SUBURBAN (DIS)ADVANTAGE:
VIEWS OF SUBURBAN LIFE FROM LOW-INCOME IMMIGRANTS IN SURREY, BC

by

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Abstract

A defining feature of changing patterns of spatial inequality in Canadian metropolitan regions is the growing dispersal of low-income households into suburban municipalities. Closely related to this process is the suburbanization of immigrant settlement, as more and more recent immigrants settle directly into the suburbs. Although local dynamics are complex and difficult to generalize, evidence suggests that Canadian suburbs are housing an increasing number of lower-income immigrant households. Behind these changes are processes of urban development and gentrification, which are deemed to be ‘pushing’ lower-income households out of the urban core and into outlying areas. Much of the current literature suggests that suburban location compounds social and economic disadvantages, arguing that historically marginalized populations in the suburbs become cut off from needed services, employment opportunities and community supports. Focusing on a case study of Metro Vancouver’s largest suburb (Surrey, BC), my research reveals a more complex picture of how residents experience life in the suburbs, and what informs their decisions to move there. I show how studies that emphasise a narrative of exclusion, displacement and unequal access to opportunities are not fully consistent with the experiences of local residents. My findings both confirm and upend current understandings of the rise of low-income suburban areas, conveying a picture of neighbourhood change as a process of both push and pull factors. I make the case that alongside challenges and barriers, moving to the suburbs affords lower-income newcomers with opportunities and benefits that go overlooked in the established literature. I also argue that narratives of displacement and social exclusion are ultimately rooted in particular ideas about what constitutes good planning and good neighbourhoods. I make the case that urban scholars project their own ideas about what constitutes good planning onto a culturally diverse group of people whose varied wants and needs do not always align with those of today’s leading urbanists.
Lay Summary

For a long time, the geography of class divides of urban areas was thought to coincide, however roughly, with the division between city and suburb. Minorities and low-income households traditionally concentrated in the urban core. The upper and middle classes lived in the suburbs. But today’s spatial divides are different. The geography of disadvantage in Canada is taking an increasingly fragmented form, cutting across city and suburb alike. A growing number of scholars are raising concerns that as lower-income households are ‘pushed’ into the suburbs, they become isolated from services, employment opportunities and community supports. Focusing on a case study of Surrey, BC, my research reveals a more complex picture of how residents experience life in the suburbs, and what informs their decisions to move there. I show how narratives of exclusion, displacement and unequal access to opportunities are not fully consistent with the experiences of local residents.
Preface

This dissertation is an original, independent, and unpublished work by author Jacopo Miro. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 3-6 was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Certificate Number H15-02601).
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Dedication

To Duff, Ru and F for all the small things,
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Setting the context

Inequalities in power, status and wealth have long been imprinted in urban space. While this fact is usually recognized of urban America, where the intersection of race, place and class shares an unsettling and deeply contested past, it is also true, though to a lesser extent, of Canadian cities. The affluence of such neighbourhoods as Shaughnessy (in Vancouver), Westmount (in Montreal), or Rosedale (in Toronto) is obvious even to the most casual observer, as is the poverty of some of Canada’s many inner-city neighbourhoods. Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, Winnipeg’s North End, or Toronto’s Moss Park come to mind. For much of the twentieth-century, the geography of class divides of urban areas was thought to coincide, however roughly, with the division between city and suburb, at least in North America, where the process of metropolitan settlement more or less followed an outward-oriented pattern marked by run-down working-class districts near the urban core, and middle- and upper-class suburbs in outlying areas. To this day, the suburbs conjure up images of two-car garages, cultural homogeneity and middle-class lifestyles. In contrast, when people think of low-income areas they tend to think of the inner-city, if not neighbourhoods in or near the urban core.

1.1.1 The changing geography of income

But, as a growing number of scholars point out, today’s spatial divides are different. The geography of disadvantage in Canada is taking an increasingly fragmented form, cutting across city and suburb alike in previously unseen ways (Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Ley and Smith 2000; Walks 2010, 2011). Recent research on socio-spatial divides points to a trajectory of increased neighbourhood inequality (i.e. a growing gap between rich and poor neighbourhoods) and increased polarization (i.e. dwindling numbers of middle-class

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1 Hulchanski, in his acclaimed study on the three cities within Toronto, notes that “poverty has moved from the centre to the edges of cities (2010: 1).” Urban geographer David Ley echoes Hulchanski’s point when stating that the new geography of income inequality in Canada represents “a dramatic transition from the old model of concentric social areas with poverty at the urban core and a solid band of middle-income districts in the suburbs (Ley and Lynch, 2012: ).”
neighbourhoods).\(^2\) At its core, the current literature identifies three main trends impacting cities today: (1) a rise in the number of low-income households in the suburbs, (2) a consolidation of middle- and upper-income households in the urban core, and (3) an overall disappearance of mixed-income neighbourhoods. There is no shortage of metaphors to describe the return of upper-income professionals to the central city, and the concomitant outward shift of lower-income households to the suburbs. Some have called it the great inversion (Ehrenhalt 2012), the urban turnaround (Simmons and Lang 2003), the fifth migration (Fishman 2005), the new urban renewal (Hyra 2012), and the back-to-the-city movement (Sturtevant and Jung 2011).

In Canada, much of the interest for new research on socio-spatial inequality can be traced back to David Hulchanski’s pioneering study *The Three Cities Within Toronto* (2010). First published in 2007, the much-publicized report documents a new geography of income inequality in Canada’s largest city, one marked by an affluent urban core surrounded by a belt of low-income suburbs. Most striking is the disappearance of traditional middle-class neighbourhoods, and the shift of low-income households from “the centre to the edge of the city (Hulchanski 2010, 1).” Over the past few years, a number of studies have lent further support to the overall trends presented by Hulchanski, including Ley and Lynch (2012), Walks (2010), Townshend et al. (2018), and Rose and Twigge-Molecey (2013). The general consensus among scholars is that while the trajectory toward greater neighbourhood polarization and inequality is most pronounced in Toronto, it also describes, to a lesser extent, other Canadian cities as well.

In Vancouver, the signature dynamic has been a continued concentration of low-income households in the Downtown Eastside and the city’s eastern part, alongside growing pockets of suburban disadvantage, particularly in the municipalities of Burnaby, Richmond and Surrey (Ley and Lynch 2012). Although economic marginalization should not be overstated—after all, many neighbourhoods remain largely middle-class and economically diverse (Stanger-Ross and Ross 2012) – significant pockets of low-income have indeed emerged throughout the metropolitan region, expanding well beyond the traditional borders of the city’s urban core.\(^3\)

\(^2\) For an in-depth discussion of the difference between inequality and polarization see Walks et al. (2016).

\(^3\) In Canada, the suburban trajectory is more about growing spatial inequality than it is about declining suburbs per se. The distribution of census tracts by median household income categories reflects this fact. Hulchanski (2010) and Ley and Lynch (2012) clearly demonstrate that the overall trend between 1971 and 2006 is one of increasing household income inequality among census tracts. Also see Filion et al. (2011).
1.1.2 Diversifying suburbs

These changes have been accompanied by an equally significant shift in the residential location of new immigrants, who increasingly settle in surrounding suburban areas directly circumventing the inner city (Hiebert 1999, 2000, 2000b; Hiebert et al. 2008; Murdie and Teixeira 2003; Ray et al. 1997). Socio-spatial inequality in both Toronto and Vancouver has been shown to be strongly correlated with visible minority and new-immigrant status. Neighbourhoods that have experienced the sharpest decline in income are also housing a disproportionate number of newcomers and visible minorities, pointing to a troubling relationship between economic success, ethnicity and place (Ley and Lynch 2012; Hulchanski 2010). These trends suggest that lower-income immigrants aren’t just moving to the suburbs, they are increasingly finding refuge in suburban neighbourhoods with disproportionately high low-income rates (Fiedler et al. 2006; Heisz and McLeod 2004; Keung 2006; Lo 2011; Ley and Lynch 2012; Smith and Ley 2008).

The changing geography of income and immigration, along with the densification of the built environment, and the diversification of commercial activities, have become defining features of current processes of suburbanization in Canada (Edgington et al. 2006; Fiedler and Addie 2008; Filion et al. 2000; Grant and Filion 2010; Hutton 2010; Keil 2013; Lo et al. 2007; Murdie 2008; Murdie and Skop 2012). Combined, these trends are reshaping the fabric of suburbia, raising fundamental questions about the ability of local community planning to assist the needs of a rapidly growing and diversifying suburban population (Andrew 2011; Keil and Young 2011; Lo 2011).

To be sure, neither immigrant suburbanization nor suburban impoverishment are new phenomena per se. As revisionist historians have shown, early twentieth-century Canadian suburbs were socially diverse, housing not only working-class households but also immigrants (Harris 1996, 2004, 2010; Harris and Lewis 2001; Harris and Larkham 1999; Lewis 2000, 2004). What is different today, however, is both the extent of the rise of lower-income immigrant neighbourhoods in the suburbs, and the blurring of distinctive patterns demarcating city from suburbs. As suburbs become more urban, they also increasingly incur a host of urban-like problems such as street homelessness, gang violence, and immigrant poverty (Paperni and Dhillon 2011; Young and Keil 2010).
1.1.3 Suburban disadvantage

But although the problems of city and suburbs are progressively similar, they each present different risks and challenges to their respective inhabitants. In particular, many observers argue that life in the suburbs presents added difficulties to historically marginalized populations, such as new immigrants and low-income people (Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Lo et al. 2015). Concerns of this sort are borne out of the idea that suburban municipalities have been slow to respond to the needs of a growing and changing population (Young and Keil 2009, 2010). More specifically, urban scholars argue that low-income households in the suburbs lack adequate access to the type of services, amenities and infrastructure that would help them enhance their life chances (Hulchanski 2010; Filion 2013; Forsyth 2013; Ley and Lynch 2012; Ley and Smith 2000; Lo 2011; Lo et al. 2011; Lo et al. 2015; Smith and Ley 2008; Young and Keil 2010; Walks 2010b).

Anxieties about suburban deprivation are ultimately rooted in concerns over the power of place in determining a person’s quality of life. The idea being that suburban neighbourhoods have attributes that exacerbate the challenges of poverty and immigrant integration, making suburban residence a new kind of social and economic trap (Andrew 2011; Freeman 2011; Walks 2010b). In other words, where you live can be an important predictor of your life chances (Walks 2010b). Numerous neighbourhood-level characteristics are cited as factors that heighten the risks of vulnerability among low-income and new immigrant households. These include a lack of reliable public transit options, limited job opportunities, a dearth of amenities and services (public health facilities, immigrant settlement agencies, recreational centres, educational institutions, etc.), and physical infrastructure that limits accessibility for those without the means to buy a car such as automobile-oriented street design, and low-density and highly segregated land-use patterns (Andrew 2011; Filion et al. 2011; Ley and Smith 2001; Lo 2011; Lo et al. 2015; Shalaby et al. 2010; Smith and Ley 2008; Young and Keil 2010).

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4 For example, Smith and Ley note that “the availability and access to services, jobs, education, and other support structures can be profoundly affected by suburban versus centre city residence (2008: 687).” Similarly, Lo et al. (2011) argue that the suburbs can generate serious accessibility problems for recent newcomers and those without the means to buy a car (2011), a point also echoed by Wang and Truelove (2003) who found that settlement services targeted to immigrant low-income groups are disproportionately located out of reach in the inner city. Pierre Filion, Professor of Planning at the University of Waterloo, is outright skeptical of the ability of Canadian suburbs to meet
There are good grounds to believe, as many urban scholars increasingly do, that changes in the geographies of advantage and disadvantage in Canadian cities are leading to new forms of social isolation and economic disparity in the suburbs. By most standards, suburban residence limits accessibility to economically marginalized groups in the form of poor access to needed services, amenities and community supports (Lo at al. 2011; Smith and Ley 2008). Given that Canadian suburbs are known, if only anecdotally, for their limited public transit options, sprawled out areas, and segregated land uses, it is reasonable to contend that suburban life may exacerbate existing challenges for more economically marginalized populations (Lo et al. 2015).

1.1.4 Displacement and push factors

Equally relevant, the current literature emphasises a narrative of displacement to explain the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs. Urban scholars suggests that newcomers and low-income people are being pushed out of the urban core and into surrounding suburban areas, a process largely thought to be driven by gentrification and the rising cost of housing in the central city (Allen and Farber 2019; Bunting et al. 2004; Ley and Lynch 2012; Murdie and Skop 212). In so doing dominant narratives frame the new patterning of urban disadvantage squarely in terms of push factors. That is, they emphasise those forces which pressure people to leave the urban core in favour of the suburbs. Again, focusing on gentrification and urban development in the central city makes intuitive sense. Given what is known about the skyrocketing cost of housing in the central city it is reasonable to suggest that, unlike in past decades, life in the central city is out of the financial reach for a growing number of lower-income households.

the rising needs of a diversifying population, particularly those of recent immigrants (Grant et al., 2013). Finally, Hulchanski notes, at the very outset of his hugely influential essay “The Three Cities Within Toronto,” that the city’s low-income population is increasingly stuck in suburban neighbourhoods with “poor access to transit and services (2010).”
Section 1.2: Gaps in the Literature

If, as an increasing number of urban scholars suggest, low-income minorities are being ‘pushed’ into suburban neighbourhoods with poor resources and weak community supports, then it becomes all the more imperative to examine how the spatial patterning of urban disadvantage operates and manifests itself on the ground. But statements about the risks associated with suburban residence, and about people being pushed out of the central core tend to be assumed rather than demonstrated. Although often cited in the literature, concerns about social isolation, and lack of access to opportunities are largely under-examined and poorly understood. With a few exceptions, current studies largely focus on describing neighbourhood income trends, but give little attention to how people experience and negotiate life in the suburbs. We know surprisingly little about the factors influencing people’s decisions to move to the suburbs, and the unique barriers and opportunities, if any, that come with suburban residence. To what extent are low-income people in the suburbs being cut off from opportunities, services and support systems? What are the finer-grain mechanisms by which suburban location amplifies or entrenches socio-economic disparity? Do suburban areas provide any kind of benefits to historically marginalized populations? Are there things about the suburbs that lower-income newcomers might find appealing? The current literature leaves these basic questions unanswered.

These shortcomings partly reflect the methodological orientation of current research on socio-spatial inequality. For the most part, studies follow a narrow quantitatively-oriented methodology centred on the use of aggregate census statistics. Existing scholarship predominantly focuses on three things: (1) categorizing neighbourhoods along income lines and studying their distribution across metropolitan areas, (2) testing the relationship between various statistical variables through the use of regression analysis, and (3) generating statistical indexes to gauge the residential segregation of different population groups.

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5 Alan Walks recent paper “Income Inequality and Polarization in Canada’s Cities” (2013) is a case in point. The 125 pages-long document is a meticulously crafted and carefully researched piece of scholarship. Published by the University of Toronto Cities Centre, the paper reads like a policy report, and is framed within a purely quantitative methodology (which is likely Walk’s primary intent). Other notable examples include Hulchanski (2010), Ley and Lynch (2012), Ley and Smith (2000), Townshend et al. (2018), and Rose and Twigge-Molecey (2013.)

6 Some of the most notable examples include, Hulchanski (2010), Ley and Lynch (2012), Stanger-Ross and Ross (2012), Walks (2013), and Walks et al. (2016).
This is not to say that the present literature isn’t useful. Current studies provide a strong framework from which we can start to make sense and interpret the nature and character of spatial inequality in Canadian urban areas. Census tract analysis, in particular, offers an effective way of comparing socio-economic divides across metropolitan regions, and track their income trajectories over time. Perhaps most notably, quantitative approaches make it possible to identify broad trends and dynamics on a scale that might otherwise be hard to identify through the use of qualitative techniques.

In as much as it is useful to examine broad regional trends, it is just as important to speak concretely about why some areas are deemed to entrench socio-economic disadvantage, while others are deemed to foster positive social and economic outcomes for their residents. But quantitative methodologies are not well suited for capturing the nitty-gritty mechanisms by which disadvantage operates and manifests itself at the local level. By taking a sweeping, top-down, bird’s-eye-view of the city, current studies gloss over the subtleties and complexity of neighbourhood-level dynamics. Granularity is lost as the geographic scale moves from street- to regional-level. To understand what life is like for low-income residents in Canadian suburbs, or even to describe what low-income suburban areas look like on the ground we need – in the words of Smith (2004) – to bring the research to residents and neighbourhoods themselves. What this means, is to incorporate more qualitatively-oriented methodologies capable of capturing people’s perspectives and experiences of life in the suburbs. It is by asking people about how they themselves experience and navigate life in the suburbs that one can start to understand the challenges and opportunities that come with settling in suburban areas, and why people might choose to live there.

1.3 Theoretical frameworks

1.3.1 Distributive justice

The gaps in the literature identified above are not simple casual omissions. They reflect a scholarly blind spot integral to the very theoretical framework currently being favoured in research on socio-spatial inequality. What follows is an abridged discussion of the theoretical
underpinnings informing this thesis. For the purpose of the research I situate my discussion in contemporary theorizations of inequality, difference, and social justice and the city.

Recent studies on socio-spatial inequality in Canada favour a political-economic framework centred around the theme of redistribution. Concerns over the ability of low-income people to access needed services and opportunities in the suburbs, are ultimately rooted in an understanding that resources tend to be unequally distributed across urban space, including jobs, community services, amenities, institutions, shops, public transit, and so on. In this context, inequality broadly concerns unjust or uneven social relations reflected in differences in power, political representation, mobility and/or access to resources (Mains, 2006). Integral to this definition is the notion that unequal social relations take on a distinct spatial dimension. Inequality, therefore, manifests itself not only relationally between people, but also across space. Scholars agree that problems arise when there is a mismatch between the location of resources (private and public) and the people who need them. This way of framing urban inequality comes straight out of the work of American scholars interested in the study of concentrated inner-city poverty, notably Wilson (1987) and Kain (1968). But it is also seen in recent Canadian studies on spatial-inequality, including Hulchanski (2010), Walks (2011), Ley and Lynch (2012) and others. When these authors raise concerns over an increasingly affluent urban core, and the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs, they do so with a clear eye toward issues of distribution. The general premise here is that as low-income households move to the suburbs they become cut off from crucial resources, opportunities and support systems that would be better accessed in the central city.

Understanding urban inequality as primarily a problem of ‘who gets what where and how’ makes intuitive sense. By most standards, disparities in the distribution of political power, physical infrastructure, economic opportunity, and services is what distinguishes affluent communities from impoverished ones. There is a reason why low-income neighbourhoods tend to be described as ‘under-serviced’. While some residents might have ready access to job opportunities, others might not, and the same is true of education, adequate housing, social services, community

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7 For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks informing my research see Chapter 7.
amenities, etc. According to this line of thought, the way to address social injustice is to ensure that people and resources are evenly distributed.

In this way, the current literature situates contemporary debates about the changing geography of disadvantage squarely within what scholars call a ‘distributive justice framework’ – or a framework that understands social justice as primarily an issue of distribution. Distributive justice frameworks have been the primary way by which urban scholars have made sense of social justice issues in cities (Fainstein 2009). They inform the radical geography of David Harvey (1973), the political philosophy of John Rawls (1971), and lay the foundations for Davidoff’s (1965) and Krumholz’s (1982) advocacy and equity planning respectively. All of these authors were writing at a time of deep social upheaval when it was increasingly clear that the wealth generated in postwar America was not being distributed evenly across segments of society.8

Redistribution remains the benchmark by which today’s scholars approach the study of urban inequality. Again, this is sensible. By definition, inequality is about social and economic disparities between people (or places). Attention to how power and resources (whether public or private) are distributed in society and across space offers a useful starting point from which to make sense of the social and economic divides in our cities.

1.3.2 Recognition of ‘difference’

8 For Harvey, the asymmetric distribution of wealth and resources in American cities is intrinsic to the economic structures of capitalist society. Taking a Marxist perspective, Harvey (1973) argues that just social outcomes can only be secured outside the dominant system of capitalist production. In contrast, Rawls (1971) outlines a vision of liberalism whereby the equitable distribution of ‘primary goods’ (wealth, income, political power, etc.) are ensured through a model of rational choice. Unlike Harvey, Rawls argues that social justice (or the fair distribution of social and economic benefits) can be built in within the existing institutions of Western liberal democracies. Distributive justice frameworks also underpin foundational texts in planning theory and social justice. Davidoff (1975) – long considered the founder of advocacy planning – urged planners to think in “distributional terms” when assessing the strength of a proposal. He believed that ‘redistribution’ (of public and private resources) should be the foremost criterion for judging the worth of a public policy. According to Davidoff, ensuring that resources and power were evenly distributed across metropolitan areas offered the most effective way of redressing the failures of urban renewal, and the disinvestment plaguing American inner-cities in the 1960s. Equity planning – a framework typically associated with Krumholz’s work in Cleveland – shared the same foundational theory of justice (Krumholz 1982; Metzger 1996).
Distributive understandings of inequality can only go so far in shedding light on the finer-grain mechanisms by which socio-economic disadvantage operates and manifests itself on the ground. I contend that as a way to bring needed analytical depth, scholars must consider approaches capable of prioritizing personal experience and multiple ways of knowing. Here, I draw from the work of Young (1990) who argues that social justice is as much about recognition of difference, as it is about redistribution. In this context, ‘difference’ is meant to acknowledge that “population groups, differentiated by criteria of age, gender, class, dis/ability, ethnicity, sexual preference, culture and religion, have different claims on the city for a full life (Sandercock 2000: 15).”

Young’s politics of difference provides a useful theoretical framework from which to study multicultural cities in that it favours an epistemology that is contextually and historically situated rather than abstract and universal. Engaging with and recognizing difference means to reject the notion of a single public around which to build impartial and universally-applicable policies. At the core of Young’s theory is the idea that group-based difference needs to be recognized, not erased, because it is precisely the difference between one social group and another that shapes the experience of marginality (Maboloc 2015; Young 2001). Said another way, social justice necessitates not equality of treatment, but different treatment based on the extent of a group’s marginalization and cultural needs (Young 1990).

The work of Young (1990) has been picked up by intercultural planners – notably Sandercock (1995, 1998, 2000a, 2003a, 2003b) – who have been pushing to incorporate the views and experiences of minorities or otherwise socially excluded groups into dominant planning paradigms (Burayidi 2003; Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Iveson 2000; Milroy 2004; Wood and Landry, 2008). What makes an intercultural planning lens relevant to the study of urban inequality is that it validates the lived experience of historically marginalized populations as legitimate knowledge. In doing so it promotes an approach that is sensitive to the nuances of local context, local knowledge and the experiences of local residents. Just as relevant, intercultural frames recognize that minority groups may have aspirations, outlooks, wants and needs that do not always align with those of the dominant culture in which they live. As Sandercock (1995) and others have argued, the idea of a single public, average user or ‘one-size-fits-all’ public interest is at best suspect, and at worst a myth. People’s views of what makes a good neighbourhood, a good service, or a good public space is mediated by class, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, (dis)ability status, etc. In one neighbourhood bike lanes might be
welcomed as an effort to promote healthy lifestyles. In another neighbourhood, bike lanes might be linked to fears of gentrification and viewed as part of longer history of discrimination. Equal distribution of resources across space doesn’t always translate to socially just outcomes. Recognition of difference helps expose forms of group-based injustice, inequity and even privilege/bias that might go unnoticed in traditional distributive justice frameworks.

More to the point for my own research, theoretical approaches that recognize and engage with the question of difference are vastly better suited for examining how people of varying cultural backgrounds might navigate and experience life in the suburbs, and why people might choose to live there. To perpetuate preconceived notions of suburban residence as inherently unfavorable to minorities and low-income households is to overlook the obvious: different people want different things from the communities in which they live. The same is true of narratives that frame a move to the suburbs as a result of forced displacement, and not personal preference. While it might be true that for some people the best and most desirable neighbourhoods are located in the central city, that’s not likely to apply to all people. Recognition of cultural heterogeneity and difference offers a compelling framework by which scholars can move beyond generalizations, and explore the complexities and subtleties of neighbourhood-level dynamics.

To summarize, I organize my research around theorizations of distributive justice and the politics of difference. Within this theoretical framework I focus on contemporary research on socio-spatial inequality/polarization in Canadian cities, while straddling two related research fields: immigrant settlement, and suburban studies. Informing my studies are more peripheral and US-centric discussions about economic restructuring, social polarization, gentrification, neighbourhood effects, spatial segregation and the urban underclass (Figure 1.1). For a list of key readings associated with the fields presented in Figure 1.1 see Appendix A.
Figure 1.1: Organizational structure of the research
Figure 1.2: Theoretical frameworks

Not mutually exclusive
Two dimensions of social justice

Distributive justice paradigm

- Social injustice is understood as the unequal distribution of power and resources in society
- Achieving social justice means a melting away of group differences & allocating power & material goods equally

- Philosophical roots in Marxist political economy
- Prominent: 1970s to present day
- Dominant framework by which scholars have made sense of urban inequality
- Focus on ‘distribution’ and ‘access’
- ‘Who gets what, where and how?’
- Equal treatment leads to equal opportunity

Politics of difference paradigm

- Social justice is also about cultural recognition
- “Recognition of difference should lead not to equality of treatment, but to different treatment based on cultural need or difference”
- Knowledge situated in concrete cultural/historical context

- Philosophical roots in postmodernism, feminist theory
- Prominent: 1990s to present day
- Dominant framework by which scholars make sense of heterogenous urban areas
- Focus on ‘recognition’ and cultural inclusivity
- Group difference should not always be erased, but needs to be affirmed, celebrated, and recognized

Lit. on socio-spatial inequality/polarization in CND

- Quantitatively-oriented methodologies
- How are ppl. distributed in metro areas relative to services/resources?
- Census statistics
- Measures ‘access’ primarily in terms of physical distance

- Multiple publics
- Different ways of knowing
- Lived experience & local knowledge
- Qualitatively-oriented methodologies

Expand frame to include
1.4 Guiding questions and contribution

In this context, I engage with narratives that frame the suburbs as new sites of socio-economic disadvantage, to examine the question: how does suburban location shape the everyday life of lower-income newcomers? My research gives particular attention to the claim that suburban residence fosters social exclusion, and amplifies the challenges of poverty and immigrant integration. I build my argument around the premise that the experience of being a low-income minority in the suburbs is unique from the experience of being poor in the inner city. This is a premise I interrogate, rather than take for granted. To this end, my research focuses on the intersection between place, class and ethnicity. At a higher level, I am interested in examining how place shapes people’s quality of life and life prospects. While there is remarkable and ample literature on the role of place as a consolidating feature of socio-economic disadvantage, much of it remains oriented toward the inner-city. Few scholars recognize that, increasingly, social and economic precarity in Canada is a suburban rather than an urban experience.

There are three broad sets of questions that inform and motivate my research:

1. What insights can be drawn from the lived experiences of lower-income newcomers to better understand the type of prospects suburban life offers them? What do they themselves make of the suburbs as places in which to live in?

2. Does suburban residence amplify the challenges that come with being a new immigrant with limited economic means? Can it act as a springboard for socio-economic uplift?

3. What are the finer-grain mechanisms by which (dis)advantage operates and manifests itself on the ground in the suburbs?

To explore these questions, I centre my research around a case study of Surrey (BC), asking the following sets of sub-questions:

- What are some of the challenges and opportunities, if any, that life in Surrey creates for newcomers with limited economic means?
• How do people describe what life in Surrey is like for them, and their decision to move there?

My research makes two main contributions to the existing literature on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. First and foremost, I build on the work of Hulchanski (2010) and others, to examine what growing neighbourhood inequality and polarization mean for local community life. Are historically marginalized populations in the suburbs cut off from support systems and needed services? Does suburban residence heighten the risks of social and economic isolation? How do people feel about the prospects that life in suburbia has to offer them? The intent here is to give close attention to neighbourhood context and the experiences of lower-income new Canadians, with the ultimate goal of examining the barriers and opportunities, if any, that suburban residence creates for this group.

The contribution here is not just one of substance, but also one of method. To examine these questions requires moving beyond the comfort zone of statistical analysis and incorporating the perspectives of residents themselves. Despite the growing literature on socio-spatial divides, this vantage point has been overlooked so far. Current studies largely ignore local residents or tend to treat them as simple victims of displacement processes. Residents’ perspectives help shed much needed light on the finer-grain mechanisms by which social and economic disadvantage operates and manifests itself on the ground. Furthermore, the experiences of local residents offer an additional, yet neglected, position from which to interpret the trajectory of socio-economic change in suburban neighbourhoods. Can push factors alone explain the rise of low-income immigrant neighbourhoods in the suburbs? To what extent are pull factors also contributing to these changes?

Second, my research makes a contribution to academic and mainstream understandings of suburbia. While increasingly under question, uncritical views of the suburbs as culturally homogenous middle-class enclaves continue to resonate today. Scholarship on urban inequality in North America has for a long time advanced a simple ‘city-suburb’ dichotomy premised on the idea of an impoverished inner city surrounded by relatively affluent suburbs (Fiedler and Addie 2008; Bourne 1996; Harris 2010). My study is situated within a broader effort to develop

1.5 Key arguments

This thesis is centred around two main arguments. First, I argue that my interviews with local residents reveal a more nuanced response to suburban life than what is generally assumed in current writings on socio-spatial inequality in Canadian cities. The existing literature emphasises a story of exclusion and isolation when considering what life must be like for lower-income newcomers settling in the suburbs. I contend that this line of thought is not so much wrong, as it is incomplete and oversimplified. I make the case that alongside challenges and barriers, moving to the suburbs affords newcomers with opportunities that go overlooked in the established literature (Table 1.1).

This is not to deny the difficulties that come with life in the suburbs, or the constraints – many of them economic – that shape where people can live. Scholars are right to point out that people’s residential choices are constrained by wealth and income in very real ways. But studies that emphasise a narrative of displacement from the central city only tell part of the story. While people are certainly priced out of certain neighbourhoods, the factors contributing to lower-income households moving to the suburbs are more complex than what the existing literature seems to suggest. My findings both confirm and upend current understandings of the rise of low-income suburban areas, conveying a picture of neighbourhood change as a process of both push and pull factors, or factors that drive people away from the central city, and factors that pull people to the suburbs (Table 1.2).

Second, I argue that concerns over the fate of marginalized groups in the suburbs stem from a common, though largely unspoken assumption: the idea that low-income households would be better off locating in the central city. I argue that when holding this line of thought, urban scholars are in fact projecting their own ideas about what constitutes good planning onto a culturally diverse group of people whose varied wants and needs do not always align with those of today’s leading urbanists.
I define ‘urbanists’ to mean popular urban commentators who’ve been recognized as experts in their fields, and whose writings and thoughts about planning, cities or urban design have reached a mass audience. This comprises a broad group of people including academic scholars such as Richard Florida and Edward Glaeser, planning practitioners such as Janette Sadik-Khan and Brent Toderian, urban designers such as Andrés Duany and Jan Gehl, and writers such as James Kunstler and Charles Montgomery. These individuals, and others like them, have emerged as leading popular voices on cities and urban planning today (at least in Canada and the United States where they routinely make various top 100 lists of most influential urbanists). They embody and shape the current planning zeitgeist by having a reach and public platform that is hard to dispute. What they promote is a specific brand of urbanism, one focused on complete-communities, mixed-use and human-scale development, pedestrian-friendly places, green design, vibrant streets and the creative industries. This brand of urbanism isn’t wrong nor bad, in fact, it has proven to be both effective and useful in improving the quality of life of countless urban residents. But it has a uniquely urban-centric perspective that doesn’t always lend itself well for thinking about the local realities and challenges facing suburban or rural communities.

I do not mean to suggest that every planner or urban thinker espouses a single planning vision or philosophy. There are admittedly a variety of perspectives and opinions about what constituted good planning and good neighbourhoods. This is true among planning practitioners, planning scholars, urban geographers and even among some of today’s most beloved urbanists. But despite the many voices and perspectives, it is also undeniable that the particular brand of urbanism being promoted by today’s ‘top’ urbanists is incredibly fashionable, pervading mainstream culture far more broadly than other views. It is precisely because of this widespread appeal that these ideas are worth considering, not because of their substantive value, but because of the way they influence how many urban scholars today view and understand suburban spaces.

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9 Among the most notable is Planetizen’s “100 Most Influential Urbanists” ranking.
10 They give TED talks, deliver keynote speeches at prestigious urban forums, make regular appearances on radio shows, write op-eds, and actively promote their views on social media and web publications.
11 Ellen Dunham-Jones is a case in point. A former TED speaker who’s made various prestigious “top urban thinkers” list, Dunham-Jones centres her research specifically on ‘suburban spaces’, doing so without disdain or contempt for the suburbs. In fact, she considers them authentic places worthy of serious academic study. Having said this, it is also telling that Dunham-Jones’s overall vision for the future of suburbia is very much in line with that of many of her fellow urbanists. She promotes walkable, green, mixed-use communities with a strong focus on the built-environment and urban design (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2009).
Table 1.1: Challenges and benefits of suburban location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges:</th>
<th>Benefits:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The current literature emphasises the following challenges (listed below) to describe the prospects lower-income households face in the suburbs.</td>
<td>I argue that suburban location offers opportunities or benefits* (listed below) to lower-income newcomers that are overlooked in the existing literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of access to social services</td>
<td>• Personal networks (family relations; friends; acquaintances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of employment opportunities</td>
<td>• Established coethnic community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor public transit options</td>
<td>• Lower cost of family-size dwellings &amp; rental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of community amenities</td>
<td>• Job networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased risk of social isolation/exclusion</td>
<td>• Employment opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The benefits listed here emerged from my interviews with local residents in Surrey. These same benefits are the pull factors making suburban location appealing to lower-income newcomers.
Table 1.2: Push and pull factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Push’ factors:</th>
<th>‘Pull’ factors:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors ‘pushing’ households out of the urban core*</td>
<td>Factors ‘pulling’ households to the suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understood as structural obstacles and challenges that propel people to</td>
<td>- Understood as structural opportunities and benefits that attract people to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave certain areas.</td>
<td>certain areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The factors below are presented in the academic literature to explain the</td>
<td>The factors below emerged from my interviews with local residents, and create</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rise of low-income, minority households in suburban areas. While distinct</td>
<td>a more complete picture of the rise of low-income, minority households in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are interrelated to one another.</td>
<td>suburban areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High cost of housing in the central core</td>
<td>• Personal networks (family-relations; friends; acquaintances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Central-core gentrification</td>
<td>• Established coethnics community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Urban redevelopment in the urban core</td>
<td>• Lower cost of family-size dwellings &amp; rental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of affordable rental housing</td>
<td>• Job networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Employment opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social and community services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lower-density neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* I recognize that push-pull models can be considered too simplistic and deterministic (Skeldon 1990; de Haas 2011). But they remain the most widely-used explanatory frameworks in migration studies, with most scholars agreeing that despite obvious flaws, they have ongoing merit (Van Hear et al. 2018).
1.6 Methodological framework

1.6.1 Theoretical influences

The methodology for this proposed research is structured around a qualitative case study, and draws mainly from two philosophical perspectives: social constructionism and critical theory. Although a discussion about the theory of social science research (how it should be conducted and what it entails) is beyond the scope of this essay, it is nonetheless crucial to recognize that methods and approaches of social science research are informed by particular epistemological and ontological paradigms. Reflecting on how and what underlying philosophical assumptions and beliefs shape one’s research goes a long way toward situating and developing a stronger thesis.

My proposed research is built on social constructionism, an ontological position premised on the idea that knowledge of events, phenomena, institutions, etc. is socially constructed (Creswell 2012). Social constructionist perspectives maintain an abiding concern for the specific and everyday context in which people live (Silverman 2013). They emphasise subjective meaning and personal experience over objective and universal facts. Methodologies based on social constructionism rely on participants’ perspectives, and are rooted in an understanding that these perspectives (however varied and complex) are shaped by various markers of cultural identity including, gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, class, and race.

The other philosophical paradigm that informs my methodological approach is critical theory, a theoretical perspective that seeks to expose relations of oppression, inequality, and discrimination, and promotes positive social change. The ‘critical’ aspect of critical theory stems from the commitment to go beyond the study of society for the sake of understanding to an approach that explicitly aims at redressing social injustice (Patton 2014). In addition, critical theory gives particular attention to intercultural matters, and more specifically how relations of inequality and power intersect with constructs of race and ethnicity. Critical approaches push one to question how dominant and hegemonic practices and values may help to create and reinforce processes of societal oppression and discrimination (Creswell 2012). It is this explicit commitment to human emancipation and social justice that makes critical theory a fundamental inspiration for my methodology.
1.6.2 Methodological approaches

Drawing from both social constructionism and critical theory, I organize and structure my proposed research around a case study. Case study research is particularly well suited to answering complex questions, and to studies that require in-depth analysis and description of some contemporary real-life social phenomenon (Yin 2014). With this in mind, case studies work best when both the substance (what the case study is about) and the boundaries (the parameters or the research) are carefully defined. One often-voiced criticism of case study research is that its findings, which are highly contextual, provide little basis for generalization (Yin, 2014). But as Flyvbjerg (2001) convincingly argues, formal generalization as understood in the natural and physical sciences is too strict and too narrow of a requirement for the vast majority of social science research. Equally important, generalization itself is but one epistemological approach among many others to generating valuable knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2001).

The case study has become a favoured methodology in planning and urban geography. But research on the changing geography of income and immigration has yet to embrace it. Recent studies favour the study of region-wide socio-demographic trends steeped in positivist methodologies. Neighbourhood-level statistics (usually drawn from the census) are collected for given metropolitan areas and are then subjected to various statistical analyses. This is true of much of the recent scholarship coming out of Canada, including Ades et al. (2016), Hulchanski (2010), Ley and Lynch (2012), Townshend et al. (2018) and Walks (2011). Like similar research in the United States (Allard 2017; Kneebone and Berube 2013; Orfield 2002) these studies take a strong public policy orientation and as such are heavily reliant on statistics and quantification—the language of government administrators and policy wonks.12

Migration scholars have conducted case study research on disadvantage and exclusion in Canada’s suburbs, but the body of research remains very limited. For one thing as Teixeira (2007, 496) points out, “the ethnocultural dimension of suburbanization has been largely

12 Many of these studies do focus on a single metropolitan region, and as such could broadly be considered case studies. Take for instance, Ley and Lynch’s (2012) study of Metro Vancouver. But because their analytical focus is on high-level trends, rather than in-depth local context, they don’t quite fit the label of ‘case study research.’
overlooked in the scholarly literature.” The converse is also true, few studies take the suburban dimension of immigrant settlement as a subject of inquiry in its own right. Among these studies, even fewer situate their research explicitly within broader debates about the changing geography of disadvantage in North American cities. Perhaps the most notable exception is Lo et al. (2015)’s case study on York Region. But even then, the authors rely on a quantitatively-oriented methodology centred on the analysis of customized census statistics, and spatial analytic techniques usually associated with transportation studies.

Within planning scholarship, the study of suburban areas is largely situated within discussions about smart growth, ecological sustainability, healthy lifestyles, and the built environment (Connelly and Roseland 2010; Grant 1994, 2002, 2006, 2009; Grant and Filion 2010; Grant and Perrott 2011; Filion 2001; Filion 2000; Filion and McSpurren 2007). For the most part, this is a literature with a strong technical positivist orientation that lacks broader social justice and equity perspectives.

There are only a handful of studies in Canada that situate the study of socio-economic disparity within a suburban, rather than an urban, setting, and do so using a qualitatively-oriented case study methodology. In this regard, my thesis takes direct inspiration from research by Smith and Ley (2008), Teixeira (2014), and Ghosh (2014). These studies set a clear precedent (or template if you will) for how scholars can effectively apply qualitative methodologies to research on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. The dearth of such type of studies in the academic literature prompts me to believe that conducting a qualitative case study is all the more important. The nature and complexity of my research questions makes a qualitative approach well suited for my thesis. As Denzin and Lincoln explain, “the province of qualitative research is the world of

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14 Smith and Ley (2008) examine the experiences of low-income immigrants in Toronto and Vancouver, paying close attention to the unique character of the experiences of those living in suburban localities. Ghosh (2014) examines the daily routines of Bangladesh newcomers who live in high-rise complexes in Toronto’s inner suburbs. Texeira (2014) studies the strategies by which newcomers (in Surrey and Richmond, BC) cope with the local housing market. These authors conduct focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to capture nuances in the lived-experience of local residents that would otherwise be difficult to convey through purely quantitative techniques.
lived experience for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture (2011: 2).”
Unlike traditional positivist approaches that stress objective and replicable truths derived from scientific methodologies, qualitative techniques consider subjective interpretation as a valid form of knowledge production. Qualitative researchers strive to make sense of the world by interpreting the meaning that people bring to it, rather than by organizing society into neatly defined categories of quantifiable data.

A major advantage of qualitative perspectives for my research is that they incorporate sources of knowledge that are mostly ignored in current Canadian studies on spatial inequality. These include such things as personal experience, introspection, life stories, and visual and photographic materials. Such elements are necessary to broaden our understanding of the neighbourhood-level implications of growing suburban poverty and immigration. Equally relevant, qualitative approaches are conducive to creating a richer and more layered understanding of how inequality manifests itself on the ground. In so doing they create a better position from which to address the question of whether suburban residence is creating new forms of social exclusion and isolation, or acting as a springboard for social uplift.

1.6.3 The Case

This thesis focuses on the municipality of Surrey (BC), Metro Vancouver’s second largest city – second only to Vancouver – and the region’s largest suburb. With a land area of over 300 square kilometers, and home to just over half a million people (517,900), Surrey is the main population centre south of the Fraser River (Figure 1.2). The city is one of Canada’s fastest growing municipalities and is expected to surpass Vancouver as BC’s largest city by 2040 (Metro Vancouver, 2011). About 1,000 new residents are added to Surrey’s population each month through immigration, migration and birth (Statistics Canada 2016).\(^{15}\) The pace of growth is creating challenges for residents and government officials alike, as the city struggles to keep up with heightened demand for public services and infrastructure notably in housing, transportation.

\(^{15}\) Immigration accounts for the bulk of Surrey’s population growth. Of the 49,636 residents added to Surrey’s population between 2011 and 2016, 36,340 (or 73%) were recent immigrants (Statistics Canada 2016a, author calculations).
and education sectors (City of Surrey 2008; SurreyCares 2014). These challenges are further compounded by the city’s vast sprawling land mass, which is about three times as large as the area covered by the city of Vancouver (Figure 4; Sinoski 2013). As an outer suburb, Surrey contains a mix of housing types, density gradients, economic activities, and land uses, including large swaths of agricultural land, which can make the city resemble that of a rural community more than an urban centre (Dowling 1996; Frost 2010; Walton-Roberts 1998).

Figure 1.3: Municipalities of Metro Vancouver

Hutton (2010) also points out that despite experiencing significant job growth, Surrey – along with the outer suburbs of Delta, Coquitlam, and Langley – maintains relatively weak jobs-to-residents ratio which coupled with its scattered low-density form poses problems for regional and local planners (2010: 121).

For a comparison more useful to an American audience. The entire island of Manhattan spans a land area of approximately 60 square kilometres, meaning that the area covered by the 260 odd-blocks from Battery Park to Inwood would fit five times in the city of Surrey.
Like other major Canadian suburbs, Surrey has a diverse population mix. It is a ‘minority-majority’ municipality, with 59% of its residents identifying as visible minority (Statistics Canada 2016a). To put things in perspective, the city of Vancouver is 52% visible minority. Immigrants account for 43% of the total population of Surrey, and are primarily from South-Asia (India and Pakistan), Southeast Asia (Philippines) and East Asia (China and South Korea). In recent years, Surrey has also become the primary settlement destination for refugees in British Columbia, with the bulk arriving from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and most recently Syria (Surrey LIP 2015).\(^{18}\) Surrey is arguably best known as the hub of Metro Vancouver’s South-Asian community (Table 1.3). One in three residents claim South-Asian heritage, with most having roots in the Punjab region of northern India (City of Surrey 2017).

Table 1.3: Recent immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of recent immigrants by country of birth, Surrey, 2016, (three largest population groups)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Recent immigrants are immigrants who entered Canada between 2011 and 2016
Source: Calculated by author from Statistics Canada, Census 2016

What is perhaps most striking about the socio-demographic profile of Surrey’s population is its trajectory of change. In 1986, only 22% of Surrey residents were immigrants, compared to 43% in 2016 (Figure 1.3). The immigrant population in Surrey grew from 39,300 to over 220,000 in the span of just thirty years (Statistics Canada 1986, 2016a). Similarly, the proportion of visible minority residents in Surrey increased by more than 30 percentage points from 1996 to 2016 (from 29% to 59%, Figure 1.4).\(^{19}\) These changes are all the more dramatic when compared to the city of Vancouver. Between 1986 and 2016, the percentage of immigrant residents in Vancouver increased only marginally, from 39% to 42.5% (Figure 1.3). Likewise, between 1996 and 2016, the share of visible minority residents in the city grew by only 6.5 percentage points.

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\(^{18}\) As of 2016, about 20,500 refugees lived in Surrey, compared to about 18,000 in Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2016a).

\(^{19}\) Statistics Canada introduced the ‘visible minority’ question only in 1996. Counts of visible minority populations prior to 1996 were produced by combining responses on ‘ethnic origin’, ‘birth place’ and ‘mother tongue’ (Statistics Canada 2016c).
(from 45% to 51.5%, Figure 1.4). But these statistics belie a more surprising trend. Unlike Surrey, Vancouver is becoming less immigrant and the expansion of its visible minority population has come to a screeching halt. Today, 42.5% of Vancouver residents are immigrants, down from 46% in 2001 (Figure 1.3). In like manner, the proportion of visible minorities in Vancouver has remained effectively stagnant, going from 49% in 2001 to 51.5% in 2016 (Figure 1.4). These numbers signal the divergent socio-demographic trajectories Vancouver and Surrey are taking. The former is adding fewer and fewer immigrants and people of colour, and becoming less diverse as a result, while the latter is following a trajectory of increased diversity, having become the primary reception site for newcomers, and refugees.

**Figure 1.4: Immigrant status**
Proportion of residents who are foreign-born, 1986-2016, selected cities

Source: Calculated by author from Statistics Canada, Census 1986 to 2016
Surrey offers a particularly good vantage point from which to contribute to emerging research on spatial inequality in Canadian suburbs. Since the 1970s, Vancouver’s geography of income and immigration has shifted in remarkable ways, a process largely marked by the dispersal of low-income and immigrant households away from the urban core and into surrounding suburban areas (Ley and Lynch 2012). In line with trends south of the border, there are, today, significantly more low-income households living in Vancouver’s suburbs, than in Vancouver proper. This fact might seem hardly surprising given that much of the region’s growth has been concentrated in suburban municipalities. But the finding is relevant for it speaks to the idea that the experience of being poor today is as much, if not more, a suburban rather than an urban experience, a reality that goes largely ignored in the scholarly literature.

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20 Neighbourhoods with the highest increases in average income are concentrated in three areas. First, in Vancouver’s historic elite neighbourhoods (Shaughnessy, Kerrisdale, Point Grey), and older inner-city neighbourhoods (Kitsilano, Fairview, False Creek, and Coal Harbour). Second, in the north shore suburbs of West and North Vancouver. Third, in the outlying areas of the Lower Fraser Valley around Delta, Langley and South Surrey. While, neighbourhoods with the sharpest decreases in average income are consolidated in East and South Vancouver, along the Expo Skytrain corridor in Burnaby, around Richmond’s city centre, and in the Surrey neighbourhoods of North Surrey and Newton (Ley and Lynch, 2012).
Today, only five of the region’s twenty most populated low-income neighbourhoods are located within the municipal boundaries of the city of Vancouver, the remaining fifteen are all located in the suburbs, predominantly Richmond, Burnaby and Surrey. The Downtown Eastside remains the neighbourhood with the highest concentration of poverty in Metro Vancouver, but high-poverty areas (defined as neighbourhoods with low-income rates of at least 30%) can be found in Coquitlam, Richmond, Surrey, Burnaby and even Langley.\textsuperscript{21}

Surrey occupies a central place in this new geography of income. Anywhere between 60,000 to 75,000 Surrey residents live in low-income households, the second largest population in Metro Vancouver (Statistics Canada 2016a). Among its poor, Surrey counts between 17,000 to 22,000 children and youths, more than any other municipality in the region.\textsuperscript{22} This reflects the profile of the low-income population in Surrey which, unlike Vancouver, is skewed more toward single-parent families than unattached adult men. The overall low-income rate for Surrey is moderate (12% to 15%), which can partly be explained by the continued presence of a significant number of middle- and even upper-income areas. This is especially true in the southern part of the city. But city-wide statistics hide a more complex reality, as there are many areas within Surrey with much higher concentrations of low-income households, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Whalley, Guildford and Newton. In fact, low-income rates in these areas are among the highest in Metro Vancouver (Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.6).

\textsuperscript{21} Low-income rates in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside range from 40% to 65% depending on how one defines the neighbourhood.
\textsuperscript{22} The 2016 census provides two main statistics for measuring low-income status. The Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) and the Low-Income Measure (LIM). If you use LICO rather than LIM you arrive at higher low-income numbers and low-income rates. For more on low-income statistics see Giles (2004).
But what makes Surrey a compelling site for studying urban inequality is not only the presence of a large low-income population, and the multi-ethnic profile of its community. It is also the fact that there are various areas within Surrey that share characteristics typically associated with distressed neighbourhoods. For instance, parts of Guildford have low-income rates ranging between 31% to 38%. In the area surrounding Holly Park more than one-in-three residents live in low-income households, and almost 20% of residents are recent immigrants (Statistics Canada 2016a). The median household income in the area is low, sitting near the $45,000 mark compared to the regional average of $72,000 (City of Surrey 2017). Whalley has an equally pronounced concentration of low-income households as well as a visible street population. The character of the neighbourhood, however, is also changing prompted in part by an influx of new
development near the Skytrain rapid transit line. As a result of new development pressures, the more suburban neighbourhood of Newton located just south of the city centre, has now emerged as the area with the largest low-income population (totalling 21,500). Home to the city’s largest South-Asian community, Newton is also a highly immigrant district – about 75% of residents there are visible minorities (City of Surrey 2017).

Another reason why Surrey is a good case study for this research is that neighbourhoods like Whalley, Guildford and Newton present unique sides and different manifestations of suburban spaces. In this way Surrey offers a view of suburbia that is multifaceted rather than unidimensional. Guilford, for instance, is an area anchored and centred around a typical postwar suburban mall. But it is also an area with a significant stock of very modest, rental apartment buildings typically seen in older central-city neighbourhoods. The same is also true of Whalley, which, in parts, resembles an inner city – with its elevated rapid transit line, laundromats, payday-loan stores, and even light-industrial districts. Both Guildford and Whalley are neighbourhoods that Keil and Young (2010) would call “in-between cities,” the space between the traditional more compact city centre and the sprawled out, low-density outer suburbs. They have a fair concentration of amenities and services typically not seen in postwar suburbs, and are both fairly well connected (economically and in terms of transportation) with the rest of the region. Just as relevant is north Surrey’s multi-ethnic character which surpasses that of most central city neighbourhoods, something obvious to anyone stepping onto the platform at Surrey Central Station.

In contrast, Newton resembles a more conventional outer-ring suburban neighbourhood, with a landscape dominated by single-detached houses, large arterial roads and big-box store developments. Located a few kilometres south of the city centre, it sits on the border with the municipality of Delta, a predominantly agricultural community. Newton’s proximity to agricultural land is reflected in the neighbourhood’s ethnic composition, which comprises a majority South Asian population from India, many of whom are employed in agricultural related activities. Due to its location and its car-centric transportation network, Newton is not as well connected to Surrey’s city centre, or for that matter the regional economy north of the Fraser River.
As stated above, this case study centres around Surrey as a way to capture the multifaceted and heterogenous nature of many of today’s suburbs. Surrey is a highly-diverse suburb with a changing and rapidly growing population. My intent here is to avoid offering a unidimensional view of suburban life focused on a narrow type of built form, or one that prioritizes the experiences of a single group. Failing to do so could give a skewed and limited image of suburbia, especially since most Canadian suburbs today are highly varied – socially, culturally, economically and physically. After all, the barriers and opportunities created by neighbourhood context are likely to vary from place to place, but they are also likely to be mediated differently by different groups. The exploratory nature of this approach is well suited for capturing a broad spectrum of experiences, which is what I am after.

1.6.4 Gathering and analyzing information

As explained earlier, anxieties over the dispersal of low-income minority households in the suburbs are rooted in the belief that place plays a critical role in shaping people’s quality of life. Scholars tend to frame these concerns within a specific belief that changes in the geography of income and immigration are leaving historically marginalized populations isolated from services and community supports, producing new forms of social exclusion and neighbourhood disadvantage (Hulchanski, 2010; Ley and Lynch, 2012, Lo et al., 2015; Smith and Ley, 2008). My proposed research puts these concerns and beliefs under the microscope, with the aim to develop a richer understanding of the barriers and opportunities that come with suburban residence. I do so by examining the experiences of suburban life from the perspectives of lower-income newcomers living in Surrey, BC.

Given the research scope and goals of this research, the methods of data-gathering are oriented toward three main activities: 1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with local Surrey residents; 2) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with local community experts; 3) naturalistic observation.

1.6.5 Interviews

Over the course of the field work, I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with 25 local immigrants who lived in Surrey. Most interviews ranged between 60 to 90 minutes, but some
lasted well over 2.5 hours, and two interviews lasted only 45 minutes. Alongside these 25 participants, I also interviewed an additional five participants in one single focus group session. My initial intent was to interview everyone individually, but because these five participants voiced preference for meeting as a group, I set up a separate focus group discussion to better accommodate their needs. The session lasted about 75 minutes. Needless to say, the material of the group discussion was not as rich as that of the in-depth interviews – where participants had more time to answer questions, and I could more freely probe respondents for details. In all, nine men and twenty-one women participated in the study. Fifteen different source countries were represented in the sample, with India being the most strongly represented country (thirteen respondents were immigrants from India). For more details about the sample characteristics of study participants see Appendix B. Most of those interviewed were in their thirties, had children, and were married. But four participants were young, single adults in their twenties, and three participants were in their mid-fifties or older. Study participants were living in precarious circumstances – working low-pay, service-sector jobs – or had experienced, either individually or as a household, economic hardship while living in Canada. The vast majority of participants (20) had been in Canada for five years or less. Everyone interviewed was living in Surrey at the time the interviews took place, but some had also lived in other municipalities in Metro Vancouver prior to moving to Surrey. In line with Canada’s immigrant population, almost everyone in the sample was highly educated. Of the thirty participants, twenty-seven had a post-secondary education, with more than half having arrived in Canada with a Master’s degree. Participants were selected from three neighbourhoods in Surrey, 40% lived in Whalley, another 40% in Newton, and 20% in Guildford.

I knew entering the research that I was not looking for a representative sample from which statistics could be generalized and applied to the broader population of Surrey. While generalization can be an effective tool in social science, the intent of my chosen research design was to get at the specific and contextual dimension of people’s experiences. Rather than trying to erase the ‘subjectivity’ of research participants, I set out to examine it. I was not interested in revealing the ‘average experience’ of life in suburbia for a hypothetical ‘average’ newcomer or ‘general’ immigrant group. In fact, I approached the research recognizing that people’s experiences and perspectives of suburban life were likely going to vary, not only between but also within different ethnic groups, and from one person to the next.
Given the paucity of in-depth, case-study research on Canadian suburbs, especially here in Metro Vancouver, it was clear to me that taking an exploratory approach would provide the best contribution to this emerging field of study. With this in mind, I purposely prioritized a broad, rather than a narrow, research scope. This is the reason why I decided in favour of a diverse sample that would include men and women of varying age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and with different length of residency in Canada. Likewise, I deliberately adopted a semi-structured approach to the interview process (see Appendix D for the interview schedule). While I had, inevitably, preconceived notions of the barriers and opportunities that come with suburban residence, the purpose of the interviews was to let people define what they themselves judged to be important. Just as critically, I wanted to allow for unanticipated answers and themes to emerge. Looking back now, it is clear that some of these unanticipated themes are among the most compelling findings emerging from the thesis.

While I don’t produce findings that can be generalized, this research still meets its original objective: providing a perspective on suburban life that until now has been taken for granted if not ignored. The accounts emerging from this small sample by no means provide a definitive take on the type of prospects lower-income newcomers face in the suburbs. Rather the point is to highlight the fact that the experience of suburban life, including its challenges and opportunities, are likely varied, and that narratives of exclusion, isolation and displacement are likely incomplete. What makes generalization difficult isn’t simply the study’s small sample size, but also the fact that there is a great deal of variation both internally within individual suburbs, and externally from one suburban municipality to another. Capturing such diversity is challenging whether one uses quantitatively- or qualitatively-oriented approaches. But taking a broad-based exploratory approach centred on one specific suburb – as I do in this research – offers a good first step by which we can start to understand the complexities and nuances of local dynamics.

Alongside the 30 interviews with local residents, I conducted an additional 20, semi-structured, interviews with 19 community experts (see Appendix C). These experts were mostly managers and outreach workers engaged in various sectors of public and non-profit service delivery, including immigrant settlement, foodbank, municipal government, skills training and employment, and youth services. Most interviews were between 60 to 75 minutes and were
conducted one-on-one. I conducted these interviews wanting to hear from professionals who had a pulse on local community dynamics in Surrey, and who could provide hands-on knowledge of Surrey’s changing social and demographic landscape. The intent here was to gather information that could help me contextualize the perspectives and lived-experiences of local residents. I needed a way to situate people’s individual experiences within a larger discussion about growing suburban diversity and change, but the lack of scholarly research on Surrey made this task difficult. For this reason, I relied on expert knowledge to paint a clearer picture of the trends and issues that were impacting the city at that time (see Appendix E for interview schedule).

Interviews with community experts allowed me to better gauge the extent and nature of social service provision in Surrey, and the wider community supports available to local residents. This information was all the more important given the scholarly concerns over the rise of low-income immigrant households in the suburbs. Underlying many of these concerns is the idea that suburban municipalities are ill-equipped to assist the needs of more economically marginalized populations. I knew that in order to tackle some of the assumptions that were being made in the literature, there were certain basic aspects of the city that I needed to get right, such as the general state of service provision in Surrey, what kind of services were available where, the kind of employment opportunities accessible in the city, and the changing profile of the local population.

1.6.6 Recruitment

Study participants were enlisted through a purposive recruitment strategy. First, I identified and approached local organizations that could assist me in advertising the study to local residents. I used professional connections – developed over the course of three years of working with a non-profit agency in Surrey – to this end. I connected with about twenty different organizations involved in delivering services to new immigrants and/or low-income populations in the neighbourhoods of Whalley, Guildford and Newton. While local agencies did not directly recruit participants for me – as is the case in many social science research projects – they did grant me access to their premises and programming so that I could advertise my study to their clients. In practical terms, this involved making trips to the respective agencies, and delivering a five- to ten-minute presentation at workshops, classes and other various programming. I would then hand out a recruitment poster to the agency with my contact information. Individuals who were
interested in participating in the research contacted me via phone or email. I expected to rely on snowballing techniques to build my sample, but I was not successful in this regard. Only two people were recruited through contacts made with initial participants.

To ensure a good mix of occupational backgrounds, I visited agencies and gave presentations on weekdays and weekends, as well at various times during the day (mornings, afternoons and evenings). This allowed me to recruit people with day jobs enrolled in evening classes, and people who worked outside the traditional 9am to 5pm schedule who took classes during the day. Alongside these efforts I also advertised the recruitment poster on various bulletin boards in the community, including Surrey libraries, recreation centres, service agencies, and neighbourhood houses. The interviews were conducted at a public library branch or recreation centre most convenient to the participants. All in all, I reached out to about twenty different agencies, and gave about thirty different presentations as a way to advertise the research.

Criteria for selection of study participants was fairly straightforward. First, individuals had to be living in Surrey, and most specifically in the neighbourhoods of Whalley, Guildford or Newton. I did recruit one participant who was in the process of moving from the neighbourhood of Clayton to Whalley. I did so because despite living in Clayton at the time of the interview, the respondent’s life revolved much more around the neighbourhoods of Newton (where she took classes) and Whalley (where she was working and moving to). In other words, she had strong first-hand knowledge of two areas important to my research. She also provided further insights into what makes neighbourhoods like Newton, Whalley and Guildford appealing to newcomers. Second, I mostly selected individuals who were ‘recent immigrants’, which I defined as having been in Canada for five years or less. Ultimately, I decided not to include Government Sponsored and Privately Assisted Refugees in my sample, though they are certainly an important population with a significant presence in Surrey. The circumstances around the migration process and settlement experience of refugees are so unique that I did not feel they could adequately be covered without drastically expanding the scope of this research. There is certainly a real need for more finely grained research on the experiences of refugees in the suburbs, but this ultimately calls for a separate research project.
Third, I recruited people who were or had experienced life as newcomers engaged in low pay, precarious work. I did not have a simple way of gauging socio-economic status and felt that recruiting people based on income levels would be ineffective or problematic. Rather, I advertised the research as a study geared toward individuals or households who were or had struggled to find their footing in the Canadian labor market. In the initial stages of the recruitment process I used such phrases as “struggling to get by,” “making ends meet,” or “scraping by”, but soon realized that many newcomers did not easily understood the meaning of such colloquial slang. Effectively, I confirmed participants’ socio-economic status over the course of the interview, asking questions about their employment history, job situation, housing tenure, etc. All the participants in this study were or had experienced economic precarity, often having worked in such jobs as cashiers, security guards, caregivers, labourers, taxi/truck drivers, etc. For more on the job profiles of study participants see Appendix B.

It is worth noting that my research findings are ultimately drawn from a small and particular group of people. The majority of participants in my sample tended to be not only highly educated – a common trait among newcomers coming to Canada – but exceptionally so: almost half of the respondents had a master’s degree, and another ten percent Ph.D’s. The high level of educational attainment within my sample is in line with what we know about response bias in academic research and government surveys: persons of lower socio-economic status are less likely to participate in studies and surveys (Tourangeau and Plewes 2013). At the same time, because my recruiting efforts centred around immigrant settlement agencies, participants in my sample were likely not as isolated and marginalized as other fellow newcomers. Both of these dynamics are likely to have shaped participants’ outlooks on life in Surrey, perhaps leading to a brighter view of suburban residence than it might otherwise have been reported through other methods. It is still worth pointing out, though, that most respondents in my sample did also speak about the many and serious challenges that come with living in Surrey, so the picture conveyed in this thesis is by no means all positive, or unidimensional. But mainly, what is important here is to recognize that perspectives about life in Surrey are likely varied. Again, in this thesis, I don’t argue that there is a single experience of suburban life among lower-income newcomers, but that

23 As various scholars have shown, income levels, especially as they apply to immigrant populations, can be misleading. Households may report low incomes while holding significant assets in the form of investment, expensive real estate or wealth stored abroad.
the experiences and outlooks reported by participants in my research do not always align with the dominant narratives found in the existing literature on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. Therefore, I propose that current analytical frameworks be expanded to incorporate a more complete and ultimately truer picture of the type of prospects and opportunities low-income people face in the suburbs.

There are two other methodological considerations worth mentioning regarding my sample. First, in gauging new immigrants’ experiences about life in Surrey, my research is likely skewed to more positive responses, if only for the fact that it fails to catch the experiences of people who might have decided to move out of Surrey because they did not like living there. By focusing on Surrey residents, I’m effectively drawing from a pool of participants who are likely content with the area in which they live. Second, as migration scholars have recognized, new immigrants have a vested interested in justifying their decision to move to a new country (Houle and Schellenberg 2010). There is a lot that rides on the decision to uproot oneself and one’s family and migrate to a distant land, precisely because doing so is a risky and arduous endeavour. With this in mind, newcomers are likely to maintain high levels of life satisfaction even when facing a difficult settlement experience. As Houle and Schellenberg (2010) note, the tendency to be optimistic functions as an important coping mechanism for new immigrants. This dynamic is likely to have shaped many of my research participants, though it is worth noting again that – while most had a positive outlook of their life in Surrey – many did not hesitate to bring up the unique challenges associated with living there.

Expert interviewees were also recruited through purposive sampling techniques. My involvement with the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), and the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition facilitated contacts with local community experts. In fact, I recruited expert interviewees from the same pool of twenty or so agencies that assisted with the recruitment of local-residents. While distinct, the two recruitment efforts were happening simultaneously of one another. Contact information for potential expert participants was publicly available online. Participants were recruited from agencies with a solid background in immigrant settlement work or service delivery for low-income populations in Surrey. Unlike the recruitment process for local-residents, the recruitment of expert professionals was a lot more expeditious and benefited greatly from snowball sampling techniques. After four years of combined involvement with the
Surrey LIP, the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition, and the City of Surrey Social Planning Department, I had established strong professional networks within the non-profit sector in Surrey. Having something of an ‘insider’ status enhanced my legitimacy and trust in the eyes of potential expert participants who, for the most part, did not hesitate to speak to me.

1.6.7 Analysis of information

For the analysis of the interview material I followed common approaches in qualitative interpretative research (Mason 2002). All the interviews with local residents were audio recorded, except for four interviews where participants explicitly requested not to be audio recorded.24 I took notes during the interviews, highlighting key segments and points as the interview unfolded. I personally transcribed all the interviews myself, a process that proved to be incredibly painstaking as many participants had basic English language skills, and strong accents.25 The benefit of transcribing the interviews by myself is that I became deeply acquainted with the material at hand early on in the investigation. It also gave me a stronger vantage point from which to discern people’s perspectives as I could hear the pauses, hesitations, chuckles, discontent, sarcasm, etc. that are harder to capture or convey in transcript form. After transcribing the interviews, I printed all the transcripts and started an initial process of reading and review, manually highlighting passages and key words. I identified two broad themes around which to centre my analysis: 1) What were people’s perception of Surrey? What did they like about the city and the neighbourhood in which they lived? What did they not like? What would they like to see improved? 2) Why did people choose to live in Surrey? How did they end up there? Did they see a future for themselves and their families in the city? Were people hoping to move elsewhere? Alongside these themes, I also colour-coded the transcripts for information on five sub-topics: employment, housing, transportation, services/amenities, and social and

24 In those four cases where I could not audio record the interviews, I took detailed notes during the interviews, and as soon as the interviews were done, I went back to the page and filled in any details still fresh in my memory that had been left out. It wasn’t always clear why some residents requested not to be audio-recorded. Those residents that expressed not feeling comfortable being recorded, seemed to be extra concerned about remaining anonymous. In some cases, I got the impression people were concerned about the risk of being identified by current or previous employers. Because participants were employed in low-pay, precarious work, many did not have good things or experiences to share about their workplace. I was careful to explain to participants the measures taken to protect their identity. I kept confidential all information that could readily expose the identity of participants: people’s names, addresses, place of employment, etc.

25 It was not uncommon for me to take 6 to 8 hours to transcribe an hour and a half of interview material.
community networks. In looking at these sub-topics, I further organized the interview data around two key themes: challenges and barriers. In speaking of their experience of life in Surrey I paid close attention to how people described their experiences in these sectors (housing, employment, transportation, etc.) I approached the analysis with the ultimate goal of answering the question: ‘what can be gleaned from the lived experiences of residents that can tell us something about the type of prospects suburban life offers them?’ To test the soundness and reliability of my hands-on approach, I also relied on the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo. I used this software as a support tool to check for recurring themes and compare the organizational structure of my analysis.

