

# Upsetting Constructions of Safety: An Auto-Ethnography of a Suburb

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Contingent Horizons: The York University Student Journal of Anthropology. 2020. 6(1):13-26.

First published online April 8, 2022.

*Contingent Horizons* is available online at

[www.contingenthorizons.com](http://www.contingenthorizons.com).

*Contingent Horizons* is an annual open-access student journal informed by an ethos of social justice. It seeks to expand anthropological discussions by publishing students' outstanding scholarly works, and remaining open to a variety of alternative formats. It is published by the department of anthropology at York University, Toronto, Canada.

ISSN 2292-7514 (Print) ISSN 2292-6739 (Online)

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE Cameron Butler, Isabel Sobotkiewicz, Marion Lougheed, Isabella Chawrun, Ana Speranza, Mikayla Hjørngaard, Kathe Gray

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# Upsetting Constructions of Safety

## An Auto-Ethnography of a Suburb

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This article examines how certain neighbourhoods and the populations that reside in them might be understood as safe and good by presenting observations from a walking, autoethnography through and around the suburb in which the author resides. The messages that societies receive and internalize about people who experience poverty are primarily constructed out of neoliberal institutions that uphold the idea that those who live in poverty are there by choice or incapacity and face the appropriate consequences of that choice. Neoliberal discourses devalue the lives of those experiencing poverty by suggesting that they are morally, physically, or mentally incapable of being responsible for themselves. While anyone could potentially experience poverty, the relational construct of the upper class/lower class creates a metaphorical divide that requires deep rethinking to transcend. When spaces are demarcated as unsafe or violent, other spaces are relationally marked as safe or secure. The article concludes that controlling outward appearances largely creates and reinforces constructions of suburban areas as safe in relation to the construction of other areas as unsafe and violent. However, the intensive focus on controlling appearances leads to a mistrust of others and the sacrificing of communities that once existed and thrived.

**KEY WORDS** Poverty, autoethnography, suburb, neighbourhood, safety, violence

**A**t the very foundation of neoliberal theory resides the idea that everyone has a responsibility to ensure that they are contributing to the economy and generating wealth in order to achieve market stability (Harvey 2005). The survival of both individuals and the national economy is thus the responsibility of individuals themselves and their capacity for enterprise. Under this neoliberal logic, those who work hard will succeed and receive rewards appropriate to the level of the work that they conduct. These discourses devalue the lives of those experiencing poverty by suggesting that they are morally, physically, or mentally incapable of being responsible for themselves and their finances (Chapados 2020). The blame for poverty is placed on individuals and their choices instead of systemic factors. Consequently, those experiencing poverty are projected as doing a disservice to society by not contributing to the economy and possibly relying on social assistance, but also to their own life simply by experiencing the negative effects of poverty (Chapados 2020). Low and high income neighbourhoods can serve as a

field where the effects of these neoliberal discourses can be examined. Where high income neighbourhoods may appear to be flourishing because people are doing their part in contributing to the economy, low income neighbourhoods suffer. Images that construct people who are experiencing poverty as violent, dangerous, or careless serve to reinforce the conception that only those who *deserve* to experience poverty are in poverty. Simultaneously, those who reside in upper-class neighbourhoods appear to be receiving the wealth and safety that they have earned by being good citizens.

In this article, I examine the signs that signify a middle to upper-class suburb as a safe and flourishing neighbourhood by conducting a walking autoethnography through the suburb in which I grew up. The signs of wealth that correlate with safety serve to reinforce the idea that those who contribute to the economy through wealth generation are good and safe populations in contrast to their lower-class counterparts. I discover that controlling outward appearances largely contributes to the construction of suburbs as safe places and upper-class populations as safe and deserving of wealth. However, the intensive focus on controlling appearances leads to and is reinforced by a mistrust of others and the sacrificing of communities that once existed. I illuminate the familiar in order to shed light on how our everyday existences are shaped by constructed binaries of upper/lower class, safe/unsafe, deserving/undeserving and healthy/unhealthy, which are confounded in both physical and social locations.

