) theoretical framework was applied to this research to help to understand existing power relations at play revolving the street-involved youths, leisure, and social relationships, and to then determine how power may have impacted the youths' behaviours in the structured leisure program as well as their subsequent social relationships.

In what follows, I provide a review of the existing literature to demonstrate what is currently known about and the gaps that exist in scholarly understandings pertaining to street-involved youths' leisure participation. I then provide a detailed description of my ethnographic research, which I conducted with street-involved youths who participated in Health Matters, a leisure program for street-involved youths delivered by Operation Come Home, an Ottawa-based youth services organization.

As an organization, Operation Come Home works with street-involved youths between the ages of 16 to 30 to prevent them from becoming homeless<sup>3</sup> adults by offering a range of programs and services, from employment support, to distance education, to social work, to housing assistance (Operation Come Home, 2012). In autumn of 2010, Operation Come Home developed a program entitled Health Matters, a program with which I volunteered over the course of 16 months. Health Matters is offered to street-involved youths aged 16 to 30, four evenings per week for four hours each night. It provides scheduled group activities during the first half of the evening (e.g., floor hockey, football, movie night, trivia night), while the second

half of the evening is spent cooking a group meal and eating it together. I took part in this program bi-weekly and assisted Health Matters staff in running the program. Through volunteering with the Health Matters program and active participation in the evening activities along with the youths, I built strong relationships with the youths, eight of whom I conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation with.

### **Review of Literature**

Due to the scarcity of literature that specifically examines street-involved youths' participation in leisure activities as well as their social relationships, research studies concerning adults who are street-involved/homeless will be drawn on to complement the existing literature. The current body of literature concerning street-involved youths, leisure participation, and its social impacts consists of four distinct categories: the first category depicts how and why leisure programming for the street-involved was developed; the second addresses the existing literature concerning street-involved youths' engagement in leisure activities and effects it has on forming community and social ties both shown in literature focusing on adults and/or street-involved youths; the third category focuses on the issue of "deviant" leisure and how it can affect street-involved youths' social ties and sense of attachment to the community, and; the fourth category examines why a sense of attachment to the larger community as well as social inclusion may be significant for street-involved youths.

### **Leisure Programming for Street-Involved/Homeless Individuals**

Programming for street-involved persons is a relatively new concept; it was only in the late 1980s that more social interest started being directed towards street-involved populations (Dawson & Harrington, 1996). In Ottawa, for example, the municipal Social Services Department passed a motion in 1989 to increase the number and type of services available to

homeless persons in shelters. Also in that year, the municipal recreation department assisted local shelters in hiring specific day programming recreation staff to implement new programs and to assist those living in temporary housing to participate in existing recreation services in the community (Dawson & Harrington, 1996).

Today in Ottawa, more than twenty years after the initiation of leisure programming for street-involved individuals, there are now a variety of services that focus on assisting those who reside on the streets. For example, for youths specifically, in addition to offering the basic necessities (e.g., housing services, food, counseling), the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa also offers evening leisure activities, including a table tennis club, women's only programs, and an ethno-cultural drop-in that reaches out to immigrant youths (Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa, 2010). Despite the availability of such services for street-involved youths in cities across Canada, research has yet to explore and identify what social effects, if any, leisure programs have on the youths involved in such programs.

### **Leisure Programming, Street-Involved Individuals, and Social Ties**

When leisure programming for the homeless was a relatively new idea in the early 1990s, Kunstler (1992) put forth suggestions to maximize these programs' benefits. Kunstler (1992) mainly argued for integrated programs between the homeless and non-homeless. She contended that people who are homeless need leisure services just like any other members of society; this included opportunities to access leisure activities offered to the general public so that homeless people could potentially become part of a community through integrated programming. Kunstler (1992) wrote, "to be successful, programs for the homeless must be viewed as an integral part of the normal recreational programs of a community" (p. 44). While I disagree with Kunstler's (1992) use of the term "normal," as it suggests that people who are homeless and their activities

are abnormal, Kunstler did raise an interesting point: Can integration in community programming form group cohesiveness and a sense of community, between all members of a recreation program – those who are street-involved and those with housing? Further, there is also the question of whether members of such a marginalized group would be comfortable in and benefit from joining a mainstream community program in the first place.

Dawson and Harrington (1996) found that some homeless individuals are “so far removed from mainstream society that they must be met ‘on their own turf’ and may require extensive rehabilitation before the attempt is made to engage them in community based recreation” (p. 24). Similarly, Ward (1995) conducted a study with homeless adults in Toronto that looked at factors as to why or why not homeless individuals used the free community recreational services and facilities open to the general public. After consulting with homeless individuals, Ward (1995) found that although they were aware of the municipal services, homeless adults did not feel welcome in the centres for a variety of reasons: negative staff attitudes towards the homeless, the very structured nature of the programs, and the presence of non-homeless users who may intentionally attempt to make homeless individuals uncomfortable. Trussel and Mair (2010) conducted research that examined the role of community service organizations in delivering leisure programs to homeless adults; the participating adults described the need for “judgement free spaces” as well as to feel fully comfortable in order to access community programming and to reap the potential benefits of such programs. Therefore, it is questionable as to whether or not Kunstler’s (1992) proposal for integrated leisure programming can lead to social ties among homeless and non-homeless groups and lead to the re-integration of homeless peoples into mainstream society. Additional research is also required

to determine whether street-involved youths (as opposed to the adults discussed above) feel unwelcome or uncomfortable when accessing and using community leisure facilities.

In contrast to Kunstler's (1992) proposal to integrate homeless persons into mainstream leisure activities offered in the community, Dawson and Harrington (1996) instead carried out a study that examined homeless adults' participation in recreation programming that was provided exclusively to homeless adults through homeless shelters across Canada. Dawson and Harrington (1996) sent out questionnaires to Canadian shelters to request information and feedback from program staff on any recreation activities that they provided. Although respondents discussed the difficulties in motivating clients, organizing activities, and locating funding as well as willing staff/volunteers, respondents believed the available recreation services had encouraging effects on the participants' wellbeing and their integration into the community, the latter being the main objective for such programs (Dawson & Harrington, 1996).

Along the lines of building relationships between people who are homeless and the community, Sherry (2010) found that homeless adults' participation in a sports team for homeless persons could lead to greater social ties. In her study, Sherry worked with homeless athletes, aged 16 years and older, who played for the Australian Street Socceroos (the competitive men's homeless street soccer team that competed at the Homeless World Cup of Soccer in 2008). Sherry (2010) conducted interviews with these soccer players and found that through their hardships and lack of economic capital, these individuals placed a greater emphasis on the need for social capital. Furthermore, these street soccer players expressed that the experience of competing together on a national team helped to develop a sense of family and community with those around them - be it with program staff, those offering support services, or fellow teammates (Sherry, 2010).

Like soccer, research has also depicted dance as a way to facilitate social relationships. Knestaut, Devine, and Verlezza (2010) conducted research with homeless adults and their children who engaged in a structured leisure dance program. The program's objective was to help participants to relieve stress and to learn to use dance as an effective coping mechanism. Although the authors focused primarily on the participants' perceived levels of stress both before and after joining the program, Knestaut and colleagues (2010) reported that participants expressed a stronger sense of belonging amongst fellow dancers through their involvement in the dance program.

### **“Deviant” Leisure Activities and their Effects on Social Ties**

To understand the effects of leisure participation among street-involved youths, particularly in relation to the formation of social ties with the community, it is essential to adopt a holistic perspective on leisure, which includes all leisure activities, even “deviant” ones, such as drug and alcohol use.

The actual percentage of street-involved individuals that engage in recreational drug and/or alcohol use as a leisure activity is unclear in the literature. Authors have agreed, however, that drug and alcohol use is highly prevalent with street-involved youths (Whitbeck et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2006). Thompson, Jun, Bender, Ferguson, and Pollio (2010) suggested that estimates from empirical research show a high variance (between 39 – 70%) in the reported percentage of street-involved youths that engage in drug and/or alcohol use.

Thompson and colleagues (2010) found that high levels of drug and alcohol use among youths have been found to hinder the ability to form concrete social connections among adults later in life. Also, drug and/or alcohol use among street-involved youths may act as a barrier to the formation of trusting relationships among these youths and homeless service providers (Krusi

et al., 2010). The use of drugs and/or alcohol as a form of leisure can therefore serve to hinder the formation of or even sever social ties between members of mainstream society and the subgroup of street-involved youths who use these substances. That being said, while more typically conventional forms of leisure have been shown to help to create social ties, taking part in “deviant” leisure activities such as drug/alcohol use has been found to distance an individual from the mainstream and to create social estrangement (Reible, 2005) – the very opposite of what homeless leisure programmers work towards (Dawson & Harrington, 1996).

In addition to drug and/or alcohol use, other forms of deviant leisure activities may also serve to sever relationships between street-involved youths and the mainstream community, especially with authority figures (e.g., law enforcement officers). In some cases, assumptions that youths participate in deviant activities may influence these relationships. As Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, and Flynn (2007) explained, “homeless youth[s] are often negatively labeled and stigmatized by service providers, law enforcement, peers, and society in general” (p. 26). As a result, it has been argued that the more involved a youth is in the street lifestyle (i.e., the longer the youth has spent residing on the streets), the more negative the relations with police or law enforcement tend to be and/or the more likely the youths are to believe that police treat street-involved differently than housed community members (Koeller, 2008).

### **Significance of Social Ties for Street-Involved/Homeless Youths**

Street-involved and homeless individuals are likely to suffer from disaffiliation and have difficulties with socialization – both of which can be addressed through the formation of relationships with the broader community through participation in leisure programming and/or leisure activities set in a public community setting (Dail, 1992; Dawson & Harrington, 1996).

Also, Dawson and Harrington (1996) argued that recreation and leisure opportunities, through the exercise of affiliation that involves interacting and connecting with others, as well as their potential to rebuild ties with the community, might assist street-involved individuals in transitioning into housed individuals. Nevertheless, very little research exists on disaffiliation and whether and/or how overcoming this sense of disengagement may be possible through leisure programming, particularly with street-involved youths.

Among street-involved youths specifically, research has revealed conflicting results as to whether these youths are in fact isolated and with impoverished social skills or if they are instead part of strong social networks. Bender and colleagues (2010) suggested that street-involved youths are guarded and have difficulty developing trust, and thus social relationships are difficult to form between these youths as well as with the broader community. In contrast, however, Smith and colleagues (2007), who administered surveys across British Columbia to street-involved youths, argued that street-involved youths have discussed forming very tightly knit “street communities” and “families”; relationships amongst these families have been shown to be critical for many youths, as older more experienced youths help those who are new to the streets learn how to survive (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Whether or not street-involved youths are in fact isolated in their social relationships remains a debate in the literature. If these individuals do in fact struggle with issues with socialization, research suggests that leisure may act as a means to assist individuals who are street-involved to develop essential social skills (Dail, 1992). Dawson and Harrington (1996) argued, “leisure skills development opens the possibility of expanded involvement not only in recreation, but that such skills are transferable to other settings and can facilitate the homeless person’s acceptance into the mainstream society” (p. 23). Kelly (2009) found that during adolescence and early adulthood it is imperative to develop social skills and

trust in social institutions and the larger community because it promotes the likelihood for individuals to engage in society and to experience inclusion in community activities; this has been shown to be critical to forming a life off of the streets.

While studies have shown the potential for street-involved adults to form social ties through participation in leisure activities and sports teams (Knestaut et al., 2010; Trussel & Mair, 2010; Sherry, 2010), there remains a gap in the literature as to the specific social impact that structured leisure activities can have on street-involved youths. Furthermore, studies suggest a common form of leisure activity among street-involved youths is drug and alcohol use, and some authors argue that participation in such activities may lead to societal estrangement and hinder youths' abilities to form strong relationships (Reible, 2005; Thompson et al., 2010). It is important to look at structured leisure's potential social impacts on street-involved youths because those residing on the streets have been shown to suffer from disaffiliation and difficulties with socialization, which may hinder their ability to leave life on the streets. In order to identify the social impacts of street-involved youths' structured leisure participation, I conducted ethnographic research using the approach outlined below.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used Foucauldian theory to help me to understand relations of power amongst street-involved youths and between street-involved youths and members of the mainstream community. Foucauldian theory helped me to learn how these relations of power are expressed through and may affect involvement in leisure activities, and subsequent social relationships. Specifically, I used Foucault's (1971; 1978, 1980) concepts of modern power, discourse, and discipline in order to theoretically position my research.

## Modern Power

A Foucauldian (1978) understanding of modern power has several tenets: it is relational, positive, and everywhere. For Foucault, power is relational in the sense that it can only be exercised through chain or net-like relations of individuals (Smith Maguire, 2008). In a Foucauldian understanding of modern power, power is also positive, in that it works through the use of discipline and discourses to *convince* individuals to act in a certain manner, rather than through the use of force and coercion; this makes power positive in that it does not function solely to repress (Rail & Harvey, 1995; Smith Maguire, 2008). Furthermore, for Foucault (1978), “power is everywhere...because it comes from everywhere” (p. 93). Modern power is thus “never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Individuals in society are at all times simultaneously exercising power, while at the same time under the influence of other powers (Foucault, 1980).