I treated the expert interviews much in the same way as the interviews with local residents, looking for recurring themes and highlighting key passages and words. But important differences also existed between the two approaches. For example, rather than providing verbatim transcripts, I opted in favour of detailed notes complete with the occasional verbatim citation for key passages. What was of interest to me in the expert interviews was basic information that could help me contextualize the insights drawn from the interviews with local residents. Unlike, with local residents, I was not looking to tap into the feelings and perspectives of expert professionals – though that would certainly be worthy of a separate research project. Because of this, I was less interested in ‘how’ community experts felt about particular issues, and more interested in ‘what’ they knew about Surrey.26

1.6.8 Naturalistic observation

In addition to interviewing, I also spent considerable time in the community serving a variety of roles. Starting in 2012 I became a member of the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition (a consortium of 15 different public and non-profit agencies tasked with implementing the city’s poverty-reduction strategy). The group included two municipal elected officials, City of Surrey planning staff, and managers from various organizations including Vancity Community Foundation, SFU Surrey, and the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development. As part of

26 Given the large amount of textual information, I knew I needed a way to prioritize the two sets of data. The process of transcribing the 30 in-depth interviews with local residents was frankly overwhelming, and incredibly time-consuming. I was aware that I was not in a position to replicate the transcription effort for the expert interviews.
this group I attended workshops, conferences, and meetings which proved to be invaluable as sources of additional knowledge for this thesis. I also worked closely with the city’s social planning department, first as the lead coordinator of the city’s annual homeless count, and second as a policy analyst and researcher. Lastly, I was hired as a consultant for the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership. Altogether, this amounted to four years of combined, part-time experience, working in Surrey at the community level. I was able to use these roles to develop strong connections with community experts, and gain a deeper understanding of local community dynamics.

1.7 Considerations and stumbling blocks

1.7.1 Terminology

What follows is a discussion of key terms informing this research. I recognize that a thorough review of any of these concepts could extend this dissertation well beyond its intended scope. My intent here is not to provide an in-depth literature review of these concepts, but rather to provide a quick reference guide to assist readers navigate the thesis.

In this study, the term spatial inequality relates to the notion that unequal social relations take on a distinct spatial dimension. Said another way, inequality manifests itself not only relationally between people, but also across space. In this context, inequality broadly concerns unjust or uneven social relations reflected in differences in power, wealth, representation, mobility and/or access to resources (Mains, 2006). I alternatively refer to this concept at various points in this thesis by the phrases: ‘unequal spatial arrangements’, ‘urban divides’ or ‘urban spatial divides’, ‘socio-spatial inequality’, or simply ‘urban inequality.’

Closely related to the concept of inequality is the term polarization. As Walks (2013) and others point out, inequality and polarization, though related, are technically two distinct concepts. Inequality is most often understood as the (income) gap between rich and poor, while polarization reflects the number of middle-income households, individuals, etc. One way to visualize this difference is to think of a society stratified in the shape of a pyramid (inequality), and one stratified in the shape of an hour-glass (polarization) (Marcuse 1989). The distinction
between inequality and polarization is one that is made most prominently in quantitatively-oriented studies. But in a lot of the literature on urban inequality these terms tend to be treated interchangeably (Walks 2013). Since I do not set out to measure in hard, statistical terms the distributional structure of income, I treat inequality and polarization – unless specified otherwise – as equal terms for speaking more generally about socio-economic disparities.

My take on the word *suburb* draws heavily from public policy research. At its most basic level I define a suburb as a municipality that is contained within a given metropolitan region, but is not itself the central city. There are two critical reasons for defining suburbs in this way. First, studies that examine changing patterns of spatial inequality in Canada (and the United States), do so through the use of census statistics that are organized along administrative/political boundaries (Hulchanski 2010; Kneebone and Berube 2013; Ley and Lynch 2012). Second, the analysis of socio-economic trends requires reliable data that can be effectively compared across space and time. This is the preferred approach by scholars interested in the study of social disparity and change in urban Canada. With this in mind, I recognize the inherent limitations of this definition. A number of important features are often associated with what constitutes a suburb and should not be overlooked. These are: land use, built form, and culture (Jackson 1985). Related to this definition of suburb is the concept of central city. The central city is considered the main population centre and economic hub of a given metropolitan area. In this thesis, I use the name Vancouver or city of Vancouver interchangeably. I refer to ‘Metro Vancouver’ when discussing the wider metropolitan area or what is also commonly called greater Vancouver.

Lastly, I use the term *newcomer*, recent/new immigrant or new Canadian loosely. Statistics Canada narrowly defines ‘recent immigrants’ as foreign-born individuals who have been in Canada for five years or less. I find this definition to be too restrictive. Others in the literature

27 If we apply this definition to Vancouver the following municipalities are considered suburbs: Anmore, Belcarra, Burnaby, Coquitlam, Delta, Langley, Maple Ridge, New Westminster, North Vancouver, Pitt Meadows, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Richmond, Surrey, West Vancouver, and White Rock. The City of Vancouver is the ‘central city’ around which these suburbs are located.

28 Cooke and Marchant (2006) discuss one notable limitation of using political boundaries and census statistics to define and compare suburban areas. They point out that “some census-defined central cities may contain elements that are suburban in character and some census-defined suburban areas contain elements that are more urban in character. This is because the functional characteristics of a place are not necessarily directly related to their political jurisdiction.” But alternative methods are just as, if not more, faulty.
broaden the scope significantly and define ‘recent immigrants’ as all those who entered Canada in the past 20 to 25 years (Walks 2001). Seeking to strike a balance between these two definitions, I refer to a newcomer as an immigrant who has lived in the country for ten years or less.

1.7.2 Stumbling blocks

Like all research, this dissertation is subject to various limitations, some empirical, some conceptual. While I discuss the shortcomings of this study in more depth in Chapter 7, there is one issue in particular that is best addressed here, at the beginning of the thesis: How to think or talk about class and socio-economic status? While seemingly simple, this question proved to be especially thorny to handle.

A lot of the emerging literature on growing urban divides uses the words ‘poverty’ or ‘poor’ to describe the socio-spatial changes occurring in metropolitan areas today. This is especially true of research in the United States, where phrases like ‘suburban poverty’, ‘geography of poverty’, or ‘suburbanization of poverty’ have taken a firm hold (Allard 2016; Kneebone and Berube 2013). While such phrases are nowhere near as prominent in the Canadian scholarship, they are still used to frame discussions about neighbourhood change in the suburbs. For instance, scholars talk of ‘poor households being pushed outside the central core’, and of ‘suburban poverty districts.’ The more I delved into the research, the more it became clear that using ‘poverty’ as framing device was at best ineffective, and at worst inaccurate.

The term ‘poverty’ shares this unusual characteristic of being at once general and narrow, making discussions about poverty confusing. When used in broad terms, ‘poverty’ often evokes vastly different images to different persons. When I told people, in the early days of my PhD, that I was interested in the issue of suburban poverty, many would proceed to ask me questions about the homeless population in Surrey. Others yet, especially students or professors with an international development background, would raise questions about the use of the word ‘poverty’ in the context of a region like Vancouver. They equated ‘poverty’ with populations who lived below subsistence level. In contrast, when the term ‘poverty’ is defined in precise terms – usually via an income measure – it loses much of its analytical force. Many scholars have
argued, rightly so, that being ‘poor’ should not be simply reduced to a condition of lack of income (Grusky and Kanbur 2006). Others point out, that standard statistical measures of poverty are inadequate in that they leave too many people outside those measures (Fremstad 2016). A quick look at Canada’s Low-Income Cut-off (LICO) or its US equivalent, the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) reveals a remarkably low bar. According to official government statistics, there are roughly 400,000 low-income people in Metro Vancouver, a staggering statistic (Statistics Canada 2016a). Yet the number of people living in precarious conditions is likely much higher.

Over the course of my field work I talked to countless individuals who did not fit the narrow definition of ‘low-income.’ Almost everyone I talked to had a job, sometimes two, some households even had savings. The vast majority were renters, but a few – those who had been in Canada the longest – were homeowners. Many owned and drove cars. Yet their experience of life in Canada, and Surrey specifically, hardly qualified as middle-class. People worked long hours in low-pay occupations – janitors, security guards, cashiers, gas station attendants, labourers, etc. Things typically associated with middle-class lifestyles – job security, benefits, paid vacation, sick leave – were mostly out of their reach. Everyone I talked to had a shelter, and most participants were satisfied with the housing they had secured. But again, people’s housing situation did not conform to what is typically associated with middle-class status. Participants lived mainly in basement-suites, or older three-storey apartment buildings. It was not uncommon for families of four or five to live in two-bedroom apartments and suites. This was also true of households with adult working children. By choosing small dwellings and multigenerational living arrangements, families were able to boost their household incomes. Such strategies allowed households to rise above low-income levels, but not much beyond it.

The profile of the people I interviewed forced me to confront the question of how best to describe their socio-economic status. ‘Low-income’ seemed too narrow a category. ‘Working-class’ too dated. ‘Lower-middle class’ too generous. The most accurate category available seemed to be ‘working poor’ – people who work but whose wages are so low that they remain in poverty (Shipler 2005). But choosing ‘working poor’ would not get rid of the problematic words ‘poor’ and ‘poverty.’ Complicating matters further was the fact that study participants did not seem to identify or view themselves as ‘poor.’ When people talked about ‘poverty’ or ‘poor
people’ they did so in reference to dynamics impacting their home countries or in reference to Surrey’s homeless population. In hindsight, these responses make sense. I was interviewing people who had entered Canada as skilled economic workers, which likely meant they had previously belonged to their countries’ middle class. Another sticking point that only became clear once I had started the field work, is that participants presented themselves well. There was little – if anything – about their appearance that could be read as a marker of low economic status. Certainly nothing that would draw the label ‘poor’.

To get around the prickly issue of having to classify study participants into a neat socio-economic category, I decided to settle on the phrases ‘lower income’, ‘low- to modest-income’, or simply ‘modest income’ people. The benefit of using such language is that it evokes the idea of low socio-economic status, without the analytical straight-jacket that comes with using such labels as ‘poor’ or ‘low-income.’

1.8 Thesis structure

The remainder of the thesis is presented in five parts. Chapter 2 offers a critical review of the literature that informs this research, focusing on three scholarly fields: literature on socio-spatial inequality in Canada, literature on the heterogenous nature of Canadian suburbs, and a more theoretically oriented literature on distributive justice and the politics of difference. I engage with these fields to make three main arguments. First, I argue that current research on socio-spatial inequality contains important empirical limitations. Second, I make the point that some of the key findings highlighted in this literature are not as new and fresh as purported to be. Third, I argue that the tendency to frame the suburbs as new sites of exclusion and social disadvantage rest on dated understandings of suburbia. Chapter 2 is effectively a deeper examination of the topics introduced at the beginning of this chapter (section 1.2).

In Chapter 3, I consider some of the overlooked opportunities and benefits that come with suburban residence. By drawing directly from the experiences of local residents, I show how many stressed the benefits of living in Surrey and framed the decision to settle there as a strategic choice. I argue that the perspectives of lower-income newcomers reveal a more complex and nuanced dynamic than the one presented in the existing literature. Unlike current
studies that stress a narrative of displacement and suburban disadvantage, local newcomers described the value of tapping into established ethnic communities and securing more affordable housing, while also accessing local employment opportunities.

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I consider some of the challenges that living in a suburb like Surrey presents for historically marginalized populations. My intent here is to paint a detailed picture of the unique barriers that people face as they settle in a suburban municipality. Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the challenges of getting around (i.e. transportation and mobility) in Surrey. Transportation was by far the foremost concern local residents had about the city. Unlike more quantitative analyses that generate accessibility coefficients to measure people’s ability to move in space, I focus on the interview responses to examine the nitty-gritty, on-the-ground experience of navigating suburban environments. I consider local dynamics related to public transit use, walking, neighbourhood form and the pressures of owning a car. Chapter 5 examines matters related to social isolation and safety. I consider how suburban form and transportation dynamics impact people’s sense of belonging and public safety. While Surrey has a negative reputation as a high crime area, I was surprised to learn the extent to which the experience of crime was a recurring theme in my interviews with local residents. The decision to devote two chapters to the challenges of suburban residence was made with a willingness to do justice to the complex ways residents made sense of life in Surrey.

Chapter 6 offers a theoretical discussion of some of the key underlying assumptions made in the current literature on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. I argue that concerns about the fate of lower-income populations in the suburbs are ultimately grounded in a belief of what constitutes good planning. I examine how current narratives about suburban disadvantage are informed by the idea of the central city as inherently superior to the suburbs. I argue that when holding this line of thought, urban commentators are in fact projecting their own ideas about what constitutes good planning onto a culturally diverse group of people whose varied wants and needs may not always align with those of today’s leading urbanists. I link this argument to a broader discussion about what counts as legitimate knowledge, and the need for urban scholars to recognize cultural difference.
Finally, \textit{Chapter 7} offers a summary of the thesis and brings together the arguments laid out in chapters 2 to 6 to address the main research questions. I also discuss some of the key limitations of the thesis and provide suggestions on how it could be improved. I present potential future research directions, focusing on the implications for public and planning policy.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Inequality has been a feature of urban society for a very long time. Socio-spatial divides in cities have been subject of interest and study extending as far back as Plato’s Republic, if not further. Even Plato, a thinker known for his elitist and antidemocratic philosophy, recognized the dangers associated with stark inequality, arguing that extreme disparities in wealth within a city-state would give rise to two cities – one rich, one poor – existing side by side and at war with one another (Lotter 2005; Santas 2007). But it wasn’t until the rise of nineteenth-century industrial society that modern articulations of urban inequality started to take shape, nowhere more so than in the popular literature of the time: Dicken’s polemic on social class inequality in London, Upton Sinclair’s exposé of industrial labour in Chicago, Zola’s account of Parisian working-class poverty, and others like them.

Today, the study of wealth and inequality in cities has been formalised into a field of academic research, largely understood through the peculiar language and metaphors of social science:

29 Plato uses the metaphor of the ‘fevered’ or ‘feverish’ city to describe a city where the accumulation of wealth and luxury has gone unchecked. In the Republic, excessive wealth is not only a barrier to the harmonious functioning of the city state, but also a morally corrupting force. To prevent the concentration of wealth at the top, Plato suggests capping the wealth of the rich at four times that of the poorest citizen, excluding slaves, foreigners, and women who had limited to no rights in Plato’s utopian vision (DeWeese-Boyd and DeWeese-Boyd 2007; Santas 2007). Even Adam Smith, considered the father of classical liberal economics, acknowledges in The Wealth of Nations that “no society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable” (Chapter VIII). Much like Plato, Smith also believed that great wealth had a morally corrupting power on society and the individual, a point he made clear in his other classic text – and at the time of his life more popular – The Theory of Moral Sentiments. The Enlightenment saw a real outburst of intellectual interest, however flawed, for the study of social and material inequality, driven in part by new ways of thinking about the past – away from an historiography based on hagiography and divine revelations toward one based on ‘natural history’ – a framework that understood human history as a series of ‘natural’ stages of development/progress (e.g. hunting, shepherding, agricultural and commercial). A case in point is Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality. For more on Enlightenment theories of societal development see Wolloch (2011). Much of this literature was spurred by sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travellers’ accounts written during a time of intense colonial conquest (see for example Montaigne’s essay On the Cannibals, Diderot’s Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville, and Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels). For more on the influence of travel literature on Enlightenment-era theories of economic development see Nohara (2018). The place and role of luxury and wealth in society were hotly debated topics in 18th-century Europe as seen in Bernard Mandeville’s The Fable of the Bees, Hume’s essay “Of Refinement in the Arts” and of course Smith’s The Wealth of Nations.

30 Not to mention the contribution from political theorists and social reformers of the time, including Engels’ The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845), Charles Booth’s Life and Labour of the People of London (1889), Henry Mayhew’s London Labour and the London Poor (1851), and, in Canada, JS Woodsworth’s My Neighbour, or HB Ames’ The City Below the Hill.
“economic restructuring,” “social polarisation,” “gentrification,” “spatial mismatch theory,”
“concentric zone model,” “index of dissimilarity,” “neighbourhood effects,” “socio-spatial
segregation” and so on. But despite the academic jargon, many of the core issues being discussed
remain the same.31 How does social and economic inequality arise? Why do some places pull
ahead while others are left behind? What are the effects of inequality on society? Is the gap
between rich and poor inevitable? Undesirable? Why are some people affluent while others
impoverished? Over time, the questions have become more specialized, with today’s urban
scholars drawing particular attention to the relationship between race, place and wealth, or the
role of neighbourhood in consolidating social and economic disadvantage.

In Canada, the study of inequality has garnered the attention of a growing number of scholars,
prompted in part by research highlighting a deepening of societal fissures. For instance, studies
have found that since the 1980s, top-income earners have been able to grow their income
significantly faster than lower-income Canadians (Heisz 2007; Picot and Myles 2005). By the
early 2000s, the share of market income earned by the top 1 percent was larger than in any
decades since the 1930s (Heisz 2016). There is also evidence suggesting declining economic
outcomes for newcomers and immigrants, a dynamic that challenges traditional narratives about
immigrant integration in Canada. Scholars have shown that new Canadians today have
significantly lower wages compared to previous immigrant cohorts, and that the earning gap
between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts has been increasing, despite rising
educational credentials among successive waves of new immigrants (Picot 2004, 2008; Picot and
Hou 2003).32 Alongside these narratives, are growing discussions about the past, and ongoing,

31 The continued relevance of these debates is also seen in colloquial speech through such phrases as “the haves and
have nots,” “we are the 99%,” “trust-fund babies,” “white-picket-fence families,” “the ‘hood,” etc. The idea that
many of the issues we’re grappling with today aren’t new in any fundamental sense is made eloquently by Marcuse
(1993) who writes: “The divisions of society, whether one chooses to speak of classes or socio-economic status or
consumption or racial/ethnic groupings, are age-old: those derived from capitalism are hardly products of the
postwar era (357)” He adds: “A divided city is certainly nothing new. Never mind the slave quarters of ancient
Athens and Rome, the ghettos of the middle ages, the imperial quarters of colonial cities, or the merchant sections of
the medieval trading cities. At least from the outset of the industrial revolution, cities have been divided in ways that
are quite familiar to us (354).”

32 Given the media’s attention to multi-millionaire foreign investors this might come as a surprise to many. But
while the number of so-called ‘business’ migrants has increased in the past few decades, they still make up a small
minority of the total number of immigrants entering Canada each year (Ley 2010). Studies also show that the rate of
growth in earnings is actually greater for more recent immigrant cohorts, but because the earning gap has been so
much larger in recent years, it isn’t clear whether today’s newcomers will be able to catch up to their Canadian-born
among immigrants, where they earn less at entry but catch up after a number of years in Canada, was last observed
role of settler colonialism and white supremacy in creating deep socio-economic inequities for Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). While some Indigenous communities and individuals are thriving, as a population group, Indigenous Peoples arguably face far greater social and economic disparities than any other group in Canada (Canadian Human Rights Commission 2013).

Within these broader discussions is a smaller body of research exploring the geography of disadvantage in urban areas, or the way inequalities are imprinted in urban space. In Canada, recent studies hint at a significant redrawing of the map of income inequality, with high-income households concentrating in the urban core, lower-income households dispersing in the suburbs, and an overall erosion in the number of mixed-income neighbourhoods found in metropolitan regions (Edelson et al. 2019; Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Walks 2010a). These trends signal a major shift in the way scholars understand urban, spatial inequality not only in Canada, but also in the United States. For a long time, the geography of class divides of urban areas was thought to coincide, however roughly, with the division between city and suburbs, with minorities and working-class people residing in the urban core alongside commerce and industry, and middle- and upper-class people living in the surrounding suburbs, away from the sights, sounds and smells of crowded city streets (Beauregard 2012). But today’s spatial divides among cohorts entering in the late 1970s (my emphasis).” Just as troubling, scholars have found that the low-income rate (which is effectively a measure of poverty) has been increasing – albeit slowly – for successive waves of newcomers, both in absolute terms and when compared to the Canadian-born population. Further studies suggest that virtually all the increase in low-income rates seen in Canada’s largest cities has been concentrated in the immigrant population (Picot 2004, 2008; Picot and Hou 2003).

33 For obvious reasons there is often a focus on the struggles facing Indigenous communities in Canada. But putting a focus solely on the challenges and struggles impacting Indigenous people one runs the risk of perpetuating racists stereotypes about Aboriginal persons as poor, lazy and uneducated. There is great diversity within the Indigenous population in Canada, including many examples of success stories and individuals leading perfectly ordinary, middle-class lifestyles. For instance, in Surrey, almost half (47%) of all Aboriginal households in the city are home owners, an ownership rate on par with the general population of the city of Vancouver (46%) (Statistics Canada 2016). The Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business (CCAB) reports that Indigenous people contributed $32 billion to the country’s economy in 2016, of which $12 billion was generated by Indigenous-owned businesses (APTN 2019). In similar fashion, a recent study from the Indigenomics Institute reports that the number of Indigenous business owners and entrepreneurs in Canada is growing at five times the rate of non-Indigenous businesses (Balfour 2019). In light of their social and economic successes, the Cree communities of northern Quebec are often presented as stark examples to their struggling cousins living on the Ontario shores of James Bay (Ha 2007; Hamilton 2016; Milewski 2013). In BC, the Osoyoos Indian Band has long received attention as a strong model of business and socio-economic development (Watkins 2017). More recently, the Tsawwassen First Nation (TFN) – the first aboriginal group in BC to implement a modern-day treaty – has generated over $1 billion of private sector investment on its lands resulting in almost full employment for TFN members (Bennett 2016; Pearson 2017).
follow a different pattern. The geography of disadvantage in Canada is taking an increasingly fractured form, cutting across city and suburb alike in unprecedented ways. Accompanying these changes are equally important changes in the ethnic and racial composition of urban and suburban populations. New immigrants, a group who long relied on the inner city as a primary port of entry, are increasingly settling straight into outlying areas, bypassing the urban core altogether (Hiebert, 1999, 2000, 2000b; Hiebert et al., 2008; Murdie and Teixeira, 2003; Ray et al., 1997). This is especially true of lower- and modest-income newcomers. In fact, those suburban areas where income levels have dropped the most are also predominantly visible minority and new immigrant in character, a dynamic that signals a simultaneously familiar and novel link between place, wealth, ethnicity. It is in this context, that a growing number of social scientists are framing the suburbs as new sites of social disparity and exclusion, raising fundamental questions about the ability of suburban communities to assist the needs of historically marginalized populations. The idea being that suburban neighbourhoods have attributes that exacerbate the challenges of poverty and immigrant integration, making suburban residence a new kind of social and economic trap. Access to social services, public transit, community amenities, employment opportunities, and other support systems are deemed to be significantly more limited in the suburbs relative to the urban core, making life more difficult for those groups in need of social and economic uplift.

What follows is a critical review of the academic literature in which this inquiry is situated. I focus specifically on literature on socio-spatial inequality in Canada, a relatively recent and compact field, with writings dating back to the mid-1980s. I also give attention to a much broader and older body of literature on North-American suburbs, focusing on the extent to which suburbs across Canada and the United States have become sites of immense change (culturally, socially, economically, and physically).

This literature review is structured around a three-pronged argument. First, I argue that while useful, recent studies on neighbourhood inequality in Canada suffer from significant analytical and empirical limitations. For one thing, much of the existing scholarship is preliminary in nature, a fact seldom acknowledged by scholars within this field. Also, most studies on the changing geography of income in Canadian urban areas have a narrow methodological orientation, one which centres almost exclusively on quantitative census tract analysis. Details
about how lower-income people experience and negotiate life in the suburbs, and how that experience might be unique relative those living in denser, urban environments go largely unexamined. Second, I make the case that the general findings coming out of current studies on socio-spatial inequality are not as new and fresh as purported to be. Scholars have been documenting trajectories of change in the inner-city and broader processes of polarization and inequality since the 1980s, if not earlier. Third, I argue that the tendency to frame the suburbs as new sites of socio-economic disadvantage rest, at least in part, on a dated understanding of suburbia. Today’s suburbs must not only be viewed as potential sites of exclusion and isolation, but also opportunity. I suggest that dominant narratives fail to adequately consider the extent to which many suburbs have diversified (socially, culturally, economically) in the past few decades.

2.2 A new geography of income

As Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson (2013) recently wrote: “We don’t talk much about ‘the wrong side of the tracks’ in public anymore.” While distinctions between impoverished and affluent areas of cities or towns continue to be implicitly understood, the boundaries demarcating poor and wealthy neighbourhoods are increasingly blurred, at least in large urban centres where gentrification is turning once-gritty, blue-collar districts into upper-middle-class enclaves. Take Vancouver, for instance. In the not-too-distant past “being a kid from East Vancouver” was a clear marker of working-class background. It was the kind of appellation worn by many as a badge of honour. To live east of Main Street was to live on the other side of the tracks, away from the privileged, well-to-do, west side of town. But social and economic change has been so extensive in East Vancouver, that the neighbourhood’s identity as a rough, hardscrabble community is increasingly a thing of the past. Today, growing up in Vancouver’s East Side doesn’t so much confer street credibility as it conveys privilege: family-size dwellings sell for upwards of a million-dollar, and (not-so-young) urban professionals are spotted pushing $1,000 strollers while sipping $5 lattes. While varying in degree, the same patterns can be found in countless other cities.

Given what’s known about the growing gap between rich and poor, and the persistence of poverty in Canadian metropolitan regions, these trends beg the question of how best to describe
today’s urban socio-spatial divides. Where, if anywhere, are the geographic lines demarcating affluent from poorer neighbourhoods? Are the colloquial ‘tracks’ vanishing or simply moving? What do we make of the populations of low-income minorities, service sector workers, blue-collar types who have long inhabited the urban core? Are they being integrated into the social and economic fabric of today’s cities? Are they being pushed out – as many argue – of the central city and into less fashionable suburban areas?

These questions have received increased attention in Canada, largely thanks to Hulchanski’s research on Toronto (2007, 2010). While scholars have recognized spatial divisions in Canadian cities for some time, Hulchanski signaled a level of polarization previously unimagined. His study found that 66% of Toronto’s neighbourhoods were firmly middle income in 1970, compared to only 29% in 2005. The proportion of low-income neighbourhoods surged from 19% to 53% between 1970 and 2005. Just as important, Hulchanski found that income polarization had distinct spatial dimensions. Between 1970 and 2005, the inner city (south of Bloor Street) transformed from a predominantly low-income area into a middle- and high-income district. In the same period, Toronto’s inner suburbs – once the heart of the city’s middle-class – experienced a steep decline. By 2005, much of the suburban land surrounding the immediate boundaries of Old Toronto was low-income, especially central Scarborough, northern Etobicoke, York and the Jane/Finch corridor.

Though not to the same extent, growing socio-spatial polarization has also been observed in Vancouver. Replicating Hulchanski’s methodology, Ley and Lynch (2012) found a dispersal of low-income tracts away from the urban core and into the surrounding suburbs, especially along the rapid transit corridor stretching into Burnaby and Surrey (Figure 2.1) Likewise, the authors found strong evidence of a gentrifying urban core, although affluent neighbourhoods also expanded into outer suburban areas (North Vancouver, Coquitlam, Port Moody, Delta, White Rock and Langley) – a pattern markedly different than the one observed in Toronto where virtually no high-income tracts were added to the suburban periphery between 1970 and 2005.
Similar trends to those observed in Toronto and Vancouver were also found in Calgary (Townshend et al. 2018), and to a lesser extent in Montreal (Rose and Twigge-Molecey 2013). Despite local variations, three main trajectories of change can be identified in the literature: (1) concentrated neighbourhood poverty is expanding beyond the traditional borders of the urban core, (2) middle income neighbourhoods are steadily disappearing, and (3) low-income areas in the urban core are increasingly being populated by middle- and high-income earners.

Alongside these changes, scholars have found equally significant shifts in the residential distribution of new immigrants and visible minorities (Figure 2.2). For much of the twentieth century the inner city functioned as the main reception sites for newcomers, but increasingly new immigrants have been shown to settle directly in the suburbs. Migration scholars have been aware of this dynamic for some time, going as far back as the mid- to late-1990s (Murdie 1994; Lo and Wang 1997; Ray 1994; Ray et al. 1997; Teixeira and Murdie 1997; Hiebert 1998a). But the trend has also been recognized, to a lesser extent, in the latest scholarship on urban income inequality. For instance, Hulchanski (2010), as well as Ley and Lynch (2012) and Walks (2010a), found low-income, suburban neighbourhoods to be predominantly visible minority and
new immigrant in character. In contrast, gentrified neighbourhoods in the urban core were found to be predominantly white and native born in profile. As the above authors suggest, neighbourhood decline becomes particularly troubling when it takes on ethnic and racial dimensions. Despite evidence suggesting a lack of socio-economic segregation of the type observed in American cities, there is increasing worry that the correlation between concentrated neighbourhood poverty and ethnic clustering is indicative of a trend toward more exclusionary neighbourhood structures (Ley and Lynch 2012; Walks 2010a).

Figure 2.2: Change in immigrant status
Change in recent immigrant status as a percentage of the total population, 1971 to 2006*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20% and more</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% to 19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5% to 9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 5%</td>
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</tbody>
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*Immigrants who arrived in Canada from 1965-1971 as a Percentage of the Total Population

2.3 Upending traditional narratives

What this recent literature points to is a reappraisal of traditional understandings of the spatial patterning of urban disadvantage. In past decades, class divisions among urban dwellers tended to correspond with the geographic split between city and suburb, especially in the United States, and to a lesser degree in Canada (Harris 2004; Lewis 2006; Nicolaides and Wiese 2006).

Knowledge about the spatial arrangements of social groups in urban areas rests on ideas first developed at the University of Chicago in the 1920s. Burgess (1925) and colleagues developed a
model of ‘concentric zones’ to describe the social and land-use distributions within cities and how these changed over time. It was later revised by Hoyt (1939), who argued in favour of a ‘sector model’ of urban development, and then again by Harris and Ullman (1945) who proposed a ‘multiple-nuclei’ configuration.\(^{34}\) Despite their differences, all of these models centred on the idea that growth extended largely outward from one or more cores of economic activity as did the social and class composition of the local population. Ethnic minorities, the poor, and working-class people lived adjacent to factories and industries, while the wealthy and the upper-middle class resided further away in suburban areas where both the houses and the lots were bigger and the streets less crowded. According to these models, as households moved up the socio-economic ladder, they also physically moved out from rundown working-class districts and into more spacious suburban residences. The enduring appeal of such models has been such that they’ve influenced much of the thinking around how cities grow and change for the greater part of the last century.

Immigrant integration is a case in point. The idea that geographic location is a predictor of socio-economic integration, a thesis known as ‘spatial assimilation’, found wide support within the social sciences. Spatial assimilation perspectives suggest that immigrants initially settle in inner-city enclaves only to move out into surrounding suburban areas as they translate socio-economic gains into bigger and better housing, and more desirable neighbourhoods (Wen 2019). This framework, which can be traced back to the work of Burgess (1925), captured the basic pattern of immigrant settlement in North-America for much of the twentieth century. Vancouver is no exception (Hiebert and Ley 2003; Mendez 2009). Chinese immigrants, for example, initially concentrated in the inner-city neighbourhoods of Chinatown and Strathcona. As successive generations of Chinese immigrants climbed the socio-economic ladder, they gradually relocated outward, into South Vancouver – especially the neighbourhood of Marpole – and into the suburb of Richmond (Burnley and Hiebert 2001; Ray et al. 1997). A similar pattern describes Vancouver’s Italian population, which also clustered in Strathcona in the early twentieth-century, and later migrated eastward into Grandview-Woodlands, and then further out into the suburb of Burnaby following WWII (Ley et al. 1992; Marlatt and Itter 2011). Both these population groups

\(^{34}\) For more on models associated with the Chicago School of Urban Sociology see, Caves (2005), Champion (2001), Harris (2006).
follow the basic ‘up and out’ pattern proposed by urban sociologists of the Chicago School: as groups climb up the socio-economic ladder they move out into the suburban periphery.

2.4 The power of place

What makes the work of Hulchanski (2010) and others so noteworthy is that it calls into questions longstanding notions about the trajectory of urban divides and how these are imprinted in space. Recent literature on socio-spatial inequality upends widely-held assumptions about cities and suburbs, such as the idea of the inner city as the enclave of the poor, or the notion of suburbia as the bastion of middle-class lifestyle. New research holds relevance, not only because it revises models of urban form and spatial organization – something certainly of interest to social scientists – but also because, as Kneebone and Berube (2013) point out, “place matters.” Neighbourhoods are more than simple geographic locations. Countless studies have shown that where one lives influences a myriad of individual, socio-economic outcomes: educational attainment, job opportunities, mental and physical health, criminality, and so on (Sampson et al. 2002). Social scientists have even coined a phrase ‘neighbourhood effects’ to describe the way ‘place’ – as a sociological construct – shapes social relations and human behaviour (Faber and Sharkey 2015). Said in more intuitive terms: the neighbourhood where you live or grow up in, shapes your prospects in life.

In Canada, the ‘neighbourhood effects’ thesis never gained as much traction as in the United States, in large part because of the diverse socio-economic fabric of Canadian cities. Unlike in the United States, the narrative of urban life in Canada has been one of upward social mobility, immigrant integration, and mixed-income neighbourhoods (Walks and Bourne 2006). The realignment of class and ethnic lines proposed by Hulchanski and others raises alarms precisely because it signals deep changes in the relationship between ethnicity, place and wealth. It does so in at least two ways.

First, new research suggests that urban Canada is becoming more spatially stratified by income and ethnicity, mimicking more traditional patterns seen in American cities. Scholars for the most part agree that concentrated neighbourhood poverty is indisputably damaging to urban life (Fong
This is because ‘concentration’ in and of itself is thought to amplify the negative effects of being poor: neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty breed more poverty. Today’s divisions in Canadian cities are not on the same level as those observed in the United States, but – if Hulchanski and others are right about the trajectory of recent trends – there are serious grounds for concerns. Second, current research on socio-spatial inequality brings attention to the actual location where low-income populations are increasingly situated. Of interest is not only the fact people are concentrating in low-income neighbourhoods, but that these neighbourhoods are located in suburban areas, rather than the traditional inner city. Suburban residence itself is assumed to be detrimental to upward mobility. This assumption is ultimately borne out of the idea that as low-income households end up in the suburbs, they become cut off from employment opportunities, public transit, social services and other crucial community supports. Because features specific to suburban neighbourhoods are deemed to exacerbate the challenges of being poor (or a newcomer), suburban residence is increasingly being framed as a new site of socio-economic disadvantage.

### 2.5 Suburban disadvantage

Claims about suburban disadvantage – the notion that suburban residence poses added barriers to historically marginalized populations – have found wide appeal in the current literature on socio-spatial inequality. Writing about Toronto, Ley and Smith (2000, 47) note that “suburban nodes [of neighbourhood poverty] can lead to significant problems of access to employment, education, and social services even within the region’s well-developed system of public transport (my emphasis).” The authors reiterate this sentiment in a later study, saying: “at the urban scale, the availability and access to services, jobs, education, and other support structures can be profoundly affected by suburban versus center city residence (Smith and Ley 2008, 687).” They go on to say that, “a spatial mismatch of people and opportunities introduces an additional

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35 For a critique of the ‘concentrated poverty’ thesis see Gans (2010).
36 The idea that neighbourhoods have characteristics that affect the outcomes or prospects of individuals within them is explicitly made in the literature. For instance, Walks (2010a, 181) writes, “The spatial polarization of the city raises the possibility that where one lives may be increasingly important for determining the life chances of urban residents.” Similarly, Ades et al. (2012, 343) note, “In a context of growing segregation in some areas, residential surroundings may increasingly affect the residents’ life chances and opportunities.”
dimension to geographies of poverty, contrasting central city accessibility with suburban isolation (2008, 700).” Bourne (1996, 173) echoes a similar view, “[in the suburbs] the socially disadvantaged, low-income minorities and elderly, single parents and some married women with young children, find themselves geographically isolated from both jobs and services (my emphasis).” There is also Hulchanski (2010) who writes:

Poverty has moved from the centre to the edges of the city. In the 1970s, most of the city’s low-income neighbourhoods were in the inner city. This meant that low-income households had good access to transit and services. Some of these neighbourhoods have gentrified and are now home to affluent households, while low-income households are concentrated in the northeastern and northwestern parts of the city (the inner suburbs), with relatively poor access to transit and services (my emphasis).

Young and Keil (2010, 92) recite a similar line of thought, “lack of connectivity in the suburbs has shown to create issues of heightened risk and vulnerability as non-car owning populations, for example, are stranded in neighbourhoods that were built despite their needs (my emphasis).” Just as relevant, Smith (2004) writes:

This trend [the suburbanization of poverty and immigrants] has fuelled concerns that the diffusion of immigrant settlement away from traditional, supportive, and well serviced reception sites, can stall accessibility to employment, educational, and socio-cultural opportunities that lead to upward and outward mobility over time. In other words, diffusion to distant sprawling suburbs may lead to the kind of socio-spatial isolation characteristic of a so-called ‘underclass’ (my emphasis).

Fielder et al. (2006, 214) build on the work of Smith to suggest that, “the presence of [suburban] areas where recent immigrants in housing need are concentrated in conjunction with high levels of poverty raises the possibility of social dislocation and exclusion, as described in American urban underclass studies (my emphasis).” In a more recent assessment of Hulchanski’s research, Ley and Lynch (2012) repeat a similar argument, saying that “Canada’s largest city is increasingly polarized between affluent neighbourhoods toward the centre and larger numbers of disadvantaged neighbourhoods on the edges enduring social exclusion in terms of employment opportunities, public services, and urban transit (my emphasis).”37 Countless other examples are

37 Speaking specifically about new immigrants, Ley and Lynch (2012, 11) also suggest that “while some recent arrivals have found suburban employment in high-technology industries and health and education professions, many others have been pushed to the suburban fringe with its cheaper housing but also its diminishing public services and precarious employment (my emphasis).”
found in the literature suggesting that low-income households in the suburbs are cut off from needed services, opportunities, and support systems.

Although often cited in the literature, these types of concerns are vastly under-examined. The idea that suburban residence poses added risks to marginalized populations is grounded in popular understandings of suburbia more than in rigorous empirical analysis. With a few exceptions, current studies largely focus on describing the geography of income in metropolitan areas, giving little to no attention to what these changes mean for residents on the ground. For instance, there is very little empirical documentation of the extent to which historically marginalized populations experience social dislocation or become disconnected from services and opportunity in the suburbs. This omission points not only to an important gap in the literature but also to the conjectural nature of many of the claims about suburban disadvantage.

2.6 ‘Pushing’ people out

Accompanying the idea of suburban disadvantage is a clear narrative of displacement. Time and again, scholars interpret the changes in the geography of income inequality as a story of people being ‘pushed out’ of the urban core. Writing about lower-income newcomers, Ley and Lynch (2012, 11) state that, “many have been pushed to the suburban fringe with its cheaper housing but also its diminishing public services and precarious employment (my emphasis).” They go on to say that, “currently, the poor and recent immigrants, two of the groups concentrated in the inner city, are being displaced and relocated because of neighbourhood gentrification and reinvestment in large downtown redevelopment projects (Ley and Lynch 2012, 34).” Most recently, Allen and Farber (2019, 216) write, “evidence has indicated that poverty distributions have become more suburbanized; increased costs of housing in city centres have pushed lower-income residents to more affordable, but less accessible areas (my emphasis).” In similar fashion, Bunting et al. (2004) write, “The revitalisation of inner-city neighbourhoods, whether in the guise of gentrification or removal of down-graded properties for redevelopment, tightens housing markets in higher-growth metropolitan areas, and serves to push lower income residents towards the inner suburbs (my emphasis).” The prevalence of narratives emphasising a story of displacement is a direct result of the link between current studies on neighbourhood inequality and gentrification research. Scholars point out that the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the
suburbs is accompanied by a concomitant upgrading of the inner city. Rising housing costs in the urban core are interpreted as the main driving force behind the relocation of low-income households from the inner city into the suburbs.

Altogether, recent scholarship on socio-spatial inequality points to a new geography of disadvantage, one marked by an increasingly affluent urban core surrounded by declining suburbs. The proposed findings upend deeply fixed notions about the location of historically marginalized populations in urban areas, and the nature of opportunity, disadvantage, and upward mobility in twenty-first century urban Canada. Implicit in much of the current literature is a concern that suburban residence presents added challenges to low-income and minority households, raising the spectre of new forms of social isolation and exclusion. Such concerns are rooted in understandings about the role of place and neighbourhood in shaping the life chances of local residents. Changes in the geography of income and ethnicity/immigration are predominantly interpreted in the context of the gentrification of the urban core, which is reflected in narratives that emphasise a story of people being pushed out of the inner city and into surrounding suburban areas.

But much like the idea of suburban disadvantage, claims about low-income households being driven out of the urban core and into the suburbs rest on weak empirical footings. Studies almost uniformly fail to assess with any real rigour what lies behind the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs, choosing instead to simply repeat the mantra that gentrification in the core is pushing people into declining suburban areas. However intuitive this idea may be, it quickly becomes clear that the current literature leaves a number of basic questions unanswered. Notably, whether the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs is a result

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38 Another example of the tendency to blindly repeat the idea that gentrification in the urban core is pushing low-income populations out into the suburbs is seen in Walks (2013, 8). In his article, Walks suggests that Ades et al.’s (2012) research links the “decentralization or suburbanization of poverty” to the idea that “gentrification is displacing many renters and other low-income households, as well as new immigrants, from the inner cities of Canada’s largest metropolitan areas.” But in fact, while Ades et al. (2012) raise the possibility of that being the case, they explicitly state that further research is needed to confirm the claim. In their concluding paragraphs Ades et al. (2012, 358) write: “Our results call for new research on the processes of impoverishment of Canadian suburbs. Is the phenomenon of the gentrification of inner cities pushing residents with fewer financial resources toward declining suburban areas? Or is it instead a case of a more diversified supply of housing in the suburbs, including rental housing?” The authors go on to add, “in other words, do these new areas of poverty concentration offer environments that are favourable to the improvement of living conditions? Or do they represent an additional handicap for populations that already have very difficult living conditions?”
of poor people moving out of the inner city, or of suburban households becoming poorer over time. And also the question of what ‘pull factors’, if any, might be at play here. In other words, whether this is simply a story of people being forced out of the urban core, or also a story of people being enticed by what the suburbs have to offer.

2.7 Gaps in the literature

In many ways, those very claims that give the current research much of its social and academic significance are also among its weakest. Time and again, recent studies raise the idea that suburban residence creates added barriers to low-income households in regard to access to services, employment opportunities, social networks and the like. Accompanying this claim is the common refrain that low-income households are being displaced from the urban core and pushed into the suburbs. Such concerns are the reason why there is a great deal of attention directed at the study of socio-spatial inequality in Canada. Academics and journalists alike express concerns over the ability of suburban communities to assist the needs of marginalized populations, and over the risks of community displacement created by processes of gentrification.

The alarms are well warranted. Scholars interested in the study of urban inequality have long understood the adverse effects that come with being stuck in neighbourhoods with poor access to employment opportunities, social services and broader community supports (Jargowsky 1997; Wilson 1987). Given the conventional image of the suburbs as places of physical and social homogeneity, the unease about the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the periphery is unsurprising. Public transit, social services, jobs, amenities, community gathering spaces are all thought to be lacking in suburbia, a dynamic that raises questions about the kind of prospects lower-income minorities face in the suburbs. A quick look at European cities, where immigrant poverty in suburban areas has been a long-standing issue, only serves to cement people’s anxieties about the growing number of suburban poor in Canada and the United States.

Concerns over the fate of low-income households in the suburbs go hand-in-hand with narratives about urban displacement. Linking inner-city gentrification to growing suburban poverty makes intuitive sense. The rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs has been accompanied by
skyrocketing housing prices in the urban core, largely as a result of gentrification forces. It is difficult to see how low-income households can continue to live in the urban core as upward pressures are put on rents and home values. Claims about the displacement of low-income people from the inner city are further reinforced by maps – such as the one produced by Hulchanski – which suggest an inversion in the location of poor and affluent populations. While some scholars question whether residential displacement is as prevalent as is often assumed, the idea that rising costs of housing in the urban core aren’t pricing people out of gentrifying neighbourhoods seems untenable.\footnote{Freeman and Braconi (2004) offer what is, perhaps, the most notable challenge to the ‘displacement paradigm’ – the idea that gentrification leads to heightened levels of out migration among low-income households. In their study on New York City, the authors found that poor households in gentrifying neighbourhoods were less likely to move than in non-gentrifying neighbourhoods. Others, however, have found flaws with Freeman and Braconi’s (2004) study, including its failure to capture more indirect forms of displacement (Newman and Wyly 2006). Furthermore, Ellen (2017), further points out that, what little research there is on displacement, has largely focused on the 1980s and 1990s, overlooking the accelerated pace of more recent redevelopment pressures. For a rebuttal of the criticisms aimed at the Freeman and Braconi’s study see Freeman et al. (2016).} At the very least, as Slater and Wyly (2006) suggest, rising housing costs make it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for new low-income households to move into gentrifying neighbourhoods. The loss of affordable housing in the urban core as a result of rising development pressures cannot be dismissed either. In Vancouver alone, ‘renovictions’ and aggressive buyouts have been well documented, not to mention the outright dismantling of social housing units, perhaps none more notable than the Little Mountain housing project.\footnote{The term ‘renoviction’ describes an eviction carried out to renovate or repair a rental unit.}

For anyone living in a globalized city, gentrification and displacement are processes that, however complex and hard to pin down, are not easily shrugged off. They may be hard to measure and define, but they appear real to most people. The current research on socio-spatial inequality, however, doesn’t simply suggest that low-income households are being displaced by forces of gentrification, but that people are actively being displaced from the urban core to the suburban periphery. In other words, recent studies establish a direct link between gentrification in the core and the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs.

But however intuitive these ideas may be, they remain largely unexamined. This is true of both the claim that people are being actively pushed out into the periphery, and the idea that people become cut off from employment opportunities, services and support networks. Very few scholars have looked into these issues with any real depth, opting instead to treat them as
unequivocally true. On the whole, concerns about the perils of suburban residence, and about people being displaced from the inner-city to the suburbs receive little scrutiny and tend to be made only in passing. To make matters worse, they are repeated time and again creating the false impression among scholars that the issue is settled and in no real need of further attention.

2.8 Further methodological issues

Without a doubt, there is a lot to value about current research on socio-spatial inequality. Studies have generated noteworthy and promising findings, spurring debate on an array of important issues. Using simple quantitative methods, scholars have been able to describe the overall trajectory of neighbourhood change in metropolitan regions, making it possible to broadly discern what areas of the city are trending upward (income wise) or downward. By incorporating a longitudinal perspective, studies have also helped to situate current dynamics within a broader historical context. Doing so has prompted an understanding of urban inequality capable of accounting for the wider structural forces shaping growing socio-spatial divides. Not to be overlooked is the way recent studies have been effective in reaching a mainstream audience largely thanks to a combination of appealing visuals – mainly maps – accessible language, and an ability to engage with pressing social matters.41 Alongside these contributions, recent studies have helped focus attention beyond the urban core, bringing renewed interest in the study of suburban areas, and neighbourhood change.

At the same time, much of the research published in recent years carries important limitations. Most critical is its preliminary nature, a point seldom acknowledged by scholars. Hulchanski’s very own breakthrough study, The Three Cities Within Toronto has yet to receive formal peer-reviewed status. It exists has a self-published policy report with an eye-friendly layout and easy-to-read content characteristic of reports geared toward a mass audience. Though not to the same extent, the same can also be said of Ley and Lynch’s (2012) study on Vancouver, Townshend et

al.’s (2018) report on spatial polarization in Calgary, Walks’ (2010b) analysis of inequality in Toronto, and Rose and Twigge-Molecey’s (2013) study on Montreal. All of these studies follow a methodology that, while elegant in its simplicity, lacks the level of sophistication commonly expected of peer-reviewed research.

At issue here is the way scholars analyse key census statistics, and the conclusions derived from such analysis. Much of the current research is centred around one key metric, ‘average individual income’. But as various commentators point out, ‘average individual income’ alone is not a particularly good measure for identifying the class composition of neighbourhoods, or for tracking its changes over time (Stanger-Ross and Ross 2012). Without turning this discussion into a technical review of statistical measures – which would go beyond the scope of this thesis – let’s briefly consider six pitfalls associated with this approach.

First, measures of central tendency (whether ‘average’ or ‘median’) are not, in and of themselves, particularly effective for studying inequality, which by definition is a concept meant to highlight ‘dispersion’ or ‘distribution.’ Research on spatial inequality commonly favours more sophisticated indexes of urban residential patterns such as the ‘index of dissimilarity’ (D), or the index of interaction/isolation (P^5) (Massey and Denton 1988, 1993). But recent studies on socio-spatial inequality in Canada have largely neglected to apply these indexes, an omission which – as Stanger-Ross and Ross (2012) point out – is surprising, if not a cause for concern.

Second, there is no way to distinguish how wealth is being distributed within a given population simply by looking at an ‘average income’ measure. In Hulchanski’s study, a neighbourhood where half the population is rich, and half the population is poor cannot be distinguished from a neighbourhood where all the population is middle-class. The current research risks treating very different neighbourhoods the same. It also risks running afoul of the ‘ecological fallacy’ – an error in interpretation whereby inferences about specific individuals are made solely on the

42 Conceptually, the index of dissimilarity measures the extent to which residents are evenly distributed across urban environments. While the index of interaction/isolation measures the likelihood of exposure between minority and majority group members within a given region. Massey and Denton (1988) classify over 20 different indexes of spatial segregation into 5 main categories: evenness, exposure, concentration, centralization and clustering. There is an extensive body of literature that examines the application of statistical instruments for the study of urban residential patterns. For a quick review of the field see Massey (2012).
43 Two key exceptions are Walks (2013) and Ades et al. (2012).
aggregate statistics for that group (Lavralcas 2001). In his study, Hulchanski uses the ‘individual average income’ of a neighbourhood to infer something about the class composition of the individuals in that neighbourhood. This opens the possibility for misinterpretation.\footnote{Consider a neighbourhood made up of mostly middle-income earners in 1970 that – for whatever reason – evolves into a neighbourhood made up of low- and high-income earners in 2005. The measurement procedure used by Hulchanski and others would not be able to capture, with any degree of accuracy, the internal transformation in the class composition of the neighbourhood in question. In fact, if those changes were to happen, Hulchanski would likely mis-identify the neighbourhood as ‘middle-class’ in 2005. The converse is also true. There are neighbourhoods that Hulchanski identifies as middle-class in 1970 that may not be as middle-income in the internal composition of its residents as his research purports to suggest.} Again, Stanger Ross and Ross (2012, 217) echo this concern when arguing that a key “liability” of Hulchanski’s approach is that it suppresses the “internal diversity” of neighbourhoods.

Third, ‘average income’ is affected by outliers at both ends of the income spectrum, which can give the false impression that households in a neighbourhood are richer or poorer than they actually are.\footnote{Hulchanski (2010, 24) and others explain that part of the reason ‘average income’ is favoured over ‘median income’ is precisely because they want to account for the presence of very low- or very high-income persons. This point is well taken. However, there are important empirical issues associated with the use of ‘average income’ which are largely ignored in the existing literature.} But more to the point, it makes historical comparisons problematic when used in conjunction with a relative income scale – as is the case in Hulchanski (2010) and Ley and Lynch (2012).\footnote{Hulchanski uses a relative income scale as a way to eliminate the need to adjust incomes for inflation – a common technique in income studies. Average income as a percentage of the CMA average is calculated for all census tracts.} This is because the average income for a metropolitan region is also sensitive to outliers at the bottom or top of the income distribution. Changes in the income structure of urban populations suggest that today’s metropolitan average is inflated – by very high-income persons – in ways not seen in 1970 Canada. Cities like Toronto and Vancouver have been especially affected by neoliberal economic restructuring – Toronto through the deregulation of investment banking, and Vancouver through the internationalisation of its real estate market.\footnote{Neoliberalism is understood as a process of government deregulation and withdrawal from service provision in favour of market-oriented delivery. The dominant economic policy from the 1980s to the present, it led to wealth accumulation among top income earners, and an overall bifurcation of traditional income structures in Western democracies. For an in-depth discussion about the role of neoliberalism on cities see Hackworth (2013).} Such dynamics, combined with the failure to report ‘median income’ measures, further detract from the existing research.\footnote{For a practical example of how neighbourhoods might be mis-classified using Hulchanski’s methodology see Cosh (2010). Hulchanski (2010, 24) explains that ‘median income’ measures were not used in his study, in part, because they are not available for the entire 35-year period: 1970 to 2005.}
Fourth, ‘individual’ income lumps together very different classes of people. Students, teenagers, pensioners on fixed-income are counted alongside full-time adult income earners. This makes any attempts at measuring the low-income population particularly difficult.49

Fifth, ‘household’ or ‘family’ income is arguably better at capturing the true spending power of people than ‘individual income’. This is because low individual income levels are often mitigated by higher household income (Fiedler et al. 2006; Ley 1999). Large expenditures (housing, food, car payments, etc.) tend to happen at the household and/or family level (Bourne 1993; Walks 2001). Families tend to pull together their income earnings to share the costs of such things as rent, mortgage payments, groceries, or car insurance. This is especially true of nuclear families, but also of multigenerational (immigrant) households, and is even true of shared-housing situations where unattached individuals live as roommates.50 Again, sole reliance on ‘individual income’ can lead to a misreading of people’s socio-economic circumstances. Hulchanski does provide some closing comments about testing other income metrics, notably ‘household’ and ‘employment’ income, but presents little analysis to back those claims.51

Six, a key facet of today’s research on socio-spatial inequality is map visualization. By mapping census statistics, one can quickly spot general trends in the distribution and location of different census tracts. But mapping entire census tracts – rather than the residents in them – can lead to important visual distortions. Suburban tracts tend to be both larger and more sparsely populated

49 Ley (1999) cautions against focusing too narrowly on individual income levels also because it can be vastly under-reported. He points out that many business/investor class immigrants have surprisingly low income, making the case that great care needs to be exercised when reporting official government statistics, such as census data. For a good overview of the standard pitfalls associated with the income variable see Bourne (1993, 1295-1296).

50 According to census statistics an ‘unattached individual’ is simply a person living either alone or with others to whom he or she is no related by blood, marriage, common law, adoption, etc. Examples include roommates or lodgers (Statistics Canada 2016b). Bourne (1993, 1298) reports that “measure of aggregate income polarization are significantly reduced when the calculations are based on total household income rather than individual earnings from employment.”

51 See page 24 “A Note on Methods” in Hulchanski (2010). Ley and Lynch (2012) do provide an analysis of ‘household income’ alongside that of “individual income” with some telling results. The overall trends are the same, but the two metrics produce maps with important local differences. For instance, the neighbourhoods of Fairview and Kitsilano show up as predominantly high income when mapping ‘individual income’, and predominantly middle income when mapping ‘household income.’ Likewise, the map of poverty in Surrey is significantly altered when mapping ‘individual income’ vs. ‘household income’. There is a significant decrease in the number of low-income neighbourhoods in Surrey when mapping ‘household income’. This is especially true of Newton which shows up as overwhelmingly low-income when testing for ‘individual income’, but as ‘middle income’ when testing for ‘household income’. For more see Figure 7 and Figure 9 (pages 17 and 19 respectively) in Ley and Lynch (2012).
then their urban counterparts, which can make certain phenomena – such as the incidence of low-income – seem more extensive than they are.52

None of these shortcomings, taken alone, bring into question the essence of Hulchanski’s findings. The trajectory of change identified in the current research is in line with broader understandings of social inequality and polarisation in Canadian cities. When taken together, however, these shortcomings do illuminate important limitations inherent in the emerging research, especially in regard to the kind of claims that can be derived from the chosen methodology. Consider a key strength of statistical analysis, namely its ability to simplify and quantify complex aspects of social life. Massey and Denton’s (1993) pioneering research on racial segregation in the United States is valuable precisely because it is able to accurately describe the degree to which urban America has been divided along lines of class, ethnicity and race, allowing for comparison over time and across space. The unique value of Massey and Denton’s work is not the observation that American society is segregated – an obvious reality to many – but a discussion of the precise extent, persistence, and nature of such segregation.

The same cannot be said of much of the recent scholarship on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. For instance, there is no way of knowing with much granularity how neighbourhoods have changed internally, or what these neighbourhoods look like on the ground.53 The literature leaves many basic questions unanswered. How many low-income households live today in Vancouver’s or Toronto’s inner city? How has this number changed since 1970? What about in the suburbs? What about from one neighbourhood to another? The lack of detail surrounding such questions is problematic, precisely because of interest to scholars who study urban inequality are concrete things about the character of particular neighbourhoods, and the make-up of the local population.

52 This is true of the maps of Toronto found in Hulchanski (2010). It also applies to Ley and Lynch’s (2012) report, where entire swathes of sparsely-populated tracts of land on the North Shore, and in the outer-ring suburbs of Delta, Langley and Maple Ridge dominate the observer’s field of view. For an overview of how representational choices in map making influence interpretation and knowledge production see Field (2018) and MacEachren (1995) and Monmonier (2018).

53 Consider Ley and Lynch’s (2012) analysis. The authors identify a handful of census tracts in Kitsilano, Fairview, and the West End as “low- or very-low income” (Figure 9, p19). Yet, residents with knowledge of the city would not register those areas as low-income neighbourhoods. These areas might contain lower-income rental apartments, pensioners on fixed incomes, or students but they otherwise contain a fair degree of socio-economic diversity. They are not areas considered as ‘poor’.
There is only so much one can say about ‘neighbourhood change’, ‘neighbourhood decline’, ‘concentrated poverty’ or ‘residential displacement’ without a methodology that can accurately capture the spaces people inhabit, and the people who live in those spaces. By this logic, the approach promoted by Hulchanski masks as much as it reveals. While it makes it easy to visualize the general distribution of income in a given city, it also makes it difficult to discern how much the reported trends reflect real changes on the ground, and how much they reflect decisions in the way socio-spatial divides are being measured (e.g. ‘average individual income’ of a census tract).

To be sure, the findings that do emerge from the recent scholarship should not be dismissed outright. Rather, they should be presented and treated for what they are: preliminary in nature, and suggestive. Like others, Hulchanski’s study on Toronto is best used as a study on which to generate further research, a starting point from which to examine the precise socio-economic character of a given neighbourhood and its change over time. As is often the case with quantitative studies, it can be all too easy to draw sweeping conclusions from what look like straightforward statistics, something seen in the media coverage of urban inequality today. But there are serious risks in taking the current findings at face value, mis-interpreting the extent and nature of neighbourhood change is top of mind. Another risk is to help reinforce narratives that rest on fragile empirical foundations, a tendency prevalent among social scientists.

54 There are many examples of the type of sweeping messages generated by recent studies on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. For example, following the release of the first Hulchanski report in 2007, the Globe and Mail published a front-page spread titled: “Toronto Divided: A Tale of 3 Cities”. The subtitle read, “The affluent move to the centre, the poor are pushed to the edges and the middle class slowly fade from view.” The article includes such phrases as “postwar suburbia is in rapid decline,” “the looming disappearance of the average, mixed-income neighbourhood that once defined Toronto,” and “an urban landscape that has a 30-year history of abandonment by people who have a choice.” Writing in the Toronto Star, Monsebraaten (2012) reports Hulchanski’s findings by saying, “Toronto’s middle-class suburbs of the 1970s have turned into ‘urban deserts’ of growing poverty while the city centre has become an enclave for the ultra rich.” Similarly, Gold (2017) wrote in a recent article in the Globe and Mail that “A landslide of wealth is flowing eastward across Vancouver, pushing low-income groups to the fringes of the city and into the suburbs.” Again, what is problematic with these types of statements is that they are far too general, and cannot be supported by the methodology at hand.

55 Hulchanski’s study is considered one of, if not the most, influential analysis of socio-spatial inequality in the Canadian context. As a result, social scientists routinely cite the study in their research. But this is done with little acknowledgement of its limitations, or the preliminary nature of its findings. This process helps to bring further authority to a study that, while certainly pioneering, has also important weaknesses. To my knowledge, Stanger-Ross and Ross (2012) remains the only article that puts Hulchanski’s research under the microscope. Most other scholars take the findings as unequivocal. See for instance, Allen and Farber (2019), Florida and Adler (2017), Ades et al. (2016, 2012), Townshend et al. (2018), and Nelson (2013).
2.9 Old trends

Nuance and details matter because, despite being presented as ‘new’ or ‘fresh’, the general trends described in recent research on socio-spatial inequality have been known for some time. Pointing out that the inner city is increasingly affluent and that low-income households can be found in the suburbs is not inherently novel, nor for that matter the idea that urban society is increasingly polarized along lines of class.

Growing socio-economic polarization in large metropolitan areas has been on the radar of social scientists since at least the 1980s. Friedmann and Wolf (1982) were the first to explicitly link urban income inequality in large metropolitan areas to the globalization of the world economy, arguing that changes in employment structures furthered social and economic divides within ‘world cities’ – a deceptively simple term that defies clear categorization. In fact, Friedmann and Wolf (1982) understood social and class polarization as inherent to the process of world city formation. The thesis was further developed by Sassen (1991, 1994) who examined in closer detail the mechanisms consolidating income and occupational polarization in global cities, focusing on the loss of manufacturing work and the accompanying growth in business and financial services. Debate on social polarization took off in the 1980s with contributions over the years from countless distinguished scholars, notably Marcuse (1989, 1993) who popularized the metaphor of the ‘divided’ or ‘quartered’ city, but also Mollenkopf and Castells (1991), Fainstein et al. (1992), Hamnett (1994, 1996), Friedmann (1995), Marcuse and Van Kempen (2000), and others. Though vast and varied, the literature on social polarization rests on various common threads, most prominently the view that globalization and economic restructuring have led to greater socio-spatial differentiation within cities. Underpinning this view is the idea that large cities are increasingly divided between a class of highly paid professionals (largely engaged in finance and business sectors), and a class of low-skilled, low-pay service sector workers (disproportionately composed of immigrants and minorities). Together with the view that the middle-class has been disappearing, these concepts have been around for more than thirty years. For instance, as early as 1984, Sassen already recognized “a vast expansion in the supply of low-

Various scholars reiterate the idea that the findings presented are surprising or fresh, including Ley who was quoted as saying, “I think there's going to be quite a bit of surprise at the data on the maps. This is fresh information (Paperny and Dhillon 2011).” And also Hulchanski, who said, “All this frankly surprised us. We knew there was a shift. That's not new. We didn't know how dramatic it was (Barber 2007).”

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wage jobs and a shrinking supply of middle-income jobs” spurred by a decline in manufacturing activity, a dynamic well documented in Bluestone and Harrison’s (1982) seminal book on deindustrialization.

So while the recent research by Hulchanski (2010), Ley and Lynch (2012) and others help confirm longstanding views about the trajectory of inequality and polarization in major urban centres, much of what they present isn’t per se new. These are dynamics that have been known to scholars for a long time, not only in the United States but also in Canada. For instance, Bourne (1993) found that the gap between highest and lowest income neighbourhoods in Toronto increased from 3 to 1 in 1950 to nearly 14 to 1 in 1985, a significant rise. Likewise, Bourne and Ley (1993) reported a net increase in social polarization in the city of Toronto and its metropolitan area, noting that income inequality there increased by 40 to 50 percent in the 1970s and early 1980s. At the time, the authors offered a grim prognosis, arguing that “the recession of the early 1990s will probably accentuate these contrasts (Bourne and Ley 1993, 21).” While offering a more tempered view of the extent of polarization in Canadian cities, MacLachlan and Sawada (1997) nonetheless agree about a distinct trend toward growing neighbourhood inequality (gap between rich and poor areas), and polarization (the loss of middle-income census tracts). Over the years, several studies have generated similar conclusions including, Bunting and Filion (1996), Bourne (1997) Murdie (1998), Walks (2001), and Bunting et al. (2004).

The same is also true of what recent studies on socio-spatial inequality have to say about neighbourhood change in the urban core, and specifically the inner city. The overall finding that the urban core is consolidating into an upper-income enclave isn’t new. Evidence of an increasingly affluent core, whether in Toronto or Vancouver, is in line with standard assessments of gentrification in urban areas. Much like the discussion on socio-spatial polarization, the topic of a transitioning inner city has been documented and theorized for the greater part of three decades.

57 Said another way, the average income of the wealthiest neighbourhood in 1950 was three times as high as the poorest neighbourhood in Toronto. By 1985, the wealthiest neighbourhood had an average income nearly fourteen times as high as the poorest one (Bourne 1993, 1311).
As early as 1981, Ley was reporting the erosion of affordable housing in the inner-city and its transformation into a zone of privilege. By 1988, Ley introduced inner-city restructuring as a “familiar theme” in Canadian urban studies, arguing that middle-class settlement of the inner city and the loss of lower-cost housing in this same area were “two sides of same coin.” In this same article, Ley (1988) identifies all the basic features commonly associated with inner-city gentrification today: displacement of lower-income households; a rapid expansion in downtown office space; the relocation of manufacturing activities in peripheral areas; housing stock upgrading; and, pent-up demand for urban living by a new class of young urban professionals.

In a later essay, Ley (1993) alludes to a Globe and Mail newspaper article describing the conspicuous consumption and “galloping gentrification” of Toronto’s central city, including the “the sleek luncheon haunts of King Street West,” the carriage trade shops of Yonge Street selling cashmere sweaters, and the flow of “Jaguars gliding into the parking garage at First Canadian Place” – the city’s tallest skyscraper and corporate headquarters of the Bank of Montreal. Titled “Toronto the Rich,” the article chronicled the influx of wealth that was being pumped into the urban core, portraying an image of Toronto’s city centre as one of wealth and privilege. But what is most telling about this article is that it dates back to 1986, a fact that speaks to the longevity of these issues. In his own analysis, Ley (1993) points out that, in the 1970s alone, the real per capita income of central city residents in Toronto grew by 40 percent, faster than the metropolitan area as a whole. He also notes that much of the rise in property prices over the same period was concentrated in the central city, largely in the form of luxury condominiums. What these writings point to – along with many others, including Bunting and Filion (1988), Filion (1991), Bourne (1993), Bourne and Ley (1993), Ley (1996), and Murdie (1996, 1998) – is the idea of the central city as a place of change and growing affluence. More importantly, this highlights the extent to which discussions about inner-city gentrification and the transition of the urban core into an elite and wealthy enclave are not new, but are part of a long established literature stretching back more than thirty years.

A similar argument applies to claims about the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs. Suburban poverty, while not as widely recognized as inner-city gentrification, has also been on the radar of urban scholars for quite some time. By the early 1990s, it was already clear to Bourne that the traditional dichotomy of ‘poor inner city vs. affluent suburbs’ did not
adequately match reality. His study of eight metropolitan areas in Canada found that the “widespread assertion of a vanishing middle-income population” more appropriately applied to suburban populations, “rather than to central or inner-core areas (Bourne 1993, 1301).” Writing about Toronto, Bourne suggested that:

The inner area immediately surrounding the central core is still the area of lowest household income, but even there average incomes have increased relative to the CMA as a whole. Still more prominent are the increases in average income in the downtown core (the central planning district), and the declining status of the mature suburbs. The former trend, as argued previously, is attributable to a combination of downtown condominium construction, gentrification and the loss of low-cost rental housing through tenure conversion or demolition. The latter trend mirrors the ageing of both the stock and population of otherwise stable post-war suburbs, and the relative increase in social housing (Bourne 1993, 1305 my emphasis).

