

Law Enforcement Experience with illegal drugs and its influence on police officer perceptions of  
illegal drugs, their users, and the market that furnish these drugs

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## Abstract

Illegal drug use is perceived as immoral, criminogenic, and an unhealthy practice for decades under the discourse sustaining drug prohibition. Those who apply prohibition laws on the front lines are narcotic police officers, particularly the ones who work in narcotic squads. Based on the specific context in which these individuals work in, perceptions and meanings on drug prohibition and illegal drug use will emerge. This project will explore drug enforcement officer's perceptions on Canadian drug legislation and illegal drug use through the mobilization of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology and social problems theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1996, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) came into force. This is the last version of prohibitive drug law in Canada. Under this law, non-medical use of many psychoactive drugs is prohibited, following the different schedules of the International Convention on drugs of which Canada is a signatory. Possession, trafficking, importation/exportation, and production of all substances referred to under this legislation are outlaw.

Throughout the years, several key drug panics emerged, reinforcing the notion that illegal drug use is a social problem. The most recent ones are the media coverage of crack-babies during the 1980s (Orcutt & Turner, 1993), of ecstasy during the 1990s (Tanner, 2015), and of methamphetamine during the early 2000s (Linneman & Wall, 2013). Each time, these drug panics have helped frame and legitimize how the illegal consumption of these substances is extremely harmful and need to be addressed with a “tough on crime” approach in the prohibitionist rhetoric. It claims illegal use of drugs are dangerous because they can cause physical harms that includes death, lead to dependency and addiction issues, are criminogenic because users will stop at nothing for their next fix, and become a strain on the welfare system (Lloyd, 2103). In this prohibitionist rhetoric, the effects of prohibition itself are not creating these problems. Illegal drug use is the source of all these problems, which justifies the prohibitionist model which is projected in the population.

The discourse is quite different from many academics (Strike, 2006; Inciardi, 1999; Jozaghi, 2012; Haden, 2006; Piazza, 2011; Crick, 2011; Reuter, 2009). They argue that most harms that stem from illicit drug use is due to prohibition. Drug prohibition creates an illicit

market fueled by organized crime with no control on the products. This leads illegal drug users toward risky consumption behaviors, causing many health harms. For these reasons, they promote other models such as decriminalization of possession without intent to traffic and even the legalization of all drugs as alternative approaches. Drug decriminalization of simple possession has been implemented in many European and Latin-American countries. However, a drug legalization model where all illicit substances are regulated has yet to emerge.

Cannabis legalization is a reality in Uruguay and eight American states and Canada is currently underway in implementing a cannabis-regulated regime for 2018. Despite these developments, however, prohibition of certain drugs is still accepted by the population on substances that have been deemed more harmful by claims-makers who sustain prohibition (Lloyd, 2013). Following this acceptance is the repression of illegal drug users and the fight against the illegal market, which are perceived as necessary. The ones who are the first-line fighters are police officers, and more specifically narcotic squad officers.

This project is about how experience in law enforcement can shape individual perceptions on illegal drugs and their users, more specifically among narcotic squad officers. They are the ones who conduct and enforce drug prohibition on the front lines; they are the individuals who are putting prohibition into action. Narcotics drug squads have been created to deal with the illegal drug market, while trying to eradicate it. Narcotics drug squads, in a sense, became the face of drug prohibition. Because of this, it would be an interesting area to explore how these individuals view their role, their perception of the efficacy of prohibition, and illegal drug use. Upon initial research, it became clear that very little qualitative research has been conducted regarding these police officers' perceptions of their role under prohibition and illegal drug use. The studies that were conducted surrounding officers' views or perceptions on illegal

drug issues and the law are quantitative in nature, using surveys to gather data (Davis, 2014; Petrocelli *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the studies with a focus on drug enforcement, examined the efficacy of officer techniques and tools in improving how they “do” prohibition (Frabutt, 2010). Due to this gap in research, I decided that a qualitative research study to examine narcotics squad officer perceptions on illegal drugs, their users, and the black market, would be of value to this field of research and to the field of criminology. As such, the larger research question guiding the project is the following: *The prohibitionist model has been dominant in Canada for dealing with certain drugs. Based on the experiences of narcotics squad officers, what are their perceptions of their role under the prohibition framework and illegal drug use?*

My sample to answer this question is limited to seven RCMP officers with experience working in narcotics squads, using qualitative semi-structured interviews. Over their experience in this role, what is crucial for this project is the exploration into how context and social constructions can possibly influence their perception of prohibition and illegal drug use. To help mobilize this final point, Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) interpretation of phenomenology of perception and the construction of illegal drugs as a social problem will be used.

Chapter 1 of this research project summarizes the main points of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of phenomenology, as well as social problems theory, and how the two can be used together as the theoretical framework guiding this thesis. According to Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of phenomenology, perceptions can be altered by both the social and natural world. The way individuals, objects, and experiences come across in a lifetime have an impact on how a person perceive the world and provides meaning. Additionally, if human perception is influenced by the social world, social constructions, which include social problems, can result in altering perception. Chapter 2 summarizes the current literature on illegal drug consumption, moral

panics surrounding illegal drugs the different harms associated with these drugs, harm reduction approaches, and different drug legislative models. Chapter 3 presents the methodology chosen for this project and its rationale. This chapter explains also the data collection technique and process, the sampling choices made, as well as the project's limitations. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings that emerged from the data collected. Chapter 5 is the discussion/analysis portion; the themes emerging from the data are interconnected and the theoretical framework, as well as the literature is used to generate a thorough understanding of the data and how it answers the project's key point of interest. The concluding chapter of this research project re-examines the research question and findings from the study, while also examining the project's limitations, contributions to the field of criminology, and avenues for future research.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will begin by exploring three epistemological standpoints that emerge through the phenomenological theories to explain which position this research project will take. The following section will explore the basis of phenomenology, how it emerged, its key philosophers, and its diverse interpretations. The subsequent section will explore Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology, which is the approach that will be taken to help guide this study. This section is followed by a more thorough examination of Merleau-Ponty's key work, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, but specifically two key chapters: "The Thing and the Natural World" and "Other People and the Human World" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Following the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, an overview of the construction of social problems will be presented. The subsequent sections will explore the limitations of the functional/normative approach to social problems theory, the value-conflict approach, and claims making as interactive process approach. To tie social problems theory to the larger theme of drug prohibition, the mobilization of this framework towards the crack-cocaine panic of the 1980s by Reinerman & Levine (1995) will be presented as a case study. The final section of this chapter will connect Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and social problems theory, along with a rationale for doing so. The merging of the Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and social problems theory will be used as the theoretical framework for this research project.

### 1.1 Epistemology

Before examining the theoretical framework that will help shape my research project, a distinction will be made between the following paradigms: idealism (intellectualism), realism (naturalism), and transcendentalism. These three epistemological standpoints will be examined because each emerges under the phenomenological framework. Idealism and realism are often

placed in juxtaposition to phenomenology, which is a transcendental philosophy. This is done to help demonstrate how phenomenology can be used to fill that gaps found from taking an idealistic or realistic stance. Idealism argues that the world itself, the objects within it, and individuals that inhabit it are all mentally constructed by the observer (Costello, 2012). Nothing truly exists unless it is experienced and perceived by someone (Costello, 2012). Realism is based on the notion that individuals are separate from the natural world and its objects and that the natural (and social) world and its objects truly exist outside of the individual (Costello, 2012). Transcendentalism, the key epistemological standpoint behind the philosophy of phenomenology, sees both idealism and realism as problematic and offers an alternative. According to proponents of transcendentalism, idealism fails to account that objects and the world do exist outside of individual existence. Because of this, idealism fails to take into account the interaction between the individual and the world, which is what creates meaning and significance. Realism, on the other hand, fails to provide an explanation about the diversity of meanings and interpretations and fails to account for the interaction that takes place between individual consciousness and the natural world (Lauer, 1965). Transcendentalism connects both idealism and realism by arguing that objects and individual consciousness are connected to one another. Phenomenology is also a stream that falls under social constructivism. Social constructivists argue that the human world is socially situated through the interaction with others and because of this; knowledge of the world is socially constructed. Phenomenologists would agree with this argument, however, would place emphasis on how constructions/perceptions are created. Furthermore, several key phenomenologists argue that if one brackets/suspends their superficial assumptions of the world, one can arrive at true conscious – a true reality.

This research project identifies best with the transcendental epistemological paradigm, because it is shaped by aspects of phenomenology, specifically interpretations by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who argues that individual perceptions is shaped by one's interactions with both the natural and human world. As such, consciousness and objects are connected to one another, creating perception and meaning through an interactive process, as per the basis of transcendentalism.

## 1.2 Basis of Phenomenology

The philosophy of phenomenology emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> century around the works of its founder Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Phenomenology's key area of inquiry is individual consciousness and being, which had taken quite a long pause from the philosophical sphere because science, logic, and the naturalist attitude was heavily prioritized at the time (Lauer, 1965). Husserl came to the realization that the naturalist approach to philosophy was quite limiting because it does not examine the meaning of the natural world for individuals and to do so, one must examine consciousness. As mentioned in the previous section, it bridges the gap between realism and idealism by offering an alternative: transcendentalism (Costello, 2012). As explored through the phenomenology of Husserl, transcendentalism connects both idealism and realism by arguing that objects and individual consciousness are connected to one another. Two key terms stemming from Husserl's philosophy are the "transcendental attitude" and the "transcendental ego/epoche". The transcendental attitude is referring to the moment when an individual brackets (puts in suspension) their uncritical and superficial view of the world to see how objects and individual consciousness can only exist together (achieve the transcendental ego or epoche) (Costello, 2012). The transcendental ego/epoche is the state in which an individual arrives at a pure consciousness through the process of the transcendental attitude. However,

according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who will be explored throughout this chapter and whose phenomenology will be guiding this research project, believes this process to be unachievable because consciousness can be tainted by external factors.

Husserl also argued that consciousness and objects are connected to one another because an object cannot be fully understood or exist without individuals making sense of it through their own consciousness and experience of it (Dermont, 2012). The world does not set the stage for experiences; it is individuals, through their interactions with the world, who are creating experiences for themselves.

Unlike Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) conducted a phenomenology of being rather than a phenomenology of consciousness. While studying under Husserl, Heidegger concluded that philosophy had been inquiring about the wrong questions regarding people's interactions with the world. What is extremely important to understand beforehand is what he termed "Being", the idea that the world does indeed exist (Lemay & Pitts, 1994). Without the existence of "Being", other beings (objects) could not possibly exist (Lemay & Pitts, 1994). Heidegger, unlike Husserl who believed all began with perception, argues that individuals begin by engaging with entities found in the world, and then perception occurs (Lemay & Pitts, 1994).

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), one of the first existential<sup>1</sup> philosophers, began his career by arguing that 'essence precedes existence'; therefore, for an object to exist, it needs to be consciously established beforehand (Palmer, 1995). For instance, for a chair to exist in the world, someone had to consciously create its design and function before it came into existence. In phenomenology, Sartre contributed introduced two terms: unreflective consciousness and reflective consciousness. Unreflective consciousness would be an individual walking down a street noticing all the autumn leaves and the pedestrians walking by; the individual fails to

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<sup>1</sup> Existentialism: human beings give sense to their life through their own actions.

recognize himself or herself (Palmer, 1995). Reflective consciousness would be an individual who misses the bus, looks down at their watch and realizes that they have forgotten to set it to the right time; in this scenario, the individual recognizes himself or herself (Palmer, 1995). Therefore, one should engage in reflective consciousness because to better understand the world, one should be aware of their being in it.

The philosopher whose perspective in phenomenology will be privileged in this thesis is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His main area of interest is perception but not solely from a sensory and mechanical position. Individual consciousness, through its interaction with other objects, creates a perceived reality that is unique to one's own lived experience. For this reason, he argues that arriving at a pure consciousness using suspension found in Husserl's philosophy, is not possible (Diprose & Reynolds, 2008), because there is an infinite number of ways to perceive an object and our perceptions are further tainted by our culture, society, and our place in time (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

As part of my research project, I will be mobilizing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to proceed through the analysis and discussion of the way narcotic squad police officers are perceiving the impact of prohibition to reduce problems of illegal drug use. However, the main limitation of phenomenology, including the works of Merleau-Ponty, is that it is much too philosophical (lack of empirical ground) and does not provide an applicable theoretical framework for social science research. To address this limitation, social problems theory will be combined with certain aspects of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology. Since it is not possible for the individual to arrive at a pure consciousness due to the infinite perceptions of the same phenomena within the same perceptual field, the way in which one encounters constructed social problems can influence one's perceptions.

### 1.3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception

For this research project, I will focus on Merleau-Ponty's key piece, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty sees phenomenology as a way of describing what people are experiencing without exploring individual psychology or other causal scientific explanations (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Like the phenomenologists that preceded Merleau-Ponty, they were not against the scientific method, but simply argued that solely using this source of knowledge would not allow for a complete picture of the world, beings, and their interactions with one another (Langer, 1989). This is where phenomenology comes into play, because it is a description of our being in the world adding to the partially created picture. This section will explore two chapters found within Merleau-Ponty's key work, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, which examines how one's interactions with the natural and human world will create and influence perception. Specifically, these chapters examine individual interactions with other things and the world, as well as how individuals interact with others, who too have their own unique experiences of the world. The points that will be examined from Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology and perceptions will help further the analysis of the data set on narcotic squad officers' perceptions of their role and illegal drug use.

#### 1.3.1 The Thing and the Natural World

In his chapter, "The Thing and the Natural World", Merleau-Ponty examines four constants: size, shape, colour, and texture experience. The overall point being made regarding these constants is that they are given to one in perception, the experience and meanings are created by the body encountering objects through these constants (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). However, their existence does presuppose individual experience. Regarding the size and shape of an object, it is always

related to one's body being situated in the world (Marshall, 2008). If one is standing too far off from an object, it will appear smaller and look differently than if one is standing beside the same object. In relation to colour, one's perception of colour is determinant to the perceptual field, the background (Marshall, 2008). This perceptual field will influence how an individual sees colour, for instance the type of lighting one is exposed to will influence their perception of a specific colour. Additionally, tactile experience creates constancy for one's body, because what one feels upon touch is only known through that experience and can be describe or perceived differently between individuals (Langer, 1989).

Merleau-Ponty moves on from his examination of constants and focuses on what he calls the "thing". The thing or things are accents that individuals get a hold of through their experience with the natural world, one finds the "thing" in perception (Marshall, 2008). As a result, perception does not assume things as facts but rather gives these things meaning (Marshall, 2008). Because perception gives things meaning, the thing cannot be separated from one's experience of it in the world (Marshall, 2008).

According to Merleau-Ponty, the natural world is an extremely important part of phenomenology, because it serves as the backdrop for individuals perceiving objects in the world. George J. Marshall (2008), an academic who has written on the works of Merleau-Ponty, argues that "experience teaches us that things are not constant nor do they dissolve into disconnected elements. Rather experience shows us that the natural world is a developing permanent being that unifies the real diversity of things" (Marshall, 2008, p. 172). Without the natural world, there would not be any "things" or experiences. At the foundation of perception, for it to be even possible, there is the natural world (Marshall, 2008). However, within this natural world, there is a synthesis of perception and experiences. Individual consciousness is not

pure but a consciousness that is constantly involved in an interaction with a natural world (Marshall, 2008). As such, a point of view is a bodily experience of the world. One's experience of the world is an integration of perspectives with his experiences.

### 1.3.2 Other People and the Human World

In his chapter "Other People and the Human World", Merleau-Ponty does continue with his main point that meanings are created through perceptual experience. However, he now discusses the impact of the social and cultural world on individual perception. Individuals have been born into their own personal lives at a time and place in which they have no control (Marshall, 2008). This background provides a breadth of experiences through interactions with other beings and this is what allows perception to occur (Marshall, 2008). However, because of this larger background or cultural context, one cannot reach pure perception because there are always larger factors that will influence it (Marshall, 2008). Merleau-Ponty begins this chapter by examining other minds and how they can co-exist with one another and then concludes by examining the social and cultural world in which individuals inhabit.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the body of another or the consciousness of the other is not for oneself but for the self of the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Everyone has a certain way of being in the world, which opens endless possibilities. Others are included in one's perspective because it is natural for one's consciousness to slip away from time to time into another's consciousness, or point of view, because we all share a common world (Baldwin, 2007). An example of how different perspectives merge together is through language. Language has created a common world where objects are given common meanings and allows one to co-exist with others (Baldwin, 2007).

Merleau-Ponty further argues in his discussion on the social and cultural world, that understanding experience and perception objectively cannot be achieved, others can only receive a representation of one's own experience with phenomena (Marshall, 2008). The example used in this chapter is an historian trying to understand the Battle of Waterloo. The historian attempts to get a bird's eye view of the battle but he can only achieve a representation of it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The real battle of Waterloo transcends this representation but at the same time unites the two because the battle does set the backdrop for this representation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Additionally, Merleau-Ponty claims that the social and cultural world are "always already there" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Being in the world, one opens oneself to all different phenomena that go beyond oneself and only exist to the extent that they are taken up by an individual (Marshall, 2008). This chapter is especially significant for understanding how parts of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can be applied to social problems theory, because the point being made is that there are social and cultural phenomena and meanings that transcend or go beyond our perception. As such, certain social meanings, one cannot help but have influence their own perception because each individual lives in a common world with others, where common meanings emerge so that people can co-exist with one another. As such, social problems are often created because they share a common meaning amongst a large group of individuals that is particular to a specific social and cultural context. The subsequent part of this chapter will examine social constructivism and social problems theory.

### 1.3.3 Application of Phenomenology in Examinations of Technology and Law Enforcement

More recent applications of phenomenology can be detected through the lens of how individuals perceive technology, especially within law enforcement due to the increased use of body worn cameras, tasers, and devices to detect driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Orlikowski and Gash (1994) were the first scholars to apply technological frames of reference to provide police officer perceptions, especially towards the use of body worn cameras. Orlikowski and Gash (1994) argue that technology should be examined in a specific social context and as such its meaning is perceived differently by individuals. As a result, when examining police officer perceptions on technology or even working under a prohibitionist model, one should recognize that this group is only one aspect of the larger social context (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994). In addition, the way in which officers perceive the use of technology will influence on how they use that technology (Sanders & Henderson, 2013). This can be applied to the context of drug prohibition because the perception of their role as part of a narcotic squad under this model and how they perceive illegal drugs will affect how these individuals interact and the choices they make when on the front lines.

#### 1.4 Construction of Social Problems

Defining social problems falls within the framework of social constructivism. Social constructivism argues that meaning is not inherent to an object or phenomena, it is created by the definitions and significance people and institutions place onto them (Best, 1995). For instance, if someone came from a non-Americanized culture, they may see a table as firewood rather than an object to place things on or they may see a cat or dog as food rather than a pet (Loseke, 2003). Our own experiences, being shaped by larger structural factors, influence the meanings we place onto different objects and phenomena. For social constructivists, the physical world is not the focus of inquiry; it is more about the way individuals and groups understand the world, and how this understanding might interfere in the way they will be interacting with others (Loseke, 2003, p.13). As individuals, we are taught during childhood different categories of objects, things, and even individual people (Gorski, 2013). For instance, two dogs have unique personalities but they

are both labelled as “dogs”. These categories become so ingrained that individuals tend not to question them until they may be exposed to a different culture (Loseke, 2003). This demonstrates how one’s commonsense understanding of the world is socially constructed. In addition, our understandings and meanings placed onto objects or things, will in effect influence our behavior. This point raised by Loseke (2003) is the object of study for social constructivist and plays a role in understanding social problems theory because it shows how people give meaning to objects found in their environment and how these meanings will affect how people react to those objects.

#### 1.4.1 Limitation of the Functional/Normative Approach and the Value-Conflict Approach

There are three different approaches to explore social problems: the functional or normative approach, the value-conflict approach, and finally, examining social problems as an interactive process. Each of these approaches is reflecting a different epistemological paradigm.

The functional/normative approach sees social problems as issues that transgress established societal norms and jeopardizes the coherent functioning of society (Tumin, 1965). According to this approach, a social problem is an issue that must be eradicated from society because it causes conflict and harm (Tumin, 1965). Social problems assume, however, that a consensus of norms and values are present, which is one of this approach’s main limitations (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011). Additionally, social problems are helpful in reinforcing these established values and norms in bringing light to what is not (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011).

The value-conflict approach to social problems, examines why some issues are framed as social problems, while other are not (Clinard, 2003). This type of approach examines how those who hold power in society manipulate which issue is defined as a social problem to further their own agendas, rather than address issues that could be harmful and are not in the interest of society (Clinard, 2003). Value-conflict, however, falls under the realist paradigm because it

promotes the idea that some problems are objectively more harmful than others and as a result, real intervention is needed.