## Previous Scholarship

While any of us could potentially experience homelessness or poverty, the relational constructs of upper/lower class create a metaphorical divide that requires deep rethinking to transcend. When spaces are demarcated as unsafe or violent, other spaces are relationally marked as safe and secure in contrast (Wacquant 2007). However, violence can and does occur in upper-class homes and neighbourhoods, even if it presents differently (Statistics Canada 2007; 2008).

Neighbourhoods, like people and populations, influence and are influenced by discourse. Considering how locations can be socially constructed and have both a physical and social character, I point to Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) distinctions between *space* and *place*. Common definitions of center around physical descriptions focusing on a district, region, or part of town. This conception refers to the actual physical environment: the buildings, the geographic location, the street makeup, and the physical boundaries. This conception is termed *space* and can be mapped on paper (Tuan 1977). However, physical mapping does not account for the ways in which humans and non-human animals experience, construct, and relate to these spaces. Spaces are also socially constructed through attributed meanings, relations that exist between social actors, history, memories, images, or general perceptions held by insiders and outsiders (Tuan 1977). This constructed understanding can be referred to as *place*. Considering the entrenchment of neoliberal theory and ideals throughout modern Western society, neighbourhoods are not immune to the effects of neoliberal discourse. Instead, I suggest that neighbourhoods serve as a field where neoliberal discourses and dichotomies can be examined in real time. I use autoethnography to pair my own constructed experience of my physical neighbourhood with a broader ecological framework that views humans as embedded

hierarchically within particular communities, institutions, and environments (Kearns and Parkinson 2001).

This article assumes that *neighbourhood* is more than a district or boundary, and refers to the manners in which a group of people relate to each other in a given space, connect to the built or constructed environment, and develop a sense of belonging. In this case, both the physical and constructed environments are necessarily interlocked as they work to constitute specific places as “violent,” “unclean,” or “deprived,” while others are constructed as “safe,” “healthy,” and “wealthy.” Factors like violence or substance use have historically been assumed to be a feature of lower-class neighbourhoods (Valverde 2008). This conflation is largely responsible for the introduction of interventions into the lives of the poor out of concern for their moral or physical health (Valverde 2008). These early interventions sought to reinforce the routines of capitalism in populations that were seen as unable or unwilling to contribute to the economy. These patterns continue to be seen today despite violence and substance use being diffuse throughout different populations (Chapados 2020).

Negative assumptions and stereotypes about low income neighbourhoods and populations can be attributed to a process called territorial stigmatization. Territorial stigmatization, as termed by Loïc Wacquant (2007), follows Erving Goffman’s theoretical approach to stigma. Goffman (1963) determines that stigma is a process in which certain attributes possessed by individuals are discredited by a society, causing one’s understanding of self to be degraded. This is a relational process where what is credited by a society is seen as right due to the discrediting of other traits. Wacquant (2007) expands upon Goffman’s original research to theorize a stigma of place. In every urban city there is at least one area that is deemed dangerous, violent, or disparaged (Wacquant 2007). It does not matter what the actual condition of this place is, only that the image of it is tainted. This follows from an increasing segregation between poor/non-poor, racialized/non-racialized, immigrant/non-immigrant, and other constructed binaries (Wacquant 2007). People can be stigmatized for a variety of reasons, all of which are confounded with their physical and social locations. It is not simply a matter of being stigmatized for one’s socio-economic status, location, gender, actions, or race. Rather, stigma arises from a combination of these factors interlocking in various ways. Alongside these dangerous or discredited neighbourhoods reside neighbourhoods that are therefore credited for being safe or correct. I argue that the construction of a neighbourhood as safe in relation to an unsafe neighbourhood serves to reinforce the neoliberal discourse that those who are upper class are good deserving citizens, and that lower-class populations are violent and undeserving of aid or any form of wealth.