What the above passage shows, is that as early as 1993, Bourne – one of Canada’s leading urban geographers – was already bringing attention to processes of inner-city upgrading and suburban decline. His research noted that while parts of inner-city Toronto were among the poorest in the region, as a whole, the inner-city was following a trajectory of rising income levels relative to the suburbs. Not only this, but Bourne also showed how the geography of poverty itself was changing, with areas of severe economic deprivation gradually moving outside of the urban core and extending into surrounding suburban areas. These findings led him to conclude that poverty “left the inner city for the suburbs (Bourne 1993, 1311).” In a different article also published in the early 1990s, Bourne and Ley echoed a similar message, arguing that:

Once concentrated only in the inner city, they [low-income households] are being displaced outward by the pressures of gentrification and redevelopment of the urban core and by the availability of cheaper land in the suburbs for the construction of social housing. In 1985 the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto identified sixteen areas of poverty and serious social need, half of them in the city of Toronto and half in the surrounding municipalities. In this sense at least, the suburbs and the city are becoming more alike (Bourne and Ley 1993, 21).

Here again, the authors reiterate the idea that low-income households were no longer only concentrated in the inner city, but also increasingly in suburban areas. In fact, Bourne and Ley

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58 See the discussion on pages 1307 to 1311. In his paper, Bourne (1993) even explicitly refers to “new clusters of suburban poverty” (my emphasis).
note that by 1985, half of the lowest-income areas in metropolitan Toronto were located in the suburbs.

The dual phenomenon of inner-city gentrification and growing clusters of suburban poverty was also widely reported at the time in Murdie (1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998). Murdie was the first to provide a detailed study of the link between the allocation of social housing in the suburbs of Toronto and growing pockets of suburban disadvantage. Later analyses by scholars interested in the study of social polarization and inner-city restructuring also verified the trend toward increased economic deprivation in the suburbs, notably Walks (2001) and Bunting et al. (2004).

In many ways, the vast body of literature on social polarisation, and inner-city change both contributes to and detracts from more recent studies on socio-spatial inequality in Canada. It contributes to the studies of Hulchanski (2010), Ley and Lynch (2012), Tonwshend et al. (2018), and others in that it validates the substantive essence of these works, doing so with ample empirical and theoretical rigour. But it also detracts from these more recent studies, in that it illuminates the extent to which their findings are not as fresh and new as purported to be. As many scholars recognize, these dynamics have been known for some time. In its defence, the recent scholarship argues that its contribution is one of degree, not so much of substance. Hulchanski, himself, did say to the press: “All this frankly surprised us. We knew there was a shift. That’s not new. We didn’t know how dramatic it was (Barber 2007).” As argued earlier, however, it is precisely the specifics of the claims – i.e. the extent of the changes – presented in Hulchanski’s research and that of others, as well as their authoritative tone, that is a matter of debate. This is because, as I outline earlier, much of the recent scholarship relies too narrowly on a single income metric.

2.10 Suburban diversity

Any review of recent studies on socio-spatial inequality in Canada would be incomplete without considering these studies’ empirical shortcomings. To recognize that claims about suburban disadvantage, or about people being pushed out of the urban core are largely conjectural, is a first step in addressing key gaps in the existing literature. So is the recognition that the scholarship’s key findings are not as novel or as strong as one might think. But to stop here would be to
overlook deeper issues with the way current analyses are framed. One such issue is the way in which much of the present literature treats and understands suburbia, not just as an urban form, or geographic location, but as a social space. In this section, I argue that the tendency to frame the suburbs as new sites of socio-economic disadvantage rests, at least in part, on a dated understanding of suburbia. Today’s suburbs must not only be viewed as potential sites of exclusion and isolation, but also of opportunity. I suggest that dominant narratives fail to adequately consider the extent to which many suburbs have diversified (socially, culturally, economically) in the past few decades.

For much of the twentieth-century, North-American suburbs were associated with single-detached homes, nuclear families, and white middle-class society. To this day, suburbs in Canada and the United States conjure up images of manicured lawns, bland subdivisions, two-car garages, split-level houses, and car-centric infrastructure. These cultural stereotypes have been both powerful and enduring, shaping people’s perceptions of suburbia outside and inside academia (Bourne 1996; Kruse and Sugrue 2006). The tendency to view the suburbs as homogenous and exclusive spaces underscores contemporary anxieties about suburban poverty. What kind of prospects can low-income households expect in places where public transit is lacking, social services are sparse, and jobs inaccessible? But as an increasing number of scholars point out, the image of suburbia as a socially homogenous residential enclave has always been more myth than reality (Harris and Larkham 1999).

Revisionist historians have been making the case for suburban diversity now for some time (Kruse and Sugrue 2006; Harris 2001, 2006; Lassiter and Niedt 2013; Lewis 2004). Scholars agree that early twentieth-century suburbs were in many ways as diverse as the cities they surrounded. Harris (1996) shows that in the years leading up to World War II there were more blue-collar workers living in the suburbs of Toronto than in the city itself. Lewis (2000) suggests that manufacturing suburbs were not only found throughout North America, but that, as in the case of Montreal, they helped drive urban expansion. Similarly, Gardener (2001) provides convincing statistical evidence showing that until the middle of the twentieth-century, suburbanites had a lower socio-economic status than central-city residents. Upper-class, suburban enclaves did exist before 1945, but many prewar suburbs had little in common with the typical image of white, middle-class suburbia that came to typify the postwar era. Plenty of
suburbs housed immigrants and visible minorities – many of them renters (Nicolaides 2002; Wiese 2004). Moreover, owner-built housing and varied types of development (including warehouses, factories and workshops) were common, making fringe areas in the early twentieth-century resemble shantytowns (Harris 2001).

Without a doubt, the mass suburbanization of the postwar period was of a different character, notably in the United States, but also in Canada (Harris 2006). By the mid-1950s, suburban communities were increasingly homogenous both in their social-economic makeup and also in their built form, a shift partly connected to changes in lending practises, innovation in house design and construction, and the rise of large development corporations (Harris 2004).\(^5\) The rise of postwar suburbia heightened the split between city and suburb, a dichotomy crystallized by such classic developments as Levittown, Long Island and Don Mill, Ontario. Although, Canada never reached the level of segregation that defined American urban society, ethnic and racial divides between city and suburbs did exist in Canadian cities too. The wave of standardization and uniformity that defined suburban expansion in the postwar period, however, did not last. By the 1970s, the suburban trajectory was already shifting toward increased diversification.

Retail functions in the form of shopping malls appeared in the suburbs as early as the 1950s. In the decades that followed, a growing number of department stores in the inner city relocated into surrounding suburban communities, or altogether closed down. This was the case for Woodward’s – Vancouver’s oldest department store – which opened Park Royal Shopping Centre in the suburb of West Vancouver in 1950, and then Oakridge Mall in 1959 (McKellar 2001). The decentralization of manufacturing activities was also in full swing by the 1960s. Industries once integral to the economy of the central city, moved to the suburban periphery lured by large lots and cheap land. ‘Back office’ functions such as call and data-entry centres followed in the 1970s, as did ‘front-office’ functions (e.g. corporate headquarters) in the 1980s (Goldstein 2015; Shearmur et al. 2007). The change in many suburbs was so significant that social scientists have introduced the term ‘edge cities’ to describe the concentration of business,

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\(^5\) In the United States, an entrenched system of white supremacy denied most Blacks, Asians and Hispanics access to suburban living. Discrimination in the housing market, physical violence, racist covenants, and a host of zoning mechanisms were used to keep suburban communities uniformly white (Gotham 2004; Nicolaides and Wiese 2017). Some of these same techniques were also used in Canada to control the ethnic and socio-economic profiles of certain neighbourhoods (Harris 2004; Lewis 2014).
shopping and entertainment activities found outside the traditional urban core (Garreau 1991). There is growing consensus among scholars today that countless suburban communities are becoming more urban, a dynamic made clear not only by the rise of suburban employment – the pace of which in some instances exceeds that of the central city – but also by a diversifying housing stock and built environment (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011; Filion et al. 2000; Filion and Gad 2006). High-rise condominiums, office towers, rental buildings, mixed-use developments, and a host of services and institutions are commonly found in most suburbs today. Even socially-oriented services typically associated with the central city can be found in many suburban municipalities, including skill training and employment programs, immigrant settlement services, supportive housing units and homeless shelters, and food banks.⁶⁰

But change in suburbia has not been limited to economic activity and physical form. Since the 1970s, suburbs throughout Canada and the United States have experienced rapid socio-cultural diversification. Recent studies on socio-spatial inequality in Canada have brought attention to the presence of low-income households in suburban areas, a dynamic that has been on the radar of Canadian scholars since the early 1990s. The changing socio-economic character of suburbia has also been widely recognized in the American literature, notably in the works of Allard (2017), Hanlon et al. (2010), Kneebone and Berube (2013), Lucy and Phillips (2006), Murphy (2007), Orfield (2002), and others. While most of these contributions are recent, the phenomenon of suburban social change is far from new (Haar 1972; Baldassare 1986).

In the Canadian context, the theme of suburban diversity most commonly appears in migration studies, especially in broader discussions about immigrant housing, spatial segregation and the social geography of Canadian cities. Again, this is a theme with an extended genesis. Migration scholars have been writing about the diverse ethnic profile of Canadian suburbs since the 1990s, if not earlier. Evenden and Walker (1992) offer one of the first reviews of the changing social make up of suburbia, pointing to both the historical roots of ethnic suburban communities in Canada, and the growing trend toward diversification. Hiebert (1999, 2000, 2005) examines the changing settlement patterns of immigrant populations, noting the increased tendency among

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⁶⁰ Social services in central cities do tend to be more highly concentrated than in the suburbs, but this is more a reflection of overall population densities and the general land use character of central city neighbourhoods. Today, there are arguably more immigrant settlement agencies operating in the suburb of Surrey, BC, than in the city of Vancouver, something which has likely been true for the past ten years.
newcomers of non-European background to settle directly in the suburbs. Similar research on the residential patterns of new immigrants and suburban diversity is also found in Ray (1994), Ray et al. (1997), Lo and Wang (1997), and, of course, Li (1998) who famously coined the term ‘ethnoburbs’ to describe multi-ethnic suburban communities with one significant ethnic minority group. Research on immigrant housing has also brought attention to suburban dimensions of immigration in Canada, including Teixeira and Murdie (1997, 2003), Ray (1998), Owusu (1999), and more recently Hiebert et al. (2006a, 2006b), Murdie (2008), Teixeira (2007, 2014, 2017). To be accurate, even within the voluminous literature on ethnicity and immigration in Canada, there exists only a handful of in-depth studies on suburban immigrant populations, a point recognized by Skop and Li (2011) who point out that “the suburbs are among the least analyzed settings in ethnic studies.” At a minimum, however, what past research demonstrates is that socio-cultural diversity in Canadian suburbs has been recognized for more than twenty years. The notion that many suburbs are culturally, and ethnically diverse is by now a well-established fact. The reality of suburban immigrant settlement has also attracted to the suburbs a host of institutions, services, businesses and events catering specifically to immigrant populations, including places of worship (mosques, gurdwaras, etc.), ethnic malls, restaurants, grocers, community organizations, and festivals.

Alongside the link between suburbanization and immigrant settlement, migration scholars also point to a link between pockets of poverty in the suburbs and growing suburban ethnic diversity. Murdie (1994, 1998) examines the link between the location of social housing in Toronto and the rise of concentrated pockets of ethno-cultural poverty in the city’s suburbs. Various studies have since recognized the suburban dimensions of concentrated immigrant poverty, notably Henry (1995), Ley and Smith (1997a, 1997b, 2000), Bourne (1997), Smith (1998, 2004), Hiebert (2005), Walks and Bourne (2006), Fiedler et al. (2006), Smith and Ley (2008), and Preston et al. (2009). These studies dispel the notion of a Canadian ‘ghetto underclass’ – a term which has fallen out of favour in recent years, but that describes deeply entrenched and spatially segregated urban poverty of the type found in American cities (Wilson 1987). What these studies do

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61 Teixeira (2007) voices a similar point when writing that “despite the marked propensity of certain ethnic groups to move to the suburbs and buy housing, the ethnocultural dimension in immigrant suburbanization has been largely overlooked in the scholarly literature.”
demonstrate, though, is that low-income areas in Canadian cities are principally populated by visible minority and immigrant populations, and that many of these areas are in the suburbs.

Notwithstanding the geographic dimension, immigrant deprivation in Canada has been extensively documented. Researchers began to detect a deterioration in the economic situation of newcomers as early as the 1980s (Hiebert 2005). This was especially true for non-European origin immigrants. Over the years, scholars have reported declining incomes among successive cohorts of newcomers, a widening income gap between foreign-born and native-born Canadians, and falling labour market participation rates among recent immigrants (Galabuzi 2006; Kazemipur and Halli 2000; Li 2003; Pendakur and Pendakur 2004; Picot and Hou 2003; Picot 2008; Walks 2011). More significantly, research indicates that virtually all the increase in low-income rates during the 1980s and 1990s was concentrated among the immigrant population (Picot 2004).

While recent studies on socio-spatial inequality acknowledge the link between suburban deprivation and ethnicity/race they pay scant attention to this connection. Recognizing this link, however, is key for developing a fuller picture of neighbourhood dynamics. Current analyses stress a narrative of low-income households being pushed out of the urban core because of gentrification. Closely linked to this narrative is the idea that as low-income folks end up in the suburbs they become cut off from crucial services, employment opportunities, and support networks. But these interpretations partly rest on an incomplete and dated understanding of suburbia, and local suburban dynamics. For one thing, as argued above, most suburbs have diversified significantly in the past few decades, incorporating land uses, densities, and economic activities historically associated with urban areas. The days of low-density, homogenous bedroom communities are increasingly long gone. Second, many suburban areas today are also socially and culturally diverse, a point of considerable significance given the disproportionate number of visible minorities and newcomers living in low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs.

62 While low-income rates did not increase in the 2000s, they did remain high for newcomers relative to the native-born population (Picot and Hou 2014). Said another way, things didn’t get worse for newcomers in the past couple of decades, but they didn’t get significantly better either.
Framing the current trajectory of neighbourhood disadvantage squarely as a story of displacement and gentrification overlooks the extent to which this is a dynamic that also needs to be studied through the lens of immigration. Knowing that newcomers are settling directly into the suburbs, bypassing the central city altogether, complicates the displacement thesis. Moreover, recognizing that newcomers are settling in culturally diverse municipalities with established immigrant communities challenges the idea of suburban isolation, raising questions about the degree to which low- and modest-income newcomers in the suburbs really become cut off from needed services and support systems. Prior writing on immigrant settlement suggests otherwise. Like others before them, new immigrants settling in the suburbs would be expected to tap into a spectrum of local resources, including informal networks, community services, and even jobs. For this reason, it is worth considering not only the added barriers and challenges that might come with suburban residence, but also the potential opportunities that life in the suburbs might afford low-income households. New lines of inquiry are necessary to expand beyond an analysis centred on ‘push factors’ – e.g. gentrification and the rising cost of housing in the urban core – to one capable of considering what ‘pull factors’, if any, might be attracting historically marginalized populations to the suburbs.

2.11 Conclusion

It has been long recognized that disparities in power, status and wealth are imprinted in urban space. Walk around any major North-American city today and you’ll find a variety of neighbourhoods: some visibly affluent, some shockingly poor, and many in-between. The disparities between one neighbourhood and the next can be brazen – think of the boundary between financial business districts and many impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods – and they can also be subtle – think of the difference between an inner-ring, streetcar suburb undergoing gentrification and one that isn’t. While there’s always been more variation in the social-economic fabric of cities than traditionally acknowledged, the residential patterns of rich and low-income households have been changing in significant ways.

For much of the twentieth-century, the geography of class divides of urban areas was thought to coincide, however roughly, with the division between city and suburbs, at least in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Canada. To this day, suburbia conjures up images of single-
family homes, manicured lawns, and middle-class sensibilities. Conversely, people tend to view neighbourhood poverty as an issue largely restricted to the inner city, or at a minimum to urban areas. But today’s spatial divides are different. A small, but growing, body of evidence suggests a concomitant rise in the number of low-income and minority households in the suburbs of Canadian cities. With ample proof of unabating inner-city gentrification, scholars are pointing to a new spatial patterning of urban disadvantage: one marked by declining suburbs, and an increasingly affluent central core.

Underlying much of the research on socio-spatial inequality are equally relevant claims about the causes and implications of this new geography of disadvantage. Foremost, are claims about the bleak prospects marginalized populations face in the suburbs. The existing literature posits that low-income households in the suburbs – unlike their counterparts in the central core – are cut off from needed services, job opportunities and support systems, making suburban residence something of a socio-economic trap. I call this the ‘suburban disadvantage’ thesis. At the same time, the current changes are interpreted as a story of people being displaced or pushed out of the urban core and into the suburbs, largely as a result of gentrification and the rising cost of housing.

This chapter offers a critical review of the emerging scholarship on socio-spatial inequality by way of a four-pronged argument. First, I argue that while the current literature offers a useful description of the changes occurring in Canadian metropolitan areas it also suffers from important empirical limitations. For one thing, I point out that many of the studies being published are preliminary in nature. Claims about displacement and suburban disadvantage, while widespread and often repeated, are vastly underexamined. This is not to say that these claims are wrong or inaccurate, but simply to point out that they are not supported by a strong body of evidence. Also, current studies follow a narrow methodological orientation, which is further undermined by relying on a limited statistical metric, ‘average individual income.’

Second, I argue that the findings presented in current writings are not as fresh and new as they purport to be. Discussions about growing neighbourhood-level polarisation and inequality go back thirty-plus years. The transformation of the urban core, specifically the inner-city, into an enclave of the upper-class, has been on the radar of gentrification scholars in Canada since the
1980s. Similarly, scholars have been discussing the trajectory of growing inequality and polarization in cities since the publication of Friedmann and Wolf’s 1982 paper on world-city formation.

Finally, I argue that claims about suburban disadvantage rest in part on dated understandings of suburbia. As revisionist historians remind us, Canadian suburbs have always been more diverse than often acknowledge. The idea of homogenous, middle-class suburbs is more myth than reality. Just as important, many suburban communities have diversified immensely in the past few decades, incorporating land-uses and economic functions traditionally associated with the central city. But it’s not only jobs and commercial activities that are found in many suburbs today, it is also a culturally diverse population base. Migration literature illuminates the extent to which the suburbs have become the new ports of entry for newcomers coming to Canada. The presence of established ethnic communities in today’s suburbs challenges dominant narratives of social isolation and curtailed access to jobs and services, raising the question of whether current interpretations should focus not only on the barriers, but also the opportunities that might come with suburban residence.
Chapter 3: Opportunities

3.1 Introduction

A common assumption among scholars studying neighbourhood change and urban inequality is that because of the relative dearth of services, jobs and infrastructure in suburbia, low-income people living in the suburbs are at a disadvantage relative to their central-city counterparts. Said another way, while life for low-income folks is difficult to begin with, it is all the more difficult when living in a suburban location. Or so people argue. As shown in section 2.5 of this thesis, one finds copious examples of this line of thought throughout the literature (Ades et al. 2012, 2016; Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Lo et al. 2015; Young and Keil 2010; Walks 2010a).

Informing many of the anxieties about the rise of low-income areas in the suburbs is the general idea that the low-density, segregated land-use, and car-centric character of suburban neighbourhoods creates added challenges to people’s abilities to access needed services, participate in community life, secure work, and experience upward mobility. These concerns, a growing number of scholars contend, are all the more relevant when considering new-immigrant households with limited economic wealth. To thrive and successfully integrate in Canadian society, newcomers can undoubtedly benefit from the varied system of supports and opportunities made available to them in the communities in which they settle. As Walks (2010a, 181) points out: “neighbourhoods provide a basis for the formation of social relationships and networks, determine accessibility to jobs and information, provide amenities and services, and are a major context for living and understanding daily life” (181). If, as an increasing number of scholars suggest, low-income minorities are ending up in suburban neighbourhoods with poor resources and weak community supports, then it becomes all the more imperative to examine how the spatial patterning of urban disadvantage operates and manifests itself on the ground.

In the next three chapters I show how interviews with local residents provide a perspective that both confirms and upends current understandings of what life must be like for economically marginalized groups living in suburban areas. While residents bring up the many challenges and barriers that come with life in the suburbs, their testimony also tells the story of people actively seeking opportunities largely overlooked by urban scholars. Local narratives reveal a more
nuanced and complete picture of the prospects suburban living affords to more marginalized households.

3.2 Co-Ethnic Networks

3.2.1 The benefits of finding ethnic networks in the suburbs

In my conversations with residents of North Surrey and Newton it was clear that many perceived suburban location in a positive light. Crucial to this view was the perceived benefit of living in proximity to a community with a shared ethnic and cultural identity, a dynamic well-known to Canadian migration scholars who have documented the importance of social networks in facilitating immigration and settlement (Ghosh 2007; Hiebert 1998; Mitchell 2004; Murdie and Skop 2012; Ley and Germain 2000; Owusu 2000; Veldman 2013).

For some, such as Ranbir – a former college instructor in his late thirties from Jalandhar, India – it all boiled down to being close to other South-Asian families, eating Indian food, and generally being able to “see my kind of people here.” Upon arriving in Canada, Ranbir and his wife and son first lived in the suburb of Burnaby, staying with a family friend. Burnaby is a major municipality that boasts two rapid transit lines, a major technology sector, two of BC’s largest post-secondary institutions, and a convenient connection, thanks to its vicinity, to downtown Vancouver. But a visit to a friend in Surrey two weeks or so after their arrival in Burnaby made Ranbir decide to ultimately move to Surrey:

So when I came here [in Surrey], I saw big, big streets, a lot of people, and hm, like hm, cultural things as well like, I'm able to eat my, hm like, my food and kind of thing, I was missing for like, for ten, fifteen days, so I really like that thing, because like people, like then visited a family here, they offered us all Indian things and I was astonished because I was not aware of all that Indian food is, everything is available in Canada as well, so that good for me and I think yeah, that was the turning point, I thought I should live in Surrey because some people, I'm able to see my kind of people here, yeah (my emphasis).

Such sentiments were especially true for respondents of South-Asian background. Surrey is a well-known hub of the South-Asian community, having Metro Vancouver’s largest South-Asian
population (Hiebert 1999; Murdie and Skop 2012; Murdie and Teixeira 2003). India is the largest source country of immigrants in Surrey, with most newcomers coming from the state of Punjab. For many South Asians the benefits of settling in Surrey are easy to see, these include access to ethnic foods (both in terms of grocery stores and dining establishments), proximity to places of worship (gurdwaras are especially prominent in the city), and a convenient link to an established community of people who speak the same language.

The appeal of Surrey as an ethnically diverse place with an established South-Asian community was a view shared among many respondents. Gurneet, who like Ranbir was originally from Punjab, talked about being pleasantly surprised by the sheer size of the Indian community in Surrey. She had arrived in Canada in 2015 with her husband and two sons, first settling in Abbotsford – an agricultural municipality outside Metro Vancouver – where her brother was living at the time. Asked about whether she liked Surrey, and whether she saw herself staying in Surrey for the long haul, Gurneet said:

GURNEET: Surrey is good, because a lot of Indians are there, and a lot of Indian stuff is available, which we living in Abbotsford I was thinking it's going to be hard but no, you don't find anything difficult in Surrey as is, because it's big, yeah.

JACOPO: So, also things like ethnic foods, and …

GURNEET: We get everything, we get everything, every damn thing. Yes, my parents back home they keep asking me ‘Do you want something? Do you want this thing?’ I said ‘No!’ [chuckles].

JACOPO: So that's one of the reasons why you decided to move from Abbotsford to Surrey?

GURNEET: Yes, yeah.

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63 As of 2016, about 168,000 South Asians lived in Surrey (about ~33% of the city’s total), compared to only 37,000 in the city of Vancouver (population numbers are rounded to the nearest 1,000). See, Census of Canada 2016.

64 The benefits of living in an ethnic enclave are too many to state in this paragraph, but expand to employment opportunities, family connections, and social interaction. The topic has been well researched. For instance, see Hiebert et al. 2007; Ley 1999; Ley and Germain 2000; Murdie 2008; Murdie & Teixeira 2003; Owusu 2000; Ray 1998.

65 Abbotsford is a predominantly agricultural community located about 60 kilometres from Vancouver. It is even further removed from the region’s urban core than Surrey itself.
Gurneet, much in the same way as Ranbir, viewed the large Indian community in Surrey as a good thing. She initially thought that moving from Abbotsford – a town with its own sizeable South-Asian population – would be “hard.” But the presence of an even larger South-Asian community in Surrey, made her see things differently: “Surrey is good, because a lot of Indians are there, and a lot of Indian stuff is available … living in Abbotsford I was thinking it's going to be hard but no, you don't find anything difficult in Surrey.” In fact, she seemed almost pleasantly annoyed by the sheer availability of Indian products, “we get everything, every damn thing” she said chuckling (my emphasis).

Access to social networks is all the more important for newcomers stuck in low-end, minimum-wage type jobs. Long hours, low pay and stress can take a heavy toll on newcomers working to adjust to a new life in Canada. As Rajpal’s testimony attests, proximity to other co-ethnics provides new immigrants with needed emotional and practical support. A former business owner, Rajpal immigrated to Canada with his wife and daughter in 2016. His first job upon arriving in Surrey involved stacking shelves, at near minimum wage, in a large warehouse in the neighbouring municipality of Delta. The work was tough and the hours long. Rajpal left the house at 6:00am each morning, and would not get back home until 6:30pm at night. The physical toll on his body was matched by the constant stress of having to meet the company’s punishing productivity targets. Demerit points were deducted for a host of so-called infractions, including shelving mistakes, and for failing to agree to work overtime. As Rajpal recalls, the threat of being fired was constantly on his mind.66

But living in Surrey – a city with a large Indo-Canadian population – had clear benefits for Rajpal, who, like countless other newcomers struggled to reconcile his current reality with memories of his past professional success. Above all, life in Surrey afforded Rajpal with a feeling of comfort and familiarity, something especially important to him in those early months

66 Rajpal described his work circumstances as such: “It was very tough, they, there was just like a dictating company, they used to watch each and every minute of yours, that you are sitting idle or that, and how much, basically I have to store all the [unintelligible, ‘goods’?] to the shelf, like this, so they give the items, and I have to store under different racks, so hm so they were very particular that how much products are you putting on the shelves in each minute, and what mistake are you doing, so they kept on marking, there already mental pressures, even, even with the physical pressure, there also tending to give us physical as well as mental pressures, because if you are getting poor performance, they're giving notice to you, and there is very insecurity, because if you do some mistakes they're giving some letter warning and you're fired, totally fired, if you go beyond certain areas, then you're totally fired.”
of resettlement. Asked about whether he wanted to stay in Surrey or whether he was hoping to move to a different city in the region – maybe one more centrally located – Rajpal replied, “I know that if I’m not living here, I will be more isolated.” He went on to say that he tended to gravitate toward other “Indians rather than some other community,” and pointed out that the handful of friends he had made since arriving to Canada were all Indo-Canadians. This stemmed, in large part, from language barriers:

So yeah I found some good company over here, mainly from India, because the main, main hardship is the language problem, because if I’m communicating in English it is very hard to be very casual, and very ease of things. So if I’m talking from on in Hindi I’m very much at ease [unintelligible] I, I can share my views through my deep heart, but if I’m speaking in English it’s a little bit, very much difficult, for me to express my views and all that yeah

Rajpal added:

I used to have working [with] one Filipino guy [who] was living near my home, and he usually give me a ride, but I paid for him, and then he give me lift, but I found him that his way of talking and all that things, I can't sometimes I can't understand him, and he, he was grown over here, but was originally from Philippines … so he was totally adapted in Canadian culture, but I was not able to contact him with my language problem at that time. So, it is very easy to get attracted with Indian community even, even if they are Punjabi, because we can understand, we can coordinate, communicate, and express our views and some attachment is there, yeah, so, that's why more people are tending to come in firstly come in, come to stay in Surrey because of the hm sickness, home sickness feeling is less, if you live here, especially for Indians."

In much the same way as Ranbir, this feeling of home sickness was further mitigated by the availability of Indian foods and grocery stores found in Surrey. Rajpal remarked that:

Compared to other Burnaby, and all of that cities … you are not hm fed up with the grocery items [in Surrey], because you can find easily Indian groceries, Indian [unintelligible] you can taste and go out having restaurants Indian easily here [in Surrey], in Burnaby and all that area it is quite expensive also, and but even if you want to go out somewhere, having dinner and all of that it is very tough, yeah, in Surrey you can easily get any Indian restaurant in, in economical range, so, even my brother in law used to stay in Vancouver, they used to come here to eat, for the restaurants, because they said there is no taste over there, Indian taste, in Surrey you can find it.
For Rajpal, settling in Surrey meant an easier transition into his new life in Canada. As he saw it, he and his family were better off living in Surrey than other cities in Metro Vancouver. With its large Indo-Canadian population, Surrey provided needed familiarity for Rajpal: he was able to meet people with whom he could communicate in his native tongue, connect on a personal level, and develop meaningful relationships. The presence of Indo-Canadian stores and restaurants helped create a bond with past places, and mitigate home sickness. Combined, these features helped shield Rajpal from the daily stress of menial work, and the culture shock of settling in a new country.

For other South-Asian respondents, it was the access to a place of worship that made Surrey a good place to be. Harjinder, a young woman in her twenties who arrived in Surrey in 2013 with her parents and brother, described going to her local temple every day. The gurdwara was conveniently located “near [her] house … a five to ten-minute drive,” and functioned both as a place for contemplation and prayer, and as a place to meet others:

HARJINDER: I’m going there [the gurdwara] everyday like before I get to college, like in the morning time.

JACOPO: Have you met people through the temple?

HARJINDER: Hm, actually, I don’t talk, I just go there, and sit for two minutes and then I go come [sic.] back, hm [pause] sometimes I eat food.

At the time of the interview, Harjinder was working as a security guard while also studying part-time at the Surrey Community College. She attended class, Monday to Friday, during the day, and worked in the evenings, finishing at 10pm on most nights. On Saturday, she worked twelve-hour shifts starting at six o’clock in the morning. And on Sunday she commuted to Vancouver to a beauty college where she took classes in hair fashion, nail polish, and makeup. The fact that Harjinder still visited her local temple despite her very busy schedule, speaks both to the strength of her Sikh faith, and also to the importance the gurdwara played in her life. Life in Surrey provided Harjinder with convenient access to something important to her, a holy place where she could practice her faith. But the gurdwara, like other places of worship, fulfilled yet another and
often overlooked role, that of a community kitchen, offering a meal, free of charge, to members of the public, who like Harjinder, found it difficult to make ends meet. It is doubtful that Harjinder would have had equally good access to a gurdwara had she been living in Vancouver. To be sure, there are various gurdwaras located north of the Fraser river, but not to the same degree as found in the more peripheral suburbs south of the Fraser. As the social geography of Vancouver changes, so is the location of businesses, services and institutions catering to specific population groups (Hiebert 1999; Pablo 2014).

Given the demographic makeup of Surrey, it comes as no surprise that many immigrants from India would choose the city as a preferred destination over other municipalities in Metro Vancouver. Settling in proximity to the region’s largest Indo-Canadian population comes with clear benefits. But Indo-Canadian respondents were not the only ones who had something to gain in locating in Surrey. The city’s varied ethnic and cultural makeup provides important support systems for countless immigrant communities, not just South-Asians.

Teodoro, a middle-age Filipino immigrant living in North Surrey, talked fondly about the community supports he found in the city. As an active member of the Filipino community, Teodoro sat on the board of one of the city’s largest Filipino organizations. Support and involvement in the Filipino community became especially valuable to him in the wake of his divorce from his wife, a point he makes clear when referring to fellow board members as “his family.” Asked about whether he liked Surrey, and whether he wanted to continue to live there, he responded with an emphatic “oh yeah, I like it here, I will retire in this city.” Far from being socially isolated in Surrey, Teodoro found a thriving Filipino community of which he became an active member, and from which he received “a lot of support.”

In some cases, positive responses to life in Surrey came from smaller groups. Narjis, a Palestinian Israeli immigrant, spoke about the closely-knit community she and her husband converged toward when moving to Surrey from New Westminster. Her husband was involved with a local mosque, and Narjis organized get-togethers with other Muslim women (the “ladies”

\[67\] For more on the role gurdwaras in the South-Asian community see Nayar (2010).
as she affectionately called them) at her house. When asked about whether they had considered moving to Abbotsford to be closer to her husband’s job, Narjis replied:

There was a discussion about moving to Abbotsford but I didn't because I wanted to be, to stay close to hm to be honest, to the Muslim community you know. Hm, we didn't like we didn't anybody who's like want to raise our kids a bit, like you know, to have friends from the same community, to hm and they will help them a little bit more about our culture and hm you know so that was hm mainly …

For Narjis and her husband, a move to Abbotsford would have meant a shorter commute to work and the likelihood of cheaper housing. The regional housing market is such that, in general, housing costs decline as one moves away from the urban core. Despite these two benefits, the family decided against the move as a way to stay closer to the Middle-Eastern community in Surrey. Again, rather than social isolation, Narjis and her husband found in Surrey a thriving, albeit small, community of like-minded people with whom to share cultural practices and traditions. Ultimately, the social bonds and sense of belonging that come with living in a tightly-knit community outweighed whatever benefits Narjis and her family would have accrued from moving to a different municipality.

What these testimonies illustrate is how a move to the suburbs proves advantageous, rather than detrimental, to many lower-income minorities. The presence of established ethnic communities offers support and familiarity to newcomers at a crucial time in their settlement experience. Sometimes the benefits are very tangible: being able to access establishments sourcing particular ethnic products, or being able to live in proximity to a place of worship. Other times, the benefits are less tangible, but equally important: tapping into a community of like-minded people, connecting with one’s cultural heritage, or communicating in one’s native tongue. With this in mind, the rise of low-income minority neighbourhoods in the suburbs must, at least in part, be attributed to pull factors, that is, factors that contribute to making suburban location attractive to historically marginalized populations.

3.2.2 The overlooked reality of diversity in the suburbs

Missing from current discussions about inequality and polarization in Canadian cities is the recognition that suburbs have been diversifying for many decades. While it is certainly true that
suburban life creates unique challenges for more marginalized populations – a point which will be discussed later on – to say that lower-income households, visible minority groups and new immigrants are getting “pushed out” of so-called more desirable inner-city neighbourhoods, overlooks that fact that for many people, suburban life offers its own set of benefits and opportunities. The spatial distribution of income and immigration today must not only be framed in terms of push factors, but also in terms of pull factors. Omitting the latter results in an incomplete and skewed picture of some of the key driving forces shaping Canadian metropolitan regions today.

Canadian suburbs have been pluralistic communities for longer than commonly thought, a reality that hasn’t gone unnoticed among Canadian migration scholars. Ethnoburb, a term used to describe a suburban area with a particularly large ethnic minority population, has been in the lexicon of urban scholars for twenty years now (Li 1998). In Toronto, the City’s Social Planning Council brought attention to the social transformation of the city’s suburbs as early as 1979 when it announced that “social minorities taken as a whole now constitute the new social majority in Metro’s postwar suburbs (Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto 1979 cited in Hulchanski 2010, 20).”

68 The metaphor of people getting “pushed out” of the urban core is widely used in the academic literature and in the mainstream media alike. Writing about newcomers in Vancouver and Toronto, Ley and Lynch (2012) write: “many others have been pushed to the suburban fringe with its cheaper housing but also its diminishing public services and precarious employment (my emphasis).” Similarly, Murdie and Skop (2013, 63) state: “the fact that poor immigrants are increasingly pushed to outlying suburban areas. More recently, Cheung (2018b) writing for the Tyee (BC’s largest online magazine) interpreted the changes impacting Metro Vancouver by saying: “the maps tell the story of wealthy people moving into the central city as poorer people are pushed further out (my emphasis).” The theme is also spreading in the academic literature, for instance in transportation planning, where it is being repeated by such scholars as Allen and Farber (2019, 216): “evidence has indicated that poverty distributions have become more suburbanized; increased costs of housing in city centres have pushed lower-income residents to more affordable, but less accessible areas (my emphasis).”

69 The tendency by academics to view the concentration of low-income newcomers in the suburbs as ‘undesirable’ is not unique to Canada. Easthope et al. (2018) review the literature in Australia and come to the same conclusion. Their study is one of the few that explicitly recognizes that the clustering of low-income immigrants in the suburbs may prove advantageous to those groups because of the low-cost of housing, family and social group networks, and the presence of state and non-profit service organizations operating in the suburbs.

70 Ethnoburbs are characterized by a multi-ethnic population where one group does not necessarily constitute a majority. Unlike traditional ethnic enclaves, ethnoburbs are larger in area and population, but lower in population density (i.e. they have a suburban feel, rather than an urban inner-city feel). While immigrants of lower economic status may live in ethnoburbs, many ethnoburbs are predominantly middle- and high-income communities. Li’s prototype for an ethnoburb is San Gabriel Valley a rapidly growing Los Angeles suburb (Li 1998).
The theme of suburban immigration has appeared in the literature intermittently since at least the early 1990s. Evenden and Walker (1992) produced what can be considered one of the first systematic reviews of the evolution and changing landscape of suburbia in Canada. In it, they highlight the presence of various ethnic communities in the suburbs of Toronto and Vancouver, while drawing a link between immigrant suburbanization and rural patterns of immigrant settlement. But the first significant look at suburban immigration can be traced to Murdie, who between 1994 and 1998 published a series of articles on ethnic residential segregation in Toronto. Murdie found that Afro-Caribbean immigrants were overrepresented in Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) public housing, and that with the exception of Regent Park, black immigrants tended to concentrate in inner-suburban areas (especially the Jane-Finch Corridor in North York, northern Etobicoke, and along the major east-west arterial roads in Scarborough). Drawing from the works of US scholars, especially Wilson (1987), he linked the decline of inner-suburban areas to economic restructuring, and the loss of manufacturing jobs. It is here that one can find one of the first descriptions of immigrant poverty in Canadian suburbs.


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71 Take as an example Steveston, BC, formerly a largely, Japanese, fishing village located at the mouth of the Fraser River. Over the years, the once-rural community gradually became absorbed by suburban sprawl and metropolitan growth. Similarly, Sikhs first settled in Surrey when the community was still predominantly agricultural.

72 Murdie was particularly interested in the relationship between residential segregation, ethnicity and social housing. His analysis, however, only led to tentative conclusions. He found that residential segregation was not as high as initially expected, and that while Blacks were over represented in high-rise developments, many also lived in low-rise areas.

73 If fact, Murdie (1998) frames the decline of Toronto’s inner suburbs, and the emergence of suburban pockets of poverty, in relation to the gentrification of the Toronto’s inner city, and the leapfrog development of outer suburban areas, a dynamic that is eventually picked up by Hulchanski in the mid-2000s.
despite never quite making it the explicit focus of his research. Hiebert is hardly alone in this regard. As Teixeira (2007) points out, most of the research on the suburbanization of immigrant and minority groups is of an exploratory and limited scope. What work has been done tends to focus on housing-related issues, leaving other areas of study largely untouched, such as who moves where and why, or what impacts these trends have on municipalities and local community life.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, the notion that suburbs of major Canadian metropolitan areas have been housing a growing immigrant population, including lower-income newcomers, is by no means a new idea. Quite the contrary, in ethnic and migration studies, this is a dynamic that has been talked about for the better part of twenty years. The fact that suburban immigration in Canada is not a new phenomenon, makes recent readings on urban inequality all the more perplexing. On the one hand, scholars have been writing about the changing cultural make up of suburbia for years, describing how a growing number of visible minorities are favouring suburban localities. On the other hand, recent urban scholarship raises the spectre of social exclusion and isolation among vulnerable suburban populations – including newcomers – as if these groups were living in culturally homogenous 1950s-style middle-class suburbs.

Social network formation offers a powerful reminder that ethno-cultural clusters – whether in the city or the suburbs – are likely to be characterized by close social ties and support networks, especially in areas with established ethnic communities (Ghosh 2007; Hiebert 1998, 2010; Murdie and Skop 2012; Owusu 2000; Ray 1998; Smith 2004; Veldman 2013). As the community grows, chain migration ensures its further expansion (Bourne 1996; Hou and Picot 2003; Massey 1988). Factors that help explain the very presence of a particular ethno-cultural cluster in any given city – kinship networks, places of worship, social clubs, ethnic retails, shops and services – are also factors that by definition create support systems around older residents and newcomers (Hiebert 2005; Mendez 2009; Qadeer and Kumar 2006).

Said another way, it is not a coincidence that a growing number of lower-income immigrant households are settling where they are settling. While housing dynamics, especially the rising cost of real estate in the inner-city, go a long way in explaining why a growing number of newcomers with limited economic means are settling in the suburbs, market dynamics alone cannot explain why many of these households are settling in the same suburban areas. Consider the fact that Metro Vancouver contains within its boundaries twenty-two municipalities, and many more neighbourhoods. Current interpretations fail to explain why despite the sheer number of possible destinations, people concentrate in specific suburbs, and in specific areas within those suburbs. If push factors such as the high cost of housing offer insights into the redrawing of the relationship between place, wealth and ethnicity, pull factors help complete this analytical picture. Ethnic networks are one factor contributing to making certain areas attractive to historically marginalized populations. The notion that more precariously positioned households are not simply reacting to market forces, but are in fact proactively choosing where to live and ultimately settle is largely missing from current understandings of the spatial patterning of income inequality.

3.3 The housing piece

3.3.1 Lower-cost housing and secondary suites

While it is reasonable to raise concerns over social isolation and exclusion, especially in light of enduring narratives about suburban life, it is also clear that suburban areas provide some benefits to people in the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. The most obvious and talked about advantage is the lower cost of housing. There are two main threads to this discussion. An older thread that links rising poverty rates in the suburbs – specifically the inner-suburbs – to the decentralisation of social housing (Bourne 1993; Ley and Smith 2000; Murdie 1994, 1998; Walks 2001), and a newer thread that links the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs to rising real estate prices in the central city (Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Walks 2010a). But the lack of any significant investment in social housing by federal authorities in almost three decades suggests that affordable social housing alone cannot explain the observed

75 The topic of ‘housing’ tends to dominate discussions about immigrant and lower-income households living in the suburbs. Numerous articles and studies have already covered this topic see Hiebert et al. 2006; Owusu 2000; Ray 1998; Murdie and Teixeira 2003; Murdie et al. 2006; Preston et al. 2006, 2010; Rose et al. 2006; Teixeira 1996, 2007, 2014, 2017; Teixeira and Murdie 1997.
trends described by Hulchanski (2010) in Toronto or Ley and Lynch (2012) in Vancouver (Sutton 2006; Turner 2008). Whatever social housing stock exists in the suburbs today it is too small and too old to account for the extent of today’s socio-spatial divides. For this reason, attention must be given to broader real-estate market dynamics, especially the role played by the rental market in providing less expensive housing to lower-income populations in the suburbs.

A quick comparison of housing costs between central city and periphery reveals some of the economic gains generated by settling in a suburb like Surrey. In 2016 (at the time the field work was being conducted) the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Vancouver was about 50% higher than in Surrey ($1,268 compared to $855), while two-bedroom unit was 75% higher ($1,757 compared to $1,006). The savings afforded to households living in more outlying areas are significant, especially for lower-income households for whom a $400 to $700 increase in rent can be unmanageable.

Though average rents for the secondary rental market are harder to calculate, it is commonly accepted that basement suites provide lower rents than other rental housing forms. With at least 68% of its rental stock comprised of secondary suites, Surrey has effectively the largest stock of lower-end rental available in the region. As Fiedler et al. (2006) point out, the role of basement suites as a low-cost, albeit often inferior, housing option for immigrants is a well-known fact. This type of rental stock is found throughout Metro Vancouver, but it is especially prevalent in Surrey, given the city’s large supply of single detached-dwellings. Not only this, but in Surrey, basement suites tend to be priced at a lower rate than in more centrally-located municipalities such as New Westminster, Burnaby and Vancouver – a fact that is explained in part by longer distances to public transit, jobs, educational institutions, and urban amenities.

The abundant supply of secondary suites in Surrey, facilitates access to lower-cost housing for

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76 These statistics only refer to purpose-built apartments, not condominiums or secondary suites (see CMHC Market Rental Report 2016).
77 Once transportation costs are considered the housing affordability equation changes considerably as residents in the suburbs – on average – take on higher transportation costs than residents living in more centrally located areas.
78 CMHC’s market rental reports do not disclose rent information for secondary suites. As a whole, the secondary rental market is a lot more difficult to assess as it is large, varied and comprises both known legal dwellings as well as illegal dwellings see CMHC Market Rental Report 2016.
countless newcomers looking for ways to save money on rent. Despite the many problems often associated with basement suites, including serious health and safety code violations, the secondary suite market fills an important gap in the housing continuum (Teixeira 2012). This gap is especially evident in the suburbs where the stock of purpose-built rental and social housing units has been very small (Preston et al. 2009; Suttor 2006). It is not surprising then, that renting a basement suite was a common experience for many of the respondents in my sample. Despite the poor reputation of basement suites, many of the people I spoke to talked about their housing circumstances with a conspicuous lack of resignation or resentment, choosing instead to frame it as part of their settlement strategy. For instance, Riya, a forty-something former care giver, mentioned how for her and her family moving to a basement suite upon arriving in Canada was a “nice thing.” At the time, in 2005, she was able to rent a two-bedroom basement suite for $500 in Surrey (about $300 to $500 less than in Vancouver), something that she described as being better than renting an apartment, and an overall good deal. For Riya, as with other newcomers like her, basement suites can be launching pads, helping newcomers establish themselves in the early phases of the settlement process.

Fabrice, a young father from Cameroon, was also content to rent a basement suite when arriving in Canada in 2016. As he described it, his housing options were limited due to financial constraints – he was a single dad, unemployed and looking for work, and though he had some savings, he was burning through them faster than he had anticipated. With the help of a distant acquaintance he was able to find a place that suited his and his daughter’s needs. For $850 a month he rented a two-bedroom suite in a house right near an elementary school. The place was clean, bright, had big windows, and a backyard, the latter of which felt especially nice to Fabrice who had spent the previous six years living in a cramped apartment in France. When recalling

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79 According to CMHC the estimated average rent, in 2005, for a two-bedroom apartment in Vancouver was $1,006 (CMHC Housing Market Information Portal). Nonetheless, Riya did also acknowledge that prices have gone up considerably, and that even basement suites have become ‘too expensive’ – though they remain much lower than what is commonly found north of the Fraser.

80 This point was also stressed in one of my interviews with a senior manager for one of Surrey’s largest immigrant settlement agencies. The manager emphasised the fact that “if you look at affordability, Vancouver is quite expensive … Surrey has better opportunities,” he went on to say “you should find an entry level job and jobs are easier to find here [in Surrey]. See even if you rent a basement it's much cheaper than in Vancouver, you know. Moving around is much easier than in Vancouver, people actually like [it here] because it's a very open city, wide roads, you know, everything and plus there are lots of communities, every hm I would say every community is here.” Again, the idea of living in a basement suite in Surrey is framed as part of broader settlement strategy, and not something that is necessarily negative.
the moment he was first shown the picture of the house, and was informed about the rent, his eyes lit up and he told his acquaintance over the phone: “I want THIS house!”

These illustrations do not negate the many problems associated with basement suites. Many of the respondents I talked to had something negative to say about their housing situation, past or present. From mold issues to dealing with abusive landlords, to living in small cramped spaces, the experiences of being a tenant in Surrey were far from perfect. These are dreadful dynamics widely document in housing scholarship, and as such should not be downplayed (Murdie and Teixeira 2003). But as other scholars have recognized, the secondary rental market does play a key role in the lives of lower-income newcomers, if for no other reason that it provides some of the last remaining affordable rental stock in many Canadian cities (Teixeira 2012).

At the same time, in today’s red-hot real estate market, cheaper rent doesn’t necessarily translate to something affordable (Teixeira 2012). For modest to low-income households, a monthly rent of $850 can be a very sizable burden. In 2016, single parent households in British Columbia could expect to spend over half of their income (55%) on rent alone, leaving only $718 to cover all other expenses, including food, transportation costs, child care, clothing, school supplies, internet/phone bills, not to speak of social expenses such as the costs of enrolling a child in a recreational activity, or going out for lunch, dinner or a movie (Statistics Canada 2016; CMHC Market Rental Report 2016).

Nonetheless, real estate dynamics in Metro Vancouver are such that finding a two-bedroom accommodation for less than $850 a month would have been a considerable feat in 2016.81 At the time of the interview, Fabrice was already paying below-average prices for his suite. It is highly unlikely that he would have been able to find a more competitive deal elsewhere without having to move even farther away from Vancouver. For Fabrice, as with so many others in similar shoes, the cost of housing was a key factor informing his decision to settle in Surrey.

To be sure, residential patterns are always the results of overlaying systems of choice and constraint (Ray 1998). The line between push and pull factor isn’t always a clear one. A point

81 With the continued rise of housing prices in the region, this observation is all the more true today, at the time of writing.
that isn’t lost on Walks and Maaranen (2008) who note the difficulty in knowing the extent to which newcomers are bypassing the central city because of gentrification and the related high cost of housing, or because of positive perceptions of life in the suburbs. But what my research shows is that, at the very least, one cannot interpret current socio-spatial divides purely as a story of people getting priced out of the central city. For many residents, the decision to move to a suburb like Surrey felt like a real choice rather than something they were forced into by necessity. Ranbir’s experiences offer a case in point. His decision to settle in Surrey with his family was solidified once he realized that for the price of renting a one-bedroom suite in Burnaby – the family’s first place of arrival – he could rent a two-bedroom in Surrey. He described his housing situation as “pretty good” and seemed genuinely content with renting a basement suite in Newton, something that he himself found surprising given that he had never been a renter in his home country. The suite was at ground level – otherwise known as a garden-level suite – which he liked, the upstairs owners were professionals, and the house was located in the heart of the Punjabi community in Surrey.

Jacopo: And how has your housing situation worked out?

Ranbir: It's pretty good, yeah, because it was at ground level, and the backyard is in front of my door, so it was good right, open weather, and easy thing, because I never lived in any rented accommodations back home, because from the very beginning we were having our own home, my father than I we made our own home, it was good, but when I came here since that was at ground level - because I was just thinking basement means underground, but when I saw that for the first time which it was at ground level, I really liked that, I said 'Oh yeah, I'm ok to live in this suite' yeah ...

On the whole, Ranbir described his decision to move to Surrey as a deliberate choice rather than a passive reaction to broader market forces. He made an active decision to move where he did, and was content with the housing he had secured. This is not to say, that his housing options were unlimited, quite the contrary. Ranbir worked a minimum-wage job as a gas station

82 Lo et al. (2011) are among the few scholars that explicitly recognize the housing and employment opportunities suburban areas provide to a growing number of immigrants arriving to Canada.
83 Back in India, Ranbir was living in a multigenerational house owned by his parents. As quoted earlier, Ranbir explained his decision to move to Surrey from Burnaby as such: “So when I came here [in Surrey], I saw big, big streets, a lot of people, and hm, like hm, cultural things as well like, I'm able to eat my, hm like, my food and kind of thing, I was missing for like, for ten, fifteen days, so I really like that thing, because like people, like then visited a family here, they offered us all Indian things and I was astonished because I was not aware of all that Indian food is, everything is available in Canada as well, so that good for me and I think yeah, that was the turning point, I thought I should live in Surrey because some people, I'm able to see my kind of people here, yeah.”
attendant, and had recently been laid off from a part-time teaching position at a local community college. His and his wife’s incomes were the primary determinant of the kind of housing the family could hope to secure. But for Ranbir, moving to Surrey was not a sacrifice. He did not see himself as being pushed out from Burnaby’s more expensive real estate market, or Vancouver’s for that matter. Rather, he described the move as an opportunity to move into the community of his choice.

3.3.2 *Opportunity for home ownership*

Another dynamic that is largely unexamined in the literature on inequality and polarization in Canadian cities is the extent to which suburban relocation opens the doors to home ownership. Studies that frame suburban residence as a kind of socio-economic trap, do so with the premise that settling in the suburbs is something of an involuntary or forced choice. Immigrants, especially those with more modest economic means – it is argued – are pushed out of more desirable inner-city neighbourhoods, ending up in less desirable suburban areas where they face greater risk of social dislocation and exclusion. But for many newcomers, even those of low or modest economic means, a move to the suburbs is a strategic choice in search of home ownership.

The link between suburbanization and home ownership is well known today. The huge pent up demand for housing in the postwar period was met by massive suburban development (Bourne 1996). In the 1940s and 50s, rising automobile ownership coupled with rapid investments in construction allowed a growing number of middle- and working-class households to access family-sized dwellings in the periphery (Bunting & Filion 2010; Harris 2004; Jackson 1985; Walks 2001). Historically, suburbanization has been largely understood as a process involving native-born Canadians, and European immigrants (Hiebert 2000b). Seldom has the settlement of outlying suburban areas been discussed as a process involving non-European minorities, especially in regard to discussions about home ownership. But today, a growing number of immigrants – the vast majority visible minorities of non-European background – are deliberately moving to the suburbs attracted by some of the same things as native middle-class Canadians. Home ownership is one such reason (Darden 2015; Hiebert 2015; Teixeira, 2012, 2014; Walks 2001).

84 For instance, Teixeira (2014) points out that little is known about the housing experiences of new immigrants, and visible minorities in the suburbs of major Canadian cities.
and Maaranen 2008). But as a number of recent studies suggest, while home ownership in the suburbs was historically viewed as a sign of economic success, today for many newcomers “homeownership is a precarious housing strategy (Preston et al. 2010).” Meaning that in situations where the cost of renting is similar to the cost of ownership, households can achieve ownership while still facing substantial financial vulnerability (Fiedler et al. 2006; Preston et al. 2009, 2010).

Consider for instance Natasha whom I interviewed in the summer of 2017. Originally from Russia, she arrived in Canada with her husband and two sons (ages 16 and 3) in 2013. Her story, like that of many, reads like a textbook case of the failings of immigrant settlement in Canada. A thirty-something educated professional with a PhD in climatology, Natasha left a promising junior-faculty position in her native Russia, to provide better opportunities for her children, especially her older son. Despite her professional credentials, she has been unable to transition back into her line of work as a climate scientist.85 Facing the prospects of working a minimum wage job just to cover childcare costs, she decided to stay home with her three-year-old child instead. The birth of a third son a year after arriving in Canada, solidified her place in the domestic sphere, further limiting her career prospects.

Her husband has become the family’s main economic provider, something of an irony given that it was Natasha who was the principal applicant on the family’s immigration papers. Natasha’s education levels, language skills, and work experience were deemed to have the best chances at securing the most points under Canada’s immigration system. Not her husband’s. But it was he who was ultimately able to transition into a job that could support the family. Today he earns a decent wage installing electronic equipment on marine vessels – a job similar to what he had back in Vladivostok.

The following excerpts provide insight into Natasha’s decision to move to Surrey, and some of the considerations she and her husband made in regard to housing. Asked about why they chose Surrey, Natasha explained she knew a close friend who lived in Surrey but also quickly added:

85 Smith (2004) cites various research chronicling the mismatch between employment and educational credentials of immigrants in Canada. She notes that in the 1990s, university-educated immigrants were twice as likely as their Canadian counterparts to hold jobs that fell well below their educational qualifications.
Natasha: Yes, it was one of the reasons, when we tried to figure out the place where we have to live, so hm of course because in Surrey I mean three years ago in Surrey the house affordability was very good I mean not very expensive yeah. So, my husband works in North Vancouver so yeah he has to drive everyday but we cannot afford I mean the housing in North Vancouver is hahah [laughs] we cannot afford it.

In response to questions about whether it was difficult to find housing, and its costs, Natasha said:

Natasha: We found a just a hm it just took one month to find the place where we live …

Jacopo: Was it hard to find the first place to rent?

Natasha: No, no, we just go to, we just look to Craigslist, so hm,

Jacopo: How was that? Was it ok?

Natasha: Yes, yes, it was two-bedroom apartment and we paid $850 per month, it was not bad, because when we moved, I know that our apartment cost $150 [more] so it rose

Jacopo: And are you still renting or …?

Natasha: We bought a condo a year ago.

Natasha: Yes, when we chose we understood that in this time we pay the same hm the same amount for renting which we can pay for mortgage, and that's why we choose the condo because when we hm so where we reside we had to pay the same thing, the same thing, we understand that we can pay $850 so for mortgage [...] mortgage is around $700 but plus strata fee plus property taxes and of course it's a little bit higher than the rent but still it's we pay for our own place.

Finally, when asked about whether she was happy in Surrey, and whether she saw herself staying in Surrey, Natasha replied:

Natasha: Hm, well, if we have more money, more savings, because, I think I want to live maybe in Burnaby, or New Westminster, but here is, actually it's not bad too, and why we don't choose Langley or something, another, because it's from here it's very close to highway - because my husband has to go to work - so yeah. So I think hm ... we continue to live here, maybe when I found a job and we have two incomes we can afford some, some, maybe in Coquitlam [chuckles] so I don't know, but it's still..

She elaborated on her answer toward the end of the interview:
Natasha: I like parks in Surrey, it was maybe it was the big I to hm the big part – I mean – hm it, it, influence our decision why we did decide to live here, exactly in this region, area, so because of the park, because near our condo we have three parks, and we can just walk to one, and walk to two, and it's, it's, because I have children it's very important for me, yeah, and actually that is why I like Surrey, hm, if I compare it with New West or Burnaby, Surrey has a lot of parks ...

To summarize, Natasha and her family first rented a two-bedroom apartment for $850 a month by 108th Avenue and 146th Street – a predominantly low-income, immigrant neighbourhood in North Surrey. Finding a place to rent was not hard, Natasha explains. They were drawn to Surrey by the availability of cheaper housing, parks, and the presence of social networks – a good family friend had recently moved to Canada and was living in North Surrey with her family at the time. Within two years, the family was able to qualify for a mortgage and they decided to buy a condominium apartment. As Natasha explains, the mortgage payments were almost on par with the cost of renting ($700 a month plus strata fees and property taxes), a little higher than their monthly rent, but at least they were putting money toward their own place, she explains.

In today’s red-hot Vancouver housing market, homeownership is beyond the reach of an increasing number of people. But in outlying peripheral areas, especially in more rough neighbourhoods, homeownership can be within the reach of modest income households – though prices continue to rise, and what was true of 2015 may not be true anymore. To be sure, Natasha and her family are not poor, and have not experienced the same level of precariousness as more economically disadvantaged newcomers. Nonetheless, they fall well below most people’s definition of middle class: they are a family of five living on one stipend, in a two-bedroom apartment in an area of Whalley that – while changing – remains predominantly lower income. Like many new immigrants, they’ve been able to weather hardships and financial setbacks thanks to the savings they brought with them from their home country, which as Natasha explains are now depleted. Had Natasha’s husband not secured a job as quickly as he did – it only took him two months to find work – the family might have been in dire straits.

Natasha’s experience sheds light on the kind of strategies that newcomers adopt as a way to achieve homeownership. While overcrowding is most often seen as an issue impacting renters, it can also apply to owner households (Hiebert 2000b, 2009b; Preston et al. 2010). In immigration
studies, the phenomenon of multigenerational homes is well documented (Creese et al. 2006; Hiebert 2000b; Lapointe and Murdie 1996). These types of living arrangements not only provide immigrant households with socio-emotional support, but are also a survival tactic in expensive housing markets as household maintainers pool together resources to cover living expenses (Cheung 2018a; Creese et al. 1999; Teixeira 2012).86

Research that looks at immigrant housing behaviour in Canada has shown that owning a home is a primary goal of most immigrants, including lower-income immigrants (Hiebert 2015; Teixeira 2014, 2017).87 But while these studies show that buying a home in the suburbs is often a preferred choice among middle class immigrants, they gloss over the fact that for more modest income immigrant households it is moving to the suburbs that makes homeownership a possibility.88 This is certainly true in Metro Vancouver where housing prices in and near the urban core are prohibitively expensive.

Above all, what one gleams from Natasha’s testimony is the complexity of factors that help define the new geography of income and immigration observed in today’s cities. Unlike dominant narratives that frame current socio-spatial divides purely as a result of people getting pushed out of the central city, Natasha’s experiences speak to the subtle interplay of push and pull factors leading to people’s decision to settle in the periphery. Without a doubt, Natasha recognizes the economic barriers constraining her housing location choice. Burnaby, New Westminster and even Coquitlam are all cities she would consider settling in if it wasn’t for the high cost of housing. At the same time, she does not frame the decision to settle in Surrey in negative terms, emphasising the fact that it’s really “not too bad here”, and that the lower cost of housing, the presence of social networks and availability of public parks makes Surrey an appealing place to be.

86 For instance, a number of respondents in our sample explained that they sought a large house/dwelling in which to live in specifically as a way to make it possible for their children to live at home while attending college or university. While the expectation to live at home while attending university/college is in part a result of cultural/ethnic norms, it is also often a financial strategy and necessity. For a good discussion on immigrant housing and strategies for pooling resources together see Clark 2003, Chapter 5: Reaching for Homeownership.
87 This was certainly true within our own sample as respondents cited greater control, security of tenure, and regaining social status as some of the main reasons for wanting to buy a home.
88 With the exception of Teixeira (2007, 2012, 2014) very few studies have looked at the suburban dimension of immigrant settlement in Canada, a point which Teixeira himself underscores. See Teixeira (2007) page 496.
As another example, consider the experience of Miriam, a middle-age outreach worker from Uganda. She and her husband (along with two young children) immigrated to Canada in the 1990s. Memories of the early settlement period bring mixed emotions in Miriam who described those first few years as especially difficult for her family. Both she and her husband struggled to find work, they took on student debt, at one point falling two months behind on rent. To this day, she does not know how they were able to make ends meet, and calls it “a miracle” they did so. As is often the case, after several years of working various jobs while retraining on the side, she eventually had a break, and in 2005 landed a job as an outreach worker with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. That same year, the family, who had been living in Burnaby for several years, lost their rental property as their landlord decided to sell the apartment. Faced with the need to move, they looked into buying a place of their own. The family moved to Surrey, because as Miriam explained “we were able to buy almost with no down payment.”

While the neighbourhood into which they moved was rough, with a visible street population of drug users – Miriam called it ‘the ‘hood’ – she saw the decision to buy a house as the right choice. Renting, she explained, “is a catch 22 … you realize [when] you rent you go out with nothing.” A move to Surrey, effectively made it possible for Miriam and her family to become homeowners, something that would have been more challenging north of the Fraser. Like Natasha, Miriam was not poor but again the family was hardly well off. Miriam’s husband was, and continues to be, unemployed which means the household is being supported by only one income. And when the time came to provide the down payment on the house, they had to borrow money from friends and family members, including her older teenage son.

The search for affordable housing resonates among all of the respondents in this research sample. Surrey’s abundant supply of basement suites offers newcomers a relatively cheap housing stock in which to initially settle – albeit one that is also precarious, frequently unregulated, and often substandard. In a region where affordable family-size dwellings are in very short supply, a move to Surrey allows immigrant households – who are on average larger than their Canadian-born counterparts – access to more moderately priced housing in an area that can still offer cultural diversity, community amenities, and services that might otherwise be lacking in more far flung suburbs.
More established immigrants, even those of modest incomes, look to Surrey as a way to enter the housing market and achieve homeownership. For some, it is a fairly pragmatic decision ‘I can own a place and pay almost the same as what I currently pay in rent’ – though rising housing prices are making that scenario less of reality for a growing number of people. In other cases, pursuing homeownership is an attempt to regain social status – ‘I was a successful professional back home, I owned my own house and I expect to do the same here.’ In most cases, the pursuit of home ownership is a combination of factors including achieving security of tenure and having greater control over one’s living environment. What is clear from speaking to local newcomers, is that while economic barriers exist which constrain people’s residential options, the decision to settle in Surrey is not necessarily framed as a bad thing, or simply as a decision governed by a lack of alternative options.

3.3.3 The importance of local context

While it is generally understood that low- and modest-income households end up in the suburbs because housing in and near the urban core is too expensive, scholars seldom give attention to the unique local characteristics that shape the housing experience of these groups (Teixeira 2012, 2014). In what kinds of neighbourhoods are people settling? In what suburbs? What types of accommodations are people accessing? What are the dynamics that shape housing choice? Why has the term ‘suburb’ become a catch-all phrase for describing a generalized location distinct from the ‘city’?

In so far as more sophisticated understandings of the relationship between immigration and suburbia exist, they tend to be based on ‘assimilation perspectives’ which frame the move to the suburbs as part of a process of upward social mobility. According to ‘spatial assimilation theory’ – a model popularized in the 1930s and 1940s by the Chicago School of Urban Sociology –

89 This was true, for instance, for Aurul, a respected agronomist in his home country of Bangladesh who got stuck in a low-paying service sector job upon arriving to Canada. The pursuit of home ownership became a way to justify to himself and his family that immigrating to Canada had been the right decision. For literature that confirms this finding see Hiebert 2015 and Teixeira 2012.

90 Consider the example of Narjis and her husband. They each arrived separately to Canada in the 1990s from the Middle East. After living in New Westminster for a couple of years, they were able to put away about $15,000 which they used on a down payment for a house. At the time Narjis was working as a cashier for a local grocer, and her husband was working as an auto-mechanic while he upgraded his educational credentials at Douglas College. While she liked New Westminster, Narjis explains they moved to Surrey in large part so they could buy a house, “this [was] my own house, you know, it [was] a small ranch house but still it was my own, I [could] call it my own.”
subsequent generations of immigrants move out to the suburbs as each generation experiences greater socio-economic success (Hou 2006; Mendez 2009). The process is often described as an ‘up and out’ pattern where immigrants move out of traditionally poorer inner-city districts into neighbouring suburban areas as they become more affluent and integrate in society (Smith 2004; Hiebert and Ley 2003). Spatial assimilation models have dominated scholarly understandings of immigrant settlement patterns for the better part of fifty years, promoting a view of the suburbs as largely white, middle-class bedroom communities comprised of a majority Anglo-Protestant population living alongside Southern, Eastern and Northwestern European immigrants – Germans, Polish, Italians, Portuguese, Greeks, etc. (Hiebert 1998, 2000; Murdie and Skop 2012).

More recent attempts to refine and adjust the assimilation paradigm fail to adequately capture the extent to which suburbs have changed over time (Hiebert 2015). Canadian suburbs today are a lot more ethnically and socially diverse than in the 1950s and 60s – in large part because of changes to Canada’s Immigration Act in the late 1960s which facilitated a shift away from a largely white European migrant pool to one originating in the Global South (Murdie 1998; Smith 2004). But suburbs have also diversified economically as various businesses and industries relocated their operations from the urban core into surrounding suburban areas drawn by the prospects of larger lots and cheaper land (Bourne 1996; Hutton 2010). The construction of purpose-built rental apartments, condominiums, and secondary suites has expanded housing options for households across the income spectrum. Alongside these transformations there has been a proliferation of services and amenities that were once only found in established urban centres, including: rapid transit networks, supportive housing projects, immigrant settlement

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91 Although not perfect, the general pattern is visible in countless North-American cities, including Vancouver. For instance, in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, Chinese and Italian immigrants arriving in Vancouver settled primarily in Chinatown and Strathcona respectively (both inner-city neighbourhoods). As subsequent generations experienced greater economic success, members of each of these communities started to leave the confines of the inner city to settle in outer suburban neighbourhoods, a process that accelerated in the postwar period. The Chinese community moved south to Marpole and eventually to Richmond, BC, while the Italian community moved east to Grandview Woodlands, and eventually to Burnaby, BC. (Hiebert 1999).