An important component of Foucault’s (1978) understanding of modern power is that where there is power, there is always resistance. In fact, for Foucault (1978), the very existence of power is dependent on the opportunity for resistance, for without this opportunity there would only be relations of domination. Foucault viewed humans as free subjects who possess the potential to resist power (Smith Maguire, 2008). Through the potential for resistance all individuals may thus exercise autonomy and personal agency (Rail & Harvey, 1995; Smith Maguire, 2008). Furthermore, resistance in power relations is productive and has the ability to challenge and potentially transform dominant modes of power in society over time (Nealon, 2008; Shaw, 2005).

## **Discourse**

Foucault (1971, 1984) argued that power is produced and demonstrated in society through discourses, which are the knowledges that become accepted norms, standards, and “truths” in society (Smith Maguire, 2008). Discourses sustain power relations in society as, “the ‘truths’ produced in discourse become the resources through which individuals come to make sense of whom and what they are, and therefore, come to accept how they should act” (Young & Dallaire, 2008, p. 237). Discursively produced truths affect individuals’ behaviours because, as Foucault (1971) described, society has worked to frame some actions as more acceptable than others within specific discourses (Smith Maguire, 2008). Foucault (1971) warned of the presentation of discourses in society as the “established order of things” (p. 8); however, he discussed the opportunity for resistance to discourses as illustrated in the “ever present opportunity to challenge the discourse of powerful others and to create alternate ways of communicating and thinking about ‘truth’” (Shaw, 2005, p. 1).

There are numerous discourses surrounding street-involved youths and leisure activities that often produce very negative understandings of these youths. For example, Bender and colleagues (2007) found that research concerning street-involved youths has focused on issues that depict them as delinquents, such as engaging in recreational substance abuse and experiencing difficulties in school and problems with the law. On the other hand, Bender and colleagues (2007) also found that when these youths are not depicted as delinquents, they are portrayed as victims. Despite this counter discourse, a compilation of Canadian research studies from the Maritime provinces that involved street-involved youths found that youths residing on the streets feel the mainstream community views them negatively and as criminals and

delinquents (Koeller, 2008). As such, youths may either resist dominant discourses, or rather, discipline themselves to meet the standards and norms of a particular discourse.

### **Discipline**

Foucault (1980) argued that what makes power so attractive (and perhaps what convinces people to accept dominant relations of power) is its productive quality. Indeed, power must be viewed as a productive network within the social body of society, and one of the outcomes of this power is the production of disciplinary power and thus disciplined bodies. Disciplinary power (i.e., power exercised with the body) works to normalize and train bodies and thereby motivates human beings to behave and treat their bodies in certain fashions to meet (or exceed) a discourse's standards (Rail & Harvey, 1995; Smith Maguire, 2008). Vigarello (1995) wrote that discipline produces practiced, docile bodies. Because docile bodies are trained to perform correctly within a certain discourse, these bodies are thus in a better position than undisciplined bodies to exercise power (Foucault, 1975). Docile bodies are "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1975, p. 136). The value of studying discipline and the power behind it is to recognize the detailed and controlled mannerisms that make up these docile bodies that are taken for granted as natural within their respective discourses (Vigarello, 1995). The controlled actions of disciplined bodies are "so deep that they are forgotten, so buried that they seem nonexistent" (Vigarello, 1995, p. 159).

Foucault's (1975) understanding of discipline and docile bodies are useful when studying street-involved youths' social relationships among other street-involved youths and with the community. For example, as discussed above, much of the research and popular discourses pertaining to street-involved youths focuses on drug and alcohol use as prominent leisure activities. By applying Foucault's concept of discipline and looking at how individuals may

choose to condition their bodies, we may create a better understanding of why these youths may participate in particular leisure activities and what implications such participation may have on forming of relationships with each other and with the broader community.

Foucauldian theoretical concepts of modern power, discourse and discipline are thus useful tools for understanding street-involved youths' leisure behaviours and social ties.

### **Methodology**

I conducted over 16 months of ethnographic research where I was immersed in the Health Matters leisure program offered by Operation Come Home. Put simply, ethnography encompasses writing about people and culture through data gathered from simultaneous observation and participation in a particular context (Ellis, 2004). Described as “the model of experientially gained knowledge of other cultures” (Tedlock, 2003, p. 167), ethnographers typically work with specific “communities of interest” (Angrosino, 2007, p. 26); that is, with groups of people who share a common culture, such as life on the streets. A crucial aspect of ethnography involves the researcher immersing her/himself within the group, as I did through volunteering with the Health Matters program. As Tedlock (2003) wrote, “ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context” (p. 165). Through ethnography, the researcher can construct a more complex understanding of the social world and its meanings as well as obtain firsthand knowledge of other cultures (Tedlock, 2003). Through ethnographic research, I became familiar with the social context in which the youths who use the program live.

### **Methods**

I invited Health Matters participants to participate in semi-structured interviews after I had spent ten months volunteering and building relationships with them. I used observational

field notes that I recorded during program hours to complement the interview data and to help to situate the data in the relevant social context (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002).

### **Participants**

The research participants included eight (two female, six male) street-involved youths between the ages of 16 and 30 who regularly and voluntarily participated in the Health Matters program during the time of interviews (i.e., at least twice weekly for two months or more), as these youths had the most experience with the program. Throughout my sixteen months of data collection, during any given month there were roughly 15 to 20 youths that would describe themselves as regulars; the regulars would change at various points in time due to other commitments, life challenges or changing interests. Prior to participating in the research, each participant gave free and informed consent to participate in the research.

A table is presented below with each participant's pseudonym, sex, age, number of years being street-involved, and living situation during data collection. It should be noted that due to the unstable housing situations for many street-involved youths, throughout my fieldwork with the Health Matters program some youths had numerous different forms of housing, and many had even more housing arrangements in previous years, including sleeping on the downtown streets.

Table 1

#### *Research Participants' Demographic Information*

Name	Sex	Age	Number of years street-involved	Housing situation
Allan	Male	28	On and off 10 years	Couch surfing, adult men's shelter, some housing/renting
Curtis	Male	22	4 years	Couch surfing, adult men's shelter

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Connor	Male	19	2 years	Couch surfing, on the streets, young men's shelter, adult men's shelter
Donnie	Male	21	3 years	Unstable housing with family (self described family as involved in gang relations), couch surfing, on the streets
Kev	Male	26	6 years	Unstable temporary squatting in a house (self described as a "crack house"), adult men's shelter
Matt	Male	21	3 years	Couch surfing, adult men's shelter
Melanie	Female	21	3 years	Social housing for young women
Sophie	Female	18	1 year	Social housing for young women, young women's shelter

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### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

I conducted semi-structured interviews (Gratton & Jones, 2004) with the eight participants; interview questions focused on leisure programming for marginalized populations, social inclusion, community, and disaffiliation. I conducted all interviews in person, one-on-one, and in a private room at the Operation Come home building. The interviews ranged in length from 25 to 45 minutes. Following the interviews, each participant received a copy of his/her interview transcript and was given the opportunity to revise it for accuracy and/or to omit information. In order to thank the youths for their involvement in the study, each youth received a twenty dollar gift certificate to local grocery/clothing store.

### **Participant Observation**

Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) described participant observation as a "way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and

uncommon activities of the people being studied” (p. 2). To this end, I took part in the leisure activities with the youths on a bi-weekly basis as a participant-observer while I also helped to run the program with the Health Matters program staff. I engaged directly with the youths and shared experiences with them while consciously observing and ultimately recording my observations within a day of each volunteer shift (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Field data generated included observational field notes, which were composed through observing research participants firsthand and taking notes on such details as the environment, participant behaviours, and brief notes on conversations between participants during the structured leisure programming. My theoretical orientations of Foucauldian Theory helped to guide the participant observation; as such, I looked for issues of both power and discourses that concerned leisure and social relationships when recording my observations. The field notes generated helped to create the context for the interviews, but also held valuable information that was used in data analysis (Given, 2008) in order to provide a more tacit understanding of the participants’ behaviours and relationships (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002).

### **Analysis**

I used Foucauldian discourse analysis to analyze the texts from both the interviews conducted with the youths in the Health Matters program and the field notes gathered through participant observation. Foucauldian discourse analysis enabled me to uncover the discourses and the associated relations of power at play (Foucault, 1978) in street-involved youths’ participation in the structured leisure activities, and to then understand the social impacts such participation may have for the youths. Specifically, I read the texts for the ways in which they portrayed issues of power relations in society and between and among street-involved youths and the mainstream community.

Foucauldian discourse analysis serves as a tool in identifying dominant societal discourses and how they may shape individuals' actions. For example, Mills (1997) stated, "a discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving" (p. 17). When applying Foucauldian discourse analysis to descriptions of behaviours in society, then, we may have a better understanding of the relations of power that shape these actions. I used Foucauldian discourse analysis to explore how the interviewed youths "subjected themselves to the rules, meanings, and power of ... discourses" (Jiwani & Rail, 2010, p. 256); this can help to locate the discourses that make up the youths' understandings and constructions of their social realities, and how these social realities may correlate with behaviours in structured leisure activities and these activities' subsequent social impacts.

### **Results**

Several discourses surfaced through my analysis of the field notes and interview transcripts. The data showed a lack of support for the commonly held "truths" that depict street-involved youths as socially isolated, as flouting authority, and as engaging in "troublemaking" leisure activities. The participants did, however, have varying sentiments towards discourses depicting youths as disaffiliated from the mainstream community.

#### **Leisure Participation as Socialization**

I found the dominant discourse that produces street-involved youths as persons who are socially isolated and secluded was in fact rejected by the majority of participants. Indeed, when the youths did describe themselves as isolated, they expressed this as an unwanted feeling - that

they did not detach themselves from others on purpose. As I show below, friendships and someone to talk to were very important to the youths at Health Matters.

During the interviews, I asked the participants why they participated in the Health Matters program. Each individual's response pertained to socialization. Matt stated that he came for "hangin' around with people and just having a good time, and just be social... That's what I need the most" (personal communication, November 23, 2011). For Curtis, the best part of the program was "just the togetherness." He explained, "We're a tight knit group ... nobody's being judged on their abilities or how they are as a person or anything you know" (personal communication, December 7, 2011). On numerous occasions, particularly when sitting down to eat a meal together, participants discussed feeling like part of a family and feeling safe when at Health Matters. Sophie explained being reluctant to invite other street-involved youths that she did not consider to be close friends to the program because she described Health Matters as her "safe zone" (personal communication, February 1, 2012).

In addition, many of the participants reported that they did not like to be alone. On numerous occasions the youths did not want to leave the program after hours. It was often a struggle to lock up and close the building, and I noticed that the mood would change towards the end of the evening. Youths often complained that nothing good happened after Health Matters. Melanie, a youth who lived in social housing with her cat, once explained to me that she was in a good mood during program hours, but that as soon as she left Health Matters and was alone, she would be disappointed (personal communication, November 9, 2011) - this was a sentiment shared amongst the youths.

The program gave the youths a chance to form a sort of support group. Sophie, for example, described herself as new to the downtown street community and found that Health

Matters gave her a chance to meet some youths in similar situations. Health Matters was the first program that offered services to the downtown community that Sophie felt comfortable attending, which then led to her feeling confident enough to join some of the day services offered by Operation Come Home.

In some cases, just “somebody” to socialize with was a sufficient reason for the youths to attend Health Matters, regardless if these youths were friends or not. As Kev explained when referring to youths who regularly attended the program, “I might not really get along with them or something, but it’s at least somebody to talk to and stuff” (personal communication, December 7, 2011). Kev also expressed not having many friends outside of the program:

I gotta say...I don’t really have many friends myself...I had to kinda just...get rid of most of my friends because they’re just not part of the lifestyle that I want, so I had to give them up so I could have a healthy lifestyle. And it [Health Matters] gives me like kind of an outlet where you know, it gives you somebody to talk to instead of just being by yourself...and just feeling like you’re in the bleakest situation, so it’s quite helpful there. (personal communication, December 7, 2011)

During the interviews, two youths described themselves as being very socially isolated prior to participating in the program. For example, Donnie described secluding himself in the past. Similarly, Matt discussed how relationships through the program changed his social habits. He explained that the program,

changed my outlook on everything, like, I just used to feel like I was a freakin’ zombie, like, I didn’t do anything, I didn’t hang out with anyone. I just didn’t think much. Now I’m actually using my mind a lot more. I’m doing more things. (personal communication, November 23, 2011)

Although youths discussed friendships formed through the program, two youths in particular were reluctant to say that these relationships would continue into the future. Curtis, for example, explained he had little trust in those close to him staying in his life, as he expressed experiences of people leaving him in the past:

Going back in my youth I guess, I'd always think oh, I'm really good friends with this person, maybe I'll be friends with them down the road... [But now] I'm not very optimistic about whether I'm holding a relationship with people... I don't wanna set myself up for failure. (personal communication, December 7, 2011)

### **Strong Respect for Authority Figures within the Health Matters Program**

While a prominent discourse in society produces street-involved youths as rejecting and having strained relationships with authority figures (Bender et al., 2007; Koeller, 2008), I found the opposite to be true of the youths in the Health Matters program. Five out of the eight youths interviewed identified their relationships with staff as being stronger than their relationships with other youths in the program. Allan, for example, said that he looked forward to seeing staff and volunteers every week. He explained that he came to the program primarily to keep in touch with and to say hi to staff members. During evenings at Health Matters, youths frequently used the opportunity to ask staff members' and volunteers' advice on anything from friend issues, addictions, tenant and housing concerns, dating, problems with the law, and school, among other issues. Numerous youths described the staff and volunteers as trustworthy. These feelings seemed to extend to me in my volunteer capacity, as on many occasions youths also shared with me personal poems, drawings and art work, journal entries, new found music and videos, and exchanged hugs and many high-fives. Melanie described the staff and volunteers as being positive role models. "With the staff I've definitely had, like, some good experiences, just like

being able to talk to people who are pretty educated...in the past I didn't really have a whole lot of opportunities to talk to stable, well educated people" (personal communication, November 9, 2011).

