

Constructing Tent City: Media representations of Oppenheimer Park

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Abstract. This paper explores the role of media representations in constructing the landscape of Vancouver's inner-city. Emphasizing how landscape is discursively created, this paper analyzes the imposition of socio-spatial realities on the Downtown Eastside. Focusing on the 2019 tent city at Oppenheimer Park, I explore how processes of territorial stigmatization, dispossession, and the erasure of disorderly bodies are directly related to media representations. Building off Blomley & Liu's (2013) work, I use a framing analysis to shed light on the dominant narratives used in local news reporting on tent city. As outlined by Entman (1993), framing analysis illuminates how certain pieces of information are highlighted to enhance the probability that receivers will perceive and process it. Often used for political purposes, framing is a powerful tool which can influence and shape public opinion. Three prominent frames were found in this research; criminalization, socialization, and disruption.

Introduction

The historical and political significance of Oppenheimer park is not lost on anyone who has either grown up in or visited Vancouver. Media reporting of the Downtown Eastside has positioned Oppenheimer park, along with the intersection of Main and Hastings, as the center piece of the city's struggle with crime, drugs, and sex work. Inextricably bound in representations of the Downtown Eastside, narratives of locations such as Oppenheimer Park have become synonymous with more general narratives of the neighbourhood in which it resides. In other words, mainstream media reporting tends to blur the distinctions of places like Oppenheimer Park, erasing specificities and nesting it within a larger narrative of poverty and crime. Notably, these representations and conceptions of Oppenheimer park fail to recognize the geographic and symbolic importance of the park.

Located in the heart of the Downtown Eastside, Oppenheimer is not only a place of constant activity for neighbourhood residents, but a place of ongoing resistance. Throughout time, the park has come to represent a place-based battle against the dispossession and displacement of various social groups. This paper situates the continued occupation of Oppenheimer park, often referred to as a tent city, within the historical battle against dispossession and for the right to remain. While there is an abundance of literature on the Downtown Eastside and its representation in the media, there is a significant gap in literature regarding the representations of tent cities in the media. In this way, this paper offers a novel contribution to research of tent cities.

Focusing on the role of news reporting in creating and circulating external representations of tent city and its occupants, I use a framing analysis to show how three dominant frames (criminalization, socialization, and disruption) inform the majority of news reports. Not only do these frames construct and impose a reality detached from the experience of residents, they also play a crucial role in influencing public opinion to either support or oppose tent city. In the case of Oppenheimer Park, negative media representations have led to growing public sentiments of contestation towards tent city. As a result, city officials have faced pressure to ease public insecurities by demonstrating competency in poverty management, most easily displayed through the eviction and displacement of tent city and its residents (Herring, 2014). Moving forward, I suggest the need for a renewed representation of tent city, one which centers the voices and experiences of residents and allows them the space for self-determination, autonomy, and dignity. Ultimately, this type of representation would reinforce the humanity of residents, in turn encouraging legal and financial accommodation from the City of Vancouver, and social accommodation from the public.

A Brief History of Oppenheimer Park

The history of the Downtown Eastside is a history of dispossession, tracing back to the earliest days of what we now call Vancouver (Ellison, 2017). With the arrival of colonial settlers in the late 19th century, land was stolen from the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, who were displaced as surveying, settlement, and city building soon began (Kobayashi et al., 2019). Established as the frontier neighbourhood, the DTES became popular for settlement among Europeans and migrant workers, many of whom arrived from Japan (Blomley, 1998). The high influx of Japanese newcomers into the Downtown Eastside resulted in the flourishing of Japantown, with Oppenheimer park central to this community (Kobayashi et al., 2019). This lasted until the early 1940s, when residents of Japantown were deported and sent to various internment camps throughout British Columbia (Ellison, 2017). Since then, Oppenheimer park has been a highly politicized park, claimed by many marginalized social groups for the purpose of protesting. Some of these include labour protests such as the 1940s Bloody Sunday protest, which

drew a crowd of 10,000 people, the 1990s HIV/ AIDS demonstration and memorial ‘a thousand crosses’, where a thousand white crosses were planted in the park, as well as the annual Women’s Memorial March which stops at Oppenheimer Park to form a healing circle.