Both the functional/normative and the value-conflict approach to social problems has been argued to imply many limitations, such as relying too heavily on numbers and measures and assuming there are common norms and values that have been established through consensus brought upon by political manipulation. Examining social problems as an interactive process, however, falls more within the constructivist paradigm, because it examines the process by which issues are constructed by individuals (claims-makers). According to this perspective, social problems do not have any true objective quality to them (Best, 1995). This interactive approach will be used in incorporation with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology because it falls under a more social constructivist paradigm, similar to phenomenology, to help analyze the data set. The functional/normative and value-conflict approaches fall under a more realist epistemological standpoint and as such does not coincide with the transcendentalism that guides phenomenology.

#### 1.4.2 Claims Making and Social Problems as an Interactive Process

The claims-making process is at the core of the social problems theory. The focus is on the interaction between claims-makers and their designated audience; one side trying to persuade the other that there is indeed a serious problem that is requiring intervention.

According to Spector and Kitsuse (2011), the construction of a social problem begins through a claims-making process. The claims-makers must begin by articulating the issue at hand to garner attention to the issue and in a manner that is controversial enough to gain political and public attention (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011). Claims can take on the following forms: they can be expressed verbally, visually, or behaviorally (Loseke, 2003). Verbal claims can be said out loud

or written, as meaning is created through words. Visual claims are images used to define and create meaning. As an example, a photo of an extremely malnourished child, living in poverty, will incite meaning that this is tragic and unacceptable (Loseke, 2003). Behavioral claims are actions used to provide meaning, often through the form of protests. However, behavioral claims are mostly used to garner attention to allow for a platform to share verbal claims. Nonetheless, claims are insignificant unless there is an audience to persuade. For the targeted audience to believe the claims being presented, they must be relatable and have significant meaning for said population (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011).

The concept of power in the claims-making process cannot be ignored. The more money, political support, recognized legitimacy and organization of a group, the more power this group has in persuading an audience with their claims (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011). This provides the claim-makers with the proper platform to be heard. Additionally, having support from subject matter experts, especially scientists, makes the claims much more believable among the audience members (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011). Loseke (2003) highlights how in the United States, the public is according a lot of creditably to scientists, because they are viewed in high esteem as subject matter experts and can present arguments from an objective standpoint.

Subsequently, when the claims are made and are believed by the audience, they must gain political attention. When the government becomes involved and has a vested interest in the issue, it often provides it with legitimacy (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011). Often this is when the issue becomes addressed and certain policies or initiatives are put in place. However, if the government does not deem the issue as problematic, it often de-legitimizes it. If the later occurs, the claims-makers will have to re-construct their claims and put forth another attempt, or accept defeat (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011).

Additionally, the actual claims are not examined, rather how well government officials are at addressing the issue will be assessed. Claims-makers will examine the situation to make sure the policies are implemented appropriately and within an acceptable timeframe. If the claim-makers believe the government is not doing what it set out to in addressing the issue, they will hold the officials accountable. Additionally, the claims-makers will also evaluate how well the policies address and help solve the issue (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011).

Finally, when the previous initiatives have failed, alternative measures will be sought. If the system is failing to address the issue, the claims-makers can turn towards more untraditional solutions for their problems. For instance, a community of minorities who feel they lack police protection may form their own vigilante group (Spector & Kitsuse, 2011).

#### 1.4.3 Drugs (crack-cocaine) as a Social Problem

To help illustrate the way in which social problems theory can be mobilized in the field of drug policy, the “crack epidemic” of the late 1980s in the United States will be presented. During the late 1980s, political rhetoric and news outlets framed the use of crack as an epidemic, claiming the lives of Americans from all social classes and from all life-stages (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). This drug was framed as instantaneously addictive and available to anyone, anywhere. Despite these claims, studies and research concluded that crack use was not at all common and only frequently used amongst a small percentage of America’s most marginalized and disenfranchised populations (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). In addition, crack and cocaine are the same substance, however crack is a form of cocaine that was cheaper to purchase; it is cooked into small pebbles and then smoked. Since this substance was a cheaper alternative to cocaine, it was more easily affordable for people from underprivileged backgrounds. Despite these facts, claims-makers, who in this scenario were the DEA with the media trying to get attention from

the politicians for more resources to fight drugs, were successful in persuading their targeted audience, the American public, that crack was indeed a pressing social issue (Best, 1995).

Due to their successful connection with the media, DEA had the perfect platform to have their claims heard and the politicians were forced to show that they were not neglecting the problem. The crack scare in the United States received support from both political parties, even though the Republican Party was in power at the time (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). This helped add to the issue's legitimacy. Rhetoric such as the "war on drugs", "instant and total addiction", and "plague" were used as language claims to gain support to have this issue be addressed (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). Additionally, live media coverage and documentaries such as "48 hours on crack street," provided visual aids to these claims, emphasizing a realness and relevance to the issue among everyday Americans (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). Once DEA and the American mass media could turn crack use into an epidemic, legislative changes were made, which again further increased the legitimacy of this issue.

Penalties pertaining to crack use were increased severely, even for occasional users. Because of the crack scare, American drug legislation was amended to increase mandatory minimum sentences for possession of crack. Any individual who was in possession of five grams of crack could face a five-year mandatory minimum sentence, whereas an individual in possession of 500 grams of powdered cocaine could face the same sentence (Davis, 2011). The message that was sent to the larger audience through these legislative amendments was that crack was much more dangerous than cocaine, even though they are identical chemical substances (Davis, 2011). Aside from these punitive measures, a National Drug Strategy was created that was based on a zero-tolerance approach. More powers were granted to the Drug Enforcement

Agency (DEA), as well as more financial resources (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). Crack and drugs in general became the United States' enemy number one at this point in time.

One of the most obvious consequence of this “War on Drugs”, that stemmed from the crack scare, was that the most marginalized in American society were heavily targeted by these tough on crime policies, which led to the over-representation of minorities in the criminal justice system. Based on this classic case study, although social problems may or may not be “real or true”, through the claims making process, they can become perceived as real among the audience members and as such can result in severe consequences.

#### 1.4.4 How Social Problems Intersect with Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

As previously stated, phenomenology is a philosophy that examines individual consciousness or perception and how this interacts with the natural world, objects and other human beings.

However, as a philosophy, it is highly speculative and not fully applicable to social science research. Because this research project examines drug law enforcement *perceptions* on their role, illegal drug use, and the illegal drug market. I was quite limited in what theory could be applied to this type of work. Phenomenology is the only philosophical approach that examines the process behind individual perception and how it is created and how it influences one's reality.

Merleau-Ponty argues that social and cultural phenomena and the meanings it creates transcend the individual because a common world is shared. This part of Merleau-Ponty's work, is essentially in how this philosophical framework will be mobilized with social problems theory to help guide this project. Upon the examination of phenomenology, it seems that individuals create meaning and perceptions through their interaction with the world and all it encompasses for themselves. However, there are larger factors, such as cultural, social context, and time period that have a strong influence in these generated meanings and perceptions. This is often out of the

individual's control. Therefore, the experiences/interactions of each individual participant under this research project will influence their perception of illegal drugs and their roles as narcotic squad officers for themselves. However, larger structural factors can also influence their perceptions.

The construction of social problems is a theoretical framework that is commonly used in social science research, and has been often used to examine drug scares. As seen through the case study provided by Reinerman and Levine (1995), public perceptions of drug use as dangerous, immoral, and something that should be prohibited, has been framed through the interactive process of claims making. As stated by Spector and Kitsuse (2011), social problems theory is not interested in whether the claims made are true or false, but rather in the process in which social problems come to be. The process of transforming illicit drugs into a wide-spread social problem has real implications as seen through the case study presented. This social problem affected the perceptions of the American public and as such could also influence the perceptions of narcotic squad officers as well because they have identities outside of their official role. As a result, they are also subject to being influenced by larger social and cultural factors. This is where social problems theory and phenomenology can be brought together to help understand the perception of police officers regarding their role under prohibition and the impact of personal use.

Based on Merleau-Ponty's argument, if social and cultural factors can transcend individual perception, it simply means that social and cultural factors can have an influence on individual perceptions, on an individual's experience within a common world. The construction of social problems, if successful in their claims-making stages, can then be considered a cultural and social phenomenon. This is made evident through the 1980s crack scare, where an overall

population truly feared crack use, where the DEA turned it into a pressing political issue, and where severe legislative changes were made, all to address this “social problem”. Social problems can then influence individual perceptions as seen through Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of phenomenology. Therefore, social problems theory can be linked to this research project that examines individual perceptions.

The following chapter will examine the methodological approach undertaken for this research project and the rationale behind this approach. A description of the methodological process – which includes the data collection, recruitment process, interview process, and analyzing strategy - will also be presented. Finally, this subsequent chapter will conclude by providing and examining several methodological limitations that need to be addressed for this project as well as its evaluation criteria.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mind-altering experiences have always been an intriguing part of life for many individuals. As people, we need intoxicants in our lives to socialize, to adapt to our environment, to self-medicate, etc. Whether mind-altering substances are being used for social or recreational reasons or to help deal with physical and emotional pains, drugs have always been and will continue to play a powerful role in society (Lloyd, 2013). Individuals engaged in illegal drug use have often been portrayed as “folk devils” over the past century. Illegal drug use has been construed as a moral transgression, framed as dangerous to one’s health due to its psychoactive components, which enables one to lose self-control, and as highly criminogenic because it is culturally perceived as a practice that allows one to turn towards any form of crime to finance personal use. Society’s fear surrounding illegal drugs has been a very complex debate due to the lack of knowledge surrounding effects of drug use and why individuals engage in this behaviour (Lloyd, 2013).

There have been many illegal drug panics that have been spearheaded by the media. The media turns several worst cases scenarios into common, everyday occurrences to do sensationalist news. Nonetheless, the media does not create this fear out of thin air. It legitimizes and amplifies the fear that has already been ingrained towards illegal substances among the masses by authority figures. This political discourse makes this fear more prominent and justified by the population. Lloyd (2013) explains that there are two reasons promoted to accentuate this fear: (1) these substances are prohibited due to their inherent danger; and (2) using illegal drugs is losing one’s self control. The Christian roots of the Western World have embedded an emphasis on self-control, particularly as part of the Protestant’s beliefs. These fears help to justify the necessity of prohibition and the repression of illegal drug users. Because of

prohibition and this repression being put into action, narcotics squad officers became the actors at the forefront of the illegal drug issue.

Emerging from the prohibitionist movement promoting these fears on illegal drugs, a “War on Drugs” has been declared by President Richard Nixon in September 1969 (Youngers, 2014), because it was a way to get re-elected for a second mandate (Youngers, 2014). One would assume that this larger political rhetoric on illegal drugs would also shape the ideology encompassing drug enforcement agencies and by extension the officers themselves. To explore the literature on this issue, the initial section of the literature review will examine how illegal drugs became viewed as problematic, particularly through different “drug panics” that have emerged over time, reinforcing the necessity for the government to react in accordance by reinforcing sanctions and resources to the police. Subsequently, other perceptions on the way to diminish the “drug problem” will be explained and the capacity to respond by using health resources. The third section will focus more specifically on existing literature on drug enforcement perceptions on prohibition and drug issues.

## 2.1 Drug Prohibitionist Rhetoric

The drug prohibitionist rhetoric is louder when a moral panic on drugs is at stake.

A moral panic happens when socially established common morals or values are violated (Young, 2008). It often involves stereotypical terms related to the issue at hand and involves different moral entrepreneurs, the mass media, scientific experts, and can mobilise different control agencies. Through a moral panic, a behavior and the segment of society often involved in that behavior are “othered” and become demonized throughout the process (Young, 2008).

Moral panics surrounding Chinese opium dens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were used politically by the United States to answer to an economic and political agenda that led to the international prohibition of non-medical use of opioids.

### The beginning of prohibition

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in United States, recreational drug use started to be constructed as an immoral and dangerous practice and so did alcohol and the non-medical use of opioids. Both the fight against alcohol and the fight against the non-medical use of opium were tied to the discourse of the protection of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant “civilization” (Carstairs, 2006). The result of the fight against alcohol was a country-wide prohibition that lasted 13 years (1920-1933) (Carstairs, 2006). The second fight against the non-medical use of opium was tied to racism against Chinese people in America and resulted in the International prohibition of non-medical use of opioids - this international prohibition still exists today. Therefore, I will center my focus on the second fight on the non-medical use of opium. The racism culminates in abuse and violence against Chinese people and the reduction of their rights. China made a commercial boycott of the United States, because the American government was doing nothing to counter this issue. To end this boycott, the United States initiated International conferences for the prohibition of the non-medical use of opioids. China was flooded by British opium at time and as such was please to dispose of this substance. Additionally, to close opium dens would please the population and reduce the violence and abuse against Chinese people in America (Windle, 2013).

Chinese men also came to Canada to work on the Trans-Canadian railroad and the drug panic mirrored the one in United States. When the construction of the Trans-Canadian railroad was completed, this population regrouped in “Chinatown”, where among other means of

survival, they opened opium dens. This period was also during one of the first big strikes in the industry to improve workers conditions. The industrials, among others, replaced the workers during the strikes initiated by the Chinese population. The “immoral” habit of smoking opium in the den, particularly by white women, and the role Chinese people played during these strikes, fed into a growing anti-Chinese sentiment among the wider Canadian population (Windle, 2013). To justify reducing the rights and even deport these workers, their “immoral” use of opium and the “contamination” of white people with this habit, especially white women, became a scapegoat in justifying these measures (Carstairs, 2006).

In Vancouver, British Columbia, a big demonstration in September 1907 against the Asian population turned into a pillage of the city’s Chinatown. Prime Minister Laurier wanted to find a solution to avoid a commercial boycott from China like the United States. Prime Minister Laurier had to find a salutation to compensate the Chinese without alienating the larger population, especially worker unions. The solution came from Chinese students during the investigation conducted by Mackenzie King, deputy Minister of Labor. They explained to Mackenzie King that the United States was on their way in prohibiting internationally the non-medical use of opioids to satisfy China, who wanted to counter British opium, in hope that it would end the commercial boycott. This prohibition of opium also permitted to the closing of opium dens, satisfied the larger population, and helped the government in reducing the abuse against the Chinese population. King recommend in a report to prohibit the non-medical use of opioids, saying that it was against Canadian and Christian values, but also explaining prohibition as an international movement. Following this report, prohibition was quickly put into place. In 1908, the first legislation prohibiting the non-medical use of opioids was implemented. In the

following years, Canada sided with United States to expand the prohibition to other non-medical use of drugs, and harden the repressive means to fight this practice (Solomon & Green, 1982).

During this moral panic, language claims surrounding this substance were that through its use it led to unproductive and immoral behaviors, such as leading women towards prostitution and transforming working men lazy. Additionally, those who used this substance, whether they were Canadian born or Chinese migrants, were “othered” and stigmatized within the community. One of the arguments made by William Mackenzie King in his report recommending the prohibition of non-medical use of opioids is that a Christian nation should set an example on the international stage (Solomon & Green, 1982). This argument implies that engaging in non-medical use of opium is wrong because it is immoral, comforting the population in his racism against Chinese people, and the necessity to act against their contamination of our moral Christian values. As opium dens were the symbol of their vice, acting to close them was seen as acting against this contamination.

### Crack-cocaine and crack babies

During the 1980s, crack became the new drug at the center of an emerging social problem, mostly in the United States, while also having repercussions in Canada. The discourse surrounding crack-cocaine was that it was instantaneously addictive and for this reason, causes multiple damages (Orcutt & Turner, 1993, p. 192). Among these damages was widespread concern over “crack babies”. Media discourse was that women who used crack-cocaine during their pregnancy would heavily affect the child’s cognitive and physical abilities; as a result, it would create a great burden on the welfare system with dysfunctional individuals for life (Reinarman & Levine, 2004). Based on longitudinal data gathered by researchers on several individuals labelled as “crack babies”, the foreseen negative effects were non-existent once they

reached late adolescence (Reinarman & Levine, 2004). However, resulting from this moral panic about the “crack epidemic”, United States legislation increased the mandatory minimum sentence for possession of crack cocaine. An individual in the possession of five grams of crack-cocaine was subjected to a five-year minimum sentence compared to an individual in possession of five hundred grams of powdered cocaine (chemically identical substances) for the same five-year minimum sentence (Davis, 2011). This difference between sentences for crack and cocaine was revoked by president Obama in 2010; considering that it was the same drug, this difference was seen as discriminating against individuals of low socio-economic status who were often African Americans, contributing to their over-representation in prison (Davis, 2011).

It was argued by moral entrepreneurs and control agencies that crack-cocaine use was instantaneously addictive and was being used by all segments of society. Addiction to crack-cocaine, for this reason, will cause a severe strain on the welfare system because individuals become trapped and controlled by this addiction, are destined to a life of poverty and criminogenic behavior (Lloyd, 2013). Subsequently, individuals engaged in this type of behavior were “othered” and marginalized in society. They were also negligent and criminogenic, particularly women because of the possible consequence of “crack babies

### Ecstasy

In many cases, youth are at the forefront of moral panics. In western society, there is a view towards youth as being innocent, vulnerable, and the future of society. As a result, when youth are put in danger or are behaving contrary to common shared values and social norms, it causes fear among audience members. Stories or panics involving youth, because of the abovementioned factors, are deemed newsworthy (Jewkes, 2004).

By the 1990s, similar anti-drug discourse seen through the previous panics was used towards a new popular drug on the market, ecstasy. Ecstasy, a synthetic drug, was heavily associated with raves, an emerging deviant subculture during this period. Due to media amplification of some ecstasy related deaths, this substance became part of a widespread drug crisis (Tanner, 2015). Ecstasy was framed as a very popular and dangerous substance used among youth around the world (Hier, 2002). Due to the popularity of this drug at the time and the death related incidents, ecstasy became the new drug spearheading a moral panic. Political reactions towards this drug varied. In Canada, more specifically in Toronto, the local government banned raves on government property. This decision moved these activities towards more hazardous “underground” venues, as a result (Tanner, 2015). During this time, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien weighed in on the rave and ecstasy panic, stating that raves are “threatening the very fabric of Canadian life” and further stated that ecstasy abuse could easily become an epidemic (Hier, 2002). Additionally, ecstasy was marketed as something never seen before on the drug scene. Ecstasy pills were packaged in a very appealing way (Hier, 2002). Pills were often found in different colours with several different designs, such as a happy face. This made the drug look non-threatening for individuals tempted to try this substance. As a result, this created more of a fear among the public because they believed that individuals, often youth, who would not typically engage in drug use behavior, will be more willing to experiment (Hier, 2002).

### Methamphetamine

In more recent years, methamphetamine became the target of a new moral panic, using the same anti-drug discourse as seen through crack and ecstasy panics. Associated with methamphetamine use came the emphasis on the “meth mouth”. Educational and media ridden campaigns displayed pictures of deteriorating mouths as a result of methamphetamine use. According to Linneman

and Wall (2013), the projection of abject bodies using the meth mouth, portrays the message that this is the result of minimal methamphetamine use and further questions why respectable people would do such a thing to themselves. People using meth portrayed in the media campaigns were labelled as “white trash” and framed as individuals rejecting their white hegemony. Meth users are defiling their white bodies and rejecting their privilege through their drug use (Linneman and Wall, 2013).

Similar rhetoric surrounding this new substance was used as the opium and crack-cocaine panic, which argued drug use rendering individuals useless to society because they have been enslaved by their addiction. This can be seen by the portrayal of methamphetamine user as “white trash”. According to Linneman and Wall (2013), white middle class individuals are often privileged in life and as such as expected to fulfill a productive and successful life according to neoliberalism. However, engaging in this type of drug use will lead to addiction and once again will place a strain on the social system, as previously seen.

To summarize this initial section of the literature review, a commonality is that the language used in drug related moral panics tends to stay consistent over time, the material used to project a panic is recycled from previous drug “problems.” Based on the prohibitionist rhetoric, illegal drugs are harmful and are criminogenic. At the forefront of each drug epidemic there is a drug portrayed as dangerous in a way that people have never been seen before. Moreover, due to the amplification of specific disastrous events, such as the deaths due to ecstasy use, makes such rare events seem much more common than they might be. Political involvement as well as its portrayal by the media tends to distort the image that is created. In consequence of these moral outbreaks, which foster public opinion, prohibitionist drug strategies

have come to dominate and have real human implications that will be explored in the following section.

