

**NEGOTIATING ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SPACES: THE SPATIAL ENCOUNTERS  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WEST ISLAND OF MONTREAL**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis engages in an initial exploration of the spatial experiences of older youth in the suburbs of the West Island of Montreal. Adopting a Lefebvrian spatial lens, the goal of this thesis is to outline the characteristics of the lived experiences of older middle class youth in a constructed suburban environment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a largely Anglophone college with students aged 18 to 19 years of age. I begin my thesis by reviewing the literature on urban youth geographies, aimed at analyzing the influence of the built urban environment. I argue that the suburban experiences of older youth varies from those of children, inner city youth, and marginalized youth who are most represented in the literature. Then, I present the important considerations of doing research with youth participants and the ways in which my conceived methods were altered during my fieldwork, leading to adjustments in sampling, and subsequent impacts on the conclusions of this thesis. I continue by presenting the themes that emerged during the interviews, which I illustrate by sharing the reflections and everyday experiences of participants. From these accounts, I draw links between the similarities and differences among participants, the literature, and Lefebvre's theories. In this analysis, I reflect upon the differences between available youth literatures and the young people from my sample, leading me to further explore broader literatures that enable me to contextualize more characteristics of my sample and concepts related to the lack of illegitimate spaces in the suburbs, the significance of private space in the suburban environment, play, resistance, and the use of alternative spaces, in a way that differs from the accounts from marginalized urban youth literatures. I argue that the young people from my sample feel less marginalized, therefore engaging in less obvious forms of resistance, while still finding ways to shape their identities and play while being limited by some of the conditions of the built suburban environment.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The literature on urban studies and youth geographies has pointed to some of the common experiences among young people and the ways that exclusion becomes a part of their everyday encounters (e.g., van Blerk, 2013; Kato, 2009; Montigny, 2013; Evans, 2008; Malone, 2002; Kennelly & Watt, 2011). Geographers, sociologists, criminologists, and lawyers have studied the impact of age biases on youth's mobility and ability to access spaces. However, youth literature has a history of emphasizing the study of children rather than the study of adolescents and young adults. This is in part due to the fact that youth are stuck in-between narrow categories of life course and law (i.e. childhood and adulthood). The emerging research on older youth in the streets has worked to address concerns that young people had previously been excluded from social science research, policy decisions, and spatial constructions. According to Hopkins and Pain (2007): "[...] this exclusion is even more so for young and middle-aged adults, missing from geographies of age which have focused almost exclusively on those at the margins (the very young and very old)" (as cited in Evans, 2008, p.1675). As a demographic age group stuck in-between childhood and adulthood, Allison James (1986) interviewed teenagers and described them as:

“being nothing” defined as “not adults” and/or viewed as entirely dependent on adults; ‘having nowt to do’ – missing from the agendas of service providers; and having “nowhere to go” – young people’s presence outside the home seen as problematic, and so young people were absent from consideration in the design and planning of public space (as cited in Evans, 2008, p.1659)

Therefore, this research aims to contribute to youth geographies and the understanding that older youth remain both as: “not adults”, not significant enough to be considered in urban planning and policy making and as “not children”, escaping the dependence of childhood, therefore lacking adult advocates.

In this research, I focused particularly on the spatialized experiences of older youth (17-24 years of age) in suburban city spaces whose ability to occupy the streets and public spaces is riddled with challenges, though less obvious than the one's affecting more vulnerable populations. The broader literature on youth in city spaces has focused on downtown areas where there is a greater presence of visible street-youth. However, suburban youth, as a whole, can also experience alienation and have barriers placed on their ability to access spaces (e.g., Robinson, 2000; Kato, 2009; Gaines, 1991). As I will demonstrate in the literature review, policing, mobility, and urban renewal are among the barriers to youth's ability to access city spaces. In my analysis, I compare and contrast these with my own findings, making note of the ways in which these same barriers impact the lived experiences of the participants in my sample. Though some of the barriers are the same, their impact is felt in a different way.

As a result of the aforementioned gaps in the literature, my research has focused on the ways that suburban older youth navigate the streets and its public spaces. I wondered what suburban older youth did when they were out of school. More specifically, I wondered how various demographic groups of suburban youth from the West Island, a suburb of Montreal, found ways to hang out, play, and form their identities on the outskirts of the city.

As I explore in more detail in the methods section, challenges in the data collection process resulted in important implications for my data collection and subsequent analysis. An unexpected hurdle during a recruitment presentation in a college class resulted in my inability to continue my recruitment process as I had conceived it. A professor extemporaneously suggested to his students that they participate in my research as a homework replacement, therefore I had to accept all willing participants, who fit the criteria. This resulted in me having to conduct more interviews than needed and limited my ability to sample my intended population. As a result, I

collected a more homogenous sample of older middle class youth. Some of the participants varied in terms of culture, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, but the sample was too small to draw conclusions about these populations on a larger scale; also, these demographic variations did not emerge as significant themes in the interviews. Rather, the more noticeable trend was a lack of descriptions or mentions of feeling marginal in terms of their personal identity and relationship to space. I took the opportunity to engage in an initial exploration of this sub-group of suburban young adults, whom are largely absent in the literature on urban youth geography. Throughout, I have clung to Henri Lefebvre's broader theories, particularly his theory of the spatial triad as a tool for critiquing the built environment, and a lens through which all parts of this thesis have been influenced. This spatial triad includes lived space, perceived space, and conceived space. These three dimensions allow us to understand space as more than its physical representation as we consider the actual experience of users of a space, the ways that we think people ought to act in a space, and the intentions of those who have constructed the space. In the theoretical frameworks chapter, I contextualize his work and the application of critical urban theory to a study on youth in the suburbs.

Some of the broader implications of conducting this research, focuses on the marginality of youth rather than marginalized youth, where it is the exploration of the banal or everyday encounters that expose some of the unfreedoms of suburban living for young middle class adults, and the ways in which their youth continues to expose them to some forms of marginality, even though they do not belong to the subgroups of young people whose bodies come to be labelled as particularly marginal and who are the focus of much research on unequal access to city spaces. In this research, I find that middle class youth might not overtly lament or fight against their marginality, but their accounts still present us with various ways in which their needs are not

always met by the built suburban environment. This also has implications for future research and longitudinal research on loneliness, online hanging out, substance use, shrinking social circles, and the integration of beauty, happiness, and users' enjoyment in the construction of public spaces.

Moreover, participants' responses draw attention to important aspects about the ways in which they reproduce capitalist middle class values. In addition, the broader implications for studying space, in particular the suburbs, are valuable for our understanding of the expansion and implications of these environments. As suburban spaces are seeing demographic changes, increases in development, and changes to their overall purpose as a heaven for commuters, it is important to explore the impacts of the current built environment. In this research, I explore some of the ways in which the suburbs are narrowly constructed to be private and separated, which has impacts for young people's ability to have contact with others that differ from them, which would make them more open to differences, able to deal with conflict, and provide opportunities for growing their networks of weak ties.

### **The West Island and Youth**

Before proceeding with an outline of this thesis, I will begin by describing the West Island and further contextualizing the rationale for my research. The West Island has recently begun a 10 to 15-year wave of development in which developers and city councilors aim to urbanize certain areas. The management of the primary shopping center, Fairview, is working with the city of Pointe-Claire to develop a "downtown". The aim is to introduce large apartment buildings as well as pedestrian access to shopping and businesses. In an article in the Montreal Gazette, the project was described as "not just a collection of buildings" but a community for living, working,

and playing” (Doyle, 2020, October 16). Though the term “play” is mentioned, it is unclear how the developers envision to include areas of play. This article and the city’s future development plans convey how space is built or conceived in alignment with consumption and urban renewal. Conceived space (or representations of space), which I define below, refers to the influence of architects, builders, engineers, and others on the built environment and the signs and symbols that they may choose to assign to a space. All in all, young people appear to be missing from the future of the urban vision: developing an understanding of this exclusion and its consequences is what this research aims to explore.

The West Island is an unofficial name given to the burrows that are located on the western side of the Island of Montreal. It has been characterized by its suburban living, large Anglophone community, and high percentages of families with children<sup>1</sup>. This territory is made up of 12 municipalities divided by the Autoroute 40: The north end has seven municipalities, including Pierrefonds (63,360 people), Dollard-Des Ormeaux (48,900), L’Île-Bizard (14,715), Roxboro (5,940), Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue (4,960), Sainte-Genève (3,695) and Senneville (920). The north is marked by higher rates of ethno-cultural diversity. The south is made up of five municipalities including: Pointe-Claire (31,380), Kirkland (20,150), Beaconsfield (19,325), Dorval (18,980) and Baie-D’Urfé (3,820) (Centraide of Greater Montreal, 2019-2020). In a territorial analysis of the West Island, the Centraide of Greater Montreal (2019-2020) noted that the following challenges “[...] (alcohol and drug use, dropping out, psychological distress and behavioural problems) are found in both underprivileged [north] and more affluent areas [south], which have high numbers of so-called “latchkey children” (p.3). “Latchkey children” are young

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<sup>1</sup> Families with children include single-parent families and those living with any number of children in the household.

people who are often left unsupervised by adults, most often after school. All of the above characteristics of this suburban zone allow for a rich analysis of the spatial practices in the context of the “marginality of youth” in the city. In my analysis of the West Island area, I aimed to engage with youth from various municipalities. This could have allowed me to compare and contrast the encounters of youth in the city. It would have also allowed me to outline the differences in young people's experiences with authority. It was my aim to give a voice to young people from less wealthy communities, central to this issue, and others from majority white middle class suburban communities, on the outskirts of this issue, and perceived as being exempt from such problems of exclusion. As I come to explain below, changes in methods altered my research and the conclusion that could be drawn from it.

The research that I conducted on young peoples’ lived experience in the suburbs has been grounded in a Lefebvrian spatial analysis. His idea of the production of space and more specifically his spatial triad: “le percu” (perceived space), “le concu” (conceived space), and “le vecu” (lived space) has been used as analytical tools to distinguish ideas of perceptions of the “every day”, the work of urban planners or city officials to construct a city and the actual lived experiences of young people. The West Island has yet to be mapped out to highlight the lived, perceived, and conceived space in relation to older youth in general. The following research questions provided a preliminary mapping out of a suburban city space, focusing on older youth:

1. *How is the West Island designed spatially?*
2. *What are the lived experiences of adolescents and the ways that they interact with suburban spaces in the West Island?*

3. *What are the commonalities and differences in perceived lived experience for young people in the city?*
4. *What has been the impact on young people's use of public, semi-public, and alternative spaces and their exclusion from these in a pre and post pandemic context?*

This study also aimed to provide those who have important control over the production of space, like urban planners and architects, with the context needed to consider this group and the ways that conceived urban and suburban spaces affect them. Published in the Tampa Bay Times, Hamilton (Sep 29th, 2005) wrote an article, titled “Suburban culture has no place for teens” to draw attention to the fact that teenagers remain forgotten in planning. He highlights that other special interest groups (the elderly, persons with disability, and young families.) have been acknowledged by informed suburban planners. Andres Duany, a suburban planner, “[...] said that he had only once or twice included teenagers in the public process of planning suburban development” (as cited in Hamilton, Sep 29th, 2005). If young people are ignored in suburban planning they still carve-out alternative spaces of their own to engage in identity formation and play. This led me to wonder, in the preparatory stages of my research, about the policing or illegitimacy of alternative spaces, the isolation that is associated with the modern adolescent experience, and the alternatives that they may carve out of these conditions.

## **Thesis Overview**

In the next chapter, I review several literatures dealing with the exclusion of young people from city spaces and the ways that this experience may vary depending on the location and the characteristics of the individual. I explore the ways that urban renewal and spaces of

consumption exacerbate exclusion, policing, and marginalization. I conclude that research on urban dynamics has often focused on marginalized youth, which is why this study will instead focus on the marginality of youth as oppose to marginal youth. As will be demonstrated, in the literature review there is an absence of the sort of less marginal youth that ultimately made up my sample. In the later section on lived methods, I discuss how the research methods and goals that I had originally conceived, based on the literature, developed into lived methods, which capture the actual experience of doing research in the field. The literature review became a tool for comparison between those that have been studied, the most marginalized, and the less vulnerable youth of my sample. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the theoretical framework that builds on Lefebvre's distinction between perceived, conceived and lived spaces. I then present the methodological section, where I outline the qualitative "ethnographic" approach that I used to map out the spatialized experiences of older adolescents in the suburban territory of Montreal known as the West Island. As mentioned, this section also includes a more in-depth discussion on the challenges of my research. This is followed by a summary of the results from each participant's interview. I then proceed to analyze the findings to reveal the empirical patterns and theoretical links grounded in a Lefebvrian spatial analysis. Lefebvre and his ideas on the influence of the built environment are used as the lens of analysis. I incorporate the ideas of other theorists, often influenced by Lefebvre, as a way of exploring phenomena that have not been adequately explored in the sub-field of youth geography. As a result of my sample, it was necessary to contrast earlier ideas from the literature review with broader works in urban sociology. The analysis was a place to compare, re-visit, and expand on the literature on youth and urban dynamics. Lastly, I found the spatial design of the suburbs to be highly separated, divided, and private. Young people have limited hangout options beyond

private spaces and places of consumption. Despite this, participants did not feel overtly marginalized and did not consciously resist the limitations of the suburban environment. The thesis concludes by revisiting some of the contributions and limitations of this exploratory study and provides suggestions for future research to inquire about the lived experiences of older suburban youth.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the literature in the areas of youth geographies with an emphasis on the sub-discipline of sociology focused on urban youth geographies. I also begin to explore the broader interdisciplinary literature on space and the city, influenced by Lefebvre's ideas. In this chapter, I aim to highlight significant and intertwining ideas from these collections of work that helped me to conceive the proposed methods and questions for my analysis.