Over the past decade, Oppenheimer park has been the site of ongoing occupations, known to many simply as ‘tent city’. Tent city is a homeless encampment primarily consisting of individuals who are chronically homeless, of which a large population are Indigenous. While *tent city* is a broad, global term referring to any sort of temporary housing structures, Herring (2014) offers a helpful framework for understanding the diverging forms of homeless encampments within North America and their subsequent treatment by local governance. Specifically, Herring (2014) outlines two possible settings for tent cities: legal and illegal, as well as two basic dimensions: institutionalized or informal. Depending on where encampments fall on these two axes, they are subject to either contestation, toleration, accommodation, or co-optation (Herring, 2014). Within this framework, Oppenheimer Park can be classified as an illegal and informal tent city, therefore falling under the realm of contestation. As a result, the tent city is a site of public unrest and anxiety, and has been subject to numerous attempts at eviction on behalf of the City of Vancouver. The illegal and informal nature of tent city has served as an excuse for municipal and provincial authorities to freeze housing wait lists in an effort to quickly clear out tent city and relocate its residents. Typically, access to social housing is determined using risk assessment protocols, which are in place to ensure higher-risk individuals such as seniors, those with underlying health conditions, and rough sleepers receive housing first (Carnegie Community Action Project, 2020). By freezing housing wait lists and bumping Oppenheimer residents to the top, some of the most vulnerable populations are left neglected, without access to safe and dignified housing.

In 2014, activists and community members joined residents of Oppenheimer Park to protest the City of Vancouver’s attempts to evict and relocate tent city residents to shelters (Georgia Straight, 2014). Indigenous activists pointed to the fact that the land is located on unceded Coast Salish territories, and therefore the City has no legal grounds to evict people from the land (Kobayashi et al., 2019). Drawing attention to the material and moral benefits of tent city, residents and activists emphasized the preference of encampments over shelters, noting strict curfews, an inability to stay with their significant other, demeaning treatment by staff, the inability to store their belongings, and restrictions on pets as barriers to living in shelters (Herring, 2014). Vocalizing the constraining and dehumanizing nature of shelters, residents fought for their right to remain in Oppenheimer Park. Despite this, an injunction was granted to the Vancouver Park Board soon after and occupants were forcibly removed (Georgia Straight, 2014). However, the fight was taken up again in 2019. Multiple eviction deadlines, daily inspections from the VPD and fire officials, and countless attempts to relocate residents out of the public’s eye have been closely followed and reported by journalists. All the while, activists and residents have urged the municipal and provincial government to either provide subsidized hous-

ing for residents, or grant the necessary resources to protect and support the livelihood of residents living in the park (Carnegie Community Action Project, 2020).