Although all of the youths interviewed talked about close relationships with program staff and volunteers, some noted that there had been a sort of "test" or trial period. During his interview, Curtis admitted to pushing buttons and putting up walls deliberately in his interactions with new staff members. He explained, "if they can't handle it, then they shouldn't be around, you know?...If you fold up and pack your shit after the first day...it's not the type of shit you need to do" (personal communication, December 7, 2011). During his interview, Curtis and I laughed about the trial period he had put me through when I first started volunteering with the program – in fact, his first statement to me was that they already had enough volunteers and that I should go home. Within a few weeks, though, we began joking regularly about him being "my annoying little brother" and he would greet me with a hug if we hadn't seen each other for a period of time.

Through the interviews as well as at points during program hours, youths expressed liking rules and regulations surrounding Health Matters and even wanting more. Some youths even stated that they felt that staff should be stricter on things like punctuality, cleaning up, and participation amongst all who attend the program. When I asked what he would change about the program, Connor said, "staff not being so lenient towards people showing up late, or um, just showing up for the meal [and not participating]...they just need to be more hard ass on their rules" (personal communication, October 19, 2011). Similarly, Sophie described enjoying participating in an activity with "structure" and liked to have this routine in her day. Donnie, one of the youths who attended Health Matters most frequently, ensured he was always on time;

more often than not he was the first youth to arrive for programming and cleaned up without having to be asked. Readers may find that this conflicts with the fact that Donnie was in fact wanted for jail time for physical assault and having violated his parole. Despite having strained relationships with police in the community, Donnie had very positive relationships with authority figures in the Health Matters program. Thus, while authority figures and rules/discipline were not always respected in the broader community (as was shown by the fact that it was not uncommon for the participants in this study to be barred from specific areas in the downtown for varying reasons such as loitering, and to acquire fines for smoking in non-smoking areas as well as graffiti and physical assaults), authority was respected within Health Matters.

### **Structured Leisure as a Way to “Stay out of Trouble” and be “Healthier”**

In many conversations and interviews, the youths described the Health Matters program as an alternative to drug and alcohol use, as a way to “stay out of trouble” and to do something they described as “productive” and “healthy.” Sophie stated she enjoyed, “actual, like, socialization with doing something, as opposed to just sitting around smoking up” (personal communication, February 1, 2012). Similarly, Melanie expressed that the leisure programming gave her “constructive” ways to engage with others outside of some other leisure activities:

it gives me an opportunity to um, engage in recreational activities, to have a sense of community, socialize with people on a level that is constructive for me and fun for me, aside from my regular routine of, well what was my regular routine of just sort of hanging around the street drinking or whatever, and partying. (personal communication, November 9, 2011)

She went on to say best parts of the program involved “just hanging out and having fun and doing things that don’t require drugs and alcohol, which is great” (personal communication, November 9, 2011).

Numerous youths described Health Matters programming as a way to occupy or take up time. Curtis, Kev, and Matt all expressed needing things to do and the need to “stay out of trouble.” As Kev elaborated, “it’s, like, a better pastime than other things that they [other street-involved youths] could be undertaking, like roaming the streets with nothing to do that’s only gonna cause you some sort of trouble” (personal communication, December 7, 2011). Similarly, Connor described the program as a productive leisure alternative:

It’s kind of like an alternative...it’s healthier, like, obviously food wise, but also for the sports, getting active and shit ‘cause, like, nobody around here gets active...Rarely is there someone around here that goes, “well, I’m gonna go jog two kilometers,” you know? Nobody thinks of that. They’re like, “oh, ok, well I’m gonna go smoke a joint.” You know, that’s their fuckin’ healthy living, you know, that’s their exercise. So, it’s [Health Matters] something different you know? Like, it takes up time and you’re actually doing something productive. (personal communication, October 19, 2011)

Connor went on to tell me that the program provided a stark contrast to his past forms of leisure, which included hanging out with friends on busy downtown streets.

Participants described the leisure program as a “healthier” activity when compared to what they otherwise would have been engaged in; youths spoke of improved physical, emotional, and mental health through their participation in Health Matters. One youth testified to smoking half a pack of cigarettes per day as opposed to his former full pack per day after a few months of involvement in the program. Other youths described using the physical activities as a way to

combat depression and to alleviate some mental health issues. Kev explained, “It’s helped me out quite a bit after I was kind of told that living a healthy lifestyle can help me feel better in a way, like, ‘cause I have depression... I’ve learned that...working out daily and other things can help” (personal communication, December 7, 2011).

### **Building (or Breaking) Relationships with the Community**

In the Health Matters program, the staff members maintain a bulletin board in the main drop-in area so that youths can be informed about different events going on in the community, such as festivals and summer activities in parks, subsidized gym memberships at a municipal gym, etc. All but one of the youths I interviewed described learning more about community events around the city through Health Matters. Donnie, for example, discussed making use of free museum nights around the city, which he learned about through the program; he also made use of a subsidized gym membership that he acquired through Health Matters. For the most part, however, the youths admitted though they were more informed about events in the community, they did not partake in these activities.

In some cases, participation in Health Matters programming had a negative impact on relationships with the outside community. Sophie, for example, related to feeling somewhat uncomfortable when some individuals from outside of the organization (e.g., volunteer nutritionists, yoga instructors) came in to help facilitate the program, delivering one-off sessions:

I dunno, I kind of felt she [a volunteer instructor] was looking down on us, a little bit... like I think the idea is good. I think that...it’s a tough thing to do. I think it has to be a special kind of person, because, I dunno, I felt very judged. (personal communication, February 1, 2012)

On another occasion, some young females from the community came in to put on a charity fashion show. I recall two male youths in particular who wanted to participate, but who felt that they were “not good enough” and did not feel comfortable even speaking with the mostly female show organizers, as they felt they were of a different social class.

### **Discussion**

Street-involved youths in Operation Come Home’s Health Matters program both resisted and embraced several dominant discourses regarding street-involved youths as socially isolated, as rejecting authority, as “troublemakers,” and as disaffiliated from the mainstream. In the following section, I show how the ways the youths took up these discourses influenced their social relationships and their ties to the community with regards to, first, leisure participation as socialization; second, respect for authority within the Health Matters program; third, structured leisure as a way to “stay out of trouble”; and, fourth the use of structured leisure to form relationships between themselves and the broader community.

#### **Leisure Participation as Socialization**

Dominant discourses in society suggest street-involved populations are secluded and socially isolated (Dail, 1992; Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Rosenthal, 1994); I found that the youths involved in Health Matters used the program to socialize and to combat feelings of isolation, which thus simultaneously resisted the discourse of street-involved persons as secluded. Youths discussed primary motivations for participation in Health Matters were due to social reasons, whether to develop relationships with fellow youths, with staff members/volunteers, or just to spend time with others in general. In fact, some youths discussed being isolated in the past, but felt that the program gave them an outlet and “somebody to talk to” (Kev, personal communication, December 7, 2011).

I found that while some youths did describe being secluded or isolated in the past, this was sometimes due to a low level of comfort and trust in other individuals; this was made especially clear when the youths described having had people leave their lives in the past or deliberately “testing” new staff members and volunteers at Health Matters. Perhaps then for some youths, isolation is a form of self-preservation to, as Curtis explained, guard against relationships that might fail or end. Nevertheless, strong social relationships were something that the youths involved in Health Matters sought to achieve; thus, through seeking to build social relationships, the participants actively rejected the dominant discourse of street-involved youths as socially isolated and as having impoverished social skills. And furthermore, the fact that youths described close relationships formed with staff/volunteers challenges discourses of youths as detached from members of the mainstream. Indeed, over time, Health Matters for many youths became a constant in their lives, a sort of “family.” Since joining the program, these youths grew to be more comfortable, trusting, and thus more social. It is possible, however, that youths who do not enjoy or seek social interaction might not attend the Health Matters program in the first place. Some youths in fact might embrace the discourse of street-involved persons as socially isolated; this is an area that could be addressed in the future by interviewing street-involved youths who reject participation in structured leisure programs.

### **Strong Respect for Authority Figures within Health Matters Programming**

While a dominant discourse in society portrays street-involved youths as rejecting and having negative relationships with authority figures (Bender et al., 2007; Koeller, 2008), I found participants actively resisted this discourse within the Health Matters program. Youths involved with Health Matters respected the authority figures within the program; this was seen primarily through the strong relationships youths reported having with program staff/volunteers, as well as

through expressing the appreciation of and desire for more “rules” and discipline in the program. Youths also expressed the fact that they appreciated “structure.”

According to Foucault (1978), it is through acts of resistance that individuals exercise the power to challenge the dominant discourses and potentially transform dominant relations of power in society over time (Nealon, 2008; Shaw, 2005). The positive relationships formed with members of authority (at least within the program) could help to alter the dominant discourse of street-involved youths as rejecting authority. This, in turn, could enable the emergence of a discourse of the importance of strong, trusting relationships as foundations for street-involved youths to demonstrate respect to authority figures.

### **Structured Leisure as a Way to “Stay Out of Trouble” and be “Healthier”**

Many youths reported participating in Health Matters to “stay out of trouble” and to participate in what they described as “constructive” and “productive” pastimes. In addition to citing reasons for participation as a desire to be productive, all the participating youths compared their involvement in the leisure program as an “alternative” to drug and/or alcohol use; drugs and alcohol were always discussed in opposition to Health Matters. Furthermore, many youths discussed substance use as a common leisure activity in which they participated frequently before they started attending Health Matters. While some youths did discuss their continuing participation in substance use, all described this usage as decreased due to participation in Health Matters. What these findings may suggest is that participating youths chose to discipline their bodies to meet the standards and norms produced within Health Matters. Disciplinary power (i.e., power exercised with the body) works to normalize and train bodies and thereby motivates individuals to behave according to a discourse’s standards (Rail & Harvey, 1995; Smith Maguire, 2002). In line with Foucault’s (1971) concept of discourse, within particular discourses

(such as the discourse of acceptable leisure), some actions are framed as more acceptable than others. For example, acceptable leisure may be to “stay out of trouble” and to play hockey. In contrast, unacceptable types of leisure may include activities such as drug and alcohol use. As discussed above, participating youths resisted the discourse of street-involved youths using drugs/alcohol by participating in the Health Matters program, which they described as a “healthier” form of leisure. The fact that some youths sought out Health Matters as a way to involve themselves in what they described as productive and conventional leisure may signal that the youths sought to discipline their bodies to fit into a discourse of acceptable leisure and, more broadly, of “acceptable” and productive behaviour for members of society.

### **Using Structured Leisure to Build (or Break) Relationships with the Community**

Health Matters was for some youths a facilitator in forming connections amongst youths and the mainstream, while for others it did not form such strong connections. For example, staff members made an effort to introduce youths to free and/or subsidized programs and events around the city. One youth in particular said that because of this effort he regularly attended a local gym as well as local museums, which helped to strengthen his attachment to the broader community and, as such, resist the discourse of street-involved youths as disaffiliated from the mainstream. The majority of youths, however, reported that despite feeling more knowledgeable of leisure opportunities in the community, they did not take advantage of these opportunities. Thus, the majority of youths continued to follow the discourse of street-involved individuals as disaffiliated from mainstream society; these findings are similar to what research from Dawson & Harrington (1996) and Kunstler (1992) found, describing street-involved adults as disaffiliated from the mainstream. I argue that reasons for not participating in leisure opportunities within the broader community stem from feelings of discomfort amongst the youths. As Ward’s (1995)

study disclosed, many homeless adults do not feel welcome using community recreational services for a variety of reasons, including negative staff attitudes towards the homeless, and the presence of non-homeless users who may intentionally attempt to make homeless individuals uncomfortable; perhaps this sentiment is also shared amongst street-involved youths.

Another way that the youths who attended Health Matters could potentially form connections with members of mainstream society was through specialized instructors coming into the program to deliver one-off leisure programs (e.g., yoga and karate); this, however did not always prove to enable relationships between the youths and mainstream individuals. The youths described the Health Matters program as a “safe zone” and in some cases were cautious of both outside programmers (e.g., outside specialists helping with programming) as well as new staff members/ volunteers, who youths admitted to putting through a “test” period. While over time the youths described forming trusting relationships with program staff members/volunteers (indeed, members of the mainstream), this was not always possible with the outside programmers. One youth described feeling judged by an instructor, while two male youths discussed feeling uncomfortable speaking with young female volunteers hosting a fundraiser fashion show at the organization; these youths expressed feeling that they were of a different (i.e., lower) social class. It is problematic if street-involved youths feel uncomfortable and “not good enough” to associate with mainstream members of the community, particularly when these individuals enter the Health Matters program that youths have described as their “safe zone”. Negative encounters can serve to increase the gap between street-involved youths and members of the mainstream community. Whether it is because the “outsiders” treat the youths differently in these situations or whether the youths simply feel this way is debatable. Indeed, while structured leisure programming may facilitate relationships between the participating youths and

the mainstream (e.g., youths that were made aware of and participated in leisure opportunities within the community), for many youths, these feelings of social connection to the mainstream did not reach beyond staff/volunteers that were involved in Health Matters on a regular basis.