I begin this chapter by clarifying and differentiating the ways that youth geographies have defined "youth" and the varied experiences that they may have due to their age, social class, and visual markers of marginality. I make note of the gaps in the literature and how in-between or less obvious categories of age, social class, and marginality have been understudied. I call attention to the emphasis of research in this field, as in many others, to focus on the most marginalized. This explains some of the lack of research on youth in the suburbs rather than the city center, where more visually marginal youth inhabit the streets. In my later analysis, I draw links to other bodies of work to compensate for the gaps in the field of urban youth geographies. In this chapter, I also review the literature in the field of urban geography, combined with youth studies, to outline some of the influences of the city, urban renewal, and modernization on the lives on young people. Next, I discuss the consequences of the above-mentioned, which has led to increased policing and reduced mobility for the most marginalized youth. I chose to include the available and significant literature on urban youth dynamics to further point to the gaps in the field. Older youth in the suburban context remain two categories of inquiry that require more attention.

## **Youth Cohorts in the City**

Early, middle, and late childhood, along with adolescence and young adults may all be considered under the category of youth. There are surely shared experiences and differences felt by young people of varied ages. Considering youth in its broadest sense, Sibley (1995) notes that youth are often banished from the city (as cited in van Blerk, 2012, p.557). Young people inevitably seem out of place in an environment that is rarely conceived for them; Mitchell (2003) gives the examples of public housing projects in cities like Detroit and Toronto among others in North America that have been constructed to be “anti-children”. High-rise buildings typically have no designated place for play (p.21). In the same way, teenagers must scout the city in search of places where they can hangout. Parks close early and are patrolled by public security; hanging out in shopping centers is considered loitering, and many apartments are too small to welcome big groups. The above may present challenges, though differently, for youth of all ages. Because young people of various cohorts (school children, teenagers, and young adults) may have mixed experiences in the city, this research is concerned with engaging with an older cohort of youth, whose experience varies from those of young children. Older youth must surely engage in a form of play, different from those of children, in which they attempt to “hang-out” in more independent ways, as will be explored in my analysis below.

## ***Youth and Social Class***

The economic standing of youth has also been shown to have an impact on hanging out habits. Unlike young children, whose needs are considered in spaces of play (e.g., playgrounds), teenagers’ needs are most often absent in the conception and construction of public and semi-public spaces. As a result, there are few built space for teenagers to call their own and in which

to engage in their identity formation. Although, adolescents are expected to be seen in places of consumption like malls, fast food restaurants, and movie theaters, a participant in Montigny's (2013) LGBTQ youth study in Montreal described her "lower class" economic standing as a barrier to her inclusion in these types of places. She described the West Island, where her college was located, as richer and intimidating. Another working-class participant described their economic standing as a barrier to their mobility because of time, work, and transportation. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that some older youth must undertake adult-like responsibilities (i.e., salaried work, child-care, domestic work) which could influence their ability to hang out in places of consumption.

In contrast, some middle-class participants expressed having greater mobility and more free time. One expressed having more freedom because they did not have to work and because their parents would drive them around (Montigny, 2013, p.75-76). Moreover, middle-class youth appear to benefit from more mobility by having greater access to vehicles. In Kato's (2009) study of middle-class youth, it was demonstrated that hanging out in cars is a regular activity for suburban middle-class adolescents (p.51). As a result, considering the economic standing of participants in this research has been important for mapping out the characteristics of the less marginalized West Island youth of my sample versus the more marginal sub samples represented in the literature.

### ***Marginalized youth vs the Marginality of Youth***

Central to the research considering the spatialities of young people's lives is the claim that young people are important social actors whose experiences of spaces and places may vary from those of other demographic groups (Evans, 2008, p.1659). Older youth are important social actors

because their lived experiences and needs vary greatly from those of children, adults, and elders whose interests are more frequently considered. In this same sense, the experiences of particular sub-groups of young people may differ or have an impact on the spatialized experiences of other groups. For example, the regulation and sometimes removal of the city's most marginalized youth from public spaces might have an impact on the ways that young people, in general, use public, semi-public, and alternative spaces. The more that marginal youth are policed and associated with undesirable behaviour and illegitimate places, the more that young people in general may come to be stereotyped as a disturbance in the city.

Much of the research on youth in the city has focused on the most vulnerable category of “street youth”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, this research became most interested in the “marginality of youth” in the city as understood by young people themselves. By marginality of youth, I mean the way in which the interests and needs of youth are typically not taken into account in urban planning. In this research, I argue and try to show that listening to the stories of suburban youth allows us to learn more about the lived experiences of an understudied population. I also aim to explore the ways that the participants accept, resist and respond to their urban conditions differently than what has been presented in the literature.

## **Urban Renewal and Youth**

In this section, I review the research demonstrating the impact of age biases on youth's ability to access and use urban spaces, which may explain the marginality of youth. Attempting to express

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<sup>2</sup> Street youth or homeless youth are a difficult group to define because of the diversity and transience of this population. As a general definition borrowed from O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri (2012) street youth are young people who temporarily or permanently have unstable housing. This includes those without any place to stay, those living in emergency shelters, abandoned buildings, staying with friends or at risk of being kicked out of their homes (p.37).

their own culture, often misunderstood by adults, youth's activities in the streets has placed them at-risk of regulatory practices (White, 1994 as cited in Malone, 2002, p.157.). These regulatory practices range from policing practices (e.g., surveillance cameras, public security, curfews, police stops) to the creation of clear 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' spatial boundaries. Malone (2002), for instance, points to politicians and the media's role in selling the public on the idea that certain events and people can cause harm to others or themselves (p.157). This may pertain to a variety of groups such as immigrants, indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and other groups that may appear to divert from the norm in some way. The concern over these groups is closely related to the publicized mobilization of emotions, particularly fear, and their association to crime or degenerate behaviour. Youth may also be viewed as potential threats to order, visible in the streets or in ambiguous public or private spaces like parks and malls. This kind of rhetoric helps to justify the sanitization of public spaces by removal of the "other" (Malone, 2002, p.162). According to Malone (2002), high-income countries work to maintain shared value systems as a strategy for the reduction of conflict in shared spaces (p.161). This "purification of space" is the desire to keep out the "other" and to maintain homogenous public spaces (Sibbey, 1995). Current tactics for urban renewal are aimed at the purification, that is to say the elimination or containment of disorder from city spaces. In contrast, Sennett (1994) has argued: "Disorderly, painful events in the city are worth encountering, because they force us to engage with 'otherness', to go beyond one's own defined boundaries of self, and are thus central to civilized and civilizing social life." For Sennett, these strategies erase disorder and difference, eliminating people's ability to deal with everyday conflict (as cited in Malone, 2002, p.161). Arguably, young people's exclusion from public and

semi-public spaces by urban renewal (van Blerk, 2013) are an example of the types of strategies that Sennett decries.

### ***Policing of Street-youth: A War on Crime***

Closely tied to urban renewal are the policing practices used to remove the most “undesirable”, “illegitimate”, and “marginal” youth. In South Africa, the government implemented strategies to reduce the visible presence of youth in the streets (van Blerk, 2013, p.564). In Cape Town, numerous “sanitizing” security practices have been implemented. Since 2006, youth have been complaining about the increase in security presence on the streets. They are constantly watched and gathered to be displaced. The younger street children would be taken to shelters and the older ones to police stations or both moved to marginalized areas (van Blerk, 2013, p.565). Mobile fingerprints technology was also used on older youth who could be stopped at any point, sometimes leading to their imprisonment, even for cases that they had already been tried for (van Blerk, 2013, p.565). Moreover, South Africa’s successful World Cup bid resulted in the implementation of by-laws that allowed for greater regulation of public space in the host cities (Cornelissen, 2011, as cited in van Blerk, 2013, p.561). This resulted in the increase of harsh tactics of systematic and forced removal from the city. During these removals, street-youth were rounded up and beaten (Samara, 2005, as cited in van Blerk, 2013, p.561), and subjected to forceful removal from the city in order to be placed in suburbs. This was deemed reasonable because they were “[...] positioned as security threats and obstacles to renewal. Safety and security were seen as the primary tasks, achievable only through a crackdown on crime and applying a zero tolerance approach.” (van Blerk, 2013, p.561). Samara (2003) suggests that a discourse and practice of a “war on crime” has been used to target young people in South Africa

(van Blerk, 2013, p.561). The experiences of youth in Cape Town of course differs from other young people because of the particular strategies used against them (i.e. beatings and fingerprint scans) but the motive for policing likely remains the same. In the name of capitalist pursuits, global cities aim to encourage urban renewal and the maintenance of order. A tourism economy is one of the greatest motivations for a city to label youth as a threat to economic pursuits. Young people, visible in the streets, become associated with a moral panic and become targets of the “war on crime”. Young people, who do not reproduce and adopt what is deemed by capitalism as rational and invisible behaviour, are deemed a threat to modernity, renewal, and legitimacy on the global economic stage. Though these strategies may not directly apply to the West Island, it is important to consider the stereotypes that may be held against young people whom can be viewed as disorderly in public spaces.

### *The Spectacle*

Increased surveillance aimed at young people in the city can be understood as a panoptic strategy. Borrowing from Foucault’s (1995) understanding of the Panopticon, the city might have some of the same effects on its users as the Panopticon prison on its inmates: “[...] [T]o induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p.201). Other than for the purpose of surveillance, the Panopticon can be used for the purpose of altering behaviour (Foucault, 1995, p.203). The gaze of adults, neighborhood watch, police, public security, mall security, cameras and other technology are among the elements of a city that could cause young people to feel watched, therefore leading to changes in behaviour. Furthermore, spaces may be constructed in such a way to discourage particular behaviours. Architecture and urban planning may be suggestive and can steer users to the appropriate

behaviour within the confines of a particular space. Therefore, the conception and materialization of space can be understood as attempts to mark certain acts, places, and bodies as legitimate or illegitimate.

It is important to note that discipline in the city is highly *contextual* (Koskela, 2003, p.302). Behaviours that might be acceptable in the daytime become illegitimate at night. In the same way, a certain activity might be heavily policed in one space and ignored in another. For example, in some rural communities, underage drinking is viewed as a normal activity because of boredom or the lack of other forms of entertainment or leisure activities. In the case of rural British youth in Eden, their community believed that “[...] there was simply not a fear of alcohol-related disorder as disturbance and threat to the person was minimal” (Valentine et al., 2008, p.33). The inferred tolerance of underage drinking in rural areas normalizes this practice. As a result, the town of Eden has not created a moral panic over youth drinking illegally in public, private, or informal drinking spaces (Valentine et al., 2008, p.37). Rather, within these rural areas, communities feel that youth binge drinking, and related public disorder, is an urban phenomenon (Valentine et al., 2008, p.33). In the city, the behaviours of youth can be highly scrutinized and varied tactics are used to punish or discourage visible antisocial behaviour, in part, because the city has been made a spectacle. Though, it is unclear how much of this has influenced the suburbs.

When a city is being watched on the global stage, it becomes a spectacle, therefore local officials need to showcase a clean, safe, and fun image of the city. As demonstrated earlier, tourism and the World Cup in Cape Town would shine a spotlight onto the city. Kennelly and Watt (2011) borrow Debord’s idea of “the spectacle” and apply it to the Olympics to explain the way that this force acts as an illusion of togetherness and nationalism while intensifying

separation and gentrification aimed at specific people and places that would tarnish the illusion of a city that attempts that has no visible signs of crime and social issues. They provide the example of Hasting Street in Vancouver, where the young street-involved youth were deemed invisible until the Olympic Games. Then, it became necessary to police, surveille, and contain them. As Merrifield (2002, p.12) notes: “Bad imagery means lost investment; lost investment signals the death knell for a city. Image is forever important.” (as cited in Kennelly & Watt, 2011, p.774). The presence of an intensive global spectacle, like the Olympic Games, will bring in spectators and media that will broadcast images of the city to the entire world. The spectacle requires and justifies the “cleaning-up” of “degenerate” spaces and people. The growth, development, and investment of towns on the outskirts of the greater metropolitan area, like the West Island, could lead to an increased focus on public spaces as spectacles, spreading the trend of regulating the behaviour of youth in the city center to the suburbs.

### **The City: A Place of Consumption**

As outlined earlier, sub-groups of youth may experience the city differently based on age, social class, and other markers of illegitimacy (i.e., being visibly marked as a member of a sub-group of youth deemed as the most “illegitimate” and “degenerate”, such as street-youth, homeless youth, and more). As mentioned above, a young person’s economic standing is crucial to their experience in and of the city, particularly their mobility. Having a job or an allowance is necessary to access transportation and to enjoy many leisure spaces with friends. To enjoy such spaces (i.e., movie theaters, shopping malls, and cafés) young people must engage in the capitalist economic relations. Only a few places, such as public spaces and libraries, are free of capitalist consumption. As a result, Lefebvre argues that capitalism destroys equal rights to the

city. Throughout this research, I incorporate and borrow many of his ideas. Henri Lefebvre's contributions have influenced multiple disciplines and may even go uncited, as his ideas are foundational to our understanding of urban sociology, the built environment, and the reproduction of economic inequality in the city. In the later section describing my theoretical framework, I present in more detail one of his most famous contributions, the spatial triad, which I use as a guiding concept in the entirety of this thesis.

Borrowing from Lefebvre, Mirabal (2009) argues that inhabiting the streets without consuming is regarded as suspicious because the street is no longer for sustaining community; bodies have to be disciplined or removed if they are unable to consume (p.18). Do young people experience a similar exclusion from spaces when not engaged in active consumption? Loitering in a mall or sitting at a café without ordering anything may result in removal. Moreover, certain spaces, businesses, and neighborhoods aim to attract a population with the ability to spend money and to discourage those who appear to be lower class or those with little ability to shop, eat, and drink in stores and restaurants.