Literature Review

Constructing Inner City Landscapes

The Downtown Eastside's popularity within local and national media is not new by any means. To properly analyze media representations of Oppenheimer Park, it is essential to first understand how the landscape of the Downtown Eastside has been externally constructed and imposed. Blomley (1998) notes that landscape is discursively created, and therefore must be understood as a 'visual ideology', one which is equally material and representational. In other words, landscape is both a physical place as well as the conception of this place. This is important to recognize when discussing inner city neighbourhoods, whose 'visual ideologies' are almost always embedded in societal power relations (Blomley, 1998). As an institution, the media is actively involved in reproducing these power relations through privileging certain narratives, frames, and voices (Blomley & Liu, 2013). For individuals who have little direct experience with the inner city, the media plays a powerful role in constructing the social and spatial reality of this space (Blomley & Liu, 2013). In this way, the development of a social understanding of poverty and homelessness is reliant on the act of external representation (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). Through selective representation, the media works to define the emotional, moral, and rational positions the general public should take towards the urban poor (Nielsen, 2015). What usually occurs, however, is an incessant tendency to document and represent 'spectacles of suffering' in inner city neighbourhoods (Culhane, 2003). This is exemplified by the documentation and representation of the DTES, which focuses disproportionately on violence, underclass deviance, and drug use (Blomley & Liu, 2013). The result is what Wacquant (2009; 2007) calls territorial stigmatization, the characterization of certain urban spaces as "pits of social and moral perdition [that] ... inspire dread and vilification throughout the society" (p. 117). These undesirable neighbourhoods are depicted from afar by institutions, who label these places as 'urban hellholes' where violence and vice are out of control (Wacquant, 2007). Likewise, the Downtown Eastside is most often represented as a space of criminality and a zone of degeneracy (Blomley & Liu, 2013). Aoki (2011) notes how the media often represents the landscape of the DTES and its residents as "diseased and infectious objects of fear that need to be contained and controlled" (p.30). In these representations, the homeless are depicted as needy, passive individuals who are in the clutches of vice and criminality (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). Transforming social ills into the personal problems of the poor (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015), the DTES is portrayed as a problem in need of outside elites to suggest solutions (Blomley & Liu,

2013). In this way, the lives of those in the DTES become a site for public judgement, policy intervention, and research investigation (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015).

Visibility, Invisibility... in the Downtown Eastside

However, the neighbourhood, its residents, and their myriad of 'issues' are represented without actually addressing the subjects themselves as audiences (Nielsen, 2015). Stories of extreme marginalization, social exclusion, and drug use often find their way into the media, with the underlying assumption that the implied audience of these stories resides beyond the neighbourhood. These deficit-based representations focus on the ills of the neighbourhood, presenting struggles as individual issues related to a few dysfunctional systems (such as housing), rather than as social issues relating to the political economy of capitalism (Nielsen, 2015). While no one is more knowledgeable about the DTES than those living there, this style of representation disregards the possibility for grounding stories in the experiences, perspectives, and opinions of residents. Instead, the voices and experiences of DTES residents are often extracted and applied in ways that reinforce pre-existing representations, with little regard for how this may affect these very same people. This is what Kobayashi et al., (2019) calls invisibilization; how residents of the DTES fail to matter within wider discourses affecting not only the city, but their own neighbourhood and lives. Rather than speaking with community members, invisibilization assumes that the media should speak for them (Blomley & Liu, 2013). As a direct result, residents are stripped of "the means to produce their own collective and individual [identity]", and are further denied the right to self-determination (Blomley & Liu, 2013, p.130).

In the most basic sense, self-determination can be understood as the freedom and power of an individual to make their own decisions regarding their life, without external influence. While the right to self-determination seems straightforward, in that every person should have the ability to decide how to live their life, processes of territorial stigmatization often work to erase this. To reiterate, territorial stigmatization is the process by which certain areas and its residents become vilified. As Wacquant (2007) elaborates, once a place is labelled as territorially stigmatized, authorities can justify special measures of surveillance and domination. These measures of control work towards the end goal of driving people out of these spaces and dissolving the 'place' of the inner city (Wacquant, 2007). This is exemplified by the growth of poverty management infrastructure in Vancouver over the past decade, which relies on a partnership between state and non-state actors to 'manage' homelessness (Fast & Cunningham, 2018). Most notably, the Vancouver Police Department works with housing organizations, medical professionals, and social workers to 'treat' homeless individuals (Fast & Cunningham, 2018). Although appearing to be a socially just initiative, this policy is carried out alongside a breadth of anti-homeless legislation which attempts to erase homelessness from public space (Freiler & Holden, 2012). Beginning around the 2010 Winter Olympics, the need to police and

manage undesirable bodies in public space can be attributed to the increase of global capital flow in the Downtown core (Freiler & Holden, 2012). The increase of investment into development in Vancouver has led to growing desires to ‘revitalise’ and ‘beautify’ the city, with the erasure of homelessness positioned as central to these initiatives. As Gerrard & Farrugia (2015) note, the “sight and scene of homelessness becomes constituted as a blemish on broader social relations in advanced capitalist nations” (p.2220). In other words, the visibility of homelessness is interpreted as a marker of social failure, unproductivity, and dysfunctionality (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). This is directly opposed to the ideologies of advanced capitalist nations; which increasingly favour productivity, efficiency, and image. Thus, it becomes the duty of state actors to uphold these values through the ‘management’ of homelessness, or in other words, the removal of homeless individuals from the sight of the public.