92 Hiebert (1998, 7) writes that by the end of the postwar period Greater Vancouver was predominantly of British origins (58.6 percent), and just over 85% of the population declared European ethnicities. The majority of immigrants at the time [1971] resided in the City of Vancouver – primarily in the east side – and that “as one might expect … the suburbs were mainly White, middle-class, and family oriented (1998, 10).”

93 Even in Toronto’s Don Mills – known as Canada’s prototypical postwar suburb – about half of the residential dwellings were found in apartment buildings (Sewell, 1993: 79-96).
services, postsecondary institutions, and faith-based organizations serving ethnic minority populations (Hiebert 2000b, Murdie 2008).

Narratives that frame the move of low- and modest-income immigrants into the suburbs simply as a reaction to rising housing prices in the urban core tend to overlook these changes. Far from entering closed-off, socially and economically homogenous communities, newcomers who arrive in the suburbs today are settling into areas that have diversified incredibly in the past thirty years. In emphasising gentrification and the role of housing dynamics in the urban core, existing writings mask the changing and complex local reality of suburban spaces.

3.4 Where are the jobs?

3.4.1 The decentralization of industrial production

Along with these dynamics, there are a number of other factors making suburban life an obvious and viable choice for low- and modest-income immigrant households. In my conversations with local residents it was clear that job opportunity is one such factor. As a number of studies show, a large segment of the immigration population is employed in lower pay sectors of the economy, and this is especially true for immigrant women and persons of colour (Chun 2012; Galabuzi 2006; Hiebert 2009a; Hiebert and Pendakur 2003). While the immigrant population is diverse – both culturally and economically – many newcomers rely on low-wage entry-level work when first arriving in Canada (Hoe 2017). The type of sectors in which a great deal of newcomers are employed (retail and wholesale trade, agriculture, manufacturing, warehousing, hospitality, and food services) are increasingly found in suburban areas (Kneebone and Berube 2013).

This is true for the vast majority of respondents in my sample. For instance, Rajpal’s first job upon arriving in Canada was stocking shelves at a warehouse for one of the world’s largest online retailers, and his second job was as a logistics coordinator for an industrial bakery. Both jobs took place in large warehouses located in outlying industrial areas, the first on Annacis

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94 Citing a 2004 Statistics Canada report, Smith (2004) notes that, in the 1990s, university-educated immigrants were twice as likely as their Canadian counterparts to be employed in jobs well below their educational qualifications. The trend is so widespread that people in Canada have become familiar with stories of engineers from India working as cab drivers and security guards. We hear of nurses and teachers from the Philippines employed as nannies and caregivers. And we interact with cashiers and clerks who arrived in Canada with advanced university degrees (Chun 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2009; Hiebert and Sherrel 2009; Prat et al. 2008).
Island, and the second just off Highway 17 in North Delta’s industrial district (or 25 to 35 km from Vancouver’s urban core). Similarly, at the time of our interview, Kadir was also working in a warehouse on Annacis Island stockpiling newspapers. His first job upon landing had been as an agricultural worker picking vegetables in a greenhouse. In a similar vein, Jenny worked at one point for a small manufacturing outfit in Delta performing various clerical duties. The family-owned shop manufactured boilers and hot-water tanks. Seojun’s workplace was not unlike Jenny’s. He worked as a labourer in a small manufacturing shop that fabricated window blinds and shutters. Others yet, such as Rachida’s father and Harmanpreet’s husband, worked menial jobs in the timber products sector, one worked in a lumber yard, the other in a sawmill. Both jobs were located in Surrey.95

Industrial production and manufacturing have been traditional employers of low-skilled and minority populations (Hiebert 2005). Historically, the bulk of manufacturing and industrial production activities were located in and around the urban core (Bunting and Filion 2010). Vancouver’s False Creek is a case in point. Through the first half of the twentieth century, manufacturing and distribution activities dominated the southern and northern shores of False Creek, a landscape of tightly packed factories, lumber mills, warehouses and rail yards (Burkinshaw 1984; North and Hardwick 1992). In countless North-American cities, the economic restructuring that ensued in the wake of the postwar period led to a decline of manufacturing employment, and a decentralization of industrial activities away from the urban core and into surrounding suburban areas (Heisz and LaRochelle-Côté 2005).

This trend applies to Metro Vancouver, where a decline of industrial activities in and along False Creek – a process that has been ongoing since the 1970s – was accompanied by an expansion of industrial production along the Fraser River, especially in Richmond, Delta, Surrey and Langley (Hutton 2010). Today, those areas retain industries that run the gamut from metal fabrication and

95 Others yet such as Harjinder had worked in an industrial laundromat in Burnaby, a warehouse in Delta, a commercial bakery in Langley and a blueberry farm in Surrey. Sandra’s husband worked as a quality technician for a glass manufacturing company in Langley. And Narjis’ husband was an aircraft mechanic for an outfit in Abbotsford.
glass manufacturing, to seafood processing facilities and foodservice distribution, to timber processing and aircraft assembly.96

The shift of manufacturing and other industrial production activities – such as warehousing and food processing – from the core of the city to the suburbs has meant a concomitant rise of low-skilled jobs in the periphery where an increasing number of lower-income immigrant households are now settling (Murdie and Skop 2012). While these sectors have changed considerably over the years, they continue to provide entry-level jobs to workers who lack the necessary skills or credentials to access higher-paying, white-collar work. As such, far from being isolated from job opportunities, low-income and minority populations are well positioned to find entry-level, blue-collar jobs in suburban areas. To be sure, blue collar work has – for the most part – failed to sustain the type of wages and benefits afforded to previous generations of workers, a trend that can be traced to four decades of falling unionization rates in the private sector (Kalleberg 2011; Rothstein 2016). Today, blue collar employment often involves night-shift work, long hours, and is not necessary well paid (Hoe 2017).

3.4.2 Broader employment growth in the suburbs

But industrial production is not the only category of suburban employment open to new-immigrants looking for entry-level jobs. Over the past few decades suburban areas have diversified, attracting a host of industries, institutions and businesses (Hutton 2010; Mendez et al. 2014). Regional retail centres, strip malls, and big-box outlets provide basic employment opportunities at low to modest wages to cashiers, store clerks, night-shift warehouse workers, and servers (Hoe 2017; Lo et al. 2015; Premji 2017; Yan et al. 2012). Fast food outlets, gas stations, and convenience stores – all a ubiquitous feature of suburban landscapes – are important employers of newcomers in the suburbs. Lower paid, entry-level work can also be found in more

96 Very little academic research has been conducted on the local economies of suburban municipalities in Metro Vancouver. Most of the case studies looking at labour market dynamics, and economic development in the region have – and continue – to focus almost exclusively on the City of Vancouver. Information on the type of industries, private sector companies, and public authorities operating in the suburbs, as well as information on the profile of the local labour-force population is usually found in more general regional analyses – some of which have become dated. Key works include Punter (2003), Wynn (1992), Bourne et al. (2011), Filion et al. (2015). Information on suburban economic development can also be found in Hutton (2010), and Barnes and Hutton (2009). However, much of this information tends to be fragmented and limited. As part of this research, I conducted a scan of the industries operating along the Fraser river in the municipalities of Richmond, Delta, Surrey and Langley using Google Maps.
professionally-oriented locations such as local government buildings, college and university campuses, medical and dental clinics, and legal offices (Hoe 2017; Chun 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2009). These include such jobs as parking lot attendants, receptionists, caregivers, cleaning staff and security guards.\footnote{Again, I want to emphasise that the reliance on service sector work by newcomers is not a positive trend that should be celebrated. My point here is simply to highlight the extent to which low-skilled, entry-level work has decentralized into – and is now present in – the suburbs.} The decentralization of low-skill jobs is a dynamic confirmed in transport studies where research has shown that residents of low-income urban neighbourhoods have longer and costlier commutes than residents living in low-income suburban neighborhoods (Khattak et al. 2000).

Within my own sample, the spectrum of jobs represented was broad, with most people having worked several jobs since arriving in Canada – and sometimes having worked multiple jobs at once. In my interviews I talked to people who had worked or were working as caregivers, servers, store clerks, warehouse packers, agricultural workers, security guards, delivery drivers, hair and nail stylists, truck and taxi drivers, gas station attendants, construction labourers, lumber yard workers, and cashiers. Among the participants, only one – Gabriela – was commuting to Vancouver for work.\footnote{Gabriela, a young woman from Cuba, was working at the time of my interview as a housekeeper for a major hotel chain in downtown Vancouver. Previous to that job, she had worked as a cook for a fast food outlet in Langley.} The others were all working in the suburbs – the vast majority south of the Fraser river (Surrey, Langley or Delta), with others working in New Westminster, Burnaby and Coquitlam.

This should not come as a surprise. Employment growth in the suburbs is a process that has been well documented in the literature (Mendez et al. 2014; Shearmur and Coffey 2002; Shearmur et al. 2007). In many North American cities, the relative proportion of jobs in the CBD has been steadily declining, as more and more jobs decentralize and locate away from traditional urban centres (Goldstein 2015). The trend began in the 1960s with manufacturing and consumer services, was then followed by back-office functions in the 1970s (e.g. call and data-entry centres), and then higher-order services or front-office functions in the 1980s (e.g. corporate headquarters). With each step, the decentralization of employment brought increased economic opportunities to suburban areas – though many are precarious and poorly remunerated. In some cases, job growth in the suburbs is outpacing that of the urban core. This is especially true in the
Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (Hutton 2010). The clustering of economic activity in suburban areas has led to development of ‘suburban downtowns’ or ‘edge cities’ – a term usually associated with the American context, but that is also increasingly relevant for Canadian cities (Fiedler and Addie 2008; Filion 2001; Filion and Gad 2006). Surrey’s City Centre district is a case in point, with its sizable concentration of commercial, business, retail, and recreational activities (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011). It is a downtown outside of the traditional urban core.

3.4.3 Spatial mismatch theory

Despite overwhelming evidence pointing to significant job growth in the suburbs, countless commentators see job opportunity as a key matter of concern in discussions about inequality and polarization in Canadian cities. Immigrant suburbanization and the changing geography of income, many argue, is raising the spectre of a spatial mismatch between people and opportunities.

For example, Smith and Ley (2008) write: “at the urban scale, the availability and access to services, jobs, education, and other support structures can be profoundly affected by suburban versus center city residence (My emphasis, 687).” The authors go on to say that “a spatial mismatch of people and opportunities introduces an additional dimension to geographies of

99 Hutton (2010) also points out that this is not quite true in Metro Vancouver, where the CBD retains much of its dominance. Though he does point out that there has been strong population growth in places like Surrey.

100 The fact that some scholars today are invoking the concept of the ‘spatial mismatch’ when speaking about suburban immigration and suburban poverty is something of an irony. The idea of a ‘spatial mismatch’ was introduced and made popular in discussions about concentrated poverty in American inner cities, and specifically in majority-Black neighbourhoods (Kain 1968; Wilson 1987). Starting in the 1960s, scholars began to posit that entrenched poverty in the inner city could in part be traced to a ‘mismatch’ or ‘disconnect’ between the place of residence of many Black households (the inner city) and the location of a growing number of jobs (the suburbs). According to traditional spatial mismatch theory, the suburbanization of employment in the 60s, 70s, and 80s directly contributed to a loss of employment opportunities for Black families living in the inner city. The model offers a useful framework from which to understand the departure of middle-class Blacks from inner city neighbourhoods, the entrenchment of poverty in the urban core, and the creation of a so-called ‘ghetto underclass’ in the United States (Wilson 1987; Holzer 1991; Gobillon et al 2007). As Mendez et al. (2014, 103) so well put it: “Those living in the inner cities often did not learn about employment opportunities in the suburbs, and if they did not drive, often they could not get there. Then, even if they were lucky enough to be called to a job interview and could drive to it, they often found that white employers were more likely to hire local white applicants” Observations about the suburbanization of employment are inherent to the very framing of spatial mismatch theory. Yet today, a number of scholars rely on the term to suggest the very opposite – that low income households in the suburbs are getting cut off from employment opportunities in the urban core. It is an ironic use of the term, and one that goes in the face of four decades of social science research which suggests that low-skilled jobs have been decentralizing.
poverty, contrasting central city accessibility with suburban isolation (2008, 700).” In a similar
tone, Ley and Lynch (2012) state that: “many [recent immigrants] have been pushed to the
suburban fringe with its cheaper housing but also its diminishing public services and precarious
employment (my emphasis, 11).” Citing Hulchanski’s “Three Cities Report”, the two authors
explain that Toronto “has become increasingly polarized between affluent neighbourhoods
toward the centre … and larger numbers of disadvantaged neighbourhoods on the edges
classified by social exclusion in terms of employment opportunities, public services, and
urban transit (my emphasis, iii).”101 The prevalence of this line of thought is not lost on Smith
(2004) who writes: “this trend [immigrant suburbanization] has fuelled concerns that the
diffusion of immigrant settlement away from traditional, supportive, and well serviced reception
sites, can stall accessibility to employment, educational, and socio-cultural opportunities that lead
to upward and outward mobility over time (my emphasis, 4).”

Concerns of this sort are indicative of the assumptions made about the economic opportunities
available to newcomers in the suburbs. More often than not, the assumption is made that when
settling in the suburbs, lower-income newcomers become further isolated from work
opportunities. But this line of thinking is increasingly grounded in inaccurate – though still
dominant – ideas about the nature of suburbia, and the geography of employment in metropolitan
regions.102 For one thing, there is a tendency to continue to view the suburbs as largely
homogenous residential areas with limited economic activities (Bourne 1996). For another, in
many people’s minds, the urban core remains the one place where true employment opportunity
is to be found. Despite ongoing decentralization, commentators are right to point out that a large
share of the metropolitan jobs continue to be concentrated in traditional CBDs (Hutton 2010).
This is especially true for finance, banking and insurance services, and the cultural and creative
industries (digital art, new media, design, architecture, etc.) (Barnes and Hutton 2009; Ley and
Lynch 2012; Coffey and Shearmur 2006). Relative to suburban areas, the urban core benefits

101 Other examples include Ley and Smith (2000, 47) who write that “These suburban nodes [of neighbourhood
poverty] can lead to significant problems of access to employment, education, and social services even within the
region’s well developed system of public transport.” As well as Bourne (1996, 173) who writes, “the socially
disadvantaged, low-income minorities and elderly, single parents and some married women with young children,
find themselves geographically isolated from both jobs and services.”
102 Consider for instance findings suggesting that residents of low-income urban neighborhoods have longer
commutes (both in terms of time and distance) than residents of low-income suburban neighborhoods (Khattak et al.
2000).
from economies of *agglomeration*, and proximity to a highly specialized talent pool (Hutton 2010; Filion 2015). But the presence and concentration of highly specialized services industry in the inner city does not necessarily translate to generating well-paid, accessible employment opportunities to low skilled residents. Low skilled workers in the urban core are largely confined to low paid jobs serving a higher income clientele (Hochstenbach and Musterd 2017). This is certainly true for many newcomers who lack strong language skills and recognized professional credentials: high-paying, white-collar employment in the CBD is largely out of their reach.

Raising the spectre of a spatial mismatch between people and job opportunities in discussions about suburban poverty and suburban immigration does not quite square with current understandings of the geography of work in Canadian cities. To suggest that lower-income households are being cut off from job opportunities by mere virtue of living in the suburbs is an oversimplification of the complex dynamics shaping immigrant settlement and labour force participation. This is because (a) the existing literature overlooks the extent to which low-skilled, entry level work has decentralized and is readily available in suburban areas – especially blue-collar work, jobs in retail, and food and beverages services and (b) the literature tends to overemphasise the job opportunities available to newcomers in the urban core.

### 3.4.4 Employment opportunities and ethnic networks

Further undermining the spatial mismatch thesis is the fact that immigrant support services and social networks have also decentralized and can increasingly be found in the suburbs (Hiebert 2000b; Burnley and Hiebert 2001). Many newcomers today find work in the suburbs precisely because that is where their own ethnic communities are now established. The importance of social networks and social capital in facilitating the integration of newcomers in the labour force is well documented (D’Addario et al. 2007; Creese et al. 1999; Hiebert 2005; Hiebert 2000b; Owusu 2000; Qadeer and Kumar 2006; Ray 1998; Rose 1997; Roth et al. 2011). New immigrants rely on local and transnational networks to find work when first arriving in Canada. These often involve family members, friends, and distant acquaintances, but also extend to broader co-ethnics relations, and local non-government immigrant agencies (Hiebert 2000a; Hiebert 2009a).
The importance of local networks in finding work was also confirmed in my interviews with local immigrants. Consider Rachida as a case in point. A twenty-something young woman from Lebanon, Rachida arrived in Canada in 2013 with her parents and three siblings. The family first stayed in Chilliwack – a rural community located about one hundred kilometres from Vancouver – where Rachida’s aunt lived. Within two months the family moved to an apartment in Guildford – a neighbourhood of North Surrey with a large Middle Eastern population. Shortly after arriving in Canada, Rachida enrolled in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program – a publicly-funded English language course for newcomers. Making the transition harder for Rachida was her age. As a nineteen-year old she was too old to attend high school in Canada, and reap the benefits that come with being streamed into the public education system. At the same time, she was too young to be competitive in the local job market. Unlike the majority of adult immigrants arriving in Canada, Rachida did not arrive already equipped with a post-secondary level education and a few years work experience under her belt. Her high-school degree was the only meaningful credential she had.

Facing limited career opportunities and the need to earn money, Rachida decided fairly early on to find a ‘survival’ job. In large part, that decision was taken with a view to contribute financially to the family economy. In her interview, she described how she had been looking for a restaurant job for some time without much success. It was not until she visited an Iraqi

103 Had Rachida been younger, her settlement experience would have followed an altogether different path. She would have entered the public high-school system in Surrey – which provides very strong support services for immigrant and refugee children, including career and counseling services, and language tutoring. Though not without its faults, the public-school system also provides strong opportunities for socialization and language learning typically not found in everyday society. Completing a high-school degree in Canada has the added benefit of better positioning immigrant children for a transition into post-secondary education. Her lack of strong English language skills, and local educational credentials made it also difficult for Rachida to enroll straight into a recognized post-secondary degree in Canada. For more on the school-to-work transition of immigrant youths see Wilkinson 2008.

104 Similarly, had Rachida been older she likely would have had a stronger educational and professional foundation on which to build. While many immigrants have to retrain once arriving to Canada, the retraining is usually facilitated by previous educational credentials and an established work history. In many cases, post-secondary institutions in Canada are able to transfer at least some credits onto local degrees, thus reducing the costs and timeline necessary for credential recognition. For more on the challenges facing non-university going immigrant youths see Yan et al. (2009).

105 Of the roughly155,000 recent immigrants living in Metro Vancouver in 2011, 63% were 25 years or older. Similarly, 64% of recent immigrants 15 years of age and over (living in Metro Vancouver in 2011) had a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree (Source: Census of Canada 2011)

106 Creese and Wiebe (2010) describe “survival employment” as a form of employment that one takes as a way to ensure basic economic survival, regardless of one’s professional or educational background. The authors point out that for newcomers survival jobs often denote a loss of social status and an experience of downward mobility. Survival jobs are by definition low-skilled, low wage, insecure and contingent.
restaurant in Surrey that she finally landed a job as a server. She believed her employer’s Middle-Eastern background played a key role in her ability to get hired: “The employers don’t hire you if someone is from another country, like not the same hm like if she’s Indian [Indo-Canadian] she’s not going to hire me … I worked seven months because my manager was from Iraq so he tried to help me, but otherwise I didn’t find a job (my emphasis).”

Rachida’s remarks point to two crucial dynamics shaping the participation of newcomers into the Canadian labour force. First, the presence of labour market discrimination based on race and ethnicity, an unfortunate reality that pits visible minorities against white, native-born Canadians, but also against other visible minority groups. Second, it highlights the importance of settling near co-ethnics as a way to facilitate entry into the labour market. These two dynamics have received considerable attention from scholars interested in the study of immigration in Canada, and also to a lesser extent from journalists and public policy analysts alike (Burnley and Hiebert 2001; Fong and Chan 2010; Gariba 2009; Hiebert 2015; Hou and Picot 2003; Lai and Huffey 2007; Pendakur 2005; Oreopoulos and Dechief 2011; Roth et al. 2011).

For Rachida, it was her shared language and cultural background that convinced the restaurant manager to help her by offering her a job. Establishing a connection through a shared homeland or geographic area produces a sense of familiarity and trust, allowing people to relate to a stranger’s plight in ways that may otherwise prove more difficult (Wu et al. 2012). By moving to Guildford, Rachida’s family was effectively able to tap into an established Middle-Eastern community and receive added support from which to facilitate entry into the labour force.

Time and again, study participants repeated that “knowing someone” was indispensable to securing work upon arriving to Canada. Because of their sheer numbers, this was especially true among Indo-Canadians living in Surrey. For instance, Harjinder explained the ease with which her father found work in Surrey: “there are a lot of people from our community, they have their own farms, and then they also have security jobs, they opened their own business, so, that's why it's easier for my dad to find work.” Similarly, Harjinder pointed out that her own brother was able to get hired as a truck driver through connections her father had made in Surrey. A senior manager for one of Surrey’s largest immigrant settlement agencies confirmed these views:
Nowadays if you look at affordability, Vancouver is quite expensive, less opportunities for employment. Surrey has better opportunities because entry level jobs because when people come to us we set goals for them, short term goals and long term goals […] 

 […] so, short term goals are, you can have hm transferable skills you have and hm because I have seen that hm I got calls from hm from you know accountants all the time hm they want some Punjabi, Indian hm South-Asian language speaking account people hm with account background if they are not hm they have not worked here but they worked back home as accountants so they can work under their supervision they can train them but they know they’ve worked with the figures so they can fit into that environment. So there’s entry level jobs that later on for people can hm have the target to become CGA, CA whatever and some people really do that so that’s the kind of example of how people can an entry level job here [in Surrey] , it's easier to get, and hm the language skills they bring from back home become an asset here because they are bilingual […] 

 […] so they and [unreadable] they have a native language with them that becomes an asset, because hm people want to have bilingual people who can understand English and who can understand another language as well, so entry level jobs hm it's easier to find an entry level job for them […] 

 […] one should find an entry level job and these jobs are easier to find here [in Surrey] you know, everything and plus like lots of community, every hm I would say every community here, and people can get in touch with them […] 

The above passage is telling for what it says about job opportunities in Surrey. Not only did the senior manager believe that employment prospects were good in Surrey, but he felt that they were actually better than in Vancouver – something that goes against much of what’s been written in the current literature on socio-spatial inequality which views lack of employment opportunities in the suburbs as a key risk of today’s socio-spatial divides. But unlike in the scholarly literature where such claims remain largely untested, the senior manager was speaking as someone with years of experience helping to connect newcomers to jobs. Not only this, but as an immigrant himself and as someone embedded in the local Indo-Canadian community in Surrey, he was speaking with a great deal of knowledge about local matters.

It’s worth noting, that the intent here, is not to delve into the intricate dynamics by which new immigrants enter the Canadian workforce. Nor is it to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of networks and social capital in facilitating access to employment opportunities. These issues have been the subject of extensive academic research (Maani et al. 2015; Nanavati 2009; Roth et al. 2011; Yan et al. 2009). Scholars have generated a great deal of knowledge about the strategies by which newcomers are able to find work in Canada, and the many barriers to employment –
including racism and discrimination – that visible minority and immigrant groups face as they start a new life in their host country (Bauder and Cameron 2012; Chun 2012; Creese et al. 2006; Galabuzi 2006; Hiebert 2009a; Hoe 2017; Kazemipur and Halli 2000; Pendakur 2005; Wilkinson 2008; Yan et al. 2012).

Rather, the goal here is to probe growing concerns about the spatial mismatch between people and work opportunities brought up in discussions about the changing geography of income and immigration in Canadian cities. Knowing what we now know about the importance of social networks in linking newcomers to job opportunities, and about the decentralization of jobs into the suburbs, it is clear that statements suggesting a heightened risk to people’s employment prospects often conceal a more complex reality. The type of work in which newcomers are employed is often precarious, yes, but it is not because of a lack in the availability of jobs in the suburbs. As stated above, if anything, both the ethnic networks that facilitate entry into the labour force, and entry-level low-skilled jobs are increasingly found in the suburbs, rather than the gentrifying urban core.

### 3.4.5 Making sense of current anxieties about limited opportunities in the suburbs

Concerns in the literature over the lack of ‘work opportunity’ in the suburbs stem in part from a confusion about the concepts of ‘availability,’ ‘accessibility,’ and ‘mobility.’ Urban scholars interested in the study of inequality and polarization in Canadian cities tend to use these terms loosely, and at times interchangeably – unlike, for instance, in transportation planning where these concepts are more rigorously defined (Litman 2012). In countless instances, the issue of a lack of job opportunities in the suburbs is brought up to illustrate the potential risks facing marginalized populations, when the more accurate issue at play is often one of ‘mobility’ – the physical act of traveling through space. As a result, the current literature tends to exaggerate the scarcity of employment opportunities that can be found in the suburbs. But this is not to say that commentators are wrong in suggesting that accessing a job in the suburbs can in fact prove challenging, especially to lower-income households who may not be able to afford a car (Lo et

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107 Cresswell (2006) defines ‘mobility’ in its most basic form as “the act of moving between locations (2).” For a more detailed treatment of the term see Envall 2007. For the purpose of this discussion ‘availability’ here simply refers to the number of jobs that are present in the suburbs.

108 This can be seen in Ley and Smith 2008; Ley and Lynch 2012; Walks 2010b.
This is because ‘mobility’ – how people get from A to B – can be an important barrier for those living in suburban municipalities. Suburbs face limited transportation options outside of private automobile use (Grant 2009). Public transit is often lacking, and the combined effect of a strict segregation of land uses, curvilinear street patterns, and sprawling distances make walking and public transit use difficult, especially when compared to more walkable inner-city neighbourhoods (Brewer and Grant 2015; Fiedler and Addie 2008; Filion et al. 2006). So, despite the growing number of suburban jobs, and the presence of social networks facilitating entry into the labour market, the physical act of commuting to work can indeed prove challenging.

There are at least two other ways in which to make sense of growing concerns about the jobs prospects available to newcomers in the suburbs. The first step is to contextualize the discussions around the changing geography of income inequality against a wider literature on gentrification, urban development, and the new economy of the inner city. The transition of inner-districts from gritty, poor minority neighbourhoods to high-end spaces dominated by affluent and educated professionals is, at this point, a well-known process (Hammel 2009; Lees et al. 2009; Ulusoy 2009). Over the past three decades scholars have documented the massive influx of private capital entering the urban core, and the transformation of the city’s economy by the rise of high-level service functions (Florida 2002; Hutton 2008; Ley 1996). Today, that growth is visible in the number of luxury condos, high-end retail, office space, urban amenities, and the concentration of high-paying, professional, managerial, and creative industry jobs located in the urban core (Lees et al. 2007).

It is in light of these changes, that one can start to see why a growing number of commentators are raising the spectre of economic isolation when describing growing suburban poverty and immigration. If well paid, middle- and upper-middle class jobs are increasingly found in the urban core what does that say for the multitude of more economically marginalized groups who are settling in the suburban outskirts. Will low-income newcomers today be able to experience upward social mobility if they settle straight into the suburbs? Or will they become cut off from

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109 I expand on this issue in the following chapter.
the kind of employment opportunities that can help them climb the proverbial socio-economic ladder?

These are valid considerations. But if commentators are justified in raising these concerns, they miss the point in at least one key respect. And that is in the way they overlook and downplay suburban job growth. As stated above, suburbs today have evolved – for the most part – into more than bedroom communities. The social and demographic changes seen in many suburbs today (increased ethno-cultural diversity, variance in household and family composition, income mix, etc.) have been accompanied by changes in the suburban economy (Mendez et al. 2014). Most apparent is the relocation of manufacturing and warehousing activities, but just as important is the growth in sectors that support middle-class jobs such as “Eds and Meds” (Education and medical institutions), government services (municipal, regional, provincial and federal levels), transport (port, railway, and airport activities), technology, surveying and construction, banking, and the like (Frey 2004; Weitz and Crawford 2012). Today’s suburbs are a lot more economically diverse than they were forty years ago, a reality that is further displayed in people’s commuting patterns. For instance, in Metro Vancouver, suburban residents today are much more likely to work in the same city in which they live – or commute to another suburb – than they are to commute into downtown Vancouver (Mendez et al. 2014; Translink 2007).

Another way to make sense of the anxieties raised regarding the job prospects of low-income people living in the suburbs is to situate these discussions in the context of more established debates about (a) concentrated neighbourhood poverty in American inner cities, and (b) the social and economic alienation in the French banlieues. Without a doubt, these two issues cast large shadows on current conversations about the changing geography of immigration and income inequality in Canadian cities.

In Canada, studies that look at where low-income and minority populations are located in urban space tend to use themes and analytical frameworks derived from the American context.

110 As a case in point, Mendez et al. 2014 found that industrial workers living in Vancouver’s inner city have longer average commute distances than workers employed in professional occupations. As the authors explain, this is largely a result of the decentralization of manufacturing and the centralization of professional jobs.
This is made clear in discussions about the settlement patterns of immigrants and cultural minorities in Canadian cities. Scholars tend to frame their analyses around the familiar themes of ‘segregation’ and ‘ghettoization’ asking such questions as ‘to what extent are these groups spatially segregated?’, ‘do we have ghettos in Canadian cities?’, and ‘is there an underclass of city dwellers who experience extreme socio-spatial isolation and intergenerational poverty?’ (Hiebert 2009b; Hiebert 2015; Ley and Germain 2000; Ley and Smith 1997b; Kazemipur and Halli 2000; Mendez 2009; Murdie 1998; Murdie and Ghosh 2010). In so doing, Canadian scholars are effectively applying to the Canadian context tropes and frameworks originally developed by American scholars to describe and explain concentrated poverty in Black inner-city neighbourhoods (Briggs et al. 2010; Jargowsky 1997; Massey and Denton 1993).

Central to discussions about race and urban poverty in America is a broader conversation about access to employment opportunities and job prospects. Wilson’s (1987) own ground-breaking work on race and poverty in the United States links the spatial patterning of urban disadvantage among Black populations to economic restructuring and the decentralization of work away from the inner city and into the suburbs. Informed by thirty years of American scholarship, scholars writing today about concentrated neighbourhood poverty in Canadian cities are raising similar questions about the spatial mismatch between jobs and people. This is especially visible in more recent conversations about neighbourhood-level poverty in the suburbs. But a major flaw of this approach is the way Canadian scholars tend to gloss over the nuances and complexities of suburban space, relying on a general, bird’s-eye view description of spatial inequality without ever quite delving into what these communities actually look like on the ground.111

Further complicating arguments about a disconnect between people and jobs in the suburbs, is the fact that urban scholars in Canada have largely dismissed the presence of urban ghettos, where the term is used to define poverty-stricken residential areas that experienced heightened depopulation, a near complete loss of institutions and systematic capital disinvestment (Freeman

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111 This is a point also made by Smith (2004, 32) who writes: “It is essential that investigations about the relationship between immigrants and concentrated disadvantage move beyond generalization and explore the subtle and not so subtle ways the dynamic differs both temporally and spatially at intra-urban and neighbourhood levels. This of course will require moving beyond the comfort zone of census tract analysis and taking the research to immigrants and neighbourhoods themselves.”
2006). Just as important, a ghetto is a residential area that both concentrates and contains a particular ethnic or racial group as a result of broader societal discrimination (Dib and Sriraman 2009; Walks and Bourne 2006). In this way, ghettos are considered the result of involuntary rather than voluntary spatial concentration (Hiebert et al. 2007; Marcuse 1997). While high-poverty neighbourhoods exist in Canadian cities, these are also more ethnically and economically diverse than what is typically understood to be an urban ghetto in its usual meaning (Hiebert 2005; Ley and Smith 1997a; Ley and Murphy 2001; Walks and Bourne 2006). In the context of today’s suburbs, scholars in Canada rightly point out the risks associated with concentrated neighbourhood poverty. But the assumptions made about social and economic isolation are largely influenced by a literature centred on the urban American experience, which is qualitatively different than the one in Canada, both historically and in its current dynamics.

As previously stated, scholars also approach the study of inequality and polarization in Canadian cities with an eye toward the French banlieue (Keil and Young 2011; Ley and Smith 1997a; Ley and Smith 1997b; Smith and Ley 2008). They do so for obvious reasons. Today’s pattern of an affluent, gentrifying urban core ringed by less affluent, more ethnically diverse suburbs closely parallels the familiar European model so often typified by the Parisian banlieue (Wacquant 1993). Much like Black, inner-city neighbourhoods in the United States, the banlieues – and its more specific moniker les cités (high-rise, low-income, public housing projects) – are economically depressed areas where intergenerational poverty, crime, and racial segregation dominate all aspects of everyday life. Combined with wider societal discrimination and racism, the results are heightened social isolation, distrust, and economic exclusion. Against this backdrop it is not difficult to see why scholars in Canada would raise alarms when considering the job prospects of marginalized populations living in high-poverty neighbourhoods in the

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112 Freeman (2006) eloquently describes the uniqueness of late twentieth-century American ghettos, arguing that what defined these spaces is the extent to which “so many people, institutions, and capital totally abandoned these neighbourhoods.” He points out that in the 1970s alone, Harlem lost nearly a third of its population, and with it much of its commercial enterprise. Equally important, middle-class residents who “formed a social buffer in the event of economic decline” left these areas en masse further contributing to the downward spiral of poverty. 113The closest thing to a ghetto in Canadian society is effectively the Indian reservation system. It is a system of coercion, constraint and discrimination targeted toward one specific ethnic group (First Nations). The very system was designed explicitly to segregate and contain First Nations into some of the most undesirable areas of the country with wide ranging and lasting implications for community health and wellbeing.

114 For an elegant look at the dynamics of everyday life in a Parisian banlieue see George Parker’s essay “The Other France” (The New Yorker, 2015).
suburbs. But much in the same way as with the American context, there are still remarkable differences – in local circumstances and dynamics – between the Parisian periphery and the suburbs of large Canadian cities such as Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal. Canadian suburbs retain a high degree of socio-economic diversity, and concentrated neighbourhood poverty – while present – is nowhere near the scale and depth of that observed in France or the United States (Bourne and Walks 2006).

To be sure, none of the respondents in this sample said that they specifically moved to Surrey for this or that job. Research participants shared occupations common with so many other newcomers arriving in Canada, jobs that were overwhelmingly low skilled, low pay and precarious (Block and Galabuzi 2011). It would be inaccurate to suggest that people are deliberately moving to the suburbs because of a desire to work a minimum wage job. It is more that the availability of low pay, entry level work makes the choice to settle in a suburb like Surrey a viable option. As a senior manager for a local settlement agency explained, access to entry-level work is for many newcomers part of broader strategy of economic integration.115 This is a dynamic that goes largely ignored in the literature on inequality and polarization which sees a move to the suburbs as just the opposite – economically marginalized households who become further isolated from job opportunities which are thought to be found in the inner city. Missing from current analyses is the idea that a move to the suburbs is in some ways a move aided by the availability of jobs in the periphery. So, while low-income immigrant populations are not deliberately moving to the suburbs because of job opportunities, the fact that a growing number of jobs are to be found in the suburbs, makes the choice to settle in the periphery a practical and sensible decision.

3.5 Beyond housing and employment: the other pulls of suburban life
What my research shows, is that the decision to settle near co-ethnics, alongside housing and employment considerations, are key to understanding the changes in the geography of income and immigration in the Greater Vancouver region. At play are not just ‘push factors’ streaming marginalized populations into the suburban periphery, but concrete ‘pull factors’ that make suburban residence a viable alternative to mainstream urban living. But my interviews with local

115 See section 4.4.4. in this chapter.
residents also show that the decision to settle in the suburbs extends beyond housing and employment considerations to include lesser-known – albeit still noteworthy – reasons.

For many respondents, access to nature, privacy and quiet streets were important and attractive qualities of suburban life. This speaks specifically to Surrey which, as an outer-ring suburb, boasts some of the region’s best and largest public parks. It is no coincidence that the city’s slogan for many decades – and up until recently – was “Surrey: The City of Parks.” Access to green space was especially important to young parents. This was true, for instance, for Natasha and Valeria, two friends from Russia – both mothers with young children – who immigrated to Canada at around the same time in 2013. They explained that the neighbourhood park was very important to them, both as a place to take their kids to play, and also as a place to meet other parents and socialize. Natasha explained:

Yes, I like parks in Surrey, it was maybe it was the big … the big part - I mean it influenced our decision why we did decided to live here, exactly in this region, because of the park, because near us we have three parks, and we can just walk to one, and walk to two, and it's, it's, because I have children it's very important for me, yeah. And actually that is why I like Surrey, hm, if I compare it with New West or Burnaby, Surrey has a lot of parks …

Asked about what she liked best about her neighbourhood, Valeria echoed similar sentiments:

Yes, I like hm my youngest kid is five years old, he was my baby, and hm I like parks here, it's Hawthorne park here, and Green Timbers parks, so it's all very close I can get by walk, hm, and so parks …

She went on to explain that:

Valeria: When I lived in Coquitlam I didn't have friends at all, I don't know why, but when we moved here to Surrey we … immediately met several families … which live in our neighbourhood. One family in park, more than one, one family in mall hm after that my close friend immigrated here from Vladivostok too …

Jacopo: Are there other places where you met people? Like community centres, library, church, school?

Valeria: Ah, new friends? I don't think so, not so much. Maybe the internet, social networks
Jacopo: Social media? Facebook?

Valeria: Yeah. But parks first of all, because when we go for a walk with our kids and as a family go for a walk with kids hm it's easier to start conversations

Jacopo: Kind of like when you have a dog?

Valeria: Yeah, haha, first place is parks, parks, stores not very common but, first of all is parks, and playgrounds.

The appeal of Surrey as a place with good access to green spaces was often talked about in relation to its quiet streets and quiet neighbourhoods. Further elaborating on what she liked about her neighbourhood, Valeria explained:

Valeria: It’s not a busy neighbourhood, not a lot of high-rises … I know now in Central Surrey and King George there are a lot of high-rises [chuckles]

Jacopo: you like the smaller buildings?

Valeria: Yes, but I like this small neighbourhood because it's not a lot of high-rises, yeah, and more like low-rises here … I like that sometimes I go by walk, hm here, so stores, parks, hm, quiet neighbourhood.

These types of remarks were common among respondents. Evgenia and Pavel – a middle-age couple from Moscow – described their neighbourhood as “peaceful”, “quiet” and “clean,” especially when compared to cities back home. At the time of our interview, the two were renting the upper floor of a house in a typical suburban residential street in North Surrey. Asked about whether they would rather have moved to a more central location closer to Vancouver, they said “maybe” but definitely not near or in Downtown Vancouver. They enjoyed the fact that Surrey was quieter and the traffic not as bad as in the urban core. Sandra, an immigrant from Colombia in her forties, shared a similar perspective. In Canada for just over a year, she and her husband were renting a basement suite in Guildford for about $800 a month. While her husband worked full time, she was taking English classes part time, and was also training at BCIT to become a Spanish language teacher – a far cry from her successful career as a municipal planner in Santiago del Cali. Though she grappled with her decision to immigrate, Sandra explained what she most appreciated about Canada was the quietness of her neighbourhood, the privacy, the lack of crowded spaces, and just the overall silence.
Others still emphasised that what they liked about Surrey was cheap parking, and the ‘big roads’ which made it easy to drive on them. Less congestion and less traffic were often brought up as unique benefits of settling in Surrey over Vancouver. A number of respondents went so far as to mention that a key benefit of where they lived was proximity to the highway, as it facilitated the commute to work.¹¹⁶

When asked about whether they were happy to be in Surrey, whether they saw themselves staying put, or whether they would prefer to move to a different municipality, the vast majority of respondents said they liked Surrey and were hoping to stay.¹¹⁷ For many residents, Surrey offered the right balance between housing costs, cultural diversity, and urban amenities.

Gabriela, like many other residents I spoke with, expressed such a sentiment. A native of Havana, Cuba, she arrived in Canada in 2015 having worked as a marketing executive assistant in her country’s large hospitality industry. At the time of our interview she was working a minimum-wage job as a housekeeper for a luxury hotel chain – in Downtown Vancouver – while

¹¹⁶ This was independently brought up by Narjis, Valeria and Natasha who explained that having quick access to the highway facilitated the commute to work. Ramanjit – a manager for a local immigrant settlement agency – mentioned the appeal of “wide roads” for newcomers settling in Surrey. The sentiment was shared by Ranbir, Suhana and others.

¹¹⁷ This sentiment was expressed by many people in various ways. Sometimes it was a brief statement as when Teodoro said with great conviction “Oh yeah, I like it here. I will retire here.” Asked about whether he would consider moving away from North Surrey, Teodoro elaborated: “Hmm, not really, I like it here, in terms of accessibility, I have my friends, I have my store, I have the, the transportation services, that kind of thing … the library is here, the mall is here, the park is here … there's buses are all at the intersections all the time, and plus the Skytrain, that kind of thing, now, going to the airport, I don't need, I don't need to drive a car, because I can just jump on the Skytrain, and zip, and I'll be there at the airport uh huh.” Others such as Ranbir expressed considerable appreciation for Surrey even when compared to Vancouver: “Yes, I would love to stay in Surrey for a long time, yeah, because like when you go to Vancouver people are saying ‘Surrey is this, Surrey is that’ kind of thing, but I didn't find that kind of thing, I always loved Surrey, I like staying in Surrey … yeah you're living here for last three years plus, and you know all the systems and stuff, City as well, that's why, yeah.” Others still such as Kanchana described how they had everything in Surrey (grocery stores, schools, jobs, services, etc.) and relied little on Vancouver, in fact she had only been in Vancouver twice since arriving to Canada. Unlike Ranbir, Kanchana was matter of fact in her view toward Surrey, but was still happy to stay there: “Maybe we can move, because again we're in a rented house so it's not our very own place, so, if we would have an opportunity, but for like the first three or four years I don't want to move anywhere else, because in Surrey you get to see all types of [unintelligible], we have the good Indian food here [chuckles] and it's close to my daughter's school, so we don't want to, I don't want to change it, let's see what the future shapes up to, maybe if we're letting an opportunity that's extremely good and we need to move cities, then we might do it.” Similarly, asked about whether she liked Surrey and wanted to stay Harjinder replied “In Surrey yeah, because here I feel like in future there will be more opportunity like here, I feel I know Surrey, because Vancouver is really more like it's more expensive than Surrey. Surrey is also getting expensive but I've live here for three years and I know about the rules, so everything it's like kind of hm there's less traffic, we don't have to pay hm for parking and everything so yes.” Sandra also spoke fondly of her neighbourhood: “I think where I live is a good place, is a good neighbourhood, is quiet, hm, is near the library, the community centre, to my garden, to my school, we have all service, it is good.”
studying part time at KPU – a community college in Surrey. She was in her late twenties, single and was in the process of moving from East Clayton – where her cousin lived – to Surrey City Centre.

Asked about what she thought of Surrey and whether she was happy to continue to live here or whether she wanted to move to a different city, she said:

I consider Surrey a good place to live, quiet, with hm family environment. I think you can find everything that you need hm what I mean is you can find the places to get your food, you can find the places to get your clothes, your basic things to live hm also I like the programs the library, the community centres.

Gabriela went on to explain the value of some of the amenities available in the community:

Like for example I went to the library in Surrey Central, and I saw a lot of brochures talking about conversations in English to help newcomers, [workshops] etc. with the idea to help people improve their English skills, and for me that is super good. It's a good initiative. Hm, also in the community centres, the different activities related with the sports, but everything is to make people [integrate] with the people in the community, with the Canadian culture … that is a good opportunity to interact with other people hm that is a good opportunity to learn English, that is a good opportunity to hm even to find a new job, because talking with the people, the people talk to you 'Ha you know what, in my company we need someone' and that kind of interaction, also the people they share with you the experiences they’ve had here in Canada, personal experiences.

In a second interview, I asked Gabriela again what she thought about Surrey, and whether she was looking at all to move to a more centrally located area such as Vancouver, Burnaby or even New Westminster. She was after all working in Downtown Vancouver, and was now enrolled to study at the Vancouver Community College [VCC] – also Downtown. She again related to me the convenience of living in North Surrey.

It will be more convenient for me here [living in Surrey Gardens] because I told you the distance between my building to Surrey Central [i.e. the Skytrain] is short, so if I have to study at VCC it is more convenient for me to stay here. If my situation become very, very difficult I will consider moving closer to New West or Burnaby, but for now I'm ok, I'm ok. Actually, I like this area I think Surrey is a city that is growing so fast, so fast … a lot of people they decide to come from Downtown to Surrey. There’s a lot of movement, you know, because of the [housing] prices, but the problem is the prices here they are going so high too, so, it depends on the needs of the people, the priorities of the people.
But in my case I have another point, my family [i.e. her cousin and her cousin’s husband] lives here in Surrey and so for me it’s important to be close to them because in case of any emergency it is better to have my family close to me you know, my classmates and the group of friends that I created at KPU [Kwantlen Polytechnic] they live in Surrey too.

So also, some of my classmates they are in the same situation, they are trying to find places to live close to KPU, to live close to the Skytrain, and we exchange experience. We try to help each other. Actually, some of my classmates, my closer classmates they are going to help me with the moving, and yes, things like that, you know. So, it’s important for me to create my group, my home environment here, you know, family, yes.

Gabriela’s response, shared by so many other residents, illustrates the qualities that contribute to making Surrey an appealing place in which to settle for countless newcomers like her. It is a “good place to live,” “quiet,” and family friendly. One can find everything one needs: shops, grocery stores, community services, and recreational amenities. The city has a rapid transit system and various post-secondary institutions. Perhaps more importantly, and overlooked in the literature, are the personal and community networks people are able to tap into or establish over time as they make a new life for themselves in Canada.

3.6 Conclusion:
Interpretations that frame current socio-spatial divides as purely the result of people getting priced out from the central city are incomplete. A more complex reality lies behind the recent changes in the geography of income and immigration observed in Canadian urban areas. While current studies emphasise a narrative of isolation, exclusion, and unequal access to opportunities, these are not fully consistent with experiences of local residents. Interviews with lower-income newcomers reveal that many are just as likely to speak of their decision to settle in Surrey in fairly positive terms, choosing to emphasise the benefits that come with life in the suburbs. Rather than seeing themselves as casualties of rising real estate prices, many respondents I spoke with talked about their decision to settle in Surrey as a deliberate and strategic choice, whether as a way to tap into social networks, access employment opportunities, or secure more affordable housing. And while the line between push and pull factors isn’t always a clear one, studies that frame the rise of low-income minority neighbourhoods in the suburbs as purely a story of displacement are simplistic. This is not to deny the challenges and barriers that come with settling in suburban areas, something which will be discussed in the next two chapters.
Chapter 4: Challenges: Getting around in the suburbs

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 4, the rise of low-income and minority neighbourhoods in the urban periphery cannot be solely interpreted as a story of people getting ‘pushed out’ from the central city. Life in the suburbs does not merely present heightened vulnerability to economically marginalized populations. Many respondents in my sample framed the decision to move to Surrey as a strategic choice, something that goes overlooked in the existing literature on inequality and polarization in Canadian cities. As people settle in the suburbs they tap into established community and social networks, and they enter communities that have diversified immensely in the past three to four decades. Long gone are the days – if they ever did exist – of the white, middle-class suburban bedroom community, where male household providers would commute to white-collar jobs downtown (Harris and Lewis 2001; Jackson, 1985; Lewis 2004). Most suburbs today have evolved into fully fledged cities with their own employment centres, industrial districts, community amenities, social services, and culturally and socially diverse populations (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2010). Indeed, sprawling, low-density residential and commercial areas still exist in today’s suburbs, but they do so alongside more urban environments.

This does not mean, however, that there are no downsides to suburban life, especially when more economically marginalized populations are considered. The challenges are real, and unique to suburban spaces, though also poorly understood and largely unexamined, especially in Canada. Given what is known about the effects of concentrated neighbourhood poverty, commentators are justified to raise alarms about the potential risks of the changing geography of income and immigration in Canadian cities. As Smith (2004) points out, quantitatively-oriented analyses are not enough to make sense of the rise of immigrant poverty in the periphery, or enough to describe its manifestation at the local level. How is the experience of being a low-income person in the suburbs unique from the experience of being poor in the inner city? How does disadvantage manifest itself and operate at the neighbourhood scale? To understand these questions, and to make sense of people’s potential experiences of social isolation or exclusion it
is necessary to introduce qualitative approaches that prioritize personal experience and local knowledge.

In the next two chapters, I make the case that life in the suburbs does create unique challenges for historically marginalized populations. Recognizing the myriad of barriers lower-income newcomers face as they try to find footing in Canadian society, I focus on those aspects that make life in the suburbs unique from that in more urban environments. This chapter zooms in on mobility and transportation challenges, the most dominant and recurrent themes in my conversations with local residents. I detail how disadvantage manifests itself at the local neighbourhood scale by showing how transit access becomes an increasingly scarcer link to opportunity for those with limited economic resources. Research shows that poor transit options disproportionately affect low-income minorities who have the most to gain from a reliable and efficient transportation system (Allen and Farber 2019; Lucas 2012; Welch 2013). For those without the means to buy a car or who cannot drive, access to reliable public transit can be as important as securing housing and employment (Blumenberg and Ong 2001; Lo et al. 2011; Sanchez et al. 2004). As the number of low-income and minority households grow in the suburbs, the findings of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 give ample reason to reflect on the risks that marginalized groups face as they settle in suburban areas.

4.2 Transport Disadvantage

As a field of academic study, transportation planning has largely been defined by positivist approaches, giving only tangential attention to broader political and social justice dimensions, if not dismissing these altogether (Beyazit 2011; Keblowski et al. 2016; Martens 2016; Pereira et al. 2017). But the link between transport and equity has been recognized for some time, going back to at least the 1960s. For instance, Wachs and Kumagai (1973) examined the link between mobility and socio-economic inequality in the US. In a breakthrough study on residential segregation, Kain (1968) identified key barriers to employment opportunities (including transportation costs) for Blacks living in American inner cities. Harvey (1973) recognized the role of transportation infrastructure in facilitating access to needed services and activities – especially jobs. In the UK, Banister and Hall (1981) noted the importance of transport services in determining social outcomes for different segments of society. Evidence of the link between
transport and social justice is also found in well-known historical events, perhaps most notably the civil rights movement (Sanchez et al. 2003). The arrest of Rosa Parks in 1955 and the ensuing Montgomery Bus Boycott, as well as opposition to urban renewal schemes – dubbed “Negro Removal” by many in the Black community – were all intimately linked to state and federal transportation policies. But it’s only since the late 1990s and early 2000s that a distinct body of research started to get built around the concept of transport disadvantage, a catch-all term used to describe disadvantages imposed by such things as poor public transit, not having a car, long travel distances, etc. (Allen and Farber 2019; Currie and Delbosc 2011b; Lucas et al. 2012). In the past ten to fifteen years significant contributions have been made to this field.

Some scholars have studied the link between transport and job opportunities, usually with a focus on the effects of low transit accessibility on employment outcomes (Fransen et al. 2018; Khattak et al. 2000; Merlin and Hu 2017; Sanchez 1999). Others have concentrated on the transport/mobility challenges of night-time workers (McArthur et al. 2019; Ortiz Escalante 2017). Attention has also been given to the transport disadvantages of women (Ceccato 2017; Parks 2004; Smith 2008), the elderly and the disabled (Páez and Farber 2012; Schmöcker et al. 2008), recent immigrants (Blumenberg 2009; Blumenberg and Smart 2011; Farbert et al. 2018; Klein and Smart 2017), and low-income populations (Blumenberg and Ong 2001; Delbosc and Currie 2011a; Pendall et al. 2014; Welch 2013).

The bulk of the literature on transport disadvantage – which tends to be divided between a UK and a US focus – is situated within a broader discussion about ‘social exclusion’. This focus is explained in part by the field’s association with the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), a government taskforce set up in the late 1990s to address social exclusion in the UK (Hine and Mitchell 2003). While there is little agreement on the exact meaning or definition of social exclusion, the term can be broadly understood to describe the inability of people to fully participate in community

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118 For an in-depth exploration of the link between social justice and planning in the context of the civil rights movement see Thomas (2012).

119 There is no single agreed definition of the term ‘transport disadvantage’ (Currie and Delbosc 2011b). In fact, different but overlapping terminologies can be found throughout the literature, including ‘transport/mobility poverty’, ‘accessibility poverty’, ‘transport-related social exclusion’, and ‘transport/mobility inequity’ (Lucas et al. 2016). Research on transport disadvantage tends to be organized around two key contributing factors: the transport system and urban forms (e.g. limited public transit), or the characteristics of the disadvantaged populations (e.g. people without cars) (Currie and Delbosc 2011b).
life, whether in social, cultural, economic or political terms (Lucas 2012). Research out of the Social Exclusion Unit – especially its 2003 report – set the stage for thinking about social exclusion through a distinctive transportation lens (Social Exclusion Unit 2003). So while, concepts like ‘transport/mobility disadvantage’, ‘transport poverty’ and ‘transport-related social exclusion’ can be understood in different ways and endlessly redefined, they are ultimately rooted in concepts of distributional justice, and the idea of ‘equitable access’ (Pereira et al. 2017). Because of this, ‘accessibility’ has become the dominant angle by which transport disadvantage is studied today, with transportation scholars creating a myriad of indexes, metrics and coefficients measuring various aspects of people’s access to jobs, services, goods, daily activities, and the like (Lucas 2012; Martens 2016; Preston and Rajé 2007).

By and large this literature is heavily reliant on quantitative methodologies, with most studies examining the interaction or strength of the relationships between various statistical variables. Approaches have revolved around such techniques as structural equation modelling (e.g. Currie and Delbosc 2011), GIS space analysis (e.g. Delmelle and Casas, 2016), and linear and non-linear regression (e.g. Mercado et al., 2012; Morency et al., 2011). Studies tend to rely on national-level datasets (e.g. census), local travel data and enhanced GIS-based instruments (Lucas et al. 2018). The quantitative slant of transport disadvantage literature does not diminish its contribution to scholarship, as scholars in this field have generated valuable findings. For instance, through a weighted regression analysis of 95,000 personal records, Khattak et al. (2000) found that residents of low-income urban neighborhoods in the US had longer commutes than their counterparts living in low-income suburban neighborhoods (Kain 1995). In a study of six American cities, Sanchez et al. (2004) found no meaningful relationship between increased access to public transit and positive employment outcomes for low-income residents on social assistance. In contrast, Baum (2009) found that American single-mothers on welfare were

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120 Transportation planning has seen a shift away from a traditional focus on ‘mobility’ to a focus on ‘accessibility’. Mobility-oriented analysis has historically evaluated transport system performance based on quantity and quality of physical travel, without giving much attention to broader accessibility considerations (Litman 2019). Because of this mobility-based approaches tend to favour faster modes of travel over slower modes of travel, thus putting an emphasis on motorists over non-drivers (Litman 2019). A growing number of transportation planners have been calling for accessibility-based approaches as a way to better capture the factors affecting people’s ability to access desired services and activities (Litman 2003, 2012). This is complicated by the fact that the concept of ‘mobilities’ has been reclaimed by social scientists, especially sociologists and urban geographers, as a valuable analytical construct to explore the movement of people (see Cresswell 2006, 2011; Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2000).
significantly more likely to become employed and increase their earnings if they owned a private vehicle (i.e. a car).

Current research overwhelmingly relies on large datasets (often at the national scale) to assess the correlation between different statistical measures. But where it falls short is in considering the perspectives of those who actually experience mobility and transportation challenges, making it difficult to examine the finer-grain details of what transport disadvantage looks like on the ground for everybody. While this gap has gone largely unnoticed in transport literature, a handful of scholars have indeed recognized it. For example, Rajé (2017, 2) has called for the need to hear directly from low-income minorities, noting that their voices are all too often mediated “through the looking glass of transport experts and policy gurus.” She goes on to argue that the complexities around journeying and travel behaviour are greatly under-discussed in the existing literature. Key to her argument is the idea that mathematical instruments, however sophisticated, cannot fully represent the “moving landscape of public transport opportunity (55).” For instance, she challenges the assumption – common in travel behaviour studies – that all residents have equal and ready access to public movement and public spaces. Or the assumption that individuals freely determine whether to make a trip and where to make it. Rajé (2017, 49) rightly points out that “in practice, there are significant limitations on who can make a trip, where to and with whom,” and that complex bargaining over access to travel and decision making tends to occur within all households, especially ethnically diverse households who are likely to follow different norms and cultural rules around travel behaviour (e.g. who gets to drive a car and for what purpose).

But Rajé (2017) also takes issue with the way accessibility is assessed in traditional transport research, noting the gulf between lived experience and the representation of public transport systems in terms of such metrics as frequency of buses per hour or access to bus stops. For instance, she points out that “waiting for the bus is not a simple business.” A lack of shelter, sitting area or scheduling information can create barriers to people’s abilities to access transit. As can a threatening social context, inadequate lighting, or the removed location of transit exchanges, where a lack of nearby private businesses or amenities might make it difficult for a traveler to seek safety in time of need. What these observations point to is the need to move beyond indexes and metrics and incorporate ‘soft’ data and qualitative approaches capable of
capturing different aspects of transport disadvantage, particularly those dimensions that shed light on the complex, often messy, and nitty-gritty experience of getting around in actual places.

Following this line of inquiry, the next few sections will examine some of the everyday transportation and mobility challenges that newcomers face as they settle in Surrey. I give particular attention to the lived experience of getting around in the suburbs as told from the perspective of local residents themselves.

4.3 Circuitous routes, infrequent service and limited coverage

Among the most pressing issues facing the growing population of lower-income newcomers in Surrey is access to adequate transportation options. As a suburb, Surrey covers an area of over 300 square kilometres, about three times the area covered by the city of Vancouver.\textsuperscript{121} Travelling from North Surrey to South Surrey entails a fifty-kilometre round trip – as the crows flies. Despite rapid urbanization, the city continues to contain large swaths of undeveloped agricultural land, making parts of Surrey resemble that of a rural community more than a major metropolitan city. Time and time again, residents related to me the mobility and transportation challenges involved in navigating such a sprawling landscape.

Transportation challenges were especially apparent for people needing to access employment opportunities in harder-to-reach light-industrial areas. As discussed in Chapter 4, the suburbs have become a major source of employment for newcomers looking for low-skilled entry-level work. Warehousing and manufacturing activities have decentralized significantly in the past few decades, and many of the jobs associated with these sectors are now found in the urban periphery. But the combination of isolated locations coupled with a poor transit system makes these jobs difficult to get to even for those workers who live in outlying suburban areas (Tomer 2012).

\textsuperscript{121} For a comparison more useful to an American audience, the entire island of Manhattan spans a land area of approximately 60 square kilometres, meaning that the area covered by the 260 odd-blocks from Battery Park to Inwood would fit five times in the city of Surrey.
At issue are circuitous bus routes, infrequent transit service, and limited service coverage area. Collectively, these factors converge to make people’s daily commutes unnecessarily long, draining and stressful. But gaps in public transit not only impact people’s quality of life, they also create barriers to employment for newcomers who are striving to get a foothold into the local labour market. This point is relevant because places which facilitate people’s mobility in physical space have been shown to also facilitate upward economic mobility (Chetty et al. 2014; Tomer et al. 2011). Urban scholars are right to point out that lower-income households are increasingly concentrated in neighbourhoods with poor access to public transit (Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Walks 2010b). But the specifics of what it actually means to have ‘poor access’ to transit go largely unexamined in the existing Canadian literature. As I show in the following section, it’s not just that lower-income residents in the suburbs live some distance away from public transit stops, but that that transit itself runs infrequently, area coverage is limited, and bus routes circuitous. To more fully understand how neighbourhood disadvantage operates at the local scale one needs to consider the specific ways in which residents rely on transit to get around. It is not enough to say that residents lack good access to transit, one needs to examine the specific gaps in service relative to people’s everyday needs.

Even those analyses that attempt to account for how transportation issues impact marginalized groups in the suburbs are fairly limited. Consider Lo et al.’s (2015) pioneering study on vulnerability in the suburbs – the first and to date sole in-depth analysis of its kind in Canada. Transportation issues are peripheral to the core of the book whose focus is on housing infrastructure, and education/employment/settlement services. When considered, transportation is reduced to three statistical variables: (a) the mode of transportation used to access x service.

122 For instance, Hulchanski (2010) finds that those neighbourhoods in Toronto with the lowest average income also have the poorest access to Toronto Transit Commission’s subway stations.

123 There is surprisingly little in-depth empirical research on public transit service and its use in Canadian suburbs, especially as it related to economically marginalized populations. Authors who touch on the topic tend to lapse into sweeping generalizations – which though not necessarily incorrect, are not all that illuminating. For instance, writing about Toronto, Keil and Young (2008b, 740) state “the connections with residential communities and business centres by public transit are highly insufficient.” In regards to infrastructure and the ‘in-between city’ these same authors allude to the challenge of public transportation in the suburbs by writing, “The usual suburban disconnectivities (like lack of public transit) are added to by a sparse social service infrastructure, and auto-city hurdles (Keil and Young 2010, 92).” Similarly, in his essay on social polarization and neighbourhood inequality Walks (2010b) writes, “while elite neighbourhoods and gentrifying inner-city neighbourhoods have seen average per capita incomes grow substantially, much of the inner suburban area, particularly in the northeast and northwest of the amalgamated city that are most isolated from the core and from public transit, has suffered income decline over the last 35 years (my emphasis).” In other words, the lack of public transit services in the suburbs is something that is widely accepted in the literature but also largely unexamined.
(car, transit, walking), (b) the amount of time taken to reach x service, and (c) the distance – measured as a straight line – between the place of residence and x service. In and of themselves, these are perfectly good data, but as the authors admit, they provide a limited picture of transportation dynamics facing vulnerable populations in the suburbs. This type of quantitative approach to transportation research, while useful, is also narrow, for it fails to capture the nitty-gritty, everyday mechanisms that make the act of getting around by public transit in the suburbs challenging or inefficient.\textsuperscript{124} Interviews with local residents do a much better job of illuminating what it means, in practice, to rely on public transit as a way to get from A to B in the suburbs. They shed light on the everyday – often mundane – challenges that newcomers face as they travel through suburban spaces. Without considering these aspects it becomes difficult to present targeted policies capable of addressing the broad spectrum of challenges observed at the community level.

Consider Rajpal’s experience as a case in point. Introduced earlier, Rajpal immigrated to Canada, from India, with his wife and daughter in 2016. The family initially stayed with his sister in-law, and then moved to a basement suite in Newton. Upon arriving in Surrey, he quickly found a job stacking shelves – for an online retailer – in a large warehouse on Annacis Island.\textsuperscript{125} The work was physical and the hours long – Rajpal’s shift would start at 7am and finish at 5:30pm (ten hours plus a thirty-minute unpaid break). He described his warehouse job at various points in our interview saying:

\begin{quote}
It was a very rough job, I have to work lot with my muscles, and all that, yes … when I was working there, when usually I come over home, I used to totally lay down on the bed, because it was not, not, very easy …
\end{quote}

And again:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{124} The limitations of Lo et al.’s approach can be seen by the conclusions the authors draw from their analysis of these three variables. The authors conclude that suburban residents don’t tend to live a walking distance from services, that residents travel long distances and take a considerable amount of time to reach needed services, and that immigrants have higher rates of transit ridership than native-born Canadians (also see Lo et al. 2011). Again, it’s not that these are bad findings, it is just that they are not particularly informative or illuminating.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{125} Part of the municipality of Delta, Annacis Island is a manmade island in the Fraser River which opened in 1955 as Canada’s first industrial park. The island, which measure approximately 6 sqkm, is connected to Delta via the Alex Fraser Bridge, and to New Westminster via the Annacis Channel Bridge. To get a sense of its size consider that Granville Island – Vancouver’s industrial hub for the first half of the twentieth-century – covers a land area of only about 0.2sqkm.
\end{quote}
It was very tough, they, there was just like a dictating company, they used to watch each and every minute of yours, that you are sitting idle or that, and how much. Basically, I have to store all the [unintelligible, 'goods'?] to the shelf, like this, so they give the items, and I have to store under different racks, so hm so they were very particular that how much products are you putting on the shelves in each minute, and what mistake are you doing. So they kept on marking, there already mental pressures, even, even with the physical pressure. They’re also tending to give us physical as well as mental pressures, because if you are getting poor performance, they're giving notice to you, and there is very insecurity, because if you do some mistakes they're giving some letter warning and you're fired, totally fired, if you go beyond certain areas, then you're totally fired, so ...

And again here:

At that time, I was literally forcing me to do the job, because at the moment I was there to go and get a job, and I said I'm not able to do, do this work anymore, because I'm very much pressured, and my own life is getting ruined.

As the above passages attest, Rajpal’s job was physically demanding and mentally draining. To make all this even worse, the threat of dismissal hung over his head constantly. If the stress and physical toll of Rajpal’s job wasn’t enough, a protracted and circuitous commute only contributed to making his day that much more of a grind.

Jacopo: When did you have to leave the house?

Rajpal: Hm 6am, yeah, because I was [unintelligible] the bus, yeah, five thirty to six.

Jacopo: What bus were you taking?

Rajpal: Yeah, I take the 340 [at Wade and 120st Street] then you have, then I walk to the [unintelligible, 'urban'?] place, there was an [unintelligible] bus 104 that drops near, near our company, 340 then 104, but by walking the route was not so good, so I used to take lifts from some of my colleagues [after work], so they dropped us to the direct 340 stop, then I take bus, because 104 bus service was very poor, yeah, and that was the bus who takes from company to main bus stop, so it was quiet, in the island [Annacis Island], so not too much bus service over there

Jacopo: Where did you have to switch bus? Where did you catch the 104 bus?

Rajpal: From Chester road, yes, Cliveden Avenue and Chester Road.

Jacopo: So is the bus stop in the middle of nowhere? Are there any shops there, or?

Rajpal: No, no, there are warehouses, and the big companies over there, mainly warehouses, the total area is for warehouses and industries, lots of industries, and main logistics companies, big, big warehouses and other [unintelligible].
Jacopo: So those must have been some really long days?

Rajpal: Yes, I used to get out from our house at 5:30am not 6am, 5:30am, and I used to come back home at 6:30pm so almost 13 hours was devoted to job only.

Jacopo: Sorry you said you came home at 6:30pm?

Rajpal: 6:30pm, because the 340 bus I catch at 5:55-50pm, so it almost takes a half hour after getting 340 bus.

Rajpal – who lacked a car – relied on public transit as his primary way to get to work. Occasionally, he would get a lift from a co-worker. As is often the case in the suburbs, especially in more isolated industrial areas – transit service is both sparse and infrequent. The commute took about an hour (each way), and Rajpal had to take two buses to get to work. Not to mention the fact, that one bus took him all the way to New Westminster – a substantial and unnecessary detour (see Map 5.1).\(^{126}\)

Because of a limited transit network, it is common for transit users in the suburbs to rely on one or more connecting buses to get to their destination. But making transit connections, especially when the service is infrequent, increases the risk of delays, and results in commutes that are longer, more stressful, and generally more unpleasant (Chakrabarti 2017). This was the case for Rajpal whose connecting bus stop was located in a remote, nondescript industrial park just off Highway 91, an area that lacks even basic sidewalk infrastructure.