## Methodology

In order to explore what is behind the construction of my suburban neighbourhood as safe, I followed Yuha Jung’s (2014) mindful walking technique. Before one begins to research, one conducts a metaphorical mental walk through what one already knows and wants to find out (Jung 2014). In my case, I was aware of the disparity between the upper and lower classes in my own community because of my previous work in social services. Despite working in these neighbourhoods that were always said to be violent or dirty, I have never feared for my own safety. I did, however, have an experience of violence in

my own neighbourhood that led me to become critical of how one determines what and who is safe. I grew uncomfortable with my ability to transcend the material line from one neighbourhood to the next without second thought. I could attend work in one stigmatized and disparaged area of the city, and then go back to my *safe* neighbourhood where I never have to see physical signs of poverty. On one hand, I was critical of the political economy that produces social and spatial inequality. On the other, I was critical of myself and my own comfortable existence.

Jung (2014) makes the case that physically moving through space can help to create an embodied, holistic understanding of material systems, organizations, people, and communities. Walking or moving in some way allows people to physically experience sensations and expand beyond media representations and preconceived ideas (Jung 2014). The mindful walking technique suggests noting one's physical observations alongside memories, sensations, and images that come to represent a space for those who live there (Jung 2014). Drawing upon conceptions in urban ethnography like the *flâneur* and *dérive* which are both commonly used to conduct street ethnography, the self becomes a surveyor or observer (Benjamin 1999; Ingold 2008; McLaren 1997; Powell 2010; Tonkiss 2005). Where the *flâneur* is detached from the space and purposeless in his stroll, the *dérive* is purposeful, hoping to understand the urban landscape, architecture, spaces, places, emotions, and behaviours (Jung 2014).

Autoethnography embraces the idea that all observers come to the field with preconceived notions, ideas, experiences, and thoughts (Ellis 2004). Researchers exist in their own life histories with their own traditions. Where traditional forms of ethnography may require the individual to act as a complete, objective, and neutral observer, autoethnography allows researchers to embrace their relation to the field they are studying through an embodied and embedded means (Ellis 2004). As a researcher, I was already embedded into the field I wished to study as a resident. My experiences and history in this particular location stem back over 10 years. As such, I aim to produce a narrative that uses my own personal life history to highlight broader cultural, material, and social trends about constructions of space, poverty, and violence.

Before beginning my ethnography, I conducted preliminary searches to examine what factors have been suggested to influence people's feelings of safety. On everyday media blogs, I briefly found lists that suggest that the presence of community, caring for one's yard, improved lighting, outdoor activity, security systems, and police presence make people feel safe in their own neighbourhoods (Smith 2020). These are assumptions popularized by theories of crime such as the broken windows theory or community perception theory, which assume that signs of physical disorder directly relate to crime recurrence and a lack of perceived safety (Said 2015). However, these theories have been widely debated as outward perception does not indicate or cause the level of crime, violence, or disorder that occurs in a place (Thatcher 2004). In fact, a study that specifically addressed people residing in low income and disparaged neighbourhoods suggested that social cohesion, access to services and amenities, and personal autonomy influenced their feelings of safety over the actual physical condition of their neighbourhood (Alik and Kearns 2017). With these ideas in mind, I walked and questioned the very presence of some of these features in my own neighbourhood.

As I walked, I jotted down notes about the physical infrastructure in place. I noted my own feelings and memories while passing certain locations. I noted both my own reaction to the space and other's reactions to me. When I finished my ethnography on my own front porch, I had a collection of stories about how I have moved through this space over time, but also in this specific instance. After my initial walk, I conducted a second walk to take photos. Photos, which were once seen as real representations of the field, are now seen to be constructed and interpreted by authors (Harper 1994). In my case, I took photos of areas that were notable for my research question. These photos, in conjunction with my notes, provide a sort of 'snapshot' into my world on this given day at this given time.

### **Reflections on Suburbia: Summary of Observations**

I begin my walking ethnography in my own foyer. I have a bright, tan colored foyer and a front door with a large glass cut out that's been fogged over so that no one can see inside. We moved here when I was eleven years old, largely because my old house backed onto a forest. My family was concerned about raising children near a forest, as forests tend to embody myths about violence against women — such that violence occurs in dark, unknown, spaces perpetrated by someone unknown to the victim. As violence and safety are both constructed in relation to one another, the construction of violence as *unknown* also works to reinforce the idea that what is known is safe. I was protected from the unknown, never from the known.