As can be seen, there is tension between the need to document, represent, and sensationalize the human suffering found in inner city neighbourhoods (Culhane, 2003), and the need to erase these bodies from public spaces (Fast & Cunningham, 2018). Further, there is an abundance of literature on the media’s role in constructing and representing these ‘problematic’ spaces, particularly within the Downtown Eastside. Researchers have noted the discursive element of space (Blomley, 1998), and how external impositions of spatial realities can affect residents’ sense of identity and dignity (Wacquant, 2007; Blomley & Liu, 2013). In addition, researchers have touched upon the visual discourse of poverty and homelessness, and the associations it holds in the political economy of capitalism (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). However, there is a gap in the research on how tent cities are represented and framed by the media. Although heavily reported on by both local and national media outlets, there is a shortage of literature on the ways by which tent cities are constructed and represented in the news. Not only are tent cities the most visible and obvious indicators of homelessness, they are also contestations of space. As symbols of poverty as well as signs of ‘disorder’, tent cities are a clear obstruction to the increasing desire of cities to ‘revitalize’ and ‘renew’ their urban spaces. Particularly, Oppenheimer Park’s tent city has become emblematic of Vancouver’s ongoing struggle with homelessness. In this way, reactions to and representations of tent city could offer us valuable insight into how dominant discourses of homelessness are created within Vancouver, as well as the emerging possibilities for change.

This research explores how local media constructs and imposes images and narratives of Oppenheimer Park and its residents. Specifically, I examine how these representations create social, political, and legal contestation towards tent city, which in turn places pressure on state actors to evict residents. Illustrating the need for renewed representations of the park and its residents, this paper positions tent city as an act of resistance to the disciplining and erasure of homeless bodies from the public realm. This is particularly relevant given the history and ongoing dispossession and displacement of individuals in the Downtown Eastside. At the same time, I recognize my positionality as a settler, and as an outsider to this neighbourhood who does not share the same experiences and history

as its residents. I therefore acknowledge that my perspective and understanding of this issue is inherently informed by my social location, and I have no intention to prescribe any singular solution. Instead, I wish to draw attention to the complex and differing needs and desires of residents, which cannot be represented nor fulfilled in any one particular way. Because of this, I argue that individuals should have the right to self-determination, and should be provided with the proper social and economic resources to do so. In the context of tent city -and at the most basic level- this would include peer support, safe injection sites, health care, heat, and sanitation (Carnegie Community Action Project, 2020).

Methods

To reiterate, local media plays an important role in representing inner city space (Blomley & Liu, 2013). For this reason, I chose to analyze several news articles published by Vancouver's mainstream news outlets on tent city at Oppenheimer Park. Published between July and September 2019, these articles were written during the peak months of tent city, when the issue was subject of considerable attention and contentious debate within Vancouver. My sample includes three articles from the *Globe & Mail*, three from the *Vancouver Sun*, three from *Global News*, and one from *The Georgia Straight*, for a total of 10 online articles. Since I am conducting a framing analysis to identify dominant frames of representation, I specifically chose articles published from some of Vancouver's most mainstream and popular news sources. Assuming that a majority of residents in Vancouver consume this media on average more than they would consume 'alternative' media, these news outlets in turn play a significant role in formulating opinions and perspectives on a certain number of issues within the city.