\(^{126}\) New Westminster is a municipality located northwest of Surrey across the Fraser River.
Rajpal’s Commute to Annacis Island: Recap

- Takes two connecting buses to get to work:
  - #340 22nd Street Station (runs every 15 minutes at peak times)
  - #104 Annacis Island (runs every 20 minutes at peak times)

- Leaves the house at 6:00am

- Arrives at his workplace at 6:48am (with ten minutes to spare before the start of his shift)

- The route covers a total of 10 km (and 15km on the way back)

- Waits for connecting bus just off Highway 91

- Leaves work at 5:30pm (hops on the #104 at either 5:35pm or 5:50pm)

- Transfers at 22nd Station in New Westminster, and catches the #340 at 6pm
  - Arrives home at 6:30pm (or 6:45pm if misses first bus)

Figure 4.1: Map of Rajpal’s commute to Annacis Island

Map designed by the author
In Surrey, low-income and immigrant households use public transit at significantly higher rates than their peers. Public transit-use among newcomers can in part be explained by lower-income levels – though cultural dimensions are also likely to be an important factor (Blumenberg and Shiki 2006; Chatman and Klein 2013; Heisz and Schellenberg 2004; Lo et al. 2011). The costs of owning a car are substantial, and immigrant households often postpone the decision to buy a private vehicle until after having successfully integrated into the labour market (Heisz and Schellenberg 2004). Even as family members start to climb the socio-economic ladder, public transit often continues to be the primary way by which people get to and from work. As such, the transportation challenges created by a substandard transit network persist through the years. Again, consider Rajpal’s experiences. Within a few months Rajpal was able to secure a relatively better position working at a commercial bakery, in an area of Delta located just southwest of Annacis Island. The pay was better as were the hours. But despite having a better work schedule (8:30am to 5pm), getting to and from work without a car was still a real challenge for Rajpal:

Jacopo: And now you work in a bakery?

Rajpal: Yes,

Jacopo: Where is it?

Rajpal: It is also in Delta, but it is on Progress Way, it is also an industrial area, very big industries, especially logistics companies over there, but it is in Delta, but it is on a different way um far side from I think the way goes on 17 Highway I think, yeah, Progress Way.

Jacopo: And you still take the bus?

Rajpal: Yeah, there is a guy who gives me the lift now, so he’s very um he’s also Punjabi but he’s quite the [unintelligible], generally he gives me the lift otherwise I have to catch bus by 7:15am because there is no bus, I have to punch in 8am exact, 8:30, so if I miss the bus I will be going to pay only, I will be cutting my fifteen minutes, so I usually take the 7:15am bus and I have to change two buses.

Jacopo: Ok, and what are the buses?

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127 As the years pass, newcomers are more likely to assume the travel behavior of native-born residents, and thus drive. Nonetheless, in the first five to ten years of residence, newcomers continue to have higher rates of transit ridership than other groups (Blumenberg and Shiki 2006; Blumenberg 2009). Blumenberg and Smart (2011) found that even after twenty years in the United States, immigrants were less likely to own and use automobiles relative to their US-born counterparts.
Rajpal: 676 first to the Ladner direction [now the 310] I have to go all the way to Ladner Exchange and then from there 640 bus it is from Ladner to Scott Road Station via Progress Way Delta so it is a different bus, yeah, a special bus for Delta area, like 104 bus is also special bus, only bus that is running in Delta Annacis [Island] and this is the only bus that goes to the Progress Way.

Jacopo: I see.

Rajpal: But there both of the similar situation. The second bus is very rare. Like the 104 here is 640. Then I miss my bus I have to wait 30 minutes more, and usually I miss my bus because the time is 5:06pm when I use to get out of the company, the bus is quite [unintelligible] to the time, because there are less stops, less passengers in the stops, so they keep on moving, yeah, so sometimes I miss my buses, so, that’s all, but now I manage to take a lift from the guy, the Punjabi guy, almost he give me a lift, when he is some [unintelligible] work, I use to take my bus.

**Rajpal’s Commute to Progress Way: Recap**

- Takes two connecting buses to get to work:
  - #676 Ladner Exchange (runs every 20 minutes)
  - #640 Scott Road Station (runs every 30 minutes)

- Leaves the house at 7:10am

- Arrives at his workplace at 8:05am (or a good 25 minutes before he is due to punch in at 8:30am)

- The route covers a total of 24 km

- Travels all the way west to the Ladner Exchange, a significant detour

- Leaves work at 5:05pm (waits 30 minutes for the #640 bus, only bus in the area)

- Catches connecting #676 bus at the Ladner Exchange at 6pm

- Arrives home at 6:30pm
Rajpal’s commuting patterns illustrate some of the inefficiencies common to public transit in the suburbs, and in particular the difficulty in accessing light-industrial areas. Each day, Rajpal allocated between two to three hours of his time to commuting purposes. Both the commute to Annacis Island and the commute to Progress Way were needlessly circuitous – one route took him all the way to New Westminster, and the other to Ladner (see Map 5.1 and Map 5.2). Making matters worse, was the frequency of bus service. To get to work, Rajpal relied on buses that ran only every 20 to 30 minutes at peak hours, which meant that he would show up to work earlier than needed (or else be late for work), and leave to go home later than expected.\footnote{128 It is very likely that despite arriving to work twenty-five minutes ahead of schedule, Rajpal was not allowed to punch in early. This is because employers do not want their workers to rack up billable overtime. In some cases, employers will go so far as to penalize anyone who punches in more than five minutes before their shift, or anyone who punches in late.}

Circuitous bus routes, and infrequent transit service were not the only things contributing to a challenging commute. Suburban areas, but especially light-industrial districts and business parks, are notorious for their lack of public transit options (Tomer 2012). The actual service area
covered by transit is limited, as illustrated by Rajpal’s comments. The 640 bus is the only bus capable of reaching North Delta’s industrial district at Progress Way. The same is true for the 104 bus on Annacis Island. No other alternative bus routes are available to people needing to access these areas for work and other purposes. Limited service is in part attributed to the fact that planners and municipalities have been slow to adapt to changes in regional commuting patterns. Suburb-to-suburb commuting is overtaking the once-dominant suburb-to-CBD commuting, but investment in transit infrastructure has not kept up with these changes (Murray 1993; TransLink 2007). In addition, the dominant expectation among many elected officials and planners alike is that workers in light-industrial areas will get to work by car, further curbing any efforts at providing stronger transit options to these areas (Tomer 2012).

But Rajpal’s narrative reveals yet another challenge typical of suburban areas such as Surrey: seldom can people rely on a direct bus route to get to their destination. Most often, people must rely on multiple buses to get around, a reality which can be attributed to limited transit service, and to the sheer distance covered by residents of suburban areas. The downside is that infrequent bus service makes the act of taking more than one bus a major hurdle for transit users, a trend also confirmed in Rajé’s (2004) case study of Bristol, UK. In that study, Rajé found high levels of indirect journeys among the city’s immigrant population. The need to rely on connecting buses increased the number of waiting periods which sometimes resulted in a suppression of trips, as people felt the burden of catching more than one bus outweighed the benefits of reaching a particular destination (Rajé 2004).

Journeys requiring interchanges are particularly bad in the suburbs, where it is common for connecting buses not to align, a scenario that sees commuters stranded at bus stops for extended periods of time waiting for their connection. In other cases, such as Rajpal’s, the allocated time window between connecting buses is too tight (2 minutes) to guarantee a smooth and reliable commute, adding unnecessary stress to daily life. When connecting buses arrive and depart a few minutes apart passengers are uncertain as to whether they will successfully catch their connecting bus. While in more urban areas connectivity issues are largely made redundant by the higher frequency of transit service, such is not the case in many suburban areas where bus service is sporadic. The combined effects of low transit frequency, and multiple connecting bus routes have real ramifications for transit users, resulting in transit delays and time-consuming
commutes. Adding to this, is the inconvenience of having to stand outside waiting – sometimes in the rain or cold – in fairly desolate areas such as highway overpasses, or remote parking lots.

Frustration with the state of public transit in Surrey was a recurring theme in my conversations with local residents. Some were terse and blunt in their assessment of transit service in the city. Kadir, a young Egyptian man in his early twenties, simply said “transit super sucks.” Likewise, Riya, a middle-age woman originally from India, stated “too much time on buses.” Others, offered more elaborate evaluations:

Sonam: Buses are not good around ... from where I live there are no bus stops, so I have to walk so far from my house and to come here it's still going to take me more than one hour on the bus, I have to change 3 buses, yeah, so I think we need something that like a bus that go more places, than changing the buses ... I've missed the bus all the time, and wait for the next one so then it takes for ever and it doesn't come on time, sometime the time to be right there, it's never on time.

Susan: Yeah, I didn’t like the bus thing at all. In fact, I’ve only had to take the bus a few times. I really … if I had to work outside of my home, I think I would have kept my car. But I couldn’t. And it was just an extra expense to me, so I decided to sell it.

Muniya: Oh, yes, with one car it's hard because even the transit is not that easy, because if you have to go to one place you have to change two or three times [i.e. change bus] and you have to wait so it will take so long by going hm using transit.

Sandra: Sometimes I have to wait hm thirty, thirty minutes ... hm especially for the place where I live, because the only route that pass is hm 326, 326, yeah, and this bus is hm is no is hm the frequency is no, not good

Suhana: Yeah, with the bus yes, because in Surrey the hm the commute is not good, the buses, and the interval is too long, after 30 minutes the next bus will come ... the bus service is not that great.
The reactions of local residents reveal themes in line with scholarly understandings of public transportation in the suburbs, especially the idea that in communities designed for the automobile, group differences in access to jobs and amenities are mostly rooted in transportation options rather than in spatial proximity (McKenzie 2013; McKenzie and Rapino 2011; Welch 2013). Communities grapple with a transit service that is limited, infrequent and unreliable, resulting in delays, wait times, and overall trips that are as protracted as they are circuitous. For those lacking access to a car, public transit and walking remain the only viable alternatives. It is for these reasons that mobility limitations in the suburbs are especially adverse for low-income minority households, who because of disproportionately lower vehicle ownership rates turn to public transit as their most reliable mode of travel (Lo et al. 2011; McKenzie 2013; Tomer 2011).

The strength of oral testimony is illuminated by the limitations of quantitative approaches focused exclusively on the analysis of statistical variables. Lo et al. (2011 and 2015) quantify access to public transit by measuring the physical distance between place of residence and transit stop – as a straight line. Likewise, access to employment is calculated as the distance between residence and workplace – also as a straight line. And commuting time is extrapolated by considering the commuting distance and the average speed of a bus moving through traffic. This approach isn’t per se wrong, and can be useful for identifying general trends in transportation mode and choice among newcomers – something that can be especially advantageous in preliminary research efforts. But inattention to residents’ transit experiences leads to an inadequate understanding of the type of challenges – and by extension everyday compromises – individuals face as they get around suburban spaces.

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129 This becomes even more apparent when comparing the travel time between different modes of transportation. As discussed later in this chapter, travelling by car allowed some respondents to reduce their commuting times by half and sometimes by as much as two thirds (see section 5.5 for a discussion). While distances traveled were often sizable (i.e. 10km+ round trips), making walking and cycling unappealing options, what accounted for lengthy commutes was largely the inefficiency of public transit relative to the automobile.

130 My findings are in agreement with broader transportation studies in the US. For instance, in a country-wide study of commuting patterns in the United States, McKenzie and Rapino found that non-Hispanic Black workers who commuted by public transit had the longest travel time of any other group (McKenzie and Rapino 2011). These same authors also found that the rate of public transportation usage among immigrants was more than twice that of their native-born counterparts.
As Rajpal’s interview illustrates, measuring the distance – as the crow flies – between place of residence and workplace is at best simplistic, and at worst misleading. Not because people don’t travel through urban space in straight lines – something that advanced quantitative mapping techniques are able to account for – but because people are at the mercy of a transit system that seldom follows the shortest route from A to B, which is especially true in the suburbs. For both his commute to Progress Way and that to Annacis Island, Rajpal followed a route not predicted by any reasonable quantitative measure. In the former case, he saw himself needing to travel all the way to Ladner completely bypassing the more direct route along Highway 91, and in the latter case he saw himself needing to randomly stop at 22nd Avenue in New Westminster traveling well beyond his final destination. What this means, is that physical distance between two points – a standard metric for measuring accessibility – is not a particularly accurate way of assessing the true distance traveled by residents, especially if these happen to be suburban residents who rely on public transit, which tend to be disproportionately lower-income minorities. Studies that rely on purely quantitative techniques to evaluate a person’s access to opportunity are likely to miss key details about the way people get around, and in so doing, at least arguably, risk misconstruing both the degree and nature of the challenges at hand.

Linked to this is the tendency to extrapolate commuting time from the distance separating place of residence and work. Because quantitative techniques can significantly underestimate distance traveled, approaches that calculate how long it takes to get from A to B based on these distances are also suspect. More importantly, however, even methods that assess travel time based on residents’ responses to a questionnaire – usually through the question ‘how long does it take you to get to X destination?’ – are likely to overlook the amount of time spent waiting around for a job/service to start, or for a bus to arrive. Because transit in the suburbs tends to run infrequently, residents such as Rajpal, who rely on buses to get to work, often have no option but to arrive at their destination a lot earlier than needed, and find themselves leaving to get home later than expected. In Rajpal’s case, he arrived at work a good 25 minutes before the start of his shift, and had to wait around another 30 minutes at the end of each day for his bus home. A two hour commute was suddenly transformed into a three hour affair – a significant increase. The same dynamics apply when trying to reach community services and amenities. Sunita – who met...
me at the Strawberry Public Library to be interviewed – had to arrive a good 30 minutes before I did, precisely because of the way the bus scheduled aligned. Had she taken the next available bus she would have been late for our meeting.

The point here, is to show how interviews with local residents are able to bring out details that go overlooked in studies prioritizing more quantitative, birds-eye view analyses of mobility patterns. Attention to local detail and context is all the more important when studying suburban places because inefficiencies in public transit accentuate challenges felt at the local level which go overlooked unless researchers consider the nitty-gritty, down-to-earth experience of individual residents. At the heart of the matter, though, is the recognition that there are things about suburban spaces that make them unique relative to inner-city districts: buses don’t run as frequently, residents navigate sprawling distances, bus routes are circuitous, and transit area coverage limited. Quantitative approaches that have been found to work well in studies of urban areas are not necessarily well suited to the study of suburban spaces, especially when more marginalized populations are considered. Lower-income newcomers who live in the suburbs don’t tend to follow the familiar travel-to-work pattern of ‘get into a car and follow a professional job into the Central Business District.’ Many, like Rajpal, work in hard-to-reach light industrial districts, others, like Teodoro work in residential areas a distance away from established transit hubs. It becomes difficult to examine with any degree of accuracy the transportation and mobility challenges these groups face without using methodologies capable of capturing details and nuances about people’s individual experiences.

4.4 Getting around in the night time

The experiences of local residents bring into focus the unique mobility and transportation challenges that newcomers face as they settle in the suburbs. This becomes even more visible when considering the work hours and work locations of economically marginalized populations (Blumenberg and Ong 2001; Martens 2016; Ortiz Escalante, 2019). As previously mentioned, many newcomers work in hard-to-reach areas located a distance away from transit and
population centres. Not only this, but many are also night workers whose work schedules are not well aligned with the operating hours of public transport services.\(^{132}\)

Again, higher level analyses that rely on broad statistical metrics tend to miss how transportation dynamics play out for populations who work outside the traditional nine-to-five hours. This is because quantitative analyses centre on demographic descriptors designed for the study of the general population (age, sex, period of migration, language spoken at home, educational attainment, industry sector, etc.) The level of depth, while sizeable, is still limited. This is seen in Lo et al. (2015) who consider over a hundred variables sampling over a thousand individuals. Despite the impressive depth and breadth of their study, the authors fail to consider aspects of newcomers’ experiences that shape people’s ability to navigate suburban spaces, access employment opportunities, reach community services, and participate in broader community life. Attention to personal experience goes a long way in illuminating dynamics overlooked in more statistically oriented studies.

In some ways, approaches such as those taken by Lo et al. (2015) fall victim to some of the same flaws observed in traditional transportation studies which – as Hine and Mitchell (2001,319) point out – “are shaped by the notion of a universal disembodied subject which has been aided by the reluctance of transport policy to include a social agenda to be addressed.” This is a point also echoed by McArthur et al. (2019) who argue that the dominant paradigm shaping transport research fails to adequately account for the needs of different types of users, and in so doing trivializes the disadvantage that some minority populations experience as a result of inequitable transport policy.

Consider the experience of Jenny as case in point. Originally from China, Jenny arrived in Canada in 2012 to work as a live-in caregiver. As a twenty-something single woman, she arrived without a family, and what she knew of Canada was thanks to a cousin who had been living in

\(^{132}\) There is a small but growing body of research which examines the relationship between equity and transportation. Though as McArthur et al. (2019) point out, on the whole ‘transport disadvantage’ especially as it relates to accessibility for women, children, disabled populations, service workers and low-income groups remains largely understudied as a distinct field of academic study. The irony of this research gap is that minority populations comprise a disproportionate percentage of transit riders in Canada and the United States. Similarly, Kebrowski et al. (2016) argue that transportation research remains largely uncritical and depoliticized, giving little attention to the socio-economic impacts of transport provision or the political contexts in which transport policy occurs.
Surrey for some time. Jenny has had a number of low-paying jobs over the years, and has had to commute to various parts of the city and the region as a result.

For one of her first jobs she commuted to Delta where she worked for a small manufacturing outfit. The family-owned company fabricated boilers and hot-water tanks. Though she described the commute as ‘not bad,’ it was not without issues. Not only was the bus sometimes late – she explained to me – but the bus driver would sometime get lost or the bus stuck in the snow. Jenny viewed these delays as a direct result of the isolated nature of the bus route. New drivers were not familiar with the local road network in industrial areas – she explained – and these areas were not prioritized for snow-clearing in the winter. Much like Rajpal, Jenny’s transportation woes were typical of those faced by newcomers working in industrial sectors of the economy. At the same time, her own experience of the challenges encountered in suburban areas extended well beyond this.

At the time of our interview, Jenny was working a different job in Newton as a night-shift caregiver. Alongside private personal care, her duties also included house cleaning and sometimes cooking. Her work hours did not conform to a middle-class professional work schedule, which made commuting by public transit that much more difficult. Her shift started at 10pm at night and ended at 8am the next morning. In other words, Jenny required access to public transit at a time in the night that typically sees very limited bus service.

Like so many people in similar shoes, night work presents real challenges to residents who rely on public transit as their primary way to get to work, particularly in the suburbs. In Jenny’s case, she had no alternative but to get to her destination fifty minutes before the start of her shift (at 9:10pm rather than 10pm). Jenny had to rely on a bus whose hours of operation did not extend beyond 8:55pm – which though early for urban standards, is typical of suburban areas.

Transit delays only served to exacerbate an already precarious employment situation for Jenny. While she liked her co-workers, her relationship with management was fractious. As she describes it, the owners of this small family-run company were not paying their employees on time. At one point, it took her two months to receive a cheque, and only after she formally made a complaint to the Employment Standards branch. Arriving late to work only gave further ammunition to her employers, and worsened Jenny’s negotiating position.

In other words, to get to work Jenny relied on a bus route whose last bus left the terminus at King George Skytrain at 8:55pm.
Making matters worse for Jenny was the fact that her drop-off stop (at 152nd Street and 72nd Avenue) was located in a low-density suburban area, bounded on the east by 3,000 acres of park and farm land, and on the west by a sprawling residential subdivision. The inconvenience of having to arrive to work an hour early was matched by the scarcity of safe spaces which Jenny could hope to access while waiting for her shift to start. At 9pm at night, the only options available to her consisted of a 24hr gas station, and a Subway fast-food outlet located in a small suburban strip-mall along 72nd Avenue. What is especially telling in this case, is that had Jenny been able to afford a car, her commute would have been about twenty minutes shorter, and a lot more straightforward. Above all, she would not have had to arrive to work an hour earlier.

Jenny’s experiences speak to the many transportation challenges encountered by suburban populations, especially those working night shifts. Public transit in the suburbs is known to be characterized by poor operating hours, especially when compared to the urban core. Consider Metro Vancouver as a whole: the regional transit authority (Translink) operates ten night-bus routes providing service between 1am and 4am. All ten routes depart from Downtown Vancouver, covering every major arterial road in the city. In comparison, each surrounding suburb, has only one route operating at night – the city of Burnaby is the sole exception with three routes, more remote suburbs such as Port Coquitlam and Pitt Meadows have none. In Surrey, late night/early morning bus service is provided by the #19 bus route which covers a short, 5 km stretch of road from the Surrey City Central Skytrain station to the Patullo Bridge. This service has been created for transporting Surrey residents from Vancouver’s entertainment district back to Surrey in the wee hours of the morning. In other words, the only late night/early morning route in Surrey is not intended to accommodate the commutes of night-shift workers in Surrey. Service gaps of this sorts are not unique to Metro Vancouver, but are part of a broader trend which sees municipalities provide late-night transport service almost exclusively to facilitate people’s access to entertainment and recreation, while ignoring the travel needs of night-timeworkers employed outside of those sectors (Martens 2016; McArthur et al. 2019; Ortiz Escalante, 2019).

But late night/early morning bus service is not the only factor differentiating Surrey and Vancouver. The overwhelming majority of buses in Vancouver not only run well into the night, most until midnight or 1am, but they do so every 20 to 30 minutes. Such is not the case in
Surrey. The public transit network in Surrey is not as extensive as that in Vancouver to begin with, and its hours of operation are also more limited.

But equally important, buses simply do not run as frequently, making public transportation an overall inefficient way for residents to get around. Teodoro, a Filipino immigrant in his fifties described the frustrations of taking the bus in Surrey. Similar to Jenny, he worked the nightshift as a caregiver in a nursing home. He would start at 11pm and end at 8am. A resident of North Surrey, Teodoro would commute to work every night to White Rock, a round trip of about two hours. At first, he described the commute as follows:

Jacopo: How do you find your commute?

Teodoro: It’s really not that bad, because I take a bus. I live near the bus stop, just a two- to three-minute walk, and my work is just hm beside the bus stop is the nursing home.

Jacopo: I see, so it’s only one bus?

Teodoro: Hm, yeah, particular time of the night, so I know my schedule very well, what time I should be at the bus stop, that kind of thing.

But when asked about what he thought about public transit in Surrey in general, he qualified his answer by saying: “I personally believe there should be more transportation available to the public,” and that we need transit “geared toward meet[ing] the needs of the general public.” He went on explain that as a transit user he did in fact encounter delays due to buses being late, and being stuck in the snow. He also recognized that delays come with the territory, and that there are legitimate reasons for the delays:135

Teodoro: I know it's unavoidable really, the bus [will not always] be there on time, right, there's also periods of lateness.

135 The fact that Teodoro was both able to recognize the legitimacy of transit delays, and willing to speak about it, suggests that he was not simply whining about or taking a jab at the public transit service – as so many people often and casually do, myself included. Public transit, as with parking, congestion, and bridge tolls are all topics that residents of Metro Vancouver frequently complain about – understandably so as the region’s transportation system is beset by a number of issues. A lot of the times, critiques are vague, and grounded in half-truths and misconceptions. In contrast, Teodoro’s thoughts were collected and composed. In my conversation with him it was clear that he did not have an axe to grind against Translink, but that he was genuinely interested in providing constructive feedback about his experiences as a transit user.
Jacopo: Congestion/traffic?

Teodoro: Yeah, and they have reasons too, like the weather, or the driver didn't show up, or traffic, the shifting [the shifts between drivers] that kind of thing, those are the things that I've noticed uh huh.

As the conversation went on, Teodoro let his guard down and opened up about some of the more unpleasant realities of his commute. For instance, he recalled a time when the bus failed to show up at all:

It was, the winter time, it was tough, it was crazy, we were freezing to death, not only me, the other passengers too, you know, and I … that's the thing that I think needs to be addressed, especially in the winter time you know. Oh, we were waiting for 30 minutes to 45 minutes for the bus, for the next bus to appear, arrive, and I think this sort of thing, the, the Ministry of Transportation has to look at to be hm to anticipate, before this problem comes into surface, uh huh, and they should provide some kind hm … what do you call that … provide hm … reserve issues [back up buses] in case of emergency you know … Oh god it was tough to wait especially this last winter we had oh it was vicious and long and very cold, yeah.

Without a doubt, the cold contributed to making a frustrating situation even worse. Transit users were left hanging with no recourse but to wait for the next bus, hoping that it would show up on time. They had to do so while out in the elements on a cold winter night. At the heart of the matter, though, is the frequency of the transit, as bus service for this particular route was provided every 30 to 35 minutes after 10pm (which is not uncommon for suburban areas).

To be sure, the failure of a bus to downright materialize, though very cumbersome, is a rare event even in the suburbs. A more relevant issue impacting Teodoro, given its more frequent occurrence, was transit breaks:

I've been taking the bus for two years now, right … and the bus 321 to White Rock it stops … They arrive at [White Rock Centre Bay 4] and they [bus drivers] ask passengers to leave the bus, and … to continue is another hm 10 to 15 minutes … They [bus drivers] ask the passengers to leave the bus, you know, to leave the bus, instead of just asking them 'oh

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136 I was able to confirm through the Translink website that as of January 2018, service after 10pm on the 321 route was provided every 30 to 35 minutes from Surrey City Central Station to White Rock (at North Bluff Road and Foster Street). Providing service every 30 minutes after 10pm is not unusual even in the urban core. The main difference, though, is that in the urban core transit users are likely to have alternative bus routes available to them, which is seldom the case in the suburbs.
why don't you just stay there and wait for 10-15 minutes, and then we can continue,' that kind of stuff. I personally find that really inconsiderate because their reasoning, because I was talking to one of the drivers who said 'oh this is my free time, this is my break and I don't want anybody in the bus' you know. I said to myself 'Is there any problems if people just stay there?' I'm not making noise or dancing or singing, or you know, I just sit there, and I just read my texts, my text messages or Facebook, until the 15 minutes and then continue the trip, you know.

That part, I know it's a very minor, but I think that has to be addressed, because there are people you know, especially in the winter time, imagine I have to go out, and wait outside for 10 to 15 minutes, then after that, go back in, you know, I don't see the logic, I don't see the logic of that type of arrangement, you know … I think 'What is your focus? What is this service all about?' Is it for the wellbeing of the people you serve, or the wellbeing of the structure, or the system? You know. So that's why I said to myself 'all services, any public service should really focus on the wellbeing of the people'… So just, and a few times instead of staying on the bus, I just decided to walk, to the facility, and it takes another 10 minutes, I don't mind during the summer time, spring, you know, but winter time, for God’s sake, I mean, in fact, if I'm driver I would invite the passengers not to leave 'please stay', and make yourself comfortable while I'm having my break, you know.

It just so happened that as Teodoro’s bus was about to reach its destination, it would pull over along 152nd Street for a ten- to fifteen-minute scheduled break. As Teodoro explained to me, though annoying, it was not so much the break that bothered him, but the fact that passengers were asked to exit the bus and wait outside on the sidewalk. Unsurprisingly, this was especially irritating in the cold and wet winter months. Not to mention the fact that this happened at 10:30pm at night while on his way to work. Teodoro had no other options but to stand outside in the drizzle, and wait for the bus to get going again, or he could ditch the bus and walk the ten-minute trip to the nursing home where he worked – having to do so in the damp and cold of the night.

Jenny’s and Teodoro’s experiences are illustrative of the transportation challenges facing night workers in Surrey. Bus service is sporadic, infrequent and altogether missing in the early hours of the morning. The lack of an extensive transit system forces some night workers to arrive to work much earlier than needed – adding to already long and tiring days. The nature of suburban form is such that many transit stops are located in fairly desolate places, giving limited options for where commuters can comfortably wait and kill time. In more extreme cases, such as Teodoro’s, transit users have no recourse but to wait outside in the night with little protection from the elements. What these testimonies show is the value of a broad analytical toolkit in
assessing how transport disadvantage operates at the local scale. Equity considerations warrant attention not just to disparities in the quality of transport service across different areas (i.e. city vs. suburb), but also to the varied profile of transit users, and the temporal organisation of the local economy (Delafontaine et al. 2011). And because transport policy maximizes overall accessibility across the population with biases toward privileged groups, groups whose schedules don’t fit traditional middle-class schedules face distinctly different constraints that can otherwise go overlooked (Sanchez 1999; McArthur et al. 2019).

4.5 Walking

In Surrey, as in many other suburbs, the state of public transit is such that people look to the car as a better and more reliable mode of transportation (Blumenberg and Smart 2011). Walking, though also a possibility, is not a particularly appealing option – even among low-income households – in large part because the combined effects of segregated land-uses and sprawling distances make walking inefficient and unpleasant (Currie and Delbosc 2011a). This was confirmed in my interview with local residents. None of the people interviewed commuted to work by walking. In contrast to urban dwellers for whom walking can be a mundane and everyday activity, for suburban residents walking around town – whether to get groceries, meet friends, run errands, or get to work – is often done out of necessity (Lucas et al. 2018).

When interviewees did allude to walking, they did so in unflattering terms. Snow and sidewalk clearing was top of mind for a number of respondents, which is not all that surprising given the timing of the interviews – the interviews were conducted in the late winter and early spring making the memories of slippery sidewalks fresh in people’s minds. Suhana, like other residents, related the frustration of walking to her bus stop:

Oh my god, I fell so many times with snow, walking from home to the bus stop I fell so many times, and my head got dizzy, and as soon as I reach the clinic 'ha, I need something' something to help me, yeah ... that time you feel helpless, like 'why?' it's so hard the life, yeah.

137 Consider the case of Fabrice, a single-dad from Cameroon, who sat down with me for an interview. Fabrice described carrying groceries – including 40lb bags of rice – from Superstore on public transit with his daughter. The pair, who lacked a car, would walk 3.5km (roughly 40 minutes) to the store to save money on transit fare, and only took the bus on the way back home.
While the region as a whole is notorious for its poor snow clearing capabilities, what frustrated residents even more was the inequity in municipal service provision. The city allocated funds to allow for the removal of snow and ice from the roads, but no such resources were allocated for sidewalk clearing. In fact, municipal trucks routinely plowed the snow from the street on to the sidewalk, further exacerbating the mobility challenges of non-drivers.\(^{138}\)

Sandra: With the snow is very difficult and dangerous, the [unintelligible], you can slip and fall … and it's curious because the roads, the roads, right, clean, and the hm I don't know the truck that clean.

Jacopo: The plow I guess.

Sandra: Yes, when clean the roads, all the snow [chuckles] is in, in the sidewalk, and then, you can't walk.

Speaking about her particular neighbourhood, Sandra continued:

Bad, very bad, because, hm, with the snow, yeah, because hm only in the principal, in the main road very clean, but in the intersection no … with the snow.

Kanchana expressed similar frustrations with the state of sidewalks and her ability to walk in the winter in Surrey:

Kanchana: Weather has been a challenge, before coming here, we knew that this place gets some snow fall, but it's minimal, one day it happens, the next day is gone. But the snow has been here for very long, months, weeks, so it was very hard walk around during that time, because the roads were very slippery - oh sorry, the roads were ok, the sidewalks were very slippery and icy, so it was a bit of problem at that time …

Jacopo: Yeah, I'm finding that for people who walk, it's not great here.

Kanchana: Yeah, because I know they clear up the roads, but they just forget the sidewalks, and not all people they tend to clear the sidewalks in front of their house, some of them do, some of them don't, or maybe say they don't get the time, I don't know what the matter is with them, but yeah, sidewalks, most of the sidewalks were totally icy.

\(^{138}\) Surrey, like many other municipalities in Metro Vancouver, lacks snow \emph{removal} equipment. The snow, while cleared from the road, is not actually removed from the street grid, and loaded on to trucks via snow blowers as is the case in cities such as Toronto and Montreal.
I met Kanchana and her husband at the Strawberry Hill Branch of the Surrey Public Library. The building, located about half a kilometre from the nearest bus stop, sits across a huge parking lot of a big box development. Pedestrian infrastructure, as is often the case around suburban shopping malls and big box complexes, is poor, largely because of the car centric nature of these type of developments. We met in the early evening of a snowy wintery day, and it was clear that walking – while not great in the best of circumstances – is made that much worse when it snows. The fact that city authorities prioritize road clearing ahead of sidewalk clearing puts pedestrians in a double jeopardy. Not only do pedestrians have to navigate spaces built around the car, but when the weather gets rough, efforts are focused on facilitating vehicular movement at the expense of pedestrians.

Alongside the challenges created by poor weather conditions, what respondents most commonly brought up when talking about walking in Surrey was the need to cover long distances. Susan recalls having to walk five blocks to get to her nearest bus stop. The closest grocery store – not counting convenience stores – was located a good forty-minutes away from her house. The round trip, of course, was twice as long. Likewise, Sandra was thirty minutes away from her nearest groceries (walking time). She described covering a similar distance to get to her English language classes everyday. In a similar vein, the only way for Rachida to get home after 10pm at night was to walk more than thirty minutes from the Newton Exchange bus loop to her house. Manjeet described how she would walk “an half hour to an hour” just to get to the hospital.

Gabriela, who was living in Clayton when we first talked but was in the process of moving to North Surrey, described how distance was a key barrier to residents who, like her, lacked access to a car:

Gabriela: Yes, I have to walk a lot, a lot to get to my hm for example I have to walk at least hm almost seven blocks to get to my bus stop, in Fraser Highway or hm, also I have to walk, not too much, but I have to walk to hm, to Save on Food to do my groceries, I have to walk hm, the library, I don't have the library close to my place, no close, close I have to take a bus, there is a library in Langley, there is another library in Newton, but for hm all kind of library I have to take a bus, is no close to my place ... because hm Clayton is a place, but basically people there have car, they have hm car, they have houses, own houses, hm, I think the level of life is completely different then my level of life, you know, actually the people who live there, they are owner of the houses, they rent the basement, they rent the hm coach house, I don't know if you heard about the
coach house, you know, and hm but in general people have cars, people have another kind of life you know ...

Jacopo: Is that hm, one of the advantages I guess about moving to Surrey Central is the Skytrain, you also have hm

Gabriela: Yes, transportation, I have library, I have university close, I have hm, a lot of stores to get my food, hm, I have hm also I think the people beside, who live close to the Skytrain and close to the bus station they are more open, they have the need to talk with you, for several reasons, hm, also I have hm, a hm how can I say, the office to do some permits like hm papers, like social insurance, like my passport are close to the Skytrain, are close to the hm, the library, yes, everything is really close to the Skytrain uh huh

Jacopo: yeah, it's too bad that is more expensive

Gabriela: Yes, yes, that is the point, the reason

Gabriela had to walk seven blocks just to get to her bus stop. Groceries were closer, but she still had to hop on the bus if she hoped to access the closest public library, go to school or get to work. The middle-class neighbourhood in which she lived was built for households who could afford a car: “in general people have cars, people have another kind of life” she explained. It is clear from her observations that the subdivision was not planned with the expectation that residents would walk seven blocks to access public transit. For Gabriela, the transportation challenges she faced as a resident of Clayton was a big reason behind her decision to move to North Surrey where she could hope to be in proximity to services and amenities.139

It should come as no surprise to readers to know that walking in the suburbs is often a challenge. Neighbourhood responses on this topic are largely in line with scholarly understandings about the car-centric nature of suburbia (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011). Less clear in my interviews with local residents is how and why pedestrians are at a disadvantage in suburban areas, especially when compared to their urban counterparts. Long distances and snow-covered sidewalks were brought up as issues making walking inefficient and unpleasant, if not downright dangerous. But broader mechanisms are at work leaving pedestrians in burdensome situations.

139 Note that a move to North Surrey, especially to City Centre, would also entail the prospects of higher rent. Because of the demand associated with transit-oriented development, landlords are able to command higher rents for properties in vicinity to public transit and urban amenities.
4.5.1 Neighbourhood form

Walking in the suburbs is often cumbersome for the simple reason that postwar suburbs prioritize a strict separation of land uses, and an automobile-centred transportation network (Lucas et al. 2018; Williamson 2010). Planning approaches to suburban areas stem from pragmatic adaptations of modernist ideology which organize city planning around principles of efficiency, orderliness and rationality (Dunham Jones and Williamson 2011; Scheer 2010). A direct application of these principles is the segregation of activities in urban space: single-family homes are located a certain distance away from commercial establishments, which in turn are located a distance away from office and business parks, etc. (Scheer 2015). Functions typically associated with urban life are classified into discrete-use districts linked by a car-centric transportation network.

Splitting large swaths of land into segregated uses discourages walking and increases dependence on the automobile. This is because the distances between different activities (home, work, shopping, school, etc.) are not easily covered on foot (Southworth and Owens 1993). Communities are planned around longer-distance travel between destinations, making the private automobile the preferred mode by which people get around. The resulting effects are spaces that facilitate vehicular movement at the expense of the needs of pedestrians (Langdon 1994). Streets are not viewed as public spaces where people move, meet and connect, but as utility corridors for motor vehicles (Duany et al., 2000). They are designed with the explicit intent to maximize vehicular flow, which often means building large multi-lane roads capable of sustaining fast-moving traffic. Such street infrastructure further discourages walking as it makes the experience of walking that much more unpleasant. Anyone who has had to walk alongside a fast-moving arterial road in the suburbs will attest to how annoying the experience can be. Noise levels are high, the air quality poor, and the surroundings – marked by a treeless expanse of sidewalks, open edge parking lots, and blank walls – repetitive (Larco 2015). Equally important, pedestrians can feel unsafe walking right alongside fast-moving cars and trucks (Marshall and Garrick 2010).

Transportation scholars typically acknowledge that accessibility is a function of transportation service provision and infrastructure as well as land-use patterns (Martens 2015). The two not only go hand in hand, but shape one another.

It is no accident that residents in Surrey spend their weekends walking along Crescent Beach or one of the city’s many parks as opposed to strolling along King George Boulevard or 104th Avenue.
But planning a community around the automobile has implications that extend well beyond the street level. It means that commercial, service and business activities are surrounded by acres of parking lots (often fronting the street), which can be cumbersome and even dangerous for pedestrians to walk through (Duany et al., 2000). Likewise, sidewalk infrastructure is itself limited in many suburban areas, and at times completely absent. Incomplete sidewalks are a key barrier to kids walking to school, and prove especially problematic for parents with strollers, and people relying on mobility aids: wheelchairs, scooters, walkers and the like (Larsen 2014). Another effect of car-centric planning which makes the experience of walking in the suburbs all the more unpleasant is the endless vista of large retail signs dotting the streetscape (Larco 2015). Oversized billboards ensure visibility from afar, making it easier for drivers to read, but also contribute to significant visual clutter.

Among the many things that put pedestrians in the suburbs at a disadvantage, none is perhaps more significant than the layout of the street network itself. Postwar suburbs across Canada and the United States lack a fine-grained, well-connected street network, making walking as an everyday activity difficult and inefficient (Southworth, 1997). Countless studies show that a dense and connected street network facilitates walking as a mode of travel (Frank and Engelke 2005; Frank et al. 2003; Knaap et al. 2007; Koschinsky and Talen 2015; Owen et al. 2007; Song 2005). This finding stems from a variety of reasons: intersections increase the route options available to people when moving through an area, they also slow down vehicular traffic, and increase opportunities for social interaction (Lund 2002; Southworth 1997; Wood et al. 2010). Furthermore, dense street patterns are defined by short blocks, which decrease walking distances between destinations, while contributing to a varied streetscape (Jacobs 1961). An often-overlooked benefit of shorter blocks is the concomitant rise in the number of pedestrian intersections, which lessens the propensity for jaywalking further limiting risky attempts at crossing the road (American Public Transport Association 2012).

142 Williamson (2010, 40) points out that “unscripted chance interaction between residents” – something celebrated by writers from Jane Jacobs to Iris Marion Young – requires publicly shared, walkable space with a host of meaningful specific destinations such as shops, libraries, parks and people’s homes.
But because of its emphasis on automobile travel, and single-use development, the postwar suburban street network is coarse and disconnected – the direct opposite of what is found in traditional inner-city neighbourhoods, and pre-WWII street-car suburbs. To maximize vehicular flow and traffic speeds, transportation engineers in the suburbs seek to minimize the number of intersections, leading to a design that works well for cars, but not people (Langdon 1994).

What’s more, developers make suburban blocks as long as possible to reduce street building and create quieter neighbourhoods (Southworth and Owens 1993). Cross streets reduce the number of lots developers can create, which offers yet another rationale for stretching blocks into long rectangles.143

The coarse street network typical of so many suburban areas today is in many ways a direct result of rural greenfield development (Southworth and Owens 1993). A sparsely distributed set of country roads, rather than a dense urban grid, has provided the backbone of most suburban development in the postwar period (Scheer 2010). Nowhere is this perhaps more visible than in Surrey where the city’s arterial grid follows the historical contours of 160-acre parcels of farm land. It’s no surprise that Surrey – like many other suburbs in Metro Vancouver including Richmond, Langley, Pitt Meadows, and Maple Ridge – evolved to have much larger arterial blocks than cities like Vancouver or New Westminster.

In Surrey, new road infrastructure was simply overlaid on top of an existing and sparsely distributed set of country roads. Over time, country roads were paved and widened to form the arterial backbone of subsequent waves of suburban development (Murray 1991). As farm land was subdivided curving loops, cul-de-sacs and intermittent stretched blocks were added to the coarse arterial grid. Subdivided streets are inwardly focused, and though quiet, they provide little or no connection to adjacent parcels of land (Southworth and Owens 1993).

Today, the result is that in most suburban areas, travel between residential developments requires cars and people to connect with an arterial road. As Larco (2015) explains, “this lack of connectivity creates a condition where apparently close destinations are actually far away in

143 Jane Jacobs was one of the first to bring attention to the importance of small or short blocks. In Death and Life of the Great American Cities (1961), she notes that the most walkable parts of towns and cities are found where blocks are the shortest (see Jacobs 1961, Chapter 9). According to Langdon (1994) to be walkable, blocks should not exceed 400 ft (or ~120 m). For more details see Southworth and Owens (1993), and Southworth (1997).
terms of in-network travel.” A condition that is especially bad for pedestrians for it results in circuitous roads and longer travel distances. The disconnected street pattern decreases route options and crossings which makes walking that much harder (Frank, Engelke, and Schmid, 2003). Pedestrian mobility is further hindered by such physical barriers as fences, walls and drain ditches (Larco 2015).
The street network in Surrey is coarse and disconnected. It is developed around arterial roads that are 800m from each other. The above represents a 160 acres of farm land that was gradually subdivided in the postwar period. The road network created was one of cul-de-sacs, curving loops, and incomplete stretched blocks. The block size itself is large, as one block measure 200m in size. The network prioritizes travel by car and is not very well suited to walking as the distances are large and the route options limited.

The street network in Vancouver is fine-grained and well connected. It was developed as a typical pre-WWII street-car suburb. Cul-de-sacs and curving loop are largely absent. It prioritizes pedestrian travel to an arterial road where shops and streetcar stops can be found. The block size is friendly to pedestrians as it measures 95m and 135m in dimensions. The addition of back alleys results in an even finer-grained grid which increase the number of walking routes.

Graphics done to scale by the author
A disconnected street network results in fewer walking options and longer routes. Residents in Surrey have to walk circuitous routes to reach arterial roads and access public transit. Retail shops, restaurants and services found along arterial roads are located behind large parking lots which front the streets further increasing walking distances.

A fine-grained street network offers more options for pedestrians and results in shorter walking distances. Residents in Vancouver can more easily reach arterial roads and access shops and public transit. Unlike in the suburbs, retail shops, restaurants and services found along arterial roads front the street which increases walkability for local residents.

The above discussion illustrates the barriers to walking, as a mode of travel, in a suburb like Surrey. While many residents picked on the fact that walking in Surrey is often a challenge, pointing to ‘long distances’ and ‘the lack of snow clearing’ as two key issues, residents were unable to put their fingers on the precise mechanisms that make walking such an unappealing option to Surrey residents. As the literature on suburban sprawl suggest, the obstacles to walkability are built and designed into the very fabric of suburbia. Long blocks, wide multilane arterial roads, fast-flowing traffic, strict separation of land uses, and a disconnected street network all contribute to making walking in the suburbs inefficient and unpleasant. The point here is not to present an in-depth analysis of walkability patterns in Surrey, but rather to highlight some of the underlying factors that make life challenging for those who lack access to a car.
While commuting to work can be a grind for urban dwellers as much as those in the suburbs, mobility and transportation challenges in suburban areas are qualitatively different than in the urban core. Longer commutes, longer distances, poorer transit service, fewer transportation options, and a street pattern that prioritizes cars over people have disproportionate negative impacts on modest and lower-income populations in the suburbs (Lucas et al. 2018; McKenzie 2013). The divide between urban and suburban is made visible when considering travel modes for different population groups. Public transit, walking and even cycling are popular modes of travel for middle and upper-middle class urban dwellers, something that is simply not the case in a suburb like Surrey. With a few exceptions, those who can afford a car in the suburbs drive. Outside of recreational uses, public transit, walking and cycling remain niche means of everyday transport for teenagers, lower-income folks, and the homeless (Kaur 2013).

4.6 Car as a mode of transportation

Surprising within the research sample was the low number of people who had something to say about their experience of walking in Surrey in any depth. In hindsight, this makes sense. Because of the sheer inefficiency of walking as a mode of travel, people look to public transit or driving as a way to get around. Even those without a car try to rely on carpooling to get to work, since even transit – as previously discussed – is not especially effective to get around.

Research shows that car ownership offers an enticing pull for anyone who lives in the suburbs, including lower-income households (Currie and Delbosc 2011a; Blumenberg and Smart 2011; Tomer 2011). A top reason for this pull is the inefficiency of public transit, and the lack of pedestrian friendly infrastructure. In fact, transportation scholars have even coined the term

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144 There is surprisingly little academic research on the profile of suburban transit users in Canada. Regional level studies show that low-income people and minorities have higher transit ridership than more affluent groups, but seldom do scholars examine how socio-economic characteristics change – if at all – at the neighbourhood level.

145 The popularity of automobile travel in the suburbs is illustrated by Tomer (2011) who found that, in the suburbs, commuting by car is the preferred option even among households who do not own a private vehicle (aka ‘zero-vehicle’ households). About 60% of so-called ‘zero-vehicle’ households in the suburbs travel by car (either through car-pooling or by borrowing someone else’s vehicle). Only about 25% of ‘zero-vehicle’ households in the suburbs use public transit as their commuting mode, which though low, is more than twice the rate of vehicle owning households.
‘forced car ownership’ to describe low-income car users who live in areas with limited transportation options (Banister 1994; Jones 1987; Mattioli 2014). The car provides residents with an effective way to overcome the transportation challenges unique to public transit and walking. It does so by facilitating door-to-door service, the ability to cover long distances in a short amount of time, and travel at off-peak hours when transit service is sparse (Blumenberg and Smart 2011; Kenyon et al. 2002). Nowhere is this perhaps more clear than when comparing the commutes of transit users to those of private vehicle drivers. With the exception of rapid transit, the car offers commuters in the suburbs three key benefits over the bus or walking: a speedier commute, a less circuitous commute, and a more flexible commute.

Consider again Rajpal as a case in point. By bus, his daily commute to Progress Way (North Delta) took about an hour. Also, his arrival and departure time – dictated by an infrequent bus service – did not align well with his work schedule. He arrived at work earlier than needed (at 8:05am rather than at 8:30am) and left later than needed too (at 5:35pm despite being done working at 5:00pm). As if this was not enough, the bus – the only one available to him – took him all the way to Ladner, an unnecessary 10km detour.

Rajpal’s commute was vastly different when given a lift. By car, it took him only 15 to 20 minutes to get to work (compared to an hour by bus). The commute was more direct, covering a distance of 13km, rather than 24km. And Rajpal did not have to arrive to work 25 minutes early, nor did he have to wait around for 30 minutes at the end of his workday for his bus to arrive. Eliminating the need for multiple bus transfers was yet another benefit to car travel, one that was especially welcome during the winter when waiting outside in the cold or rain can be tough.

The same was true for Rajpal’s commute to Annacis Island. It took him about an hour to get to work by bus, compared to 15 to 20 minutes by car. Moreover, with the car Rajpal followed a more direct route to work than with the bus, which took him all the way into New Westminster, and added two bridge crossings as a result. It is not surprising that, given the striking difference between these two modes of travel, people would opt for the car over public transit when possible. This same dynamic held true even for residents of North Surrey, who because of their proximity to transit and population hubs might be thought better positioned to get around by public transit. Ultimately, the ease provided by private-vehicle use compared to public transit did
not go lost on Rajpal who remarked, “when I will be getting my own car I think my life will be
totally different as it is now.”

Kadir, a North Surrey resident who worked – much like Rajpal had done in his first job – twelve-
hour shifts packing newspapers in a warehouse on Annacis Island, described transit in Surrey as
‘super sucks.’ There are no direct buses that run to Annacis Island from any of the four Skytrain
stations located in North Surrey (Scott Road Station, Gateway Station, Surrey Central Station,
and King George Stations). Residents of North Surrey travelling to Annacis Island by public
transit must either take the #316 bus from Surrey Central station to the Scottsdale Exchange
which runs only every 30 minutes, or make their way to 88th Avenue and King George
Boulevard to catch the #388 (a thirty-minute walk to the nearest transit centre). The estimated
travel time is anywhere from one hour to an hour and twenty minutes. Comparatively, by car
Kadir took only 20 to 25 minutes to get to work. Once again, the car offered clear benefits to
commuters in Surrey, even for those who like Kadir lived in more centrally connected areas of
the city.

At the time of our interview, Kadir owned and drove his own car, a telling reality for someone
his age. In his early-twenties, Kadir was working part time, while also taking part time classes at
Kwantlen University. He had been in Canada for about two years, having worked a string of
minimum wage jobs since arriving with his parents, two brothers and a sister in 2015. While for
young people going to university owning a car is often an unnecessary luxury, for others, such as
Kadir, it is a way of securing much needed work. As described in the previous chapter, light
industrial areas are important sites for newcomers looking to access entry-level, low-skilled
work. But in the suburbs, light industrial districts are poorly served by public transit, and are
located a significant distance away from residential centres.\textsuperscript{146} Having access to a car is
sometimes the only reliable way for people to reach these areas. This was true for Kadir who
worked on Annacis Island, Rajpal who worked in North Delta – and who relied on car-pooling
whenever possible – and Sejoun who worked at a blind manufacturing outfit in Langley.

\textsuperscript{146} Take the city of Vancouver as an example. Industrial zones in the city are located in Grandview-Woodland, the
Downtown Eastside, False Creek Flats, Mount Pleasant, and Renfrew-Collingwood – or neighbourhoods that are
centrally located. Industrial zones in South Vancouver, though farther out from the urban core, are still readily
accessible by public transit. In fact, Tomer (2012) found that in the United States, regardless of the region, city jobs
across every industry category are better serviced by public transit than their suburban counterparts.
The appeal of car ownership extends beyond the need to access employment opportunities in light-industrial areas. The sprawling nature of a suburb like Surrey is such that owning a car is convenient even for residents employed in non-industrial sectors of the economy. Jenny, who worked the nightshift as a caregiver in Newton, took 45 minutes to get to work by bus. The same commute by car would have taken 15 minutes. As stated previously, she also arrived at her destination an hour earlier because of limited bus service in that area, something that would not have been the case by car. Likewise, driving would have shortened Teodoro’s commute to South Surrey by half. Time and again, the appeal of private vehicle transportation was brought to light in my conversations with local residents who looked to the car as a way to address the transportation gaps associated with the city’s public transit system. In this way, these findings are in line with research showing that for low-income households access to cars translates to job opportunities and increased earnings (Baum 2009; Blumenberg and Manville 2004; Gurley and Bruce 2005).

As is often the case in urban planning, addressing one set of issues creates new ones. This is true among suburban populations who switch to the car as a primary mode of travel. For modest and lower-income households owning a car comes with its own sets of challenges, most notably the additional financial costs of owning and operating the vehicle (Currie and Delbosc 2011a). The Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) estimates that it costs the average driver $9,000 a year to own a medium size car in Canada (including insurance, gas, maintenance, monthly payments, etc.) For more economically marginalized populations who tend to buy older, used cars, the costs can run even higher (older models do not run as efficiently as newer ones, and they incur higher yearly maintenance costs). In some cases, car ownership is a real and serious money pit (Kaur 2013). Transportation related expenses were a recurring theme in my conversations with local residents. Suhana’s and Narji’s reaction to transportation costs were typical among respondents:

Suhana: Cost of living is too high, cost of living is too high ... insurance, especially the car insurance, it's too much, it kills the person, it shouldn't be like that, it should be around a $100 [month] so that everyone can afford it, and they can use the car, but it's so expensive to have the hm buying the car is not the problem, but paying the insurance it's too much ... but even when you have the responsibility, you have to see the priorities.
Narjis: Yes, and that's even harder, they have to pay for more commute, like you know this is another hm stress, the time, and then you know I mean if you work in Surrey you have to finish hm and run to you know and then the commute if you have your own car pay for gas, and gas is not cheap, and if you're taking the bus, that's even no cheap anymore too, like you know, everything is changing, hm, and parking and all that, like you know.

The cost of fuel, bridge tolls (on the recently upgraded Port Mann Bridge), parking fees, and car insurance were listed as common sources of concern among participants. In this way, the interview material is in line with broader research that shows how transportation costs in the suburbs account for a significantly larger share of a household average monthly expenditures (Metro Vancouver 2017). Despite the costs associated with having a car, for many newcomers living in the suburbs, owning a private vehicle is something of a necessity. But the car serves functions that go well beyond facilitating access to employment in harder-to-reach areas.

Harjinder, first introduced in Chapter 4, worked as a part-time security guard while training to become an education assistant through the Surrey Community College. At the time of our interview, she was twenty-one years old, and living with her parents and younger brother in a two-bedroom basement suite in North Surrey. Her dad worked as an agricultural labourer, her older brother worked as a truck driver, and her mom was unemployed. Harjinder had worked a series of jobs in low-paying sectors over the years including commercial laundry (Burnaby), blueberry packaging and processing (Surrey), and commercial baking (Langley). She settled ultimately on security guard. As she described it, the hours were long, but the work itself was not strenuous.

For Harjinder – a security guard – a car was not only something she needed to get to work, much like a cab driver, the car was the job. She needed the car to patrol assigned areas, and would sit in the car for hours at a time monitoring construction sites. In cold and wet winter months, the car was Harjinder’s de facto office and often sole source of shelter. The same was true for Muniya’s husband who also worked as a security guard. Muniya related to me the necessity of having to buy a car so that her husband could have a shot at getting a job:

Transportation was the hm the big issue, so we just had one and second one that hm what do you call it the used car so I bought it from one of the dealers like because they were also quite expensive, and without that he [her husband] wouldn't get the job, without car,
without license he wouldn't get the job, so that necessary so he the first question was
'do you have license?' 'do you have car?' that was the first thing they will ask you …

In the absence of a solid public transportation system, the car helps newcomers in the suburbs fulfill everyday tasks that are as essential as they are mundane: running errands, getting groceries, picking people up from work, taking kids to school. Despite his age, Kadir – who was in his early twenties when we spoke – took on responsibilities typically expected of parents. As the sole person in his family to own a car, Kadir acted as the family’s driver. He would drive his parents to medical appointments, stock up on monthly groceries at the nearest big-box grocery store (the Real Canadian Superstore), and run various other errands. The car was a dependable means of assisting the commutes and needs of multiple family members, as shown through my conversations with local residents.

Asked about his wife’s commute, Ranbir explained that while she took the bus, he tried to give her a ride whenever he could because driving was much quicker:

Ranbir: Usually, she [his wife] takes bus and if I'm having time I always drop her off like right now we're having only one car for all of the family ...

Jacopo: And transit has been ok for her?

Ranbir: Yeah, it's ok, yeah. I don't think it really take like lot of time, but it's ok for her, yeah, because she, if I'm dropping her it take only twelve to fourteen minutes, if she's going by transportation she leaves home fifty minutes before, five zero, fifty, yeah. Because one bus than second bus, waiting time and that.

By giving his wife a ride to work, Ranbir was able to shorten his wife’s commute from 50 minutes down to about 15 minutes, a significant difference. This discrepancy – typical of many suburban areas – is in part attributed to wait times between transit connections. Commuting times are lengthened when transit users rely on multiple buses to get to work, as was the case for Ranbir’s wife. Those commuting by private automobile, in contrast, face no such delays. They can simply hop in their car, and drive to work without needing to stop along the way at some designated bus loop.

A similar dynamic was related by Narjis when she alluded to her teenage son who at the time was bagging groceries at a local supermarket.
Narjis: Hm, my oldest son now he works, I take him to work, and bring him back, hm, it would take him longer to take the bus to come home, like, hm, but I can get there in ten minutes, he can come home, have some rest, and then study, hm, or do whatever ...

Jacopo: With the bus it would take longer?

Narjis: Yeah, so that's why hm, unless I'm not available, he'll take the bus, that's why, but if I'm available I'd rather pick him up.

Likewise, Aurul also described how he would try to pick up his wife from work whenever he could. His wife, who worked at restaurant in New Westminster, would make her way home late into the night. Rather than have her wait at the Skytrain station for her connecting bus, Aurul would try to pick her up. She felt safer that way, Aurul implied.

Jacopo: Now that you are in Surrey, does your wife still work in New West?

Aurul: Yes, yes, she does, she takes hm, this is also challenging for us, because she mostly works from 4pm to 11pm in the night time, and she has to take the Skytrain and bus, and when she comes back at midnight she's scared in the security, because you know in Surrey, the Skytrain is not very secure, right, sometimes there is hm so she's scared and sometimes she said 'oh, if people give me the ride' so I and my daughter tried to give ride back and forth but not all times is possible because we also have work, so now I'm thinking to change my wife's job too, if I can find any job in Surrey close to here hm so I'm thinking now, yeah.

In the suburbs, even something as mundane as getting to a grocery store can prove challenging without a car (Bereitschaft 2017). To be sure, grocery shopping without a car can be a tricky endeavour regardless of whether one lives in a compact urban district or a sprawling suburban area. Many urban residents are familiar with the fine art that is schlepping groceries on bike or foot. But a good public transit system, coupled by a fine-grain street pattern, crosswalks, and compact distances go a long way in making grocery shopping – inconvenient as it may be – a feasible task for non-drivers in the city (Lucas et al. 2018). In contrast, suburban residents face barriers that are qualitatively different than those found in more centrally located areas. For some, the simple act of walking to a grocery store is not a matter of inconvenience, but a real hit on their quality of life.

Susan, a middle-age self-employed technical writer, who experienced entrenched poverty while growing up in the United States, described the reality of getting around Surrey without a car. At
the time of our interview, she and her husband were renting a suite in Newton, and had recently sold their second car to make ends meet.

Jacopo: You said that you sold your car to save money, which is understandable. But it could be hard in Surrey without a car, no?

Susan: Yeah, I’ve experienced it too, I didn’t like the bus thing at all. In fact, I’ve only had to take the bus a few times. I really … if I had to work outside of my home, I think I would have kept my car. But I couldn’t. And it was just an extra expense to me, so I decided to sell it. Hm…

Jacopo: Do you feel like you can still get around?

Susan: Well we have another car so it’s ok. I think if didn’t have a car at all, it would feel a little bit lost … hm … maybe it would be hard cause I’m not in central city [means Surrey City Centre] It’s not like I’m next to the bus or the Skytrain. I have to walk five blocks to the nearest bus … well I guess I could go two blocks in the other direction and find a bus and see where it goes. Like I know nothing about the bus system. I just know one bus.

Jacopo: How did you get here today?

Susan: I took my husband’s car, yeah … yeah … it’s 40 minutes to walk here. I have walked it.

Jacopo: Is this the nearest shopping area to you?

Susan: Hm, I would say probably, this one and it’s probably the same distance if I went the other way there was an IGA but it just closed, if I had to go the other direction there’s Price Pro. But I never had to walk there … probably this one is 40 minutes one way, and that’s probably the closest actual grocery store, yeah. And I have walked it … I know I can … haha … so.

Susan’s experiences typify some of the familiar transportation challenges facing Surrey residents, especially those who like Susan were living in Newton. Getting around without a car was a major difficulty for Susan. Her nearest bus stop was located five blocks from her house. Walking to the nearest supermarket took forty minutes (one way), a walk that she herself had done before. And though able to sell her car to save money, Susan is quick to point out that without access to her husband’s car she would have been ‘lost.’ This was a sentiment most frequently echoed by residents of Newton who live a distance away from the Surrey City Centre and its more wide-ranging transportation options. For the sake of comparisons, Newton has only two transit exchanges compared to five in North Surrey, and no rapid transit service to speak of.
Bus service also runs less frequently in Newton than in North Surrey, and covers a more limited land area.

Susan’s experiences also point to a different, though equally relevant, dynamic observed among residents in the suburbs. Because of the costs and gaps associated with public transit, households who do own a car will often not spend money on transit fares. As Sonam bluntly put it: “when I go travelling on bus or Skytrain it’s expensive to pay, so you only pay for gas or you pay for the transit.” Narjis shared a similar sentiment, as did many others. She noted that because she was already paying for the car – largely in the form of car insurance payments – there was not much of a financial incentive to also pay for public transit. Many households are left to choose between paying for transit or a private vehicle, but they cannot afford to pay for both. The lack of a good public transit service often serves to solidify the decision to purchase a car, as people feel they are not getting the ‘best bang for their buck’ when using the bus. But as residents come to rely on the car as their primary mode of transportation, they are not likely to switch back to using public transit, which increases dependency on a mode of transport which for low- to modest-income families can be tough to keep up with (Currie and Delbosc 2011a; Blumenberg and Smart 2011).

Transportation issues and the challenge of getting around impact virtually every aspect of the lives of suburban residents: getting to work, securing a job, shopping for groceries, accessing community services. Transportation challenges also factor in when considering everyday domestic life. Natasha, introduced earlier in Chapter 4, talked about the process of taking her children to the Newton Recreation Centre from her house in North Surrey:

When we had only one car, my husband use it of course for work, so that's why I had to, I had to use public transit with my children, so it was part, because for instance if I want to go to Newton, I always had to use two buses, and I spend around 20 minutes between buses in Surrey Central, so I take this one, then I spend 20 minutes waiting time, then I use second one, so it was little bit, not comfortable, not convenient, yes, of course. So for instance, if I use car I spend, to drive to Newton, I spend just around 20 minutes, but with bus I spend around one hour ... cause from here we don't have a direct bus to Newton, we have to change always.

Lara, a woman in her mid-forties and native of Switzerland, described “not knowing what to do” without a car. She had arrived in Canada in 2016 with her two daughters, sponsored by her Canadian husband, who was working a precarious job in the construction industry. Her own
professional background was as a chef, but at the time of our interview, Lara was unemployed and struggling to find work. Unable to find an elementary school near her house, she drove her younger daughter to school everyday. The school, located about 3km (or a 30 minute walk) from Lara’s house, was too close for her daughter to qualify for school bus service, but too far to walk to. Lara noted that public transit wasn’t great in Surrey, especially when compared to Switzerland where “you can live better without a car” and where buses arrive “every 5 minutes.” With more than a hint of exasperation she described her experience here in Canada as that of American soccer mom:

Because here in schools, so I feel really like American mom, we notice in Europe the drop off and pick up with the cars, so we don't know that in Switzerland they go by themselves they walk [parents and kids], that's it, nobody is driving hm their kids [to school].

Owning a car adds significant expenses to a household’s monthly budget. But for many newcomers in Surrey, the lack of an extensive public transit system makes the decision to buy a car a priority, if not a necessity. For some, it is a way to access employment opportunities in harder-to-reach areas, such as in light industrial districts. For others, securing a job is premised on the applicant’s ability to have a car of his or her own, as was the case for Harjinder and for Muniya’s husband. In other instances, the car is used as a way to help other family members overcome the deficiencies in the local public transit service. In other cases still, newcomers rely on the car to take their kids to school or to access local recreational facilities, something that can be unfeasible without it.

4.7 Conclusion

The rise of poor minority neighbourhoods in the periphery of Canadian cities cannot be exclusively interpreted as a story of people getting priced out of the central city – though that is certainly an important dynamic. Pull factors are contributing to making the suburbs strategic places in which to settle for a growing number of low- and modest-income newcomers. But with the opportunities that come with such a move, there are also clear challenges, transportation key among them. The relationship between equity and transport has been reported in the academic literature for some time. Although it wasn’t until the early 2000s that scholars started to examine the link between exclusion, transport and social disadvantage with any degree of sustained
interest. Today, there exists an extensive body of literature centred around the concept of ‘transport disadvantage’ – a term that defies precise definition – but that can broadly be understood to describe the spectrum of transport-related factors compounding social inequity: poor public transit options, not having access to a car, long travel distances, etc. (Currie and Delbosc 2011b). But this literature, which is overwhelmingly reliant on quantitative methodologies, is largely focused on testing the relationship between variables using large datasets and sophisticated statistical techniques. Often missing from the scholarship is a detailed understanding on what transport disadvantage actually looks like on the ground for everyday people, especially for those living in suburban areas.

The everyday grind of waiting for a connecting bus at 10:30pm in the rain is not something easily captured by quantitative methods. Nor is the experience of being dropped off by some desolate strip mall at 9pm, only to then wait for an hour for one’s shift to start. Even simpler details about people’s commutes can go overlooked in conventional transportation studies. Metrics like frequency of buses per hour or proximity to a bus stop offer only coarse approximations of the type of barriers residents experience in their day to day lives. Respondents describe transit routes that aren’t just long or indirect, but routes that sometimes travel opposite to, or well beyond, the very locations people are trying to reach.

Through interviews with local residents, this chapter sheds light on some of the mechanisms by which disadvantage operates at the neighbourhood scale, focusing on the everyday barriers that make life in the suburbs challenging for more economically marginalized populations. I argue that land-use patterns and gaps in public transit provision create mobility challenges that are qualitatively unique to suburban areas, making it harder for people to get around, and producing barriers to opportunities.

For those without the means to buy a car, or who cannot drive, access to reliable public transit can be as important as securing housing and employment (Blumenberg and Ong 2001). Many newcomers of modest economic means grapple with circuitous and time-consuming commutes, especially when traveling to harder-to-reach light industrial areas. Limited and infrequent bus service contributes to an added level of difficulty as residents are forced to arrive at work earlier than needed and leave to go home later than expected. Assessing accessibility on the basis of
proximity to a bus stop or distance traveled belies a more complex reality. Some residents are redirected to altogether different municipalities before finally reaching their destinations. Many rely on multiple buses for each trip they take, increasing both the number of waiting periods and the risks of delays. Residents find themselves having to wait for transit in fairly desolate places such as along arterial roads, or next to highway overpasses, where a lack of nearby private businesses or amenities make it difficult for travelers to access shelter, washroom facilities, or places in which to seek safety in time of need. For those commuting on weekends or off-peak hours, transport disadvantages are compounded. Like many suburbs, late-night transit service in Surrey is especially limited. Night-time workers have to allocate extra time to their commutes, and endure longer waiting periods. In some cases, people look to car-pooling or even car ownership as a way to address gaps in transit service. While transit isn’t particularly great in Surrey, walking is even less appealing. Long distances, a disconnected street pattern, and lack of snow clearing in the winter make walking unpleasant and inefficient, if not downright dangerous. People commonly turn to the private automobile as a way to address the mobility challenges associated with public transit and walking, a phenomenon known in the literature as “forced car ownership.” In many cases, driving greatly reduces commuting times, adds flexibility to people’s arrival and departure times, and gives residents greater control over desired routes. But in addressing one set of issues, car ownership creates other problems, most notably added costs that can be hard to absorb especially among household’s whose incomes are already stretched.