### **Conclusion**

Based on my research, I have several practical considerations for other leisure programs for street-involved youths:

(i) Having well trained and dedicated staff/volunteers that are accepting and welcoming of street-involved youths is very important. It is most beneficial for the participating youths when these staff/volunteers remain with the program for extended periods of time as it has been shown that youths take time in developing crucial trusting relationships with staff/volunteers.

(ii) Rules, discipline, and structure are important for street-involved youths and it is important to create and uphold rules that program participants view to be fair and just.

(iii) Participants appreciate the incorporating of a health component into a structured leisure program (e.g., physical activity and healthy meals that youths can prepare). Many youths described lacking this health component in their lives prior to engagement in Health Matters.

(iv) Many street-involved youths have a low level of comfort with members of the mainstream as well as with people they have just met, and so it is necessary to create “safe” spaces for these youths (e.g., judgement free spaces) (Trussel & Mair, 2010; Ward, 1995) - somewhere they can go and feel like they belong. The responsibility for maintaining safe space requires that potential specialized instructors who deliver one-off sessions should receive training on working with street-involved youths before they are invited to assist with programming.

I argue that if the above suggestions were implemented in organizations that serve street-involved youths throughout Canada, more youths would have a heightened chance of forming

much needed social connections, whether with other street-involved youths and/or with program staff/volunteers. In addition, if provided safe and judgement free spaces, and if youths feel a level of comfort, these social relationships may be extended to members of the mainstream community outside of the program. Of utmost importance, however, is simply that structured leisure programs provide street-involved youths with a secure space in which to feel like they belong and may participate in a range of leisure activities while in the presence of others. For many street-involved youths, these are incredibly important issues that, when addressed, make their lives more bearable.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term “street-involved youth” is used to refer to youths who use emergency shelters and homeless services, individuals who sleep on the street, those persons who stay in locations that are not suitable for human tenancy, and/or those persons who move continuously from couch to couch (Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009; Operation Come Home, 2010). This term also refers to youths who spend significant amounts of time on the streets and who participate in street lifestyle/culture (Kelly & Caputo, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> The term “leisure”, throughout this research, is conceptualized as a state of mind (Neulinger, 1981; Godbey, 2008). “Leisure participation”, thus, describes involvement in activities (social or solitary, formal or informal, competitive or non-competitive) that are voluntary, intrinsically motivated and that derive pleasure for the participants (Smale, Donohoe, & Pelot, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> The term “homeless” is used in place of “street-involved” in cases where the authors of the literature upon which I draw used homeless as the noun to describe the population of individuals with/on whom they conducted their research.

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Street-Involved Youths' Unstructured Leisure: Activities and their Social Consequences

### Abstract

Research has shown that leisure can be an effective tool in reducing disaffiliation issues for those who live on the streets; however, there is little research that incorporates input from street-involved persons themselves (Dawson & Harrington, 1997; Klitzing, 2004), especially from street-involved youths. In the ethnographic study described herein, I sought to examine the role of unstructured leisure activities (e.g., leisure in non-programmed settings) in forming social connections between street-involved youths as well as between these youths and members of the mainstream community. Findings revealed that the youths used unstructured leisure to form social connections with others participating in similar unstructured leisure activities. However, if a youth were uninterested in participating in similar unstructured leisure activities as other street-involved youths (such as drug/alcohol use), this could in turn disconnect that youth from others using substances. Further, in contrast to popular assumptions, my findings suggest that street-involved youths participate in a range of conventional unstructured leisure activities within the mainstream apart from drug/alcohol use. Nevertheless, although youths partook in conventional leisure within the mainstream, most youths did not generate feelings of connections to the broader community. These findings illustrate the complicated nature of using leisure in attempts to help street-involved youths form social ties.

Historically, the definition and root of homelessness has been tied to the concept of disaffiliation (Bahr, 1986), which is when someone withdraws from the mainstream; this term is also linked to feelings of isolation, alienation, and disengagement (Dawson & Harrington, 1996). Literature has shown that leisure<sup>1</sup> can be an effective tool to address disaffiliation issues for those residing on the streets; however, there is little research that incorporates input from street-involved persons themselves (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004), particularly youths', and that focuses on unstructured (i.e., non-programmed) leisure activities. As such, the research presented herein examines street-involved youths'<sup>2</sup> unstructured leisure activities to better understand what contribution, if any, unstructured leisure activities play in street-involved youths' sense of attachment to their community as well as their feelings of social inclusion. I applied a Foucauldian (1971; 1978; 1980) theoretical framework to this research to help to understand existing power relations at play in street-involved youths' leisure and social relationships.

In order to learn of the social lives and behaviours of street-involved youths I conducted ethnographic research with youths participating in Health Matters, a leisure program delivered by Operation Come Home, an Ottawa-based youth services organization. Operation Come Home offers programs and services that aim to prevent street-involved youths between the ages of 16 to 30 from becoming homeless<sup>3</sup> adults; the programs and services range from employment support, to distance education, to social work, to housing assistance (Operation Come Home, 2012).

### **Literature Review**

In this review of literature, due to the paucity of studies pertaining specifically to youths, I draw on literature about both youths and adults who are street-involved. Specifically, I present

literature on street-involved people's social relationships, leisure involvement, and leisure participation's potential social impacts.

### **Street-Involved People's Social Relationships**

There is little literature available that looks at street-involved youths' social relationships. Some studies suggest that as youths spend time on the street, they become increasingly involved in the street lifestyle and subsequently detach themselves from their families and society (Haley & Roy, 1999; Health and Welfare Canada, 1993). It has been suggested that participation by youths in illegal or socially unacceptable activities such as drug use and survival sex can serve to further alienate youths socially (Haley & Roy, 1999). Studies on street-involved *adults* have found that while living on the streets, and gradually becoming cut off from mainstream society, adults are likely to experience disaffiliation, feelings of isolation, and disengagement (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Rosenthal, 1994). As Kunstler (1992) succinctly noted, "to be homeless is to be isolated from friends, relatives and mainstream society" (p. 42). Similarly, Magee and Hurliaux (2007) found homeless women felt isolated due to limited contact with housed family and friends and they also experienced societal alienation and discrimination from living in shelters. Casey, Goudie, and Reeve's (2007) study concerning homeless women and the use of public spaces in Britain found that given the high level of restriction placed on the environments where homeless individuals make their habitats and go about their daily lives, the homeless feel a great deal of social exclusion from public spaces, which may lead to feelings of detachment from society. As Dawson and Harrington (1996) stated, it has become "increasingly obvious that some homeless people are irrevocably cut off from mainstream society" (p. 22). Ultimately, the more individuals become detached from mainstream society, the less likely it becomes that they will leave their lives on the streets (Fast et al., 2010).

Socialization is crucial for street-involved individuals as it can offer a support network of peers that provides both safety and companionship. Socialization can, however, prove difficult for street-involved youths for numerous reasons, including issues of trust (Bender et al., 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Bender and colleagues (2007) conducted a study that explored street-involved youths' survival strengths and skills; while one of these strengths involved peer networking, these researchers found that street-involved youths were guarded in the social relationships that they formed, in part due to past experiences of having been exploited and/or victimized by individuals who had acted as providers and/or guardians (Bender et al., 2007). Furthermore, these youths expressed that "friendship was not a term they used lightly and they felt they had to be very cautious about who they trusted" (Bender et al., 2007, pp. 34-35). Nevertheless, the authors found that street-involved youths' peer networks typically consisted of other street-involved youths, as these were the individuals with whom they most frequently socialized (Bender et al., 2007).

A study by Toronto's Yonge Street Mission (2009) suggested that street-involved youths' peer networks were not necessarily positive since they were typically formed out of necessity. The authors found that 14.2% of the youths reported having chosen their friends because they liked them. The majority of youths in this study instead formed social networks that were opportunity driven or formed through meeting acquaintances at local shelters, on the street, or at organizational services for the homeless (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). The participants formed friendships with street-involved peers because they "lacked options" and shared common needs and/or circumstances with other youths on the streets and not because the youths liked these individuals (Yonge Street Mission, 2009).

In contrast, some studies have shown peer networks among street-involved youths to be very positive forces. Through a survey administered to 762 street-involved youths aged 12 to 18 from communities throughout British Columbia, Smith and colleagues (2007) found that youths described their “street families” as more supportive than their biological families. These youths reported strong social ties with the surrogate families they had formed on the streets. The participants reported that these friends were the first people youths turned to for help (Smith et al., 2007). Peer networks have also been shown to be crucial sources of support, protection and guidance for youths on the streets (Bender et al., 2007), as well as a way to help to fight off loneliness and provide a feeling of community for youths (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Kidd and Davidson (2007) conducted a qualitative analysis of narratives from 208 youths living on the streets and found that while all youths discussed independence as important within the street culture, youths described feeling safer as a group and more experienced youths were said to teach and guide “new” street-involved youths. Similarly, Trussell and Mair (2010), who interviewed homeless adults, noted that participants expressed the importance of making connections with people in similar living conditions (i.e., other homeless individuals): “Many participants expressed the importance of finding social networks formed by people who could understand and empathize with them; something to help combat their feelings of being judged as an outsider in society” (Trussell & Mair, 2010, p. 541). These adults purposely sought others who were “like them.”

Researchers (Haley & Roy, 1999; Health and Welfare Canada, 1993; Operation Come Home Strategic Plan, 2010) have suggested that it is ideal for street-involved youths and adults to form an attachment with the mainstream community; further, this is most often the ultimate goal of organizations that serve this population. While street-involved individuals have been

depicted as detached from the mainstream society and to have formed their own “street families,” some research produced by organizations that serve street-involved youths (Haley & Roy, 1999; Health and Welfare Canada, 1993; Operation Come Home Strategic Plan, 2010) has found that youths do in fact want to leave their lives on the streets, but need help in doing so. For example, Kidd and Davidson (2007) noted that youths living on the streets sometimes spoke of the importance of forming strong connections with individuals outside of the street community to “help support a move back into a more mainstream existence” (p. 229). Furthermore, Kidd and Davidson (2007) suggested that youths who held “more mainstream values” (p. 229) were more motivated to leave their lives on the streets, while youths who rejected the mainstream and identified themselves as “outsiders” were more likely to accept their lives on the streets and to remain entrenched in the street culture. Nonetheless, these authors argued that there is a “range of lives lived by homeless youth[s]” (Kidd & Davidson, 2007, p. 222), and, as such, while some youths do not enjoy their time on the streets and reach for more mainstream influences, other youths choose to spend “all of their time on the streets and have virtually no contact with any agency, organization, or mainstream people” (Kidd & Davidson, 2007, p. 222).

### **Leisure Involvement for Persons who are Street-Involved**

In order to understand whether unstructured leisure plays a role in street-involved youths’ social relationships, it is first important to determine what leisure activities are engaged in by individuals who reside on the streets. Below, I outline the current literature on street-involved youths’ and adults’ leisure participation, including activities labeled as “deviant.”

Several studies have noted street-involved youths’ difficulties in accessing leisure opportunities. Operation Come Home’s 2010 Strategic Plan stated, “evenings seem to be a real problem for homeless youth[s] with very little in the way of activities that are geared to their age

group” (p. 13). The organization further found limited “kid-friendly” and free activities and spaces were available or accessible to youths in the evenings and on weekends. Similarly, questionnaires administered to street-involved youths across British Columbia found that “there was a substantial decrease in involvement in sports and recreational activities once youth[s] become street-involved” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 28); this was particularly true for organized activities that require money and regular attendance (Smith et al., 2007).

Many street-involved persons do not feel welcome to participate in leisure activities within mainstream community centres. In a study with homeless adults in Toronto, Ward (1995) found that while several participants wanted to engage in physically active leisure pursuits, instead they most often found themselves doing sedentary leisure activities like playing cards. The adults did not feel they had access to the activities that they wanted to pursue, and although most were aware of local community centres that offered subsidized or free programming, participants did not feel welcome in these centres for a number of reasons, including staff attitudes towards the homeless and the presence of non-homeless users (Ward, 1995). Similarly, Trussel and Mair (2010) found that in order to enjoy leisure activities, homeless adults must find spaces where they feel “safe, connected, and accepted without judgement” (p. 545). These authors also found that issues of trust and fears of meeting new people and being judged due to stigmas associated with homelessness were common inhibitors to homeless adults’ leisure. There is a gap, however, in the literature concerning whether or not street-involved youths use community leisure facilities and whether these youths feel comfortable using these public spaces.

In terms of activities in which street-involved persons have been found to participate, Klitzing (2004) noted that homeless women’s leisure activities are on the most part accessible, informal, and inexpensive, and are much like activities in which housed participants would

participate, with the exception that activities that required funding were not always possible. Other studies of homeless men's and women's leisure activities have found that popular leisure activities include journaling, listening to music, reading, watching television (Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010), using computers/internet, online games, walking, (Borchard, 2010; Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010), people watching on public park benches or at coffee shops, generally spending time together outside of the shelter, and at times drinking in public parks (Borchard, 2010). While the above studies show a range of leisure activities in which homeless adults participate, the literature depicting street-involved youths and leisure refers almost exclusively to drug and alcohol use.