Developed by Entman (1993), framing analysis illuminates how certain pieces of information are highlighted to enhance the probability that receivers will perceive and process it. In other words, framing uses selection and salience to "call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements" (p.53). Very popular in political news, frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). Most importantly, frames used in political news directly influence and determine public support on certain causes and policies (Entman, 1993). In turn, this support has a tangible effect as individuals can mobilise for or against certain policies (Blomley & Liu, 2013). Blomley & Liu (2013) identify three popular frames used by Vancouver media when reporting on the Downtown Eastside; medicalization, criminalization, and socialization. Building off this research, I closely follow Blomley & Liu's frames of criminalization and socialization, while also introducing my own frame: disruption. The 10 online articles were coded according to how they defined the issue and who is presented as the expert on the issue. If an article defined the issue as a criminal/legal issue and centered the police as experts, it was coded as criminalization. If an

article defined the issue as a social issue and presented housing authorities as experts, it was coded as socialization. If an article defined the issue as a cost to the city and placed state actors and local businesses as experts, it was coded as disruption. Ultimately, this research identifies how media coverage of tent city utilizes the frames of criminalization, socialization, and disruption to construct and impose a socio-spatial reality of tent city and its occupants.

Findings

Criminalization

Through a criminalization frame, Oppenheimer Park is represented as an area plagued by rampant crime and criminal residents. This framing suggests that criminality is the primary social problem of homelessness, rather than economic or social circumstances (Herring, 2014). Constructing tent city as a legal issue and a policing problem, this is the most explicit and commonly used frame in news articles of Oppenheimer Park. Seven of the ten articles analyzed represent tent city as a dangerous and violent place, where even “seasoned sergeants... won’t have their officers go into the park without at least four officers.” (Vancouver Sun, 2019). This framing is achieved through an emphasis on weapon seizures, shootings, assaults, and drug trade. Articles cite statistics from the Vancouver Police Department on the increase in police calls, the seizure of drugs and guns, and an overall increase in violent crime. However, these numbers are cited out of context, applying yearly statistics for an entire district to describe Oppenheimer Park specifically. The result is a representation of tent city and its occupants as a “flourishing market for the criminal element” (Vancouver Sun, 2019), posing a “huge public safety concern” (Globe and Mail, 2019). The Vancouver Police Department is central to this framing, as news articles build their content around statements, opinions, and statistics from the police. Further, police quotes, statistics, and assessments are included far more than those of outreach workers or social housing representatives. Oppenheimer Park is thus defined as a place of criminality and an object of law enforcement, with the police positioned as crucial agents in combating and solving it. Constructing tent city residents as symbols of incivility, this representation assumes that the continued existence and visibility of tent city is a failure on behalf of the City, who is tolerating illegalities (Herring, 2014). Further, this results in public perceptions of tent city as a threatening space, along with feelings of antagonism and even moral superiority towards its residents. Ultimately, criminalization heightens public agitation and insecurity, which in turn places pressure on political actors to swiftly and forcefully remove the encampment and its ‘criminal’ residents.

Socialization

A more humanistic approach, socialization frames Oppenheimer Park as a social problem and advocates for welfare-based solutions. This framing constructs Oppenheimer Park and its residents as a “manifested symptom of disease, and that disease is poverty and homelessness.” (Vancouver Sun, 2019). Primarily, social housing is suggested as a remedy to the many resource distribution problems in the neighbourhood. Focusing on the issue of housing, news articles describe Oppenheimer Park as “a flashpoint for the homelessness crisis in the city” (Globe and Mail, 2019) and a “stark demonstration of the city’s homeless problem” (CTV News, 2019). Correspondingly, socialization often fails to address the real cause of poverty; structural inequalities in the capitalist system. Even more so, socialization explicitly avoids drawing connections between the ongoing impact of colonization and the disproportionately high rate of Indigenous people in Oppenheimer Park (Carnegie Community Action Project, 2020). Instead, socialization frames occupants of tent city as passive victims in need of help from social agencies as well as the state. Further, these articles identify the important role of the City, BC Housing, and the Carnegie Community Action Project in offering homes for those currently living in tent city. City workers are depicted as “committed to moving people indoors” (Global News, 2019) and “trying to get everybody housing” (Global News, 2019). Emphasizing our societal obligation to the homeless, this approach calls upon higher levels of government to offer more funding to municipal and provincial governments for social housing. Likewise, these articles address the living conditions of Single Room Occupancies (SROs), describing them as full of cockroaches, bed bugs, and vermin, and note that park conditions are safer than shelters. While a more socially progressive and tolerant frame than criminalization, socialization still fails to center the voices of residents. Often speaking for and about residents, this framing can result in an erasure of agency, as residents are advised what is needed to ‘fix’ their situation.