## 2.2 Consequences of the Prohibitionist Rhetoric

Outlawing drug use has caused increased engagement in risk behavior among illegal drug users, especially problematic drug users (Debeck & *al.*, 2010). Individuals who engage in illegal drug use, especially by injection, are at risk of contracting or spreading serious infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. Often, many intravenous drug users (IDUs) share needles among one another, allowing for the transmission of blood borne diseases. However, this is not the only health related risk faced by IDUs. Reusing needles with debris and using contaminated water to dilute the substances can lead to skin infections such as septicemia, the creation of abscesses, and the collapsing of veins (Strike, 2006). In addition, the risk of overdose, especially of fatal overdose, is quite common among PDUs due to the unsafe practices of using drugs undertaken to avoid detection (Strike, 2006). For instance, many IDUs often inject too fast, without properly measuring their dose to avoid law enforcement detection, which can lead to overdose. Due to the prohibitionist rhetoric, which demonizes illegal drug use, many individuals, especially IDUs, often engage in risky drug consumption behaviour to avoid stigmatization as well as prosecution. For instance, these individuals consume their drugs in private, which increases the chances of fatal overdose and take their drugs too fast and with contaminated paraphilia to avoid detection and judgement.

Due to these pressing public health concerns that emerge with illegal drug use, the notion of harm reduction has become quite prominent amongst non-for-profit-organizations (NGOs) and the health care community. Harm reduction, in the sense of harms caused by illegal drug consumption, is trying to reduce health and safety risks associated with this stigmatized

practice (Inciardi, 1999). Harm reduction is not a policy model itself; however, it is a guiding principle for regulation models that differ from prohibition (Babor, 2009). Under a prohibitionist framework, it is quite difficult to acquire political support from all levels of government because both notions heavily contradict one another (Debeck & *al.*, 2010). Many political figures have expressed their fears of allowing harm reduction initiatives because it would undermine the zero-tolerance policies implemented and do not wish to be accused of condoning drug use.

Regarding harm reduction initiatives, the most common programs include safe injection sites, needle exchanges, access to safer crack-cocaine paraphernalia, and methadone maintenance programs (Debeck & *al.*, 2010). Safe injection sites are non-stigmatizing and safe environments for IDUs to inject already purchased drugs. These facilities provide safe and clean equipment to each individual, before injecting their drug of choice in the presence of a health care professional (Jozaghi, 2012). In Canada, the largest success story surrounding drug harm reduction is InSite, located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Studies have shown that Vancouver's InSite has aided an estimate of 2 000 000 IDU since opening its doors in 2003 (Fischer & *al.*, 2016). The opening of this facility, however, did not go unopposed. The Harper conservative government was strictly opposed to this initiative. In 2011, after a Supreme Court ruling, the InSite facility was exempt from The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, Canada's drug policy, allowing the facility to continue providing their services on the condition that extensive research was to be conducted to measure its effects (Debeck & *al.*, 2010). The Supreme Court argued that not allowing InSite to be exempt from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act would be a violation of the Charter of Rights because this facility offers a healthcare service to IDUs (Debeck & *al.*, 2010). In addition, InSite was recently renewed for four years as of March 2016. Despite providing a safe and stigma free environment for IDUs,

safe injection sites also allow for a first point of contact with the welfare system. Addiction services, housing services, and mental health services, among others, are often offered at these facilities in a non-coercive fashion (Jozaghi, 2012). Despite InSite's success, there has been some difficulty in acquiring support for other safe injection sites across Canada. There has been increased activism to open such facilities in areas such as Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. However, they have met severe political opposition from the municipal level (Fischer & *al.*, 2016). But since the opioid crisis, the Canadian public as well as political figures have been keener on opening safe injection and other harm reduction sites. Throughout 2017, many sites have been approved across major Canadian cities, including Ottawa.

In addition to safe injection sites as a harm reduction initiative, there are needle exchanges, which are often comprised of volunteers roaming high risk IDU areas or a facility that provides individuals with clean needles and sometimes other drug paraphernalia in exchange for used needles and or tools (Jozaghi, 2012).

Methadone maintenance programs, which have only appeared in Canada during the 1990s, are provided by selected pharmacies allowing IDUs the opportunity to intake daily oral doses of methadone, an opioid substitute used to wean individuals off drugs or to help others maintain their addiction in a controlled and safer fashion (Fischer & *al.*, 2016). Methadone has been proven to prevent opioid withdrawal and the euphoria that can be produced, especially through heroin use. As a result, it becomes easier for the individual to reduce opioid consumption and in some cases completely cease consumption (Kerr & *al.*, 2007).

Although harm reduction strategies have been successful in reducing disease and fatal overdose, several scholars have highlighted issues with several initiatives that have been implemented that should be considered to help improve these services. McLean (2013) argues

that safe injection facilities and needle exchanges should not be “over-institutionalized” in order to increase the stigma-free environment that must be associated with these programs. In order to attract individuals, the facility should provide a non-judgmental atmosphere and be presented as warm and inviting. In McLean’s study, the Bronx NY needle exchange facility took a more institutionalized form to receive more funding (McLean, 2013). In many instances, to receive funding, one must be able to measure the outcomes of the service provided. As a result, the Bronx needle exchange took on a more clinical physical environment, “couches and chairs were replaced with plexiglass windows,” and the relationships between staff and clients became distant overtime (McLean, 2013). Another concern highlighted is in relation to needle exchange programs and the need to bring used needles as an exchange for new ones. As simple as this may seem, it is important to allow individuals to procure clean needles without the need to dispose of older ones because it is a basic service that should be provided to those that need it (Strike & *al.*, 2006). In addition, needle exchange facilities and safe injection sites have fixed hours. However, for IDUs with serious addiction issues, they may need to take a dose during closed hours (Strike & *al.*, 2006). It has been recommended by many clients that needle exchanges and safe injection sites should be open on a 24-hour basis (Strike & *al.*, 2006).

One final and more abstract concern highlighted by Bourgois (2000) is the use of methadone treatment as a form of social control. Methadone and heroin are extremely similar in their chemical composition; they are practically the same substance. However, it is more socially acceptable to use methadone through a maintenance program than it is to use heroin. Methadone programs are often based on a privilege system, according to Bourgois, only given to those responsible enough to arrive sober for their dose, need to arrive during a specific time frame, and must take the substance in front of a clinician. Bourgois further argues that being a methadone

addict is more socially acceptable than being a heroin addict because individuals who partake in these programs are seen to be in a better state of mind and show motivation, which is heavily valued in Western societies.

What can be drawn from this section on the consequences of the prohibitionist rhetoric is that this zero-tolerance based model is causing serious harm from a public health perspective. Outlawing drugs promotes risk behavior among those who partake in drug use. Because of this engagement in risk behavior, users are more prone to contracting infectious diseases and having a fatal overdose. Despite this legislative drug model, public health professionals, academics, and non-for-profit organizations have taken a vested interest in harm reduction strategies and have pushed for more safe injection sites, needle exchanges, and for methadone clinics. Harm reduction and the prohibitionist framework stem from two opposing ideologies; therefore, it is difficult to implement one without contradicting the other.

Prohibition is not the only drug model available, other, less punitive models do exist and which could be considered as an alternative option for Canada. Decriminalization of simple possession (without the intent of traffic) and legalization are two distinct models that are becoming more acceptable in our current society (Cabral, 2017). The following section will explore drug prohibition in more depth and will also provide an examination of drug decriminalization and legalization.

### 2.3 Drug Policy Models

This section will explore the three main drug policy models: prohibition, decriminalization, and legalization to simply provide a contextual overview. As previously stated, drug prohibition has been the dominant model for dealing with the illegal drug issue; however, several European and Latino American countries have undertaken a form of decriminalization model of simple

possession. Legalization, on the other side of the spectrum, has only been applied to cannabis and a true legalization system where all illegal substances become regulated has yet to come into fruition. This section will explore the political standpoint of each legislative model and its technical implications. Each section will also explore the benefits and limitations of the presented framework. Since this research study is focusing on narcotic squad officers' perceptions on their role and illegal drug use, a thorough understanding of this model but also its alternatives is necessary. Additionally, with cannabis legalization under way in Canada, an examination of the legalization framework is also crucial. Decriminalization of simple possession will be examined because there is possibility that some participants will make references to some aspects found within this model, since there will be discussions surrounding benefit and limitations of Canadian drug legislation.

### 2.3.1 Prohibition

Prohibition is defined as the criminalization of possession/use, manufacturing, and sale of substances deemed illegal through national (domestic) criminal laws. In Canada, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) is the current piece of legislation guiding Canadian drug policy. These outlawed substances include the non-medical uses of opiates, plant based drugs such as cannabis, and synthetic drugs which includes amphetamines, benzodiazepines, LSD, and barbiturates among others. Through prohibitionist policies, the goal is to generally deter individual users and traffickers through the threat of criminal sanctions to eliminate illicit drugs (Nadelmann, 1990). Individuals who are under the possession or manufacture and or sell illicit substances will be either fined or incapacitated depending on the laws enacted in a specific country. Alongside these criminalized measures, the rehabilitation of drug users with the overall goal of having them abstain from use is another goal found under a prohibitionist framework but

not inclusive (Babor, 2010). Treatment of drug addiction is heavily emphasized and even coerced in some cases. This framework is the most dominant; most of the countries have ratified the three UN Conventions on drugs. Until the Obama presidency, the United States, who initiated the international prohibition of certain non-medical drugs have been at the forefront of prohibition, Canada being not too far behind.

Despite the political popularity of drug prohibition and its general acceptance among the masses, due to illegal drugs being construed as a social problem, there is a severe lack of empirical evidence that proves prohibition to be successful in dealing with the drug issue. The most commonly argued consequences of drug prohibition are the following: (1) it encourages risk behavior due to stigmatization and (2) creates a lucrative black market.

The first issue is that the political anti-drug rhetoric has made room for the stigmatization of illegal drug users, often preventing safe use and impeding individual recovery and reintegration. According to a study exploring public perceptions on illegal drug use and addiction, victim blaming is heavily present (Lloyd, 2013). The public tends to view illegal drug users as individuals making wrong life choices, leading them down the path to drug addiction. In many instances, non-illegal drug users associate drug addiction with intravenous use, which often generates feelings of disgust (Lloyd, 2013, p. 92). In addition, due to the lack of knowledge on the effects of illegal psychoactive substances and on addiction, fear has been embedded in public perceptions of illegal drugs and the prohibitionist stance often adopted in and of itself only adds to this fear and perceptions of illegal drugs as more dangerous.

Irvin Goffman's notion of stigma, found within the larger framework of symbolic interactionism can be applied to these perceptions. Individuals create meaning and construct the "self" through social interactions. The interactions between problematic users of illegal drugs

and non-users can result in shaping illegal drug user's views of themselves in the negative way others view them (Lloyd, 2013). As a result, their primary identity is that of an addict, impeding the right mind set for recovery. A final point concluded by this study is that stigmatization does not allow for reintegration into society because it is very difficult for recovering drug addicts to find employment, which leads to financial stability, allowing one to live a more conventional lifestyle (Fraser & More, 2008). Stigmatization does not only create a self-fulfilling prophecy, it also promotes risky drug consumption, as has already been explored in the section on harm reduction. In summation, individuals engage in dangerous methods to consume drugs in hopes of avoiding detection, in fear of facing a criminal sanction (Babor, 2009).

The second issue being raised is that due to the continual demand for illegal substances, a lucrative market has been created to offer these products to willing consumers (Haden, 2006). The heads of these illegal markets are powerful and inside institutions, businesses, and bringing corruption. More at the street level, the fight between gangs for territory can threaten citizens. The way to deal with debts can also be violent between the actors of this market.

Illegal substances found at the street level can be extremely harmful. In many instances, the cheaper, street level drugs, often purchased by the more marginalized users, can be tainted with dangerous substance. The Fentanyl issue is an example of this. This substance is often used in a patch form for individuals who suffer severe chronic pain, however, can be very dangerous if misused (Collier, 2013). Furthermore, the Fentanyl being produced for illegal markets is done without the necessary quality requirements and there is lack in medical follow up to take this substance properly (Collier, 2013). The dosage that can kill an individual is in micrograms, making illegal use extremely dangerous.

### 2.3.2 Canada's Drug Strategy

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canada has always taken a prohibitionist stance. Canada's first piece of drug legislation was created in 1908, the Sale of Opium Act, which condoned the manufacturing and sale of opium due to the fear of an economic threat stemming from the Asian immigrant population. The Act was unchallenged until the 1950s, when illegal drug use became more of a public health concern among health care professionals (John Howard Society, 2003). Addiction became less associated with criminality and became viewed as a disease in need of special treatment. Because of this climate, the 1955 Senate Special Committee on the Traffic of Narcotic Drugs in Canada took place, consulting experts across the country.

By 1996, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act became in full effect and continues today as Canada's policy. This Act encompasses, possession, trafficking for the purpose of, exporting for the purpose of, and production (Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, 1996). Substances criminalized under this Act are divided in 9 different annexes. These annexes or Schedules adhere to the UN Convention against Psychotropic Substances (1971). Nonetheless, several amendments were made to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in respect to The Safe Streets and Communities Act (Bill C-10) of 2010, creating a shift to a more punitive approach towards drug policy. A key amendment from this Bill is the administration of mandatory minimum sentencing for several drug offences.

In 2007, under the Harper Conservative government, a new Canadian drug strategy was put into place, which became more punitive in nature. Before this new punitive turn was undertaken, Health Canada was the agency who controlled the Canadian drug strategy, taking a harm reduction and public health approach to the issue. However, in 2007, the Department of Justice became responsible for the implementation of Canada's drug policy, making it more of a

criminal justice issue (Fischer & *al.*, 2016). The new approach takes on a zero-tolerance and a general deterrence based approach to drug prevention, allowing no room for harm reduction based education (Fischer & *al.*, 2016). Preventing youth illegal drug consumption has always and continues to be of high importance from a government standpoint, however, the prevention programming solely focuses on how to deter illegal drug use and the severe physical and psychological harms it can cause, which includes addiction and overdose (National Drug Strategy Evaluation, March 31, 2016).

Despite this strong prohibitionist stance Canada has been undertaking towards its drug policy, the issue is slowly changing due to the turn in government during the fall of 2015. The current Liberal government run by Justin Trudeau has made the legalization and regulation of the sale and use of cannabis across Canada a key priority. The *Cannabis Act* (2017) has been passed by Cabinet and the legalization of cannabis is planned on coming into effect during the summer of 2018. Examining the evidence-based research on drug policy, many scholars on this issue would argue that Canada is currently taking a step in the right direction because the decriminalization of simple possession is being considered and more harm reduction initiatives are being implemented.

### 2.3.3 Decriminalization of simple possession

Drug decriminalization of simple possession is an action that can be undertaken by a government to reduce the repression of illegal drug users and to enlarge health care for the problematic use of these drugs. Illegal drug use is seen as more of a health and public safety issue, rather than a criminal offence. This type of framework acknowledges the shortcomings of prohibition and takes a more medicalized and less stigmatizing approach. The overarching theme of harm reduction heavily influences decriminalization policies of simple possession and it is a national

decision because UN Conventions permit this decriminalisation of simple possession (Beusekom & al., 2002).

While decriminalization of simple possession means that there will be no criminal law sanctions imposed on the users, Husak (2003) argues that there should be no alternative sanctions imposed, contrary to the choice made by most of the countries who decriminalised simple possession (Cabral, 2017). In other words, fines cannot be imposed and treatment cannot be coerced, there should be no consequences for the individual user because it is a health issue and not one that should be dealt with by the criminal justice system. Despite many advantages due to decriminalization such as more possibilities to decrease infectious diseases, stigmatization, and the increase in drug treatment (it's not automatic) (Beauchesne, 2018), it does not reduce the presence and power of the illegal market. More health care, when it is really integrated in the policy of decriminalisation of simple possession, can be successful, like shown in the Portuguese model that was implemented in 2001.

The Portuguese decriminalization drug strategy was guided by the following thirteen principles that are based on humanism and pragmatism (Beusekom, 2002):

1. Reinforce international cooperation surrounding the drug issue.
2. Decriminalization of drug use, making drug use no longer a criminal offence but an administrative one.
3. Heavy focus on drug prevention rather than reaction.
4. Improve the responses of healthcare workers for those who use/abuse drugs.
5. Improve harm reduction strategies, mostly through the emphasis on needle/syringe exchanges and methadone maintenance programs.
6. Encourage the reintegration of drug addicts into society.

7. Extension of harm reduction into prisons and the availability of rehabilitative programs.
8. Offer treatment as an alternative to incarceration.
9. Increase education and research on drug addiction and improve training for those who work in the field of drugs.
10. Establish better evaluation criteria for private and public drug initiatives.
11. Simplified interdepartmental political model for the development of the drug strategy.
12. Work on combatting drug trafficking and money laundering to improve communication between national and international authorities.
13. Implementation of a strategy to increase public investment to help with the program implementation.

Personal use, in this policy, is the amount of substance an average person would use for a period of 10 days. More than this amount is considered for the purpose of trafficking, which results in a criminal sanction (Goncalves & *al.*, 2015). For individuals caught for personal use, they are sent to the Commission for the Dissuasion of Drug Use for a hearing within the first 72 hours since receiving a citation. The Commission is comprised of individuals from the health, legal, and social sector and their objective is to conclude whether the individual before them has substance addiction or their use is non-problematic (Hughes & Stevens, 2010). Based on the Commission's conclusion, individuals with non-problematic drug use are often dismissed, and in some instances fines are issued. For individuals who are deemed as suffering from addiction, treatment is offered to the individual on a voluntary basis. If the individual refuses to comply with treatment, fines are sometimes issued. In the instance of a worst case scenario, where the individual is unable to complete treatment and there have been many issues along the way to

recovery, the individual may have travel restrictions imposed on them, be forced to avoid certain sectors of their community, and certain individuals (Cabral, 2017).

Several changes in law enforcement resulted due to this shift in drug legislation. The contact of law enforcement with the illegal drug users is to bring the person to the Commission of Dissuasion. For this reason, some law enforcement officers are more on the lookout for drug users because they believe the new system is more beneficial for them – taking on a more harm reduction role. Other law enforcement officials believe that issuing citations for use is a waste of time and resources and let many incidents pass because they view their role in assessing this issue as having minimal effects (Goncalves & *al.*, 2015).

According to Felix & *al.* (2017), it is difficult to measure whether the decriminalization of simple possession leads to an increase in drug use, especially its impact in the illegal drug market. Based on their quantitative study that examines drug prices in Portugal post-decriminalization, the new legislative framework did not decrease drug prices. In most cases, drug prices stayed constant or increased slightly (Felix & *al.*, 2017). The results of this study contrast with the popular belief that a decriminalization of simple possession model will decrease drug prices and as a result increase drug use and dependency (Felix & *al.*, 2017). Regarding overdoses and cases of infectious disease, including HIV/AIDS, the rates have decreased since the implementation of this legal framework (Cabral, 2017). Portugal has now become the country with the lowest rate of fatal drug overdose in all European Union countries (Cabral, 2017).

#### 2.3.4 Legalization

A drug legalization model is when law pertaining to the prohibition of substances are abolished and drugs are regulated. This model does not exist presently. However, the legalization of

cannabis was implemented in Uruguay in 2013 and in the following years, eight American states implemented this legalization. Canada is currently taking the same direction and is in the midst of cannabis legalization.

According to Crick (2012), legalization will take power and financial resources away from the illegal drug market. The money generated could be allocated towards beneficial programs such as treatment and other harm reduction initiatives. In addition, the substances themselves under a regulatory can be of higher and safer quality in controlled doses and this helps decrease the chances of fatal and non-fatal overdose among users (Inciardi, 1999).

Due to the engrained views of drugs being dangerous and criminogenic through the century long discourse surrounding drug related moral panics and the way many states have politically framed the drug issue, the idea of a true legalization model leaves many with feelings of complete opposition. Arguments often made against drug legalization is that it will heavily increase drug use, especially among youth, due to the belief that it will be more available with very little legal repercussion for use (Inciardi, 1999). Moreover, along with the idea of increased drug use, there is a fear that it will strain the welfare system by increasing the number of socially unproductive individuals because of problematic drug use. Therefore, having these views entrenched within society, does not make it easy to convince the public otherwise. It is not necessarily the substances themselves that are dangerous but rather that there are high-risk consumption practices that are often undertaken – as seen in the discussion on stigmatization and the need for harm reduction. In addition, due to the public resistance towards a legalization regime due to their socially embedded fear of illegal substances, it is very difficult for the public to understand and accept the fact that if illegal substances were sold on a regulated market, there would be better quality control (Rolles, 2009).

## 2.4 Law Enforcement Role in drug squad & Perceptions

Narcotic squad officers' roles are catered specifically to the fight against the illegal drug market. Common preconceptions about these officers are that they hold a tough on crime, zero-tolerance attitude and especially among the American officers with corrupt tactics to acquire arrest quotas for their own personal agendas. Although their specific role in the police is to enforce drug laws, one cannot assume that all of them fully agree about the necessity to prohibit certain drugs because there are particularly dangerous, or about the efficacy of prohibition to diminish health problems with these drugs. For instance, there is an organization of retired police officers called law enforcement against prohibition "LEAP" who argue for a change in drug laws and do not believe prohibitionist enforcement methods to be at all effective (Silverberg, 2005). Some members of the organization believe in drug decriminalization, while others believe legalization to be the best legislative framework to deal with the drug issue (Silverberg, 2005). Nonetheless, as a whole, there is very little literature that enquires police perceptions on these matters and none specific to the narcotic drugs officers.