Researchers have found that a high percentage of street-involved youths use drugs and/or alcohol in their leisure time (Krusi et al., 2010; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Whitbeck and colleagues (2004) compared a sample of homeless youths with housed youths and found that homeless male and female youths were ten and seventeen times more likely (respectively) than the housed youths to use drugs and alcohol in excess. Through an analysis of narratives from street-involved youths in New York City and Toronto, Kidd and Davidson (2007) found drugs to be a "major part of the street context and culture" (p. 231). Surveys of street-involved youths in British Columbia also found high rates of substance use; the results showed, however, that not all youths were using: 3% reported having never used drugs and/or alcohol and 14% reported that they had not used substances within the past month (Smith et al., 2007). Smith et al. (2007) found that the most frequently used substances were marijuana, tobacco, and alcohol. While there is debate in the literature as to the actual percentage of street-involved youths who engage in alcohol and substance use during leisure time, in general, researchers agree that it is highly prevalent (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Smith et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2006).

## **Social Impacts of Leisure Participation**

There is a scarcity of literature that examines the social impacts of leisure participation for street-involved persons in general (Klitzing, 2004), and youths in particular. The existing literature does, however, show that leisure activities can be a means of connecting street-involved adults with the broader, housed community and can also be used to form bonds amongst street-involved persons.

Programmed (i.e., structured) leisure activities can act as important vehicles for facilitating social interactions between street-involved adults and members of mainstream community (Klitzing, 2004; Trussel & Mair, 2010), so long as the adults are comfortable accessing the local community centres and organizations providing the leisure opportunities (Trussel & Mair, 2010). Trussel & Mair (2010) found that homeless adults who did participate in structured leisure programs discussed the strong social connections they made through these activities (Trussel & Mair, 2010). Indeed, “recreation can be a vital link to the community” (Dawson & Harrington, 1996).

In terms of unstructured leisure activities, Klitzing (2004) found that homeless adult women who participated in leisure activities in community spaces such as parks, stores, or skating rinks tended to have a closer affiliation with the mainstream community than homeless adult women who did not. Similarly, Trussel and Mair (2010) found that even use of public spaces in the private realm (such as the use of internet, which can connect individuals in a public domain but can be used in a private setting) helped homeless adults to feel an attachment to the community in a comfortable and safe manner (Trussel & Mair, 2010). As such, programmed leisure activities as well as unstructured, individual forms of leisure may facilitate connections between homeless adults and the community.

Leisure may also act as a means to form connections amongst street-involved individuals themselves. In their research on homeless adults' leisure activities, Trussel and Mair (2010) found that many adult participants used leisure as a way to connect with other adults in similar living situations. In terms of so-called deviant leisure activities (e.g., drug and alcohol use), Thompson and colleagues (2010) suggested these activities may assist in forming ties amongst street-involved youths. Drug and alcohol use has been shown to have become a normative behaviour among street-involved youths and an activity around which to organize social gatherings (Thompson et al., 2010). Thompson and colleagues (2010) wrote that "alcohol use is a common and normative daily activity for homeless youth[s] that not only provides respite from the daily stress of living on the street, but also is an activity around which social and emotionally supportive interactions occur" (p. 425). Furthermore, these authors found that the more entrenched in street lifestyle a youth is, the more prone s/he is to become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol (Thompson et al., 2010).

While alcohol and/or drug use may facilitate the formation of social ties amongst street-involved youths, high levels of drug and alcohol use among youths may also hinder the ability to form concrete social connections among adults later in life (Thompson et al., 2010). Similarly, drug and/or alcohol use among homeless youths may act as a barrier to the formation of trusting relationships among homeless youths and service providers for the homeless (Krusi et al, 2010) and, as such, can serve to hinder the formation of or even sever social ties between members of mainstream society and the subgroup of homeless youths who use these substances. Furthermore, Smith and colleagues (2007) found that street-involved youths reported experiencing different negative social effects from substance use, including fighting, arguing with family members, and having issues with law enforcement. Thus, while participation in non-deviant mainstream forms

of leisure can serve to reinforce the social order and stimulate social ties (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004; Sherry, 2010; Trussel & Mair, 2010), participation in deviant leisure has the potential to separate participants from the mainstream (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Reible, 2005; Thompson et al., 2010). Very little, however, is known about the leisure activities street-involved youths participate in outside of drug and alcohol use, and moreover, the social impacts of these activities.

Klitzing (2004) argued that few researchers have studied issues of affiliation and social relationships of street-involved populations through a qualitative approach. As well, few researchers have sought to include the voices of homeless and street-involved populations, particularly youths. As such, research is required to identify street-involved youths' leisure activities and social connections, with input from the youths themselves.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used Foucauldian theory to help to understand power relations that may exist between and amongst street-involved youths and between the youths and the mainstream community. Specifically, I used Foucault's (1971; 1978; 1980; 1984) concepts of modern power, discourse, discipline and social constraints to theoretically position my research with the youths.

#### **Modern Power**

Foucault's (1978; 1980) concept of modern power is understood as a relationship between individuals and "must be analyzed as something that circulates" (1980, p. 98) like a chain through these individuals. Modern power "exists only in the context of a relationship in which one individual attempts to direct the behaviour or actions of another" (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 295). In this way, power is never owned or possessed by individuals, but instead power is *exercised*. Individuals and institutions are the vehicles of this power, and at all times

individuals are “simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). As such, Foucault (1978) argued that within society, “power is everywhere...because it comes from everywhere” (p. 93).

For Foucault (1978; 1980), power is both positive and productive. Power is positive because “it is predicated on the other being able to choose” (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 296). That is, individuals at all times have the option to resist relations of power. As Foucault (1978) wrote, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95); as such Foucault’s power is never strictly repressive. Shaw (2005) discussed that “the concept of resistance... refers to actions or processes that challenge constraints or challenge forms of oppression imposed by powerful others” (p. 1). Leisure has been argued to be a potential site for resistant behaviours due to the “relative freedom associated with leisure situations” (Shaw, 2005, p. 1); resistant leisure behaviours, for example, may simply be those actions that challenge dominant ideas of what leisure should entail. Whether resistance is intentional or not, however, the opportunity for resisting and challenging existing power relations illustrates that Foucauldian power is productive because resistance creates an avenue for social change (Shaw, 2005).

### **Discourse**

Discourse, according to Foucault (1971; 1984), is made up of the knowledges that become accepted norms, standards, and “truths” in society (Smith Maguire, 2008). Foucault’s concept of power is central to the formation and acceptance (or rejection) of discourses because it is through relations of power within society that certain discourses become dominant and as seen as reflecting truth, while others are not (Mills, 1997). Discourses are controlled and are given power by people within society (Foucault, 1971). Foucault (1971) warned that the power behind discourses within society lies in the fact that individuals come to accept dominant

discourses as truth and then make sense of their social realities and the ways in which they should behave based on these “truths.” That is, discursively produced truths affect individuals’ behaviours because, as Foucault (1971) described, within discourses individuals learn the “rules of exclusion,” which prohibit some actions while permitting others.

Like power, discourses can be found everywhere in society; individuals are always acting in relation to these discourses. For example, individuals are either a subject *of* or subject *to* a particular discourse. That being said, within society at all times there is a multiplicity of discourses present and individuals can choose which discourse they wish to follow and which they choose to resist (Foucault, 1971). When discussing street-involved youths, for example, numerous discourses exist within society that youths may choose to accept or resist. For example, much literature presents leisure for street-involved youths as centering around drug and alcohol use (Bender et al., 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Krusi et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2010; Whitbeck et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2006), which becomes an accepted “truth” within society and is used to depict these youths as delinquents. Street-involved populations are also discursively produced as isolated and detached from society; indeed, this has been a common focus of research and even a part of the definition of what it means to be homeless (Bahr, 1968; Kunstler, 1992).

## **Discipline**

Power is central to the concept of discipline, as discipline is power exercised with the body. Foucault (1975) argued that disciplined bodies are not negative, but are positive, because through discipline individuals are working to train and normalize their bodies to fit within a particular discourse. Disciplined bodies are subjected and practiced; as such individuals exercising discipline are not passive but are active agents (Vigarello, 1995). Foucault called

disciplined bodies “docile” bodies. Docile bodies are created through “a matter of ‘correct training’, of movements that are, from one end to the other, controlled and reconstructed” (Vigarello, 1995, p. 159).

Foucault (1975) gave examples of docile bodies as those of soldiers; these bodies are trained and improved upon to meet the standards of the discourse of what it means to be an ideal soldier within the army. Foucault’s (1975) concept of discipline, then, may be applied to other discursive fields. For the research presented herein, discipline may be applied to the chosen unstructured leisure behaviours of street-involved youths in hopes of understanding how these youths choose to control and train their bodies within particular discourses of leisure for street-involved individuals.

### **Social Constraints**

While for Foucault power produces dominant discourses in society that help to influence an individual’s actions, power can also be looked at in terms of influencing social constraints that affect behaviours within these discourses. Smith Maguire (2008) noted, “by drawing on systematic knowledge and discourses, we frame some actions as more acceptable than others, thus indirectly constraining the available avenues of action” (p. 295). That is, Foucault’s (1980) theory of power describes how the influence of certain powers may constrain individuals’ actions and behaviours . While constraints are most often identified as restricting or limiting actions (Shogan, 2002), for Foucault, since power is always productive, constraints too should be seen as productive, and therefore as never solely inhibiting (Golob & Giles, 2011; Irving & Giles, 2011; Shogan, 2002). Shogan (2002) applied Foucault’s concept of constraints to participation in leisure activities. Shogan (2002) argued that “constraints make possible activities and the experiences within them, they enable skill acquisition and they produce bodily comportment and

expectations that may enable or restrict experiences of leisure” (p. 36). Thus, through a Foucauldian understanding of constraints, it may be possible to highlight how leisure may inhibit and enable particular social relationships.

Through undertaking research to determine the dominant discourses that exist concerning street-involved youths, leisure, and social relationships, as well as how these discourses may impact the formation of disciplined bodies and affect social constraints, I formed a better understanding of the power relations at play as well as the impacts discourses have on the youths’ leisure activities. Ethnographic research, which is described below, allowed me to learn firsthand of the youths’ leisure behaviours and their related social impacts.

### **Methodology**

I conducted ethnographic research for 16 months with youths involved in Health Matters’ leisure programming. As a process, ethnographic research involves the immersion of the researcher in another group’s community or culture (such as the culture of street-involved youths) for prolonged periods of time in order to create a richer understanding of others’ lives; this is most often done through fieldwork (Jones, 2010). Ethnographers must make a commitment to strive for the immersion within another cultural setting and to become a trusted outsider (Jones, 2010). Through ethnographic research alongside the youths attending the Health Matters program, I gained firsthand knowledge of the social contexts in which these youths live every day.

Angrosino (2007) stated that ethnographic studies are useful when there is little understanding in an area of social issues or behaviours because it allows the researcher to enter the community and to get the “lay of the land” (p. 20). For this reason, I felt that ethnography was the best approach for my research with street-involved youths due to both the lack of

qualitative research concerning street-involved youths' lives, as well as the lack of research incorporating these individuals' voices and input (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004).

### **Methods**

After volunteering with the Health Matters leisure program for 10 months, I approached youths to ask if they were interested in participating in semi-structured interviews to discuss the social impacts of their unstructured leisure activities. I also took observational field notes during weekly program hours to complement the interview data as well as position the data in the relevant social context (Bernard, 2013).

### **Participants**

The research participants included eight street-involved youths (two female and six male) between the ages of 16 and 30 who regularly participated in the Health Matters program (i.e., at least twice weekly for two months or more). Throughout my 16 months of data collection, during any given month, there were roughly 15 to 20 youths that would regularly and voluntarily participate in the weekly Health Matters programming; the regulars changed at points in time throughout the year for reasons including changing interests, life challenges, as well as various commitments that did not allow time for leisure programming. The University of Ottawa's requirements for the ethical conduct of research on human beings were fulfilled prior to conducting any research with the participants.

In the table presented below, I provide information on each participant's sex, age, number of years of being street-involved, and living situation during data collection. It should be noted that due to the unstable housing situations for many street-involved youths, some youths had various forms of housing during my fieldwork. Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' anonymity. The disproportionately high number of male participants reflects the

higher number of males who access services at Operation Come Home as well as the Health Matters program.

Table 1

*Research Participants' Demographic Information*

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Name	Sex	Age	Number of years street-involved	Housing situation
Allan	Male	28	On and off 10 years	Couch surfing, adult men's shelter, some housing/renting
Curtis	Male	22	4 years	Couch surfing, adult men's shelter
Connor	Male	19	2 years	Couch surfing, on the streets, young men's shelter, adult men's shelter
Donnie	Male	21	3 years	Unstable housing with family (self described family as involved in gang relations), couch surfing, on the streets
Kev	Male	26	6 years	Unstable temporary squatting in a house (self described as a "crack house"), adult men's shelter
Matt	Male	21	3 years	Couch surfing, adult men's shelter
Melanie	Female	21	3 years	Social housing for young women
Sophie	Female	18	1 year	Social housing for young women, young women's shelter

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### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interview questions centered on what leisure meant to the youths, existing social relations between and amongst youths and the community, and connections to the mainstream community. Interviews were conducted in person and one-on-one with each individual youth. Interviews were held in a private room of the Operation Come Home building during Health Matters program hours to ensure the participants' privacy. The interviews ranged between 25 and 45 minutes in length. Upon completion of the interview, youths were compensated with a twenty dollar gift certificate to a local grocery/clothing store to thank them for their contribution to the research. Once interviews were completed and transcribed verbatim, each participant received a copy of his/her transcript and had the opportunity to revise it for accuracy and/or to omit information if s/he chose to do so.