In this city, it appears that concerns about safety largely surround the visibility of activities of vice: substance use, sexual service provision, homelessness, and mental health crises (Battagello 2018a,b; Bellacicco 2019). In my neighbourhood these are not immediately nor visibly present. In fact, it looks as though the street is empty of nearly everything. Standing on my front porch, my tan brick house protrudes out to the side preventing me from being able to see down my street. Above me, a brass lantern sits but it is off. We once kept it on all night, something everyone was encouraged to do in my old neighbourhood due to the absence of streetlights. Keeping houselights on was thought to deter crime while providing light for people on the street. Recent propositions brought forth to city council have debated this very suggestion. My current neighbourhood is quite well lit with a streetlight on every lawn, so we are generally the only house that leaves the lights on past midnight. Eventually, this light led to an unknown visitor in the middle of the night: a woman who would come to seek help after fighting with her husband. Regardless of whether or not lighting deters crime, it does influence people's feelings of safety as this woman believed our house to be a safe one.

Across the street, the house that is an exact mirror of mine has motion censored lighting. When I exit my home, the light flicks on to illuminate the street and show that there is movement outside. Two cars sit in my driveway, one in the driveway across the street, and another is parked on the road in front of my house. It is nearly impossible to live in this neighbourhood and not own a car. Public transit is nowhere to be found, nor are there stores within walking distance of the neighbourhood.

Walking down the driveway, each house looks familiar. Every house on the street is the same build, but the colours vary and repeat every few houses. If you were to enter any of these houses they would have the same layout: a foyer, stairs leading to an upstairs and

a downstairs, and a family room featuring three front windows. Behind the family room lies a bathroom and a kitchen, and behind those, bedrooms. Garages also protrude on the sides of the front doors.

Each house has a backyard that is fenced in. My own backyard has a pool and had play structures when I was young. It also has a large deck that is perfect for barbeques and socializing despite this being a rare occurrence. Many of the houses in this area have private pools due to a lack of public space for people to enjoy. The four houses that are in my view all have their windows either covered or fogged over. They all have a garden in front of their house and a driveway that stretches down from the garage. There is also a tree in each front yard that is kept trimmed because of the hazards posed by hanging branches.

As I continue down the sidewalk, I notice that each front door has a blue or red sticker in the window advertising a home security system. Some houses have small cameras outside of the garage. They are visible from the sidewalk, again probably to deter crime by suggesting that people are being watched. None of the houses have any sort of decor that says anything about or reflects the people who live there. No last names or specifiers are present on anything outside. In fact, houses in this neighbourhood do not even have mailboxes. Instead, there are community mailboxes, two on every street to which 27 houses have an assigned grey box that requires a key. The mailboxes have a drive up section, so people can collect their mail while sitting directly in their car. The mailboxes also have evidence of old posters and tape that is no longer there. People used to advertise services such as lawn cutting, snow shoveling, or babysitting. I myself once babysat local children in the neighbourhood. I don't know who takes the posters down.

From here, I can see that the school yard is empty. Yellow soccer nets are visible on both sides of the yard. We used to come here to play as children. However, there were always rumors about the elderly couple who lived on the other side of the yard. They had a large property with sprawling trees and old pieces of equipment that were left in various places of the yard rusting away. That side of the school was different from the side that I lived on, as no yard that unconventional could possibly survive without the neighbours reporting it to the city.

It is at this point on my journey that a car with blacked out windows drives by me. This is the first sign of a person I have witnessed on my walk. I can see them slow down as they approach, and then pull into a driveway a few houses behind me to turn around and trail me for a few minutes. They finally slow down by the edge of the road and park. In this moment I became acutely aware of my status as a young unprotected woman. Recalling popular discourse about violence against women, my heart started to beat rapidly and my pace quickened as I continued walking. This distracted me from my observation of the area as I was more focused on my actions and theirs. In order to not appear suspicious, I walked swiftly away, with my notebook down, to continue my path, passing more of the same houses and another mailbox of similar build.