This exclusion means that many young people do not have the same "right" to the city that is held by other dominant groups. Harvey (2008) maintains that the right to the city is more than an individual's right to access urban spaces and their resources. Rather, it is a collective right to exercise power over the processes of urbanization and the concentration of wealth, privilege, and consumerism that it holds. For Harvey (2008), the freedom to make and remake the city to our heart's desire is one of the most precious yet neglected human rights (p.23). This is the very problem that young people face in urban/suburban areas: the city is not built in their

image; instead urban renewal, gentrification<sup>3</sup>, and modernity are used as tropes to implement, build, and develop the city for the advancement of businesses, wealthier residents, and a global reputation. In the case of the construction of the Olympic host cities, bid committee are mostly made up of urban elites like politicians, real-estate developers, and business people who are “[...] explicitly committed to making their cities more competitive within a globalized economy” (Roche, 2000, as cited Kennelly & Watts, 2011, p.768). Therefore, the improvements that they aim to implement are unlikely to meet the needs of the marginalized youth, central to the issue, and youth in general. To modernize and “clean up” the city for an event like the Olympics involves the forced sanitization and removal of those deemed undesirable. Most often, it is the groups with greater financial power who have the most impact over the conceived space and the policies that affect it. If the Olympics represent an extreme of the city of spectacle, the notion that the idea of spectacle is used in other context remains useful for thinking about the ways in which more modest spectacles of consumption are choreographed and orchestrated in places like the West Island whom have begun expansion and renewal projects.

The case of the Olympic host cities focuses on the most marginal youth like street-youth or street involved youth. Yet, youth geographers, as noted numerous times above, have worked to demonstrate that youth in general have a weak claim to being able to inhabit the city. The Charte Montréalaise (article 15) maintains that citizens have the right to participate in the decisions of city affairs (2017, p.10). This may be so, but do young people in general have an equal opportunity to practice this right? As mentioned in the introduction, older youth fall into an in-between category, no longer children dependent on adults but not quite seen as fully

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<sup>3</sup> Gentrification, a process in which people, their cultures, and their neighborhoods are expunged in order to make room for businesses and wealthier residents.

independent adults themselves, leading them to lack adult advocates who will represent their interests in city affairs. Because of their in-between status, older youth are mostly forgotten, unless they become an obstacle to city affairs, as was illustrated in the examples of Olympic host cities. Adolescents and young adults remain an invisible population, hidden in-between the categories of a dependent child and independent adult, until they engage in something framed as “illegal” or “disturbing”. Only then do they become important to consider in the built environment as city officials and developers implement strategies to reduce loitering, public drinking, or other behaviours deemed undesirable when attempting to beautify a city. “[...] [W]hen youth congregate in places not specifically designed for them, or not sufficiently marginal that they are ‘invisible’ to the public, they are seen as threatening and kept under close surveillance” (Katz in van Blerk, 2013, p.557). As a result, young people find ways to “[...] use the city creatively on a temporal (often at night) or a spatial (less overtly public locations) basis: carving out special niches where social gathering and identity formation can take place” (Matthews et al., 1998; Ward, 1978; Hopkins, 2010, as cited in van Blerk, 2013, p.557). For example, bus stops, empty lots, abandoned buildings, and unsupervised parks can all become spaces appropriated by young people (Mitchell. 2003, p.21). These spaces, however, come to be associated with illegitimacy leading the police, city officials, and the media to perpetuate the trope that certain areas are anti-social behaviours spaces. As a result, youth binge drinking, crime, and homelessness are viewed as an urban problem that stereotypes young people in the city (Valentine, Holloway, Knell, Jayne, 2008, p.28). The mapping out of youth’s use of suburban spaces will add to this body of literature and point to the ways that a sub-set of young people use public and alternative spaces in suburbia.

## **Community Policing: Montreal**

In some cities, municipal by-laws combined with disorder policing have led to the “cleansing” of the city via forced mobility. Cities from around the globe have adopted various policing practices targeting young people and their illegitimacy on the streets. As was illustrated earlier in the studies on Vancouver and Cape Town, the status of young people’s bodies in the city have been associated to moral panics and in some instances requiring a war on crime. Young people can be viewed as illegitimate and dangerous, particularly those who are most visible on the streets. Street-involved youth and lower income youth are seen as an obstacle to “progress” and capital in global cities, where the image of a clean and safe public arena is linked to economic opportunity (Kennelly & Watt, 2011; van Blerk, 2013). However, little is known about the policing of youth beyond those categories, as in the case of youth on which this research reports.

Cities, and the municipalities within them, must compete for the positive gaze of the world if they aim to hold a spot on the national and global stage. Individual suburbs or neighbourhoods, however, must also compete against each other as they choreograph the spectacle of capitalist consumption, to attract residents, consumers, and investment. The urban spectacle of consumption requires policy, planners, politicians and businesses to engage in a relentless modernization, gentrification and globalization of urban space. This contributes to my research interest aimed at listening to the experiences of suburban youth rather than those who are most visibly on the margins.

In Montreal, the city of interest in this research, police have adopted a community policing model. According to Huey (2007): “Such policing models often assume that the community is one single homogenous body and, thus, that we can arrive at a consensus about what the community really wants” (as cited in Sylvestre, 2010, p.434). The SPVM (Service de

police de la Ville de Montréal) claim to be intervening where the public wants them to in order to increase the population's sense of security in the city. In Montreal, as well as in other cities, the adoption of the community policing model was thought to be moving towards the democratization of policing, as opposed to the use of repressive policing practices. Yet, city officials and the police continue to support repressive broken-window and zero-tolerance policies (Lyons 1997, Mouhanna 2002, Hermer et al. 2005, as cited in Sylvestre, 2010, p.453). As a result, street youth in Montreal have been heavily ticketed for by-law offenses (Douglas, 2011). In accordance with broken-window theory, visible signs of physical disorder, incivilities, and antisocial behaviour are thought to encourage further crimes and compromise the feeling of safety for citizens of Montreal, but also the spectacle of capitalist consumption. This has required criminal laws and municipal by-laws to be used on behalf of citizens to rid the city streets of visible signs of disorder.

Sylvestre (2010) conducted a study in order to investigate if the policing of homelessness was really demanded by citizens. He concluded that the policing of antisocial behaviours (commonly associated with street youth, sex-workers, and homeless individuals) protected the interests of particular groups like merchants. According to Sylvestre (2010), the presence of disorder in Montreal continues to be perceived as a threat to the investment projects of developers, merchants, and business actors. Due to their large financial investments (e.g., multiplication of condo complexes, growth of universities, and the revitalization of multiple districts), local politicians tend to sympathize with the complaints and interests of these groups, making the voices of these groups louder than those of individual citizens.

Sylvestre's (2010) analysis of how the Montreal police measured its citizens' concerns demonstrated that there is no convincing evidence in police data and phone reports that citizens

demanding disorder policing. Sylvestre (2020) also explains how programs against disorder help maintain the police officers' *raison d'être* in the community. Police claim that there is a community consensus in favor of disorder policing, yet the empirical evidence, in Montreal, demonstrates a disconnect between citizens' calls for service and what police have been doing on their behalf. Rather, the type of antisocial behaviours being policed reflect the demands of important interest groups and bureaucrats (e.g., real estate investors, business owners, etc.) as well as the institutional incentives of the police (Sylvestre, 2010, p.454). The divide between policing practices and the demands of citizens further illustrates the importance of a critical analysis of spaces, policing, and regulations in the suburbs of Montreal. As will be described in the theoretical framework chapter, Lefebvre encourages such observations as a way of defining who has conceived the built environment and shaped the perception of what is deemed normal and acceptable versus the actual experience of users.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature on youth geographies, with a focus on urban youth geographies. I started by presenting sub-categorizing young people by age, class, and level of marginality, to demonstrate the importance of these variations in identity across youth literatures. By examining a wide range of interdisciplinary works on youth, space, and the city, I have demonstrated the influences that have marked and challenged young people's right to the city. Throughout this chapter, I have also drawn attention to the gaps in the literature in which I was unable to locate much research on the types of young people in my sample: suburban, older youth, middle class, whom do not label themselves as being on the margins of society. Additionally, I discussed the consequences of global cities and urban renewal, which have

resulted in increased policing and reduced mobility for street-involved youth. I suggest that these themes must also be explored further, to determine how less visibly marginal youth are affected. With the preliminary research questions in mind, in the literature review I have drawn attention to the absence of the types of youth represented in my sample to ask: *How does the design and spatial features of the West Island impact the lived experiences and use of public, semi-public, and alternatives spaces for older middle class college youth, and how do these experiences compare to youth represented in the literature on urban youth geographies?* In the following section, I describe my theoretical framework, grounded in Lefebvre's ideas, which I use as a theoretical thread linking the gaps between the literature and my own sample.

### **Chapter III: Theoretical Framework**

Inspired by the use of Lefebvre in studies of city spaces and the use of this theoretical framework in youth studies (e.g., Kennelly & Watt, 2011), this research will be grounded in a Lefebvrian spatial analysis. As Kennelly & Watt (2011) argue, Lefebvre's theories were developed prior to the structuring of urban areas resulting from the later stages of capitalist globalization; yet his theories of space and his conceptualization of the implications of the reproduction of economic inequalities in the city is well suited for theorizing the consequences of urban renewal, the development of the suburbs, and urban practices of older youth. Furthermore, his spatial triad can be used to conceptually map out the West Island and evaluate the multiple dimensions at play in the production and consumption of city spaces for older youth in general.

Prior to the translation and accessibility of Lefebvre's most famous works in the 1990s, most Anglo-American geographers had not yet grasped the significance of his work (McCann, 1999, p.167). Since, Lefebvre's theories have been adopted by many discipline in the English speaking world such as sociology and geography. Those interested in understanding the implications of the built urban environment can turn their attention to Lefebvre, though his theories can also be applied to suburban and rural spaces, as demonstrated by my decision to adopt him as the primary influence in this thesis. His theories, influenced by Marx, allow for a critical examination of public spaces.

Lefebvre's ideas provide an analytical lens that is foundational to all parts of this work. His theories are central to many of the ways that sociologists understand physical space and the ways that it reproduces the conditions of capitalism. So much so, that researchers and theorists often adopt Lefebvre's ideas without citing him as his framework is so deeply embedded in the way many of us have come to think about space. As argued by Schmid (2022), "[a]n increasing

number of texts take Lefebvre's theory as a point of departure, place it in a contemporary context, and thus make it fruitful for further reflections and analysis. Among these are efforts to combine Lefebvre's with other approaches and thus to open up new perspectives" (p.221). As a result, Lefebvre's work is used as the broader thread within this research, allowing the integration of other theories. Lefebvre's theories though widely cited are not always used empirically. This research is an attempt to do so. In consequence, as will be discussed in greater detail in the methods chapter, the interview questions have been carefully crafted to elicit data aligned to Lefebvre's three dimensional analysis.

### **The Spatial Triad**

Lefebvre's conceptualization of the production of space and more specifically his spatial triad: "le perçu" (perceived space), "le conçu" (conceived space), and "le vécu" (lived space) was used as analytical tools to distinguish ideas of perceptions of the "every day", the work of urban planners or city officials to construct a city, and the actual lived experiences of young people. Individuals, especially those with capitalist and political resources contribute to the construction of the social world, including its urban space. This construction of the environment then molds and reproduces the experiences of broader social groups. Lefebvre's theory of perceived, conceived, and lived space can be used as an organizing conceptual thread in the literature on young people in the city as will be demonstrated below. It highlights the routine encounters that come to appear as normal and natural.

### ***Perceived Space***

The first of the three concepts within Lefebvre's spatial triad is "spatial practice," also referred to as "perceived space". For Lefebvre, the production of space refers to humans' ability to create (produce) the very environment that molds them. Space (the whole of the environment) is not passive; it influences our perceptions and lived experiences. Social space is full of symbols that give the world its meaning. In addition, perceived space is also about how we think space ought to be, and the social experiences and visual symbols that shape what individuals come to expect as normal in a particular space. Socially constructed norms tell us about what should occur in certain spaces, not least because previous experiences and popular culture help shape an individual's perception of what space should be. For example, teenagers filming TikTok dances in a mall corridor might appear strange to an onlooker because of previous visits or the typical depiction of shopping behaviour in the media. Onlookers are likely to have constructed a normative perception of what should take place here.

### ***Conceived Space***

Conceived space is "[...] the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent- all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p.38). Conceived space is the cognitive understanding of what makes up the physical space. It is important to note the role of capital and governments in conceived space because those who have capital can hire professionals to produce space. This is so despite the fact that their ideas about what space should be used for or what it should look like often contradicts with the ideas of everyday users. The gentrification of cities makes for a great example. City planners have developed projects to

“beautify” the city while causing problems, such as rising rent and the displacement of those who inhabited the space before the profit-driven development materialized. When the built space is conceived by adults, youth become linked by shared experiences, in which each person feels that they “[...] navigate the world according to rules, laws and boundaries, set out, for the most part, by adults” (Sarre, 2010 as cited in Montigny, 2013, p.19). Different levels of government also play an important role in the production of city space. They have the authority and access to the capital to approve projects that have a significant impact on the production of public spaces (parks, schools, roads, etc.). It is important to note that the physical properties of space influence how we experience it, but only in conjunction with our own perception of it. Perception and conception are the two cognitive dimensions of the production of space that shape the actual lived experience of users.

### ***Lived Space***

Our perceptions of space are often linked to the normative as when we think that a park is for children to play in. We know this because we have played in parks as children and seen this representation in books and films. The construction of space is most often suited for these normative needs. Therefore, a park would be constructed to have swings that fit a child and play structures measured to these needs. Yet, the lived experience often differs greatly from the perceived and conceived. Lived space is the actual use of space that, oftentimes, involves users altering the normative use of space. To illustrate, the literature of urban youth has demonstrated that young people use public places as spaces to “hang out” because the city is rarely built for their use and needs. As a result, they use shopping centers, parks, and more alternative places to

fit their needs. The combination of perceived and conceived space shape the actual lived experiences of users while these users also come to alter the environment.