It is quite evident that the primary role of narcotic squad officers is to specifically enforce current drug laws within a country. These officers use confidential informants to help build cases against drug traffickers, producers, and even criminal organizations and networks (Lee, 2003). Undercover operations can also be used to infiltrate criminal groups during drug investigations (Mazerolle & *al.*, 2007). Their role gives them a particular perspective on the illegal market, its violence, but also on the fact that whatever they do, illegal drugs continue to flourish in the illegal market and is rarely disturbed by enforcement actions. However, I will provide several research studies conducted on the general population of police officers.

A study by Davis (2014) examines the attitudes of 350 police officers in North Carolina towards the possibility of syringe decriminalization. The motivation behind this study was the debate surrounding syringe decriminalization to reduce the transmission of HIV/Aids. The Southern United States has been disproportionately affected by HIV/Aids and those most commonly affected are intravenous drug users (IDU). Due to public health concerns, there had been a movement to decriminalize the possession and use of syringes in the state. Based on the survey's results, most law enforcement officials who took the survey were acceptant of syringe decriminalization, 57% percent of responded also agreed that syringe decriminalization would not promote drug use (Davis, 2014). Moreover, 66% of respondents agreed that this initiative would help reduce the spread of HIV/Aids, would have positive effects for the community as well as law enforcement (Davis, 2014).

A study conducted by Petrocelli & *al.*, (2014), acknowledges the lack of data towards law enforcement official's perception of the drug laws they enforce. As a result, the authors provide a survey of 1000 American law enforcement officials from all levels to measure their attitudes towards illegal drug harms and the strategies/policies used to apply prohibition (Petrocelli & *al.*, 2014). The results of this survey fit the common preconceptions of law enforcement officers. For every illicit drug, except steroids, over 50% of the respondents believe that the possession laws are far too lenient, 58.7% believe that possession laws for cannabis are not strict enough, and that the laws pertaining to manufacturing and sale were not strict enough (Petrocelli & *al.*, 2014). Subsequently, when asked which drugs they believed caused the most harm, more than 90% of the respondents answered that crack, heroin, and methamphetamines (Petrocelli & *al.*, 2014). Despite the survey's results, one must considered the limits of using surveys to capture law enforcement attitudes towards prohibition of certain drugs and their

policies to diminish the problems that can be associated with their use. The survey does not paint a very full picture of these law enforcement officers' perceptions because the questions asked allows limited answers that are already framed in prohibitionist discourse. Finding an illegal drug dangerous does not mean you think you are efficient to diminish its usage and the problems that can be associated with it.

A study conducted by Frabutt (2010) examines the different initiatives conducted to combat open-air drug markets, in other words, illegal drug markets that take place openly in public spaces. This exploratory piece, which is part of a larger research project, examines the perspective of law enforcement officials, community stakeholders, and illegal drug users, on the efficacy of these diverse strategies in two North Carolina communities (Frabutt, 2010).

Narrowing the focus down to law enforcement, 13 police officers participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher (Frabutt, 2010). They were questioned on which strategies tend to work best when addressing open drug markets. Findings concluded that mapping at risk areas, getting the community involved, identifying key players in the street drug trade, and undercover tactics tend to work best in dealing with this issue (Frabutt, 2010).

These two examples show the typical studies on police officers and drugs issues. They are generally framed inside the parameters of prohibition and do not really open the possibility for these officers to debate about these parameters. Also, these studies are based on an American-centric point of view.

## 2.5 Concluding Remarks

Based on the many themes gathered from the existing literature explored in this chapter, my primary research question is as follows: The prohibitionist model has been dominant in Canada for dealing with the non-medical use of certain drugs. Based on the experiences of narcotic squad

officers, what are their perceptions of their role under prohibition and their efficiency to deal with illegal drug use? As highlighted, no academic research has been conducted regarding narcotic squad officers' perspective on prohibition and its efficiency to diminish the problems with illegal drugs. Additionally, the studies that do exist that examine police officers' perceptions on illegal drug issues falls a bit short because surveys were used to gather data in the parameters of prohibition with close-ended answers and does not leave room for further explanations and clarifications or even criticism of these ways to deal with illegal drugs.

Due to the prohibitionist rhetoric that has been explored throughout the literature review, narcotic squad officers, those who "do prohibition", have gained an anti-drug image; however, there is currently no real knowledge available that examines what these individuals truly think on illegal drug issues and the way to deal with it. The goal of this research project is to play a part in reducing the gap on the lack of empirical knowledge conducted on law enforcement perspectives pertaining to these issues. As part of my research, I gathered data on Canadian narcotic squad officer's perspectives of drug legislation using the results to help answer the larger question guiding my research project.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

With this research project, I wish to better understand the perceptions of narcotic squad officers regarding their role, illegal drug use, and the illegal drug market. This chapter will begin by addressing the paradigm guiding this research study, which is social constructionism, and its rationale. Following this section, a description and justification for the data collection technique will be provided. The subsequent section will highlight the sampling technique, size, and population, used for this research study, followed by a section on the data collection process (recruitment process and conducting interviews). The next section examines the data analysis technique chosen for this project, which is a qualitative thematic analysis, and its justification. This section is followed by the evaluation criteria guiding this project, which reflects the paradigm shaping this study. The final section in this chapter will examine the methodological limitations of this study, such as the sample size and researcher subjectivity and bias.

### 3.1 Paradigm

The paradigm guiding this research project is social constructionism. Constructivist researchers do not believe in one true reality, but that each individual constructs their own and based on their social interactions with others, institutions, and within a specific time and cultural context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is coherent with the phenomenology being used for this research project. At the core of the transcendental epistemology, which guides phenomenology, individuals and

their interaction with a natural world go hand in hand in creating meaning and consciousness (Costello, 2012). As a constructivist researcher, I prioritize subjectivity in research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge of the world is socially, culturally and politically constructed, which allows for different realities to emerge when engaging with others and social phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Each individual experience is not less valid than another, but allows the researcher to see a topic from a very different perspective, justifying the collection of exploratory data under this paradigm. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that as a constructivist researcher, the researcher is also influenced by the subjectivity of the participants. For instance, pertaining to the same event, each individual will possess their own interpretation of it and will proceed by describing in their own terms. Although constructivists tend to place high importance on participant subjectivity, the process of reflexivity can still and should be obtained (Galletta, 2013). Reflexivity is when a researcher acknowledges the larger structural influences at play and their impact on individual perceptions; therefore, they are factors one must consistently reflect on when analyzing the data at hand. Subsequently, as a constructivist, the role of the researcher is not one of providing expertise but of being a learner (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The participants in this project are the experts of the phenomena being discussed because they are the ones who have dealt with it firsthand. As the primary investigator, the participants educated me on the topic. Each individual participant in this research study has their own unique contributions to add. There are similarities within the responses received but each story will not be identical.

### 3.2 Data Collection Technique

The data gathering technique being used for this study are semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews will allow for reciprocity and reflexivity in the data collection to take place (Evans, 2007). Since semi-structured interviews allow more room for an open dialogue between

the researcher and participants, a “give and take” scenario takes place through communication between both parties (Galletta, 2013). Both the researcher and the participants are exchanging ideas, alternative explanations, and new ways of seeing specific social phenomena (Galletta, 2013). In a sense, both parties are working together for the data to emerge. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews provides a platform for both the researcher and participants to engage in critical reflection of the data. Critical reflection is when one examines a given data set and attempts to make connections between the participants lived experience and how that experience is connected to and interacts with larger institutional structures at play and broader political considerations (Galletta, 2013). Constructivist researchers acknowledge that larger social structures are at play in an individual’s construction of “reality” and acknowledge that one cannot disassociate research from politics. Being reflexive, helps account for researcher bias within a study. This technique also provides the researcher to probe participants on points of interest, helping them to expand or even clarify a specific concept or scenario (Evans, 2007). Finally, the use of dialogue instead of an interrogatory technique will help enhance rapport between interviewer and interviewees, facilitating the researcher to properly listen and engage with what is being said by the participants (Clandinin, 2007). This helps demonstrate that the participant is not being taken for granted and that the researcher is genuinely interested in what that individual says on the topic of interest.

The use of semi-structured interviews for this research project will facilitate the abovementioned elements to occur, more so than structured interviews or questionnaires, which only provide room for closed-ended answers that only scrape the surface of the phenomena being explored. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, may be a bit more efficient in achieving these interview goals, however, due to my lack of experience in conducting professional

interviews, I needed some level of structure to keep me guided throughout the interviewing process to ensure that the participants and I get the most out of the experiences being shared. The interview guide has been modified and elaborated on to increase the possibility for more open-ended questions and responses. The interview guide is also attached to this thesis as Appendix A.

### 3.3 Sampling

The sampling technique being used for this project is purposive because emphasis is not being placed on generalizability since this project is of an exploratory nature. Since the core of this research project is guided by the constructivist paradigm, purposive sampling is viewed as the proper technique to use to gain unique insight from a specific population. As stated by Patton, “the sampling strategy must fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced” (Patton, 1990). Even if I am only focusing my study on a specific population, I will not be using a random sample due to the chosen sample size, time, and resource constraints, but most importantly because I am simply exploring narcotic squad officer’s perceptions of their role and their perception of illegal drug use. Specifically, I will be using criteria sampling because I am looking for a category of participants (Emmel, 2013), which are individuals that possess drug law enforcement experience at either the municipal, provincial, and/or federal levels from a specific policing organization.

For this project, I interviewed seven participants because this provided me with a large enough sample to draw commonalities and differences between each participant’s lived experience and what larger and more abstract themes are at play. In addition, this sample size is not too ambitious for a Master’s thesis, where there are heavy time and resource constraints. Finally, since the participants I recruited are law enforcement officers, I needed to consider the

possibility of having some difficulty in finding a large volume of volunteers. Police officers are often very busy and in many cases, may not want to fully share their experiences about law because they are the ones applying the law. Initially, I had planned to conduct eight to 10 interviews, however, I was only able to garner seven due to participation constraints. However, after the transcribing process, I felt that I had reached saturation with my data set, which is why I made the decision not to restart the recruitment process. The interviews were conducted from January to April 2017 with members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The reasoning behind this choice of police force are the following: the RCMP is Canada's federal police force and as such there is a large quantity of police officers but also officers that have been stationed in various locations across the country, and many have the opportunity to work for different levels of government. Within the RCMP, based on careers choices, officers have the opportunity to work in various levels of government, including at the federal level. This allowed me to recruit participants that had a breadth of drug law enforcement experience but also had the opportunity to work at different levels of government and in various locations.

Each participant interviewed for this research project began their careers by working at the municipal level but are currently at a point in their careers where they work high level cases and projects at the federal level. For instance, more serious trafficking cases are often dealt with at a federal level, while visible drug abuse and petty drug crimes are often seen at a more local/municipal level. At the municipal level, most members are general duty officers, meaning they respond to 911 calls and patrol the local community. In many cases, these are also the officers that liaise with local schools to provide public awareness and prevention on a range of different issues, including drug use. At the provincial level, in most cases, the files are province wide and many detachments within the region work together on higher level cases. This includes

but is not restricted to drug trafficking and production cases. At the federal level, most work is investigative and intelligence based in special units. Regarding illicit drugs, most federal RCMP officers working in these units are more concerned with importation and exportation of illicit substances and organized crime, rather than street level drug offences.

Furthermore, the sample of police officers interviewed for this research project were much older and possess many years of experience working under a drug prohibition model. Because of their age and experience, each participant acknowledges how they are limited in their role as narcotic squad officers. They understand that they cannot fully stop the illegal market and see this as one of the main shortcomings of drug prohibition. In addition, due to their limitations under this model, they see themselves as harm reduction actors, able to assist individuals who fall victim to illegal drug use. They have noted that they cannot stop the illegal drug trade, however, they are able to make a difference through the harm reduction component. If the sample was much younger in age, it is quite possible that their perceptions would have been quite different because they lack this rich experience working under this law.

Additionally, ethical approval also played in favor of my decision to solely interview members from one police organization. This allowed me to only seek approval from one organization, rather than multiple, which could have heavily complicated and delayed the data collection

### 3.4 Data Collection

Based on several limitations as a Master's student, such as time and financial resources, I decided to conduct one-hour long interviews with seven RCMP officers since I was not able to reach the eight to 10 that I had planned on conducting initially. This provided me with the opportunity to collect enough data to highlight nuances in perceptions but also similarities until

reaching saturation. This allowed me to identify key themes in my data set that will be presented in the following chapter. The demographics of the police officers were not important for this specific research project, the only criteria that needed to be met was experience in drug law enforcement while working for the RCMP.

Since this research project used human subjects as part of its data collection method, ethical approval from both the University of Ottawa and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was needed before proceeding. As part of both applications, an interview guide had to be provided to ensure that the questions being asked did not put the participant in harm's way and that they would not infringe on the "Duty of Loyalty" sworn by members of the public service. A recruitment text properly explaining the research project, its intent, and voluntary basis was provided. Additionally, an informed consent form was provided and approved to ensure that participation is strictly voluntary, that participants can drop out of the research project at any moment in time without suffering any repercussions, and how anonymity would be upheld. The informed consent form and recruitment text are including in this thesis as Appendix B and Appendix C. As per the anonymity component, I provided each participant with the following pseudonym to facilitate the flow of the presentation of findings and discussion portion of the project:

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
Participant 1	Sarah
Participant 2	Maggie
Participant 3	Emma
Participant 4	Claire
Participant 5	David

Participant 6	Louis
Participant 7	Joey

Since police officers are not part of a vulnerable population, the approval process by the University of Ottawa was expedited. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the request for approval from the RCMP. The main limitation of the data collection process was gaining ethical approval from the RCMP to go forth with my project. Due to administrative and bureaucratic delays, the timeline for gaining approval to proceed with my research project took much longer than anticipated. Finally, months after the intended start date to begin the recruitment process, approval was granted. Upon organizational approval, I had to agree to a Memorandum of Agreement between myself and the RCMP, which outlines the conditions for the recruitment and interviewing of participants. Several of the conditions were to provide a copy of the final project to the RCMP for approval before publication and to ensure that the project does not jeopardize the security and integrity of the organization. Additionally, members were asked by the organization to sign a “Duty of Loyalty” form before commencing the interview, to ensure that they were aware of what they can or cannot say as members of the public service. The Duty of Loyalty Form as attached to this thesis as **Appendix D**.

*Recruitment Process*

Upon approval from both the University of Ottawa and RCMP in January 2017, I began to recruit participants. The Research Ethics Board approval letters are included in this thesis under Appendix E and Appendix F. I began by sending an electronic copy of the recruitment text to a contact within the organization who had previously accepted to conduct the recruitment on my behalf. I approached this individual for assistance because at an earlier date, when explaining my

research project, he/she had offered to assist me in any way possible. As such, I followed up on his/her offer. I decided to take this route because as an outsider, it would have been difficult to recruit individuals from this organization. As predicted, this facilitated the recruitment process, allowing me to finish conducting interviews within a two-month time frame. Within the following week from when I had emailed my contact, I had received confirmation of interest from three participants. After each of the initial three interviews, each participant offered their assistance in recruiting more members for the project on my behalf. By the end of two months, I reached seven interviews. I decided then to cease recruiting because I was having difficulties in obtaining an eighth participant. Upon re-examination of the data after having transcribed each interview, I felt that I had reached saturation because many answers started to become repetitive.

### *Conducting Interviews*

For each interview, I did my best to accommodate everyone so that their day to day lives were interrupted in the least bit possible. I met all participants at their place of work, in a quiet boardroom or office based on their availability. Before the commencement of the interviews, I had a light conversation with each participant that was unrelated to the research project to help establish rapport and allow the participants to be at ease. Subsequently, I had each volunteer sign the informed consent form and the “Duty of Loyalty” form before conducting the audio-recorded interviews. Most interviews took between half an hour to an hour to conduct.

The first interview followed the question guide a bit too closely. Since it was my first time conducting an interview, I did not know how to properly probe and because of this, I did not do so as frequently as I should have. However, I was still able to garner key information from this first interview. Based on lessons learned, I decided to add sub-questions to help me probe participants for future interviews, while respecting the approved interview guide. With

practice and the added sub-questions, each following interview was an improvement from the last and allowed for the data that I was searching for to surface. By the end of the process, I started to go a little off-topic at the beginning to help improve rapport and comfort between myself and the interviewees. This allowed the participants to divulge a little more, even though the off-topic content may not be applicable to the project in question. Upon the completion of the interviews, I listened through the audio recording of each participant and proceeded to transcribe the interviews in verbatim for ease of reference.

### 3.5 Analytical Technique

The analytical technique that has been used for this research project is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a commonly used technique in qualitative research to gather and analyze themes found within a data set (Attride-Stirling, 2001). There are different approaches in how one can conduct thematic analysis, ranging from a more descriptive highlight of themes to a more abstract analysis of the themes and their connection to the larger goal of one's research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is applicable to most theoretical orientations, including constructionism. This technique provided me with the proper platform to explore different realities and meanings, which are created from a diversity of experiences in society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), researcher subjectivity is argued to be unavoidable in thematic analysis but can be reduced if the investigator takes on the role of reflexivity throughout the data analysis process. As the primary investigator, I have made decisions on how themes will be defined, what constitutes rich data, and whether to use semantic or latent themes. Defining what can be considered a "theme" is based on the researcher's judgment and should not be rigidly defined (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Additionally, I have taken a deductive approach to thematic analysis, which is when the researcher provides very broad pre-defined conceptual categories before coding the data set, where then themes emerge. I decided to take this approach because I already had some sense in the type of responses I would receive from narcotic squad officers. Regarding the data, I narrowed down the focus to several key themes and proceeded by providing an analysis of the theme rather than a detailed account of the data. To properly go about making criteria for themes, is to look at data that feels of heavy importance at the time, one can always go back into the codebook and modify. What is important under this analytical approach is being consistent across the entire coding process, which is more important than prevalence. As a constructivist researcher, I have used a latent level analysis rather the semantic. A latent level analysis goes beyond the surface level themes that are formulated directly from the words used in the data to a much broader and abstract level of defining themes. It becomes more of an analysis than a description (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Nonetheless, the process at times did become inductive because as the data were coded, other conceptual categories emerged. The conceptual categories and themes established are the following:

<b>Conceptual Category</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Enforcement Role	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Technical Aspects</li> <li>2. Education &amp; Prevention</li> <li>3. Dividing Identities</li> </ol>
Cannabis Legalization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marijuana Legalization</li> </ol>
Illegal Drug Use	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Youth Drug Consumption</li> <li>2. Severity Scale</li> </ol>

	3. Health Harms
Illegal Drug User & Addict	1. Sympathy & Victimization 2. Marginalization & Disenfranchisement
New Drug Scene	1. Fentanyl Crisis and Other Drugs 2. Drug Marketing
Biggest Threats	1. Life and Limb 2. Organized Crime
Benefits and Limits of Prohibition	1. Enforcement Capacity 2. Feeding Demand

### 3.6 Scientific Validity and Rigor

Quantitative and qualitative research does not use the same criteria regarding their scientific validity. Since my project did mobilize a qualitative methodology, it must be evaluated according to criteria such as reflexivity, focus on process, and tolerance for reflexivity. These criteria will be elaborated on following this section. In addition, the chosen paradigm will influence a project’s evaluation criteria. This thesis is guided by the constructivist paradigm; therefore, rigor is a criterion of high importance. Key to the constructivist paradigm, “real world” that is quantifiable does not exist. Everyone creates their own “world” based on one’s own experiences, which are never identical to another. As such, more traditional evaluation criteria like generalizability and validity, which we often see in more quantitative research, cannot be used. Douglas Ezzy (2002) claims that being rigorous in qualitative research is acknowledging the particularities of conducting a specific research project as it is to follow specific methods and

practices. In addition, rigor in qualitative research is heavily tied into ethical considerations of a study. Some see rigor as using the proper methods, and ethics, conducting moral research, as two separate entities (Ezzy, 2002). However, with the acceptance of more critical and constructivist research, many academics see rigor and ethics because the way in which a researcher conducts a study will also have moral implications (Ezzy, 2002). Ezzy (2002) provides different models to assess rigor in research, which are followed by a set of guidelines. As a constructivist researcher, the proper evaluation criteria to use for my research project is the “interpretive model of rigor in qualitative research” (Ezzy, 2002). The goal behind an interpretive model is to acquire very rich and detailed description of social phenomena based on individual experience. To ensure that I am gathering rich detailed data, I will need to follow these six guidelines provided by Ezzy (2002):

1. Scepticism: researcher must be skeptical of common and quantitative understandings of social life.
2. Close scrutiny: research aims at being close to what individuals are experiencing/their world.
3. Thick description: researcher should be able to gather rich descriptions of the phenomena being explored.
4. Focus on process: social life, people’s world, are in constant flux. It is part of a process.
5. Appreciation of subjectivity: social life is constructed by individual understandings and interpretations.
6. Tolerance for complexity: want to avoid simple explanations because social life is highly complex. Many different agents influence individual perceptions and these perceptions can be altered. Research should acknowledge this.