Across the street there was a house with patio chairs out in the front area. This is one of the only houses that has a place to sit in view of the public, although, the chairs do not look like they belong due to the lack of space for them. Other areas of the city will have seats on porches and often people will sit there, sharing a drink, conversing, or smoking. In the summer, you can see families who spend time in their garage. In the winter, every garage door is closed.

In my line of sight is the park, which is made up of a parking lot, play structure, bike path, basketball court, and baseball field. Currently, there are no humans nor animals in sight. In the summer, children's T-Ball leagues will play at the park. Families bring chairs and drinks and set up along the field, while younger children play on the structure. The play structure is one that is thought to be stimulating for children. There is a giant game of Tic Tac Toe in red and yellow letters, a structure for older kids that has a zipline, a large slide, and a pole, and one for younger children that is just a slide and stairs. The sign in front of the play structure reads "Closed when ground frozen/ inspected and maintained by the city/ call 311 to report hazards and concerns/ adult supervision required."

One side of the bike path follows the fenced-off back end of the park. As I walk, I notice that some litter, coffee cups and plastic bags, has collected against the fence. In the summer, the park is cleaned regularly, and this would have been cleared. On the other side of the fence is a wall of trees. I can hear the noise of the road on the other side, and at night, see the lights from a car lot shining through the trees. From my current position, there is no visible sign of anything at all, only the sound of cars rushing by.

I continue to walk and reach a hole in the fence that looks to have been cut because of the jagged edges. I duck down to crawl through. Even though it is winter the other side is still lined with litter uncovered by snow as though people had been here recently. While I had never been on the other side of the hole, I had seen it before and always assumed that it was used by teenagers to have private space away from watchful eyes. I am surprised by the amount of space back here, as there is a small pathway that goes alongside of a railroad track with overgrown trees and bushes on either side. As I walk a little further, my arm gets cut by a thorn. This area is not maintained like the rest of the park. There are also beer cans and bottles strewn across the ground, some covered by dirt and branches, others just sitting. There are other types of litter here: old buckets, gloves, shirts, and coffee cups. Alongside these lies a bright pink child's sippy cup. When I emerge from the hole, there are still no people to be found. There is a house alongside this end of the park that has both a privacy fence and privacy hedges. Along the back, there is a noise barrier to prevent noise pollution from the train. As I exit the park, I still have not seen a single person.

Continuing down the road, the houses are duplexes, meaning that two houses are attached in the middle. These duplexes have front porches that could only fit one standing person. There is no ability for social interaction on these porches nor seating. As well, many of these homes have split their yards down the middle either with hedges or fencing suggesting that no one wants to share their lawns. Some of these houses are also built so that the garage protrudes from the middle of the house, so you could exit and never see your neighbour.

## **Discussion**

### **Appearance and Safety as Two Sides of the Same Coin**

When I examined the signs that signify this neighbourhood as a safe one, I largely discovered that concerns for appearance and aesthetics are conflated with conceptions of safety. Areas in the downtown core appear to be unkempt in comparison to this suburb. This idea comes to fruition when it is frequently and continuously suggested by news media and politicians that the populations who reside in the downtown are ruining business simply



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Green and white sign on a fence stating the bylaw encouraging residents to pick up after and control their dogs

by virtue of their public existence and visibility. These statements deny the many factors that can influence the downfall of businesses within downtown cores. However, drawing on community perception theory (O'Brian et al. 2012), it is thought that signs of disorder keep outsiders away because those outsiders view that area as unsafe. While there is nothing that particularly marks the suburb as safe, there is an absence of public or visible disorder. This disparity contributes to the relational development of one neighbourhood as safe and another as unsafe.

Controlling the outward appearance of one's home is encouraged by both neighbours and the City, whether it be trimming lawns, grooming gardens, shoveling snow, cutting down dead trees, or keeping garbage contained. While each of these suggestions is marketed as an issue of controlling safety hazards, they also work to control the appearance of the subdivision and prevent signs of disorder. Uniformity is one of the largest features of this neighbourhood as almost all of the houses look the same, causing a certain sense of comfort for the residents due to feelings of predictability and familiarity.