### **Theoretical Thread**

I will also use Lefebvre's understanding of the production of space to draw links with the broader literature on urban youth, linking the experiences of global urban youth to those of young adults in the West Island. This common thread highlights the routine encounters experienced by young people in cities that come to appear as normal and natural. To illustrate, the study of Olympic host cities and their impact on youth demonstrates clear links to the ideas of Lefebvre (Kennelly & Watt, 2011). The Olympic Games urban vision contains strategies for the revival of "degenerate" spaces. For Lefebvre, conceived spaces are constructed in a way that involves the use of social power over social groups. It nudges individuals to act in a certain way as a result of the organization of space and architecture. For example, a park with a bench will entice a person to sit down. But a park bench might also be seen by someone else as an opportunity to lie down and take a nap. If those conceiving the space believe that an act is undesirable, illegitimate, or "degenerate" they can construct a space to discourage this type of behaviour. This very park bench can be built to have an armrest in the middle of it that will stop anyone from being able to comfortably lie down on it. In the case of the development of urban sprawl; politicians, real-estate developers, and investors use powerful tactics to protect their image and investments. Therefore, the improvements that they aim to implement are likely to subject youth to the consequences of the imbalance between these power relations.

The broader youth literature demonstrates that teenagers are subjected to power and exclusion in the city. Childress (2004) describes how:

Teenagers have limited ability to manipulate private property. They can't own it, can't modify it, can't rent it. They can only choose, occupy and use the property of others. This limitation is true in their communities, it's true in their schools, and it's true in their homes (p.196).

These hierarchical social relations are in part produced and reproduced through space (conceived space). Because the city is not perceived as a place for hanging out or loitering, and designed instead for consumption and production (perceived space), it is reasonable for youth, highly tied to their mobility and creativity, to make use of spaces outside of their intended use (lived experience). This research seeks to apply this broad theoretical framework to particular spaces (suburban zones) and particular groups of youth (older suburban youth whom are mostly middle class).

## **Chapter IV: Methodology**

### **Choice of Methods**

I aimed to use a qualitative ethnographic approach to map out the spatialized experiences of adolescents in the West Island area of Montreal. My group of interest is young people. More specifically, one of my goals in undertaking this research was to give a voice to older youth. This group, as noted above, often forgotten, in-between categories of childhood and adulthood, has been largely ignored in policy and social science research. To determine the parameters of my group of interest, I borrowed from youth geographies. The concept of youth is variable temporally and spatially. Furthermore, the transition between youth-hood and adulthood is not linear (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, 2003, Skelton & Valentine, 1998 as cited in Montigny, 2013). Therefore, “youth” or “adolescent,” in this research, does not represent its commonly agreed-upon definition which is far removed from “childhood” and “adulthood” (Valentine, 2003, Aitken, 2001, Weller, 2006, Evans, 2008). Considering that the study takes place at a college where students must graduate high school before entering, I have focused on an older sample range of 17 to 24 years of age. This had the potential to capture the experiences of young people aged 15-24, as participants were asked to recall lived experiences that would have taken place before the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to space has been even more restricted since, therefore I aimed to gather data about youth’s current experiences and those that occurred before the lockdown. I conducted interviews with adolescents inviting them to describe their experiences in their own words. The interview format was chosen in order for each participant to feel most comfortable discussing events, topics, and places that they may not have wanted to share with their peers. Furthermore, this format was easily adaptable to the circumstances of COVID-19, in which many participants preferred to conduct interviews over Zoom.

## **Choice of Setting**

This research took place on the John Abbott College campus. Being the largest cegep in the area, this location was chosen as it had the potential to capture a great diversity of students with differing demographic characteristics. A fact sheet published by John Abbott College (September 14, 2020)<sup>4</sup>, attests to the college having a large student body of over 8700 students (full-time and continuing education) from over 85 nations. 65% of students' mother tongue is English, while the other 35% are varied. Furthermore, 83% of students are aged 17-20, while 17% are aged 21 and over. This location was also more likely to provide me with the opportunity to interview students who reside or hangout in various burrows. A high school setting may have yielded less variety because public high schools are made up of students from the same residential zone. Opting to do this research within a few high schools may have also limited my ability to catch people from various economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds due to the divided nature, public, private, or affiliated to a particular religion, of the area's high schools.

## **Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria and Sampling**

The sampling process was designed to maximize the diversity of students from various burrows, ethnic/cultural backgrounds, and gender. My aim was to conduct a maximum of 10-12 interviews. If there was sufficient response (more than 12 individuals), I would select for features of interest (gender, racialized individuals, etc.). If the number of response was below 12, I would select on a first come first serve basis. If participants did not display sufficient variation in the

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<sup>4</sup> I had located this fact sheet on the John Abbott College website at the time that I was writing my research proposal and obtaining ethics approval. The fact sheet has since been removed from the website.

population, this would be a limitation of my research and would be reflected in my analysis and conclusion.

The proposed selection of participants was set to be on a first come/first served basis. Those who would not be selected would receive an email informing them of the maximum capacity of this study. All students were asked to complete demographic questions<sup>5</sup> on a google form. If interest was above 12, students would be chosen based on the answers from the demographic questionnaire to increase variation in the sample and represent features of interest (gender, ethnicity, burrow, etc.). This selection method was detailed in the invitation email<sup>6</sup>.

During recruitment, an unexpected hurdle caused me to make a sampling decision while in the field. During one of my recruitment presentations, a professor suggested to students that their participation in my research could be a replacement for another homework assignment. Now that students had been given the choice between homework and attending my interview, it was likely that more would be motivated to participate. In this case, I accepted to interview all the students from these two classes who wanted to participate, as my refusal would have caused them to miss out on the opportunity offered by the professor. Therefore, I conducted 18 interviews with all who signed up knowing that I would only be using 12 interviews. When it came time to choose the 12 interviews used for my analysis, it became clear to me that choosing interviews based on features of interest would be a manipulation of the data on my part. I could have been inclined to choose interviews that would confirm some of my favoured explanations for this research or to select idiosyncratic features that stood out from the rest of the sample. As a result, I decided to select the first 12 interviews in chronological order of participation. This unanticipated event is a limitation of my sampling, combined with the limitation in sample size.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for Interview Guide

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B for Invitation Email

Additionally, one exception was made in following the chronological order, I made the decision to omit one interview which would have been included in the first 12 because it was an outlier. The participant shared with me that they rarely left their dwelling, for personal reasons, and knew very little about the West Island, and was therefore unable to provide answers to many of the interview questions. In such a small sample, I could not include this interview.

Due to the location of the study (the college) the sample size range was set between the ages of 17 to 24. The actual sample of 12 captured an age range of 18 to 19, which is in alignment with the greater majority of students attending the college. It was also my aim to have balance between individuals who identify as men or women, while also allowing for any individuals of other gender identifications to participate. The sample of 12 had 8 females and 4 males. I also aimed to sample for participants from diverse neighborhoods in an attempt to include youth from various economic classes and cultural backgrounds. I was able to capture a sample of 9 on-island and 3 off-island residents from various burrows. I recognize that this inability to sample for a wider range of demographic elements is a limitation of this research project. Certain dimensions, though significant, would require a larger sample size that would go beyond the scope of this research. This project, undertaking an initial mapping out of the spatialized experiences of West Island's youth, will allow for future research to explore the differences in lived experiences within particular subgroups of youth.

All students were invited to participate under the following criteria:

- 1) The participant must self-identify as an adolescent or young adult
- 2) The participant must speak English or French

3) The participant must either live or spend leisure time in the West Island (including Pierrefonds, Dollard-Des Ormeaux, L'Île-Bizard, Roxboro, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Sainte-Geneviève, Senneville, Pointe-Claire, Kirkland, Beaconsfield, Dorval, and Baie-D'Urfé).

### **Data Collection Tools and Process**

Prior to the winter semester of 2022, professors from the John Abbott College (Cegep) in the West Island were invited to collaborate in the research process. I aimed to contact 3-4 professors willing to participate. Each professor would act as a liaison to assist me in recruiting students by sharing my research invitation email<sup>7</sup> or by allowing me to present myself and my project in their class. Each John Abbott professor would have an average of 40 students per class. I began the process by contacting a few professors at a time. One professor was the first to agree to send out the email to a few of his classes from the current and prior semesters. He also informed me that he had sent my email to other professors in the department. The earlier emails only yielded one interview booking. As a result, I reached out to another professor who accepted to send out the recruitment email and invited me to present my project in two of his classes to solicit participants, while also introducing students to research in the social sciences<sup>8</sup>. After this, I would follow up with other professors who had agreed to have me present in the fall semester, if needed. Due to having reached the maximum number of interviews after this, I stopped all recruitment.

In order to obtain ethics approval from John Abbott College, ethics approval from the University of Ottawa was obtained first. The goal was to interview in late 2021 and early 2022, yet delays, beyond my control, in the ethics approval process at John Abbott College postponed

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B for Invitation Email

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C for Class Presentation

the process until much later in the 2022 winter semester. The college had not forwarded my application from mid-November to the correct person, despite follow up emails and phone messages, until late January. It was cited that early pandemic retirements had caused staff shortages. I received confirmation of approval on 2/4/2022, and awaited the required certificate. I received an email informing me that the process would be delayed due to an absence of administrative staff. I received the required certificate on 2/22/2022. This step in the research process totaled 2 and a half months.

At the time, in-person interviews could be conducted, but many preferred to meet over zoom due to the persisting concerns regarding COVID-19. Participants were given the choice between in-person interviews on campus or Zoom. Interviews were audio-recorded (zoom and/or in-person). Interviews taking place on zoom were not video recorded. Students had the choice to keep their cameras closed or open. Participants were also given the choice to conduct their interviews in French or English. Interested students were given a consent form to sign<sup>9</sup> and answered demographic questions<sup>10</sup> in a google form.

On the day of the interview, students were to be asked to start with an online mapping activity to encourage discussion and to familiarize the individual with the focus of the interview. Each student would be given their own map on the google maps website prompting them to pin and label places of significance to them. Their answers did not need to be precise as the intent was to keep track of which burrow each place was located in. If students wanted to be more specific or wanted to give more detail, they could zoom in on street view and walk me through these places. Throughout the interview, students could be prompted to label other locations that they may have introduced in response to the interview questions or discussion. If students chose

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix D for Consent Form

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix A for Interview Guide

to show certain places on street view, I would have asked them for their permission to revisit the google street view of these places. In practice, this strategy did not yield much interesting discussion in early interviews and was time-consuming. Instead, I decided to let students discuss locations, with the intention of asking follow-up questions if I needed more precise information about the location. This strategy was better suited for my interviews as it allowed me to respect the time limit. Furthermore, my prior knowledge of the West Island, Montreal, and its surrounding suburbs combined with my follow-up questions provided me with the necessary knowledge to locate places mentioned in the interview.

The demographic questionnaire and interview questions<sup>11</sup> were carefully designed to be aligned with the framework and the research questions. The demographic questionnaire was designed to help recognize trends during the analysis. Questions were asked about age, language, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity/culture, high school, birthplace, siblings, city of residence, and employment status. I also asked about their dwelling type and their parent(s) jobs in hopes of gaining some information about their social class and household income. I refrained from asking them to self-report social class and income as I felt that their answers could have been inaccurate due to the nature of their role in the family structure. When it came time to create the interview questions, four sub-sections of inquiry were designed on the basis of my theoretical framework; lived space, perceived space, constructed space, and the right to the city. I hoped to elicit responses that would allow for a well-rounded analysis, beyond lived experience alone, which would be the simplest to capture while interviewing participants. This design ensured that I could draw links between my results and my theoretical framework, which draws on Lefebvre.

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<sup>11</sup> see Appendix A for Interview Guide

The design of this data collection process, as well as my ability to adjust, allowed for well-rounded fieldwork that provided insight into how youth from the West Island experience the city.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

The interviews<sup>12</sup> have been analyzed using thematic analysis. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, emerging and re-occurring themes were highlighted. In order to identify themes of significance, I have taken into consideration the frequency of each theme, as well as the emphasis that certain individuals have placed on certain topics. In order to make these distinctions, I have also reviewed interview notes that I made during our discussions. The emerging themes have been conceptualized within the broader themes of this research (perceived, conceived, and lived space).

### **Lived Methods**

As a result of the aforementioned hurdle in sampling, I was unable to capture a sample that was representative of the variation found in the student body of John Abbott College. Though, I did capture something different and worth exploring, namely, a sample where respondents had a number of similarities. This allowed me to explore, less of the marginality of youth, and more about this small subset of middle class youth who have adopted middle class values. In consequence, I have also had to think about resistance or the “alternative” use of space in a different way. After the data collection, I had to dive back into the literature as unexpected themes and ideas emerged beyond what I had encountered in my initial youth literature review

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix A for Interview Guide

that was highly focused on the most marginal, who are most likely to carve out alternatives. Instead, this sample adopted and reproduced more of the conditions of capitalism, as demonstrated in my analysis. As I took a slight step away from youth literature and dove deeper into the literature on urban public spaces, streets, play, and so on, I was able to see representations of my sample and the ways that my participants illustrated some of the fundamental concepts in the literature on suburban space, urban public spaces, third spaces, virtual spaces, playful spaces, and so forth. Though youth literature shaped my research and its construction, it was the findings that pushed me to ‘live’ my methods beyond the guidelines that I had set out to follow. The primary *raison d’être* of my research was the lack of literature dedicated to older youth in the suburbs. I had first looked to youth geographies for answers about the interesting patterns that emerged in my analysis and realized that I would need to go back into other literatures, as I would be unlikely to find many resources in a body of work that has largely focused on the most marginal, this as I began analyzing my data was far removed from my sample.