While conducting my own research, diversity of experience took precedence over reliability and validity. The goal is to grasp a stronger and deeper understanding on my participants' unique experiences as narcotic squad officers to see the larger structural complexities of the social phenomena at play: narcotic squad officer's perception of their role and illegal drug use in Canada. Using my interviewing techniques that were established in this chapter, especially through trying to establish good rapport with the interviewees, enabled myself to reach closer to these individuals' real experiences and a glimpse into their own perceptions. Additionally, through the same techniques and the use of semi-structured interviews, I gathered a detailed experience of each participant experience as a narcotic squad officer.

### 3.7 Methodological Limitations

This research project has several methodological limitations that need to be addressed before the project's findings are presented in the following chapter. The first limitation that will be addressed is the sampling size of this project. Initially, the goal was to interview eight to 10 police officers; however, I was only able to obtain seven. Seven participants, however is a sufficient sample size for a Master's student, who is only at the initial stages of learning how to conduct academic research. Within this size, there tends to be enough information gathered to answer research questions and goals and often most individuals can reach saturation with this size. Due to the nature of this project and the population being interviewed, despite the contacts that could assist me with the recruitment process, it was difficult to obtain participants.

The second limitation relies on some of the conditions that have been required by the RCMP as part of their approval to recruit members of the organization. I received approval to conduct my interviews from the RCMP nine months after submitting my proposal and application. This heavily delayed the progression of my research project, yet nonetheless, I

eventually conducted interviews with narcotic squad officers from the RCMP. However, upon my organizational approval, there were conditions in which I needed to follow that can be categorized as a limitation. Before commencing the recruitment process, I needed to sign a *Memorandum of Agreement* between myself and the RCMP. As part of this agreement, I needed to provide the RCMP with a copy of the final draft of this research project to ensure that the findings do not jeopardize the security of the department. As part of the agreement, my initial interview guide needed to be modified because several questions were far too critical to ask public services representatives. This slightly altered my initial project and the type of data the interviews generated. Furthermore, as part of this agreement, each participant was obligated to sign a “Duty of Loyalty” form. “Duty of Loyalty” applies to all Canadian public servants, prohibiting them from criticizing the federal government. As a government employee, they must be by-partisan and remain neutral to conduct their work ethically and with integrity. Due to this form, there is the possibility of participant bias with the data collected. As a result, it is possible that responses provided were more scripted rather than truly honest accounts of their perceptions on the issues being explored.

A third and final limitation is also related to researcher subjectivity and bias. In conducting research, individual subjectivity is unavoidable. However, there are specific methods that can be used to reduce the influence of this final limitation. When conducting the presentation of findings as well as the discussion portion of this project, I needed to constantly engage in reflexive thinking. I needed to police myself in assuring that I provided the most objective presentation of my data as possible as well as through its analysis. Finally, it is important to also reflect on the larger social and political influences at play, according to Gaelleta’s (2010)

interpretation of reflexive research. Language is also crucial in reducing researcher subjectivity, it must remain neutral when approaching the data and its analysis.

### 3.8 Concluding Remarks on Chapter

This chapter has provided a layout of the complete data collection process for this research project, while providing the logical reasoning behind the chosen methods and steps. When comparing what academics have written on semi-structured interviews, my experience did not go completely as according to the scholarly work published on this data gathering technique. It took a few interviews for the process to take the form of a dialogue rather than that of an interrogation. This is in part due to the level of experience that I have in conducting semi-structured interviews. Additionally, it is a bit difficult at the initial stages of the interview process to probe based on answers given. This is a skill that is difficult to master, however, I feel that I did slightly improve on this aspect with each interview. Finally, the “Duty of Loyalty” clause could have played a role in the responses provided by participants on certain topics of interest and is something that **must be acknowledged** when exploring the presentation of findings as well as that data analysis portion of this project. Due to this limitation, I believe that it may have influenced the answers provided during each interview, and possibly generated less critical data. Because of this, it is possible that the participants did not fully share their true perspectives on certain questions being asked.

The following chapter will examine the findings from my data set, as well as a discussion portion, which provides an analysis of the findings. I will be examining the conceptual categories established and the themes that have emerged within each category in the following chapter. Once the data are presented, I will provide a discussion portion that will

establish a thorough analysis of my identified themes by using the current literature as well as my theoretical framework that merges aspects of phenomenology and social problems theory.

## CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the data has been initially analyzed through a deductive thematic coding technique and sorted into pre-defined categories: enforcement role, cannabis legalization, illegal use, and benefits and limits of Canada's drug legislation. However, several new categories have emerged after continuously coding the data set: drug user and addict, the new drug scene, and biggest threats. This portion of the research project will present the findings from the interviews to highlight the themes found under each conceptual category. For each category, what participants have said will be carefully analyzed in order to capture their perceptions about different themes. Following this chapter, a very thorough and encompassing analysis will be provided under a discussion portion in order to expose how the themes interconnect and how they answer the research question guiding this project: Based on the experiences of narcotic squad officers, what are their perceptions of their role, illegal drug use, and the illegal drug market?

This chapter will be divided in the following order of categories for ease of reference: (1) enforcement role, (2) cannabis legalization, (3) illegal drug use, (4) illegal drug user and addict, (5) new drug scene, (6) biggest threats, and (7) benefits and limits of Canada's drug legislation. Most participants had something to contribute to each category/theme; however, some only provided very brief and close-ended answers that leave no room for interpretation. As a result, some sections will be shorter than others.

### 4.1 Enforcement Role

The first topic of discussion during the interview process was to allow each participant the opportunity to describe their roles as narcotic squad officers without divulging too many technical details since they might be considered classified information. This initial category is

much more descriptive in nature; however, it provides a strong basis for understanding how these officers perceive Canada's drug legislation and illegal drug use. This section will provide a general sense of how participants perceive their role, offering a clearer picture of the context in which they are evolving on a daily basis. This conceptual category is divided into three subsections where the following themes arose from the data set: technical aspects of drug law enforcement, education and prevention, and dividing identities.

#### 4.1.1 Technical Aspects of Drug Law Enforcement

The first theme to emerge from the enforcement role category is the broader technical aspect of being a narcotic squad officer. Under this role, there are very standard activities, in which all law enforcement officers conduct in their day to day policing. These activities are commonly seen at the frontline or detachment level, especially when individuals begin their enforcement careers. Once progression was made in their career, any participants specialized in larger federal drug units that conducted more large scale investigations, intelligence, and even synthetic drugs and clandestine laboratory dismantlement.

This theme highlights the similarities but also the different roles and experiences in which this sample of participants possesses. Sarah's description of her earlier career provides a standard overview of what she believes to be the common duties of an officer. All other interview participants began their careers conducting the same activities, however, in different locations across Canada. I will only be providing one quote that best reports these common activities.

“When I first started in the RCMP as a general duty manager. Our focus was more calls for service and we did street level drug enforcement. A lot of vehicle stops that turned into more marijuana and hash seizures. Things like that. We would do, gather intelligence and do say street level or even higher than that

search warrants on residences or wherever. We would lay the charge but anything bigger than that would go to a dedicated federal drug enforcement unit.” (Sarah)

Based on Sarah’s initial experience doing drug enforcement, she responded to 911 calls regarding street level drugs and conducted search and seizures, which are very common at the detachment level.

Emma had a very similar experience.

“In that function in those first years, I umm, I made several small drug seizures when I was either doing investigations or stopping cars while doing my highway patrol function and also did some search warrants for some dwellings based on information from human sources and then from their made some minor drug seizures like marijuana, marijuana cultivation, cocaine and so on.” (Emma)

Emma’s experience, although similar, differed slightly because she explicitly stated the use of human sources (drug informants) as part of the smaller investigations she initially conducted.

This nuance in experience could possibly alter her perceptions of her role and views on drug legislation and illegal drug use, in comparison to someone who did not possess this experience.

Louis took the path of transitioning to a larger federal drug unit and conducted very large scale and complex drug investigations.

“I think my first drug seizure was a marijuana plant that I seized from one of my neighbors that lived in the same apartment building that I was living in. And then, grew from there to harder drugs, cocaine trafficking, chemical drug trafficking, drug importation with organized crime groups. I’m talking about wiretap, I’m talking about listening device, undercover operations, we, we would infiltrate the organized crime group, purchase drugs from them, from the targets, selected targets.” (Louis)

Louis describes his experience in conducting larger investigations that focused on the importation and exportation of what he describes as “harder” drugs, involving organized crime. In many cases, these investigations were undercover operations, therefore, much more complex in achieving warrants.

Joey's experience during the latter part of his career is quite intriguing, as he reports taking undercover investigations even further.

"Part of that, I would have been, I worked as an undercover police officer so I would have had an opportunity to purchase drugs. As an undercover operator, I also sold drugs and I was also a drug expert in both provincial and court of Queen's Bench (name of province) and also would have grown marijuana with a license from, a license through health Canada to have the plants which was to further my experience as an expert witness in court." (Joey)

Joey was the only individual interviewed with this type of drug enforcement experience. These unique experiences could also alter Joey's perceptions on Canadian drug legislation and illegal drug use.

Finally, Claire took on a different role and joined a clandestine laboratory (clan labs) dismantlement team and she also specialized in the production of synthetic drugs. Clan labs are where synthetic drugs are manufactured; therefore, one needs some specialization in these types of substances to dismantle a lab safely.

"So, I'm part of the clan lab team, in (location of detachment). So, I'm taking care of the unit in (location of detachment) so, in that we are called to respond to clandestine laboratories dismantlement." (Claire)

Each participant has a different experience concerning drug enforcement and it might influence differently the way they perceive illegal drug issues and their role.

#### 4.1.2 Education and Prevention

The second theme to emerge from this category is education and prevention. Each participant has experience in providing drug education to youth in schools, while others also have experience in educating other first responders and other members of the community on the risks associated with illegal drugs. The overall goal of education and awareness strategies is to prevent illegal

drug use. According to one participant, prevention definitely falls within the policing mandate alongside enforcement capacities.

“So, drugs being one of them, there’s always a combination of enforcement, education and prevention. And I think that works the best. Dealing with all prongs, that approach with policing. And I guess I would have participated in all aspects of those, you know. Throughout the whole of my career. The education piece as far as doing presentations to youth, or seniors, or to government, in order too, obviously, facilitate other things, and the enforcement piece I think is pretty self-evident.” (Joey)

Sarah, Maggie, Emma, and David, all had similar experiences working with schools as liaison officers to provide drug education and awareness to youth.

“My job was enforcement with a little bit of education and a little bit of training. We did do some drug talks for educational purposes. We did this as the local detachment, you know, visiting the high school, that kind of stuff but not a lot more in detachment, like literally on detachment we were assigned a school and I was, and mine was the high school in the community. And I would either do safety talks or drug talks, or whatever was needed at the time.” (Sarah)

“When I was in detachment, we did a lot of drug awareness. It was in schools, for kids or any kind of audience.” (Maggie)

“However, as a constable, starting out my career, wherever I worked, there would be an assigned, a school liaison for a certain school. Right? And so, part of my prevention efforts would always be, you know, talking about the harmful effects of drugs, right?” (Emma)

“Went to schools in the past. Back in the past when I was more detachment level. A lot of school talks and a lot of that kind of stuff.” (David)

Each of the quotations presented above are quite straightforward, supporting the idea that drug enforcements officers also provide prevention efforts alongside their enforcement roles.

However, the school talks and the liaisons discussed above, often took place earlier on in their careers, at the detachment level.

For Louis, he and his team additionally went out into the community to inform individuals on the risks associated with illegal drug use but also on how to detect any suspicious

behavior that could be linked to participation in the market of illegal drugs (i.e. production and trafficking).

“So, during that time when I was working, I was working the street level drugs, ensuring that education is being made at every level, to ensure we have our eyes and ears out there to our public, our community, to ensure that if they see something, they can report back to the police.” (Louis)

The police will not always be able to detect things on their own and this assistance from an informed public is necessary. A statement made by Claire also highlights that booth can also be a place to inform the public.

“We’re doing a couple days a year with prevention. There’s opening also, I know in the summer they do like a booth, they used to do a booth, a clandestine lab team. Same thing with other explosives, bomb squad or police dog services. Actually, at your own booth and people come in and ask questions.” (Claire)

#### 4.1.3 Dividing Identities

A third and final theme to emerge from the category of drug enforcement role is dividing identities. Several participants throughout the interview process made a clear distinction between their own personal views as a civilian and their views as a police officer, representing a larger policing organization. Other participants, however, simply placed emphasis on their role as a police officer and provided no further views on the questions being asked. Not every participant made this clear distinction; however, among those who did, it peaked my curiosity. It is possible that this clear distinction might influence their views on illegal drug use and drug prohibition in general; therefore, it is something to keep in mind for the analysis found under the discussion portion of this project. Other participants, however, made no such distinction but overly emphasized that their role as a police officer and as part of this role, had no say on certain matters or provided very conservative answers that coincide with the ideology that all illegal drugs are dangerous and thus should be prohibited.

The distinction between the identity of a police officer and as a civilian can be seen through the following quote.

“So, I think, I think it is the police’s job, not only to enforce but to educate and I think, the issues that we have with marijuana and all that is all a healthy debate that is going on right now. I mean, one government says it is illegal and the new government says they are going to make it legal. And there is a whole bunch of underlying things that need to be ironed out before that type of thing could be made legal. As a police officer, it’s not my job to decide what is right or wrong. It’s my job to enforce the law.” (Sarah)

Based on this quote, the first portion appears to be alluding to the participant’s own opinion outside of the enforcement institution. The final sentence from this quote explicitly shows that as a police officer, this individual’s role is to enforce existing laws and not to decide what is right or wrong. A similar conclusion can also be drawn from a statement made by Joey.

“So, I guess my personal opinion would be that I think that organized crime has tentacles in a variety of aspects in everyday life and are making money from that lucrative business.” (Joey).

The analysis of this quote, which is quite straightforward, is that based on this individual’s experience, but specifically in his *own opinion*, he believes organized crime is involved in many aspects of society, including the illegal drug market. However, the explicit clarification of this being *a personal opinion* can be viewed or not as a statement distinguishing their views from that of an enforcement officer or even from the larger policing organization.

Maggie provided interesting perspectives about the same topic. This participant at times provided very close ended responses or responses that simply argued that illegal drugs are dangerous, while at other times, provided her own opinion.

“Obviously, I don’t want to get into the legalization aspect and debate things because I am the representative of the police and right now it’s illegal to possess, sell cannabis and anything else.” (Maggie)

“I’m not saying this on behalf of the RCMP but I think in my opinion, the greatest danger is the mentality of the younger generation.” (Maggie)

Referring to the first quote, she did not want to get out of her police officer role and in the second, she took a personal stand. Maybe it is because the first quote was taken from the very beginning of the interview, while the second came from the end. It is possible that this participant started to feel more at ease in sharing her individual opinions despite what her job entails.

## 4.2 Cannabis Legalization.

Another topic of discussion was the current reform to legalize cannabis. In fact, it was the only issue where comments were made about Canadian drug legislation.

At the time the interviews were done, Canadian cannabis legalization was a very topical point of discussion at the national level. Although legalization is underway, each participant expressed concerns towards this change.

Sarah seems indifferent to the legalization of cannabis but ultimately believes the government will get it right in time. Her only worry is on cannabis and driving.

“(T)he debate with cannabis that is going on right now, if it becomes legal or not legal, it doesn’t really concern me too much. I think the government will get it right, it might take a while, there’s issues that have to be worked like alcohol, driving a car impaired by alcohol is very easy to determine, its 80 milligrams, we don’t charge until 100. We have a device or an instrument that, but what do you do for marijuana?... What scared me right now, I mean, to be perfectly honest is things like fentanyl. Where, pure ignorance of something is going to get you killed, right?” (Sarah)

David’s view on cannabis legalization is quite similar to the response provided by Sarah.

“You know what, with what we’re going into talking about the legalization and the dates and all of that, a lot of marijuana is obviously big a big money maker right now so everybody wants to jump on board and have their name somewhat associated to it. We’ll see, time will tell how that is going to go.” (David)

I do not get the sense that this participant is too concerned with what is to come on this front because whatever the official outcome will be, they will modify their role accordingly.

Maggie sees this legislative change as a very complex issue; more complex than the general public seems to believe.

“And it complicates the laws, we’d need to set up new legislation, who can make it, who can sell it, who can have it sold to, just like liquor or tobacco. All that structure and logistics now has to apply to whatever else, you want to legalize cannabis, which is complex.” (Maggie)

This participant believes there is a lot of work that goes into making this legislative change but also in the regulation of liquor and tobacco. Having cannabis added to the substances that will be regulated will add strain to an already complex system.

Emma is fearful that people will not follow the limits imposed by the regulation of cannabis, and it is the police who will have to deal with that.

“And so, one of the fears I have is once we go down the path of allowing the recreational use of marijuana, for example, so the headline is marijuana legalized right? The other things below the headlines that people don’t read and don’t take is the, people are now allowed to have 4 plants. People are allowed to have 30gs on them at any given time, but people read marijuana legalized and society, that segment of society gets emboldened and say oh we’re allowed to grow 4 plants, I’ll grow 5 – 6 who cares. 30gs? Who cares, I got 60gs on me. I can share with my friends too. And we’re not going to be increasing the police’s ability to deal with those, right?.” (Emma)

This participant is also worried about health problems that will follow:

“But I think for me, I just find that the “ponderance (amount) of the evidence in my life, kind of shows, why would we, why would we go down the path of having another substance on the market, you know that will further aggravate addiction problems and dependency problems and so on right?” (Emma)

Claire had similar concerns regarding cannabis legalization but also fears that law enforcement will not have the capacity to keep up with these changes and to ensure that these new laws are properly followed.

“You don’t know or you will push the limit. How can the police assess the THC on the spot? It’s impossible, you have to send your analysis to Health Canada. So, you have your own plants but as an example, in 2 years they’re 35 percent, so they’re stronger than a lot of things that you would actually take like um, now sometimes it’s worse.” (Claire)

Joey, for his part, explicitly states that he does not think that cannabis legalization is the best course of action but understands its appeals.

“I think and I can understand why Canadians may think that that’s, that the legalization is good. I don’t necessarily support that opinion in the sense that yeah I guess I don’t support that opinion. Maybe good for the economy but I’m not convinced that its good for to have a normal life and do coke. I don’t see that as being normal. I guess I would say the same thing about marijuana.” (Joey)

The comment that one cannot live a normal life and do cocaine or cannabis demonstrates this individual’s views on illegal use but this opinion also reflects this individual’s view on cannabis legalization.

### 4.3 Illegal Use of Drugs

The third topic of conversation was perception of illegal drug use. More specifically, the participants were asked if they thought it is possible for individuals to function in society or live traditionally “normal” lives, while occasionally using illegal substances. Each participant agreed that illegal drug use is a risky and unhealthy behavior; however, their arguments that led to this overall differed. Some participants saw cannabis as the least worrisome substance to use recreationally, while others viewed this substance just like any other “harder” substance. This category is divided into sub-sections based on the three themes to emerge from the data set: youth drug consumption, severity scale, and health harm.

#### 4.3.1 Youth Drug Consumption

A common theme that emerged from almost each interview pertained to issues regarding youth illegal drug consumption. Youth are portrayed as more accepting illegal drug use, as avid risk

takers, and because of these factors are more susceptible to the negative consequences often associated with illegal drug use: overdose, negative health consequences, and becoming a strain on the social system.

An interesting point of concern that emerged from the interview process from most participants is the belief that youth are consuming more illegal drugs than in previous generations and are beginning this drug experimentation at a younger age than before. The “new generation”, as several participants referred to, is different than any other generation in terms of illegal drug experimentation.

“(T)he greatest danger is the mentality of the younger generation. Not that I am old, but I am old. But I see and you see the, how the people react, the younger generation now that are open to a lot more things in society and one is drugs.”  
(Maggie)

“But they want to have fun and now with the new generation that they’ve known and seen everything.” (Claire)

A second area of concern for several participants was regarding youth experimentation more specifically. More risky drugs are increasingly found in schools, even elementary schools. Additionally, reasons behind why youth experiment, however, differed for several participants.