Interviews with local residents highlight the extent to which transportation issues impact virtually every aspect of people’s lives: commuting to work, securing employment, shopping for groceries, reaching community services, etc. It is by incorporating the perspective of local residents that one start to paint a fuller picture of the unique risks and barriers associated with suburban residence in the context of growing socio-spatial inequality.
Chapter 5: Challenges: Safety and social isolation

5.1 Introduction

Transportation is not the only challenge facing lower-income newcomers who live in the suburbs today. Research suggests that dynamics typically associated with concentrated neighbourhood poverty – social isolation, exclusion, crime, etc. – are also at play in suburban areas where poverty rates have increased over the past few decades (Kneebone and Raphael 2011). It is thus not unreasonable for urban scholars to express concerns over the risks associated with rising socio-spatial inequality in Canada. But as shown in Chapter 4, these concerns are not always fully accurate or adequately demonstrated. For one thing, spatial dynamics play out differently in the suburbs than often imagined. Suburbs across Canada have diversified immensely – ethnically, culturally, and economically – in the past three to four decades. Far from being isolated or disconnected from fellow co-ethnics, many newcomers and minorities move to the suburbs drawn by the presence of established networks and co-ethnic communities. Similarly, suburban residents are not as removed from community services and amenities as is often portrayed in the existing literature. The demographic changes impacting suburbia have been accompanied by equally important changes in built form and economy. High-rises, multi-family buildings, mixed-use developments, office space, restaurants, retail shops, and an array of services are found in most suburbs today. Services may not be as concentrated as in the urban core, but they are certainly there. In my own interviews with local residents, time and again, people expressed the convenience of finding most – if not all – of what they needed in Surrey. Seldom did people have to travel to Vancouver for the purpose of accessing services not found in Surrey.

147 Concerns over social exclusion and isolation are voiced throughout the literature. For instance, Fielder et al. (2006b, 214) write, “…the presence of areas where recent immigrants in housing need are concentrated in conjunction with high levels of poverty raises the possibility of social dislocation and exclusion, as described in American urban underclass studies.” Similarly, Ley and Lynch (2012, 11) write, “This trend has led to a distinct racialization and decentralization of poverty over the last several decades … the troubling relationships between race and economic success are producing new forms of social exclusion that are most acute in Toronto and Vancouver.” Walks (2010a) declares “The spatial polarization of the city raises the possibility that where one lives may be increasingly important for determining the life chances of urban residents.” He goes on to say, “The integration of new immigrants and visible minorities into Canadian society may break down, leading to increasing racial divisions, distrust, discrimination, and social exclusion.”

148 This fact is well known to migration scholars who for some time have recognized that ethno-cultural clusters in the suburbs are indeed served by institutional and commercial services (Hiebert 2000b).
Nonetheless, social isolation and safety are issues that impact local residents, and do so in ways that are place specific, i.e. they play out in the suburbs differently than in more urban environments. This is largely because of the way that transportation dynamics and neighbourhood form in suburbia amplify broader social inequities. As discussed above, one way in which this plays out, is in regard to accessing employment opportunities. It is well known that persistent conditions of inequality characterize the employment outcomes of many newcomers and minority groups. Language barriers, race-based discrimination, and unrecognized professional credentials are but some of the factors contributing to inequitable employment opportunities for these groups (Galabuzi 2006; Hiebert 2009a; Pendakur 2005). In the suburbs, gaps in the public transit network, disconnected street patterns, and long distances help reinforce and amplify inequities found in the labour market (Allen and Farber 2019; Lucas et al. 2018; Tomer et al. 2011). Simply put, it can be difficult, time consuming, and costly for residents to get to and from work, which exacerbates employment outcomes for more economically marginalized populations.

But neighbourhood form and transportation do not just limit access to employment opportunities. As my conversations with local residents highlight, neighbourhood form and transportation dynamics also affect social cohesion, community belonging, and public safety. This chapter shows how the lack of street life and car-centric character of Surrey create added barriers to social inclusion for newcomers. In a second line of research, I illustrate how people’s sense of safety is also affected by place-based characteristics unique to suburban spaces.

5.2 Social Isolation

5.2.1 Concentration and Clustering

Isolation was a theme routinely brought up in my interviews with respondents, especially among very recent immigrants who – because of limited length of residency – had not had the chance to form strong bonds, ties and attachment to people in their local communities. In many ways, the feeling of isolation conveyed was in line with accepted understandings of the experience of starting life afresh in a new country (Smith and Ley 2008). Various respondents talked about
feeling excluded from mainstream society, and unable to meet so-called ‘real Canadians’ – which I interpreted to mean white native-born Canadians. Newcomers rely on co-ethnic networks to establish themselves in Canada, but ethnic communities – as documented in the existing literature on migration – can both support and also hinder new immigrants (Hiebert et al. 2007). This is because enclave development, especially among visible minorities, has been documented to increase social distance and isolation from mainstream society.\textsuperscript{149} Many newcomers rely on their ethnic networks and support groups to find work, secure housing, and go about many aspects of everyday life, which limits the need to step outside of ethnic and cultural circles (Hiebert et al. 2007).\textsuperscript{150} New language acquisition – a powerful determinant of social integration – can be stalled as people continue to converse and communicate in their mother tongue, making it harder to forge meaningful relationships outside of the cultural enclave.\textsuperscript{151}

This type of feeling was prominent among respondents who expressed both gratitude for being able to tap into an established ethnic community, but also lamented the real and perceived distance this created from mainstream society. Rajpal, introduced earlier, described his decision to move to Surrey as a way to be near other Indo-Canadians. He feared that if he settled elsewhere in the region he would become more socially isolated at a time when he and his family where already struggling to find their footing in the new country. By living among other Indo-Canadians Rajpal found a sense of familiarity, a shared cultural connection, and – more pragmatically – he found people with whom he could more easily communicate.

So yeah I found some good company over here, mainly from India, because the main, main hardship is the language problem, because if I'm communicating in English it is very hard to be very casual, and very ease of things, so if I'm talking from on in Hindi I'm very much at ease [unintelligible], I, I can share my views through my deep heart, but if I'm speaking in English it's a little bit, very much difficult, for me to express my views and all that, yeah

\textsuperscript{149} It is worth noting that enclave development is a complex process involving both voluntary and non-voluntary factors. Non-voluntary forces include institutional and individual discrimination, and racism. And voluntary forces include such things as a desire to protect a unique cultural heritage, or tap into a network of like-minded people speaking a shared language (Hiebert et al. 2007).

\textsuperscript{150} Institutional racism and discrimination in mainstream society put additional barriers to integration and social mixing.

\textsuperscript{151} Again, this is not to say that newcomers should be encouraged to lose their mother tongue and be expected to communicate only in English. Rather, it is to point out that tapping into a community of people speaking a shared language can inadvertently create barriers to broader social integration into mainstream society.
Rajpal went on to say:

So I'm very much tend to hm ... attract to Indians rather than some other community, because I used to have working when I'm immigrant, one Filipino guy was living near my home, and he usually give me a ride, but I paid for him, and then he give me lift, but I found him that his way of talking and all that things, I can't sometimes I can't understand him, and he, he was grown over here, but was originally from Philippines, but he, his parents took him when he was five year old like my daughter so he was totally adapted in Canadian culture, but I was not able to connect him with my language problem at that time, so, it is very easy to get attracted with Indian community even, even if they are Punjabi, because we can understand, we can coordinate, communicate, and express our views and some attachment is there, yeah, so, that's why more people are tending to come in firstly come in, come to stay in Surrey because of the hm sickness, home sickness feeling is less, if you live here, especially for Indians

The ability to meaningfully connect with others was important to Rajpal who at the time was dealing with the jolt of starting a new life in Canada. He had gone from a comfortable – if not privileged – upper middle-class lifestyle in India, a business man who owned his own home and who was wealthy enough to hire domestic workers, to renting a basement suite in Newton, and packing shelves in a warehouse at near minimum wage. Interacting with others with whom he could speak Hindi allowed him to “share my views from my deep heart”, he could speak more honestly and more casually. “There is some attachment there,” he explained, in a way that was not the case when interacting with non-Indo Canadians.

Nonetheless, it was clear to Rajpal that while life in Surrey afforded proximity to a cultural community of like-minded people, it also created barriers. When asked about whether he liked Surrey, and whether he’d considered staying for the long run, Rajpal expressed mixed emotions:

I don't like Surrey, but hm I know that if I'm not living here, I will be more isolated. But I know that that community is not good here, as compared to other communities, yeah, it is a very criminal-type of area.

Top of mind for Rajpal was criminal activity related to gun violence and drug crime. Street-level criminality has given Surrey a bad reputation for some time, but the line between perception and reality is scarcely clear. Like many residents in Surrey, Rajpal’s experience with criminal activity was peripheral rather than direct: he heard about car theft from a neighbour, and read
about gang-related shootings in the local paper. Just as clear to him was the connection between drug-dealing and the Indo-Canadian community:

> Because rich Punjabi guys are taking drugs and are in violence so the image is not good, all over India, the image of Surrey is not as good as compared to other Burnaby, and all of that cities.

For Rajpal, life in Surrey meant proximity to an established co-ethnic community and opportunity for social support, “I know that if I’m not living here [in Surrey], I will be more isolated,” he related to me. But his feelings for the city were hardly one-sided, “I don’t like Surrey,” “it is very criminal-type of area,” “the image of Surrey is not as good as compared to other [cities].” The sense of familiarity was also accompanied by a feeling of being stuck in an undesirable area of Metro Vancouver, one with a drug crime problem. He appreciated living among other immigrants from India, but also lamented the fact that – as he saw it – a section of the Indo-Canadian community was involved in the type of crime that made Surrey unappealing for people like him.

Said another way, clustering around other Indo-Canadians had its benefits, but also its downsides: insularity and further distancing from the mainstream. This is perhaps best seen in Rajpal’s decision to send his daughter to a public school in Delta, rather than Surrey, a decision he describes below:

> I have seen that in Delta there is more diverse community rather than in Surrey schools, that's why we opted for school in Delta. Yeah, because there they are multicultural kind of kids coming and as compared to Surrey so yeah, that was my top choice she should go in Delta only because she would learn more English and more multicultural aspects rather than Punjabi and I have seen that Punjabi people send their kids to Punjabi schools only, Punjabi specific schools they [unintelligible] they're inclined to much for [unintelligible].“

Rajpal feared that by sending his daughter to a school in Surrey she would lack exposure to mainstream Canadian society, and its broader cultural diversity. He saw the large presence of Indo-Canadians in the Surrey school system as a potential barrier to integration, “she would learn

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152 The connection between gang violence and members of Surrey’s South-Asian population has been widely reported. South Asians, however, should not be singled out as other populations have been involved in gangs and organized crime in the city (Brend 2019; Rinaldi 2014). Also, the vast majority of people of South-Asian background in Surrey have no ties to criminal gangs. If anything, South-Asians are the victims of gang violence.
more English and [learn] more multicultural aspects” in Delta. Going further, he took issue with fellow acquaintances who sent their kids to Punjabi schools. Rajpal’s sentiments illustrate how social isolation plays out in dual-like form for many newcomers: newcomers seek out co-ethnic communities to overcome social isolation, but ties with a specific ethno-cultural enclave can turn newcomers ‘inwards’ and further isolate them from the rest of society.

This type of feeling was common among other respondents. Gurneet, also from India, enrolled her two sons in French Immersion to ensure they would mingle with kids from other cultural backgrounds. She herself grappled with the pull toward the familiar and her desire to branch out into the wider community. She liked Surrey precisely because “a lot of Indians are there, and a lot of Indian stuff is available.” But as a part time student enrolled at the Surrey Community College, Gurneet aspired to break down the cultural silos she saw in her class:

Like you know they hm if any group project we have to do in our own class and our teachers they tell us 'you have your own choice' then our community people [i.e. Indo-Canadians] they want to do the group project without not the other community people [i.e. other immigrants], they, they simply say 'we have our own people' to do the project, yeah, and in fact I still remember it was second day at the class and I went to the teacher I told her that we are all from different communities and different community backgrounds and I have a suggestion that everybody should seat with a different person every time so that we can mingle out with and we can know about different cultures and more, and she never supported me, and she simply said that it's your class who take the decision and you see if you're able to convince people and hm and my community people were ready, but the other community people they simply said 'no we don't want to' yeah so, for one month I was feeling that, you know, I have not properly sat with my people, I have not properly sat with other people and that I belong to no community [unintelligible] so I tried rather than, you know, finding a space in other people I should get into my community only, yeah.

Cultural divides, Gurneet found, were equally strong in public spaces. She went on to say:

If we go to the parks and all mostly we have our own community people those that come and talk to you generally, but no other community people will come and talk to, no, yeah ...

Time and again, respondents talked about feeling isolated from broader society. Many of the residents I spoke with found it difficult to reach across ethnic and cultural lines. When relationships were formed, people tended to do so by drawing from within their own ethnic circles. In line with studies on social isolation, respondents in my sample found strangers and neighbours to be, for the most part, cordial and nice, but described connections that lacked meaningful depth (Vancouver Foundation 2012).
To be sure, there is little that is novel about pointing to feelings of isolation among new immigrants settling in a new country (D’Addario et al. 2007; Hiebert 2015; Ley 1999; Ray and Preston 2009; Teixeira 2007; Veldman 2013). The topic has been researched extensively, and it has come to be well known by the general public as well. What is of interest here is how the redrawing of the geography of immigration and income in Canadian cities is leading to new forms of inequity. While isolation is common among newcomers throughout metropolitan regions in Canada, for those living in the suburbs the experience is distinct from those living in the urban core.

As researchers have started to recognize, today’s lower-income immigrants are increasingly living in suburban areas where other neighbours are also immigrants of modest economic means (Hiebert 2007; Murdie 2008; Smith and Ley 2008). Surrey is a minority-majority area, meaning that visible minorities make up the majority (almost 60%) of total municipal residents (Statistics Canada 2016). Moreover, as shown in Chapter 2, lower-income neighbourhoods in the city have high rates of minority and immigrant residents. What this means, is that for newcomers in the suburbs isolation is not simply a result of uprooting to a new country, but also of living in neighbourhoods where by being surrounded by other immigrants, people feel greater distance from what they perceive as mainstream Canadian society. Natasha, introduced earlier, spoke to this dynamic:

All these connections, I mean the LINC program and the library champions program it was connections with immigrants, so maybe, hm, at that time I would like more connections with hm Canadians [chuckles] I don't know, to better understand the culture, the customs, some traditions, I don't know, cause now, I know a lot about Philippines, Mexicans [chuckles] traditions I mean hm Punjabi, because in Surrey here yeah, a lot of Chinese, so yeah, I have a lot of connections with immigrants, but yeah, I don't have enough [unintelligible] so because I don't know.153

Speaking about her daughter’s school, Lara voiced a similar concern: “Hm so, in this class that she's right now in, there are eighty, eighty-five percent from Asia, so sometimes I don't feel like

153 Nadia expressed a similar sentiment: “[Sigh] you know my problem is that I don't have like [unintelligible] friends, I just have Russian friends, it's not good I know but hm [chuckles] I just communicate with Russian friends, but you know I have a lot of friends here, but unfortunately just Russians, maybe because I'm shy, I don't know I can't communicate with these people outside or hm strangers so, but I got a lot of friends here.”
I'm in Canada [chuckles].” Asked about whether it had been hard for her to connect with other parents, Lara explained: “Yes, there was once a morning for parents to [hm] to look at what they [the children] built and stuff, and yeah, it was really, so, it's eighty percent Asian were there and me, and I think only two other mothers, and we were here [motions with her hand] even when you say 'hi' there's not really a reaction, so, they, yeah.” In similar fashion, Jenny described some of the pitfalls of withdrawing into one’s cultural enclave:

Jacopo: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about your experiences, here in Canada, so far?

Jenny: Hm, so far, I learned a lot, and I think is better to, to get [unintelligible] like the minority people, like you guys the white people, because if you withdraw into the Chinese community, you will not learn things, you will not improve, hm, as far as I know, the hourly wage, the salary for Chinese community is cheaper, yes, than people work in the white people community.\textsuperscript{154}

Jacopo: So you feel you have to kind of go outside of the –

Jenny: This is why I'm learning, I'm trying to improve my English.

In lower-income neighbourhoods where street-level crime and disinvestment are realities, social distance from mainstream society can feel even greater, as attested by Rajpal’s earlier comments. Newcomers who live in high-poverty areas are aware that they live largely around other immigrants and visible minorities (i.e. not among middle-class white Canadians). In my own interactions with local residents it was clear, at times, that people wanted to talk to me because of my perceived status as an educated “white Canadian.” One respondent went so far as to say: “I

\textsuperscript{154} Jenny is making a reference to an informal or underground economy. Earlier in the interview she had talked about how as a Chinese immigrant she relied heavily on Vansky, a classified advertisement website geared to Vancouver’s Chinese community. She did not find Craigslist to be an effective website in which to find such things as work or housing. Jenny explained that on Vansky she could easily communicate in Chinese, and credentials such as reference letters or criminal record checks were usually not requested. Rather, more important were such things as one’s hometown and one’s Chinese background. The flip side, as Jenny explained is that because of being part of this informal/underground economy, jobs and housing were also more likely to be precarious and not regulated.
wanted to talk to you because you look like Justin Trudeau” (I paraphrase). On more than one occasion, people admitted wanting to talk to me because they hoped we could become friends. The opportunity to connect with an outsider who was perceived to have a link to mainstream Canadian society was a reality for a number of respondents. In many ways, residents saw me as a link to a world that they themselves did not have access to, since most of their everyday interactions in Surrey [taking the bus, buying food, riding the elevator to one’s apartment, going to night school, being at work, waiting in a line at the local bank, etc.] centred around other immigrants and visible minorities.

Residents’ concerns about feeling left out of broader society are in line with a long-line of research showing the risks associated with living in areas with a concentrated incidence of low-income households (Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993). At issue here is deepening socio-spatial isolation, and a disconnect from mainstream opportunities structures (Hiebert 2007; Smith and Ley 2008). In this way, my interviews with local residents do lend credence – at least in part – to concerns brought up in the literature on inequality and polarization. Minorities and economically-marginalized populations in the suburbs do run the risk of becoming further marginalized. While such statements are backed by limited empirical research, interviews with local residents – as we started to show – offer a first step from which one can start to shed light on this issue.

5.2.2 Mode of Travel and Neighbourhood Form

The comment made by Kadir – a young Egyptian man who had immigrated to Canada with his parents in 2015 – was made after our interview, and is of course subjective. I would argue that I have little resemblance to the 23rd Prime Minister of Canada. No one else I know or met as ever made such a comment to me other than Kadir. This is telling for it makes me think that if I have something in common with Justin Trudeau is that I’m a white guy in my thirties who wears dress shirts. But if you live in a neighbourhood where you are unlikely to come across young, white urban professional-types who speak English without a recognizable accent, then one might make the link between me and the Prime Minister. In other words, the above comment should be interpreted for what it says about the respondent, and less for what it says about me.

It is telling for instance that various South-Asians respondents used the word “multicultural” to mean communities with fewer Indo-Canadians. Some respondents, such as Jenny, even referred to white people as “minorities”.

Having said this, current dynamics are still more complex than presented in the existing literature which overlooks the opportunities and benefits that come with a move to the suburbs.

My point here about ‘limited empirical research’ is in regards to current research on inequality and polarization in Canadian cities which abounds with largely untested – statements about the risks suburban life poses to more marginalized populations.
But the mechanisms by which spatial urban divides operate at the neighbourhood scale go beyond clustering and concentration. To be sure, the residential concentration of low-income immigrant households in suburban areas amplifies risks to social inclusion: it can be a challenge for people to form relationships and seek opportunities outside their geographic and social enclaves. What’s more, there are added features unique to suburban areas – especially in relation to neighbourhood form – that further reinforce relations of exclusion and isolation, thus deepening broader social inequities.

To say that human relationships are mediated by space – both social and physical – isn’t something new (Lofland 1998; Massey 1995; Williamson 2010). But it is worth thinking about how this dynamic plays out in the context of the changing geography of income and immigration. As seen earlier, postwar suburbs prioritize a strict separation of land uses organized around an automobile-centred street network. This approach to planning is not particularly amenable to walking as a mode of travel and by extension to social interaction at the street level (Demerath and Levinger 2003; Lofland 1998; Lund 2002; Wood et al. 2010; Williamson 2010). The absence of pedestrians and overall lack of street life in suburban areas amplifies vulnerabilities for low- and modest-income newcomers at risk of social isolation.

A native of Havana Cuba, Gabriela recounted her first impressions of life in Surrey. Her experiences are illustrative of how suburban space mediates people’s everyday interactions, and how it can exacerbate the challenges of being a stranger in a new country with limited economic means. Asked about what she thought of Surrey and whether she was happy living here, Gabriela said:

Gabriela: Is good to not be lonely, because hm, my first impression when I got here was like 'I can't see nobody in my neighbourhood, where is the people? How they people meet each other? How the people interact each other? Because I was in the streets and I said 'Uh! I can't see nobody! Where is the people around? Where is the people here?' I remember I ask my cousin's husband, I said 'Sebastian, how the people get married here? How? Because I can't see nobody! Nobody, nobody.

Jacopo: So would you say you met people through your cousin? Through your school?

Gabriela: Through my cousin, through my school too, hm also through work that place gives you the opportunity to meet new people, interact hm of course get friends,
create your group of friends, your group of interactions, yeah, yeah, those places, because on the street you try to hm is really weird to find someone and start a friendship, is really weird, is no easy ...

Jacopo: Is that different in Cuba? Are people more hm …

Gabriela: People yes, completely different because of the weather. People are on the street most of the time, they hm they wear casual clothes, they speak with you, even the weather, the sports, the hm any topic hm any kind of topic. But the people hm for example if you are walking on the street 'oh Jacopo nice t-shirt!' or 'how are you today?' hm 'come on let's go to another place to drink a coffee' or 'to take an ice cream' you know and then you can is easier to interact with people, to establish a friendship, you know, more open, more friendly, here hm I told you, that was one of the things that hm make me feel bad because I didn't see nobody on the street, even if you are on the street and you try to hm to make eye contact with the people, is so hard, because the people they focus on the phone, or the people they don't look at you, you try to smile, you try to interact with them, is no easy.

Coming from a country with a vibrant street life, Gabriela was astonished by the lack of pedestrians in Surrey, “I can't see nobody in my neighbourhood, where is the people? How they people meet each other? How the people interact each other?” Her astonishment was such that she jokingly asked her brother in-law “Sebastian, how do people get married here?” In other words, ‘how do people meet?’ In her home country, walking was an everyday experience that lent itself to social interaction. Gabriela found the lack of pedestrians in Surrey disquieting and isolating, as it made it difficult to connect with others and get to know people: “I didn’t see nobody on the street,” “if you try to make eye contact with people … they focus on the phone … they don’t look at you … it’s not easy.”

While forging relationships with strangers in urban environments isn’t necessarily easy either, the extent to which the car-centric nature of suburbia keeps people away from one another is to a degree not seen in cities, where the potential for human interaction is at least more pronounced, thanks in large part to walkable and mixed-use neighbourhoods (Williamson 2010). The most widely-praised examples of good planning in Vancouver all revolve around walkable neighbourhoods. Granville Island, Fairview, and Mt. Pleasant are esteemed examples of communities that foster social connectedness and cohesion (Punter 2004). They are mixed-use neighbourhoods with a variety of housing types, household incomes – though this is changing with gentrification – and public and community spaces. In contrast, except for a few recently developed pockets of mixed-use development, much of Surrey remains overwhelmingly
suburban in feel: low-density, single use, and car-centric. Gabriela, who resided in Clayton when we first met, lived in precisely such a neighbourhood.

This dynamic impacted not only young single people like Gabriela, but also families. Lara, introduced earlier, rented the upstairs suite of a house in Surrey with her two daughters and her husband. An immigrant from Western Europe, she recognized she had a leg up relative to other immigrants: her English was fairly strong, and her spouse was a Canadian-born man. Despite this fact, Lara was not immune to feelings of isolation and loneliness, something that she herself connected to the lack of opportunities for social interaction in the public realm. Asked whether she’d been able to meet people in Surrey, and whether she felt isolated, Lara replied:

Lara: Of course, because I've got my Canadian husband I think I'm much more integrated than maybe other people or families who come here, and hm so I'm playing steel darts, and I'm playing twice a week in teams, and at the weekends usually when I have time so I play tournaments and so I'm very integrated in this darts family, but it's hm without that I would be isolated yes, because here in school so [chuckles] I feel really like American mom, we noticed in Europe the drop off and pick up with the cars, so we don't know that in Switzerland they go by themselves they walk [parents and kids], that's it, nobody is driving hm their kids, but maybe you walk with them and then you have contact with other parents, but that's not really possible here, so, ... it's like, like a movie [chuckles].

Jacopo: And what about in your neighbourhood? You’ve met your downstairs neighbours.

Lara: So with two neighbours hm and that's it, so, I know there have to be a lot of children because the schools are full, but you can't see anybody on the streets, so they really live in their house, so, and hm I don't know why it is like this, because in Switzerland the kids they have bicycles there, are outside playing, I don't know if it's too dangerous or is it because both parents work, so, I don't know why it is ... So in December with the first snow we could see two houses away from us where two boys were playing in the snow, then my daughter went to them, and 'can I play with you', it's hard when it's not your language, 'ha yes of course' and she was there and they played together so, yeah, she tried, but it's, it's not that easy, and the same with school, she has there a best friend now, but hm, her best friend is from hm White Rock, so, because her mother works here, and so you can't say after school 'ha you can play together' yeah.

She went on to describe the challenges of meeting people in her neighbourhood during the day:

Lara: I think to hm to be integrated here, so, during the day here as a mom it's almost impossible because really the, the moms I know, they're both working, there's nobody here during the day to make friends, so, you have to make friends with a hobby, otherwise it's almost impossible ... But I can't complaint for myself, because I'm integrated hm
Jacopo: But I can see how if you have to drop your kids off and pick them up ...

Lara: And in the meantime, I feel alone, yeah.

Jacopo: Are there things you had in Switzerland you wish you had here in Surrey? Hm, you talked about how kids tend to be hm you see more kids out in the parks or the streets ...

Lara: Yeah, that's different here than in Switzerland, because of course everything is smaller [in Switzerland]. Here, are a lot of kids, playgrounds and stuff, during the summer they are full, but you, still you have to drive there, and it's not, it's not the neighbour, you understand, maybe someone from wherever, and the kids are playing together but to really make friends hm it's hard, I really hope in summer when my daughter can go to the right school there are kids from the area and I hope really she can make friends so I can 'ok your friend can play in our house, or tomorrow you can go his place so ... there are a lot of kids but no connection so, because, yeah, maybe it's too big, I don't know.

Like Gabriela, Lara articulated the importance of place in mediating social relationships. She was at loss to understand why “you can’t see anybody on the streets,” especially children which – as she explained – in her home country were a constant fixture of the neighbourhood, “in Switzerland the kids they have bicycles they are outside playing.” But here in Surrey, Lara remarked, everyone “really lives in their house.” The absence of neighbours out on the street created barriers for social interaction. To Lara’s surprise it had been difficult for her younger daughter to meet other kids in her neighbourhood. She said, “I know there have to be a lot of children, because the schools are full, but you can’t see anybody outside.” She herself admitted to “feeling alone,” and compared her situation to that of an “American mom” who drives her kids to school, a practice not commonly followed – Lara explained – by parents in Switzerland.159 Lara remarked that as a mom getting to know people in her neighbourhood “it’s almost impossible” since “there’s nobody here during the day to make friends,” which was the direct result of the unqualified residential character of her neighbourhood.160

159 By “American mom” Lara is likely to have meant what is also colloquially called a “soccer mom,” that is, a housewife who lives in the suburbs, and drives her kids to school and sport activities. This can be seen in such references as: “it’s like a movie,” “there’s nobody here during the day to make friends,” “I feel alone,” “I feel like an American mom” who “drops off and picks up” her kids to and from school. These are common tropes found in popular cultures that are used to depict suburban housewives in North America.

160 At the time of our interview, Lara was unemployed and looking for work, a situation complicated by her status as a mother with a young child. Elementary school is dismissed at 2:30pm, and because the responsibility to pick up and look after the child tends to fall on mothers (rather than the fathers), immigrant moms face the challenge of
commercial, cultural, recreational and office activities meant that on weekdays her neighbourhood was emptied of people.

Lara further drew a link between social isolation and the sprawling car-centric character of Surrey. She explained, “there are a lot of kids, playgrounds and stuff … but you, still you have to drive there, and it's not, it's not the neighbour, you understand, maybe someone from wherever, and the kids are playing together but to really make friends hm it's hard (my emphasis).” She went on to say: “there are a lot of kids but no connection so, because, yeah, maybe it's too big [i.e. the city], I don't know.”

One way in which compact neighbourhoods foster social relationships is by creating opportunities for interaction between local residents (Bereitschaft 2017; Leyden 2003; Lund 2002, 2003). The relationship between community engagement and neighbourhood form is well documented in the literature on active travel. Wood et al. (2010) found a strong positive association between seeing neighbours when out walking and people’s sense of community. Speck (2012) details the benefits of what he calls the ‘useful walk’ which occurs when people walk to work, shop or socialize. These findings resonate with Jacobs’ (1961) observation that unplanned interaction with neighbours contributes to relationship formation and development:

The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery and nodding hello to the two boys drinking pop on the stoop, eyeing the girls while waiting to be called for dinner, admonishing the children, hearing about a job from the hardware man and borrowing a dollar from the druggist, admiring the new babies and sympathizing over the way a coat faded … Most of it is ostensibly utterly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all (Jacobs 1961, 56).

finding work that can accommodate school hours. Often, mothers will postpone entry into the labour force, putting at risk their career aspirations, and relinquishing valuable income that could help the family cope in the early settlement years.

161 Likely also at play is the difference in recreational models between North America and Europe. It is common, if not widespread, for middle-class families in Canada to enrol children in institutionalized sports from an early age (soccer practice, volleyball camp, swim lessons, etc.) This model is premised on organized-league playing where parents drive their kids to practices, games and tournaments throughout the metropolitan region. In contrast, European children tend to spend their recreational and leisure time engaged in informal non-organized activities at their local park, school, square, or even the grounds of the local parish (Messner and Musto 2016).
This fact was not lost on Lara who noted the value of living in a pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood: “nobody is driving hm their kids [to school in Switzerland], maybe you walk with them and then you have contact with other parents, but that's not really possible here [in Surrey].” It is telling that Lara viewed the simple act of driving your kid to school as isolating in that it prevented opportunity for talking and meeting other parents on the street.\(^{162}\) The sheer size of city did not help either, as it meant that some parents drove long distances just to get to their children to school, a reality made evident by her daughter’s best friend who traveled each day from White Rock and back (a round trip of about 30km to 40km). Lara lamented the distance between the two families, noting that it made it very difficult to organize play dates.

The above narratives are illustrative of the way in which features unique to suburban areas can further reinforce exclusion and isolation. For minorities and lower-income households who live in the suburbs participating in community life can be made more difficult by specific features of the neighbourhoods which they inhabit. Land-use patterns, street networks and transportation systems can amplify social inequities by making everyday activities more difficult: getting to and from work, building support networks, making friends, socializing, etc. (Bereitschaft 2017; Hannah-Jones 2011).\(^{163}\) In Surrey, the strict segregation of land-uses coupled with a car-centric transportation network create added barriers to social interaction and inclusion for newcomers. It can be hard for people to get to meet others and build social networks as human activity is oriented away from the street and the public realm and into the private domain of one’s house, one’s car, or one’s backyard. Opportunities for spontaneous interaction with fellow neighbours are minimized as driving is favoured over walking as the primary form of travel. Moreover, as the responses of local residents demonstrate, streets can feel empty and neighbourhoods devoid of community life. This does not mean that suburban form inherently produces social isolation – as some commentators have suggested in the past – but rather that features of suburbia have the

\(^{162}\) I say this, because when asked about whether she felt isolated and had been able to make friends in Canada, Lara explained she was thankful for being able to tap into her husband’s social network, what she called her ‘steel darts family.’ BUT, she listed the act of driving children to school as the very first thing that came to mind when thinking about the challenge of social isolation and of meeting new people in Canada

\(^{163}\) In fact, a growing number of scholars have started to study whether socially vulnerable groups are being systematically excluded from walkable, pedestrian-friendly urban environments (Bereitschaft 2017;
potential to exacerbate some of the challenges that come with being a newcomer of modest or low-economic means.¹⁶⁴

5.3 Safety

5.3.1 Concentration and Clustering

Some of the same features that create added barriers to community belonging, also impact people’s sense of public safety. Criminal activity was a recurring theme in my conversations with local residents, in large part because of Surrey’s gang violence problem – an issue with complex and disputed roots whose analysis lies beyond the scope of this research (City of Surrey 2018). But the experience of crime among residents can be connected – at least in part – to a discussion about the what makes suburban spaces unique. Unlike service provision, crime and safety are rarely brought up as matters of concern by scholars studying the changing geography of income and immigration in Canadian cities. It is true that among suburbs, Surrey is something of an outlier in that it has a crime problem not witnessed in surrounding municipalities in Metro Vancouver (City of Surrey 2018).¹⁶⁵ For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that crime and safety are overlooked topics of discussion in writings on inequality and polarization in Canadian cities.¹⁶⁶

Urban scholars have studied the link between crime and place for a long time, usually through the prism of concentrated neighbourhood poverty (Hipp 2007; Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013; ¹⁶⁴ See for instance, Williamson (2010). Obviously, social isolation affects people regardless of income. Meaning that even high-income immigrants might find it difficult to develop social relations and community ties in a new country. But, low and modest-income populations lack resources available to higher-income groups that can help alleviate some of the challenges of integrating in society. For instance, transportation challenges can be facilitated by the ability to buy a reliable working vehicle, something that might be out of reach for lower-income households who may have to rely on public transit as a way to get around. ¹⁶⁵ The extent of criminal activity in the city, however, should not be overestimated as Surrey remains a safe place in which to live. In 2017, only 6 gang-related homicides occurred in Surrey, a city with a population of over 500,000 (City of Surrey 2018). In fact, in my experience working alongside various grassroots community organizations I can say there is significant community push back against media characterizations of Surrey as a hub of criminal activity. ¹⁶⁶ For instance, Hulchanski (2010) posits that low-income households in the suburbs might be further disadvantaged by lacking access to services and transit. Smith and Ley (2008) raise similar concerns, as do Ley and Lynch (2012). Walks 2010b echoes some of the same concerns expressed by these writers. But none of them raises the potential risk of exposure to crime.)
Wilson 1987). Because poverty has been concentrated historically in minority, inner-city neighbourhoods, crime as a sociological problem has tended to be studied in an explicitly urban context, while suburbs have for the most part been left out of these discussions (Kneebone and Raphael 2011). But as suburbs become more urban, criminal activity once associated with inner-city neighbourhoods is also being observed in suburban areas (Allard 2017).

Drug dealing, burglaries, car theft, breaking and entering, prostitution and gang violence are all activities that local residents came back to time and again in the interviews for this research. Riya described how she was robbed in front of her house at 11pm at night while coming back from work. Bindhiya talked about how her house was once burglarized, and described gang-related activity on her street where she lived. Rachida related how her car was broken into, and recounted the time a stranger climbed into the back of her car while she was parked along the side of the road. Jenny also described how she had been the victim of a breaking and entering (but because she worked night shifts, she was not home when the burglar(s) climbed through her roommate’s window). Narjis mentioned how the family car was stolen not once, but twice. Other respondents reported similar experiences.

None of the respondents witnessed gang-related shootings first hand, but a number of residents reported gun violence near their home or place of work (Riya near her workplace, Harjinder on her street, and Narjis just outside of her house). Others yet, heard about neighbourhood crimes through news media and word of mouth. Nanchana’s account is indicative of how respondents formed opinions about safety and crime in Surrey:

167 Frameworks that look at the relationship between crime and place go back to the Chicago School of sociology where the theory of ‘social disorganization’ was first developed (Shaw and McKay 1942).
168 This is not because more middle-class suburban residents don’t commit crimes. It is just that violent crime (homicides, aggravated assault, armed robberies, gun violence, etc.) has historically been concentrated in impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods, the reasons are complex and structural in nature (Sampson 2012).
169 Again, this is not to say that minority and poor populations bring crime with them. Rather, the structural forces that create and perpetuate poverty are some of the same forces that create and perpetuate criminal activity (chronic unemployment, economic restructuring, discrimination and racism, intergeneration trauma, etc.) (Wilson 1987).
170 I single out these three cases, because the respondents provided details about the shootings. Meaning that while they did not witness the shooting as it occurred, they had clearly witnessed the aftermath. They were thus speaking from personal experience, and not describing events that they had heard through word of mouth or the news media. For instance, Riya described how one of the company vans where she worked had been hit by stray bullets. Similarly, Harjinder related how a car on her street had also been shot at, and how the police arrived soon after. Finally, Narjis described how a young girl was gunned down outside of her (Narjis’) house. Narjis didn’t know the victim, but she did specify that the young girl attended the same school as her kids. In other words, the experience of gun violence hit close to home for some of the respondents.
I feel happy to be where I am but I don't know about the safety, because my landlord tells that it's not good if you go out at night alone, if you're going with a group, or going with your husband, or going with your family then it's ok, but it's not good to roam around hm at night, late at night rather, alone, it might not be safe, hm, oh, I few months back I heard there was a shoot out the street, two streets from our house hm [unintelligible], because I heard that in Surrey you get to, hm, there a lot of shoot outs and hm several accidents take place in Surrey ..

Even for those respondents who were not victims of crime, fear and criminality were integral parts of the social fabric of the community in which they lived. Nanchana, like others, heard about theft, shootings, and break-ins from fellow neighbours and co-workers, by reading the local paper, or by watching the evening news.\textsuperscript{171} The combined effects of living in a place where the issue of crime is a topic of everyday conversation, results in a heightened sense of insecurity. As the following snippets reveal, feeling unsafe – especially at night – was common among respondents.

The last bus go to our house at 10 o'clock [pm] I never get there at light and when I get to the home is so dark that all that makes me fright [scared] ... and I always try to get back to the home at 8 o'clock but hm sometimes I need to wait in the work or something so I feel fright [scared] so I remember myself when I was in Lebanon, yeah ... and always I look up behind me, 'someone behind me?' I'm still scared ... [Rachida describing walking home from work at night]

... and now every morning when I go to work, like when I wake up, if I go to work Sunday and Saturday 6 o'clock or 5:30 in the morning it's too dark, and I'm always scared to go into my car after that day [the day she was robbed], even in the night time, so I always just like ask my husband or whoever like my mom 'can you stand in the window, I'll go when I seat in my car and drive out [Riya speaking about leaving her house to get to work early in the morning]

I think South Surrey is safer because here [North Surrey] I saw something right it’s not very safe … I used to live at 108 Ave, it’s near Whalley north, now I’m at 104 Ave and 132 Street, and both these places not very safe so, so yeah it’s … hm … it’s … I don’t mean it’s dangerous, I just feel scared when I come home in the late evening [Jacopo: when it’s dark] yeah, and here I used to see somebody sell the drugs … yeah … [Jenny speaking about her neighbourhood]

\textsuperscript{171} Muniya gave another good example of the way that crime informed people’s perceptions of Surrey: "Yes, lot of hm times we heard about shootings, and all that stuff, but hm, because I, hm the thing is that we don't go out, my daughters always stay at home after school, they are home, they don't go out anywhere, so, they don't have any really any friends into that stuff, so, maybe the teenage boys and the hm like maybe they're having those circles and [unintelligible] it has a bad reputation no doubt, we keep on hearing on the news, 'oh that shooting happened there and this'."
... you keep hearing about hm like the RCMP, yeah, shootings, and all that stuff, and drugs and recently there was an incident about the maroon van which was near the Guildford mall, so yeah, mornings I'm fine but evenings I feel that it's unsecure [sic] to go out of the house, yes, not super safe for the kids, yes ... I don't want to take risks, especially with kids, and there were a few incidents on our road as well that somebody came and smash somebody's car and stuff like that [Gurneet talking about not feeling safe walking at night]

When she comes back at midnight she's scared in the security [safety], because you know in Surrey, the Skytrain is not very secure, right. Sometimes there is hm so she's scared and sometimes she said 'oh, if people give me the ride' (Aurul talking about his wife not feeling safe at the Skytrain station)

Untangling the line between perception and reality is a delicate matter when it comes to crime and safety (Hipp 2010a). Statements about criminal activity can be overblown, and to some extent people’s personal experiences of crime and safety are just that: personal and subjective (Hipp 2010b). To see drugs being sold on the street can make a strong impression on some people, and not on others. But perception, though varied and subjective, cannot be dismissed, as it is real to the person in question.

The fact that nearly all respondents had some experience – whether direct or indirect – with crime and voiced concerns about safety is both troubling and telling. It speaks to the extent to which suburban areas are urbanizing, and the degree to which the geography of disadvantage is changing at the regional level (Allard 2017).172 The same neighbourhood characteristics traditionally associated with high crime rates in the inner-city (poverty rates, residential stability, job access, social capital, social trust, educational attainment, housing precarity, family composition, etc.) are at play in parts of suburbia (Kneebone and Raphael 2011). Minorities and low-income households living in high-poverty areas in the suburbs are disproportionately impacted by the negative effects that come with living in underprivileged communities (Sacket 2016).

The above responses confirm the known, and unfortunate, connection between crime and place, but do so in the context of a suburban municipality. More importantly, they illustrate, at least in part, the extent to which minorities and lower-income households in Surrey are exposed to crime

172 Activities such as drug dealing, burglaries, car theft, breaking and entering, prostitution and gang violence.
as they go about their everyday life. This finding lends credence to concerns about the life outcomes and trajectories of marginalized populations, especially young people, in the suburbs. Said another way, if – as some scholars contend – the redrawing of the map of immigration and income is putting marginalized groups further at a disadvantage, then exposure to street-level crime is one way by which positive outcomes for vulnerable populations are put at an even greater risk.

In the following passage, Miriam – first introduced in Chapter 4 – stretched the argument further arguing that newcomers in Surrey are settling in areas that set them up for failure. As an outreach worker, Miriam was acutely aware that place could be a powerful determinant of people’s prospects.

Miriam: Nobody wants to bring up their children in this environment of Surrey especially around hm I think it's from 108th to 88 and King George, I think that's the whole area that is marked for, for, that is not, that I've heard that it's not a good place …

Jacopo: I can see that, it's a little rough.

Miriam: … and then up to Guildford around 152 there and 148 actually 150, yeah.

Jacopo: I know that quite a few refugees live there too.

Miriam: Yeah, and it's unfortunate, this is another thing that it's sometimes looks like a set up hm when landed immigrants appear here they are put in a place that sets them up for failure … yeah, so when you put people there who are [unintelligible] arriving that they get into that environment, it's not healthy. And also with this one, I don't remember the apartment where all the Africans are, hm, it's here in Surrey, the Grosvenor, something I can't remember … it's an apartment building but it's like a disaster, yeah. It's [unintelligible], it's hm near drugs, young kids are picking them, because I remember my boys were in grade 4, when they were approached to buy hm, a guy taught [sic]

\footnote{Miriam was herself an immigrant from Uganda. As black African woman I don’t believe she was being disparaging when saying, “where all the Africans are,” but rather felt she was speaking about her own community.}
them how to do drugs, grade 4, those were ten years old, prospective drug dealers [chuckles] (my emphasis).

In the above passage, Miriam articulated the idea that low-income newcomers end up in neighbourhoods that aren’t particularly healthy or conducive to positive social outcomes. Referencing broader societal forces, Miriam viewed the concentration of lower-income immigrants in certain areas of Surrey as setting people up for failure. Key to her concern was exposure to street level crime, “it’s near drugs, young kids are picking them,” Miriam said, noting that her own boys were only ten years old when they were first approached by a local dealer.

5.3.2 Mode of Travel and Neighbourhood Form

But it is not just the ill effects of concentrated neighbourhood poverty that impacts residents’ sense of public safety. There are features specific to suburban neighbourhoods that help erode it as well. Jacobs was the first to articulate the idea of ‘eyes on the street’ – the concept that diverse, mixed-use neighbourhoods are conducive to safe public spaces for children and adults alike (Jacobs 1961).174 According to Jacobs, the motley collection of residents, shopkeepers, and passers-by involved in everyday activities help transform the dynamics of social interactions in the neighbourhood ecology for the better. The presence of ‘eyes on the street’ helps deter crime and anti-social behaviour through a collective act of self-policing. Not because of suspicion of others, but out of interest for the everyday goings-on at street level, what Jacobs astutely termed “the intricate sidewalk ballet” (Demerath and Levinger 2003).175

174 Jacobs took Greenwich Village as a case study arguing that the various shop owners (the local barber, the grocer, the deli owner, etc.) along with residents in apartments facing the street (for instance, a senior resident leaning against a window sill taking in the sights and sounds below on the sidewalk) provide a safe environment for children and adults alike (Jacobs 1961).

175 I cannot do justice to the full range of Jacobs’ own writing, so here is the relevant excerpt from Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961) “Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. The order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance … an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole.”
Underpinning much of Jacobs’ theory is the idea that socially diverse, mixed-use neighbourhoods are the building blocks for strong and safe communities. Neighbourhood form matters, Jacobs argues, for it has the power to strengthen or hamper people’s sense of security in the very community in which they live (Jacobs 1961). Though Jacobs’ ideas continue to be debated – in large part because of the historically higher incidence of crime in inner-city neighbourhoods relative to suburban areas – studies have generally validated the core of the ‘eyes on the street’ thesis (Anderson et al. 2013; Cozens 2008).

This is especially true of active transportation scholars interested in the relationship between built form and physical activity (Gilderbloom et al. 2015). For instance, McDonald et al. (2010) found that parents are more likely to allow their children to walk to school when they know that other adults are watching the streets. Similarly, McMillan (2007) observed a positive association between walking and biking to school and built form – notably, street-facing windows, and mixed land uses. Likewise, Wood et al. (2010) found a strong relationship between people’s sense of community and walkable commercial districts. More recently, Webb Jamme et al. (2018) have shown that people feel safer in areas where businesses are oriented toward the street, and with less space dedicated to surface parking.

Though Jacobs’ ideas were originally applied to an urban context – and specifically inner-city neighbourhoods – they hold relevance for suburban settings as well. As seen earlier in this chapter, the lack of street life in Surrey amplified people’s sense of social isolation. Various respondents reported feeling at a loss because of the lack of people out on the streets on the basis that the lack of human presence hindered opportunity for social interaction. What is clear in my conversations with local residents is that the same neighbourhood characteristics that amplify social isolation also affect people’s sense of safety.

Consider the way that respondents framed their answers to questions about neighbourhood safety. If it wasn’t surprising enough to learn that many residents felt a sense of insecurity, even more telling was the way they described feeling unsafe. Riya declared, “after 9pm I’m scared to walk.” Similarly, Rachida said, “after 8pm I’m scared, yeah.” She added, “I always try to get home by 8pm.” Likewise Jenny stated, “I just feel scared when I come home in the late evening.” Narjis noted that after one of her kid’s classmate was shot outside of their house, “for a long
time, they [her kids] waited for me to pick them up, they didn't want to walk home [from
school].” Asked about whether she felt safe walking at night in her neighbourhood, Valeria
replied “not very much.” Gurneet added, “mornings I’m fine, but evenings I feel that’s unsecure
[sic] to go out of the house, it’s not safe for the kids.” Rajpal was of the opinion that “the
community is very much unsafe, considered unsafe … we never go out at night.” Asked about
what he would like to see improved the most in his community, Teodoro replied “public safety.”
Suhana echoed Teodoro and pointed to ‘drugs,’ ‘robberies,’ and ‘shootings’ as the top things
she’d like to see addressed. She added that while she felt ‘ok’ walking at night, doing so wasn’t
really safe. Natasha stated that while people were “kind,” she also said, “I still I don't hm I'm
afraid to go to somewhere in the night time, yeah, I'm afraid.”

Fear of walking – especially in the dark – was the most important theme to emerge from
conversations about crime and safety with local residents. While in itself an unsurprising fact –
some apprehension is to be expected when walking at night in areas where crime is prevalent –
the finding does speak to the unique neighbourhood form of suburban areas. Much like in the
earlier discussion about social isolation, the lack of human presence on the street contributed to
people’s feelings of uneasiness about walking at night. Gabriela conveyed this very point when
describing her commute home from work:

.. most of the time, my cousin has to pick me up, and hm drive me to my place because I
didn't have a bus, I didn't have a bus, and so dark in the streets, a little dangerous,
because the street was really hm empty, and nobody there, nobody to help me, taxi is
expensive …

Rachida expressed a similar feeling – mentioned earlier – when saying:

The last bus go to our house at 10 o'clock [pm] I never get there at light and when I get to
the home is so dark that all that makes me fright [scared] ... and I always try to get back to
the home at 8 o'clock but hm sometimes I need to wait in the work or something so I feel
fright [scared] so I remember myself when I was in Lebanon, yeah ... and always I look up
behind me, 'someone behind me?' I'm still scared ...

What made walking at night scary to local residents was, in large part, the lack of people out and
about. The streets felt a “little dangerous,” Gabriela explained because they were “dark” and
“empty” and because there was nobody around. Rachida was afraid of people lurking in the
shadows. Despite their increased diversity, post-war suburbs share characteristics that are unfavorable to the development of thriving public spaces, and vibrant streets (Lofland 1998). Car-dependent neighbourhoods, low-density developments, and a strict segregation of land uses contribute to keeping ‘eyes’ away from the street, rendering informal mechanisms of social order and control ineffective (Cozens 2008).

Features such as extended setbacks, long blocks, and relatively large minimum lot sizes maximize privacy for homeowners while increasing the divide between the private sphere of the home and the social life of the street.\footnote{Here setback is loosely defined as the distance between the actual building and the curb. For an in-depth discussion about the relationship between built form and private and public spheres see Lofland 1998, and more specifically Chapter 7 “Control by Design.”} What goes on in the home is removed – by sheer physical distance and barriers – from the activity on the street, effectively minimizing visibility between people, rather than encouraging it (Lofland 1998). Poorly-lit roads, and limited sidewalk infrastructure make walking unpleasant, further reducing the number of bodies – and thus eyes – on the streets (Larco 2015; Wood et al. 2010). Surrey’s low-density character – which at times resembles more that of a semi-rural community – results in part from its vast number of parks and greenways. Residents turn to informal paths in such green areas as a way to shorten walking distances, but in doing so find themselves traveling through areas that are dark and often deserted.

Even along commercial areas, where one might expect a level of human hustle and bustle, street life isn’t necessarily thriving. Commercial districts in the suburbs are largely single-use, and designed to facilitate automobile travel, which results in spaces that are again inhospitable to walking (Frank and Engelke 2005; Frank, Engelke and Schmid 2003). Businesses are located in single-use developments – usually strip malls or shopping malls – removed from the street and sitting behind large swaths of concrete parking (Dunham Jones and Williamson 2011). The sense of security derived by being in a crowd of people on a busy commercial strip is largely missing in the suburbs as businesses do not front the streets and are thus not in proximity to the sidewalk (Mullen 2003; Wood et al. 2013).
While dark alleys and empty streets are found in the urban core too – especially in a city like Vancouver which retains a sizable single-family zoning district – these coexist alongside busy arterials and commercial strips which have a significant pedestrian presence (Punter 2004). The fact that respondents reported feeling unsafe walking past 8pm or 9pm offers a stark contrast to the experience of many urban residents (Gilderbloom et al. 2004). The urban core offers more opportunities for people wanting to travel alongside routes with a significant human presence. Frequent bus service provides urban residents with a largely safe way to get around. An extensive public transit network allows urban residents to be dropped off closer to their destinations, eliminating the need to walk long distances in the dark alone. Those features, typical of suburban areas, that prioritize car travel over other modes of transportation are the same features that amplify people’s sense of danger as they get around Surrey.

To be sure, this is not to say that neighbourhood form creates crime, or unsafe places. One should be careful not to succumb to a deterministic logic where a sole and direct link is drawn between social problems/benefits and spatial form (what is often termed as ‘environmental,’ ‘spatial’ or ‘geographic’ determinism). After all, crime has been historically concentrated in mixed-use, inner-city neighbourhoods, the types of neighbourhoods that Jacobs defends in Death and Life of Great American Cities. As stated above, the sociological reasons behind the

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177 See Judkins 2010. As Williamson (2010, 39) points out, scholars have been wary of geographic or physical determinism for two main reasons. First, because of the risk of attributing to place/geography outcomes that are a result of socio-cultural background or of individual action or of economic status, among other things. Second, one runs the risk of making people seem prisoners of the built form, which is simplistic if not implausible. Lofland notes that social scientists have been critical of the view of place as a determinant of social outcomes going back to the late nineteenth century. She cites Emile Durkheim’s writings on the sociology of suicide to make this point. Among other examples, she quotes Nathan Glazer’s 1956 statement that “we [sociologist] must root out of our thinking the assumption that the physical form of our communities has social consequences (cited in Lofland 1998, 180).” Lofland also cites noted urban sociologist Herbert Gans who – she points out - criticized Jane Jacobs for falling victim to the “fallacy of physical determinism (Gans 1968, quoted in Lofland 1998).” Campbell (2002, 275) captures the essence of physical determinism when writing about postwar planning in the UK, “The momentum for state-sanctioned planning activity in Britain was borne out of the optimism of the post-war years; a sense that if physical master plans of the way neighbourhoods should look were prepared, it would be so. ‘Nice’ buildings set in ‘nice’ spaces make for ‘nice’ places and ‘nice’ people! However, it soon became clear that utopias of physical form tend to disintegrate in the face of social, economic and political processes … This is a lesson that the enthusiasts for the recent wave of New Urbanism might usefully bear in mind.”

178 There are definite tensions in current understandings of neighbourhood crime. On the one hand, evidence suggests that violent crime and property crime are more prevalent in urban areas, rather than in low-density suburban neighbourhoods, which seems to be at odds with Jacobs’ theory of eyes on the street (Anderson et al. 2013; Weisburd et al., 2013). At the same time, sociologists have been able to show the importance of informal mechanisms of social control/monitoring in curbing anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. One way of resolving this tension is to think of street-level crime as linked to both opportunity – for instance, the presence of
criminal activity observed in Surrey are complex and beyond the scope of this research. But without a doubt, there are aspects of suburban form that can amplify people’s sense of safety. Walking at night on deserted streets in areas where crime is perceived (or known) to occur is likely to affect people’s ideas about safety and danger in the suburbs.

5.4 Conclusion

This thesis argues that current changes in the geography of income and immigration of Canadian cities can, and should, be interpreted in more nuanced ways than currently explored in the existing literature. Nonetheless, scholars are right to suggest that new trends in socio-spatial inequality come with added risks for more marginalized populations. As shown in Chapter 4, transportation is one such challenge. But neighbourhood form and transportation dynamics affect more than just the ability of people to get around and access opportunities. They also help to amplify broader social inequities, notably people’s sense of belonging and sense of public safety. The car-centric nature of a suburb like Surrey is not conducive to producing spaces with an active pedestrian street life, something that in turn diminishes the opportunity for spontaneous social interaction. This dynamic was conveyed in my interviews with local residents, many of whom talked about feeling alone or isolated due the sheer lack of people on the streets. Likewise, the very fabric of suburbia – dominated by low-density segregated land-uses – contributes to a lack of ‘eyes on the street’ which influences people’s sense of security and safety as people navigate suburban spaces.

shops/commercial property, people, transit stops, housing, etc. – and to mechanisms of social controls – for instance, formal surveillance by a police force, and informal monitoring by neighbourhood residents (Sacket 2016).
Chapter 6: Current interpretations and the recognition of difference

6.1 Introduction

When I first set out to interview local immigrants about their experience of life in Surrey, I was fairly confident of the type of feedback I would receive. In my mind, I was going to meet a bunch of people dissatisfied by the prospects of what life in Surrey offered them. Not only this, I felt reasonably certain that Surrey was not the place they had intended to settle in, and certainly not the place they were hoping to live long term. Vancouver, not Surrey, was clearly the spot people were after. The city everyone looked up to. How could it be otherwise? Vancouver is the engine of the region’s economy, a paragon of urban livability: cultural richness, walkable neighbourhoods, a solid public transit network, and plenty of enviable public spaces.179 Above all, Vancouver – like all major cities – offers jobs and services, something especially important to anyone looking to improve their economic position. In comparison, Surrey has always seemed like a distant backwater, the ugly cousin to the sleek and glamorous city of glass.180

Like other commentators, I believed the rise of low-income, minority neighbourhoods in Surrey was the result of a simple, if otherwise unfortunate, dynamic: skyrocketing housing costs in the central city. Housing had simply become too expensive in Vancouver. People were getting squeezed out, priced out, if not outright displaced from the urban core. Those who were ending up in Surrey, especially lower-income newcomers, did so not so much by choice as out of necessity. Said another way, people were getting stuck in a place they’d rather not be.181 The patterns were troubling. Just before I started my research, Hulchanski (2010) issued a landmark report signalling a new geography of income inequality in Toronto: an affluent urban core

179 The reputation of Vancouver as world-class city is by now well established. Vancouver frequently appears in the top most livable cities in the world. Images of False Creek, sun setting, North Shore Mountains in the background epitomize the essence of the city: a modern urban metropolis surrounded by stunning natural beauty.
180 The nickname, meant to reflect the dominant steel-and-glass architectural aesthetic of the city’s downtown, was coined by local cultural icon Douglas Coupland (2009). Surrey’s status as second-class city is undisputable, confirmed by the fact that outside of Canada, its name is seldom recognized. Star architect, Bing Thom described Surrey as the “armpit of the Lower Mainland” explaining that “Vancouverites liked to say that Surrey was too poor, too young, too dumb." Former mayor of Surrey Dianne Watts noted that “Surrey was often portrayed as Vancouver's big, ugly sister across the river” (Rochon 2010).
181 As an example, Young and Keil (2010, 92) talk about vulnerable populations getting “stranded” in the suburbs.
surrounded by a disadvantaged and disconnected periphery. Similar analyses soon followed. Ley and Lynch (2012) observed comparable trends in Vancouver: older-inner city neighbourhoods becoming increasingly affluent, and pockets of concentrated poverty growing in the surrounding suburbs. Though not as stark as in Toronto, these socio-economic divides were unmistakable. Adding to people’s concerns was the unsettling relationship between race and economic success: disadvantaged neighbourhoods were disproportionately new immigrant and visible minority.

Alarms started to sound.\textsuperscript{182} Scholars spoke of a new form of social exclusion. In the United States, the phrase ‘suburban poverty’ – long considered a contradiction – quickly rose in popularity among urban social scientists (Allard and Roth 2010; Allard 2017; Anacker 2015; Kneebone and Garr 2010, Kneebone and Raphael 2011; Kneebone and Berube 2013). The spectre of a European-style geography of disadvantage hung like a shadow over discussions about neighbourhood change. At issue, was the idea that low- and modest-income households, many of them minorities, were increasingly locating in outlying areas and becoming cut off from employment opportunities, social services and support networks.

As I started to interview local residents it became apparent that this picture was far more complex than what was assumed in the existing literature. Narratives about social exclusion, and people being pushed out of the urban core did not square with the testimony on the ground. Respondents often talked about life in Surrey as one of opportunity. Not just in terms of accessing less expensive housing, but in regard to jobs, services, and personal networks – the very things scholars believed people to be without. To be sure, life in the suburbs was certainly not all positive. Respondents operated within a clear system of constraints and choices. Push factors, such as the high costs of housing, did impact people’s residential options. And many lamented the poor public transit services available in suburban areas. But interviewees were

\textsuperscript{182} Hulchanski’s (2010) report created enough buzz to single-handedly pave the way for the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, a major 7-year research project tasked with exploring urban inequality and polarization in all major Canadian cities. In the past ten years, many commentators have brought attention to urban, socio-spatial inequality in Canada, and theorized about the risks associated with its related trends. For instance, Walks (2010a) raised the possibility of “increasing racial divisions, distrust, discrimination, and social exclusion.” Bourne (2007) noted that new patterns of spatial disadvantage in Canadian cities are making it harder for new comers and refugees to access needed services. Young and Keil (2010) stated that socio-spatial inequality is creating new zones of social exclusion. Inspired by Hulchanski’s approach, Townshend et al. (2018) found equally disturbing trends in Calgary, and called for greater attention to how inequality is increasingly racialized and spatially manifested. The discussion quickly found its way into the mainstream media: Paperny and Dhillon (2011), Jackson (2012), Javed (2012), Gold (2017).
more likely to stress the benefits associated with life in Surrey. They framed their decisions to move to Surrey as a strategic choice. As it turned out, not only did many like the place, they wanted to stay long term. Where urban experts see the making of a socio-economic trap, many local immigrants see an advantageous and livable – though certainly not perfect – setting in which to start life anew.

In this chapter, I make the case that concerns about the fate of so-called vulnerable populations living in the suburbs are grounded in particular beliefs of what constitutes good planning and good neighbourhoods. I argue that these beliefs are informed by today’s leading urbanists, where I define ‘urbanists’ to mean popular urban commentators whose writings and thoughts about cities and planning have reached a mass audience. This comprises a broad group of people including academic scholars (e.g. Richard Florida, Christopher Leinberger, Edward Glaeser), planning practitioners (e.g. Janette Sadik-Khan, Brent Toderian, Jennifer Keesmaat), urban designers (e.g. Andrés Duany, Jan Gehl), and writers (e.g. James Kunstler, Charles Montgomery, Taras Grescoe). What these individuals have in common is that they have emerged as leading popular voices on city planning today – at least in Canada and the United States (giving TED talks, delivering keynote speeches at prominent urban forums, making regular appearances on radio shows, writing op-eds, and promoting their views on urbanism through social media or popular online platforms such as CityLab, a web publication launched by the Atlantic magazine).

Many of today’s leading popular urbanists hold a view of good planning and the ‘good’ city that is very much in opposition to the type of planning and development traditionally associated with suburban areas. Because of their car-centric nature, low-density, and segregated land-uses, suburbs tend to be viewed as poor examples of community planning, especially relative to the central city. Critiques of the suburbs are not new. In fact, they have been around for the better part of fifty years, despite the fact that suburban development continues to be the most dominant form of development in North America. Sprawl has become a highly politicized term, one associated with serious environmental, social and economic costs (Krieger 2005).

It is in large part due to these negative connotations, that urban scholars frame the rise of low-income minority neighbourhoods in the suburbs as a dynamic involving marginalized populations getting pushed out of the central city. Underlying this interpretation is an enduring,
though untested, assumption: the idea of the central city as an inherently better place in which to settle than the suburbs. Nowhere is this better reflected than among commentators who see people’s decisions to move to the suburbs simply as a matter of necessity, not active choice.

In this chapter, I argue that when holding this line of thought, urban commentators are in fact projecting their own ideas about what constitutes good planning and good neighbourhoods onto a culturally diverse group of people whose varied wants and needs do not always align with those of today’s leading urbanists. I situate my argument within a broader discussion about the need to move beyond a framework centred on an understanding of social justice in distributional terms to one capable of recognizing cultural difference.
6.2 The supremacy of the central city

Concerns over the fate of marginalized groups in the suburbs stem from a common, though largely unspoken assumption: the idea that low-income households would be better off locating in the central city. If only they could afford to, of course. Ready access to services, jobs and networks are frequently listed as key benefits of what the city has to offer to marginalized individuals that the suburbs lack. Smith and Ley (2008) reiterate this very idea in their study on concentrated immigrant poverty. They write, “at the urban scale, the availability and access to services, jobs, education, and other support structures can be profoundly affected by suburban versus center city residence (2008, 687).” Later adding, “a spatial mismatch of people and opportunities introduces an additional dimension to geographies of poverty, contrasting central city accessibility with suburban isolation (2008, 700).” Hulchanski (2010), Ley and Lynch (2012), Smith (2004), Walks (2010a), Young and Keil (2010), and others, all echo similar sentiments.

While taken as given, the implicit primacy of the central city as a place of opportunity and livability is neither natural nor universally true. Rather, it is a notion both culturally determined and historically specific, one developed over many years by the contributions – some big, some small – of various actors. Many urbanists, architects, and planning practitioners been captivated by the central city for some time. But this was not always the case. For much of the twentieth century, central cities were not regarded as especially good and healthy places in which to live (Beauregard 2012; Krieger 2005). Sweated labour, tenement housing, infectious diseases and fire were all facts of daily life for the great majority of urban dwellers. Noxious fumes polluted the air, and harsh chemicals contaminated municipal waterways of large cities throughout Canada and the United States (Harris 2004).\(^\text{183}\)

Even Vancouver, a minor industrial city for much of the twentieth century – and one surrounded by abundant natural beauty at that – elicited criticism from urban observers of the time. The 1928 Bartholomew plan for the city labelled a large portion of the urban core “an eyesore and a

\(^{183}\) Harris (2004, 16) points out that “Crowding and inadequate services threatened the physical health of city residents, especially where garbage disposal was ineffective and where families still relied on outdoor privies and drank polluted water.” Harris also notes that airborne pollution was particularly bad because “factory smoke was associated with prosperity” and thus demand for regulation was weak.
menace to health,” and argued that “regeneration [was] essential for normal civic development (Bartholomew 1928, 147).” The city’s garbage dump, located on the mud flats of False Creek, was a popular playground for countless working-class kids living in Vancouver’s East End (Marlatt and Itter, 2011). Soil and water were so extensively contaminated by pollutants in the early decades of the twentieth-century, that parts of the city’s inlet remain toxic to human health today (Braul et al. 1989). As things stood, urban areas across North America were not so much models to be replicated, but problems in need of fixing.184

When, in the postwar period, industries started to close, and manufacturing jobs began to disappear, inner-city districts throughout Canada and the United States entered a period of prolonged decline (Beauregard 2012; Shier 2002). Downtown department stores, former beacons of urban ascendance, reduced operations or altogether closed down, some relocating to the urban periphery in newly-built shopping malls (Belshaw 2015; Howard 2015). Many central cities experienced population loss, including Vancouver, which saw its population shrink and stagnate from the late 60s to the early 80s (Nicolaides and Wiese 2017).185 Countless working- and middle-class families left the city for the suburbs in search of space, privacy and mass-produced homes, the latter made affordable by a massive expansion of the highway system, innovative building practices, and new lending policies that subsidized home ownership (Harris 2004). For a good twenty-five years following the end of WWII, as conditions worsened, central cities were hardly being celebrated for their livability.186

Circumstances could not be more different today. Many prominent urbanists view the suburbs as models of poor community planning, while putting central living on a pedestal.

The sheer number of books – recently published by some of today’s best-known urbanists – conveying positive visions of central-city life is remarkable. Among the more popular contributions are Glaeser’s *Triumph of the City* (2012), Montgomery’s *Happy City* (2013),

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184 In fact, suburbanisation, Vaughan et al. (2015) note, was proposed as a solution to the perceived problem of the concentration of working-class people in the central city. For more on this also see Krieger (2005).

185 Between 1966 and 1971, Vancouver’s population grew by only 3.9% from 410,375 to 426,256 – the slowest recorded growth in the city’s history at the time. By 1976, population numbers actually declined – falling back to 410,188 – and only grew 1.0% in the next five years (*Census of Canada 1966, 1971, 1976, 1981*).