### **Statement of Positionality**

Prior to the data collection, I acknowledged my own bias. Having spent my teenage years on the Island of Montreal, mostly in the West Island, I need to reflect on my own opinion of the city, the suburbs, law enforcement, and alternative spaces, though, of course. This also provides me with insider expertise on this particular geographical location. As a researcher, I acknowledge my own history with space, exclusion, and law enforcement. Having grown up in the West Island, in a middle class family, and attended John Abbott College, I have “lived” some of the aspects of middle class culture in the area. Furthermore, as a youth, I left home at 17 to gain

some independence and lived for a short-time in an off-campus apartment with other students. Though I remained open to all possibilities, these life experiences inspired the stories I wished to recount in my research. I originally aimed to tell my story and those of my peers who did not have a place in the urban. What is more, I wanted to look at those who are most vulnerable, those at the center of this issue, in an effort to demonstrate that young people are not welcomed in the city. As I dove deeper into the literature, I noticed gaps that steered me away from the most vulnerable, and into in-between categories, often forgotten. Additionally, I began my thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic, this set limitations and barriers on possible research; considering time limits, ethics, and government restrictions. Finally, I acknowledge that my presence, as the researcher, has a unique impact on the participants being observed because I am a 25-year-old, female, white, master's student. A different observer (male, non-student, etc.) could impact the students' conduct differently. Though I attempted to disrupt the observation as little as possible, I must acknowledge my own presence as a possible factor in influencing conduct and responses.

### **Recognized Limitations and Mitigation Strategies**

Prior to presenting my interview findings and my analysis of data, I acknowledge some limitations of this research, some of which I have touched on in earlier sections. First, the small sample size (12) limits the ability to sample for a wide variety of demographic variance. Moreover, the 12 participants did not display all the variations found in the population; this is reflected in my analysis and conclusion. Information provided in the demographic survey relating to their dwelling and their parents careers, combined with participants' discussions about finances leads me to believe that most of my sample is representative of the middle class. My

findings and analysis act as a primary exploration of this specific subpopulation and location. My analysis and conclusion reflect the fact that I did not capture the full range of students who attend this college and the full range of young people in the West Island. The important and unexpected occurrence during my class presentation is largely part of the ways in which my sample was altered. Students motivated to participate were likely those more involved in and motivated by their academic studies. The opportunity to obtain a larger and more diverse sample, including youth from more varied economic backgrounds, would have likely yielded different results.

This study used interview and thematic analysis of the data collection (audio transcriptions, and notes) from human participants; in some cases participants were under the age of 18. In conducting interviews with young people multiple ethical considerations must be acknowledged. First, qualitative research involves a power imbalance between the researcher and participants, even more so when conducting interviews with underage youth. Of the 18 interviews, the 12 selected did not have any participants under 18. Alternative use of space, policing, or illegal acts are sensitive topics. In a group setting where school or community peers may be present, participants may be uncomfortable expressing their experiences with their peers or could modify responses. Therefore, interviews were selected over group discussions to create a more comfortable environment. A limitation of my sampling strategy is that students might have thought that I, the researcher, would share personal information about the interviews with their professors. Students were informed that all feedback about the interview would be anonymized and that no identifying information would be shared with professors or classmates. Lastly, a list of student's names, who participated for grades, had to be shared with the professor who had offered this possibility. Students were made aware that their names would be shared to acknowledge their participation prior to the interview.

All possible measures were taken to empower respondents to share their ideas in their own words in a comfortable environment. Each person was asked if they would like to conduct the discussion with the door open or closed. The consent form<sup>13</sup> was discussed at the start of each interview. Each person was also given the option of choosing their own pseudonym. If they did not want to choose one, I informed them that I would be choosing a name at random.

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix D for Consent Form

## Chapter V: Findings

### Introduction

In this section, I will summarize the findings from each of the 12 interviews. Thinking about space, in the way that it is framed in this research, was likely to be unfamiliar to the participants. Therefore, the interview questions were carefully created and divided based on the three pillars of the spatial triad, hoping to elicit discussion that would be grounded in spatial practices. Though, these summaries also showcase how difficult it was in practice to drill into the spatial dimensions of the social practices. This required me to analyze these conversations to find threads between their accounts, my theoretical framework, and the literature. After completing the interview process, I transcribed and studied each of the conversations to identify re-emerging patterns in the findings. The findings presented below were selected both because of their recurrence within an interview or multiple interviews and the level of implied importance that participants demonstrated when speaking about them. These findings remain separate from the analysis in an effort to allow for the participants' voices to be heard, separately from the analysis in which I interpret and connect their responses to a Lefebvrian spatial analysis. Lastly, the final section of this chapter highlights some of the standout patterns and differences among the participants. The initial exploration of these findings revealed some of the similarities among this group, and the ways in which many of them described their middle class suburban lifestyles.

**Table 1: Demographics of Interview Participants**

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | West Island resident (Y/N) | Race/Culture           |
|-----------|--------|-----|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Sasha     | Female | 19  | Y                          | White (Eastern Europe) |

|         |        |    |   |                             |
|---------|--------|----|---|-----------------------------|
| Jackson | Male   | 18 | N | White                       |
| Nel     | Female | 19 | Y | White                       |
| Tiffany | Female | 18 | Y | European                    |
| John    | Male   | 19 | Y | Chinese Canadian            |
| Jade    | Female | 19 | Y | Middle Eastern              |
| Dalton  | Male   | 18 | N | White                       |
| Josie   | Female | 18 | N | Canadian                    |
| Emma    | Female | 18 | Y | French Canadian             |
| Nick    | Male   | 18 | Y | Canadian                    |
| Carla   | Female | 19 | Y | European and Middle Eastern |
| Khloe   | Female | 18 | Y | White                       |

### ***Sasha***

Over the course of the interview, Sasha emphasized the importance of a transitional period that had impacted the way she divided her time spent outside of school and work. Rather than choosing to hang out with friends often, she preferred to spend time alone or with her boyfriend (once a week). She made note of the value she gave to her own time and how it increased since the onset of COVID-19. This transitional period, which she referred to as a time in which she “cleaned out” her friend group, occurred during the pandemic, at a time in which she was transitioning from high school to cegep. As I asked her more questions about this, she cited a few possible reasons for this change. She mentioned that her remaining friends did not attend the same cegep as her and lived further into the city/outside of the West Island. She also described a conversation she had before the pandemic in which she was warned that her friend group would shrink once she entered cegep: the person had told her “only the real ones will stay”. Sasha

agreed that this was indeed what occurred and that her social circle had become significantly smaller.

Furthermore, she described having less of an interest in going out, drinking, and partying since the pandemic. She admitted having experienced FOMO (fear of missing out) when looking at Instagram. Nonetheless, she continued to value her own time over the desire to have plans with friends. In high school, she was more easily influenced by others to drink. She also explained how television shows (ex: euphoria) and books shaped her idea of teenage partying. She described staying in parks until 1 am to drink and wanting to have drunken stories to share with friends. Her behaviour had a negative impact on her grades. She found that the “teenage lifestyle” portrayed in the media was not beneficial to her. Therefore, she stopped smoking and drinking during the lockdown as she was limited to her family home.

Another theme of significance that Sasha brought up during our conversation was the lack of lively spaces in the suburbs. Sasha told me about her previous neighborhood, closer to downtown. She explained how there was more to see, more to do, and more people inhabiting the city. She enjoyed being within walking distance of shops, restaurants, convenience stores, and metro stations. She also enjoyed the bike path along the river. It was a place to walk, bike, and even a place for cultural activities like dance. On the contrary, she describes how the West Island does not have these characteristics. She gives the example of a park near her current home. Sasha described this park:

Il y a un petit terrain de jeux pour les enfants avec des balançoires. Most importantly, en été c'est un basketball court/tennis court et l'hiver il y a la patinoire mais le problème is that it's just dead. There is not a lot of people there. J'ai l'impression de visiter un parc qui est mort.

She explains how this is not a place worth visiting. She goes on to say how parks in the city are a place to hang out unlike the ones found in residential neighborhoods. She found green spaces in the city to be a “vibe”. The idea of spaces that are a “vibe” came up multiple times while talking about places that Sasha enjoys. She listed a unique pay-for-your-time café downtown, the Jean-Talon Market area, and busy downtown parks. However, she specified how she did not go downtown often because of the hassle of transportation. She preferred driving over public transportation, but explained that finding a parking spot and the risk of getting a ticket make it a stressful situation. As we continued to discuss hangout places in the West Island, Sasha said that she has not found many places that she would refer to as a “vibe” in the area. Prior to COVID-19, she had enjoyed going to a Starbucks inside of a bookstore but has since stopped going. She would also go to McDonald’s but avoided eating there too often. She noted that Fairview Mall was highly frequented by young people and families, but that she did not enjoy it. She found this place to be overcrowded. She also noted that Fairview and its surrounding area were cluttered.

She explained:

I kinda stuck to the idea of a café to have fun. Même là, je sais même pas y’a quoi comme café dans le West Island. Honestly, I am not gonna go to Fairview to have a cute little moment. C’est fucking sale. Y’a des familles qui vont partire là bas. Si non, fucking teenagers. I don’t know.

In general, Sasha could not list many places in the West Island that she found enjoyable, fun, or beautiful. After she explained how her old neighborhood was beautiful, I asked her if the West Island was beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. Sasha responded:

Y a pas vraiment quelque chose à voir. La seul fois que j’ai vue quelque chose qui était relativement beau c’est quand j’ai prit l’auto et je suis entraine de me promener sur Lakeshore (*road*). Oui, c’est beau de voir les maisons mais je vais pas m’asseoir là et regarder les maisons.

In conclusion, Sasha found that a suburban neighborhood was more of a place to settle down and to have a safe home. She found that it lacked the walkability and lively space to encounter or observe others in public spaces.

### *Jackson*

Jackson explained he used his time off and weekends to hang out with friends. He spent most of it with his smaller group of tight-knit friends (Approximately 3-5 people). They preferred to gather at each other's homes to play video games, play board games, drink, and smoke marijuana. He explained that one of his parents' houses (divorced) was the preferred location for the group as this parent is lenient. They also enjoyed going to bars and clubs, but they had been hanging out at each other's homes more often because some of his friends are "broke" at the moment. When the group did decide to go out drinking, they might try to organize something bigger with a group of about 20 to 25 people.

As a smaller group, Jackson also explained how they enjoyed gambling:

One thing we tend to do a lot is gamble. We tend to play a lot of dice stuff like this. Usually, the girls don't enjoy that too much and the girls will stay home. When the boys come over we'll do poker.

Most of his close friends (male) have girlfriends, but he noted how the girls did not participate in this activity. He went on to explain more about their gambling hobby:

Yeah so we will go to a casino every once in a while. Two of my friends have car troubles right now so there's sometimes no way to go to the casino. But yeah, we did go I'd say like two weeks ago or something like that and we'll definitely go every once in a while, we've been to Casino Montreal and then as well as the poker casino in Kahnawá:ke (*First Nations Reserve*). But, I'd say the majority of the time is at home just playing quick games of cards usually poker/dice um I think that's about it, and then every once in a while there's a slot machine at a bar or something, maybe we'll touch it but it's rare.

Other hobbies that this group enjoyed include going to a rock climbing gym in the West Island and various other sports. Jackson mentioned skateboarding (at the skate park), basketball, spike ball, etc. At times, a girlfriend or female co-worker might join him, but he leaned towards saying that his male friends were generally the ones participating in sport-related hanging out activities. Outside of his activities with friends, Jackson still made time for his girlfriend, noting how he had since stopped playing video games to spend time with her.

I mean I'd much rather hang out with her than play video games but I think I tend to see her quite a bit I would say three to four times a week definitely.

They lived close to each other and attended the same school. Therefore, they could easily see each other, even during the pandemic.

For Jackson, an important element of his ability to hang out was transportation. He had a few friends who lived within walking distance of his primary home. Nonetheless, he lived off Island. He explained that he and his friends' ability to drive provided them with freedom. He also explained how public transportation off Island was limited and expensive.

Lastly, Jackson noted that his friend group had changed since entering cegep. He had not been able to make a lot of new friends at John Abbott since he was a student during the pandemic (online classes). He also described that his "friend group shrunk so much" due to having lost contact with friends from high school during the pandemic and the transition to cegep. He reflected on the positive and negative aspects of this transition during the pandemic. On one side, he did not see his friends from the West Island (high school friends) as much anymore; on the positive side, he had been able to "cut off" people who he no longer wanted to be friends with.

## *Nel*

Nel had a preference for hanging out outside, especially by the water along the Lakeshore (road) and walks in the Pointe-Claire village. She also liked to hang out in cars. In the summer months, she used to spend a lot of time hanging out at the public pool, but she had since become a coach and lifeguard. The pool had become her workplace, rather than her hangout spot, but she recognized the social aspect of the job:

During the summer the appeal of lifeguarding, I am told, is that it's a party job so there's a really big social aspect. Thursday nights is usually when it happens because there's a gap where we don't have to wake up early in the mornings on Fridays so we get together as a staff and there's a party or an outing or something.

In the winter, she told me that she coached synchro at an indoor pool and found that there was less of a social aspect as most coaches were preoccupied with a second job or school. Though her summer job was seen as a “party job”, she did not drink alcohol. Because of this, she attended fewer staff events. She noted that enjoyed her coworkers and the idea of seeing them in a social setting but had a hard time convincing the group to do sober activities. She recognized that her choice to be sober impacts her hanging out:

It definitely sort of limits the sort of stuff within my age group that I'm able to do. A lot of times when there's a bigger group of people. People are getting drunk...or things like going out to clubs or bars is not so much my thing because the main attraction of that is being drunk which since I'm not doing it makes it definitely less appealing.