### **Participant Observation**

When using participant observation, researchers place themselves “where the action is” (Bernard, 2013, p. 310) in order to collect data through simultaneous participation in and observation of the culture or group being studied. Participant observation requires the researcher establishing a rapport with research participants and learning to act so that those who are observed continue to behave as they normally would without the researcher's presence (Bernard, 2013). For the research at hand, I participated in the Health Matters leisure program twice weekly for the four hour duration of the program as a volunteer. I actively participated in the evening leisure activities (e.g., playing hockey, karaoke, cooking group meals) while at the same time observing interactions between and amongst the youths as well as observing what they relayed about their outside leisure activities and their social relationships. Because Foucauldian theory informed all areas of my research, when I recorded my participant observations I focused

primarily on issues of power and discourses related to both leisure and social relationships for street-involved youths. I recorded my observations as field notes within 24 hours of each volunteer shift.

While I was able to participate in the weekly programmed activities amongst the youths and to interact with the youths during the Health Matters program, due to issues of privacy and regulations from Operation Come Home concerning appropriate volunteer conduct, the participant observation was not conducted outside of program hours. Thus, I relied on discussions with the youths (as well as the interviews) to learn details of their unstructured leisure behaviours and consequent social connections.

### **Analysis**

Phillips and Hardy (2002) wrote that discourses produce social reality and that social interactions may be understood in reference to these discourses. Furthermore, discourses reflect power in society through what is established as dominant discourses (Foucault, 1971). Foucault (1971) explained that within discourses there exist rules of exclusion that prohibit certain actions while permitting other actions viewed as more acceptable; in this way, discourses may influence behaviours of individuals by them acting in accordance with, or against, certain discourses.

According to Van Dijk (2001), a discourse analyst attempts to describe and explain discourses in society and “focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm or legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (p. 353). Discourse analysis can therefore be used to study groups’ or institutions’ social power within society (Van Dijk, 2001). Researchers may apply Foucauldian discourse analysis to talk, text, and social actions in order to explore the relationships between discourse and power, and to uncover societal truths (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In this research specifically, I applied Foucauldian

discourse analysis to the texts from both observational field notes as well as interview transcripts to uncover the relationships of power and the dominant discourses that make up the youths' social realities. I then analyzed the texts to look for correlations between the discourses and behaviours of the youths in unstructured leisure activities and the consequent social impacts of these activities.

## **Results**

Through discussions with the youths during interviews and weekly Health Matters program hours, I learned of the different unstructured leisure activities in which they engaged, with whom they did these activities, and the subsequent effects of these activities on youths' relationships with their friends as well as the broader community. My findings show that some leisure activities can connect certain street-involved youths with each other, while also simultaneously disconnecting them from other youths. Further, while some leisure activities help to bridge social ties between youths and the mainstream, other leisure activities can just as easily detach street-involved youths from the mainstream community.

### **Leisure Can Connect Street-Involved Youths with Each Other**

Some leisure activities in which the participants engaged helped to connect them with other street-involved youths, this was said to be particularly true for drug and/or alcohol use. The youths reported that partying and substance use created close bonds amongst those involved in these activities.

In terms of leisure as drug and/or alcohol use, all of youths I interviewed reported they either currently participated in substance use with friends or had in the past; most often these activities were done in groups (e.g., parties) rather than alone. While all participants said they drank alcohol, half of the participants described using alcohol in excess, while the other half

described drinking in moderation. In terms of drug use, only half of the interviewed youths reported using drugs, and marijuana was the main drug of choice. From informal conversations with the youths during Health Matters program hours, however, I learned that while drug and alcohol use was not necessarily highly prevalent among the youths that regularly attended the leisure program, substance use was a common leisure activity amongst the “majority” (Melanie, personal communication, November 9, 2011) of street-involved youths in the city. Furthermore, the youths explained that these activities could help to form a community. In fact, many youths voiced the fact they felt that their main community in Ottawa was the street community (or street families). According to Melanie,

Downtown...there is a street community. I think that’s probably why a lot of people end up there. It’s not just because of the drugs. They’re going there because their family is fucked up or whatever and they go there to establish a community – drugs come in hand in hand with that. (personal communication, November 9, 2011)

When asked why drugs go hand in hand with the street community, she explained:

It’s a way in order to have something in common with those people. You do drugs, you drink, you have something in common with them. You help them get their drugs, they help you. (personal communication, November 9, 2011)

Although Melanie said she viewed the high use of substances in street culture as problematic, she discussed the strong bonds formed amongst youths within the street community. In this way, substance use was shown to be an activity that can potentially solidify relationships amongst street-involved youths and form a community outside of the mainstream.

### **Leisure Does Not Always Connect Youths with One Another**

Although activities such as drug and/or alcohol use can form close bonds amongst street-involved youths, not all street-involved youths feel a strong connection within the street community. While most of the youths I interviewed described the street community as a “tight” group, and explained that they had been through a lot together, Sophie, on the other hand, was relatively new to the downtown street community and did not feel this connection. She explained that if she were to categorize herself in a group, it would be in the downtown street community; however, she did not feel as though she truly fit in because she did not have many friends on the streets and did not participate in activities or “hang out” with the “downtown youths.”

Specific types of unstructured leisure (namely drug and/or alcohol use) were described by some Health Matters participants as disconnecting them from other street-involved youths. In fact, several participants reported ending friendships because of drug and alcohol use. For example, Connor explained that many of his friends “get high [smoke marijuana] and sit around” (personal communication, October 19, 2011), which he did not like. Connor noted that he had a wide group of friends, which included some friends from school, some from his youth, and some from the street community. When asked if these were the people he would like to be spending time with he answered, “some of them, yes. There’s like a few here and there that I want to like push more away from my life...Some of them I just view as a bad influence” (personal communication, October 19, 2011). Donnie also mentioned that he was actively looking for new friends. He explained to me that his older brothers and friends spend most of their time smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol excessively, activities in which he was no longer interested (personal communication, November 2, 2011). Similarly, Kev explained that he did most of his leisure activities alone because he was not interested in the activities in which his friends were

participating: “I don’t really have many friends around that are into leisurely activities – most of my friends are into... smoking more crack or they were into getting high, or drunk, and those were their leisure activities” (personal communication, December 7, 2011). Kev then went on to explain that he had cut most of these friends out of his life when he stopped using substances:

I don’t really see ‘em that often at all and most of them I just cut them out – you know, just like I have a friend, he’s just like a social drinker and a sociable kind of person, but you know, most of his habits are still something I don’t agree with, so I don’t see him on an often basis. (personal communication, December 7, 2011)

These sentiments were common among the youths who participated in the Health Matters leisure program, as there were numerous times when youths would complain that many of their friends were using drugs and alcohol heavily while they themselves wanted to do other types of leisure activities. Drug and alcohol use as leisure, therefore, was shown to sometimes disconnect and severing relationships among some street-involved youths.

### **Leisure Can Connect Street-Involved Youths to the Mainstream**

Three out of the eight youths interviewed said that they felt like part of the mainstream community and that these feelings were mainly due to their deliberate, planned involvement in the community. For example, Donnie, who dropped out of high school at age 16 and started to drink heavily at that time, said that he was trying to become more involved again in mainstream society: “I guess I’m just starting to go back into the community” (personal communication, November 2, 2011). Donnie described feeling like part of the mainstream community because he regularly participates in events across the city. For example, he participated in a 5km charity road race last year, he sometimes attends free museum nights, and he often spends time visiting university and college campuses to learn about different programs and, as he described it, to try

to meet new friends. He also participates in a weekly art group for youths at a local church, and regularly visits the local public library. While Donnie did serve a brief stay in jail during the months of my volunteering, he was nonetheless positive about his connection to the mainstream community.

Similarly, Allan also reported feeling like part of the mainstream, namely through his involvement in the community as a volunteer who cleans up streets, paints pillars and garbage cans, as well as occasionally coaches a youth soccer team with his cousin. In his interview, Allan stated, “I’d like to be involved more in community – I find you meet good people like that...different paths of people...people who are just, you know, caring and outgoing” (personal communication, December 7, 2011). Curtis also felt that he was a part of the mainstream community because he is well known in the city, whether through growing up in Ottawa and playing on numerous sports teams or from parties: “Ya, I guess I’m a mainstream person. I’m well known, you know, all over Ottawa really, whether I like it or not” (personal communication, December 7, 2011).

Another way that the youths connected to the mainstream was through their openness to participating in leisure activities with people they had just met. These leisure activities consisted of mainly casual pick-up sports games, such as non-competitive soccer, football, and basketball in city parks. Due to the transient nature of the life of a street-involved youth, the participants reported that it was at times difficult to get into contact with other street-involved youths to engage in leisure activities together: street-involved youths have limited access to the internet for use of email or Facebook to keep in touch, move around quite frequently, and many do not have cell phones. Many youths interviewed also described difficulties in finding others that are interested in similar leisure activities (i.e., instead of drug/alcohol use). As such, five of the

youths interviewed said that they were open to participating in leisure activities with different people that they had just met or “whoever” was in close proximity to where they wanted to participate in a particular activity. Curtis explained that he was “not too worried about who I’m doing leisure with, you know, it’s nice when you’re...with friends, it’s a plus, it’s a bonus, because you get along and you have chemistry like that, but you just gotta get to know people” (personal communication, December 7, 2011). Donnie said that he usually participates in leisure with “people who I meet around the neighbourhood” (personal communication, November 2, 2011), such as when he plays basketball at an outdoor court in the neighbourhood where he grew up. For Donnie, Allan, and Curtis, meeting new people through leisure thus helped to connect them to the mainstream community.

### **Leisure in the Community Might Not Connect Youths with the Mainstream Community**

Participation in leisure activities within the mainstream community did not always bridge connections between street-involved youths and the mainstream. As is shown below, participation in leisure like social protests, as well as more typical conventional forms of leisure, did not always facilitate relationships between youths and the broader community.

Youths who attended Health Matters frequently took part in social protests; participation in these protests served to form close bonds amongst fellow activists, including both street-involved and mainstream activists. Melanie, Connor, and Matt (among other youths I came to know through Health Matters) also reported heavy involvement in different social rights movements. Melanie participates on a police youth advisory board, and both Melanie and Connor volunteer with youth advisory boards that advocate for equal treatment and awareness of gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals; particular involvement centered around helping with local gay pride activities. Their involvement on these committees is tied to the Youth

Services Bureau, another downtown organization that serves street-involved youths. Matt and Melanie also regularly attend social justice-related protests in the city and had even travelled to surrounding cities to participate in particular protests. It should be noted that these youths were very accepting and supportive of, as well as informed about, different marginalized groups in society. Finding others with similar viewpoints helped to form strong bonds with fellow protesters. Melanie in particular stressed that the social rights protest group she met with weekly was the first group in which she truly felt she belonged.

The youths' participation in social rights groups and protests appeared to put a strain on their relationships with members of the mainstream. Most of the social protests and social rights groups focused specifically on inequalities in the mainstream; involvement in these groups allowed youths to voice their strong opinions and sometimes feelings of resentment towards the mainstream, which thus distanced them from the broader community.

In addition to those involved in social activism, all eight youths interviewed described participating in more conventional mainstream forms of leisure. In terms of mainstream unstructured leisure in a group setting, youths described going for coffee, playing billiards, watching movies, playing chess and card games, and dating. As described above, pick up sports games in city parks were common amongst the participants, and some reported swimming at local beaches in the summer. In terms of more individual unstructured leisure activities, the most popular leisure activities to do on one's own were internet use and listening to music. As Connor said, "I've always got music blasting. If you don't see me with my music blasting it means my MP3 [player] is dead" (personal communication, October 19, 2011). Reading was another popular activity in which all participants engaged. Reading materials included comic books, novels (Melanie often collected donation novels for the Operation Come Home bookshelf), free

newspapers, online documents, and/or library books from the local public library. Walking was also a leisure activity all youths engaged in, and some youths would walk for several hours around the city for something to do. As Kev described, “I usually walk, walking is usually the best thing I have” (personal communication, December 7, 2011). Artistic forms of leisure were also common, including jewelry making, dance, creative writing, graffiti art, sketching and making one’s own clothes. And finally, two of the youths (Melanie and Sophie) described attending school as being a leisure activity for them as they derived pleasure from this.

The activities listed above portray what could be classified as mainstream leisure activities that the youths participated in; furthermore, due to the fact that the participants did not have private spaces of their own, many of these activities also took place *within* the mainstream community. Yet even though these leisure activities could be categorized as mainstream and took place amongst the broader community, these activities did not necessarily cause all youths to form a connection or identify themselves with the mainstream community.

Five out of the eight youths interviewed openly rejected the mainstream community. Many youths felt that mainstream individuals “are all one kind of person” (Matt, personal communication, November 23, 2011) and included individuals who were “trying to conform to society” (Sophie, personal communication, February 1, 2012). Connor said that going to school at a local college is as mainstream as he gets, “Cause I hate being mainstream, I fuckin’ hate being mainstream with a passion... Everything about mainstream. Like, anything that involves mainstream, I don’t wanna be” (personal communication, October 19, 2011). Similarly, when Matt was asked whether he felt a part of the mainstream community, he said a long and loud, “Nooooo.” He then went on to ask, “Do I look mainstream? I don’t think so” (personal communication, November 23, 2011), while laughing. Similarly, Sophie responded, “Definitely

not. I would never put myself, Sophie Lee, in the mainstream of anything” (personal communication, February 1, 2012).