Throughout the neighbourhood there are other signs and symbols that can lead the population to believe that it is a safe place. The usage of security cameras and home security systems that are advertised in nearly every window are thought to deter crime as others know very clearly that they are being watched (Welsh and Farrington 2009). The presence of an intense system of streetlights on every lawn serves a similar purpose by highlighting dark spaces and preventing people from lurking in the shadows. People are not afraid of what they can see.

While each of these aesthetic features throughout the neighbourhood appear to be there for safety reasons, they actually do not prevent unsafe things from happening either

in public or behind closed doors. The presence of lights or security cameras do not help to reduce crime but increase the opportunity for populations to be watched (Deukmedjian 2013). Thus, lighting and security cameras can actually make areas less safe for populations that are heavily policed and surveilled. Throughout my youth different experiences of violence occurred behind the doors of these homes. Domestic disputes and substance use hide their presence in the suburbs behind closed doors and in private space—a privilege awarded to home and private property owners. While there is a tendency to equate cleanliness, organization, and order with safety, this is a false equation (Valverde 2008). Using aesthetic value as a marker, it's clear that those with money to invest in their properties and security systems are the ones who benefit from these types of narratives. Controlling appearances only



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Intensive presence of streetlights on every lawn

seeks to aid the construction of suburbs and their private populations as safe and good citizens, while those who reside in disordered neighbourhoods are seen as bad citizens.

### **What Do We Sacrifice?**

As dominant societal understandings of safe and unsafe are reliant upon a mutually exclusive, relationally constructed binary, safety and danger have a particular face. Namely, safety is what is familiar, and danger is what is unknown. The constructions of safety that hold that suburbs are safe due to their aesthetic appeal largely serve the class interests of the elite as they are constructed as good citizens when they are able to maintain curb appeal. When those who are unfamiliar, disordered, or *other* to the upper classes are constructed as dangerous, a sense of fear about those who do not belong is created and maintained. Low-income neighbourhoods are demarcated from the rest of the city and become the host for the unknown other that causes violence (Waquant 2007). While this is clear when considering the disparity between lower and upper-class neighbourhoods, it is also clear in the absence of community and others *within* upper-class neighbourhoods. This is particularly noticeable in constructions of violence against women. Many women are taught not to put themselves in unsafe situations, avoid unfamiliar places, and to be on guard any time that they are alone (Bartky 1997).



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TOP Cigarette butts litter the ground

BOTTOM The hole in the fence

RIGHT View from the front door

As I walked through the neighbourhood, I did not see any other people walking. This is a common experience as this community relies heavily on car use. After the car circled around me as I was walking, I began to reflect on how the construction of the stranger continues to penetrate my everyday actions, how I move through space, and how I relate to other people. Regardless of this person's intention my immediate thought was to get away from them quickly. Even in my own *safe* neighbourhood I was concerned for my safety because I did not know this car nor person. In retrospect, it is possible that they were following me because I also appear to be a stranger, walking with a notebook and observing the street.

As previously mentioned, the usage of lighting and security also serves to uncover the

unknown and provide additional measures to protect against strangers. The relational construct of the other or the stranger is reinforced through this fear of, and protection from, an unknown criminal. Information about residents is absent from the outside of each house, as communal mailboxes are used to separate people from their names. Nearly all of the houses along the route were covered so that no one can see inside of them. People are taking intensive measures to protect themselves and their identity. Regardless of these security measures, harm continues to occur in private space.

Constructions of the unsafe *other* in this community rely heavily upon our understanding of substance use and crisis. While opioid use in the downtown core has recently been declared an "epidemic," the entrenchment of substance use in upper-class areas is largely ignored (Luthar and Ansary 2005; WEC Health Unit 2017). A lot of the violence that I have witnessed in this neighbourhood involves alcohol, as fights break out between couples, or intoxicated people wander into the street at various times during the day. Because alcohol is a legal substance and is largely supported by communities, alcohol misuse goes unquestioned for the most part (Rossow and Amundsen 1996).