Rather than partying, she explained that she preferred to hang out with her close friends (approximately 3). They were able to hang out in cars or go for walks. For example, they would drive around wealthy neighborhoods to judge houses. Furthermore, she shared specific interests with some of her friends that helped create long-term bonds. They connected over television shows and crochet or writing and anime. She mentioned using Discord to go back and forth

sharing their writing. Aside from walks, this was another way to stay connected with a friend during COVID-19.

As mentioned, Nel confided that she enjoyed spending time outside and going for walks. She had noticed a rise in urban development in her area. A few open green and abandoned spaces had been turned into modern condo buildings, which she found to be aesthetically unappealing. She also noted that these constructions have removed her ability to access spaces that she had previously used. There was a private forest (that she explored) and a parking lot (where she had learned to ride a bike) that were never reinforced as being private, but had since become policed by private security.

### *Tiffany*

On the weekend, Tiffany told me that she enjoyed going to restaurants with friends. Afterward, they liked to go back to her house to bake or enjoy some snacks. Tiffany was not interested in going to parties to get drunk or smoke. She also gravitated to friends who did not participate in these types of activities as she felt it reflects their character.

The group, she noted, relied on one of the members of the friend group who was able to drive their parents' car. Otherwise, Tiffany would prefer to ask her parents for a ride rather than take public transportation. Having lived abroad, Tiffany noted how she disliked public transportation in Canada. She had not foreseen the need to get her license but has since found it necessary due to the lack of a metro system.

Tiffany and her friends, she shared, enjoyed going to Fairview mall for food/beverages and some shopping. She mentioned how she missed the variety of activities that could be found in malls in Asia. She particularly missed the Arcades. She also explained that she enjoyed Pointe-Claire Village for its slightly European feel. She was able to walk, eat food, and look at

nice gardens and houses. She confided that she kept her spending within the range of her allowance as she was unable to work due to her study permit.

Tiffany noted she had a small group of close friends from high school, but that she had also made a new group of friends at John Abbott. She attributed her ability to making new friends to the tight-knit nature of her program. Tiffany has always been dedicated to her studies. Her parents have been strict and have encouraged her to dedicate a large amount of her time to studying. School-related work was the only way she could have friends over when she was younger. Therefore, she shared that studying or leisurely reading were her only hobbies. Proven to be responsible, her parents have been more permissive since COVID-19. They recognized that it was important for her to socialize outside of school. She attributed their parenting style to the fact that they are immigrants from southeastern Europe.

Tiffany noted that she enjoyed spending time with her family. She also liked her bedroom but mentioned it was not very private. Regardless, she had been able to keep some details of her life private. She was not permitted to date but had formed a relationship. When she has wanted to meet up with him, she has taken pictures with a friend in advance to be able to send them to her parents when necessary.

### ***John***

John's friend group, he informed me, consisted of a mix of boys and girls from high school and cegep. He mentioned that the majority of his friends are Asian and that his private high school had between  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  Asian students. Since attending John Abbott, his friend group has started to diversify.

When hanging out with friends, he particularly liked to plan a game of volleyball or going to one friend's house who had welcoming parents. He also shared that he went on a walk with his friend every Sunday morning. Sometimes a few others would join, but the goal was to chat while also getting some physical activity. John said that he was the one in the group who would organize group activities. In terms of spending money on hanging out activities John said:

Usually, when we decide on social activities, I don't really think about the amount I'm going to spend because I think it's worth the price in any case like it doesn't matter the price like even restaurants like whether it is... I don't know just to buy shawarma, spice bros, or some cheap restaurants or like going to a moderately expensive restaurant for a different experience as long as it's with some people.

Also, he confided that the group did engage in some social drinking. John, however, was not interested in getting drunk. He might have a drink, but he preferred to keep tabs on his friends since they enjoyed getting drunk.

Lastly, John spoke about his gaming hobby. At times, he would bring his Nintendo switch to the school library to pass the time between breaks. He also shared that he spent time playing online with friends.

Interviewer:

Is gaming a big part of your life in general?

John:

yeah I'd say I spend an unhealthy...a big amount of time on video games.

Interviewer:

Okay so after school? on the weekends?

John:

I think it's the biggest social activity that I do with my friends since we don't see each other as often in person, well at least the other friends that are at other schools right now, and so we tend to play video games together during like every night.

They also, he explained, used Discord while gaming to communicate with each other. John said:

The game is just to give us something to do sometimes but like usually it's kind of like an unsaid agreement that we just go on this voice chat platform. It's called Discord, for gamers, and sometimes we just talk, sometimes we play Wordle, also crosswords, sometimes we just ask weird questions like philosophical or whatever, or sometimes we play video games.

They also used the platform to keep in touch. The platform was highly customizable, permitting them to divide the conversation by sub-topic. They, he said, had specific places to talk about med-prep for those in the group who are preparing for medical school. They also liked making their own memes to poke fun at each other.

### *Jade*

Jade was the only member of her friend group to have a car. She was the one that the group relied on for a ride. She did not mind the role as she enjoyed driving in the neighborhood. At times, she would ask her friends to pay for some of her food to compensate her for driving. Her group of friends did not regularly go out drinking. Therefore, they did not have to worry about finding a way home from parties very often. When asked what she and her friends liked to do, Jade said:

Jade:

We usually just go over to people's houses. We go and we get food, we usually go to McDonald's. but other than that there isn't really much to do to be honest.

Interviewer:

Do you ever feel bored or wish there were more things to do around?

Jade:

Yeah, the only other thing I can really think of is me and my friends, we like puzzles so we go to escape rooms but other than that like we don't really go anywhere.

When asked what hangout spots she would have liked to have in the West Island, she said:

I kind of wanted to bring this up because my manager wants to open up a little coffee shop like an Instagram-worthy coffee shop. I thought that that was a really good idea.

She was not the type to take pictures at these places for the purpose of posting them on Instagram, she shared, but still liked the idea. Otherwise, she liked to spend a lot of time in her

car. She enjoyed picking up her friends to get McDonald's or Starbucks and eating in a parking lot.

Jade also reported working about 20 hours a week while going to school. She enjoyed her work and her co-workers and had become friends with them. Since she worked in the mall, she no longer liked to go to Fairview for fun. She enjoyed juggling school and work and having money. She took fewer classes the semester of the interview, but she found that she did not have time for any additional hobbies. School and work were top priorities for her. As she said, “I like to sleep”, implying that there was not much room to add more to her plate.

Lastly, Jade mentioned how meeting up with friends had become more difficult since high school. They used to follow a similar schedule, but this was no longer the case. She began finding it harder to align her schedule with her friends now that they had enrolled in different programs and have work. She tried to have more of a fixed schedule at work so that she could plan events with friends ahead of time. Every once in a while, she liked to plan to do something special (ex: a concert, festival, etc.) with her friends. Therefore, she made sure that she and her friends asked for the day off in advance.

### ***Dalton***

Since the pandemic restrictions were lifted, Dalton regularly went downtown for dinner or more recently, concerts. He told me he lived off-Island and did not drive, but found that he was able to make plans to go downtown as long as there were fewer than 4 people in attendance. They would usually carpool to a metro station and take the metro from there. To Dalton, having more than a carload of people became “more trouble than it's worth”. At times, he confided, he felt guilty for

taking rides from friends, but he also took public transportation. Because he lived off-Island, the buses were not the same as the STM. Dalton explains:

EXO first off it's more expensive but that's whatever, but where it always gets you is the last bus generally, on weekdays, is the latest 10 p.m. so that's usually a big factor if I'm gonna try to go out during a weekday. Whether it be because I have the day off or just because I'm going after class. I'll never really be out past 10 or else I'm kind of screwed for getting home.

Despite some of these complications, he was happy to not have to pay car expenses and worry about gas prices.

Life had gotten busier since COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, working in the kitchen of a restaurant, he was working more than he would like. He also found that his hours affected the rest of his day. Working at a pub, he had a lot of night shifts or mid-day shifts. He either worked early enough that he could not go out for brunch or worked late enough that he could not go out on Friday and Saturday. Dalton went on to explain how he did not hang out at work or create friendships beyond work relations. Dalton elaborated:

I pretty much avoid everyone from my work and I have other friends that work in similar situations working in pubs working whatever and I know they'll stay after work a lot to drink or hang around. It rubs me the wrong way that sort of the main place you drink would be the main place you work. It seems like a dangerous connection to me.

He explained how he liked to keep a degree of separation in the different aspects of his life such as work, school, family, and friends. Furthermore, he explained how drinking made him nervous due to personal reasons. He aimed to keep drinking down to once or twice a week maximum. He tried to plan something to do at least once a week that was not related to partying or drinking, such as hanging out at Starbucks or seeing his girlfriend. At times, he confessed getting roped into going out by his friends.

Dalton liked to feel quite productive. He did not like to feel stagnant for too long and would go for a bike ride if he had been home all day. He also liked to show up to school a few

hours early to chat with friends. If Dalton was alone, he liked to play video games or work on his music. He also used Discord to communicate with friends online. Dalton had joined a club at John Abbott. He had been invited to join the club by a friend in gym class. He was not particularly interested in the subject of the club but liked the idea of having a reserved space on campus to hang out. He hosted the Discord server for the group.

Lastly, Dalton mentioned a few unique or unusual places that his friends use to hang out. They had been to an abandoned factory off highway 20 but he mentioned how unsafe it was in hindsight. He and his friends also had a spot on a roof near campus where they had set up furniture. At times, public security had also told them to leave parks or skate parks past closing time, but this never resulted in anything but a warning in his case. In general, this never deterred him from these places, though he most often found himself to be in places he should be in rather than those where he should not be in.

### ***Josie***

Josie confided she usually looked forward to the weekend for going out, seeing friends, and clubbing. She did not do much with friends during the week (within the school year), so she made time for it on the weekends even if she had to wake up early in the morning for work. She explained how she had two jobs, one of which required her to start at 8 am on Sunday. She did not let this stop her from going out on Saturday and said she would rather still go out and get only the 2 hours of sleep. When they went clubbing downtown, she and her friends tried to find a designated driver but would opt for Uber if they could not find a sober volunteer. Josie said that she hated not having her license. She lived off-Island and said that she had to walk to a bus and

pay about \$6. Therefore, she would usually rely on her dad to drive her to school and her friends (who worked with her) to drive her to work.

Josie went to high school in the West Island and had to wait later for her father to pick her up after school since she lived further away. The school would usually kick her out after school hours as they did not want students loitering on school grounds. She started going to a public library. It is there where she eventually made some friends from another high school. These friends got her a job where they worked. They have been working together ever since.

Josie also elaborated on some hangout places that she frequented. In the winter, she mainly went to friends' houses because she did not want to be outside and said that there were not any other indoor spaces to chill than a home. In the summer, she liked to play basketball at the park near her house, watching the sunset and chilling out. She and her friends also liked to go fishing at a secret beach under a bridge. When asked about the policing of parks or the hidden fishing spot, she said:

I guess it depends, like under the bridges it's not so bad just because I guess they don't patrol there as often. But, yeah we talked a few times as people came and they're like you can't be fishing here or like well no actually you can fish there as long as you have your license. They'll just be like: you have your fishing license? or whatever. These days I don't really care. For parks it's like more after hours you can't be there so yeah they'll... we call them the pubes..so public security would come and yeah they would kick us out or whatever.

She explained how they gave out warnings rather than tickets. She remained respectful, not giving them a reason to escalate the situation.

Lastly, Josie outlined some of the differences in hanging out with her male versus female friends. With her male best friend and the other guys, she said she might play basketball, have a fire in the backyard (off-island), play drinking games, and sesh (smoking weed). She also watched movies in the car with him. With her female best friend, she found that they could do so

much as she was really open and willing. They painted, went downtown or for drives, and much more. Josie spoke to how she generally got along with more guys than girls:

Honestly, I get along better with most guys than I do girls. [...] I have fun with the things they do so I'm like oh he's down like yeah, of course, let's go do that. Maybe in like other guy friend groups that I've had in the past, it was more like because I'm a girl I'd be excluded. I guess more like they'd be like oh I want to hang out with the boys or whatever like I've got a less important factor in the group. Now it's not like that like yeah its fine you know in the guy friend group I have now.

She went on to explain how she had a lot of female acquaintances in high school, but that she was less interested in their topics of conversation.

[...] it's either drama or what he/she said or you know "my god did you see Becky with like you know"... yeah it wasn't necessarily the things I was interested in. I would obviously do it like I had a bunch of girlfriends whatever and it was fun to hang out with them every once in a while but they couldn't ever be like my core friends because I just had no interest. Guys actually talk about, you know, different things and I just found their conversations and what they did more interesting than girls.

Though she found herself having a larger group of male friends versus female friends, she still had some strong female friendships.

### ***Emma***

In the winter, Emma, told me, she liked to go to the rink by her house to skate or watch her brother play hockey. She knew the workers there and liked to chat with them. In the summer, she spent her free time at the pool near her house. She also had a summer job as a lifeguard at this pool. She was looking forward to the summer as the friends she grew up with would be joining the team. Before she had become an employee at the pool, she would still spend every day there and wouldn't come home until it closed. She also made long-lasting friendships. Emma also shared that she coached figure skating and had another group of friends from skating. She also

had another group of friends from school. She was quite busy with her coaching sessions but did not complain as she enjoyed it. She explained:

Emma

Like, I don't like people, like people are just gross to me. But, I'm like: these kinds of people I can deal with.

Interviewer:

Okay. Tell me more about that. Why do you feel that way? What is it about other people that is less appealing than these people that you enjoy? Tell me more about that.

Emma

Okay. Cuz like obviously I went to a public high school. Like these idiots that you go with, I don't wanna be rude [...] Because they act like complete idiots and you're like, it's not just like they're doing it for the attention, but it's like you also know it's like somewhat a part of 'em.