“What we’re seeing more and more is now ecstasy is not coming to high schools, but elementary schools.” (Claire)

“Plus, again now we find those little pills of amphetamine or methamphetamine plus GHB in schools, elementary now.” (Claire)

Based on Claire’s experience, she believes there is an increase in “harder”, synthetic drugs, found in schools but not solely high schools, even in elementary schools. This is a trend that has not been as common in the past based on this participant’s response. This demonstrates why she believes the new generation to be worse than previous ones in terms of drug use. David adds to this point made by Claire, by focusing on the current Fentanyl issue.

“And we have seen that we’ve got 3 or 4 high schools in the area, big big high schools where Fentanyl is a common commodity. Scary but.” (David)

Pertaining to illegal drug use, currently, Fentanyl has been added to the category of drugs viewed as a social problem, but is seen as an illegal drug that is more potent and harmful than ever before. According to David, this drug has become a very big commodity in several high schools within his region. According to David’s comment “scary but”, it is assumed that he views this risky drug consumption at an early age as a frightening reality but at the same time, this is what he is perceiving as part of his enforcement role.

According to Maggie, the reason behind why youth experiment with these dangerous substances can be seen through the following quote.

“We deal with the new generation, you’re a teenager, to an adult, your thinking changes, responsibilities, you grow up, and then you understand better, how the world works, you learn a lot and you understand what your environment actually is. You know, we get through to a lot of people and I think a lot of, the community in general understands but you know, the younger generation is vulnerable because of that part of their mentality.” (Maggie)

Based on Maggie’s statement, she believes the mentality of today’s generation has become a bit more vulnerable and less responsible. However, she does not go into too much detail on this. If I were to substitute new generation for youth in general, it would seem as though youth have less responsibilities today than in the past, they do not properly understand how the world works, and are not developmentally mature as adults. However, when they grow up, these issues change for the better. It is then easier to reach out to the older segments of the population to prevent illegal drug use but because of the lack in mental development and maturity among youth, they are a segment of the population that is difficult for law enforcement to reach for prevention efforts.

Sarah on the other hand, sees experimentation among youth as a normal process.

“Do I think, but I also think that experimentation as a young person, but I am not specifically talking about drugs but experimentation as a young person is

probably, this is an opinion now, this is my opinion, probably a normal thing.”  
(Sarah)

“Pure ignorance of something is going to get you killed, right? I mean, very rarely do kids experiment with marijuana and end up dying. Right? But it’s happening all the time with Fentanyl, right... So, I mean everybody, well most people, you’ve been caught by your parents drinking or you know not me personally but a lot of people, like marijuana or whatever, and you get in trouble by your parents and if you get in trouble with the police it’s nothing that’s going to follow you around for the rest of your life. Right? It’s a learning experience.” (Sarah)

Based on Sarah’s perception, youth experimentation in general is quite natural and can have some positive aspects associated with it. Most youth engage in risky behavior such as underage drinking and consuming cannabis. They may get in trouble with their parents if caught or may even be caught by police. Nonetheless, these consequences are minor and can be viewed as valuable learning experiences. However, based on “but it’s (dying) happening all the time with Fentanyl, right”, experimentation becomes dangerous when youth engage in harder drug use, like Fentanyl. In the end, the point that seems to be made by Sarah is that it all depends on what youth experiment with.

To conclude the findings under this theme of youth consumption, Emma had very interesting points to make on why she viewed youth drug consumption negatively.

“But my own experience with that is, I’ve seen far too many young people, who I encountered, who were in those circles. And when I say in those circles, I arrive at a party and they were either smoking up or with people who were smoking up or had smoked up. I’d stop them. And so, I’ve really seen anybody from those circles that, later on I could say that they have gone on to bigger and better things, right?” (Emma)

“And so, you have to understand that my point of view is, when I got to (former area), I got to deal, at the beginning of my career, I got to deal with some of the kids who were like, 17/18 years old, right? And I left (former area) and went to (new area) and then I went to (another new area) and then I came back to (former area) and saw the same thing. And then I came back to live in (former area) again and I saw those same people that I dealt with and I’ve seen kind of, was able to see where that had gone to right?” (Emma)

Based on Emma's experience, she has constantly seen youth who engage in illegal drug use, including cannabis, as individuals who never went on to "bigger and better things". Because of this unique experience, it potentially explains why she possesses these views on illegal drug use.

#### 4.3.2 Severity Scale

The second theme to emerge out of this category on illegal drug use is severity scale. Severity scale pertains to the debate surrounding "soft" drugs and "hard" drugs. Essentially, some individuals view certain illegal drugs as more severe in terms of its effects, physical and psychological damage, and susceptibility towards addiction, while others see all illegal drugs as equally harmful, like Joey for example.

"I'm not convinced that its good for to have a normal life and do coke. I don't see that as being normal. I guess I would say the same thing about marijuana." (Joey)

Those who perceived drugs on a scale of severity, the only drug believed to be less harmful is cannabis. Among all participants, everyone viewed Fentanyl as the more harmful drug because people can die.

The first portion will examine quotes that view all illegal drugs as equally harmful, except for Fentanyl.

"To me, a drug is a drug. You're looking at caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, which are the main 3 drugs and you could almost add sugar to that but that's another story...Everything is the same (all drugs, including alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine). The problem that I see with the [illegal] drugs is that it's produced 99.9% of the time, and I'm talking here about illicit drugs, in clan labs, where there is no standard." (David)

According to David's experience as a drug enforcement officer, but also through his personal life, it is implied that he perceives all illegal drugs are as equally harmful due to the increase risk because of the lack of quality control. But the main problem with the illegal drugs is the fact that you have no quality assurance on the products in the illegal market. Maggie's views are similar.

The illegal market is not safe because you do not know how the products were modified and synthetic cannabis made in clandestine labs is also dangerous for the same reason.

“(I) f it makes them more money to mix the pure form of whatever drug their using with something that, another chemical or another substance that maybe toxic, could cause problems, allergic reactions, and long term effects, they’ll do it. They don’t care, so when I see, you hear oh its just cannabis it’s natural, it’s not natural. Having worked on these clandestine laboratories, there’s a lot of chemicals, a lot of.” (Maggie)

Maggie also believes Fentanyl is the worst illegal drug in the market.

“It’s not, it did not get the reaction that Fentanyl is getting because of the strength and potency of Fentanyl and the risk obviously is more because you don’t need so much of it to create that overdose.” (Maggie)

Maggie expressed how heroin caused many overdoses in the past, like Fentanyl. However, this new synthetic opioid is more serious because only a very limited amount of this substance can lead to an overdose.

Other participants had slightly different views on drug severity. Based on the following quote, Sarah sees cannabis as less harmful than the other drugs and Fentanyl worse than the others.

“And I mean, I’ve never tried marijuana so I don’t know but the thing I always said as a police officer about marijuana is that no one’s ever tried to beat me up being high on marijuana. They just want to hug me. Right? But, I’ve been, some people have tried to beat me up on cocaine before, so as a police officer.” (Sarah)

“So, I think, I don’t think the average person realizes how, how bad that it and its one of the few things in my work where you make a single mistake and you die (Fentanyl). You’re not going to get that with marijuana.” (Sarah)

“Especially the chemical drugs. So basically, people who are abusing the chemical drugs right could see some effects in one generation, maybe two generations from now. If they abuse it. (Be) cause the chemical drugs are very, very strong and the human body is very... is not necessarily made for absorbing all these chemicals, so it’s got to be stored somewhere.” (Louis)

Claire is also more concerned about synthetic drugs becoming readily available in elementary schools.

“It depends on which drugs we’re talking about...I’d say, am I for this (marijuana legalization)? Not necessarily but I understand that the government is trying to do something... plus they’ll get their taxes behind that but the only thing is that now, what we’re seeing more and more is now ecstasy is now coming to high schools, elementary schools.” (Claire)

#### 4.3.3 Health Harm

The third theme to emerge from this category on illegal use is health harm. There was a consensus among the participants that engaging with illegal drug use will cause negative physical and psychological effects. The harms highlighted were the chemical imbalance of the body, overdose, and dependency and addiction issues. During the interviews with project participants, many highlighted the health related harms caused by occasional and chronic illegal drug use. Participants agreed that any kind of illegal drug use is dangerous to one’s health and as such is not a risk any individual should take. One participant discussed how illegal drug use can cause a chemical imbalance in one’s body; other participants explained how toxic substances are found in most illicit drugs, which can facilitate an overdose and long term physical and mental health issues; and one discussed how illegal drug use can lead to physical addiction. This quote from David demonstrates how using drugs can damage a body’s chemical balance.

“Because what’s happening, is your body is made, is a fine-tuned machine as it is... As soon as you’re adding a drug, any type of drug, this is going up. Taking a coffee, your heart is racing a little bit, take some sugar you get an insulin rush and you get a little bit of a crash and then you try to get to 0 with more sugar, and it’s a yoyo. Well it’s the same with caffeine, cigarettes, same thing with the other drugs but depending on the drug, very large spikes like the methamphetamine or the cocaine, or very low or like the Fentanyl or the heroin, or morphine, or any of the opiates.” (David)

Based on David's expertise on synthetic drugs, he believes that drug use can cause a chemical disequilibrium to one's body, which can lead to psychological issues. Substances such as methamphetamine or cocaine – which are stimulants – can give one very large spikes, whereas depressants like opiates can make one feel extremely low. The body, for someone who has no mental health issues runs like a “fine-tuned” machine and the more one uses these types of substances, the more prone they become to obtain this imbalance.

Claire highlights the noticeable physical damage she is beginning to see among individuals who partake in illegal drug use.

“Now we know, especially, like Fentanyl, people are dying from it but like ecstasy or meth, we're starting to see the damages on people's face, on skin, on health in general actually, so...” (Claire)

Therefore, based on this experience, she sees drugs use as an unhealthy practice.

Louis and Claire see's illegal drug use as unhealthy because toxicants are found in most drugs being purchased on the street.

“So, methamphetamine is made with certain chemicals...So, we're talking about gasoline, you're talking about fuel, you're talking about ether, you're talking about... so it's really and you're talking about stuff that is not made for human consumption.” (Louis)

“Again, the risk is there because the recipe you can't trust what's in the chemicals. Plus, if you knew the list of chemicals, for example, you would find ether in designer drugs, would you drink ether? Of course not. Sulfuric acid, would you? You would die instantly. But it's found, it's one of the precursor in designer drugs. So, when you think about it, it can create more damages than benefits.” (Claire)

“When you're talking about synthetics, right? I mean, you clearly don't know what's in it. That's what I try to tell my kids and it's like okay. I don't want to preach to death with you but you just don't know what the heck is in it. So why would you possibly take it? Right? And the person, 9 times out of 10, I always found the person that's distributing this stuff, geeze, I hope they weren't making it!” (Sarah)

Finally, Maggie argues that there are illegal drugs that are naturally highly physically and psychologically addictive.

“So, it doesn’t mean there’s not heroin, methamphetamines, which are both highly addictive drugs, physically, highly addictive drugs. Not only psychologically.”  
(Maggie)

In her opinion, some drugs cannot be used recreationally because they are inherently addictive based on their molecular composition.

#### 4.4 Illegal Drug User & Addict

Throughout the interview process, even though participants were not directly questioned on their perceptions towards illegal drug users and people addict to these drugs, some provided their perceptions of these users. These participants do not view illegal drug users and drug addicts in a negative light; rather they seem to sympathize with these individuals. Additionally, several participants were also able to make larger structural connections towards why individuals suffer from addiction issues to begin with. This category is a bit shorter because not every participant discussed this since it was not part of the interview guide. This section is divided into two sub-sections: sympathy and victimization and disenfranchisement and marginalization.

##### 4.4.1 Sympathy and Victimization

A theme that emerged under this category is sympathy and victimization. Several participants highlighted how they feel sympathetic towards illegal drug users and people addict to these drugs; they see them more as victims than as criminals. A consensus among some participants was that these individuals are not criminals and that police cannot arrest their way out of this problem because it is a social and public health problem. Putting people in jail will not address the root causes behind problematic drug use. As a result, the focus of law enforcement should be

to decrease demand through prevention efforts and to tackle criminal organizations that feed the demand. In the end, individuals do not want to become dependent or addicted to the substances they use, even though certain factors can drive them towards this lifestyle.

“Having seen the side that we see and the effects obviously, the overdoses, the lifestyle of people who, heroin addicts, that unfortunately, nobody wants to become a heroin addict. Nobody.... They become, in my opinion, there not really criminals, these heroin addicts are just, it’s an unfortunate situation. No enforcement action is going to stop it. It’s the dealers, the sourcing of the drugs that we have to concentrate on...its, you know, you look at it even as a police officer, you feel bad for them, you feel sorry for them. And you want to help them but there’s no, within our roles we’re very limited, we’re the enforcement side of things, information, they know more, so yeah.” (Maggie)

“I guess the other thing I could add, has it ever effected my... skewed my perceptions when I dealt with people? I don’t think so. I’ve never seen, you know, the recreational use of marijuana as something that would link people to kind of dark hearted behaviors, you know, like, I don’t see it as linked to something like dishonesty or lack of morality or lack of values, it’s a personal choice.” (Emma)

Louis and Sarah agree that illegal drug users have health problems or other problems that are not a matter of the criminal justice system. It’s a social issue.

“But at the end of the day, it’s those people that come up with the health issues, the family issues, you know. It’s a social issue at the end of the day. So, that’s a little bit what I see.” (Louis)

Although it is not clearly stated, it appears that arresting individuals for drug use is not going to make the situation better for this group, which is quite similar to Sarah’s opinion.

#### 4.4.2 Disenfranchisement and Marginalization

Some participants were sympathetic towards this segment of the population and saw them more as victims due to structural inequalities, such as marginalization and disenfranchisement. What is interesting with this theme of disenfranchisement and marginalization, is that part of my personal/researcher biases when going into the interview portion of this research project, was that I would not receive these more complex views towards illegal drug use and addiction from drug

enforcement officers. Several officers were able to link larger systemic issues as to why individual use illegal drugs in a problematic way. Sarah is having a sharp opinion about who are most at risk of developing drug dependency problems.

“The police are going to miss more than they get. Right? And sometimes, society is not open enough or open enough quickly enough, to educate the people that are most at risk. And the people that are most at risk are the very young, the poor, the disenfranchised, the uneducated and I think we’re missing a lot of these people, I mean, Canada has a whole. Because you can just walk through the streets of (city), you can see, you don’t see that in the Maritimes as much. It takes a while to get used to it. Those are, those are people that are, you know, abusing drugs, to the point where, if you see one person but there’s probably 10 victims behind them.” (Sarah)

According to Sarah, those who are abusing drugs are the individuals in society who are very young, poor, disenfranchised and uneducated. These are the individuals who are more at risk of using and abusing illegal drugs. These are the individuals that Sarah feels law enforcement and society misses, because they are not provided with the education and services they needed to prevent drug use and/or abuse from occurring. Claire presented very similar views:

“(D)epending on where you’re from what your background, social economy, where you’re coming from like the, for example, if your and again what I observed, people that have or parents that have not necessarily, the financial status to actually take their kids to Harvard for example, or they don’t have a lot of money for their family, they’re working really hard but they just can’t actually reach their goal. I’ve noticed that people have the tendency to actually fall into drugs a bit more easier.” (Claire)

#### 4.5 New Drug Scene

In conducting the interviews, participants were not asked directly on their perceptions of Fentanyl. However, most participants highlighted that Fentanyl is indeed a crisis being faced by Canada, and that it should be considered as a serious issue due to the dangerous potency of this substance. Some participants also highlighted that once Fentanyl will be under control, there will always be new chemical substances to emerge on the illegal market, which means that the drug

problem might perpetuate indefinitely. Finally, several participants provided information on drug marketing techniques used to appeal younger and untraditional demographics. As such, I have decided to label this conceptual category as the new drug scene. This section is divided into two sub-sections: Fentanyl crisis and other illegal drugs and drug marketing of these products.

#### 4.5.1 Fentanyl Crisis

Currently, Fentanyl has been causing many deaths across Canada and has begun to affect new categories of users. According to participants, one of the most alarming aspects of the current Fentanyl crisis is the dosage/potency ratio of this substance.

“I mean the quantity (Fentanyl) is just crazy, it’ll kill ya. That means the concealment methods are different. It can be put into anything. You just don’t know what’s there. It can be in a micro-quantity.... Police are always behind. Right, that’s the nature of the business. So, yeah but this is a particularly bad one. I don’t remember one being this bad. Since I’ve been a policeman. (on new drug strains)” (Sarah)

Due to these “micro quantities”, concealment methods are different and more difficult to establish since they are much more difficult to find.

Maggie agrees with Sarah and adds the fact that people dying from Fentanyl have a larger spectrum than the traditional illegal drug user they see.

“(Y)ou have Fentanyl which is creating deaths and because it’s people maybe that aren’t heroin junkies and we’re hearing stories of students from, you know, I guess normal, in brackets, normal families that are overdosing because they’re taking a pill that has Fentanyl in it or has been contaminated with Fentanyl not knowing and this is more, is being seen more and more in the media and gets more reaction than maybe a heroin junkie in some ally somewhere where the family doesn’t, there’s no connection, there’s no reaction, which is sad because, you know, with a heroin overdose or a Fentanyl overdose, it’s the same thing. The person dies.” (Maggie)

David’s point highlights the reality behind Naloxone, the antidote for Fentanyl, which many first responders are becoming familiarized with.

“What we see right now with Fentanyl, is exactly that, we’ve saved those people, zombies, they’re at the stages of zombies, we’re saving them with Naloxone, the antidote but they’re not fully functional even if we save them. So, yes they’re alive.” (David)

Claire, who is defining herself as an expert on synthetic drugs, discusses how producers can alter drug recipes to make new substances.

“Yeah, so if you look at the periodic board, if you stay in the column, there’s ways to interact with other chemicals in the same row. And again, I’m not a chemist, just trying to understand and try and survive in that type of environment. But yeah, there’s ways to actually interchange the chemicals and now if you create something, it’s not regulated. So, you can actually use those precursors cause they’re not at this point so now they become regulated you interchange your chemicals and you obtain something new.” (Claire)

“Fentanyl is maybe another one right? In the sense that as soon as there’s a law that’s going to protect certain drugs or prevent certain drugs, then a chemist can make something that is totally new and that’s a gap again.” (Joey)

In the end, those who are in the drug trade will find new ways to make a specific substance or a new strain of an already established substance to continue and increase their profit margins.

#### 4.5.2 Drug Marketing

According to David, pills, the form of most of the illegal synthetic drugs are more attractive to people because they echo the format of legal synthetic drugs from the pharmaceutical industry, but also the type of solution of this industry: to cure yours problems, take a pill. “Canadians are over medicated. Yes, we are, there’s a pill for everything, you have a headache and take a Tylenol.” (David). Maggie thinks this is the reason why ecstasy became so popular in the 1990s.

“Yeah and if you go to the marketing aspect of the criminal groups, drug trafficking groups, when you look at a pill or when you look at a powder in a little baggie, what looks safer? It’s part of their marketing thing, that’s why ecstasy was so, it exploded on the market. Cause it was a little pink pill with a little smiley face or unicorn, what’s so dangerous about that?” (Maggie)

As they argue, pills look safer than powder because many individuals assume that if it is in a pill form, there is less possibility for contamination. In addition, applying a “smiley face” or “unicorn” picture onto the pill makes it look more appealing because it makes the substance seem more innocent and less harmful. Because of this marketing strategy, more and more drugs are being sold in tablet form, particularly to youth, according to David.

“(S)o they (users) want that new hit, the new drug, the new high that’s what they want. They try drugs in a tablet form. To me the tablet form, (targets) very young audience. (David)

Pills are still produced in clan labs by untrained individuals. Therefore, there is still possibility for contamination and for miscalculations in the pills concentration/potency. Claire also raises the problem of brand name pharmaceutical drugs made illegally that can be dangerous because it is not regulated.

“Even Viagra now, they’re doing contraband Viagra. So, they’re going to put the logo... So, from there, people are using it thinking that it’s the same thing but it’s not at the end of the line, it’s going to be made like you said, it’s not regulated, it’s made by some Joe Blow in his house, so that’s the reality.” (Claire)

#### *4.6 Biggest Threats*

As part of the interview guide, each participant was inquired on what they believed to be the biggest threat to emerge from illegal drugs based on their experience. Some participants provided only one single response, while others provided several biggest threats based on their experience in drug enforcement.

Every participant, except for one, agreed that one of the biggest threats caused by illegal drugs is how it can have serious negative consequences to one’s overall health, which includes death. Aside from this argument, several participants also argued that the dangers related to organized crime were another serious consequence of the drug trade that should not be

overlooked. Based on what an individual has been exposed to throughout their enforcement career, it can alter what they perceive to be the most crucial consequence of the illicit drug trade. This category on biggest threats will be divided in two themes: life and limb and organized crime.