Disruption

While researchers have noted the prevalence of both criminalization and socialization in media representations of the Downtown Eastside, I found strong evidence of a new frame: disruption. Above all, the disruption frame constructs Oppenheimer Park as a disruption to the political, economic, and social functioning of the city. Articles frame tent city as a social cost, emphasizing how much money Oppenheimer Park and its residents have cost the city of Vancouver and its taxpayers (see Appendix). Showing the costs of policing, fire department resources, and park ranger visits, tent city is represented as an unnecessary drain on public services. Articles not only state that the park has gone “above and beyond the normal funding budgeted for regular park operations” (CTV News, 2019), but that these costs amount to a substantial fraction of Vancouver’s annual operating budget. This

creates the public perception of tent city as a financial burden, an unworthy use of public funds which could go towards other more deserving social programs or groups. In turn, this framing enhances public agitation, leading to the antagonism of tent city residents. Moreover, Oppenheimer Park is described as a mess full of “piles of belongings” (Globe and Mail, 2019) which city workers must sort through, clear, and monitor for fire or safety risks. Articles cite community events which had to be rescheduled, and recreational activities which can’t be programmed due to disputes and mess. In addition, tent city is framed as a cost to local businesses, deterring potential customers. Multiple articles quote representatives of the Hastings North Business Improvement Association, who urge the park to return to its regular use so that business can continue as usual. Ultimately, this frame constructs tent city residents as disorderly and disruptive to an otherwise well-functioning system. Occupants who have “defied the order to leave Oppenheimer Park” (Globe and Mail, 2019), or who have refused the offer of shelter from state agents are described with frustration. Above all, this frame creates an identity of tent city residents by placing them in opposition to productive and helpful state agents.

Limitations

While I do find strong evidence of the three frames of criminalization, socialization, and disruption, I would like to acknowledge the limitations in this sample. Namely, the small sample of 10 articles makes it hard to generalize these findings, along with the exclusive use of online articles instead of print, television, and/or a mix of mediums. While this paper argues that, generally speaking, news reporting plays a crucial role in influencing public opinion, it is still important to note that newspapers will never fully determine public opinion. At the same time, the choice to only sample mainstream media inevitably limits the scope and diversity in opinion, narratives, and imagery found in the sample.

Conclusion

Frames work in nuanced and subtle ways to create a ‘visual ideology’ of the inner-city landscape (Blomley, 1998). In the case of Oppenheimer Park, frames are used to externally construct and impose a socio-spatial reality of the park and its residents. This research found the established frames of *criminalization* and *socialization* to be prevalent in media coverage of tent city, alongside a new frame of *disruption*. To reiterate, criminalization depicts park residents as violent, aggressive individuals who pose a general public safety concern. Emphasizing enforcement and authority as the ‘solution’, *criminalization* positions the VPD as key figures in ‘fighting’ tent city. Meanwhile, socialization leans towards a more socially-just representation, focusing on housing as the ‘solution’ to tent

city, while neglecting to address the ongoing role of capitalism and colonization. Relying on depictions of residents as passive victims, *socialization* tends to prescribe solutions on behalf of residents, erasing their voices in the process. Finally, *disruption* emphasizes the political, economic, and social disruption of tent city. Highlighting the financial and social costs of tent city, disruption depicts residents as an unnecessary drain on municipal resources. Ultimately, these frames center representations of criminality, victimhood, and disorder, which in turn creates public contestation towards tent city. Correspondingly, widespread feelings of agitation and anxiety place city officials under pressure to act quickly to clear out tent city and relocate residents. However, this process fails to account for the experiences and opinions of residents, who increasingly rely on tent city as a safety net in the absence of dignified, affordable housing (Carnegie Community Action Project 2020). Even more so, this approach towards tent city is implicated in larger acts of erasure; including the erasure of bodies, of agency, and of self-determination.