It is possible that because some of the participants felt that society was rejecting them, they did not feel like part of the community. Some youths explained that despite their presence in the community, they felt mainstream society did not accept them. Kev explained:

I’m not a part of the mainstream of Ottawa. I’m I guess what would be deemed as socially unacceptable...it’s not socially acceptable to be homeless...I’m homeless, so I’m not socially acceptable in the mainstream of Ottawa...I’m not socially acceptable in the mainstream pretty much anywhere...it’s just not proper to be homeless (personal communication, December 7, 2011).

Melanie explained that she felt the pressure to fit into the mould of what society deemed appropriate was “powerful and damaging” (personal communication, November 9, 2011). She said that due to her appearance (street styled clothing), when walking down the street strangers would say rude things to her and this hurt. Melanie explained:

I want to see myself as being just as good a person as anybody...but society views me as less because of my position in and involvement in the community and like where I stand on the hierarchy of how people are viewed or whatever. (personal communication, November 9, 2011)

Melanie continued to explain that:

Still, no matter where I go it seems in society, like the normal side of society, aside from the street-involved side of it, um, I always feel a little bit like an outsider...but I mean, I realize that everyone comes from different places and everyone’s an outsider

equally. I just appear to be a little bit different. (personal communication, November 9, 2011)

Because some youths did not feel like part of the mainstream community, not all of the participants made use of mainstream facilities that were available to them, often at reduced rates, and some youths were uncomfortable participating in activities within public spaces alone. Three of the youths expressed not wanting to participate in leisure activities alone. For example, Kev explained that he would prefer not to walk alone and would rather have someone to accompany him. Similarly, Matt discussed wanting to take advantage of a subsidized gym membership at a local gym, but did not want to exercise alone. “I don’t wanna always have to go alone, so I don’t have to like ask somebody...that I totally do not know how to do such and such thing...I’d rather be with someone I trust” (personal communication, November 23, 2011). Matt worried about not knowing how to use the equipment and did not feel comfortable asking staff at the gym or clients for help. Melanie also explained she would not go to the community gym unless she had someone with whom she could go. Thus, due to levels of discomfort and because the youths did not want to visit community centres alone, many of them did not take advantage of community leisure programs and services.

### **Discussion**

The above results complicate our understanding of leisure as an avenue to connect street-involved individuals to the mainstream community as well as to one another. Below, I discuss how street-involved youths’ leisure participation and related social relationships trouble and nuance three prominent discourses about street-involved youths: street-involved youths participate in deviant leisure; street-involved youths are socially isolated; and, street-involved youths are disaffiliated from the mainstream community.

### **Leisure Can Connect Street-Involved Youths with Each Other**

For some of the research participants, unstructured leisure enabled them to connect with other street-involved youths, particularly through involvement in drug and/or alcohol use. While the youths who participated in these activities derived many of the apparently “desirable” outcomes from leisure (e.g., companionship, social support, and social capital), such participation also often resulted in them participating in activities that have been discursively produced as socially “undesirable” (i.e., drinking alcohol and using drugs).

Street-involved youths represent a subculture that is marginalized and research has suggested that these youths are disaffiliated from the mainstream (Haley & Roy, 1999; Health and Welfare Canada, 1993); because of this, their motivation to pursue certain leisure activities may stem from a desire to actively distance themselves from and resist mainstream society, but also to fit in with other street-involved youths. The street community, otherwise known as street families (Smith et al., 2007), is for many youths their main community in Ottawa. For the most part, participants described close and tight knit bonds with other street-involved youths. Bender and colleagues (2007) described street families as sources of support, protection, and guidance. Nevertheless, as Melanie noted, drug and alcohol use is a way for street-involved youths “to have something in common” (personal communication, November 9, 2011). Thus, street-involved youths may use drug and alcohol use to discipline themselves to become docile bodies within the street-involved youth sub-culture, which also serves to resist societal views of “appropriate” leisure involvement (Reible, 2005). As Melanie explained, youths go to the street community to “establish a community” (personal communication, November 9, 2011) separate from the mainstream, and relationships within this community are said to be solidified through

substance use. Thus leisure as substance use may be a way for youths to resist the mainstream, and in doing so, may distance these youths from the broader community.

### **Leisure Does Not Always Connect Street-Involved Youths with One Another**

Leisure does not always connect street-involved youths with one another; in fact, at times it may serve to disconnect youths, particularly when youths do not share the same leisure activities. As discussed above, substance use was shown to form connections amongst youths; however this form of leisure can become an issue for those who are not interested in or want to decrease/eliminate their drug and/or alcohol use. Youths may be left with hard choices: whether to engage in leisure activities they might not be interested in in order to maintain friendships and to form connections with other street-involved youths, or to push away the friends they feel have potentially harmful influences on their health. Among the youths who attended Health Matters, partying and substance use were not reported to be extreme and/or frequent. It appears that youths involved in the Health Matters program who were interviewed were for the most part trying to stay away from the drug and alcohol scene and instead find other forms of leisure. Youths showed this resistance to substance use when discussing actively eliminating friends from their lives who they viewed as a “bad influence” (personal communication, Connor, October 19, 2011) and who were heavily involved in substance use. In short, they were intentionally resisting the dominant discourse of street-involved youths as using drugs and/or alcohol and, as such, used leisure as a form of resistance to street culture.

### **Leisure Can Connect Street-Involved Youths to the Mainstream**

The participants had differing feelings about the nature of their relationships with the mainstream community: while some embraced the mainstream, others rejected it. Only three of the youths interviewed said they felt a connection to the mainstream. For these three youths,

unstructured leisure allowed them to connect to people in the broader community. As shown by Klitzing (2004), it could be that leisure in public spaces helped to create these feelings of connection. Conversely, however, it could be that the youths who already felt a connection to the community were more comfortable using these spaces and so were more active in leisure activities within the community; in this way, youths may have disciplined themselves to become docile bodies (Foucault, 1975; Vigarello, 1995) within the mainstream. These youths resisted popular assumptions of what leisure and social relations should look like for street-involved youths, and thus were able to discipline their bodies according to mainstream assumptions of leisure, and subsequently formed or maintained a connection with the broader community.

Through disciplining their bodies to become docile (Foucault, 1975) mainstream bodies that fit within the mainstream, these youths can also be said to have rejected discourses of street-involved youths as disaffiliated from the mainstream. I believe, however, that this resistance was unintentional for these youths, as they did not express knowing that it was perhaps unusual for street-involved youths to feel a connection to the community; instead, they saw the mainstream community as the community in which they lived and/or grew up and so for them the connection was natural.

### **Leisure in the Community Might Not Connect Street-Involved Youths with the Mainstream Community**

Involvement in leisure activities within the mainstream, such as social protests and other more conventional leisure like going to the movies and walking did not always result in the formation of connections between the youths and the mainstream. Although all participants discussed participating in mainstream forms of leisure *within* the mainstream community on a regular basis, five youths explained that they felt no attachment to the mainstream community.

Three of these five youths were involved in social rights protests/groups and were all very vocal about their disengagement from the mainstream community. While these youths described social connections formed with others involved in these groups (including mainstream and street-involved activists), their involvement in these groups encouraged them to focus on, for example, political issues and inequalities that they viewed as problematic within the mainstream. Social protests and groups may also be described as sites for resistance against dominant – or mainstream, societal discourses. Involvement in social protests and related groups were thus forms of leisure that encouraged youths to detach themselves from association with the mainstream.

Participation in other more conventional leisure activities within the mainstream also proved to fall shy of enabling street-involved youths to form connections with mainstream. The reasons for this lack of connection varied. Some youths discussed feeling unwanted societal pressures to fit into the mould presented by mainstream, while others felt they were viewed as lower on the hierarchy and as though they were not accepted by society. The youths that stated they felt different from or unacceptable in the mainstream were the ones who reported being uncomfortable utilizing some public spaces, such as city gyms, alone. Studies with homeless adults suggest many street-involved persons do not feel welcome to participate in leisure activities within the mainstream community (Dawson & Harrington, 1997; Ward, 1995). My findings also support Trussel and Mair's (2010) work with homeless adults, which suggested that in order to enjoy leisure activities, street-involved persons must find spaces where they feel "safe, connected, and accepted without judgement" (p. 545). My research extends these findings to youths.

Though some youths reported feeling rejected by or uncomfortable in the mainstream, others instead expressed that *they* rejected the mainstream. As Connor succinctly stated: “I fuckin’ hate ...mainstream with a passion... anything that involves mainstream, I don’t wanna be” (personal communication, October 19, 2011). Ideally, it seems that leisure practitioners would like leisure to serve as a way to discipline street-involved youths so that they form connections with and enter the mainstream and become housed adults. The problem with the assumption that leisure will form these social ties is that it ignores the ways in which many youths that are on the street reject the discourse that the mainstream is in fact a desirable place to be. Many street-involved youths resist dominant exercises of power in that they reject (for various reasons) the life that others assume that they should have; however, this does not have to mean the complete rejection of all things mainstream, as is shown through their participation in typically mainstream forms of leisure.

Overall, despite research that has described street-involved and homeless persons as isolated (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Haley & Roy, 1999; Kunstler, 1992; Magee & Hurliaux, 2007; Rosenthal, 1994), for the most part, the participants in this study reported enjoying social leisure activities with others, whether members of the street community, the mainstream, or both. My results showed that all of the youths discussed using leisure to seek out important social connections with other street-involved or mainstream individuals who participated in similar leisure activities. Whether these connections were formed amongst youths engaged in more deviant leisure activities such as substance use or whether connections were formed through more conventional leisure (either with other street-involved youths or “whoever” was in close proximity), all youths sought out people with whom to spend leisure time. Thus, it is not a matter of youths having or not having social ties; in line with Foucault’s concept of social constraints

(Shogan, 2002), it is more a matter of how some leisure activities may inhibit some types of relationships, while they may simultaneously enable others. For example, youths discussed that at times constraints to leisure involvement included not having any friends to participate with who have similar interests in leisure activities, as well as other logistical constraints; while these factors inhibited some youths from participating in leisure with close friends, this then enabled some youths to participate in leisure with strangers or “just people I meet in the neighbourhood” (Donnie, personal communication, November 2, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

As Foucault’s work has shown, reliance on binaries fails to allow us to see the diversity and richness in human experiences; simply because youths may participate in mainstream leisure within the community does not mean that they necessarily feel a connection to the mainstream. Additionally, simply because the majority of street-involved youths may use substances – perhaps in part to form connections amongst the street community, should not imply that all street-involved youths use substances or that leisure as substance use connects all street-involved youths. Certainly, the above results complicate our understanding of leisure as an avenue to connect street-involved individuals to the mainstream community as well as how forms of leisure may unite street-involved individuals with one another.

Regardless of the type of leisure in which the youths engaged, these activities were used by the youths to seek out and form crucial connections with others. Furthermore, although involvement in what some may deem to be deviant leisure (i.e., substance use) certainly has some harmful consequences, these forms of leisure must also be understood as mechanisms that help to meet some street-involved youths’ social needs (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Thompson et al., 2010). As such, efforts to try to end the trend of substance use in the street community may

prove difficult without readily available leisure alternatives that may assist in forming similar social ties amongst youths.

As a practical consideration, I argue that the above findings speak to the need for services for street-involved youths in urban settings that provide opportunities for varying forms of leisure. Available and accessible leisure programs and services are paramount within the city, particularly for those youths who wish to avoid substance use, yet still seek to form social connections with others. I suggest the following for organizations serving street-involved youths and that want to help facilitate unstructured leisure activities:

- (i) Offer spaces within the organization where youths can spend leisure time and socialize in a safe and welcoming location. This does not have to be structured in nature, but could simply be to offer a supply of board games, for example, during drop-in hours.
- (ii) Offer a sign out program of leisure/sports equipment that youths can use on their own time outside of organization hours.
- (iii) Inform youths of subsidized programming in the city (e.g., subsidized gym memberships). If there is an interest from the youths, contact the community centre to arrange for private or group tours of the facility so that youths can learn of the programs and services held at the centre and to become familiar with the facility while in a comfortable group setting.
- (iv) Educate youths about events happening in the community; youths might not choose to take up the opportunities but it is important that they are aware of these options in case they are interested.
- (v) Encourage youths to join social activist groups that align with their beliefs and values; allow youths to “spread the word” by sharing information and pamphlets, for example, about different social rights group in the area.

(v) And finally, I feel that these findings speak to the need for structured leisure programs within the city where youths may go to access leisure and fulfill their needs for socialization on a regular basis.

If implemented, these suggestions would enable a broader variety of unstructured leisure for street-involved youths, as well as help to facilitate vital social relationships amongst the leisure participants, mainstream or otherwise.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term “leisure”, throughout this research, will refer to Neulinger’s (1981) definition of leisure as a state of mind; defining criterion of leisure as a state of mind include perceived freedom and selected activities that are intrinsically motivated and from which the individual derives pleasure. Leisure activities may consist of social activities participated in with others, as well as individual activities, and may consist of more conventional types of leisure such as reading and physical activity, as well as what may be characterized as “deviant” leisure activities such as drug and alcohol use.