186 Beauregard (2012, 16), who chronicles the postwar discourse on urban decline in the United States, notes that “postwar cities were places of crime, poverty, fiscal irresponsibility, idleness, drugs, family breakdown, and a loss of community. The suburbs functioned as the opposite; deviance, immorality, and illegality were much less pronounced, while the nuclear family and a sense of community thrived.”
Speck’s *Walkable City* (2012), Sadik-Khan’s *Streetfight* (2017), and Grescoe’s *Straphanger* (2012). Not to mention the New Urbanist literature which has put forth pointed critiques of suburban sprawl since at least the early 1990s, if not earlier (Duany et al. 2000; Duany et al. 2010). Even Vancouver has been swept up by this city-affirming wave, notably seen in such publications as Harcourt and Cameron’s *City Making in Paradise* (2007), Punter’s *The Vancouver Achievement* (2003), and most recently Beasley’s *Vancouverism* (2019). The fact that all of these, with the exception of Punter (2003), were written for lay audiences speaks to how far perceptions about urban life have changed. Ideas once confined to academic and professional audiences have now entered the mainstream.

Today, it is not only commonplace to view central cities as perfectly good places in which to live, but as decidedly more livable than the suburbs. Many of today’s leading urbanists voice the idea that people who live in dense, walkable neighbourhoods tend to be on average happier and healthier than their suburban counterparts. Compact, walkable urban areas are seen as a panacea for scores of social ills. It is said that residents of walkable neighbourhoods are more civically engaged, community minded, healthier, safer, and even more productive than those in low-density suburban areas (Demerath and Levinger 2003; Doyle et al. 2006; Rogers et al. 2010). Some urbanists go so far as to conjure the “Trick-or-Treat Test” – how easily kids walk to candy on Halloween night – as a way to spark discussion about the drawbacks of suburban built-form, and the virtues of compact, walkable neighbourhoods (Toderian 2012). The supremacy of the city has become established fact. Nowhere is this more visible than in answers to questions about why central cities have become so expensive to live in. The general response is simply to

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187 Local planners have ascribed common meaning to the unique brand of planning celebrated in Vancouver under the name of ‘vancouverism’.

188 While a common refrain among popular urban thinkers, the peer reviewed scholarship on this topic is mixed. In the United States, suburban residents have been found to be less healthy – typically defined as a ‘self-reported’ variable or through body mass index (BMI) – than urban residents living in walkable neighbourhoods (Doyle et al. 2006; Oishi et al. 2015). But such studies tend to rely on a narrow definition of health. In fact, there are numerous studies that show that suburban residents are as active if not more than urban residents, thanks in part to being more closely located to nature. In Canada, pre-teens and teens in suburban areas have been found more likely to walk or bike than their peers living in more compact downtown areas, despite dominant narratives suggesting the opposite (Seliske et al. 2012). In regard to “happiness,” there is even less of a consensus in the academic literature. Some studies show that urban dwellers living in compact communities report being more satisfied with their lives than residents of less walkable areas (Rogers et al. 2010). But other studies show the contrary (Oishi et al. 2015; Turcotte 2009)
say that lots of people want to live there (Roberts 2019).\textsuperscript{189} Of all the dynamics shaping real-estate markets today, time and again, people return to the idea that central cities are coveted places in which to reside. What this shows is that the notion of the central city as a favoured place among the throngs of urban dwellers is increasingly taken as given.

In contrast, the suburbs are seen in a very different light. One could say they have fallen from grace (Krieger 2005). While some popular commentators continue to defend suburbia – Joel Kotkin and Wendell Cox come to mind – they are a small minority among the popular voices in urbanism today. It is the suburbs, not the city, that are in need of radical fixing – so goes the mantra of many leading urbanists today. Suburban areas are deemed to be socially isolated, financially unsustainable, and environmentally destructive, among other things. They are also often described as ‘soulless,’ ‘artificial,’ ‘sterile,’ ‘dull,’ and ‘cookie-cutter’ (Duany et al. 2000; Jackson 1985; Williamson 2010). An entire school of design, New Urbanism, was developed precisely to counter the excesses of suburban sprawl. Inspired by traditional neighbourhoods built before the advent of mass automobile ownership, its founders called for the creation of compact, walkable, mixed-use communities (Duany et al. 2000; Grant 2009; Talen 2013). In time, new urbanist ideals were incorporated under the umbrella of Smart Growth – a planning philosophy promoting broad elements of sustainable development (Duany et al. 2010; Song 2012). More recently, scholars have been using the language of ‘retrofitting,’ to denote the process by which underperforming suburban spaces – malls, parking lots, office parks, etc. – are being transformed into higher-density, mixed-use developments (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011; Talen 2015). Suburban retrofitting is premised on the notion that making the suburbs more like the city makes for good planning policy. The fact that such ideas are not only part of today’s planning orthodoxy, but are trendy, even sexy, speaks to the extent to which perspectives about

\textsuperscript{189} While there is certainly more than a grain of truth to this answer, it also masks a whole set of dynamics which have helped to inflate housing prices in the city. Notably, rising income inequality, height and density zoning regulations, labour market segmentation, real estate speculation, and aversion to neighbourhood change and a bias toward the status quo by NIMBYs (Freemark 2019; Bunting et al. 2004; Scally and Tighe 2015). More importantly, the above answer masks the fact that housing prices have also skyrocketed in surrounding suburban areas. But because land value in the suburbs has traditionally been less expensive than in the urban core – primarily because of the greater availability of green-field sites on which to develop – coupled with colossal subsidies to suburban home ownership, housing costs in the suburbs have been artificially softened compared to those in the urban core (Harris 2004).
cities and suburbs have changed in the past fifty-plus years. We’ve effectively shifted – at least within planning circles – from an ‘urban problem’ to a suburban one.

Given these views, it is perhaps not surprising to see scholars reinforce the idea that marginalized people are better off locating in central-city neighbourhoods than suburban ones. As with other disciplines, planning ideas are the product of social and historical processes and therefore need to be interpreted within the broader socio-cultural context in which they take place. It is by illuminating these processes that one can start to make sense of current anxieties regarding the rise of low-income, minority neighbourhoods in today’s suburbs. Ultimately, the tendency to frame growing immigrant economic disadvantage in the suburbs as a story of people getting ‘pushed’ from the central city needs to be interrogated, rather than taken at face value.

Today, the city is viewed in a favorable light in large part thanks to sustained pushbacks from residents, critics and scholars against modernist planning. Starting in the 1960s people began to articulate an impassioned defence of city life in response to urban renewal – a catch-all term describing the razing and redevelopment of impoverished, largely minority, inner-city areas (Fainstein and Fainstein 2012). Jacobs (1961) and Gans (1962a) were among the leading voices of the time, two intellectuals who embraced the diversity and messiness of neighbourhood life – the very thing that modernist planning looked to weed out (L’Hereux 2012; Seamon 2012). At the heart of their critiques was the idea that impoverished, inner-city neighbourhoods could be good neighbourhoods. Not only did Jacobs and Gans help expose the failings of modernist

190 The trendiness of such ideas as ‘smart growth’ and ‘suburban retrofitting’ is seen in the way these terms are ubiquitous and idolized in current planning circles. Dunham-Jones and Williamson have won several awards for their book, including the 2009 American Publishers Awards for Professional and Scholarly Excellence. Dunham-Jones has gone on to speak on national media as well as present at the prestigious 2017 TED Conference. Meanwhile, smart growth has become part of the everyday lexicon of planners and policy makers.

191 The expression ‘urban problem’ emerged in the 1960s to describe the social and physical breakdown of American inner-cities. Addressing urban poverty and the general deterioration of urban areas was a top priority among the Kennedy and Johnson administrations (Beauregard 2012). In Canada, while the concept never had the same racial dimensions as it did in the United States, it was also in use at the time (Langford 2012, Murray 2011).

192 Without going into details it is worth pointing out that Gans and Jacobs also differed significantly in their positions. Most notably, Gans criticized Jacobs for putting too much emphasis on the built form, and not giving enough thought to how structural forces – social, economic, cultural – shaped neighbourhoods, especially as it related to the African-American population (Gans 1962b; L’Hereux 2012). This line of criticism has accompanied newer iterations of Jacobs’ vision, notably New Urbanism. Harvey (1997) argued the new urbanists were prone to committing the same errors as modernist planners in that they put too much stock in the built environment’s ability to address social inequalities. One key aspect in which Gans and Jacobs agreed was that they both condemned modernist planning approaches for their failure to see strong and valuable communities in impoverished neighbourhoods.
planning – mass displacement of tenants, entrenched segregation, breakdown of community ties, etc. – they put into question its very foundations (Hirt 2012; Scott 1998). Modernist planning failed, Jacobs and Gans argued, because it understood the city not in its actuality – people doing everyday things in real places – but as a series of abstractions: Le Corbusier’s ‘towers in the park’ or Robert Moses’s network of freeways and bridges (Hirt 2012; Scott 1998; Seamon 2012). Jacobs, more than anyone else, articulated what made cities great. In so doing her ideas were instrumental in redefining both the role of planning, and what cities could be (Sassen 2016).

_Death and Life of American Cities_ established the blueprint for what many consider today good community planning: mixed-use, human-scale developments, walkable neighbourhoods, vibrant streets, diversity of housing stock, bottom-up approaches, etc. It is a testament to the power of Jacobs’ legacy that some of the most livable places in the world today are associated with her name (Gehl 2010; Sadik-Khan 2016). Her vision has been so triumphant that many core cities have become victims of their own success. Nowhere is this more visible than in the way succeeding waves of gentrification – artist-types in the 60s, young urban professionals in the 80s and 90s, tech workers and corporate executives in the 2000s – have contributed to making cities less affordable for the very people Jacobs memorialized in _Death and Life of American Cities_ (Ley 1996; Zukin 1989).

It is against this complicated backdrop that scholars today are forming their views on neighbourhood disadvantage, especially as it relates to the suburbs. Enduring narratives about what constitutes a good neighbourhood help explain the tendency to view the rise of low-income, minority areas in the suburbs as deeply problematic. Suburban spaces – with their emphasis on car-based travel – are the antithesis of the very kind of planning which has been in vogue for the past forty years. These spaces are seen, largely, as second-rate to vibrant urban environments, something especially true among planners who tend to see the suburbs as poor – if not failed –

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193 This includes Vancouver’s South False Creek which was redeveloped in the 1970s following Jacobs’ ideas, and is considered today a model of outstanding community planning (Punter 2004). In fact, Jacobs’ imprint on Vancouver extends well beyond False Creek. Notably in Strathcona and Chinatown, where Jacobs’ ideas and activism provided a blueprint on how to fight a freeway proposal that would have razed to the ground large chunks of these two neighbourhoods. It’s worth mentioning, that despite these victories, local residents were unable to prevent the destruction of Hogan’s Alley which was the centre of Vancouver’s Black community (Harcourt and Cameron 2007).

194 This despite the fact that growth in the suburbs has and continues to outstrip that in the central city (Gordon and Shirokoff 2014).
examples of good community planning (Duany et al. 2000; Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011; Hayden 2006). In fact, the very concept of ‘neighbourhood’ – which for Jacobs (1961) and the New Urbanists is a foundational block of city planning – doesn’t quite carry the same oomph when referenced to suburban places as it does when applied to urban settings (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 1994). Suburbs are not known for their strong neighbourhoods, critics argue that there is a sense of ‘placelessness’ about suburbia which makes the idea of ‘neighbourhood’ ill-suited for describing suburban spaces (Super 1999).

If the suburbs aren’t seen as particularly great places for the ‘general public’, it then follows – by this logic – that they are even less suitable for low-income minorities who stand to benefit most from the very things Jacobs talked about: variety in the housing stock (age, type and tenure), walkable neighbourhoods, a sufficient mix of land uses, small blocks to encourage opportunity for spontaneous social interaction, vibrant public spaces where people can gather, and an assortment of amenities, services and institutions to support a multiplicity of cultural and economic needs. After all, many of the things thought to exacerbate economic precarity have come to be associated with suburban life itself: social isolation, limited employment opportunities, poor transportation options, a restricted housing stock, weak community capacity, subpar public spaces, and socio-cultural homogeneity. In other words, concerns about the prospects of low-income minorities in the suburbs are integral to mainstream attitudes about city versus suburban living as well as to entrenched ideas about good planning and good neighbourhoods.

6.3 Socio-spatial inequality under the spotlight

This is not to say that popular urban commentators are wrong. There is much to celebrate about community planning today. Attention to bottom-up approaches, and a focus on pedestrian-friendly spaces – rather than automobile-oriented uses – has benefitted many people. The rationale behind much of the type of planning occurring in cities is robust. Today’s leading urbanists are not wrong in pushing for more pedestrian-friendly streets, vibrant public spaces, human-scale and mixed-used developments, higher residential densities, and investments in public transit. All of these measures have been promoted with an eye to improving the quality of life of residents, making community more inclusive and diverse (socially, economically and
physically). Rather at issue is the way that dominant notions about what counts as good planning are informing people’s ideas about what life must be like for low-income minorities in the suburbs. Because suburban spaces are largely seen as inferior relative to the kind of spaces found in the central cities, urban scholars are likely to view today’s suburbs as socio-economic traps for more marginalized populations. Among the most common assumptions are that people are isolated from services, community life and employment opportunities. But these assumptions belie a more complex reality, one that is concealed by the tendency – on the part of many urban observers – to project their own ideas about what constitutes good planning onto a culturally diverse group of people whose varied wants and needs may not always align with those of today’s leading urbanists.

In many ways, scholars today are falling prey to the same pitfalls early critics of modernist planning warned against, especially in regard to knowledge production. Studies favour purely quantitative approaches that rely on the use of aggregate statistics (Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Lo et al. 2015; Townshend et al. 2018; Walks 2010a). Part of the drawback with such approaches is that knowledge is derived from a narrow type of source material, typically census data or customized data sets acquired via mass survey questionnaires. Information that isn’t readily quantifiable is omitted from the research. Quantitative methodologies are ill-suited for capturing alternative ways of knowing, which limits the type of claims scholars can make with the evidence gathered (Flyvbjerg 2002). On a deeper level, the use of statistics in the social sciences is an attempt at reducing reality (which is messy and complex) into neat, uniform analytical categories (Scott 1998). Quantitative methods simplify information about places and people into standardized measures that can be readily counted and analysed (Piven 2007).

The knowledge produced, however detailed, is always an approximation or a two-dimensional map – to use the popular analogy – of the terrain it purports to describe (Scott 1998). Also at issue, is the distance created between the vantage point of the knower and the subject of study. In much of the recent literature on socio-spatial inequality, knowledge production occurs from a top-down, bird’s eye-view epistemology – something made evident in the literature’s widespread use of cartography. By virtue of the methodologies being privileged, current analyses never get down to the street level, making it difficult – if not impossible – to capture the nitty gritty of everyday lived experience. This means that much of existing literature on urban inequality omits
important facets of social life such as cultural identity, mythologies, social relations but also people’s feelings, aspirations, worldviews, life histories, and people’s sense of their own physicality.

Part of the problem with the current research is of a methodological nature. Peripheral to the literature’s main findings – which identify growing socio-spatial divides in Canadian cities – are implicit claims about (a) why low-income minorities are increasingly found in the suburbs, and (b) the risks associated with this trend. It is these claims that are problematic in that they are not supported by the methodology at hand. Analyses of aggregate statistics allow scholars to identify and describe regional patterns but are less effective at explaining the full spectrum of factors behind the new spatial patterning of urban disadvantage, or its implications for community life. Examples in the literature abound. Hulchanski (2010) states that low-income households concentrating in Toronto’s inner suburbs have poor access to transit and other services. Ley and Lynch (2012, iii) summarize Hulchanski’s findings by saying that disadvantaged neighbourhoods are increasingly found “on the edges [of cities] characterized by social exclusion in terms of employment opportunities, public services, and urban transit.” Walks (2010a) reiterates the idea that socio-spatial inequality is leading to new forms of social isolation and exclusion. Again, much of these claims go untested.

That there are unsupported claims in the existing literature is in itself not all that revealing. Some conjecture is inevitable – even necessary – when arguments are constructed. Conjecture is part and parcel of knowledge formation in the social sciences as bits of information are selected and woven together into a coherent narrative (O'Shaughnessy 2009). Not every statement is checked and verified, in part because doing so would make the research process unmanageable, but also because there isn’t always an agreed and established standard against which to test one’s position. This is especially true in regard to claims that are peripheral to the research question at hand. And while such claims might turn out to be inaccurate or simplistic there is often a grain of truth to what’s been said. Recent studies on spatial inequality are no exception. To say that low-income households in the suburbs are isolated from services and opportunity is not completely misplaced. Given what’s generally known about the needs of low-income households and suburban localities, the claim – however untested – makes intuitive sense. What’s disputed is the
qualification surrounding the claim. Interviews with local residents show that reality, as is often the case, is more complex, that there is more to the story.

What’s especially problematic in current studies on socio-spatial inequality is the failure to acknowledge concerns about the rise of low-income minority neighbourhoods for what they are, conjectures. It’s the tendency not to make known the limitations of the claims being presented that is at issue here. At a minimum, researchers have the responsibility to acknowledge the presence of research blind spots and consider how these might affect their argument. The reason for this is made all the more evident in contemporary writings on urban inequality. Unchecked statements get repeated from one study to the next, gradually turning what started as contested claims or conjectures into accepted ‘facts’. This can be seen in how Hulchanski (2010) interprets growing socio-spatial divides and its associated risks, and how these interpretations are in turn reinforced in subsequent studies. Where the current scholarship falls short is in the way it explains and makes sense of the dynamics at hand. Statements about the risks associated with suburban living tend to be assumed rather than demonstrated. This shortcoming, however, is not merely a casual omission, but rather a scholarly blind spot integral to the very methodology being used.

To be clear, this does not mean discarding quantitatively-informed studies. Using population statistics as a proxy for studying distributive inequalities – in wealth, power and access – is still relevant. Census tract analysis is especially helpful as a descriptive tool. It offers an effective and dependable way of gauging socio-economic divides, of understanding how these are manifested in space, and how they’ve changed over time. It also makes it possible to identify broad trends and dynamics on a scale that might otherwise be difficult to identify through the use of qualitative techniques. Furthermore, inequality is an issue of increasing concern to public policy, a field heavily reliant on statistics and quantification (Cunningham, 2007; Jackson 2015). Without a doubt, quantitatively-oriented methods have helped put inequality on the radars of researchers while also opening the door for broader public discussion – no small feat considering the wealth of scholarship being produced within academia every year.

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195 Another good example is the Hamilton Project of the Brookings Institution, found at www.hamiltonproject.org, and recent studies by the Economic Innovation Group (EIG), https://eig.org/dci, or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ‘Atlas of Inequality’ https://inequality.media.mit.edu/
So, while current analyses are useful for describing the changing landscape of urban inequality, they are less helpful when it comes to interpreting these changes. The dual dynamic of a narrow methodological approach coupled with an implicit bias toward city living results in simplistic, if not skewed, explanations of the changes taking place. For instance, the idea that low-income households who locate in the suburbs do so simply as a result of getting priced out of the urban core. And the related idea that by being in the suburbs, these same households are worse off than if they’d been able to locate in the central city. While these assumptions are not named outright, they do run through much of the literature. At its core lies the sentiment that because ‘we’ – urban professionals, planners, researchers, etc. – see the city as the better alternative, others should do so as well. But in making these assumptions, urban scholars are inadvertently universalizing personal preferences and essentializing the experiences of others, the very things that critics like Jacobs, Gans and a score of planning theorists have cautioned against.

To better understand the processes by which socio-economic disparities become imprinted in the fabric of urban space – why some neighbourhoods get wealthier and others slump – and how place itself can in turn amplify or dampen these divides, one must reassess the analytical and methodological frameworks found in the current literature. Much in the same way as Jacobs, one must be willing to reappraise the very meaning of an ‘impoverished’ district and ask whether areas considered to be ‘subpar’, ‘inferior’, or ‘lousy’ are really that to their local residents. Just as important, one must question the very methods by which knowledge is generated and consider how these analytical frameworks can be expanded to more meaningfully capture the dynamics at play.

6.4 Expanding the analytical framework

Richer investigations demand moving beyond the comfort zone of census tract analysis, something that Smith (2004) reiterates in her study on immigrant settlement and concentrated disadvantage. To understand the implications of growing socio-spatial divides on local community life, or the complex set of factors shaping the trajectory and geography of inequality within and across metropolitan areas necessitates qualitatively-oriented approaches. I am not the
first one to make this point. In her own analysis of immigrant settlement and neighbourhood poverty, Smith (2004, 32) concludes by echoing this very sentiment,

It is essential that investigations about the relationship between immigrants and concentrated disadvantage move beyond generalization and explore the subtle and not so subtle ways the dynamic differs both temporally and spatially at intra-urban and neighbourhood levels … *This of course will require moving beyond the comfort zone of census tract analysis and taking the research to immigrants and neighbourhoods themselves*. It is only through qualitative assessment that we are likely to understand what makes immigrant poverty and neighbourhood deprivation unique from that experienced by the Canadian born and distinctive among different immigrant groups. Perhaps most importantly, *it is only through asking immigrants about the experience and negotiation of a poor life in a disadvantaged neighbourhood that we will be able to address the often mentioned, but poorly understood, experiences of social isolation and entrenchment associated with blocked mobility and the evolution of underclass populations and neighbourhoods* (my emphasis).

Smith (2004) speaks specifically to the notion that quantitative methods can only get you so far. Any attempt at understanding how people might experience neighbourhood disadvantage should start by asking local residents. Likewise, in as much as it is useful to examine broad regional trends, it is just as important to speak concretely about why some areas are deemed to entrench socio-economic disadvantage, while others are deemed to foster positive social and economic outcomes for their residents. Quantitative methods that rely on census statistics are not particularly well suited for capturing these types of details. This is partly because of the tendency to take a top-down, bird’s-eye-view of the city, rather than promoting bottom-up, street-level perspectives of city life. Granularity is lost as the geographic scale moves from street- to regional-level.

What is at issue, however, is not simply an empirical matter. It is not enough to call for more or better data, but to call into question the underlying theoretical framework informing much of the current research. Quantitative techniques can be strengthened (Stanger Ross and Ross 2012), and the set of statistical variables expanded, but to move the research forward necessitates a rethinking of the way socio-spatial inequality is understood. Concretely, this means moving beyond an understanding of social justice strictly in distributive terms, to a framework capable of taking the concept of ‘difference’ seriously into account.
6.5 Distributive justice

Socio-spatial inequality as it is currently framed in the Canadian literature centres on the idea of distribution. At its core is an interest in how people and resources are distributed in urban space, and whether the two align in ways conducive to equitable social relations. This is seen in Hulchanski (2010), Walks (2011), Ley and Lynch (2012) and many others. When these authors raise concerns over an increasingly affluent urban core, and the rise of low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs, they do so with a clear eye toward issues of distribution. They do so for good reasons. Socio-spatial divides have been shown to pose important risks to community health, social cohesion, and economic integration, among other things (Massey and Fischer 2003; Sampson 2012).

On one level, there is a clear mindfulness over the clustering of certain population groups, which feeds into broader concerns over spatial segregation. Much has been written about the problems associated with concentrated neighbourhood poverty, and to a lesser extent about the rise of elite, affluent enclaves (gentrified areas in the inner city, suburban gated communities, etc.) (Lees et al. 2008; Jargowsky 1997; Wilson 1987). On another level, the concerns stem from an understanding that things (not just people) tend to be unequally distributed across space, including jobs, community services, amenities, institutions, shops, public transit, and so on. Scholars agree that problems arise when there is a mismatch between the location of resources and the people who need them. It is in this context, that articulations about the idea of suburban disadvantage take shape. Researchers interested in the study of neighbourhood change reiterate the idea that as low-income households move to the suburbs they become cut off from critical resources and opportunities (services, employment, community supports, etc.). In doing so, the current literature situates contemporary debates about the changing geography of disadvantage squarely within distributive justice frameworks.

Not only have distributive justice frameworks been around for some time, but they have been the primary way by which urban scholars have made sense of social justice issues in cities (Fainstein 2009). Understanding urban inequality as primarily a problem of redistribution makes intuitive sense. As even the most casual observer of urban life would tell you, wealth and resources are not distributed evenly among urban populations. Some have more than enough to spare, others
are left with the proverbial short end of the stick. It is not only wealth that is unevenly distributed in urban society, though that is usually the first thing to come to mind, but also political power, physical infrastructure, economic opportunity, community services and the like. At the root of urban disadvantage, many scholars argue, is the uneven distribution of these social and economic benefits. While some residents might have ready access to job opportunities others might not, and the same is true of education, adequate housing, social services, community amenities, etc. Address this imbalance and you address urban deprivation. This line of thought, commonly typified by the question ‘who gets what where?’, is at the center of the way scholars and planners have made sense of social justice issues in urban areas for more than fifty years (Smith 1974).

As a theoretical framework distributive justice has deep roots (Fleischacker 2004). It informs both Rawls’ (1971) theory of justice, and Harvey’s (1973) radical geography, key texts in moral philosophy and human geography respectively. Writing at a time of deep social upheaval – the Civil Rights movement, the War on Poverty, anti-war protests – both Harvey and Rawls sought to make sense of the profound inequities gripping American society at the time (Fainstein and Fainstein 2012; Harvey 2000; Heynen et al. 2018). Inherent in these early – and for their time radical – critiques was the understanding that space functioned as a mechanism for determining who gained access to certain resources (Connoly and Steil 2009; Fainstein 2009). This was especially clear in civil-rights-era, urban America where the fruits of postwar economic growth

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196 Smith is often cited as having coined the much-quoted-phrase “who gets what where and how?” but the phrase can be traced back – at the very least – to the famed political scientist Harold Lasswell (1936) something which Smith himself acknowledges (Smith 2010).
197 In political philosophy, Rawls (1971) outlined a vision of liberalism that sought to reconcile individual freedoms with equal opportunity. In doing so he reinvigorated the field of political philosophy which at the time was dominated by Mill’s utilitarianism, a theory of justice centred on the notion of maximizing the greatest good (Connoly and Steil 2009). Utilitarian principles formed the basis for the rational comprehensive planning approach dominant in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Writing at a time of social and political upheaval, it was clear to Rawls – as was clear to many others in the 1960s and 1970s – that liberal market ideology was not succeeding in allocating basic material goods or basic liberties to a whole swath of the American population. Unlike Mill, Rawls argued that social justice was about ensuring the fair or even distribution of the benefits and burdens of social life, with a specific focus on what he called ‘primary goods’: wealth, income, basic rights, political power, etc. (Fainstein 2009; Foss 2016; Wenar 2017). Similarly, Harvey (1973) also looked at justice as a matter of distribution of resources and power in society. But unlike, Rawls he refuted the idea that capitalist economies would able to achieve social justice through ameliorative public policies (Butler and Mussawir 2017). Harvey argued that unequal social relations were inherent to the structures of capitalist production and accumulation. Not only this, he posited that unequal spatial development was fundamental to – and not just an unfortunate by-product of – the functioning of capitalism (Connoly and Steil 2009; Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1997; Smith 2000). Taking a Marxist political economy position, Harvey called for an outright rejection of the capitalist market structure (Fainstein 2009).
were not being shared evenly across neighbourhoods and segments of society (Archer 2010; Foss 2016; Thomas 2012).  

Distributive justice frameworks also underpin foundational texts in planning theory and social justice. This is true of ‘advocacy planning’, and its offspring ‘equity planning’ – two schools of thought that emerged in the cultural struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. Davidoff, widely considered the founder of advocacy planning, made this point very clear when writing, “there is only one basic criterion for judging the worth of public policy proposals: redistribution (Davidoff 1975, 317).” He urged planners to think in “distributional terms” when assessing the strength of a proposal, by which he meant giving attention to how power and resources were being distributed in society (and across space) (Davidoff 1970, 1975).  

Like others, he understood the issue of inner-city poverty as primarily a problem of the uneven distribution of power and resources. By the 1960s, it was clear to many urban commentators in the United States that jobs, housing, and public funds were being pumped into the suburbs to the detriment of underserviced inner-city communities. For this reason, redistribution offered a compelling framework for thinking about how urban problems could be remedied (Davidoff et al. 1970; Fainstein and Fainstein 2012).  

Equity planning – a framework typically associated with Krumholz’s work in Cleveland – shared the same foundational theory of justice (Krumholz 1982; Metzger 1996). Its broader social justice goal remained the equitable redistribution of private and public resources within society. Unlike Harvey, however, neither Davidoff nor Krumholz examine the processes that give rise to uneven distribution in the first place. It is one thing to identify disadvantage as it is happening – as Davidoff or Krumholz do – and another to identify the underlying structures (economic, political and cultural) that create unjust social outcomes in urban areas. The point is not lost on Thomas (2008) who notes that what makes the contributions...
of political economists like Harvey valuable is that they illuminate the extent to which inequity is structurally ingrained in modern society. So, while inequality manifests itself at surface level, its roots go much deeper.

6.6 The politics of difference

It has become increasingly apparent to scholars that distribution is only one component – albeit an important one – of social justice (Fraser 1995, 1999). Nowhere is this point made more forcefully than in Young’s (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Distributive justice alone, Young contends, cannot account for all forms of structural injustices. Writing with an eye toward the new social movements of the 1960s and 70s, Young makes the argument that there are systems of oppression and domination that cannot be readily addressed through distributive policies. Social injustices that arise as a result of cultural bias, the gendered division of labour, or the enduring legacy of a people’s colonial past, for instance, cannot be fully remedied by redistributing resources. This is due to the fact that what’s at issue is not simply a lack of resources, but a lack of *recognition* (Fraser 1995). The idea here is that group-based difference needs to be recognized, not erased, because it is precisely the difference between one social group and another that shapes the experience of marginality (Maboloc 2015; Young 2001).

Young reject Rawls’ liberal perspective, arguing that there is simply no universal, impartial position from which one can conceptualize social justice/injustice (Lotter 1999). She ultimately arrives at the conclusion that social justice necessitates not equality of treatment, but different treatment based on the extent of a group’s marginalization and cultural needs (Young 1990).

Young’s writings have been particularly influential to intercultural planners, who have latched onto the idea of ‘difference’ as encompassing a broad set of social markers, including age, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability status, and religion, alongside more traditional

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202 Young (1990) set out to broaden the scope of social justice, from one primarily focused on matters of distribution to one capable of addressing the claims made by the new social movements of the 1970s and 80s, including feminists, Black-liberation activists, gay-rights campaigners, Indigenous people, disability-rights advocates, etc. It was clear to Young that theories of distributive justice could not account for the wider systems of oppression and domination that continued to disadvantage members of historically marginalized groups (Young 2005). For Young, the very idea of ‘impartiality’ or a ‘veil of ignorance’ (i.e. an initial position of equality) was naïve, precisely because of people’s positional difference. No abstract socio-political arrangement – however clever – could simply erase entrenched/historical social injustice. Commitment to equality had to start with a recognition of a politics of difference (Young 1990).
differentiations like ethnicity/race and class (Amin 2002; Burayidi 2000; Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Iveson 2000; Milroy 2004; Sandercock 1995; Wood and Landry 2008). As Sandercock (2000a) and others have argued, ‘difference’ helps make obvious what is embedded and assumed in dominant planning policies and practices. It brings cultural bias to the fore, rather than suppress it (Agyeman and Erickson 2012). Recognition of difference offers a compelling analytical framework for those wanting to bring different or historically marginalized voices to the planning table. It does so by embracing an epistemology that recognizes multiple ways of knowing, and multiple publics. In this way, difference – as an analytical frame – provides a strong foundation from which to make sense of the increasingly pluralistic character of cities today (Fainstein 2009; Fainstein and DeFilippis 2016).

Planning scholars interested in inter- and multi-cultural issues have used ‘difference’ as a lens to expose the prevailing ethnocentrism of current planning practices. This is certainly true of Sandercock (1998, 2000a, 2000b) who, almost twenty years ago now, famously declared that ‘difference’ had finally arrived on the planning agenda\(^{203}\), but is also true of many others including Fincher and Jacobs (1998), Iveson (2000), Amin (2002), Fincher (2003), Day (2003), Burayidi (2000, 2003), Milroy (2004), and Wood and Landry (2008). In all of these writings, ‘difference’ is used as a concept to underscore the idea that planners have a culture.

Of course, the idea that planning isn’t simply a value-free, technical discipline is by now a well-rehearsed one, having been reiterated over the years by many scholars, notably Meyerson and Banfield (1955), Davidoff (1965), Bolan (1969), Friedmann (1973), Forester (1989), Healey (1992), Sandercock (1998), Flyvbjerg (1998), Fainstein (2000), Campbell (2002) and others. But it’s the work of intercultural planners that has brought the significance of Young’s argument into sharp relief. Recognition of difference doesn’t just mean that planning exists within a wider system of societal norms and practices, but that the very idea of a universal, ‘one size fits all’, public interest is suspect (Sandercock 2000a). In fact, Sandercock (2000a) and others point out

\(^{203}\) It’s worth noting that Sandercock brought attention to ‘difference’ as early as 1995 when she noted that planners were being “challenged in the city and in the academy by frontiers of difference” (Sandercock 1995, 79).
that universal notions of a single public interest often reflect the norms, interests and values of the dominant culture to the detriment of minority communities.\textsuperscript{204}

### 6.7 Desirable for whom?

Adopting a framework capable of recognizing and engaging with difference helps bring to light the implicit biases informing current understandings of socio-spatial inequality in Canadian cities. Not only this, but it helps illuminate where current understandings fall short, and contributes to a fuller understanding of the mechanisms by which (dis)advantage operates at the neighbourhood level.

For instance, implicit in the literature is the idea that the desirability of certain neighbourhoods cuts unequivocally across lines of income, culture, ethnicity and social class. Or said another way, that that which is desirable in the eyes of today’s leading urbanists is also deemed desirable to local populations whose members might have little in common – culturally, socially, economically – with urban design and planning professionals, scholars and consultants whose interests, worldviews, and priorities tend to be embedded in and informed by Anglo-European, middle-class culture. Take the following passage as an example:

> It is common to say that people “choose” their neighbourhoods, but it’s money that buys choice. An increasing number of people in Toronto have relatively little money and thus fewer choices about where they can live. Those who have money and many choices can outbid those without these resources for the highest-quality housing, the most desirable neighbourhoods, and the best access to services (Hulchanski 2010, 19 my emphasis).\textsuperscript{205}

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\textsuperscript{204} Like others, Sandercock (1998) rejects the distance of Enlightenment epistemology between knower and knowledge, arguing that knowledge isn’t simply found in nature, but is in part a construction, a reflection of the values and biases of those doing the knowing. Simply put, knowledge isn’t value-neutral or unambiguously objective, which also doesn’t mean an acceptance of moral or cultural relativism. Rather it’s recognizing the importance of contextualizing knowledge (in a specific time, place and culture), and not treating it as a pure abstraction (Sandercock 1995).

\textsuperscript{205} Walks (2010a, 177) echoes a similar sentiment: “When the real estate market determines access to space, managers and those with high and rising incomes are able to outbid others for housing and location, thereby displacing low-income households from desirable neighbourhoods, driving up housing values, and contributing to greater neighbourhood segregation (my emphasis).” But like Hulchanski, Walks fails to give much attention to what counts as a ‘desirable’ neighbourhood, and the possibility that ‘desirability’ varies from one socio-cultural group to another.
Hulchanski is right to point out that people’s residential choices are ultimately constrained by wealth and income. People are free to live where they wish to only in so far as they can afford it. Money buys choice, and lack of money constrains it in a very real way. This point cannot be understated. But the second half of his statement is arguably trickier. Crucial to Hulchanski’s argument is the notion that different people are competing for the same neighbourhoods, because certain neighbourhoods are equally desirable to all residents. This presupposes the idea that there is such a thing as the ‘best’ neighbourhood with the ‘best’ services. To be sure, many people are competing for the same housing stock. Central city areas are indeed desired by a large swath of the population. But it is far from evident that a neighbourhood can be deemed universally appealing regardless of a person’s social, cultural, and economic identity or background (in relation to such identifiers as ethnicity, race, class, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) The problem with Hulchanski’s statement is that it ignores the obvious: different people want different things from their neighbourhoods.

This is something that became apparent in my interviews with local residents in Surrey. On the whole, people were happy to live there. For many, Surrey provided a place where people could tap into an established ethnic community. Some of the benefits of living in Surrey were very concrete: access to ethnic foods, proximity to a temple or a mosque, more spacious and less expensive housing. Other benefits were more difficult to define: a sense of familiarity, and the feeling of being around like-minded people. Others yet were counterintuitive: the presence of big roads, cheaper parking, quieter streets, greater privacy, access to nature – things typically associated with white middle-class suburban sensibilities. The majority of respondents felt they could find everything they needed in Surrey, including immigrant settlement services, recreational facilities, post-secondary institutions, and employment opportunities. In fact, it can be argued that many of today’s suburbs do a better job at serving ethnically diverse populations, especially newcomers, than central-city districts.

The notion that people in the suburbs face greater social exclusion and are cut off from opportunities relative to residents in the central city is flawed. It is an idea premised on a dated understanding of suburbia, but also one that equates the varied wants and needs of a culturally diverse group of people with those of design and planning professionals, consultants and commentators, who – as Agyeman (2012a) points out – are largely white, Anglo-European and
middle-class. As Gans (1969) himself remarked, planners tend to plan for people like themselves.206 The vision of what constitute a good neighbourhood is defined along culturally specific lines. Which is to say it is an extension of the identities of those doing the defining, in this case people who are overwhelmingly white, middle- and upper-middle class professionals. But while culturally specific, views about what makes certain neighbourhoods desirable are presented as given. This is not to deny the challenges that come with life in the suburbs – a point I emphasise in chapters four and five – or the conveniences that life in the central city affords to countless people.

To say people compete for the “most desirable neighbourhoods” with the “best services” conceals the reality of a politics of difference. There is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes the ‘best services’ or the ‘best neighbourhood’. Different services cater to different people. In my interviews with local residents, respondents had little to say about such things as bike lanes, food trucks, specialty coffee shops, artisanal bakeries and craft breweries – amenities highly coveted among a growing segment of the urban population (Hyra 2015; Lusk 2019; Nilsson et al. 2018). These were things that were not on the radars of the residents I spoke with in Surrey. Most likely because those whom I talked to were largely in ‘survival mode’. They were working multiple jobs, sometimes retraining, facing financial strains trying all the while to improve their English skills and to adapt to a new place and new culture. In short, they could not afford the luxury to focus on aspects of social life beyond their most immediate needs.207 It is also likely that the value of such amenities did not resonate with the respondents in my sample simply because such amenities are sparse in suburban locales. You don’t miss what you don’t know.

6.8 Place, culture and experience

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206 This paraphrase is taken from Healey (2016, 150). The original passage is found in Gans (1969, 36) and reads as follows: “the planner planned for people of his own class-culture, for other middle and upper middle class professionals … the planner did not realise he was planning for himself, his supporters and people of his class, however; he thought that by focusing on what he felt were desirable types of housing, business and industry, he was planning for everybody.”
207 In fact, a lot of respondents commented on not being able to develop friendships and get to know people because of the sheer lack of free time. Work and household responsibilities took up the bulk of people’s schedules. But spare time was difficult to find even on evenings and weekends as people sought opportunity to retrain or enroll in language classes.
But equally likely, amenities and services increasingly associated with the central city are the product of and serve a particular culture, one that is overwhelmingly tied to knowledge, professional and creative industries (Foley and Lauria 2000; Hern 2016; Hyra 2017; Lusk 2019; Staley 2018). There is little to suggest that any of the residents I interviewed would have considered relocating to the urban core had they been able to secure housing of equivalent quality and price point. In part, this is because the advantages of settling in a suburb like Surrey go beyond real estate economics. As stated earlier, they include such things as access to support networks and employment opportunities, and proximity to businesses and institutions serving the immigrant community. But that is only half the story. As inner-city neighbourhoods gentrify, they not only become more affluent, but also more culturally and ethnically homogenous (Cheung 2018b; Hyra 2017). Latest census data shows that neighbourhoods in Vancouver long-known for their ethnic and social mix are becoming less diverse, key among them Mt. Pleasant and Grandview Woodlands where the visible minority population shrank between 15 to 20 percent in the past five years (Hern, 2016; Nair and Carman 2017). But the trend predates these recent changes. The neighbourhood of Fairview, often celebrated as an outstanding model for good community planning, has also become more homogenous since its redevelopment in the 1970s (Ley and Lynch 2012).

Because the central city has long been associated with working-class, immigrant districts there is still a tendency to view central-city neighbourhoods as the locations where historically marginalized populations can best access services, jobs, and community supports. In the not so distant past, immigrant businesses, ethnic grocers and restaurants, and immigrant settlement services were all concentrated in the central city (Hanlon et al. 2009; Murdie 1998; Ray et al. 1997). Vancouver offers a case in point. Historically, the best dim sum was found in Chinatown, and the best samosas at the Punjabi Market – a six-block stretch along Main Street between East 48th Avenue and East 51st Avenue (Chan 2019; Klassen 2015). MOSAIC, one of the oldest and largest immigrant settlement agencies in the region had its centre of operations in East Vancouver on Commercial Drive. McAuley Park – also in East Vancouver – has been the longstanding public gathering place for the Vietnamese Heritage Association (Van Stavel 2018). Today, the focal point of South-Asian commerce and culture is found in Surrey, and the best dim sum in Richmond (Todd 2011; Wooley 2011). The Punjabi Market is a shell of its former self (Pablo 2014). MOSAIC has moved its head office east, and opened a centre in Surrey, actions
largely prompted by changes in the social geography of Vancouver and its suburbs. McAuley Park is facetiously labeled the ‘gentrification triangle’ by urban types, and today the handful of Vietnamese seniors who gather to fly the flag of South Vietnam each April 30th are surrounded by some of the trendiest establishments in the city: Matchstick Coffee, Savio Volpe, Les Faux Bourgeois, and the Black Lodge (Johnson 2016). Gone are the mom and pop bakeries serving $5 Vietnamese subs. Traces of Vancouver’s working-class, immigrant past remain, but they are increasingly faint.

All this points to a curious, though relevant, dynamic in current research on socio-spatial inequality. It misreads the central city much in the same way as it misreads contemporary suburbia. A great deal of the social service infrastructure supporting newcomers, especially those of low economic means, has moved to the suburbs. But so have the businesses, institutions, places of worship, and even jobs on which new immigrants rely. This is not to say that the region is segregated. Both Vancouver and its surrounding suburbs remain highly diverse. But the trends are unquestionable, with parts of the region revealing clear socioeconomic fault lines.

Current scholarship understates the extent to which the central city has changed socially and culturally over the years, and how this in turns creates informal barriers to historically marginalized populations. Much of the research on socio-spatial inequality focuses on income levels and property values, giving less attention to the social and cultural dimensions of neighbourhood change. But as gentrification scholars have shown, processes of neighbourhood decline and reinvestment are characterized by more than just upward and downward swings in income and housing costs. The cultural and economic fabric of urban space – in terms of amenities, businesses, services and cultural institutions – changes from one area to the next, from one passing year or decade to another (Zukin 1989, 1995).

Today, in the central city, one is more likely to find upscale chains like Whole Foods or Urban Fare than discount outlets like Walmart or Superstore, especially in those areas deemed highly desirable by planners and urban experts alike. A low-income, immigrant household living in

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208 Superstore (short for The Real Canadian Superstore) is a discount supermarket chain owned by Loblaw and found throughout Canada. There are at least three Whole Foods in Vancouver, all centrally located: one in the neighbourhood of Kitsilano, one in Coal Harbour, and one bordering Fairview and Mt. Pleasant. The city also boasts
Fairview, Olympic Village or Mt. Pleasant would be hard pressed to find a low-budget option at which to eat or shop for the whole family. In contrast, big-box, budget chains are ubiquitous in the suburbs. While low-cost supermarket chains are generally not viewed as the hallmark of a great neighbourhood, they do serve the needs and budgets of working-class and low-income households. Among the people I interviewed, a majority shopped at discount supermarket chains like Walmart, Superstore, and T&T. Such chains provide “family pack” quantities at competitive prices. They also cater to specific customer segments, making it possible for newcomers in Surrey to find a variety of ethnically-oriented products. Kadir, a young man from Egypt, talked about finding everything he needed at the Superstore in Guildford. Fabrice, a single-dad from Cameroon, described carrying groceries – including 40lb bags of rice – from Superstore on public transit with his daughter. The pair, who lacked a car, would walk 3.5km (roughly 40 minutes) to the store to save money on transit fare, and only took the bus on the way back home. Ultimately, Fabrice justified the long trek to Superstore for the difference it made to his wallet, a 40lb bag of rice retailed for as little as $20. It is far from clear that benefits typically associated with life in the central city would be passed on to people like Kadir and Fabrice – newcomers with limited earning power. Scholars of food deserts have even coined a term for this particular dynamic, ‘food mirages’, a phrase meant to describe affluent areas where grocery stores abound but are unaffordable to lower-income populations (Anguelovski 2016). Without a doubt, local economic dynamics in the central city don’t just make it difficult for people to access affordably priced foods, they create barriers to broader aspects of a person’s social and economic life, finding suitable housing of course, but also buying clothes or furniture, or going

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209 I know this because I actually helped Fabrice grocery shop. Once he told me of his ordeal, I offered to take him grocery shopping with my car.

210 It’s worth noting here that this example also speaks to some of the challenges that come with suburban residence. Fabrice lived a good forty-minute walk from his nearest grocery store, a common enough reality for many suburban dwellers, who live in low-density, single-use car-centric communities. So while the central city might pose accessibility challenges to lower-income people in terms of the affordability of services and amenities available, life in the suburbs isn’t without its own problems. Accessibility in suburban neighbourhoods is more of a transportation and land use issue. But there is arguably a difference between the two. When a product isn’t affordable, you either can’t buy it, or you have to settle for less of it – which when it comes to groceries/food, is seldom a viable or appealing option, something especially true for families. But if the same product is obtainable at a more affordable price some distance away, then as long as one is willing to sacrifice convenience, time and effort, the product can be procured, which without the necessary money would be impossible.
for a drink, or grabbing a bite to eat, or attending a community event. The type of establishments and businesses found in central-city neighbourhoods increasingly cater to a class of well-paid professional workers to the detriment of those whose incomes aren’t as high. So while urban scholars, planning professionals and consultants might view the central city in more favorable terms than the suburbs, the extent to which this might be true – in so far as historically marginalized populations are concerned – needs to be interrogated rather than presumed.

But these divides do not simply cut along economic lines. They are also social and cultural in nature. New York Times’ columnist David Brooks (2017) eloquently describes the way in which informal social barriers entrench inequality in American society:

American upper-middle-class culture (where the opportunities are) is now laced with cultural signifiers that are completely illegible unless you happen to have grown up in this class. They play on the normal human fear of humiliation and exclusion. Their chief message is, “You are not welcome here.”

In her thorough book “The Sum of Small Things,” Elizabeth Currid-Halkett argues that the educated class establishes class barriers not through material consumption and wealth display but by establishing practices that can be accessed only by those who possess rarefied information.

To feel at home in opportunity-rich areas, you’ve got to understand the right barre techniques, sport the right baby carrier, have the right podcast, food truck, tea, wine and Pilates tastes, not to mention possess the right attitudes about David Foster Wallace, child-rearing, gender norms and intersectionality.

The educated class has built an ever more intricate net to cradle us in and ease everyone else out. It’s not really the prices that ensure 80 percent of your co-shoppers at Whole Foods are, comfortingly, also college grads; it’s the cultural codes.

Status rules are partly about collusion, about attracting educated people to your circle, tightening the bonds between you and erecting shields against everybody else. We in the educated class have created barriers to mobility that are more devastating for being invisible. The rest of America can’t name them, can’t understand them. They just know they’re there.

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211 As a personal anecdote, in Port Coquitlam where my family and I currently reside, posing for a picture with Santa Claus at the local winter holiday festival costs $5. At Oakridge mall it can cost upwards of $50. Port Coquitlam is a suburb of Vancouver with strong working-class roots. Oakridge is one of Vancouver’s most affluent neighbourhoods.
Although Brooks is speaking directly to the American context, the essence of what he says rings true in Canada as well, where socio-economic divides while less acute, are still present and growing (Green and Kesselman 2006; Heisz 2016).\textsuperscript{212} The observation that power and status are not only the product of economic wealth, but are culturally and symbolically created through everyday practices has been made before, most notably by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1979), who used the concept of ‘habitus’ to describe how social status and class position become embodied in everyday life (Hillier and Rooksby 2005). Brooks is right to point out that, “it’s not really the prices that ensure 80 percent of your co-shoppers at Whole Foods are, comfortably, also college grads; it’s the cultural codes.” We exhibit our socioeconomic position through specific behaviour, norms, values, tastes and language. And while economic wealth is necessary to gain entry to a particular space, neighbourhood or social circle, it is a specific set of cultural signifiers that legitimizes one’s presence in a particular space or group, the apparatus that announces to the wider world, “You belong here.” As Brooks (2017) notes, whether one does or doesn’t belong to a space or social circle can be read in a set of practices that are as intricate they are quotidian, from the ‘type of podcasts’ one listens to, to one’s choice of ‘baby carrier’, from ‘food truck’ preferences, to one’s attitudes about ‘gender norms’ and ‘intersectionality.’ What this means is that social and cultural barriers are, at the very least, as important as structural ones in reinforcing today’s urban divides. A point made eloquently by Marcuse (1985) in his study of everyday displacement pressures in gentrifying neighbourhoods.

What makes certain spaces or circumstances feel exclusionary is often hard to convey. But, as Brooks (2017) points out, while informal social barriers might be hard to pinpoint, people know they are there nonetheless. The converse is also true. It is equally hard for people to describe why some spaces or circumstances feel inclusive. Consider, for instance, Ranbir’s decision to settle in Surrey after emigrating from India in 2013. Having initially settled in Burnaby – a thriving suburb located immediately east of Vancouver – Ranbir eventually decided to move to Surrey. He explained his decision as follows:

\begin{quote}
When I came here, I saw, big streets, a lot of people, and hm, like hm, cultural things as well like, I'm able to eat my, hm like, my food and kind of thing, I was missing for like,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{212} For early seminal research on the trajectory of inequality in Canada see MacLachlan and Sawada (1997) and Myles, Picot, and Pyper (2000).
for ten, fifteen days, so I really like that thing, because like people, like then visited a family here, they offered us all Indian things and I was astonished because I was not aware of all that Indian food is, everything is available in Canada as well, so that good for me and I think yeah, that was the turning point, I thought I should live in Surrey because of some people, *I'm able to see my kind of people here*, yeah [my emphasis].

What the above passage speaks to is the feeling of familiarity Ranbir experienced when he visited Surrey for the first time. Being in a place among other Indo-Canadians brought comfort to Ranbir, who like many new immigrants struggled with loneliness and isolation. It was the feeling of seeing people who looked and talked like him, and who cooked the same food as he did that made the difference. In Surrey, Ranbir had found a community he identified with, a place where he felt like he belonged. 213

As the central city gentrifies it is also arguably becoming less diverse (Hyra 2015). Shops that have longed catered to working-class, minority populations are harder to find in the urban core. These include businesses like corner stores, markets, eateries which for a long time functioned as vehicles for entrepreneurship among new immigrants (Meltzer 2016). The decline of the Punjabi Market on Main Street in Vancouver is a case in point (Chan 2019). Once the commercial hub of the Indo-Canadian community, many of its shops have either closed or relocated to neighbouring suburbs. Another telling example is the number of old convenience stores being redeveloped into trendy coffee bars or cafes. Take for instance the Federal Store located at the corner of Quebec St. and East 10th Avenue in the heart of Mt. Pleasant. Formerly owned by a South Korean couple, it was run as a nondescript convenience store that sold smokes and candy for almost twenty years, until it was recently bought be a pair of young, white restaurateurs who transformed it into a hip ‘store-café’ (Stainsby 2017).

The transformation of commercial enterprise doesn’t just imply a change in local amenities or services, but a reshaping of social space, where social space is understood to encompass both the material amenities of a particular place (businesses, services, housing stock, public infrastructure) and the social, symbolic, and cultural dynamics constitutive of those places

213 The fact that Burnaby is as culturally diverse as Vancouver, if not more, but without a gentrifying ‘creative class’ of young urban professionals is all the more telling. From what is known about the social and cultural trajectory of change in the central city, it can be argued that settling in Vancouver would have proven even more alienating for Ranbir.
This is because businesses do more than just providing goods or services to people. They function as social spaces where residents catch up with one another, learn about community events, and hear about resources and services available in the area (Huse 2016). They are informal sites where community happens. As a large body of literature documents, independent specialty stores serve a variety of functions for the ethnic communities they serve (Huse, 2016; Mazer and Rankin 2011; Rath 2000). Consider the Ailing Mary’s Filipino Store just off 104th Avenue in Whalley, or the Al Baraka Convenience Store on 108th Avenue in Guildford. The services offered in such establishments are as eclectic as they are varied. At Ailing Mary’s one can pick up a dozen freshly baked pandesal (sweet bread buns) for $3.50, stock up on Bagoong (fermented fish paste), wire money through Western Union, and rent Filipino movies. Similarly, at Al Baraka one can buy a Turkish coffee or tea set, stock up on middle eastern sweets, and order made-in-house shish kebabs and chicken shawarma. The store offers private catering services, and fundraises for local community organizations such as the Nisa Homes – a local Surrey agency that provides shelter and resources to Muslim women and children escaping domestic violence.

The presence of these types of establishments go a long way in providing a sense of familiarity and belonging to local residents. Just as relevant, they help legitimize a group’s presence in urban space, especially for historically marginalized populations who because of their racial, ethnic or cultural background, immigrant status, or socio-economic position tend to be shut out – economically and symbolically – from the parallel but separate world of white, upper-middle class culture. People who would otherwise feel uncomfortable or out of place patronizing a third-wave coffee shop or an upscale grocery store like Whole Foods – given the symbolic and material trappings that come with such locales – can look elsewhere to claim their place in the city (Hyra 2015). But as the central city transforms, and businesses once serving working-class and immigrant populations either close down or relocate to the suburbs, people’s ability to belong, and – to paraphrase Ranbir – ‘see their kind of people’ is threatened.

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214 For theoretical discussions on how social systems produce space in their image see Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (1989), Soja (1990). For a good summary on the social production of space see Fairbanks (2003). And for discussion grounded in the study of gentrification see Mazer and Rankin (2011).
Claims about the desirability of central-city neighbourhoods relative to suburban ones overlook what the experience of everyday life is like for different people as they navigate real spaces in the city. A newcomer going about his or her everyday life in Whalley, Guildford or Newton will largely come across others like him or her: visible minorities who are likely to speak English with an accent, and whose clothes and shoes are more likely to be sourced from the local Walmart than from an independent clothing boutique. Businesses and establishments – whether barbershops, restaurants, or coffee shops – are predominantly unassuming, no-frills-type places. Like other suburbs, Surrey has a large population of children and teens, something especially true in Whalley, Guildford and Newton where Black and Brown youths are a visible presence in local malls, McDonald’s restaurants, and various transit hubs. Contrast this to the experience of everyday life in Mt. Pleasant, one of the many gentrifying neighbourhoods in Vancouver. Walk along Main Street today and on nearly every block one finds a third-wave coffee shop where mustachioed baristas serve pour-over coffee in flashy glass funnels, and where a 16-ounce fresh-pressed, organic juice can retail for as much as $11.\textsuperscript{215} The clientele is largely white, made up of younger adults between the ages of 25 to 35, and middle-age urban professionals, two demographic groups underrepresented in Surrey. This is not to suggest that Vancouver is an ethnically homogenous city, far from it, but rather to convey how differently class and ethnicity intersect in gentrifying central-city neighbourhoods relative to new immigrant reception areas in the suburbs. The urban core continues to attract new immigrant populations, but these are increasingly tied to knowledge and creative industries, if not altogether part of a very wealthy investor class (Ley 2010). Likewise, suburban areas throughout Metro Vancouver, retain large numbers of white residents, but these tend to be working and middle-class families, not single, young urban professionals. In suburban areas like Whalley, Guildford and Newton the working-class new immigrant population is markedly more visible than in most central-city neighbourhoods today. Such snapshots point to the elusive, though undeniable, cultural gulf between central city and periphery, and raise questions about the ease with which lower-income, minority persons fit into today’s central city.\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{215} Cheung (2018b, 2018c) describes some of the changes accompanying gentrification in East Vancouver. While he doesn’t mention the various hipster barbershops that have popped up in the neighbourhood, he does describe some of the new eating establishments taking hold in Mount Pleasant.

\textsuperscript{216} Overall demographic patterns between city and suburb are difficult to describe because metropolitan areas in Canada, unlike in the United States where racial and ethnic segregation is much more entrenched, remain highly diverse. In Metro Vancouver alone, one can find predominantly white affluent suburban areas (think of Port Moody or White Rock), affluent immigrant suburbs (think of Richmond), and lower-income immigrant zones (Whalley,
To raise concerns over the risks associated with the rise of low-income minority neighbourhoods in the suburbs is to overlook the countless ways in which these neighbourhoods – despite their many problems – can be good places to live. But it’s also to underestimate the effects of cultural and economic dislocation that central living presents to more marginalized populations. It is far from clear that a move to the city is as advantageous to low-income, minority households as the literature seem to suggest. Desirability and preference are influenced by particular worldviews, cultural norms and social expectations, which in many ways vary from group to group. Scholars tend to equate successful urban neighbourhoods with areas of the central city experiencing neighbourhood revitalisation. But by doing so they fail to adequately recognize that that which is deemed desirable or preferable to some is not always so to others. In effect, not enough attention is given to the importance that ‘difference’ makes, which results in a tendency to universalize the experience of the upper-middle class while marginalizing that of minority populations.

### 6.9 Planning in the age of difference

To be sure, there are plenty of reasons for celebrating central-city revitalisation. A focus on walkable neighbourhoods and amenity-rich, mixed-use developments has and continues to bring definite benefits to many urban dwellers: safer and vibrant streets for pedestrians, shorter commutes to work, ready access to community services and businesses, reduced vehicular traffic, lower carbon missions, and so on. By most metrics, the blueprint outlined by Jacobs (1961) more than fifty years ago has worked. But it has worked for some at the expense, and despite the experiences, of others. Gentrification has transformed neighbourhoods in incalculable ways, making it increasingly difficult for low- and modest-income households to maintain a foothold in the city (Hyra, 2008; Podagrosi and Vojnovic, 2008). Long gone are the working-class, immigrant districts Jane Jacobs so idolized. Today’s newcomers, especially those of more low- and modest-economic means, seem content with settling outside the central core. Whatever benefits the city has to offer they are neither equally shared nor equally welcomed across segments of society.

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Guildford and Newton in Surrey, and Edmonds in Burnaby). Likewise, despite a trajectory of change toward higher neighbourhood incomes, Vancouver retains large numbers of low-income residents.
At issue is not simply a matter of redistribution, but a deeper dynamic involving the cultural specificity of planning policies and practices. Much of what is considered to be good planning today is associated with a specific urban built form emphasising such principles as: mixed-uses, pedestrian-friendly streets, compact neighbourhoods, transit-oriented communities, human-scale design, and strong public spaces. When planners and other urban professionals discuss what makes a particular development successful or deliberate over the merits of a specific neighbourhood they largely concentrate on these features. The best examples of this approach to urban planning are increasingly found in gentrifying, or gentrified, neighbourhoods in the central city. This explains in part why the central city is viewed both as a model for community planning, and as a favored place in which to live among urbanists (planners, urban designers, urban scholars, etc.).

But as Agyeman (2012a) points out, planning and urban design professions are not known for their diversity or difference, or cultural heterogeneity. To this day, planning remains a field largely dominated by white people, both in terms of its everyday practitioners, and also in terms of its recognized leading thinkers, whether popular or academic. The accepted collection of writings outlining the field’s substantive and theoretical foundations, or planning canon as one might call it, consists overwhelmingly of white voices. Attempts at expanding the canon’s limited cultural DNA have led scholars to draw outside the discipline from such disparate fields as sociology, women’s studies, literature, visual art, and creative writing (Sandercock 1998). And while these outside voices have a lot to contribute to the field, they are just that, outsiders.

The narrow cultural profile of planning, both as a practice and as an academic discipline, creates barriers to its ability to respond adequately to the realities of increasingly different and heterogenous urban areas. This is because, as Agyeman (2012a) describes, our ‘positionality’ – that is our identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality and so on – shapes our understanding of and outlook on the world. In relation to planning, this means that such things as people’s cultural background and lived experiences have a real influence on how people approach and think about planning (theoretically and practically), from the design of public spaces, to the interpretation of codes and land use regulation, to the way plans and processes are evaluated. Nowhere, is this perhaps more obvious than in the way central cities throughout North America are being redeveloped, designed, and planned. Whether it’s in conversations about place making,
transit-oriented development, or people-oriented design, the voices of people of colour, immigrants, low-income people, and other historically marginalized populations are largely missing (Zavestoski and Agyeman 2015). This omission is not in itself surprising. Marginalized voices have for the most part been ignored by mainstream planners (Sandercock 1995, 1998). But equally, if not more unsettling, is the tendency to equate the needs of minority voices with those of the dominant culture. This assumes that beyond disparities in income and resources, different groups of residents are essentially similar; that people of markedly different social and cultural backgrounds sharing vastly different collective pasts have needs, wants and values aligned with those of the dominant white culture.

Attention to difference offers a powerful reminder of the shortcomings involved in planning for the ‘average’ or ‘everyday’ user (Agyeman 2012b). The very idea of an ‘average/everyday’ user is something of a cognitive trick, a reification – the process of presenting an abstract concept as a concrete object. Spaces designed for the so-called ‘average’ person are almost always implicitly planned around a specific user, usually male, white and middle-class, if not affluent. In Young’s (1990) sense, recognition of difference should lead not to equality of treatment, but to different treatment based on cultural need or difference. Failing to do so has obvious, and not so obvious, implications for local residents.

In her case study of the Westside of the city of Costa Mesa, California, Day (2003) shows how ideas assumed to be transparent and self-evident can be interpreted differently by various segments of the local population. Wealthier white residents were more likely to view efforts aimed at promoting ‘walking’ or ‘cycling’ as primarily recreational strategies. In contrast, non-homeowner Latino residents interpreted the same calls to expand walking and cycling opportunities as requests to facilitate people’s daily commutes. Similar disparities were found around policies aimed at celebrating local history and traditions. Controversy surrounded a longtime Latino businessman over his refusal to remove a mural that had been outside his business for years. Day (2003) explains that while the mural held historic and cultural value for many Latino residents, it did not comply with the city’s sign ordinance. The matter generated a great deal of discussion around what counts as local heritage, who gets to identify it, and whose history gets to be recognized as part of the official community record (and see also Dubrow 1998).
What these examples show is that the notion of a homogenous life experience and identity cannot be assumed. Judging a particular neighbourhood to be a good place in which to live – or deeming it preferable to others – requires great caution. There are few – if any – self-evident or universally accepted standards around which to plan a community. The very idea of ‘public space’ is disputed, with many scholars arguing that public spaces are never unconditionally public no matter their form (Day 2003; Low et al. 2005). For one thing, spaces commonly thought to be unremarkable or ‘normal’ might be unsafe or inhospitable to a segment of the population (Anderson 2015). But equally important, not everyone is viewed as having an equally legitimate claim to space in the city. More often than not, this is a dynamic that plays out implicitly rather than explicitly. For sure, there are many examples of explicit measures restricting people’s access to certain spaces: hostile architectural designs aimed at preventing people – usually the homeless – from lingering; bylaws that restrict overnight access to public parks; regulations that ban sleeping in cars; and less ethically glaring maneuvers like denying washroom access to the non-paying public, or the criminalization of youth activities like skateboarding or outdoor basketball (Brasuell 2017; Chellew 2016; Cobb 2018; Schmitt 2015; Wood 2018). But more common, are the subtle, informal and implicit dynamics that make some spaces feel ‘off limits’ or unsafe to certain segments of the population.

For instance, studies show that Black people – regardless of their socio-economic status – routinely receive added scrutiny when navigating white-dominated spaces, not only from other members of the public but also from store managers, clerks, attendants, security guards, police officers, and so on (Anderson 2015). Women – especially visible minority women – have been shown to be more acutely aware of safety concerns in public parks (Arnold and Shinew 1998; Glaser 1994). Dense vegetation, hedging, insufficient lighting, and a lack of clear sightlines increase feelings of fear and discomfort among park users, but more so for women than men (Baran et al. 2018; Jansson et al. 2013; Maruthaveeran and van den Bosch 2014). Concerns over safety are linked to lower levels of utilization of public parks among women, who also are

217 Racial profiling and discrimination have received the most attention and are usually discussed in the context of the United States. But these practices/dynamics have been shown to exist in Canada as well. Also, it’s not only Black people who have been shown to be targets of racial profiling but also Indigenous people, Muslims, and persons of Latin American, South Asian and Arab origins (Cecco 2018; Commission des Droits de La Personne et des Droits de la Jeunesse 2011; Ontario Human Rights Commission 2002).
significantly less likely than their male counterparts to visit parks alone (Loukaitou-Sideris 1995; Maruthaveeran and van den Bosch 2014). Agyeman (2010, 2014) reveals how Western practices of park design and park management create added barriers to participation in the public realm for ethno-cultural minorities. For instance, he relates how a decision by the City of Bristol (UK) to introduce tall native grasses inadvertently drove away members of the Asian and African Caribbean population from the city’s public parks. City staff had failed to recognize people’s residual fear of snakes.  

Similarly, Agyeman discusses how something as mundane as the layout and design of public benches can dissuade certain groups from gathering in public spaces. This is because public benches in much of North America – in addition to only fitting three to four people – tend to be scattered rather than grouped together in a ‘forum’ style, making it difficult for immigrant populations, who are more likely to congregate in large multigenerational family groups, to sit and talk together (Agyeman 2010).

While some of the examples above might seem trivial, the cumulative effects of being and living as a member of a minority group should not be understated. The experiences of being ‘stared at’, of needing to routinely explain where one is from, of being asked “Can I help you?” when the intended question is really “What is your business here?”, of standing out in a crowd simply because of one’s skin colour or accent, of occupying spaces ill-suited to one’s gender, cultural identity, or religious background all have a way of telling people they do not belong (Anderson 2015). Taken together policies that entrench ethnocentric, heteronormative and androcentric perspectives help normalize certain people’s access to space in the city while delegitimizing the presence of others.

These considerations offer an important reminder of the blind spots inherent in much of the recent literature on socio-spatial inequality. In disseminating the notion of central-city advantage relative to suburban areas, current writings gloss over the role difference plays in mediating the experiences of local residents. Scholars take as given the idea that because central-city living is attractive to (and celebrated by) urban experts and a class of urban professionals, that it must also be equally appealing to others regardless of broader socio-cultural differences. They fail to consider the possibility that places deemed to be vibrant, safe, and inclusive might be alienating.

218 As Agyeman explains, at issue here was not the failure to predict people’s fear of snakes in long grass, but rather the failure by City staff to recognize, understand and engage with difference, diversity, and cultural heterogeneity.
unappealing or even hostile to groups occupying positions of marginality (socially, economically, culturally, and the like).

At its core, this is an issue that can be traced back to the lack of diversity within planning and other related fields such as architecture and urban geography (Agyeman and Erickson 2012). Practitioners and scholars alike inadvertently plan communities, setting standards for what counts as good planning, that tend to speak to their own, distinct socio-economic realities, and unique cultural values. As Gans (1969) so aptly put it, “planners tend to plan for people like themselves.” Promoting a diverse professional workforce that more accurately reflects the socio-cultural make-up of cities is a first step in creating culturally inclusive spaces. Agyeman (2014) echoes this sentiment when making sense of the park’s management practices in Bristol. He asks: ‘What if a member of the staff had been Asian or African-Caribbean?’ Would the City have designed the same policy promoting the use of tall grasses in public parks?