I continued by asking her follow-up questions about the types of people she preferred to be surrounded by. She explained how she avoided loud people. She was drawn to smaller groups of quiet people who focused on their education and made time for other things as well. When she was hanging out with friends outside of her regular activities, they might go for a walk or get something to eat. They also took random pictures on Snapchat during awkward moments while chilling together. These ended up being posted on their Instagram stories. Emma did not enjoy shopping at Fairview. She preferred to only go shopping when she needed to. She was not a big spender and did not suggest places to go that were overly expensive.

Lastly, Emma also explained how she used to walk or bike to the pool or rink. Some of the street lights had stopped working and a few cat-calling incidents had made her feel unsafe. At the time of the interview, she could drive and no longer walked to the pool or rink. In general, she explained, she needed to coordinate with her parents and siblings to get the car, otherwise, someone would have to drop her off wherever she was going.

## *Nick*

Nick told me that he liked going to house parties. The previous weekend there had been a party hosted at a friend's parents' office building with about 200 people in attendance. When attending house parties, he had seen parents call the cops on their child's party when they were out of town. Otherwise, the cops would come around for noise complaints at times. He did not want to host events at his house because of the trouble. He did not go to bars often. He had tried clubs, he confided, but did not enjoy them:

I thought it was gross. In all honesty, it's fun, but like, it's expensive and it's gross. I don't like the environment.

His preference was for the house party environment because he would know the people in attendance. He also explained how people might be drinking, smoking, doing drugs, or playing drinking games, but that there was no dancing. Furthermore, Nick went on to say that he started drinking at the age of 15, but that there were not as many house parties then. He did not really seek out places to drink. Rather, he would drink at a house party when these were held. He also explained how his friend group started smoking weed quite young. He waited until the summer of Secondary 5 (around 16-17). At the time of the interview, he, confided that he smoked every couple of weeks while some of his friends smoked daily. Lastly, Nick claimed that he had all the freedom that he needed and that his parents were not strict. They were involved in his school life and wanted to make sure he was succeeding but remained “very chill” when it came to his going out habits.

Nick and his friends, he told me, all played sports on various teams. Therefore, they were likely to play sports together when hanging out. He played for a basketball league but liked to play a variety of sports when meeting up with friends. Nick noted that he had male and female

friends, but that when “the boys” were hanging out, there was a preference for there to be no female friends or female significant others in attendance. He agreed that he and his friends would not bring a girlfriend to a big chilling with the boys and that it was preferred that those things be kept separate. He felt that the topics of conversation would change based on who was in attendance.

He also added that winter was boring and that there was not much to do if you did not have a girlfriend. He was currently single, but explained that he would not use a dating app as it was “cringe”. He would rather it happened naturally and found it odd to use dating apps at a young age. He had met his last partner at work and found that this was better than to start something on social media.

Lastly, Nick shared that he had made a lot of new friends at John Abbott College. He explained how he did not make friends in his classes or within the science program, rather it was in the “community”. He went on to explain how he did not even need to text a group chat, there would always be a group of friends gambling in the cafeteria, which the school had since had to ban. He had stopped going to the cafeteria because of the ban. Nick also played other gambling games with friends. He explained how blackjack and poker became popular in the summertime. He and his friends had only been to the casino a few times since they lost money. His hangout spot of choice as at a friend's house.

### *Carla*

Carla explained that most of her money was spent first on food and second on clothes. She went on to explain how money played a role in her hanging out decisions:

Let's say we'll go out like a few times in a row and spending money. At some point we'll just say like, okay, like we've been spending a lot, let's just go to one of each other's

houses and then not spend. Um, and also like going out with his friends for example, if we go bowling or whatever and then we go eat and then there's something else we wanna do after, we're gonna try to, let's say we would play like basketball outside cuz you don't spend money to do that.

Furthermore, she worked once a week, every Saturday. She had made a lot of friends at work and even met her boyfriend there. She explained how because of this, she did not dread going to work.

In terms of hobbies, Carla shared that she used to play flag football but stopped because of COVID-19. She explained:

I kind of lost a bit of interest. Since Covid, we all just like got lazy, I guess. I can speak for myself. And I just preferred to work out at home instead. So, I've just gone more into that and I just felt like okay, flag football, it was a good part of my life, but it's like over.

If she was home alone and feeling motivated, she might work out. Otherwise, she enjoyed watching movies, watching TikToks, and going on Instagram.

Carla had a preference for hanging out downtown, particularly around Saint Catherine's street. For her, it was everything that you might need in terms of shopping and restaurants. In the West Island, she enjoyed going to Fairview for food and shopping. Carla said that all she really did with her leisure time was shop and eat. She liked to try some new food every time she was downtown. Therefore, she intimated that she would like to see more variety of food in Fairview. For example, she said that there was a new Boustan in the mall, but that there were already many locations in the West Island. She was impressed by the food options available at Carrefour Laval. She also insisted that Fairview should continue to make an effort to have outdoor seating space. Carla also liked the Pointe-Claire Village to walk and get ice cream. Carla equally noted how she did not drink much, but her friends did, so she would normally takes on the role of the mom of the group. For her, a night out would consist of going bowling in the West Island and then going to eat downtown. Lastly, she explained how she had found her own ways of having fun as

someone who did not really drink, but that she normally thought of clubbing, partying, and drinking to typically be associated with what young adults do for fun.

### ***Khloe***

With six classes and 18 to 20 hours of work per week, Khloe confided that she did not have much time for other things. If she worked mornings, she would use the afternoon to do her homework. Therefore, she did not go out to do much else. She also explained her relationship to work:

First, I like working. So that's a thing. But also, it's like I wanna save for later like university and all that. And as of now, I'm not a hundred percent sure what I wanna do. I'm kind of afraid that I won't have enough money or like, I don't really know what to do, like in the future.

Khloe went on to say how saving money made her feel more comfortable about the uncertainty of the future. She added that she did not spend a lot of money on clothes and would rather spend her money on an outing if she had a good paycheck for a week. She might go to a restaurant or to the movies with a friend or two. She specified how she had three real friends. She had other acquaintances and people to speak to during class but kept her circle small. She experienced some low self-esteem and felt that her best friends did not judge her. She said:

They know about it and that's why I feel safe with them. Rather than with someone new. Cause I know they'll always be there for me and I could just talk to them and go out with them. I feel like more, um, I feel myself when I'm with them, but not with other people. I feel like I have to be someone else, better than myself.

Since college, Khloe had found that there had been a lot of new things in her life and a loss of balance. Therefore, she was on a journey to find out more about who she was. She felt that cegep and her professors were quite different from high schools. She also felt that cegep was different because “it [was] your future” which could be a lot of pressure.

In her free time, Khloe also enjoyed being with her family. She cooked with her mother, went on family walks, and took her brothers to the library. Khloe enjoyed playing piano when she was alone but would like to try a team sport. I asked her if she had ever played team sports or tried joining a team at John Abbott. She went on to explain that she had not played sports in high school and that college sports had tryouts. Therefore, others would know how to play and have experience. She felt she wouldn't make the team. We spoke about clubs and how this could be something interesting for her to think about. Lastly, we discussed workout activities in her community, but she worried about the costs.

Finally, I asked Khloe about the activities that she thought other people her age did. She suggested bars and museums. She explained how she did not go out drinking because her friends did not drink. Therefore, she had never really had the opportunity of frequenting bars. If she was going to have a couple of drinks, it would be in a restaurant. Lastly, she mentioned that some activities like museums and concerts required you to go downtown, but that she did not have any issues with taking public transportation.

### **Patterns and Differences**

Certain findings have been highlighted due to their recurrence in multiple interviews. This sample of students did not diverge from many social norms. Most of them place importance on school, work, and normative steps that they are expected to follow after cegep, such as going to university and moving out afterwards. In the same sense, few of them described a strong dislike for the normative, the suburbs, society, or policing. Few of the participants described alternative hangout places or a desire for better places in the suburbs. Rather, they acknowledged the nature of the suburbs as a place for working (middle class) families to settle and buy a home. Although, most agreed that there were not many places of interest for young people in the West Island, they

did not seem to push against normative consumption practices (buying food, shopping, drinking alcohol).

Many participants also shared similar thoughts about transportation and the importance of a car as a symbol of freedom and a “place” to hang out. Participants who had cars described the vehicle as a place of their own, where they could hang out with friends and go for leisure drives. Having a car or a friend with access to a car was also important for hanging out, drinking, or getting to school/work. For those who relied on public transportation, having a friend, sibling, or parent who could drive them made hanging out and other daily activities easier.

Participants also shared experiences related to drinking and partying. Most mentioned how it was a primary hanging-out activity for most young people, even though others shared the experience of not drinking at all or drinking very little. Other activities mentioned by multiple participants included getting food/drinks (at restaurants, fast food, at home, and in cars), going for drives (especially to look at luxury houses), going for walks (especially in Pointe-Claire Village), shopping, sports, and gambling.

Another pattern was the students' comments of gender norms<sup>14</sup>. Multiple participants discussed some gender-based elements of friendship and dating. For one, there were multiple mentions of hanging out activities that took place between boys. At times, it was presented as

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14 It is worth mentioning that I made other interesting observations about the ways that some of the participants interacted with gender. I would like to acknowledge some of these here, though I am unable to dedicate a section of my paper to the intricacies of these gendered questions. I did not anticipate for participants to mention some of the following things, therefore my questionnaire did not include enough questions to explore this fully with all participants. Furthermore, much of these observations are beyond the scope of my analysis and should be explored in future research. Firstly, I noticed some gender differences in preferences for certain hanging out activities, though this went beyond my studies focus on the spatial world and would be best suited for a study on leisure. Secondly, the subject of female/female or male/male friendship emerged. Multiple female participants described some gender preferences. Some male participants preferred for girls or girlfriends to not be present during male bonding time. While one female participant described having a preference for hanging out with boys, stating that they often got along better with boys and that girls are too much 'drama'. This did not necessarily exclude them from having female friends, but those who mentioned this seemed to be more selective of their female friendships. Studies focused on exploring the influences of gender norms on friendship could explore this further since I had not explored this topic with other participants.

arising from the belief that the girls would not be interested in their activities, on other occasions this was the result of the separation between friendships and girlfriends.

As we discussed friendships and social groups, multiple participants cited having a small or tight-knit group of friends or a smaller set of friends than they had previously had. Some mentioned that the shrinking of social circles may have been caused by the transition from high school to cegep or that COVID-19 and its restrictions may have had an impact. Some participants felt that they had gotten rid of some friends who were not “real” or who they simply did not want to continue to see.

## **Chapter VI: Analysis**

### **Thematic Analysis**

Having listened to the audio recordings and transcribed the interviews, I began the thematic analysis by creating codes for the most common themes and ideas that had emerged, such as friends, place (meaning public space of significance to them), transportation, policing, suburbs, and more. I began by using these codes and added new codes as some less obvious themes emerged (i.e. aesthetics, transitional period, gambling, alone time, etc.). I did not categorize my codes in a way that directly related to my theoretical framework, as it would be my analysis of these codes that would help organize the ideas in this way. Instead, it was the participants who helped guide me in the choice of codes based on frequency and emphasis. This is one of the reasons why listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts multiple times was helpful in this process. Another useful step in the thematic analysis was running queries to observe the number of coding references and percentage covered for each case. This allowed me to make note of the certain themes that may have been more significant for some participants versus others. After the coding process, I was able to organize my findings and develop my analysis. The themes explored in this analysis are shaped by points that I wanted to come back to and acknowledge from the literature and my research questions, as well as new emerging themes from the coding process, as summarized in the findings.

### **Legitimate and Illegitimate Space in the Suburbs**

The literature on young people in the city recognizes that youth seem out of place in an environment that has not been conceived for them. In some ways this is true of my respondents; they have little legitimate choice when searching for a place to hang out in the suburbs. Parks close early and are patrolled by public security, the shopping center is repetitive and

overcrowded, and many places of consumption (restaurants, entertainment spaces, bars) are too expensive to frequent regularly. There are also very few illegitimate spaces to scout out. The downtown city center may have more to offer in terms of abandoned buildings and alternative spaces, while the suburbs off-island may have more unused and unchecked green spaces. This sample of participants revealed that privatized space, the home, is the most viable option for everyday hanging out. I will elaborate on this by illustrating the lack of alternative spaces at their disposal, the lack of abstract green spaces, and the middle-class comforts of suburban dwellings.

### *Alternative Spaces*

The majority of alternative spaces mentioned by participants were not in the West Island. Dalton mentioned an abandoned building he visited two or three times off highway 20 located in a suburb of Montreal (not in the West Island). Another participant mentioned the second floor of a convenience store that her friend works at in Chinatown. The owner allowed this friend group to hang out and eat in the space because it was uninhabited and was being used as storage for the establishment. They explained:

She [the owner] has a couple of sofas and a couple of cushions and we just kind of eat there because there is nowhere to sit in Chinatown.

Though the space is technically private, I categorize it as an alternative space because it is being used differently than for its prescribed use (storage or private residence). The ability to use this space was also an ingenious use of social capital in this group. Due to their connection, they were able to use this space for an alternative purpose to meet their needs (a place to eat) in an area of the downtown core that was not otherwise available. For the participants who lived off-island, it was outdoor spaces they mentioned when referring to alternative hangout places. Josie mentioned the secret beach under a bridge where she could go fishing (without a license) with

friends. Moreover, Nel lives in the West Island, but her best friend lives off-island. She mentioned hanging outside in a field:

We both kind of like being outside. She has a dog so sometimes we'll bring her and go for a walk there [the field].

Nel preferred to be outside when possible. Jackson, another off-island resident, mentioned an abandoned tree house that was discovered in the forest behind one of his friend's houses. In high school, they would regularly go walking out there to go hang out. He added that they no longer frequented this place.