#### 4.6.1 Life and Limb

There was a consensus among the majority of this sample of officers that the biggest consequence caused by illicit drugs pertain to an overall “life and limb” argument. What is most dangerous about drugs, based on what had been shared by participants, is that it might cause severe harm to one’s health and, in the worst-case scenario, might result in death. This has already been touched upon in a previous category on illegal use, but this point will be presented here under a different perspective.

Sarah and Claire argued that the life and limb argument is the most crucial social harm caused by illicit drugs; meaning that the loss and degradation of life is the biggest threat.

“To me, again it goes to the life and limb argument, public safety. Like, I just said. Its, how do I say this? I can’t remember what the figures are. The police are going to miss more than they get. Right? ... We’re going to lose a lot more people to this. Right?” (Sarah)

“I would say of course health. It’s the primary because of the addiction. Going towards designer drugs that are stronger and stronger so it’s extremely harder to get out.” (Claire)

Based on her experience working on illegal synthetic drug related files, Claire has been exposed to the harms related to the chemical composition of those substances, and to their impact on the development of addiction. Louis provided very similar views to Claire, but underlines that other generations can be affected by someone who use chemical drugs from the illegal market.

“Health. It’s really, especially the chemical drugs. You get the so basically, people who are abusing the chemical drugs right could see some effects in one generations, maybe two generations from now. If they abuse it.” (Louis)

David sees death obviously is the biggest threat and the disconnection between the user and the rest of the world.

“I won’t even go into the death, ok? That’s a given. We know that. Disconnect. So, you’re, you’re getting individuals that are disconnected from the rest of the world. The drug use creates a state of mind where all that you’re looking for is your next fix.” (David)

#### 4.6.2 Organized Crime

A second theme to emerge under the category of biggest threat caused by illegal drugs was the involvement of organized crime. It is important to note that participants who highlighted this issue as a serious consequence, were those who have encountered criminal organizations more frequently as part of their role through clan lab dismantlement and high level infiltration investigations. The main concerns with organized crime that was highlighted by participants is the systematic violence it causes, but also how criminal networks can easily infiltrate aspects of everyday life through corruption.

“But the organized crime also is very important. We have the street gangs, they’re extremely violent, they would do anything to protect their drugs. We’ve seen, how do you call that? Collateral damages, so we have to be careful of that, that’s a huge risk.” (Claire)

“(T)he organized crimes that say are producing the chemical drugs, the cocaine, all that stuff goes into our streets and it goes to the occasional users and people profit from them.” (Louis)

Joey was the one who underlines the corruption of institutions and other areas by organized crime.

“(T)hink that, the involvement of organized crime in the trafficking in drugs is a significant problem that we have. And I think that organized crime has the ability then to infiltrate all levels and all aspects of society and it makes it that more

complicated to mitigate or reduce their influence and the harm that they do. So I think that would be the biggest one.” (Joey)

Joey’s take on this issue is quite interesting and could be influenced by his experience in infiltrating criminal organizations as an undercover operator and working within a very high level investigative capacity as part of his drug enforcement role.

## 4.7 Benefits and Limits of Prohibition

This category was explicitly explored as part of the interview guide; therefore, each participant had something to contribute. Responses from participants fell under two key themes: enforcement capacity and feeding demand.

### 4.7.1 Enforcement Capacity

There was consensus among participants that current drug laws have provided them with their enforcement capacity, which in the end does make a positive difference.

“Well, the legislation, the laws, for trafficking, selling, production of any illegal substance has enabled me to investigate and conduct my duties as a drug investigator. Its, permitted me to take action against criminal organizations, take drugs off the street that could be, could harm our communities. Stopping the money of these criminal organizations from benefiting from the sale of these drugs. Arresting and putting these people and jail so that they can no longer harm the communities. Not saying there not being replaced but so its disrupting the drug flow, disrupting organized crime in certain areas where I worked.” (Maggie)

At the end of the day, through Maggie’s experience, she was able to hold criminals accountable for their despicable actions, take some drugs off the streets, and as a result, this is helping to keep people safe. The statement made on how this is interrupting the drug flow, I assume, means that even if enforcement efforts are not eliminating the problem, it might make a difference overall.

David’s perception is quite similar to Maggie.

“So, it provides us with, we’re the gate keepers, we’re the ones, sorry for my French, that when the shit hits the fan, we’re the ones that are going to be there to

assist. If we don't have the tools, the proper tools to address the drugs, people are going to start falling down, dying like flies." (David)

When problems occur, they believe that law enforcement is there to help and assist. In the end, they are the one's doing their best to keep the public safe from diverse forms of harm. Again, Louis claims that enforcement actions do make a positive difference. Drug enforcement actions are able to take dangerous people out of circulation, those who provide the illicit drugs to begin with.

"(W)e're able to do law enforcement actions where we we're able to take these people out the system out of the community and this disrupted what they were doing. Now, does it mean that it stopped. No. But at least, we're able to take these people out." (Louis)

Emma and Sarah claim that Canada's current drug legislation is effective because their discretion, power, and resources allow them to reduce harms caused by drug prohibition.

"I've never felt like I was constrained by, I'll use your term, the prohibitionist framework, you know, from making my own judgments on how I apply my discretion, right?...But I've never been constrained by the laws in, I've never felt like I was constrained by the laws, you know, I found generally, that the framework that we were operating in, worked pretty effectively..." (Emma)

"So you would try to get a cannabis seizure a hash seizure and work it up to a bigger seizure of that or a cocaine seizure or something to that affect. So, you would always try like to get information, or confidential informant, using the lesser charge to build it up into something more significant." (Sarah)

Finally, Joey discusses how these current laws provide concrete parameters to distinguish what is acceptable from what is unacceptable, but in the same time to catch people who like to be outlaw.

"Well its put boundaries around what we can and cannot do and how we can do it. Which is certainly helpful. Makes that part very clear, you know what's legal and what isn't. At the same time, probably, its allowed people to want to be more involved in using because its illegal and people have the tendency to want to do something that's bad because it's a little bit exciting, want to be a little adventurous." (Joey)

#### 4.7.2 Feeding Demand

The second theme to emerge under this category is how the current Canadian prohibitionist framework feeds the demand for illegal drugs, which is its main limitation. Prohibition feeds into the demand, according to participants, because there are people who will always want to use illegal drugs whether it is a licit or illicit activity. According to what had been stated in the interviews, people use illegal drugs to enhance their amusement but also to escape harsh realities and to cope with personal but also social difficulties. Having these substances prohibited, opens avenues for groups to fill this void in the illegal market. As stated by David, people tend to want or are curious about what they cannot have, but also, police can stimulate the implication in the illegal market by showing how much money we can do.

“Ok, the problem with prohibition it creates a demand. Its creates, you always envy what the other guy or the other gal has.” (David)

“So, all of that to say, the prohibition is creating an influx of for demand that wouldn’t be there. So every time that we advertise in the media that we seized drugs and that’s why my line has always been, lets not put any money with the seizure. Let’s not put a value, a dollar figure attached because now we’re glorifying the drug trade.” (David)

David argues that prohibition feeds into a demand and the financial gain through the illegal drug market become glorified in the way it is discussed publically by law enforcement.

#### 4.8 Concluding Remarks on Chapter

Based on the findings presented in this chapter, it can be concluded that this sample of drug enforcement officers believe illegal drug use is an unhealthy and dangerous practice and the prohibitionist model to be the best approach in dealing with these drugs.

The following chapter will provide a concrete analysis of the findings presented in this section and will heavily incorporated the theoretical framework that is shaping this

research project and will use relevant literature to help further the analysis. The themes that have been highlighted will be interconnected to help provide a bigger picture on what this project is exploring and answer the larger research question guiding this work.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

This chapter will begin by providing a brief overview of the findings, which centers on police officer's perception on their role under prohibition, illegal drug use, and the illegal market. The following section will mobilize the key aspects from Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, which will be supported by the key findings that emerged throughout this research project. The subsequent section will further the discussion on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and the project's core findings by applying concepts found within social problems theory. The final section will present concluding remarks on the chapter, whilst also acknowledging the limitations of the project's findings.

### 5.1 Overview of Findings

As presented and analyzed in the findings portion of this research project, police officers perceive their role under Canadian prohibition as reducing the harms caused by the illegal drug trade, while also acknowledging their limitation in stopping this trade. According to participants, there are going to be gaps in any type of legislative approach with these drugs, yet, based on the interview questionnaire, believe that most drugs should stay prohibited. Themes that were highlighted in the findings chapter surrounding the illegal drug issue is that several participants believe it creates and fuels an illegal market that is run by criminal organizations, causes severe health harms to users, leads to addiction and dependency problems, can be fatal in some

instances, and encourages risk behavior among youth. Each participant in this study perceived the current legislative framework as a way for them to reduce drug harms due to the enforcement capacities it provides - powers and tools provided to enforcement officers by law allowing dangerous individuals to be put out of circulation – at least for a period of time, large quantities of drugs to be taken off the street – which saves lives, provides a clear distinction on what is acceptable and unacceptable, and allows enforcement officers to assist in emergency situations pertaining to the drug issue, i.e. an overdose.

Concerning the issue of legalization, there was consensus from participants that the regulation of cannabis will be complex and difficult to apply. These samples of officers are aware that they do not have a strong impact on the illegal drug market stemming from prohibition, yet they are worried about the capacity in transitioning into a regulated regime for cannabis.

In fact, the overall conclusion drawn by interview participants is that illegal drug use is a harmful and problematic behavior and that one cannot simply use it recreationally and continue to live a “normal” life - normal in the sense as what is culturally and socially perceived as a normal life in a Western/Canadian context. Participants did perceive some substances to be more at risk than others based on their ingredients, potency, and dosage ratio; however, what was concluded is that all illegal substances are dangerous to experiment.

Based on these larger project findings, the following section will use these discoveries to support the mobilization of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of phenomenology.

## 5.2 Mobilization of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology

As seen through Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) phenomenology in his portion on “being in the world”, larger social influences, shaped by a historical and cultural context, transcends individual

consciousness. In other words, consciousness is susceptible to being influenced by other beings in the world or structures. People share a common world, using language/claims to generate a common meaning, which is influenced by larger social processes (Baldwin, 2007). Everyone has a certain way of being in the world, which opens endless possibilities. Others are included in one's perspective because it is natural for one's consciousness to slip away from time to time and into another's consciousness, or point of view, because we all share a common world (Baldwin, 2007). Additionally, according to Merleau-Ponty, one's perceptual field or context shapes reality for oneself. As a result, specific exposure to scenarios, individuals, and objects, within a precise social context, will influence how one consciously perceives what they experience in the world – both natural and human (Marshall, 2008).

Using the findings of this research project, centering on the main points of inquiry – police officer roles under prohibition and illegal drug use – Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can be used to help understand why these individuals perceive what they have claimed to perceive. Examining the conclusion that drug prohibition allows police to take on a harm reduction role, yet fails to address the illegal market, could be influenced by these individuals' lived experience as police officers, as well as the organizational culture of the police, which creates their perceptions. Based on the experiences highlighted, these officers have taken illegal substances off the streets, have taken dangerous individuals out of circulation, seized importations and exportations of drugs, and have responded to emergency calls for service. In conclusion, these officers perceive the abovementioned impact as positive elements that are in part due to current Canadian drug legislation. These perceptions are engrained in experience, which revolves around the individuals, objects, and scenarios exposed to within a very particular context – which is shaped by social and cultural factors and this will be elaborated on in the following section.

Additionally, if the frequency of these types of scenarios is significant, it can further reinforce and validate this perception for oneself.

Furthermore, exploring the conclusion that all illegal drug use is problematic and should be discouraged could also be influenced by these participants' lived experience as police officers but also through their training and education sessions. Each participant has experience working under the harsh realities of being a frontline officer and having more specifically worked in drug units. I assume they came into contact more frequently with illegal drug users through which immediate negative effects of consumption might be more apparent because those who often need assistance or come into contact with police are problematic drug users. What is being meant by immediate negative effects are the symptoms of individuals who suffer from dependency and addiction problems, of people who live on the streets because they have lost all their human connections and possessions because of their chronic drug use, and of those who have suffered through an overdose (fatal or non-fatal). This analysis is being made because in patrolling the streets and responding to calls, individuals are often exposed to the homeless who suffer from addiction and some of the calls that enforcement receive is to assist with an overdose. They do not see people who manage their drug habit, which tend to be in the middle and upper classes and who do not have major health problems.

In addition, for participants who had experience specializing in illegal synthetic drugs, they were fearful of youth engaging in synthetic drug use such as ecstasy, GHB, and even Fentanyl. Based on this specific perceptual field, these officers gained expertise in the chemical composition of these synthetic drugs and as such perceive the ingredients to prepare or cut the drugs labs run by amateur chemists to be extremely harmful due to their perceived toxicity. In connection to this, these same participants believed illegal synthetic drugs, due to their

composition, to be the most harmful of drugs to be purchased on the market. Based on these perceptions that are engrained in their experience with a specific illegal market and more visible on-the-street users of these drugs, it could be a potential reason as to why these participants have shared this fear/perception. Moreover, for participants who had experience working large scale investigations and undercover operations, based on what had been shared, focus more on high level aspects of the illegal market such as dismantling criminal organizations and intercepting drug importations and exportations. Therefore, under this specific context, criminal organizations tend to be the focus and as such, these officers have developed a lot of expertise on this issue. Because of this perceptual field, it is possible that it had an influence as to why these participants perceived organized crime to be one of the biggest threats associated with the drug issue. Based on the phenomenology being utilized, if these are scenarios in which these officers are exposed to in addressing the illegal drug issue, these events will create perception for each individual. As a result, according to Merleau-Ponty, these types of interactions within the natural world would justify why this sample of participants perceive illegal drug use negatively and how they view their role as not a solution to a bigger and more complex problem but as harm reduction actors.

Before moving forward to the subsequent section, an interesting finding made throughout the interview process could also have an influence on the perceptions shared by participants from both a methodological and theoretical standpoint. As discussed in the presentation of findings, in some instances, distinctions were made between personal opinions (as a civilian) and opinions as a police officer. From a methodological perspective, it is possible that for some participants, on points of interests, their professional opinions prevailed. It is quite possible that these opinions or perceptions were in fact what they truly believe to be real for themselves or other factors could have been at play, such as protecting their role as an enforcement officer and the duty of loyalty

clause<sup>2</sup> that each participant needed to sign before commencing the interviews. From a theoretical perspective, it is possible that there are different levels of perceptions that come together in shaping unique realities for each participant. Some officers claimed that their perspective as an individual differed from their perspective as an officer. Both perceptions are valid because they are for oneself, therefore, personal realities could be potentially made of a combination of perceptions. Therefore, these different ways of perceiving certain issues can potentially come together and shape one's unique understanding of the world.

To deepen the discussion on perceptions explored in this section, the incorporation of social problems theory will be mobilized in order to demonstrate how larger social forces can alter/taint individual perceptions. Furthermore, how this sample of officers can be influenced by social constructions but also help legitimize claims based on their social standing as police officers, will also be explored.

### 5.3 Mobilization of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Social Problems

As per Merleau-Ponty (1962), social and cultural factors transcend individual perception, social and cultural essences can influence individual perceptions within a shared world/society. This argument is key in intersecting phenomenology with the construction of social problems.

As seen through the case study on crack-cocaine by Reinerman and Levine (1996), drug use has been framed as a social problem. According to Spector and Kitsuse (2011), social problems emerge through an interactive claims-making process. Claims-makers can use verbal, visual, and behavioral claims to garner public attention towards an issue of concern. If the claims-makers are successful in persuading the targeted audience, political action is often taken as a solution

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<sup>2</sup> A duty of loyalty form was signed by each participant before the commencement of the interviews (see methodology chapter). This could be a potentially reason behind some provided very "close-ended" and very standard replies or made distinctions between their civilian and enforcement identity during certain topics of discussion.

(Spector & Kitsuse, 2011). What is important is that the audience truly believes the issue to be problematic and that there are concrete solutions that can be put into place to solve it, for an issue to be labelled as a social problem (Loseke, 2003). As seen through the crack-cocaine example, the DEA was able to persuade the public into believing that this drug was a very serious and harmful social issue, putting pressure on the American government (Reinarman & Levine, 1996). These claims were able to persuade the audience due to the help from mass media, which projected verbal and visual claims into the public realm on this issue (Reinarman & Levine, 1996). Subsequently, reinforcing the legitimacy of illegal drug use as a social problem, several moral panics occurred surrounding specific illegal substances during different time periods (Carstairs, 2006; Orcutt & Tuner, 1992; Reinarman & Levine, 2004; Tanner, 2015; Hier, 2002; Linneman & Wall, 2013), reinforcing the idea that illegal drug use is problematic and should be prohibited. Additionally, the prohibitionist discourse that emerged with this social problem, has transformed the drug issue into a topic of constant fear the last century. Because of illegal drug use being constructed as a social problem during an extreme length of time, it can be argued that these prohibitionist views have been ingrained societies, particularly because this discourse is sustained by international institutions at the United Nations. Linking this argument with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the construction of social problems, due to its large social influence, can alter individual perceptions.

The sample of police officers who participated in this study did evolve in the larger social and cultural context that has deemed illegal drug use as harmful, criminogenic, and immoral. Because of this, they too are susceptible to how illegal drug use has been constructed as a social problem as part of their own perceptions and can result in these individuals perceiving things in a particular way as part of their official role - which takes place in a very specific perceptual field,

the police and drug units. As highlighted in the previous section, this sample of officers view illegal drug use negatively and view their role as minimizing harm caused by the illegal drug trade, which is hardly impacted by enforcement efforts. Based on individual experiences shared, participants have responded to calls for service that were related to illegal drugs, where one can infer are in many instances emergency situations, have seen individuals living on the streets and rendered hopeless due to their addiction to illegal psychoactive substances, see individuals using illegal drugs as placing a strain on the social system, and have begun seeing youth of very young age engaging in illegal drug use that has been argued as very dangerous due to the perceived toxicity<sup>3</sup> of the substances highlighted.

This last point that centers on youth drug experimentation can be connected to another aspect of social problems theory – the youth component of moral panics. As argued by Jewkes (2004), youth are often at the forefront of moral panics because they are deemed newsworthy – easily incites public attention and concern. Society tends to uphold the idea that youth are innocent beings and as such become vulnerable because they can be easily corrupted (Jewkes, 2004). Youth are often viewed as the future of society and because of this, if they are caught engaging in immoral and risky behavior, it is viewed as jeopardizing the future (Jewkes, 2004). Due to the portrayal of youth as part of many moral panics and the ecstasy scare being a perfect example of this (Tanner, 2015), the image of youth tends to be an issue that easily incites public attention and concern. As previously mentioned in this section, this sample of officers, as actors in this specific social and cultural context that takes on said view of youth, can also have this fear or concern influence their perceptions. In general, the perceptions that were shared, paint a very

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<sup>3</sup> However, there is a real danger in terms of toxicity of these illegal substances due to the lack of quality assurance and the lack of information on consumption.

negative picture of illegal drug use, which coincides with the larger social view that emerged as part of this practice being labelled as a social problem.

A subsequent point that centers on youth drug experimentation is that there is a disconnection between the official role of the officers as impartial individuals who uphold the law and their perception that they are the special protectors of youth. Utilizing the work of Merleau-Ponty, at times individuals slip into a contradiction within their perceptions. While this sample of officers has mentioned on several occasions that they remain neutral and enforce the law, they also acknowledge the need to pay special attention towards youth due to their increased vulnerability. It is possible that individual perceptions on a specific issue or scenario can cause some conflict for the individual.

The analysis being made in connecting Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and social problems theory with this project's core findings is that this larger social construction that portrays illegal drug use negatively, especially when it involves youth, could possibly have altered the perceptions of the officers interviewed. If this is possible, then these potentially pre-ingrained perceptions - whether one is conscious or not of this influence - can shape how they experience and perceive the scenarios and individuals they encounter in the field and also generate meanings associated with these encounters. Additionally, if these pre-ingrained perceptions correspond with what these officers are experiencing and perceiving within their own perceptual field, it can also help validate these perceptions. As per Merleau-Ponty, one's interactions with the natural and human world is what creates perception and meaning for oneself. Therefore, in conclusion, the construction of social problems, with its application to phenomenology for the purposes of this research project, could be utilized to provide an analysis

as to why this sample of officers who work in drug units perceive illegal drug use to be problematic and their role as harm minimizers, rather than abolishing the illegal drug trade.