6.10 Local testimonies

But lack of representation is only part of the problem. At issue is also the lack of any kind of intercultural lens – that is a lens capable of recognizing, understanding and engaging with difference – in the current literature on socio-spatial inequality. To assume that city living offers added benefits to historically marginalized groups such as lower-income new immigrants is to disregard the role of positionality in informing policy, but it is also to overlook how other people’s positionality might challenge present-day planning paradigms. In a case study on whiteness and white spaces, Jackson (1999) shows how what white people might see as ‘diverse’ spaces, black people may perceive as culturally homogenous and privileged. Likewise, Miller and Lubitow (2015) show how place-making schemes aimed at creating bike lanes in

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219 This is Gans (1969) as paraphrased in Healey (2016, 150). Gans (1969, 37) goes on to say, “In short, the standards and other tools used by planners in various community facilities often reflected the vested interests and cultural values and biases of the planner himself and of his allies. Sometimes the plans were even based on the fads and fashions of the era. For example, until about World War II, most planners shared the common middle-class belief that multi-family dwellings were undesirable. They thought that since poor people lived in them, and poor people exhibited high rates of individual and social pathology, apartments must be pathological. Consequently, planners wanted to put as many people as possible into single-family housing.”

traditionally disadvantaged minority neighbourhoods, can be seen by local residents as part of a much longer history of destabilizing interventions by white, privileged elites.\textsuperscript{221}

Recognizing that spaces resonate differently to different people, and how people’s lived experiences of race, class, gender, and the like mediate people’s views of what makes good neighbourhoods is crucial for understanding the extent to which inclusion and exclusion are built into the very fabric of urban areas. Planning policies, however progressive, can act as a regulatory mechanism by which social divisions are reinforced and perpetuated in space, effectively making some localities accessible to some groups but not to others.

In my research it was clear that many principles guiding planning and development decisions in central cities today did not resonate with many of the Surrey residents I spoke with. Quite the contrary, people’s views were in some cases diametrically opposed to today’s planning orthodoxy. As stated earlier, most interviewees liked Surrey and talked about wanting to continue to live there, something that in itself doesn’t square with current planning paradigms which tend to elevate urban lifestyles above what’s offered in the suburbs. But discrepancy in opinions was made most visible in seemingly minor details. For instance, respondents talked about liking the privacy and quietness of suburbia, as well as the lack of crowds.

Sandra, a middle-age woman from Santiago de Cali (Colombia) who had been in Canada for just over a year, described really liking the “silence” in Surrey. She and her husband rented a basement suite in a Guildford. She described Cali – a city of 2.3 million people – as both crowded and loud, noting that “in Colombia when people made [sic] a party it is very loud.” Asked what she liked about Surrey and whether she would consider moving to Burnaby to be closer to her husband’s workplace, Sandra explained that “houses here [in Surrey] are very good, very big, and there is more distance in between houses, in Burnaby the houses are very close [together].” She chuckled at the thought of living in Vancouver, dismissing the idea and saying “there are lots of [tall] buildings, yeah … I prefer houses with only one floor.” She went on to add that she was not keen about apartment living: “no I need the land, contact with the land.” Sandra’s remarks were echoed by many other respondents. Time and time again, participants

\textsuperscript{221} For a Canadian case study on how space is experienced differently depending on one’s social location see Mazer and Rankin (2011).
mentioned ‘quiet streets’ and ‘the lack of crowds’ as some of the best features they liked about Surrey, while also voicing disapproval for high-rise buildings which they often associated with Vancouver.\textsuperscript{222}

While residents did not go into much detail about their preferences for low-density neighbourhoods, their responses might be attributed to two contrasting dynamics. The bulk of newcomers arriving today in Metro Vancouver are from developing nations in the Global South (India, Bangladesh, Latin and Central America) or advanced economies in Asia, notably China, South Korea and Russia. Many of these new immigrants come to Canada having lived in environments that are highly urban where population densities – at least in the cities – outstrip those commonly found in North American metropolitan regions.\textsuperscript{223} Pollution, congestion, overcrowding, and small living spaces are facts of everyday life for many of these residents. With this in mind, it is not unreasonable to think that newcomers arriving to Metro Vancouver might not only aspire to a different way of life, but might be prone to associate dense neighbourhoods, and high-rise buildings in particular, with a lower quality of life. Another dynamic to which one might attribute people’s preference for low-density neighbourhoods, is the attachment to land and nature. Residents of the Global South immigrating to Canada today may arrive with strong connections to rural areas, due in part to more recent patterns of urbanization, and the historically high proportion of the population living in the rural areas of developing nations.

But there were other details in the interview material that ran counter to conventional planning principles. For instance, a number of respondents alluded to the value of living in vicinity to the freeway and other thoroughfares. Asked about whether she was happy to stay in Surrey, Natasha

\textsuperscript{222} More often than not, such sentiments were made in passing. Lara simply stated “I like the neighbourhood because it’s very quiet.” When asked her thoughts on Vancouver, Ranbir simply remarked “I don’t like it because it’s too crowded, yeah, I’ve never liked the downtown area as well, but Surrey I like.” Speaking about her neighbourhood, Evgenia remarked “it’s a nice community, it’s quiet, it’s clean.” When asked about Vancouver, she added “No I don’t want to live downtown Vancouver.” Similarly, Valeria explained what she liked about her neighbourhood by saying “it’s not [a] busy neighbourhood, not a lot of high-rises.” She stressed this point adding “I like my small neighbourhood, because not a lot of high-rises … it’s a quiet neighbourhood.” Likewise, Suhana remarked “Good thing I like is that there is no pollution here, and hm the store and everything is very well organized, and hm ... weather is nice, good country hm open space, less people, less crowded.”

\textsuperscript{223} Participants came from such cities as Mymensingh (Bangladesh), Manila (Philippines), Moscow (Russia), Jalandhar (India), Cairo (Egypt), Tianjin (China), New Delhi (India), Vladivostock (Russia), Seoul (South Korea), Havana (Cuba).
replied, “but here is, actually it's not bad too, and why we don't choose Langley or something, another, because it's from here it's very close to highway, because my husband has to go to work [in North Vancouver] so yeah.” Valeria echoed a similar sentiment saying:

So, all malls is [sic] close, five minutes one mall, five minutes another mall, so I'm in the middle of hm between Guildford and Surrey Central, and one mall is hm SuperStore, I like that sometimes I go by walk, hm here, so stores, parks, hm, quiet neighbourhood ... and hm one more [thing], it's close to highway, and close to Skytrain [my emphasis]

As did Narjis when describing what she liked about where she lived in Surrey. Speaking of the first place she and her husband moved to, she listed the ‘small ranch house’, ‘Bear Creek Park’ and the ‘highway to go to work’ as the three things that she liked most about that particular location. She repeated this when speaking of her current place in Newton. Although a different location in Surrey, proximity to the highway factored in once again into her and her husband’s decision making.

Jacopo: And do you like where you are now in Surrey? Do you see yourself moving or you like it here?

Narjis: No, I like it, I hm you know I mean hm there isn't like a view or something or like you know, it's just a normal neighbourhood ... even though the neighbours change so many times, people move in and move out, you know, it still to me like you know, I kind of hm I feel like I'm in a good strategic [location] my husband sometimes he takes Highway 16 from South Surrey and hm which is easier to come, and or if there's an accident or something hm 64th or 67th, 64th is right there and you can go to the Highway, you can go to Richmond, or Vancouver, like you know, so, [unintelligible] it's not, I'm kind of in the middle.

It was not uncommon for participants to frame the decision to settle close to the highway as a deliberate and strategic choice. Proximity to a freeway was something people valued. In large part because – in a city where the car is king, and where people’s commutes are long – it’s nearly impossible to get to work without relying on one of the many highways or major thoroughfares crisscrossing Surrey. Locating close to a highway interchange is a way for residents to reduce commuting times and distances. But it wasn’t just proximity to major roadways that people valued, in some cases residents spoke positively of the open, sprawling feel of Surrey. Ramanjit, a senior manager for a local immigrant settlement agency, mentioned how the “wide roads” and “very open” feel of the city was attractive to newcomers, especially South-Asians. Ranbir – a local resident originally from Punjab – echoed a similar sentiment when speaking positively of Surrey’s “big streets” while comparing these to Burnaby’s which he found too “congested”. In a similar fashion, Suhana singled out Surrey’s “very clean and very wide” roads and the city’s
“open spaces” as some of the best things Surrey had to offer. These three, like others in my sample, linked Surrey’s big roads and its low-density built form to improved mobility, reduced congestion and good traffic sense, a view running counter to conventional planning wisdom which associates sprawling landscapes with increased congestion and bottlenecks (Burchell et al. 2005).

Alongside these concerns were considerations over the type and size of housing available in Surrey relative to other municipalities in the region. As stated earlier, a preference for low-density neighbourhoods with large lots and big houses was important to many residents. This despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents lived in basement suites. Clear from the interviews, however, was the idea that a preference for single-detached houses extended beyond the desire for privacy, quietness, and access to green spaces. Like other decisions, housing choices were often strategic in nature, and meant to address a variety of needs, needs typically not associated with those of Anglo-European, middle-class households. Many new immigrant families rely on housing to accommodate extended family members, adult children, and larger-than-average families. Cultural expectations and financial realities combine to shape the very idea of family structure, emphasising collective living arrangements over individual ones. This was evident among many of the residents who participated in this research.

For instance, Aurul – first introduced in Chapter 4 – talked about looking for a three-bedroom place that could accommodate his ageing mother – who had arrived in Canada through family sponsorship – and his adult, working, daughter who had come back to live with her parents after what Aurul described as an arranged marriage gone “terribly wrong.” In addition to the mother and adult daughter, the family also occasionally housed Aurul’s mother-in-law. The need for a larger dwelling partly explained the decision to move from a two-bedroom apartment in New Westminster to a three-bedroom in Surrey.

Natasha, also introduced in Chapter 4, talked about how her mother had stayed with the family for two to three months at a time to help out with childcare. The grandmother – who was still living in Russia – had visited the family to take care of Natasha’s two younger children, giving Natasha the ability to upgrade her educational credentials at a local community college. Natasha
explained that, in addition to having a close family friend living in Surrey, life south of the Fraser (river) offered housing that better fit their family’s needs.

Harjinder, a young woman in her twenties, described sharing a two-bedroom suite with her older brother – who worked as a truck driver – and her parents. At the time, Harjinder was working as a security guard while also studying part time. Living under the same roof, was a deliberate strategy by which the family could pool resources and generate savings.

Jacopo: What was it like for you guys to find housing? It can be expensive, sometimes people have to rent basement suites …

Harjinder: Uh huh, for rent, because we are all, like my dad, my brother, me, we are working, and then it's easy, just living, renting, this is kind of ok, because when we work, like when we're earning money we're earning enough money to buy rent, like, to hm for like renting, and other expenses, that's fine, otherwise, we're planning to buy a house.

Asked about her tuition fees and other expenses, Harjinder explained that in continuing to live with her parents and older brother she was able to save money, as expenditures were shared among four working adults. The family unit provided needed financial support.

Harjinder: hm, no [I didn’t take out a student loan] I worked, and the, I worked two jobs and then I saved enough money and hm then I paid, it was ok for me, yeah, because I live in a family so, my family supported me too, so, that was fine … if I was, I'm thinking if I was living alone, like paying everything then it would be hard, but otherwise I know I'm feeling ok, so …

Similar dynamics were observed among many other participants. Narjis talked about how the decision to settle in Surrey – rather than Abbotsford where her husband worked – was made with the idea of giving her kids the option to continue living at home while going to university or college. Like other immigrant parents of modest means, Narjis and her husband found it difficult, if not impossible, to cover the costs of their children’s on-campus accommodations.

Narjis: like you know, the kids are growing and they decide to go to a university, it's hm, if we're here like hm they don't live in a dorm, this is more accessible than Abbotsford, all thinking about the future … that was like how the decision was made [unintelligible - name of company?] like you know, those are close to where my husband work and housing is there cheaper, to hm the houses there, but like we
decided 'ok in the future we cannot afford the kids each one of them going to live on their own’ [chuckles] it would be difficult for us so we wanted to manage that we still have an house accessible for them [her children] to live in hm in order to help them financially

The decision to stay under one roof to allow adult children to save on living expenditures and/or contribute to the household economy was common among households with university-age children. In some cases, such as Miriam’s, adult children not only lived at home, but also helped the parents securing the necessary funds for a down payment, upending Anglo-European middle-class norms of parental responsibility, where the expectation is typically for the parents to secure the needed resources (financial and otherwise) to ensure children receive the best possible college education (Calarco 2018).

The marketing of the central city to a class of young urban professionals – many of them single and childless – has meant that groups who have historically relied on larger dwellings because of multigenerational family structures have increasingly looked to the suburbs as more viable alternatives in which to settle. While housing costs constrain people’s residential choices, making suburban locations appealing to new immigrant households with limited economic means, housing costs alone do not explain the rise in the number of lower-income, immigrant households in the suburbs. Any of the adult, working, children mentioned above could have chosen to live with roommates in Vancouver, like countless other young people. Yet they live with their parents, contribute to the family economy, and for the most part shy away from taking on student debt. Likewise, any of the parents mentioned here could have chosen to live alone in smaller units in the central city. Cultural norms around familial obligations, and household structure play a crucial role in people’s residential choices, as do a sense of belonging and communal support.

As a last point, one might wonder the extent to which newcomers’ views of Surrey are skewed by a lack of knowledge of the regional context, particularly Surrey’s unsavory reputation relative to Vancouver and other municipalities.\textsuperscript{224} It can be argued that because of their status as new residents, newcomers are unlikely to fully realize – at least initially – that they are concentrating

\textsuperscript{224} Surrey’s reputation as ‘second rate’ or ‘inferior’ to Vancouver’s is undeniable. There are even jokes made about South Surrey residents who will say they are from White Rock (a wealthier neighbouring suburb) to avoid the stigma associated with Surrey.
in areas which don’t tend to be appealing to the wider population. Sure, residents might say “I like Surrey, I like this neighbourhood, I want to settle here” but how much weight should one put on residents’ opinions when they themselves have little knowledge of what the rest of the metropolitan region is like. Do people recognize what other municipalities or neighbourhoods have to offer, and what they might be missing in Surrey? This is a dynamic that came up in my field work. In a few instances, after the interviews were done, some participants asked what I thought about Surrey and the neighbourhood in which they lived. By asking such questions it was clear to me that people were looking for an ‘outsider’s opinion’, wanting to know whether where they lived was considered to be a good area by others who did not live in Surrey.

Having said this, there were equally as many respondents who did suggest they were aware of Surrey’s less than spotless reputation. A number of them pushed back against mainstream negative views to argue that Surrey was a place that worked for them.

Ranbir: I would love to stay in Surrey for long time, yeah, because like when you go to Vancouver people are saying ‘Surrey is this, Surrey is that, kind of thing, but I, I didn't find that kind of thing, I always loved Su ... like Surrey, staying in Surrey, maybe the case here, yeah, yeah, you are, you're living here for last three years plus, and you know all the systems and stuff, city as well, that's why, yeah

Rajpal also recognized that Surrey did not have a great reputation, saying “I know that the community is not good here, as compared to other communities, yeah, it is a criminal-type of area … the image of Surrey is not as good as compared to other Burnaby, and all of that cities.” And while Rajpal was decidedly more reserved in his praise of the city, he, like Ranbir, talked about the value of living among people of South-Asian descent, and the pull that this created for him and his family. The benefits of living in Surrey outweighed whatever pitfalls might have come with the decision to settle in the periphery.

The above testimonies offer a reminder that things taken as given or self-evident might be perceived in a different light by different people. Many of the residents I spoke with, talked about Surrey – not just in positive terms – but often as a better alternative than Vancouver or other more centrally located urban centres such as Burnaby or New Westminster. Respondents did so by point to things that planners and urban scholars have learned to (or are learning to increasingly) question: wide roads, low-density housing, exclusionary zoning, and car-centric
infrastructure. While urban commentators tend to view the urban core as a place of opportunity for historically marginalized populations, especially when compared to suburban localities, it was clear in my interviews that many local residents did not share the same perspective. The majority of respondents valued things about Surrey that have fallen out of favor with contemporary urban planning, opting for single-detached lots over higher-density buildings, quiet streets, ready access to the highway system, and larger dwellings capable of accommodating multigenerational families.

6.11 Systems of meaning

In many ways, the gulf between how some scholars interpret socio-spatial changes in metropolitan areas and how local residents view their presence in the suburbs can be attributed to differences in economic and social position, and in specific wants and needs. Newcomers with modest incomes are looking for employment opportunities, community networks, and cultural institutions and businesses that are increasingly found in outlying areas. In this way, a move to a suburb like Surrey can be interpreted as a strategic choice in search of opportunity, something overlooked by current analyses which emphasise a narrative of suburban “social exclusion” and of people being “pushed to the suburban fringe” (Ley and Lynch 2012, 11). But differences between how scholars and local residents view the suburbs (relative to the urban core) relate, at a deeper level, to a matter of systems of meaning — the collection of systems of beliefs, values, and worldviews by which people make sense of their lives and guide their actions (Geertz 1983). This goes to the root of how different people can form such disparate views when looking at the same thing. To quote Healey (1992, 152),

We see things differently because words, phrases, expressions, objects, are interpreted differently according to our frame of reference […] We may shift our ideas, learn from each other, adapt to each other, ‘act in the world’ together. Systems of meaning or frames of references shift and evolve in response to such encounters. But it can never be possible to construct a stable consensus around 'how we see things', merely a temporary accommodation of different, and differently adapting, perceptions.

Citing a number of articles, Foley and Lauria (2000, 221) point out that “planners tend to defend institutional and personal class world-views that make it difficult for them to recognize the validity of other visions.” While scholars might be more cognizant of their own positionality and its effects on research than practitioners, they are certainly not immune to the tendencies described above.

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Consider, for instance, Surrey’s unfavorable reputation as a city with a gang violence and crime problem. Among many non-Surrey residents, the city is viewed as unattractive because of its reputation as an ‘unsafe’ place – an image reinforced in part by negative media coverage. But perceptions of safety can shift significantly from one group to another. Among the newcomers I interviewed, the vast majority felt that Surrey was a safe place to be, despite the fact that many reported some experience of criminal activity. What became clear in the interviews was that people’s view of life in Surrey was constructed in relation to previous life experiences. ‘Being safe’ was a concept understood against the experience of having lived in regions of the world with heightened levels of crime and violence. In fact, many respondents cited ‘safety’ as a key benefit of living in Canada, something especially true for families with daughters. The very frame of reference by which some respondents made sense of crime and safety concerns in Surrey was, in all likelihood, vastly differently than that of Anglo-European, middle-class households whose perception of safety is formed against the experience of having lived in uniformly safe communities.

But this curious dynamic applied to matters extending well beyond those of crime and safety.

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226 There is no single study or source that captures, in definitive terms, Surrey’s unsavoury reputation. Rather, this is something tacitly known among those who’ve lived in Metro Vancouver for some time. Nonetheless, one can point to many examples that speak to or reinforce this notion. For instance, writing for the Globe and Mail, Lisa Rochon (2010) remarks, “[Surrey] bears a nasty reputation for carjackings, drug dens, petty theft and endless, anonymous sprawl.” She even quotes Surrey’s former mayor Dianna Watts as saying: “Surrey was often portrayed as Vancouver's big, ugly sister across the river.” A satirical map by Vancouver artist Lisa Zerebeski published in the popular online blog “Judgemental Maps” identifies Surrey as “Gangland / Car Capital of North America / Plus a lot of guns and stabbings and drugs and home invasions” (Daro 2016). Facebook groups have been devoted to showcasing Surrey’s reputation of crime, drugs, and violence (Brunoro 2015). In 2013, a local company made headlines for selling shirts with such slogans as “Better Safe Than Surrey”, and “Surrey, The Future Dies Here” – a dual reference to the city’s gang violence program and the city’s official slogan (Brunoro 2015). A quick online search for the phrase “surrey reputation” brings up various online forums with such titles as “How Safe is Surrey?” (Quora), “Surrey: Still a shithole?” (Reddit), “Surrey? Ghetto? Really? (City Data Forum), and news articles such as “The Surrey Stigma: The City We Love to Hate” (The Peak), and “Surrey Gang Violence Is Ruining City’s Rep, Mayor Says” (Huffington Post).

227 Consider Rajpal’s response for instance. Like other respondents he voiced concerns about crime in Surrey, saying “the daytime life is totally normal, but from what somebody told me the night life, when you go outside, there is prostitution here, there is hm firing, open firing here, there is drug dealing here, even there is stealing, hm, what do you say that hm vandalizing on the car, yeah.” But also added “in India it is always considered unsafe, because anything can happen to the girls … but we are used to it … in the larger hm broader way I think life is safe here as compared to India because all security systems and all police systems are very much better even the cities are safe than India.” Suhana – who had two daughters – echoed similar sentiments. Like, Rajpal she voiced concerns about crime in Surrey, but also singled out security as one of the best benefits of living in Canada, “hm for the kids [her daughters included] that it's more secure here rather than over there [India] they can come [home] anytime, so they're ok.”
Time and again, respondents made sense of life in Surrey through interpretative frames that seldom aligned with those of urban experts. Critics of sprawl typically cite automobile dependence for contributing to a diminishment in the quality of life of suburban residents with traffic congestion, air pollution, and protracted commutes listed as key detractors. But for a number of respondents these were not particularly serious issues, certainly not serious enough for people to re-evaluate their decision to live in the suburbs. Not because respondents failed to recognize the reality of these issues, but because they measured them against a uniquely different frame of reference. Evgenia and Pavel were direct in their assessment that “traffic wasn’t bad” in Surrey. The couple’s evaluation was hardly uninformed, as the pair lived near the 152nd Street on-ramp to Highway 1 – a major rush-hour bottleneck. But they interpreted their experiences of life in Surrey against those of life in Moscow – where they had lived prior to coming to Canada, and where congestion, air quality, traffic and pollution were so much more dire. The same applied to discussions about housing choice, public spaces, services, consumer preferences, safety, community amenities, and so on. Everything was interpreted and mediated through a unique socio-cultural prism.

What is at issue, therefore, is not simply a matter of difference in experience, but of difference in meaning. People see things differently, because the very act of making sense of the world is constituted by systems of meaning and cognitive frames that are expressions of our situated knowledge (Fischer 2003a; Fischer 2003b; Fischer and Forester 1993; Healey 1992, 1997). Ideas about what makes a good neighbourhood are created through socially interpreted understandings that might vary significantly from one social group to another. This is especially true in relation to cross-cultural dialogue, for instance when planners engage with immigrant populations (Sandercock 2000a; Agyeman 2012a). In my own research, it was clear that people operated within different systems of meaning than those of planners or urban scholars who operate within the boundaries of a largely, white, Anglo-European, professional culture.

It was telling, for instance, that when asked about their thoughts on “social and community services” in Surrey, Evgenia and Pavel’s reaction was to talk about garbage disposal. For them, the concept of ‘social and community services’ related to hard infrastructure like waste management, telecommunication systems, and sewer and road networks. Things like public libraries, community centres, and non-profit service agencies did not factor strongly in their
understanding of community services. Something perhaps attributable to the absence – in Russia – of a strong civil society, and by the liberalization of service provision in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union (Kravchenko and Moskvina 2018).

Or, as another example, take the word ‘poverty’ or ‘poor’. Planners and urban scholars in North America have devoted significant attention to the issue of ‘urban poverty’, typically in regard to discussions about impoverished inner-city districts (Briggs et al. 2010; Metzger 1996; Walks and Bourne 2006). Since the late 1980s, the term ‘concentrated neighbourhood poverty’ – a concept describing urban areas with high concentrations of low-income people – has been used as a useful analytical construct to make sense of the varied neighbourhood effects associated with living in high poverty areas, including such outcomes as delinquency, psychological stress, educational attainment, employment opportunities, and health problems (Jargowsky 1997; Sampson 2008; Smith and Ley 2008, Wilson 1987). More recently, the term ‘working poor’ has gained traction in the social sciences for its usefulness in upending neoliberal notions that present job creation as the key solution to combat poverty (Shipler 2005). Critics of neoliberal economic policies note that large segments of the poor population in Canada and the US are actually employed. What these populations lack are wages, security and benefits afforded to middle-income households (Ivanova 2016). By most standards, words such as ‘poverty’ and ‘poor’ are understood by policy analysts in Canada to describe populations whose incomes fall below a certain level.

Early on in my field work, it became clear, however, that using the word ‘poor’ or ‘poverty’ when referring to a respondent’s socio-economic status, neighbourhood, or life circumstances was not effective. While such terms are part of the lexicon of planners and urban scholars, they hold vastly different connotations outside of Western democratic states. Respondents described their circumstances of life Canada as “difficult”, “hard”, “painful”, “modest” or by other such words, but seldom if ever did they use the words ‘poor’ or ‘poverty’.

228 In the context of a nationalized economy welfare services were channeled and allocated through trade unions. Liberalization reforms in the 1990s effectively transferred responsibility for social security from the state unto private enterprise (Kravchenko and Moskvina 2018).

229 Miriam and Teodoro did speak about poverty as an issue in Surrey. But both had been living in Canada for over ten years, and both had been involved in local community development efforts where ‘poverty’ would have been discussed as an issue. Miriam through her role as an assistant social worker for the Ministry of Children and Family development, and Teodoro through his involvement in local grassroots politics.
discuss ‘poor people’ it was usually in regard to the local homeless population, or people in their own home countries. It was clear that respondents did not view themselves as ‘poor’ or as living in ‘poor neighbourhoods’ despite sharing household characteristics that in Canada are commonly associated with a livelihood at or below the poverty line – a minimum wage, precarious work, overcrowding, large families with dependents, etc. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise, after all most respondents formed their views of what it meant to be poor in the cultural context of life in developing nations where poverty is generally understood in ‘absolute terms’, or in relation to the extreme deprivation of basic human needs and material resources (Waskey 2006). For many immigrants, a poor district doesn’t so much evoke an image of a run-down inner-city neighbourhood, but rather that of a slum or informal settlement in the Global South.

To be sure, respondents in my sample – like the majority of newcomers arriving to Canada today – were highly educated, skilled workers. By design, Canada draws its immigrant population largely from the upper ranks of other countries’ middle class (Kelley and Trebilcock 2010). So, the hesitation to identify oneself or one’s neighbourhood as ‘poor’ is understandable, even when taking into account the loss of socio-economic status many newcomers experience as they initially settle in Canada. But experience is not the only thing shaping how people interpret and make sense of the world around them. People rely on systems of meaning (beliefs, values, worldviews, etc.) that are informed by the very culture in which they’ve been embedded. For respondents, this was true not only in regard to such concepts as ‘urban poverty’ or ‘social and community services’, but extended to broader ideas about neighbourhood form, mobility, family structure, local amenities, lifestyle preferences, and the like. In addition to contrasting needs and past experiences, these systems of meaning combine to create a view of the prospects of suburban life which stands at odds with the one presented by many urban scholars today.

6.12 Conclusion

Suburbs in Canada and the US are home to an increasing number of low-income households, many of them immigrant and visible minorities (Allard 2017; Fiedler and Addie 2008; Hanlon 2013; Hulchanski 2010; Ley and Lynch 2012; Smith and Ley 2008; Walks 2010a). This trend is raising concerns among a growing body of scholars who view suburban residence as posing added risks to historically marginalized populations. Underlying these concerns is the idea that
people are getting ‘pushed out’ of the central city, and becoming cut off from needed opportunities, resources and support systems. While descriptively confirming this new patterning of urban disadvantage, my research shows a picture that is more complex than what’s presented in the current literature. Framing the rise of low-income minority neighbourhoods primarily as a story of displacement and of social exclusion is not fully consistent with the testimony on the ground. Interviews with local newcomers reveal a narrative of people in search of opportunity. For many, the decision to locate in Surrey is framed as a deliberate choice to tap into community supports, access job opportunities, and live in an area with the kind of services and amenities commonly afforded to urban dwellers: adult education, post-secondary institutions, social service agencies, job skills training programs, ethnic retailers and businesses, and so on. This is not to deny that people’s residential choices are ultimately constrained by wealth and income, as Hulchanski (2010) and others point out. Nor that higher-income households are able to outbid others for housing and location. Rather, it is to suggest that the changing geography of income and immigration in Canadian cities cannot be simply framed as a story of people getting priced out of central-city neighbourhoods.

In this chapter, I have argued that the tendency to view the central city as a more advantageous place in which to locate than the surrounding suburbs is ultimately grounded in specific beliefs about what constitutes good planning. For some time now, many of today’s leading urbanists have been inclined to see the revitalized central city in a positive light, especially when compared to the suburbs. Central-city districts across Canada and the US are being celebrated for their walkable neighbourhoods, mixed-use developments, and vibrant public spaces among many other things (Cameron and Harcourt 2007; Diers 2004; Glaeser 2011; Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2016; Speck 2012). The optimism surrounding cities, and urban living more specifically, needs to be understood in light of longstanding efforts to defend the idea of the city as a good place to live (Jacobs 1961; Gans 1962), and a resolute push back against modernism – both in terms of a critique of modernist interventions into urban areas, and also in terms of a call for more socially oriented planning approaches (Davidoff 1965; Friedmann 1973; Krumholz 1982; Forester 1989; Healey 1997; Sandercock 1998).

In contrast, suburbia – and its associated lifestyle – has fallen out of favour among today’s leading urbanists, largely because of its link with a plethora of socio-economic and
environmental problems (Krieger 2005). The suburbs are everything the city is not, or so it is often thought. While cities are viewed as places of opportunity, diversity and vibrancy, the suburbs tend to be seen as homogenous, exclusionary, inaccessible, dull, and lacking services and amenities (Duany et al. 2000; Duany et al. 2010). And though such views of suburbia contain a grain of truth, they are also increasingly dated and overly simplified (Fiedler and Addie 2008; Lucy and Phillips 2006). This urban-suburban dichotomy sets the context for understanding how scholars come to frame the suburbs as new sites of neighbourhood disadvantage. Dualistic views of cities and suburbs help reinforce the idea that central cities are more favorable places in which to position oneself, and the preferred location of choice of urban dwellers regardless of differences in social, economic, and cultural background.

The notion of central-city advantage is further propped up by what is, at best, a tenuous empirical foundation. Statements about the risks of suburban residence for lower-income populations tend to be assumed rather than demonstrated. As are the benefits of central-city living – which remain under-investigated in so far as historically marginalized populations are concerned (Hyra 2015). These shortcomings are not merely casual omissions; rather, they are integral to the very methodology being favored in the existing research. Current studies on socio-spatial inequality favour quantitatively-oriented statistical analyses that, while useful for describing the changing landscape of urban inequality, prove less effective when it comes to interpreting these same changes. What are the finer-grain mechanisms by which socio-economic disadvantage operates and manifests itself on the ground? How does place mitigate and/or exacerbate the day-to-day challenges of low-income households, especially for newcomers and minorities living in the suburbs? How do we make sense of the rise of low-income, minority neighbourhoods in outlying areas? Like Smith (2004) before me, I argue that answering these questions requires moving beyond the comfort zone of census tract analysis and taking the research to residents themselves, and the spaces they inhabit. It is by incorporating qualitative approaches capable of capturing bottom-up perspectives that one can start to understand the risks and opportunities – if any – that suburban residence presents to historically marginalized populations.

These considerations offer an important reminder of the blind spots inherent in much of the recent literature on socio-spatial inequality. By failing to take into account what life must be like for lower-income newcomers in the suburbs, scholars run the risk of universalizing personal
preferences and essentializing the experiences of others, the very things that critics like Jacobs (1961), Gans (1962) and a score of planning theorists have cautioned against (Agyeman 2012a; Burayidi 2003; Campbell 2002; Fincher et al. 2014; Sandercock 1998). Further, current writings gloss over the role that ‘difference’ plays in mediating the experiences of local residents—something largely explained by a methodology which treats inequity and justice primarily in ‘distributive’ terms. As a number of scholars have already argued, ‘recognition of difference’ is as much a fundamental dimension of justice in the politics of urban life as the issue of distribution of power and resources. This is an argument first introduced in the work of Young (1990), who posits that promoting equity, and social justice more broadly, may require unequal treatment based on the recognition of how groups are differentiated along lines of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, etc.

Recognizing that spaces resonate differently to different people, and how people’s lived experiences of race, class, gender, and the like mediate people’s views of what makes good neighbourhoods, is crucial for understanding the extent to which inclusion and exclusion are built into the very fabric of urban areas. As Sandercock (1998) has eloquently argued, the idea of a single public interest is both inaccurate and misleading. Recognition of difference doesn’t just mean that planning exists within a wider system of societal norms and practices, but that the very idea of a universal, ‘one size fits all’, public interest is suspect—in large part because that which is deemed ‘universal’ tends to reflect the norms and values of the dominant culture (Fenster 1998; Fincher et al. 2014; Iveson 2000; Sandercock 2000a). Difference, then, is an important construct not only for what it reveals about the experience and negotiation of suburban life for underprivileged groups, but also for what it reveals about the biases inherent in scholarly assessments of what suburban residence means for historically marginalized populations.

Scholars interested in the study of difference make the point that the notion of a homogenous life experience and identity cannot be assumed. Judging a particular area to be a good place in which to live—or deeming it preferable to others—requires great caution. For one thing, there are few—if any—self-evident or universally accepted standards around which to plan a community. But just as relevant—and as my research shows—urban scholars run the risk of projecting their own ideas about what constitutes good planning or a good neighbourhood onto a culturally diverse group of people whose needs, experiences and ways of interpreting the world might be
significantly different than their own. And so, while the central city is seen as a more advantageous place in which to locate than the suburbs, it’s worth interrogating ‘who’ is doing the ‘seeing’, and whether spaces deemed to be ‘preferable’ or ‘favourable’, are in fact preferable or favourable to all or only to specific groups of people.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary

On various occasions, over the past few years, I have had this eerie feeling of being a subject in my own research. Not unlike the feeling of being a character in a movie. As I make the twenty-five-kilometre trek from my home in Port Coquitlam to Vancouver, I can see aspects of my research unfold before my very eyes. I don’t have to go far into East Vancouver – the city’s longstanding working-class district – to spot the steady flow of Porsche Cayennes, Teslas, Mercedes-Benz SUVs and other luxury vehicles. As I criss-cross town on my way to UBC, I see the level of affluence rising, from one neighbourhood to the next, like mercury in a thermometer. Residential lots get bigger, the houses more elegant, drab arterial roads give way to tree-lined streets and scrupulous landscaping. But wealth is not the only dynamic at play here. Hop on the SkyTrain – the region’s rapid transit rail – and travel east, away from the urban core. The ethnic profile of the population changes, though in a subtler and more gradual sort of way. The more the train travels east into neighbouring suburbs, the more the transformation becomes apparent to the eye and the ear: the ethnic mix becomes at once more diverse, less white, less English-speaking. To be sure, Vancouver remains an incredibly diverse city, with a large visible-minority population, but it no longer functions as the main reception area for working-class newcomers today. Suburbs like Surrey, Burnaby, Richmond and Coquitlam have established themselves as the primary ports of entry into BC for a majority of new immigrants, especially those with modest or limited economic means.

As I sit on the SkyTrain, making my way home at the end of day, I reflect on these changes. Seeing groups of Arabic-speaking teenagers (or are they young adults?) step into the train in Burquitlam – a low-income neighborhood sitting on the border between Burnaby and Coquitlam – triggers distant memories. As one of a handful of ESL students in my high school who lived in Burquitlam in the late 1990s, I remember the area quite well: a small cluster of three-storey rental apartment buildings that housed predominantly low-income, immigrant families. At the time, newcomers in the area were mostly from the Balkans and Iran. Though the apartment
complex itself was ethnically diverse, it was an isolated pocket in an otherwise typical middle-class suburb.

These days, when I make the trek into Vancouver and then back to Port Coquitlam, I am reminded of how much things have changed over the past twenty years. As the train travels through the outer suburbs, I commonly see women wearing hijabs, Black youths holding basketballs, Sikhs wearing turbans, Brown teens speaking Arabic or other languages I can’t quite place (Pashto? Turkish?). In Burquitlam itself, the local Greek restaurant where my brother washed dishes as a teenager has been replaced by ‘Papa’s Shish Kebabs’. In similar fashion, the ‘Lonestar Café’ – a Texas-style burger joint I frequented as a teen – is now a Middle Eastern halal market. In downtown Port Coquitlam where I currently live, you can find – nestled between the Dairy Queen and the A&W – an Indo-Canadian grocer, and Rami’s Cuts, a beloved barber shop run by Jordanian-born Rami Edwan. Just around the corner sits an Iraqi halal butcher, and further down the road a prominent Mosque. While Canadian suburbs have been more diverse than they are often given credit for, what’s striking today is the sheer extent of that diversity, and how the multicultural character of today’s suburbs is imprinted in the local landscape. When my parents and I arrived in Burquitlam in the late 1990s there was little to suggest we were part of a much larger trajectory of change in immigrant settlement patterns.

Changes in the geography of income and immigrant settlement have been more and more on the radar of urban scholars. The trajectory of change presented in recent studies is remarkable. Inner-city neighbourhoods which traditionally housed low-income households, working-class immigrants are being transformed by urban development and processes of gentrification. Central cities throughout Canada and the US have experienced a steep increase in neighbourhood income, at the same time, many suburban areas have seen their income levels decline. While local dynamics are complex and difficult to generalize, research suggests that low-income households and minorities are increasingly found in suburban municipalities, while higher-income households are ever more likely to settle in or near the urban core.

What makes recent studies significant is not simply the extent of the changes being described, but also the potential implications of these changes on society. Scholars for the most interpret these new trends as largely a story of people being pushed out of the central city, and becoming
cut off from needed services and support networks. Such interpretations make intuitive sense. The effects of gentrification in the core are by now well-known – rising costs of housing, conversion of rental properties to condominiums, demolition of affordable rental stock, etc. Likewise, the suburbs have been traditionally thought of as homogenous communities lacking the very kinds of services and infrastructure that could be valuable to historically marginalized populations. At first glance, the rise of low-income immigrant neighbourhoods in the periphery suggests that a growing number of people are being priced out of desirable central city locations and being forced to relocate into isolated suburban areas. But these types of claims tend to be assumed rather than demonstrated in the literature. We know surprisingly little about what suburban life actually looks like for low-income immigrant households, or why they might choose to live in the suburbs. Are there any benefits or opportunities that come with suburban residence? What are the precise barriers making life more difficult for newcomers with limited economic means? What are the finer-grain mechanisms by which suburban location amplifies or entrenches socio-economic disparity? These questions go largely unanswered in the existing scholarship.

This is not to say that recent analyses are wrong or unhelpful. What they do well is describe in precise statistical terms the trajectory of income change at the neighbourhood level. They do so while also illuminating the close relationship between changes in neighbourhood income and immigrant status. Said another way, studies show that suburban neighbourhoods with declining relative incomes are also disproportionally recent immigrant and visible minority in character. In making the link between economic success and the racial-ethnic profile of the local population, these studies effectively raise alarms about potentially new forms of social exclusion and economic disadvantage.

Nonetheless, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, current studies have four main drawbacks that are worth noting. First, they have a narrow methodological orientation centred on quantitative census tract analysis. This limits the type of questions scholars can tackle, but also takes away from the proposed findings. Scholars favour a method of gauging income disparity
that, while simple and elegant, carries important liabilities. Second, I point out that while presented as new and fresh, the overall trajectory of change introduced in the current literature has been known for some time. Research on central-city change, and specifically the transformation of inner-city areas into upper-class enclaves, can be traced back to the 1980s. This line of inquiry is firmly situated within a rich and established literature on gentrification. Similarly, discussions about the decline of middle-income households and the increased social polarization of urban society, have been around for at least a couple of decades. Third, current studies are ultimately premised on a dated if not oversimplified image of suburbia. While it is true that services and amenities don’t tend to be as highly concentrated in suburban municipalities as they are in central-city neighbourhoods, suburbs today are vastly more diverse (socially, culturally, economically and even physically) than often assumed. In the case of Metro Vancouver, there are likely more immigrant settlement agencies currently operating in Surrey than in the city of Vancouver proper. Long gone are the days – if they ever did exist – of the low-density, homogenous suburban bedroom community. By most standards, suburbs today contain a variety of land uses, a spectrum of housing options, a multiplicity of services and amenities, and various employment opportunities. The fourth drawback with current studies on socio-spatial inequality is that they fail to capture the details of what neighbourhood disadvantage actually looks like on the ground, and how it operates. Doing so requires moving beyond the comfort zone of census tract analysis and taking the research to local residents themselves.

It is in this context that I have centred my thesis around the question of how suburban location shapes the everyday life of lower-income newcomers. The intent here has been to engage with the claim that life in the suburbs isolates low-income households from needed services and community supports, further amplifying existing disadvantages and hardships. Three broad questions have motivated my line of inquiry, namely:

1) What insights can be drawn from the lived experiences of lower-income newcomers to better understand the type of prospects suburban life offers them? What do they themselves make of the suburbs as places in which to live in?

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230 As Stanger-Ross and Ross (2012) point out, using ‘average individual income’ of entire census tracts as the main variable for testing the residential distribution of income groups, suppresses the internal diversity of the very neighbourhoods being studied. For more on this see Section 2.8 of this thesis (Chapter 2).
2) Does suburban residence amplify the challenges that come with being a new immigrant with limited economic means? Can it act as a springboard for socio-economic uplift?

3) What are the finer-grain mechanisms by which (dis)advantage operates and manifests itself on the ground in the suburbs?

To examine these issues, I have framed this research more pragmatically around a case study of Surrey (BC), asking the following sets of sub-questions: 1) What are some of the challenges and opportunities, if any, that life in Surrey creates for newcomers with limited economic means? 2) How do people describe what life in Surrey is like for them, and their decision to move there?

What my research reveals is a more nuanced and complex picture of what life is like in the suburbs for historically marginalized populations who live there. Narratives about people being pushed out of the central core and becoming cut off from services and community supports did not fully square with the testimony of local residents. In many ways, participants spoke of life in Surrey in positive terms, choosing to emphasise the benefits that came with living in Surrey. While it was clear that people’s residential options were limited by financial constraints, most residents did not frame their decision to move to Surrey as a story of displacement. Quite the contrary, many described their decision to move there as a strategic choice whereby they could tap into social networks, access employment opportunities, procure adequate housing, and secure various other benefits.

My argument should not be interpreted as meaning that life in Surrey does not come with its own sets of challenges and barriers. As many participants made clear, there were many downsides to living in a suburb like Surrey, notably in terms of mobility and transportation, social isolation and even public safety. I still remember a participant who, weary of my line of enquiry, stopped me mid-sentence and bluntly stated “I want to talk about the public transportation.” She went on to describe in detail her experience of taking the bus in Surrey, and the challenges that limited service at night created for her as a nightshift worker. Likewise, I did not want to undermine or downplay people’s experiences with crime – which I found disturbing – and how the car-centric nature of Surrey amplified residents’ feelings of social isolation and disconnection. I included
these narratives precisely because of the desire to paint a fuller picture than the one currently being presented in the existing literature.

Ultimately, I make the case that while it is certainly true that suburban life creates unique challenges for more marginalized populations, to say that lower-income households, visible minority groups and new immigrants are getting “pushed out” of so-called more desirable inner-city neighbourhoods, overlooks that fact that for many people, suburban life offers its own set of benefits and opportunities. I argue that changes to the geography of income and immigrant settlement must not only be framed in terms of push factors, but also in terms of pull factors. Omitting the latter results in an incomplete and skewed picture of some of the key driving forces shaping Canadian metropolitan regions today.

Alongside these points I also argue that concerns over the prospects of marginalized groups in the suburbs are grounded in a belief that people would be better off locating in the central city. Many of today’s most popular urban commentators criticize the suburbs as examples of poor community planning, especially when compared to the type of trendy, walkable neighbourhoods increasingly found in inner-city districts. Part of this framing explains the tendency to interpret the rise of low-income immigrant areas in the periphery as a result of people being ‘pushed out’ of more ‘desirable’ central areas. I posit that when holding this line of thought, urban scholars are in fact projecting their own ideas about what constitutes good planning onto a culturally diverse group of people whose varied wants and needs do not always align with those of today’s leading urbanists. This thesis proposes moving beyond traditional understandings of social justice as primarily an issue of distribution, to a theoretical framework centred on the recognition of cultural difference. Adopting a theoretical framework capable of recognizing cultural difference opens the possibility that suburban neighbourhoods – despite their many problems – can be good places to live, and that people might want to live there.

7.2 Reflections and future directions

Inevitably, over the course of this research not everything went as expected. By way of conclusion, here are some thoughts on some of the pitfalls of this research, and how things could be improved, and expanded moving forward.
It was fairly obvious to me early on into my PhD program that I needed to let residents define the research agenda by listening to their concerns. As one of the first studies to examine the everyday experiences of low-income newcomers in the suburbs, I was wary of diving into the research with preconceptions about what was important to them. My research design needed some structure of course, and I knew that probing residents on topics related to housing, transportation, employment, social isolation, etc. would offer a solid foundation for the investigation. After all, these were recurring themes in the small but emerging literature on growing socio-spatial divides. I opted for an exploratory approach thinking that it would be most effective at paving the way for future research. In a way, I looked at the research as a foundation on which to build a stronger empirical and theoretical edifice. To this day, I believe this was the right way to go about the research.

What I did not foresee at the time, however, was the impact that choosing such an approach would have on the field work, and in particular the recruitment process. Choosing a broad research scope has its drawbacks. Lacking a simple heading under which to file my research – ‘housing,’ ‘transportation,’ ‘employment,’ ‘social isolation,’ – made it difficult to communicate in simple and direct terms the essence of the project. Each of the catch phrases I had to describe the research had unique problems. ‘Urban inequality’ was abstract and academic, not to mention ‘socio-spatial inequality’ which was even more theoretical. Using such jargon was not particularly effective with policy-minded expert professionals, and even less so with local resident who had limited knowledge of English. ‘Suburban poverty’ proved more effective, but did not adequately capture the nature of the research at hand (see section 1.8 in Chapter 1). Phrases like, “I study the relationship between people and the places they inhabit” felt too broad, and others like “I explore how suburban residence shapes the experiences of newcomers as they try to find a footing in Canadian society” were too much of a mouthful. Taking an exploratory approach not only made it difficult to explain to people what I studied, but more importantly it made it hard to convey the relevance of the research to the community. These were all things detrimental to my recruiting efforts as they deterred community buy-in. In time, I became more skilled at translating academic jargon into language that could be more readily understood by local community members, but it took considerable trial and error.
While, as a rookie researcher, I had very little background conducting field research, I did have extensive experience working in the community. Prior to starting the field work I had worked as the lead coordinator for the city of Surrey homeless count, a five-month intensive process involving meeting with all major non-profit agencies operating in Surrey, coordinating with municipal staff, visiting venues and locations scattered across the 300 square kilometre area of the city. I had also been involved in various other roles working with the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition, the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership, and the city’s social planning department. All in all, I had about three years of experience working at the local community level before the start of the field work. Over that period, I developed strong networks with key community actors and agencies, and felt like I had a solid pulse on dynamics and trends impacting the city. Perhaps because of this, the lukewarm response to my initial recruitment efforts seemed even more of a puzzle. What was I doing wrong? What could I do better?

There were definitely issues which I knew at the time were stalling the process, others I only came to recognize much later. It did not take me too long to understand I needed to communicate in a language that people could readily understand, especially when reaching out to local residents whose grasp of the English language was for the most part basic. I also quickly learned the importance of ‘being in the right place at the right time’, and how timing can break or make someone’s research. While I had developed my research topic as early as 2012, I did not start the field work until January 2016. The timing of the start of the field work coincided with one of Canada’s largest humanitarian efforts in recent history: a ramping up in the intake of refugees from war-torn Syria. At the local level, immigrant-settlement agencies, non-profit organizations and social planning departments were all scrambling to address the massive resettlement efforts created by this new influx of refugees. My recruitment efforts were severely stymied by the fact that agencies were swamped by the spike in demand for services. Getting a hold of people, arranging meetings, even basic email communication proved to be a lot more difficult and time consuming that I had initially anticipated. Further complicating matters was the steady increase in research apathy as local agencies were being contacted by the press and academic institutions with a flood of requests, mainly interviews and research project proposals. Thanks to the strength of my networks and my involvement in the community leading up to the field work I was able to connect with all the key players, though the recruitment process was greatly prolonged as a result of these dynamics.
Another issue I did not foresee at the start of the field work was how difficult it could be getting people to actually sit down for an interview. I was aware of the many challenges that come with conducting research involving the participation of historically marginalized populations. Recruiting and conducting interviews with people who are new to the country, who have basic English language skills, and who live in precarious financial straits creates obvious issues. Language and cultural barriers were top of mind when I set out to recruit participants for the research. I also knew that the likelihood of completing an interview was highly contingent on my ability to establish trust and build a good rapport with potential respondents. Finding interested participants was difficult, but scheduling and lining up actual interviews proved far harder. Of those local residents who voiced initial interest, many were not able to follow through with the interviews. At the time, I vastly overlooked how challenging it could be for people to meet with me in person. This was not an issue that came up when conducting the expert interviews which took place largely during work hours (usually lunch) at the person’s place of work.

I understood at the start of the field work that I would interview people living in precarious situations, but I failed to fully grasp the extent to which working precarious jobs often means working overnight, working long hours, working more than one job, all while raising young children, and taking classes to upgrade professional credentials or improve English language skills. People live incredibly packed lives, which are often not aligned with traditional 9 to 5, Monday to Friday work schedules. If there is a common denominator among the precariously employed, it is how little time they have to spare. When people are not working, they are often engaged in some kind of mundane but essential activity, like schlepping heavy groceries on public transit, hitting the laundromat, or making long treks on foot to avoid spending a few bucks on bus fare. In practical terms this meant that many respondents, while interested in the research, found it challenging to meet in person to conduct the actual interviews. This made the recruiting process all the more difficult, making it feel at times like pulling teeth. I often met people late into the evening (7pm or 8pm) as people were headed home from a long day’s work, or as they were preparing to set off to work night shifts. Finding individuals who were able and willing to commit to a ninety-minute interview was much harder than I had initially anticipated. And while I still understand the rationale for paying people a nominal sum ($20) to ensure free and
informed consent, I do find myself wondering whether there could be a more meaningful way of compensating participants for their time.

This thesis identifies suggestive and revelatory findings, but there is a lot of opportunity for moving the research even further. At the start of my PhD studies I envisioned the research to consist of two parts. Part one would illuminate the experiences of life in the suburbs for lower-income newcomers, with a focus on the barriers and opportunities that come with suburban residence. Part two would delve into an in-depth analysis of the planning policy landscape in which suburbs operate today, with the intent of generating concrete planning policy recommendations. It became clear early on in the inquiry that two parts would be better treated as two separate projects. The interview material gathered from local residents was simply too rich to be discussed in one or two chapters. To do it justice, I felt I had to redirect the focus and centre the thesis on the interviews, and save the policy analysis for future research.

The policy landscape is complicated by the way various levels of government jurisdiction interact to shape communities on the ground. For instance, public transportation in Metro Vancouver is largely managed as a regional issue (through TransLink) though individual municipalities like Surrey have their own transportation planning departments that help influence and dictate service delivery at the local level. But the bulk of public transportation money comes from Provincial and Federal levels of government. Little can be accomplished without collaboration from all three levels. Community services like public libraries, neighbourhood houses, recreational centres, community gardens, etc. are all managed at the municipal level, with some financial assistance from higher levels of government. In regard to these services, the ability of cities like Surrey to respond to the needs of a changing population lies largely in their own control, for instance in the willingness within Council to increase property taxes or reorient spending priorities. Unlike Vancouver, Surrey’s social planning department consists of only two full time planners, a striking reality when you consider the city’s large population (~500,000 people), and the myriad of issues it is currently facing: rapid population growth, street homelessness, the region’s largest intake of new immigrants and refugees, the region’s youngest low-income population, gang violence and drug crime problems, etc. Also, there are only two neighbourhood houses operating in Surrey, compared to about a dozen in Vancouver. The shortage can in part be attributed to the fact that the City of Surrey owns significantly fewer
parcels of land than the City of Vancouver, limiting its ability to support its non-profit sector. Also, Surrey – unlike Vancouver – has been more reluctant to rely on ‘density bonusing’ and ‘community amenity contributions’ to generate funding or space for community-oriented enterprises. In addition, services targeted to immigrant populations usually involve two levels of government. Local non-profit agencies operate at the municipal level but largely through funding received from federal agencies, which in many ways dictates the nature and extent of the services and programming being offered. A detailed analysis of the policy landscape in which suburban municipalities operate today, including similarities to and differences from traditional central cities, would contribute to a stronger understanding of how to make life better for local residents.

This inquiry is not meant to be a definitive take of what life in the suburbs is like for lower-income newcomers. Suburbs are incredibly varied places, and what may be true in one location, may not be true in another. The same applies to population groups. Rather, I offer an example of how we can start to make sense of the prospects people face as they settle in suburban areas. Along with challenges and barriers comes opportunity. While suburban location creates indisputable obstacles to low- and modest-income households, it also offers real benefits to the many low- and modest-income newcomers who move there. Recognizing that more and more people experience socio-economic disadvantage in suburban settings, and that these areas are complex and varied landscapes, is part of a broader call for scholars to view suburban communities as crucial to the study of neighbourhood disadvantage, urban inequality, and concentrated poverty. My hope is for this research to encourage and stimulate thinking on these important issues in years to come.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Analytical framework

My research is organized around the following fields of study. For a diagram of how these fields connect to one another see Figure 1.1 (Chapter 1). The list below is not exhaustive of all the readings informing this research.

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<th>Socio-spatial inequality/Polarization (Canada)</th>
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<td>• Keil and Young 2008a, 2008b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Young and Keil 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Young et al. 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alongside the research fields above, my thesis is also informed more peripherally by an established, US-centric literature on the following topics. Again, the list below is not exhaustive of all the readings cited in this research but, rather, it serves as an overview of key works informing each topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic restructuring; Social polarization; Gentrification</th>
<th>Urban underclass; Spatial segregation; Neighbourhood effects;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Socio-economic restructuring</td>
<td>• Concentrated neighbourhood poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deindustrialization / post-fordist cities</td>
<td>• Neighbourhood effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reorganization of urban space</td>
<td>• Life chances/prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• World/global city thesis</td>
<td>• Inner-city decline, ‘ghetto’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vanishing middle-class</td>
<td>• Racial segregation &amp; concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Labour market segmentation</td>
<td>• Urban ‘underclass’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gentrification / inner-city restructuring</td>
<td>• Spatial mismatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USA</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bluestone and Harrison 1982</td>
<td>• Jargowsky 1997, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fainstein et al. 1992</td>
<td>• Kain 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Friedmann and Wolf 1982</td>
<td>• Massey and Denton 1988, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hamnett 1994, 1996</td>
<td>• Sampson 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lees et al. 2008</td>
<td>• Wilson 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marcuse 1989, 1993</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mollenkopf and Castells 1991</td>
<td><strong>CANADA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Smith 1979</td>
<td>• Henry 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Zukin 1989</td>
<td>• Hajnal 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CANADA</strong></td>
<td>• Kazemipur and Halli 1997, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bourne 1993, 1997</td>
<td>• Ley and Smith 1997a, 1997b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bourne and Ley 1993</td>
<td>• Murdie 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coffey and Shearmur 2006</td>
<td>• Smith and Ley 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hutton 2008</td>
<td>• Walks and Bourne 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ley 1981, 1988, 1996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MacLachlan and Sawada 1997</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Murdie 1996, 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shearmur and Hutton 2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Walks 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Last but not least, my thesis engages with and is informed by two main theoretical frameworks: distributive justice and the politics of difference/cultural recognition. The following list is by no means complete, but rather reflects the most prominent texts in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Distributive Justice Paradigm</strong></th>
<th><strong>Politics of Difference &amp; Cultural Recognition Paradigm</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Unequal distribution of wealth and resources</td>
<td>• Equal treatment does not guarantee equal opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Who gets what where and how?’</td>
<td>• Social justice is also about recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equal treatment leads to equal opportunity</td>
<td>• Affirm rather than suppress group difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong spatial dimension</td>
<td>• Multiple publics &amp; different ways of knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political economy frameworks</td>
<td>• Foundational to Intercultural planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Foundational to advocacy &amp; equity planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Davidoff (1965, 1975)
- Davidoff, Davidoff & Gold (1970)
- Harvey (1973)
- Krumholz (1982)
- Rawls (1971)
- Smith (1974)
- Agyeman and Erickson (2012)
- Amin (2002)
- Fincher (2003)
- Fincher and Jacobs (1998)
- Fincher, Iveson & Preston (2014)
- Fraser (1995, 1999)
- Iveson (2000)
- Milroy (2004)
- Young (1990, 2000, 2005)
- Wood and Landry (2008)
Appendix B: Profile of study participants

The tables below show the profiles of the 49 research participants I interviewed for this study. As explained in Chapter 1, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 25 residents and 19 community experts. On top of these interviews, I also organized a focus group discussion with 5 additional local residents who expressed a preference in meeting as a group, rather than individually. I personally transcribed and analysed all the interviews with local residents, including the focus group discussion. For the interviews with community experts, I opted instead for detailed notes with the occasional verbatim citation for those passages most relevant to my research. While the study centres and draws heavily from all of these interviews, not all participants were quoted directly in the body of this thesis.

The names of study participants quoted in this research have been changed to protect their identity. For stylistic purposes and ease of reading, I assigned pseudonyms, rather than numbered codes for respondents cited directly in the dissertation. Confidentiality was especially important to residents who sometimes relayed sensitive information about employers and poor working conditions. Details and identifying characteristics of study respondents (e.g. age, place of residence, place of work, etc.) were purposely kept vague with the intent of protecting people’s confidentiality.

Sample characteristics of study participants (local residents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of origins*</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia/ South East Asia/ East Asia</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central &amp; Latin America</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age profile</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 to 29</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 55</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older than 55</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Minority Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Canada</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5yrs or less</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6yrs to 10yrs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10yrs</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whalley</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work**</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working multiple jobs</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working one job</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample size is 30

*Place of origins: The sample mirrors Surrey’s immigrant population with a majority of participants (57%) reporting South Asian, Southeast Asian and East Asian backgrounds. Within these regions, India was by far the most prominent source country of immigration, with 43% of respondents claiming it as their home country. Other countries represented within these regions included China, the Philippines, South Korea, and Bangladesh. A total of 15 different countries were represented in the sample drawn from five different continents. Again, in line with Surrey’s immigrant makeup, the vast majority of participants (80%) were visible minorities. The large proportion of visible minorities reflects the changing make up of Canada’s immigrant population resulting from changes made to immigrant policy in the 1960s and 1970s. In this study, labeling
participant’s country of immigration was sometimes more difficult than initially expected. For instance, Fabrice immigrated to Canada from France, but he was not French and lacked French citizenship. Fabrice was Cameroonian. He was born in Cameroon and lived there until his early twenties when he moved to France under a temporary work permit. Before arriving in Canada he had lived and worked in France for several years. But his experiences of life in France and Canada were those of an immigrant Black man from Cameroon. Similarly, Narjis immigrated to Canada from Israel where she was born and grew up. But she was Palestinian, or an Arab citizen of Israel. To label Fabrice’s and Narji’s country of immigration as ‘France’ and ‘Israel’ respectively is somewhat misleading. This is why I opt for the more general term ‘place of origins’ as a way to describe people’s ethnic backgrounds.

Work**: Classifying the kind of sectors in which study participants were employed into neat boxes proved difficult. For one thing, many participants (30%) reported working more than one job at the time the interview took place. As a result of this, work-related statistics don’t always add up to 100% which makes it difficult to present these figures through easy-to-understand tables. Second, participants often had worked various jobs since arriving in Canada. Some of the participants who had been in Canada for an extended period were employed in middle-class-type jobs but had previously worked low-pay, precarious jobs. Accounting for the ‘time dimension’ in people’s employment trajectory complicates the way work-related statistics can be easily reported. Third, a significant percentage (33%) of study participants were unemployed at the time of the interview. In part, this reflects the fact that most participants (67%) were recent immigrants, and many of them (70%) were women. For various households in my sample, the combination of poor employment prospects coupled with high child-care costs meant that young mothers would often opt to stay home with their children, rather than secure a minimum-wage job just to pay for childcare. Others described the challenges of trying to find workplaces that could accommodate elementary-school hours. In other cases, ‘unemployment status’ simply meant that one spouse was working full time, while the other took courses to upgrade their professional credentials. The jobs most commonly cited by study participants were ‘cashier’ (27%), ‘labourer’ (13%), and ‘caregiver’ (10%). But at least a dozen other jobs were also represented in the sample, including security guard, taxi driver, janitor, waitress, call centre agent, hairdresser, secretary, data entry person, painter, and tutor.
Appendix C: Recruitment – list and titles of expert interviewees

The table below shows the list and titles of the 19 expert interviewees who participated in this study. As explained in Chapter 1, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the following study participants with the intent of getting a sense of Surrey’s social service landscape, and key social and demographic dynamics impacting the city. I predominantly focused on agencies engaged in immigrant settlement services but extended the research beyond these to also include organizations serving the general population, including the City of Surrey (municipal services), Sources Community Resource Society (employment and housing services), and Invergarry Adult Education (adult education services).

**Expert interviewee list and titles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile/role</th>
<th>Agency name</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Community Development</td>
<td>DIVERSEcity</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager, Settlement, Career &amp; Family Services</td>
<td>DIVERSEcity</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Ivergarry Adult Education Centre</td>
<td>Adult education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Mennonite Central Committee</td>
<td>Social services; Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
<td>Mennonite Central Committee</td>
<td>Social services; Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Communications and Development</td>
<td>MOSAIC</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Muslim Food Bank</td>
<td>Food services; Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Programs Coordinator</td>
<td>Oak Avenue Neighbourhood House</td>
<td>Community services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>OPTIONS Community Services</td>
<td>Community services; Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Youth Program</td>
<td>Pacific Community Resource Society</td>
<td>Community services; Youth program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Progressive Intercultural Community Services</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Service Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement Program Manager</td>
<td>Progressive Intercultural Community Services</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Connections Coordinator</td>
<td>Progressive Intercultural Community Services</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Manager</td>
<td>Sources Community Resources Society</td>
<td>Social services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>SUCCESS BC</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Social Planner</td>
<td>City of Surrey</td>
<td>Municipal services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Planner</td>
<td>City of Surrey</td>
<td>Municipal services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Surrey Philippine Independence Day Society</td>
<td>Community services Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs Manager</td>
<td>UMOJA Operation Compassion Society</td>
<td>Immigrant settlement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Interview schedule – local residents

Below is a list of the questions I used to guide my interviews with residents in Surrey. As explained in Chapter 1, all interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. The questions were specific to each interviewee’s experience, but the following interview schedule was used as a guideline. Participants were not asked every single question below, rather I used these questions as a way to guide the line of inquiry.

Introduce self and research project. Obtain informed consent.

1. Personal Background
   Do you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?
   Where were you born? When did you move to Canada, and why? What did you do in x country before you arrived here? How old were you when you moved? Did you move here with your family?

2. Settling in Canada and Moving to Surrey
   Could you talk about your experience of moving to Canada?
   What were your expectations and hopes moving here? Why did you move to Surrey? What were your first impressions when you arrived? How have things worked out so far? Looking back over the past x years, what have been the biggest challenges for you and your family? What have been some of the most positive experiences? Do you feel integrated into Canadian society? What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

3. Family
   I wonder if you can tell me a bit about your family?
   Are you married? Do you have kids? How are they adapting and settling in? How does your spouse feel about living in Surrey? What about your kids? Do you have other family members here in Canada? Have they been able to help you settle in?

4. Daily Routine
   Do you mind telling me what your daily or weekly routine looks like?
What does a typical day/week look like for you? When do you get up to go to work? How do you get there? Do you bring your kids to school? When do you get back home? What are some of the things/activities that you do during the week?

5. Work & Making Ends Meet
A huge part of starting a new life in Canada, is finding a job and earning a living, I wonder if you’d like to share what your experiences have been in this regard?
What do you do for a living now? Was it hard for you to find work? Is this what you expected to do when you moved here? What kind of jobs have you had over the years? How do you feel about your career prospects? What are some of your biggest expenses? How do you make ends meet at the end of each month?

6. Supports
What kind of supports, if any, have you received in the past x years that have helped you make a go at this new life here in Canada? Do you have a community or group of people around which to connect? Have you accessed any government programs or services? What about local community groups or non-profit service agencies? What have been your experiences dealing with them? Have they played an important role in your life?

7. Housing and Local Neighbourhood
Can you describe your current housing situation?
Where do you live? How long have you been living here? How’s the place working out? Are you happy where you are? Do you see yourself staying? What’s the rent like? How do you feel about the neighbourhood in which you live? Do you feel safe? What are the things you like about your neighbourhood? What are the things that you would improve?

8. Getting Around
So, when people think about suburbs, they often think of places that are hard to get around, unless you have a car. What are your thoughts on this? What’s your experience been so far? How do you get around the city? Do you drive? Take the bus? Walk? Are you happy with the transportation options available to you? What kind of challenges, if any, do you and your family face in terms of getting around in Surrey?
Appendix E: Interview schedule – expert interviewees

Below is a list of the questions I used to guide my interviews with local community experts. As explained in Chapter 1, all interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. The questions were specific to each interviewee’s role and experience, but the following interview schedule was used as a guideline. Participants were not asked every single question below, rather I used these questions as a way to guide the line of inquiry.

Introduce self and research project. Obtain informed consent.

1. Could you tell me a bit about your professional background?
   What kind of work are you involved with? How long have you been working in this sector?
   How did you get here? What are some of the reasons that made you decide to get involved in this kind of work?

2. What is your agency/group/organization about? What does it do?
   What can you tell me about its history? What have been some of its key activities/projects?
   How would you describe its day to day activities?

3. What are some of the key issues and trends in Surrey’s poverty and immigration landscape?
   How has Surrey’s poverty and immigration landscape changed over time? What are some of the opportunities and challenges that have come with these changes? What do you know about neighbourhood-level immigrant poverty?

4. What are your thoughts on the supports available to low-income and new-immigrant households in the city?
   What kind of services, programs and supports are available to people? How are these working out? What could be improved? What kind of feedback have you received from clients and community members/groups?

5. What do you know about the neighbourhoods in which your organization/group/agency operates? How would you describe these neighbourhoods? What do you know about the
ethnic, social and economic profile of the local residents? What about the neighbourhoods’ broader social, economic and physical characteristics? Do you get the sense that these are good places for people to settle? What would you improve about these neighbourhoods?
Appendix F: Interview schedule – focus group

Below is a list of the questions I used to guide my focus group discussion with local residents.

Introduce self and research project. Obtain informed consent.

1. What were your hopes and dreams moving to Surrey?

2. How are things working out so far?

3. What two or three things would most improve your quality of life here?

4. How would you describe your life in Surrey?

5. What are some of the key challenges you’ve had to deal with since arriving here?

6. How do you feel about living in Surrey? Do you see yourself staying here long term?
   Would you rather move to a different municipality or area?

7. What are some of best things you like about life here?