Another example of these discourses and how they operate resides behind the hole in the fence at the park. My initial thought upon entering was that this was used by teens

and probably harmless. My most immediate thought reinforced the popular sentiment that substance use is only problematic if you are poor. Even though people in both the upper and lower class factions of the city use substances, substance use by those in poverty contributes to the overwhelming image of low income neighbourhoods as dangerous (Rossow and Amundsen 1996).



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Our collective fear of the unknown has required us to entirely close off to our fellow human beings (Christopherson 1994). The built environment provides barriers to social interactions. This antisocial architecture where garages protrude far out and porches have no room to sit, prevents residents from interacting with their neighbours as people do in older neighbourhoods. The two houses that have seating available in the front of their homes are out of place from the rest of the private spaces because these houses are not built for socializing. The houses are built far back from the street, with a lawn and garden that separates the houses from public space. The duplexes on one of the streets were also built or arranged in a way so as to separate one's space from their neighbours. People are discouraged from seeing their neighbours and building connections with them simply by virtue of the architecture in this neighbourhood. This is particularly noteworthy as community cohesion is a facet of safety.

Social lives also suffer due to a lack of public space. While there is a park and a school yard within the area, there are no places indoors to which people can go to socialize. As a result, social activities in the winter are greatly decreased. In the summer, families can go to the park and there are activities for people of all ages. However, it is important to note that there is a sign recommending that children be watched at all times. Children are unable to have a social space away from adults. A lack of sidewalks on many of the streets also discourages children (and others) from being able to safely get around by themselves.

Due to the lack of public space, many of the backyards are fenced in with private pools and play structures. The absence of public space encourages residents to spend more time within the home, and consequently, more time away from others. While the absence of infrastructure and community space in low-income neighbourhoods is very commonly seen as the cause of poor health (Cohen et al. 2016), it is not seen as a problem here but rather as a protective factor. The impact of losing a collective bond with others can certainly be felt as most people are either alone or required to leave the neighbourhood in order to seek socialization (Christopherson 1994).

As a younger person, I would babysit local children and bring them to the park. I was able to gain money and create connections with other members of the neighbourhood. Many teens would advertise their services on the communal mailboxes. Now each mailbox is empty. There are old pieces of tape still there, however, any evidence of the informal

labour market has been torn off. The community that once was has now moved on. All members of a community suffer when the informal labour market can no longer survive. Members of the community are no longer to be trusted, removing the idea that there ever was a community at all.

## Conclusion

With the creation of new suburbs away from the downtown core of communities there is the opportunity for the presence of ever increasing and new safety features to be built into these neighbourhoods. Security cameras, intensive lighting, and antisocial infrastructure that deters visitors all seek to create a secure space (Deukmedjian 2013). However, many of these features do not actually prevent crimes such as domestic violence or substance use, but simply create an image that these suburbs are safe and the populations that reside in them are also safe (Boomsma and Steg 2014). The idea that upper-class people are people who take care of their neighbourhood only serves the neoliberal thought that those who contribute to the economy, have wealth, and are good citizens will reap rewards. Those who allow or even foster disorder in their neighbourhoods are thought to be bad citizens who do not deserve aid beyond what they've been given. These ideas reinforce the status quo and elite class interests. By highlighting my own personal experiences through purposeful walking, I've demonstrated that constructions of safety in upper-class neighbourhoods rely very heavily on aesthetic value in place of actual safety.

As neoliberal ideologies become further entrenched in our society, individualism and privatization override collectivity (Deukmedjian 2013). The way that we understand safety has less to do with actual crime and more to do with restricting movement through public space and managing risk. Safety is not a binary of unsafe and safe, but a spectrum depending on multiply conflated factors. The use of fear to restrict movement discourages community well-being, resulting that well-being is traded for a false sense of safety and security. Women, children, and other key populations are especially discouraged from leaving the home through both the built infrastructure and institutional messages in order to ensure their safety. The question becomes: safety from whom?

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