A final point on this project's main findings and social problems theory is that this sample of participants can also be viewed as claims-makers due to the symbolic and legal power they hold as law enforcement officers. This point will be elaborated on by incorporating findings relating to public education and awareness. Each participant holds experience providing educational talks, kiosks, and courses geared towards the public. The key messages behind these educational and awareness campaigns, according to participants, is so that the public is fully aware of the dangers caused by illegal drug use and the illegal drug trade with the goal to deter use of these drugs, especially among youth. This message coincides with the larger prohibitionist rhetoric that emerged through the construction of illegal drugs as a social problem. Therefore, it is possible that this prohibitionist rhetoric is influencing the perceptions of this sample of officers, but that they too are also legitimizing and adding to this rhetoric as claims makers. The following section will provide concluding remarks on this chapter's analysis of the findings and will also provide the limitations of this type of study.

#### 5.4 Concluding Remarks on Chapter

Throughout the discussion, phenomenology and social problems theory have been mobilized to see how participant perceive their role working under prohibition and on illegal drug use but also how this sample of officers can also add to the larger claims-making process, adding to the legitimization of illegal drug use being construed as a social problem that helps justify the prohibitionist model. Based on what has been shared by participants, the overall analysis is that what they have encountered - which creates perception according to Merleau-Ponty – can provide a potential understanding as to why their perceptions coincide with the larger

prohibitionist rhetoric that was explored throughout this project. Under the prohibitionist rhetoric, illegal drugs are viewed as a great social harm that should be eliminated through general deterrence. Additionally, as members of the larger social sphere, social constructions can also have an influence on their perceptions, potentially altering how they encounter on-the-job experiences but by also possibly reinforcing what they perceive. Finally, as a unique group that holds specific enforcement powers and potentially perceived subject-matter expertise on illegal drug issue through their dealings with it first-hand, could also be argued as claims-makers and can also reinforce the prohibitionist rhetoric, if what they perceive and share with audience members coincides with this larger view. What is being concluded from this exploratory research study is only applicable to the specific sample of participants in this study, therefore, cannot be generalized towards the larger population or towards other police officers.

## CONCLUSION

This research study examined the perceptions of drug enforcement officers on their role and illegal drug use. As part of this study, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers having worked in drug units, which were analyzed through a qualitative deductive thematic analysis. The goal of this study was to gain insight into the frontline experiences of these officers to better understand how this can shape their views on the current legislative framework in place for specific psychoactive substances and how they view illegal drug use in terms of harms.

This research project makes a relevant contribution to the field of criminology and for numerous reasons. A qualitative account of drug enforcement perceptions on their role under Canadian probation and illegal drug use is an area of inquiry that has yet to be examined academically. The limited academic literature that examines specifically law enforcement *perceptions* tends to focus on domestic violence and the effectiveness of drug law enforcement tools and techniques used towards open-air drug markets, and officer attitudes on drug harms and strategies (Davis, 2014; Petrocelli *et al.*, 2014; Frabutt, 2010).

Subsequently, most studies in this field are much more quantitative in nature and have often used surveys and questionnaires, which are sent to a large sample of participants. This research study is quite original, since it was qualitative and used seven semi-structured interviews targeting a specific sample of participants.

This project also examines the issue of drug enforcement perceptions from a strictly Canadian context, which is very limited in the field of drug academia. These findings will help fill this gap by providing a different contextual framework, one in which participants have

worked from various locations from across Canada including the East and West Coasts, central Canada, as well as the North.

Throughout the progression of this research project, there was constant evolution in regards to Canadian drug policy due to the opioid crisis and the country's journey towards cannabis legalization. When I began the initial research for this project, the majority of information pertaining to Fentanyl overdoses came from 2014-2015 and were interpreted from a Vancouver-centric approach. Many of the alarming issues with Fentanyl were raised by workers from InSite in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, who were trying to shed light on this issue facing the intravenous drug user community (*The Globe and Mail*, 2014). However, throughout the timelines of this thesis, Fentanyl has become a widespread epidemic affecting Canadians from all regions and all socio-economic backgrounds. According to recent statistics, there has been approximately 2 500 recorded Fentanyl fatal-overdoses in Canada in 2016 (Huffington Post, 2017). Additionally, more support has been garnered towards the need for harm reduction initiatives in light of this crisis; resulting in Ottawa gaining approval in July 2017 to open a safe injection site.

Alongside the Fentanyl crisis, there were constant developments pertaining to the transition from cannabis prohibition to legalization. The *Cannabis Act* was introduced in the House of Commons on April 13, 2017 and is currently in its second reading in the Senate as of November 30, 2017. Due to these ongoing changes within the Canadian political climate, literature pertaining to the opioid crisis, safe injection sites, and cannabis legalization, I have decided to exclude developments on both these issues from the literature review after February 2017, when the interview process began.

Another limitation is that this project solely focuses on an enforcement side of the drug issue. Therefore, a more public health point of view, which could differ drastically, was not established. Therefore, issues of concern revolved around criminal organizations, overdoses, drug marketing, and enforcement capacity. This project only provided one part of a much larger picture on this subject matter.

A final limitation of this research study is that the use of semi-structured interviews did not allow me to fully immerse myself into the participant's perceptual field/work context, therefore, I am only able to gather and present a representation of these lived experiences. To address this limitation, an ethnographic approach to this research project could be conducted as part of future research.

For the way forward, future research could be conducted on this current study but with a focus on the perceptions of cannabis legalization in Canada. Such a research project would have to be conducted, however, once the *Cannabis Act* has come into force so that the officers who would potentially be interviewed would have some experience under this new regime. This would make a very compelling research study because Canadian police officers have always worked under prohibition, therefore, would be a valid avenue for inquiry on how their views could have changed due to this shift in legislation. Additionally, further research could be conducted on this thesis topic but with a different policing organization to see if there are nuances based on perceptions founded in experience. Finally, examining perceptions on drug legislation and drug use could be conducted with a different sample of frontline workers, such as public health nurses, individuals who work in a rehabilitative environment, and possibly other first responders – such as paramedics. These possible avenues for future research would be

feasible as a Master's research project but could also be undertaken at the doctorate level, where the sample size used could be vastly expanded.

The findings from this research study demonstrate that this sample of police officers perceive their role as minimizing the harms caused by the illegal drug trade, which has been caused by prohibition, and perceive illegal drug use as heavily problematic. Based on individual front-line experience, each participant has seen the darker side of the illegal drug trade and as a potential result view illegal drug use as problematic. According to participants, illegal drugs have created a market where criminal organizations can flourish, causes severe health harms that include dependency and addiction issues, and can lead to systemic violence. These points are seen through the presentation of findings but more explicitly under the context of consequences that come from the prohibitionist regime. Based on these shared experiences, individual perceptions are influenced and a reality is created in consequence for oneself, according to the theoretical orientation taken for this project. Moreover, due to the political status of enforcement officers, they too play the role as claims-makers, reinforcing commonly held public views on illegal drugs, helping to potentially alter the perceptions and reality of the larger Canadian audience. Additionally, based on the front-line work that has been conducted under this larger drug legislative framework, the sample of officers agrees that their role under a prohibitionist framework is to reduce harms caused by the illegal drug trade. Furthermore, recent developments on the opioid crisis and cannabis legalization played a role in the topics covered and the perceptions provided by the participants because they are extremely topical issues during the months the interviews were conducted.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

1. What is your own experience in regards to drug law enforcement?
2. What is your official role as a drug law enforcement officer? What are the principle guidelines in which you are instructed to follow?
3. What are your perceptions on the recreational use of currently illicit substances based on your work experience?
4. What is the biggest threat caused by illicit drugs, based on your experience in the field and why?
5. What has the prohibitionist framework allowed you to do as a drug law enforcement officer?



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## CONSENT

**Title of the study:** Law Enforcement Experience with Drug Prohibition on Individual Perceptions of a Contemporary Drug Problem in Canada

**RCMP Reference Number:**

**Principle Investigator and Supervisor:** Pascale Bourque and Dr. Bastien Quirion, Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa.

**Contact Information:**

- Pascale Bourque:
- Dr. Bastien Quirion:

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Pascale Bourque as part of a Master's Thesis in Criminology supervised by Dr. Bastien Quirion.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to gain insight on drug law enforcement officers' perspective on the prohibitionist framework and its application in the field.

**Participation:** My participation will consist essentially of taking part in a face-to-face audio-recorded semi-structured interview of an hour. I will be asked about my experience in drug law enforcement and my perceptions of contemporary Canadian drug issue. The interview will be conducted through the winter/spring of 2017.

**Audio-Recording:** My participation in this research project will require my consent to audio-record my interview.

**Risks:** My participation in this study will entail that time will be taken away from daily activities, which can interrupt family life. To minimize the aforementioned risk, the principal investigator will accommodate the participant by scheduling the interview when it best suits the participants and will be the individual to travel the longer distance to proceed with the interview. There is also the possibility of social repercussions and to mitigate this risk factor, pseudonyms will be used and no recollection of personal information and location/name of detachment will be used. This will ensure participant confidentiality.

**Benefits:** My participation in this study will help advance knowledge in the field of drug use and its political regulation in order to inform policy

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decisions in an era where decriminalization and legalization are become predominant.

**Confidentiality:** I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential between myself and the researcher. I understand that the contents will be used only to further this research project and that my confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and no collection of personal information (i.e. detachment, sex, age, ethnicity, etc.). In addition, the location and name of the detachment within the province will not be disclosed.

**Conservation of data:** The data collected in form of transcripts and audio recordings from the interviews will be stored in a locked location, where the principal investigator and supervisor are the only individuals to have access and all data stored on a computer will be protected by a password and an up to date anti-virus program. The principal investigator and the project supervisor will be the only individuals to have access to this data. All data for participants will be kept until 5 years after the project is completed.

**Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be discarded (recorded tapes deleted, files will be deleted, and all written data properly shredded).

**Audio-Recording Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to the audio-recording of my interview for the above research study conducted by Pascale Bourque of the Criminology Department of the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Bastien Quirion.

**Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Pascale Bourque of the Criminology Department of the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Bastien Quirion.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5  
Tel.: (613) 562-5387

Email: [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)

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There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:      *(Signature)*                      Date: *(Date)*

Researcher's signature:      *(Signature)*                      Date: *(Date)*

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## Participation in research on Law Enforcement Experiences with Drug Prohibition on Individual Perceptions of a Contemporary Drug Issue in Canada

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research, which has been approved by the RCMP Human Resources Research Review Board. Before you begin, please read and sign this document.

The Treasury Board Secretariat document on Duty of Loyalty (<http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/psm-fpfm/ve/code/icg01-eng.asp>) notes the following:

- The duty of loyalty owed by public servants to the Government of Canada encompasses a duty to refrain from public criticism of the Government of Canada.
- Failure to observe the duty of loyalty may justify disciplinary action, including dismissal.
- However, the duty of loyalty is not absolute, and public criticism may be justified in certain circumstances.
- In determining whether any particular public criticism is justified and therefore not subject to disciplinary action, the duty of loyalty must be balanced with other interests such as the public servant's freedom of expression.
- Three situations in which the balancing of these interests is likely to result in an exception being made to the duty of loyalty are where:
  - ✓ The Government is engaged in illegal acts;
  - ✓ Government policies jeopardize life, health or safety; or
  - ✓ The public servant's criticism has no impact on his or her ability to perform effectively the duties of a public servant or on the public perception of that ability.

I have read and understand my obligations as an employee of the Government of Canada

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## University of Ottawa Master's in Criminology Research Study

### Participants Needed!

**You are invited to take part in a research project that wishes to gain drug law enforcement perspectives on Canada's current drug situation.**

**Research:** Law Enforcement Experiences with Drug Prohibition on Individual Perceptions of a Contemporary Drug Issue in Canada.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research project is to gain insight on drug law enforcement officers' perceptions on the prohibitionist framework and its application in the field.

**Number of Participants Needed:** A maximum of 8 participants will be needed on a first come, first served basis.

#### **Eligibility Criteria:**

- Police Officers with experience in drug law enforcement (currently employed and retired).
- Speaks French and or English

**What Participants Will be Asked to Do:** You will be asked to partake in a face-to-face semi structured interview of an hour. You will be asked to talk about your experiences in drug law enforcement and how that has influenced your views on the way recreational drug use has been politically dealt with in Canada, and benefits and consequences of the techniques being used to deal with the drug issue. The interviews will be scheduled for Winter/Spring 2017, more specific times will be established based on individual interest and accommodation.

**Confidentiality:** Participation in this research project is strictly *voluntary* and *you may withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions*. Identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and no personal information will be collected. All information will be discarded upon withdraw.

**Contact Information:** If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact Pascale Bourque, the principle investigator.

Research supervisor Bastien Quirion

**RCMP Reference Number:**



**Université d'Ottawa**  
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**  
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

## Ethics Approval Notice

### Social Sciences and Humanities REB

#### Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Pascale	Bourque	Social Sciences / Criminology	Principal Investigator
Bastien	Quirion	Social Sciences / Criminology	Supervisor

**File Number:** 05-16-03

**Type of Project:** Other

**Title:** Law Enforcement Experience with Drug Prohibition on Individual Perceptions of a contemporary Drug issue in Canada

<b>Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Approval Type</b>
06/22/2016	06/21/2017	Approved

**Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A



**Université d'Ottawa**  
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**  
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).

**Signature:**

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

## Memorandum of Agreement

THIS ARRANGEMENT, made in duplicate as of the 21<sup>st</sup> day of January, 2017

### BETWEEN

THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE  
(HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS "RCMP")

### AND

PASCALE BORQUE  
(HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS "researcher")

### BACKGROUND

WHEREAS the researcher and the wishes to conduct research with employees of the RCMP; and

WHEREAS such research projects may further the research objectives of the participants through an advancement in the state of police research and improved law enforcement policy, training and equipment.

### NOW, THEREFORE THE PARTICIPANTS WILL AS FOLLOWS:

#### 1. DEFINITIONS:

In this Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) the following terms, in singular or plural form according to the context, are defined as follows:

"Arrangement" means Memorandum of Agreement

"MOA" means Memorandum of Agreement

"Participants" means the RCMP and Pascale Borque

"Project" means the collaborative research project

"Participant" means volunteer participants of the proposed research project.

**2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE:**

Pascale Borque's research will:

- Explore law enforcement experiences with drug prohibition on individual perceptions of a contemporary drug Issue in Canada.

**3. OBLIGATIONS OF THE RCMP:**

3.1 The RCMP intends to:

- Provide the researcher with the opportunity to notify RCMP employees of the research, and provide information on how to participate in the research.

**4. OBLIGATIONS OF Pascale Borque:**

4.1 Pascale Borque through the RCMP intends to:

- provide the call for participation in the research.
- Coordinate and schedule interviews with RCMP employees who respond to the call for participation.
- protect the information gathered for the research in accordance with the details provided in the research proposal approved by the RCMP Human Resources Research Review Board.
- provide to the RCMP Human Resources Research Review Board with a copy of the final research paper.

**5. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

No transfer of funds is authorized under this MOA.

**6. TERM:**

This Arrangement will commence upon execution of the research and will not expire.

7. **CONFIDENTIALITY AND USE OF INFORMATION**

The researcher intends to:

- 7.1 use the information provided by the research participants solely for the specific project to which it relates.
- 7.2 treat information received from the research participants in confidence and take all reasonable measures to preserve its confidentiality and integrity and to safeguard the information against accidental or unauthorized access, use or disclosure.
- 7.3 not disseminate the information to any third party without the prior written consent of the RCMP and the participants except as required by law.
- 7.4 limit access to the information to those whose duties require such access, who are legally bound to keep confidences who have the appropriate security clearance, and have entered into a non-disclosure agreement.
- 7.5 All information owned by the RCMP that is shared with the researcher for the purpose of this project, will be returned to the RCMP at the conclusion of the Project. No copy of such information will be kept by the researcher.
- 7.6. **DISCLOSURE AND USE OF INFORMATION** Information obtained through this research will be used in a manner consistent with ethical research practices. Information collected will not be used for purposes other than for the purpose and scope for which this research was intended unless an amendment and an agreement is made to use the same for other purposes.
- 7.7 The researcher will provide the RCMP with manuscript drafts.
- 7.8 If any of the results from the study are later considered for publication or as part of a presentation, the Director General of the RCMP's National Communications Services must provide prior consent to how the organization is described and/or identified.
- 7.9 Upon review of the draft manuscript, if the RCMP is of the opinion that information obtained therein compromises the security of the Department, an institution, an individual or the public, the researcher will edit the manuscript prior to publication to the satisfaction of the RCMP.

**PROTECTED "A"**

- 7.10 In addition to the provision of draft manuscripts, the researcher will provide the RCMP with a copy of any published manuscripts prepared pursuant to this MOA upon their publication.
- 7.11 The researcher will only disclose or publish non-identifiable information.
- 7.12 The researcher will not include in the final manuscript, any information that identifies or could be used to identify an individual.
- 7.13. **NO END TO CONFIDENTIALITY** All obligations of confidentiality and restrictions on the use of information in this MOA do not expire.

**8. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

The researcher will:

- 8.1 promptly notify the RCMP of any unauthorized use or disclosure of the information exchanged under this MOA and will furnish the RCMP with details of such unauthorized use or disclosure. In the event of such an occurrence the researcher will take all reasonably necessary steps to prevent a re-occurrence.
- 8.2 immediately notify the RCMP if the researcher receives a request under the *Privacy Act*, the *Access to Information Act* or other lawful authority, for information provided under this MOA. If requested, the researcher will endeavor to protect the information from disclosure to the extent permitted by law.
- 8.3 immediately return any information that should not have been provided to the researcher by the RCMP and destroy any copy using Government of Canada approved equipment.

**9. ACCURACY OF INFORMATION**

The researcher will be required to:

- 9.1 verify the accuracy and completeness of the information provided to the RCMP.
- 9.2 promptly notify the RCMP if the researcher learns that inaccurate or potentially unreliable information may have been provided or received and take all reasonable remedial steps.

**10. EQUIPMENT:**

The researcher will provide any necessary equipment including computing equipment and required software.

**11. DEPARTMENTAL REPRESENTATIVES:**

The following officials are designated as the departmental representatives for purposes of this Arrangement and any notices required under this Arrangement will be delivered as follows:

<b>For the RCMP:</b>  I/C Statistics, Demographics and HR Research Workforce Programs and Services Human Resources Management Services	<b>For the researcher:</b> Ph: Fax: e-mail:
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**12. LIABILITY:**

The researcher will be responsible for any damages caused in carrying out the terms of this Arrangement, and for any indemnification that arises therefrom.

**13. DISPUTE RESOLUTION:**

In the event of a dispute arising from the interpretation or operation of this Arrangement, it will be referred to the representatives set out above, who will use their best efforts to resolve the matter amicably. If such negotiation fails, the matter will be referred to the Chief Human Resources Officer for the RCMP for a final and binding decision.

**14. USE AND EXPLOITATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:**

**14.1 NATURE OF THE PROJECT** Depending on the nature of research, the Intellectual Property that may arise may be difficult to predict, and the researcher may consider it desirable to defer settling the terms on which it will be available until the Intellectual Property is known.

## 14.2. DEFINITIONS

**"Intellectual Property"** is all rights to inventions, patents, industrial designs, copyright material, trade secrets, and confidential information first produced by the researcher.

**"Arising Intellectual Property"** is Intellectual Property that is developed through the research.

**"Background Intellectual Property"** is Intellectual Property that is owned by the researcher or the RCMP prior to initiation of the research.

**"Results"** is all information, Know-how, results, inventions, software and other Intellectual Property identified or first reduced to practice or writing in the course of the research

- 14.3 This Arrangement does not affect the ownership of any Intellectual Property in any Background or in any other technology, design, work, invention, software, data, technique, Know-how, or materials that are not Results. The Intellectual Property in them will remain the property of the party that contributes them to the research (or its licensors). No licence to use any Intellectual Property is granted or implied by this Arrangement except the rights expressly granted in this Arrangement.
- 14.4 Each Participant grants the other a royalty-free, non-exclusive licence to use its Background for the purpose of carrying out the research, but for no other purpose. The researcher may not grant any sub-licence to use the RCMP's background.
- 14.5 The researcher will own the Intellectual Property in the results, and may take such steps as it may decide from time to time, and at its own expense, to register and maintain any protection for that Intellectual Property, including filing and prosecuting patent applications for any of the results.
- 14.6 The researcher grants to the RCMP an exclusive, indefinite, fully paid-up, royalty free licence (with the right to sub-licence) to use the Intellectual Property in any of the Results for any purpose.

## 15. MONITORING:

The Participants will meet on a periodic basis to review and assess the operation and effectiveness of this Arrangement.

**PROTECTED "A"**

**16. TERMINATION:**

This Arrangement may be terminated by either Participant upon thirty (30) days written notice. Termination does not release a Participant from any obligations which accrued while the Arrangement was in force.

Signed by the authorized officers of the Participants:

For Pascale Borque:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For the RCMP:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Superintendent  
Director General, Workforce Programs  
and Services  
Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Date: 2017-01-23