<sup>2</sup> The term “street-involved youth” is used to refer to youths who are without shelter either temporarily, periodically or absolutely, as well as those youths who are at risk of losing their shelter (Gaetz, 2002). These youths may be accessing emergency shelters, couch surfing, or staying in locations that are unsafe (Operation Come Home, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> The term “homeless” will be used instead of street-involved when making reference to literature that uses homeless as the noun of choice when referring to the population of individuals on the streets.

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## Conclusions

In this final chapter, I summarize the results from the two stand-alone articles contained in this thesis and present some general conclusions from these papers. I then provide practical recommendations for leisure programs and services targeted towards street-involved youths, discuss some future research considerations, and finish with some final words on my experiences with the youths involved in Health Matters.

### **Paper One: The Social Impacts of Street-Involved Youths' Participation in a Structured Leisure Program**

While dominant discourses portray street-involved youths as socially isolated, as troublemakers who reject authority, and as disaffiliated from the mainstream, in this paper I argued that numerous youths involved in Health Matters resisted these discourses. My findings revealed that the youths involved in Health Matters participated in the program mainly for socialization purposes and these youths sought out others with whom they could pass time or form potential friendships; indeed, socialization was incredibly important for these youths. I also found that, at times, even more important than forming friendships with other youths was forming relationships with program staff and volunteers. Participation in Health Matters leisure programming helped street-involved youths to form important social ties, which enabled them to resist the discourse of street-involved youths as socially isolated.

“Staying out of trouble” was a core motivator for numerous youths to maintain their involvement with the Health Matters program. In fact, participating youths described appreciating the structure, rules, and authority within the leisure program, which showed an active rejection of the dominant discourse of street-involved youths as delinquent and involved in solely deviant leisure activities.

While participation in Health Matters over time connected participating youths to employees and regular volunteers, which thus challenged discourses of street-involved youths' disaffiliation to the mainstream, attempts to bring in "outside" instructors and to facilitate leisure activities within the community were not as successful. In fact, I found that attempts to connect street-involved youths to the mainstream through structured leisure activities can have adverse affects if youths do not feel a level of comfort or trust with, accepted by, or "good enough" for the mainstream.

Together, these four findings make a strong contribution to our understanding of structured leisure's role in street-involved youths' use of leisure programs to build and/or maintain social relationships.

### **Paper Two: Street-Involved Youths' Unstructured Leisure: Activities and their Social Consequences**

The research presented in this paper adds to and complicates our understanding of what unstructured (e.g., non-programmed) leisure activities street-involved youths participate in, as well as these activities' social impacts. While each youth is unique in his/her social relationships as well as his/her leisure behaviours and preferences, I found four main points to be representative of their unstructured leisure activities and social relationships. First, street-involved youths (like other members of society) engage in a wide range of activities in their leisure time. While a large portion of youths reported using substances in their unstructured leisure time, other youths reported instead seeking out leisure alternatives, such as visiting local museums, playing basketball in the park, or reading.

Second, certain types of unstructured leisure, like alcohol and drug use, may facilitate the formation of bonds amongst street-involved youths, but these same forms of leisure that can

create bonds amongst street-involved youths (i.e., substance use) can also sever relationships amongst street-involved youths who do not use, or who are no longer interested in substance use. While all youths who participated in my research did discuss participating in drug and/or alcohol use in either the past or present, most of the youths involved in Health Matters described their use as being (or having been) very minimal.

My third main finding was that street-involved youths will participate in unstructured leisure activities when and where they feel a level of comfort and with people with whom they feel comfortable. Some participants described openness to participating in leisure with and meeting new people; however, this was found to only occur where youths feel comfortable and accepted. For example, some youths felt comfortable in the mainstream and so approached individuals in city parks to participate in leisure with them, while other youths formed connections through participation in social rights and protest groups.

Finally, I found that simply because the youths may engage in mainstream leisure activities and live alongside mainstream citizens does not mean that these youths necessarily feel like part of the community. Whether detachment from the community is by choice or whether it connects with feelings of rejection from the mainstream, of course, varies from youth to youth. As a result, unstructured forms of leisure do not necessarily facilitate connections between street-involved youths and the mainstream; many street-involved youths intentionally resist the mainstream community and reject the discourse that the mainstream is in fact a desirable place to be.

These findings trouble popular understandings of leisure as strictly enabling of social relationships (Klitzing, 2004; Knestaut et al., 2010; Trussel & Mair, 2010) and as leisure as a means of facilitating connections between street-involved populations and the mainstream

community (Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Klitzing, 2004; Kunstler, 1992). As such, they make an important contribution to our understanding of street-involved youths' unstructured leisure behaviours and their subsequent social connections.

### **General Conclusions**

In general, the street-involved youths who participated in this study used both structured and unstructured leisure to form crucial social connections in their lives. Not all types of leisure, however, served to facilitate relationships for everyone. Also, while all participants discussed close relationships with staff/volunteers involved with Health Matters, there were very mixed feelings amongst the youths as to their feelings towards relationships with the mainstream community members outside of the program. In some cases, both structured and unstructured leisure served to connect (or strengthen already existing connections) between the youths and the mainstream; for many youths, though, these social connections to the mainstream were not forged.

### **Practical Recommendations**

It is my hope that the research presented in this thesis may provide some practical assistance to those who may be attempting to initiate new leisure services for street-involved youths or those who are trying to maintain and/or improve such services. Leisure services in this case can be divided into two categories: the first includes specialized programs offered to groups of street-involved youths by organizations that serve these youths (like Operation Come Home's Health Matters program) and the second includes integrated programming/services held in community centres that street-involved youths may visit on their own time.

In terms of specialized programming for street-involved youths, I offer the following recommendations:

- (i) Hire staff members/volunteers who have experience working with street-involved youths or ensure that they are given extensive training; this is paramount to a leisure program's success in facilitating social connections both among youths and between youths and staffs. Youths need to feel safe, welcomed and not judged (Trussel & Mair, 2010) in order to participate in leisure activities. Trained and understanding staff can help to create a safe and welcoming space.
- (ii) It is most beneficial for the youths if staff/volunteers can dedicate themselves to the program for prolonged periods of time in order to allow for the formation of trusting relationships with the youths.
- (iii) Make programs relevant to the youths so that they genuinely want to participate; ask youths for input into the activities in which they would like to participate.
- (iv) Incorporate a health component to the leisure program (e.g., physical activity and healthy foods), as this is something many participants described as lacking in their lives.
- (v) Ensure rules and discipline within the program are fair and consistent; youths appreciate this form of structure in their everyday lives.
- (vi) Pick appropriate program hours to ensure higher attendance rates amongst youths (e.g., day time programming may conflict with counseling appointments for many youths; however evenings were found to be a time when youths were looking for activities in which to participate).
- (vii) Ensure the program is accessible; offer programs that are easy to get to (e.g., can be reached by public transportation), but that also accommodate varying levels of health and/or physical abilities.

(viii) If possible, encourage social relationships and camaraderie amongst the participating youths; offer leisure activities that use team building skills and that include minimal levels of competition.

(ix) At all times, do what is possible to offer safe spaces where youths feel accepted; this may be accomplished through helping the youths to feel they are a part of the program, either through asking for input from the youths for possible activities, making program t-shirts (if funding is available) to help the youths to feel more like a group, but more importantly, ensuring staff and everyone entering the building are accepting, friendly, and open to all individuals.

(x) For youths that are interested in participating in unstructured leisure activities outside of program hours, offer a sign out program for leisure/sports equipment that they can use on their own time.

(xi) Encourage youths to visit free leisure events and/or subsidized programming (as Health Matters has done); provide information online or on a bulletin board so that youths can find out what is happening around the community and decide if they would like to take part in the leisure opportunities. Not all youths may choose to take up these opportunities, but they provide the youths with a variety of options for activities with which they may not otherwise be familiar.

In addition to specialized leisure programming that targets street-involved youths, many community centres and fitness centres also offer subsidized and/or free programs to street-involved populations. While these appear to be easy options for street-involved youths who are seeking new leisure opportunities, some street-involved individuals reported feeling uncomfortable using these facilities and consequently did not take advantage of these services (Ward, 1995). Below I include suggestions as to what community and fitness centres can do to make their spaces potentially more inviting to street-involved youths:

- (i) Train frontline staff to work with street-involved youths; a warm and friendly staff member can make an unknown space feel safe.
- (ii) As mentioned above, offer a sign out program for leisure/sports equipment for youths that are interested in participating in unstructured leisure activities outside of the centre.
- (iii) If applicable, limit private use of public community spaces, such as baseball diamonds or soccer fields attached to community centres, to ensure that these spaces are available for all members of the public to use on a regular basis.
- (iv) Offer introductory group tours to organizations that serve street-involved youths and street-involved youths themselves; this may help the staff members and youths to learn of the programs and services held at the centre and to become familiar with the facility while in a comfortable group setting.
- (v) Offer introductory individual tours to street-involved youths that may be interested in attending the centre.
- (vi) Use social media or community events to reach out to organizations that serve street-involved youths to meet and engage with youths in order to let them know of leisure opportunities available; meeting youths in spaces where they are comfortable may encourage them to visit a new location.

These are but a few suggestions based on my research findings. More research is needed, however, in the area of street-involved youths, leisure, and socialization to ensure the highest quality of services are available to meet these youths' diverse and pressing social needs.

### **Future Research Considerations**

While I engaged with approximately 100 unique youths during my frontline volunteering with the Health Matters program, I interviewed just eight of the youths who regularly attended

the program. It would be beneficial to conduct a study that interviewed a greater number of street-involved youths who participate in a structured leisure program to provide more of an opportunity for variation in results between the youths. In addition, it would be interesting to interview youths from different leisure programs to see if results differ depending on the program. A strong contribution to the literature could also be made by conducting a study that involved interviewing street-involved youths before and after their long-term participation in a structured leisure program in order to track any changes to both leisure behaviours and/or social relationships. In addition, it would be beneficial to interview youths not involved in leisure programs to understand first why they are uninterested or choose not to participate in structured leisure, and second, to identify the unstructured leisure activities in which they choose to participate. Overall, more research that examines the social impacts of street-involved youths' engagement in different types of structured and unstructured leisure is needed to assess how leisure services, community centres, and youth services organizations may improve upon and expand these vital services.

In terms of approaches to research conducted with street-involved youths, I argue that more qualitative research is needed in the area of social impacts of leisure participation for street-involved youths, as well as further qualitative research that focus on the social ties both amongst street-involved youths as well as between these youths and the mainstream community. Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, allows for open ended questions so that youths can more fully express themselves and their lives as opposed to being left to select a response that best suits them on a questionnaire, which already makes assumptions about the youths' lives and practices. In the research presented above, the interviewed youths were very vocal about their leisure behaviours and their relationships; these behaviours and complex social

relations, I argue, would be difficult to sum up in a quantitative survey and, furthermore, there would be the risk of these relationships being oversimplified. In addition, in most forms of quantitative research there is no relationship of trust formed with the researcher beforehand as there can be when conducting qualitative research, and especially through an ethnographic approach. Without a relationship of trust between research participants and the researcher, youths may not put much effort into their responses or may not feel comfortable in sharing personal information.

### **Final Words**

Throughout my 16 months of involvement in the lives of the street-involved youths who participate in Health Matters, I learned an extensive amount about street-involved youths' everyday lives and the extreme importance of social connections to their lives. In fact, as I continue to volunteer with Health Matters today, the youths are constantly teaching me new things as to the values placed on social relationships: a smile, a friend to lean on, and just someone to talk to are crucial when living in what Kev memorably described as the "bleakest of situations" (personal communication, December 7, 2011). I hope that the results from my research provide a strong rationale for continuing and extending services that facilitate street-involved youths' participation in both structured and unstructured leisure that they themselves identify as productive and healthy. Further, I hope that my findings have shown that while involvement in what some may deem to be deviant leisure certainly has some negative consequences, such participation should be understood as a mechanism that meets some street-involved youths' social needs. Trying to end their involvement in drugs and alcohol without providing viable and desirable alternatives will thus likely continue to be a very difficult task.

The Health Matters leisure program, which was described by some youths as a “family” and by other youths as their “safe zone,” became for the participating youths a constant source of social support in their lives. For four nights per week the youths would attend the program and share some laughs, at times some friendly competition through a sports game, cook a healthy meal together, and sit down and chat about anything at all while eating together as a group. I regret to report, however, that due to cuts in funding, Health Matters has recently been cut to two nights per week rather than the previous four. I remember the night that staff members/volunteers had to tell the participating youths that Health Matters would be reduced in hours. One youth expressed that it felt like a sort of death, and she fought back a few tears. While it may be difficult for some reading this thesis to understand the impact of this reduction in program hours, it is important to consider just how crucial a social program can be for someone who has expressed feeling isolation in the past. The youths genuinely want to attend the leisure program - and the primary reason for this participation is socialization. On many occasions when I spoke to youths and asked them what they had done that day prior to the 4:00pm start of the program, many responded with “nothing” or simply “walking for hours around the city.” The program provided (and continues to provide) these youths with a safe, warm, and welcoming space. If there is one message that I hope my thesis conveys, it is that street-involved youths need more, not less, access to these sorts of spaces.

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### **Contributions**

Carolyn McClelland developed, designed, and undertook this thesis, its theorization, analysis, and writing. Dr. Audrey Giles supported all aspects of the thesis's development, theorization and analysis, and provided assistance and input into writing and reviewing the final product. Both papers will be published with McClelland as first author and Giles as second.