As Leilani Farha, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, states; “Instructing tent encampment residents that they can find warmth in shelters that are unsafe and unhygienic is not a solution. The City of Vancouver has human rights obligations which includes ensuring encampment residents have access to basic services...”. (Carnegie Community Action Project, 2020). In a city where “it seems like you aren’t really *allowed* to be homeless”, tent city not only opposes normative functions of public spaces, but serves as an active claim for the right to agency and self-determination (Fast & Cunningham, 2018, p.255). Situated within a long history of dispossession and dislocation, this occupation embodies collective survival and the ongoing *right to remain* (Kobayashi et al., 2019). Likewise, tent city is a reminder of the importance of grassroots initiatives in inner-city communities, which are produced and reproduced through collective action and struggle. As Blomley (1998) reminds us, the space of the Downtown Eastside is owned by those who have lived, loved, died, suffered, and survived there. Because of this, we need to begin questioning and challenging the ways we represent and understand this space. Moving away from deficit-based representations, it is crucial we start affirming the agency and autonomy of those we are representing.

Ultimately, this entails creating space within media, academia, and government where “low income residents are recognized as the experts in matters that affect them and have control over decisions, services and operations that affect them” (Blomley, 2015, p.93). In the context of Oppenheimer Park, this means grounding media representations in the voices and experiences of residents. Speaking with residents rather than for them, this requires a major shift in how individuals conceptualize and position themselves in relation to the Downtown Eastside. Moving away from contestation, new representations would demand respect and accommodation from the public and state actors alike. Legal accommodation through rezoning, financial accommodation through the provision of basic resources such as water, heat, and sanitation, as well as social accommodation through peer resources. These are notable examples of ways in which we can slowly work towards supporting and encouraging the agency and self-determination of tent city

residents. Following the path set by Portland's permanent homeless encampment Dignity Village, where legal sanctions and city ordinances work with, rather than against residents, Oppenheimer Park could have the potential to be a participatory and autonomous space. By allocating a safe and clean environment for individuals to live in, their own personal space to manage and organize, and the possibility to contribute to a larger community, we could provide residents with the necessary resources to practice self-determination and agency.

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Appendix

Total costs of Oppenheimer Park by CTV News (2019)

<i>Oppenheimer Park Encampment: Estimated overall costs: January 1- July 31, 2019</i>		
DEPARTMENT	DESCRIPTION	COST
Engineering (Street Operations and Sanitation)	Varied service levels including daily weekday cleanups (January-April), expanded 7 day clean-up (May) and current service of Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday	\$95,000
Park Board	Ranger visits, janitorial costs for cleaning of Field house and port-a-potties as well as regular park maintenance	\$200,000
ACCS	Additional staff for fieldhouse (6 days to 7 days a week) and additional staffing costs for outreach	\$60,000
VF&RS	Fire Prevention staff enforcing Fire Chief's Order	\$240,000
VPD	On-duty resources and call-out incremental resources	\$222,000
TOTAL* (Excludes VPD/VFRS patrol and emergency response)		\$817,000
<i>Estimated total costs August 19-23**</i>		
City of Vancouver Departments & Park Board	Includes wages, supplies and other incidentals for Outreach, Engineering, VFRS, VPD, and Park Board staff	\$117,500
TOTAL** (Excludes VPD/VFRS patrol and emergency response)		\$117,500
*** Excludes Costs incurred by Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Housing & BC Ambulance Service		