One of the only alternative places in the West Island was mentioned by Dalton who said that he and his friends had a secret spot on a roof near campus where they had set up furniture. Nel mentioned some places that no longer existed. One was a forest behind her house, it was privately owned, but non-trespassing was not enforced. Her family would take walks to observe wildlife. The forest had since been cut down to make room for “hideous modern condo buildings”. Nel declared: “There’s just like a whole neighborhood in my backyard that wasn't there five years ago”. Nel also mentioned an abandoned office building that had since been turned into townhomes. She said that she was more understanding of the change because it was an abandoned place, rather than a green space. Nonetheless, she shared the following insights:

It used to have this enormous parking lot and it was where my brother and I learned how to ride our bikes because it was just this big open space right down the street from us with different levels and things like that so you could learn how to ride a bike but their now condos so it's interesting because they weren't technically public spaces but they were so unenforced in being private spaces that it was somewhere where you could go and spend time. I know this is a youth/young adult thing [referring to the study] but I think kids are running out of spaces that aren't strictly for kids but that they can still spend time in. They have the park in the place that used to be the forest which is clearly designed and destined for kids but there aren't trees or creeks or anything that you can kind of learn.

Her account, combined with the lack of mention of alternative spaces located in the West Island by other participants, points to the conceived and perceived nature of suburban city planning.

Suburban planning is highly prescriptive. The perceived nature of the suburbs is not really contested: a place for nuclear families, single-family homes, legitimate recreational activities and sports, sidewalks, restaurants, shopping centers and strips, and big box stores, all within reasonable distance to commute to work. Conceived and perceived in rigid ways, there is little room for the in-between. Places must be conceived within the perceived confines of private space or public space managed by the city. Privately owned homes are reserved for the inhabitants and their guests. Privately owned businesses are open to paying customers. Privately owned, but unused or abandoned spaces, could be a place where some try to carve out in-between spaces (i.e. abandoned buildings or unused lots), but the conceived nature of the suburbs leaves little room for such places to exist. As mentioned by Nel, these places have been overtaken by expansion for private dwellings. Public places managed by the city (parks, recreational facilities, walking paths, and other green spaces) are to be used by community members within their prescribed limits (i.e. for their intended use, during open hours). Due to the limitations of these public spaces, public security must act as a reminder of these terms and conditions.

### ***Public Security***

The West Island may have little to offer in terms of unintended, abandoned, or secret places as a result of the presence of public security. Most participants mentioned their awareness of public security in public places. They were aware that they patrolled neighborhoods, checked parked cars in parks after hours, and told people to leave outdoor spaces after closing hours. The participants did not suggest that they felt worried about the possible consequence of receiving tickets from public security. Multiple participants mentioned that warnings were given out rather

than tickets. Yet, their presence was clearly felt by most who enjoyed outdoor spaces. Nel mentioned:

There have been a few times when it got late and we noticed a public security car going around and decided to leave just before it became an issue. A few parks have closing times, which on the one hand I kind of understand why. I have been in parks when people are setting garbage cans on fire or setting off fireworks. I can understand the want to avoid that but sometimes you just kind of want to be outside at 11 o'clock and you aren't committing a crime.

She went on to further develop her thoughts on the differences she noticed related to green spaces and public security outside of the West Island:

Nel: Up nearby Saint-Lazard and Hudson [off-island], because it's less developed and it's in this weird like half zone between suburb and country, you have a lot more free green space just because things are actually more spaced out and there's not as much enforcement in where you're allowed to go. I think once you get further out there's less policing and there's more space to roam free. Down by the water, it's still a little bit policed once it gets too late at night. There are definitely public security people going around, particularly looking at parked cars because I know that it's kind of like the hookup spot for a lot of people.

Interviewer:

Do you feel like that changes what you end up doing or where you end up going? The fact that you know that certain places are more policed or that there may be more public security.

Nel:

Not really, just because even the places that are more policed are still more welcoming places to exist in than the less green areas. Lesser areas are generally more either residential or like office buildings and that's not really an appealing place to just kind of spend time, so even though you're more likely to run into public security at a park or by the water it's actually a nice place to be so it's more worth it to for me at least because I can be fairly confident that I'm not going to be arrested for existing in public. It's more worth it to have the: "I'm just walking this area is open" conversation than to spend time near an apartment complex.

There is still a presence of public security off-island, but the greater availability of green spaces makes encounters with public security less frequent. Josie also shared insight into how public security encouraged the removal of occupants in the West Island parks after hours. At times, interactions had been nice and polite. On other occasions, flashlights were pointed in their eyes, while threats of tickets were made. Yet, Josie said that the "*pubes*", as she called them, had never

actually given out a ticket to her or her friends. Overall, it seemed that their presence was known and understood to be aimed at correcting undesirable behaviours in public spaces, rather than punishment. Nonetheless, their presence was felt and understood.

The development of the suburbs to accommodate a need to house a growing population looking for single-family home removes the likely possibility of the survival of abandoned or unused spaces. Lastly, the purpose and design of the suburbs are understood to have been designed for a particular population (middle-class working families). With this particular population in mind, the suburbs have been conceived to meet their needs and reflect middle-class values and lifestyle. Due to the highly prescriptive nature of the environment, young adults are in a position to either adopt these values and lifestyle or resist them.

### **Dreaming of Capitalism and Privatized Space**

As discussed in the literature review, much of what has been studied in this domain has focused on marginalized youth in city centers. This study differs in both aspects; it is focused on those who live, hang out, and/or attend cegep in the West Island suburbs of Montreal. The participants did not describe feeling marginalized in the ways described in the literature. My sample, a young educated middle class, would not be “highly visible” in shared public spaces. On the contrary, they are highly invisible. The only time they are acknowledged is when public security corrects their undesirable behaviours (being visible in parks after hours). Otherwise, there are not many places for a group of youth to be noticed and encountered in the suburbs. How could this be? To start, these middle class youth are unlikely to exhibit many visual cues of marginality, which would be undesirable in the context of the spectacle of consumption. Therefore, they are less likely to encounter more frequent and brutal forms of forced removal. Their removal is not

necessary: they are not visibly marginal and do not inhabit many public spaces. Moreover, they do not resist or attempt to shape the city to accommodate their needs. As Jackson said: “I don’t know if teenagers and young adults don’t care enough to want to even change it or want to even have a say in it [...]”. Resisting the limitations of the urban environment may not be something that the young people in this sample actively think about. Below I discuss how they engage in some forms of resistance, in ways that they might not realize. Moreover, the participants did not exhibit or share feelings of being marginal, “othered”, or on the “outs” of society; this correlated with the absence of resistance as a theme of importance in the interviews. Most participants had not previously given much thought to the ways that the built environment may have been affecting them or other young people. When asked more direct questions about conceived space they often took their time to think of an answer, said that they could not think of anything, or stated that they had never given it much thought. It would be difficult to imagine these participants engaging in many acts of resistance if they had not given much thought to what may be oppressing or influencing them or their peers. Lefebvre argues the impossibility of resisting capitalism without understanding and reimagining the city (1996). The consumption and commodification of the city and all space within it is the basis of the capitalist city. It appears that as young members of the middle-class, resistance against the mode of production and the commodification of the city is not necessary for survival, freedom, or mobility in the same way that it may have been for more vulnerable street involved youth mentioned in the literature. The young middle class likely see themselves as being part of this system rather than on the “outside” of it. Therefore, they lack the motivation to resist capitalism and the motivation to reimagine the city.

This sample is highly influenced by the boundaries of conceived and perceived space. They are aware of the goals of suburban living and why it is constructed in this way. They understand the behaviour that is expected in suburban public spaces and are unlikely to resist these boundaries as demonstrated in the above mentioned comments on public security. Moreover, it is their perception of the suburbs as constructed for a specific purpose and demographic that helps to set boundaries. Sasha described moving from the city to the suburbs:

Sa ce sens que c'est un quartier résidentiel. C'est ça que m'est parents voulais. Je comprend et je respect. Avant [referring to where she was living before], il y avait plein de gens d'ici et de là. Ont était dans un triplex, donc il y avait toujours des gens aux déçu de nous, à côté de nous donc sa fait du bruit.

She later goes on to say that the infrastructure in the West Island caters to those who are 35+ who want to settle down or have children. She elaborates:

You have retirement homes et des petits spots. C'est plus residential donc tu viens ici pour vivre pas vraiment pour visiter. Si non, genre, les enfants ont l'école et des petits parc ici et là. Moi, je me sans pas vraiment interpeler.

When asked if she would like to move, she enthusiastically said yes, but that she would like to finish her university studies before finding a job and moving closer to the downtown core where she was more likely to find it a “vibe,” with more people and beautiful with its iconic duplexes and triplexes with colorful spiral staircases. Overall, she found the city to have more character and a vibrant community. A few of the participants, like Jackson, mentioned wanting to wait until the end of their studies to move out of their family home, while still dreaming of owning something themselves in the future:

I am comfortable where I'm at because being in university and managing a job where I have enough money to be able to pay for rent, even with a large amount of roommates, would be a lot of work and I think it would kill a lot of my social life. I'm lucky that my parents are like ‘as long as you're in school then you can live here rent free’ so my plan is to go to university but then stay at home so I don't have to pay rent and I can just save up money so then once I graduate university and get a real job, then I can immediately go into getting a condo or getting a house [...]

It appears that the participants aim to follow a normative path to secure their place as middle class adults. They are all currently enrolled in a higher education institution (cegep) with the intention of attending university afterwards. Most also hold part time jobs to allow them to either enjoy hanging out or to save for the future. Gorman (1998) points to the belief that obtaining a college education is a primary factor in transcending or securing a high wage position. For some, the desire to obtain a higher education may be motivated by their parents' values. Others have already adopted the values and may hope to achieve the 'Suburban dream' of owning a single family home, cars, and the financial capacity to enjoy leisure and vacation.

I would suggest that the participants are maintaining the structures that enable the reproduction of capitalism. How? By following normative middle-class ideals and by demonstrating a lack of resistance. Why? For one, they may have internalized the possible risk of downward mobility or what Barbara Ehrenreich (1989) has coined 'the fear of falling'. Khloe shared feelings that could be linked to this idea. She explained that she was saving money for university because she was uncertain about the future and what she wanted to do. She feared not having enough money and explained how having more money would make her feel more comfortable. Other participants did not overtly seem anxious about their financial futures, but described wanting to stay home, like John, to avoid spending money on rent, electricity, and food. This is less of an anxious view on money, but more of a strategy to secure one's financial future.

All the more, the ideas of Lefebvre lend themselves to the study of these young middle class actors and their lack of resistance. Henri Lefebvre (1973/1976) wrote about the duality of the middle class. He suggested that the middle class maintained capitalist power structures and relations of production by believing that they were not bound to them. The duality lay in the way

that individuals might criticize and reject the system to some degree, while also serving and benefiting from it. “They live a double life: rich and poor, here and somewhere else, part of “the system” but supplied with alibis, engaged in thankless duties with an enjoyment that is half real and half tissue with illusions” (Lefebvre, 1973/1976, p.25). This idea can be used to understand the duality of participants' accounts of finances. They may benefit from some of the privileges of their conditions (i.e. having a car, attending cegep, having no job or a part time job, having little financial responsibilities, feeling that their home or their bedroom is a space of their own), while critiquing some of the pitfalls of capitalism that are less beneficial to them. When asked about the influence of finances on hanging out, most participants described feeling that hanging out places, leisure, and entertainment were places of consumption. Some felt that activities were directly related to consumption, but preferred not to place too many limitations on themselves.

When I asked Josie about the role that finances played in her hanging out choices, she explained:

um a lot because I don't know... there's not a lot of activities that don't cost money unless you're just going outside and like walking or looking at stuff but you know a lot of people they want to like go downtown and like go shopping or I don't know literally anything like if you want to not watch a movie in your house and go to movies, that costs money so I guess it depends like how much money I have in the bank. I mean yes and no, I guess it plays a role but most of the time we just do it anyway.

Another participant, Jade, described how school, work, and hanging out on the weekends left her with little time to engage in consumption: “I'm happy like I like my money, but I would like to go out and be able to spend that money.” John felt that spending money on social activities, particularly food, was worth it as long as it was with people. He was not too concerned with his spending because he had a job and his parents covered his needs. Others felt that spending money to socialize or leave the home often was unsustainable for their wallet. Therefore, having to make choices and place limitations on their spending. Tiffany commented on the matter:

Generally we try to limit how many times we go out to an expensive restaurant so we're trying to stick to the more chain restaurants but even then it's kind of cheaper to just go to Costco and buy like a ton of stuff and bring it back home and like cook together. So when we do go out, it's mostly like a treat. So yeah when we stay at my place, it's just more casual.

Tiffany has an allowance and has to stay within those financial boundaries. In Khloe's case, she explains how her spending is dependent on her paycheck. A "good pay" would allow her to go do something, while she might decide to save on a week with a smaller paycheck. Multiple participants described making choices to eat at more casual/fast food restaurants, splitting Ubers to go out downtown, or limiting the number of times that they went out to do something. For example, Sasha eats at McDonald's because it was what she could afford to do more often, but she still limited this because she is saving for a vacation. Many of the participants shared similar experiences. In a sense, they wanted to enjoy the fruits of their labor, in the cycle of consumption, but also felt limited to some degree by their purchasing power. They found ways to work around it. The inability to engage in constant and unwavering consumption was not followed by revolt. In most cases, they did not engage with other possibilities or the imagination of space beyond consumption. Rather, they conformed and reproduced these relations of production by working, saving, and aiming for higher education in the hopes of having more financial resources in the future.

The group shows signs of having acquired middle class values and opt, in most cases, to follow its normative constraints. If there are no conceived spaces to do the type of hanging out that they are looking for, they will opt for the place that is perceived as the key to the suburban dream: the private single family home. Multiple participants cited the home as a primary hanging out spot, often allowing for less constant consumption and greater freedom to choose

what behaviours were appropriate. Jackson and his friends hangout out at his mom's house a lot because she was quite lenient. Jackson explains:

Usually in my off time on the weekend if I'm hanging out with friends we tend to hang out at each other's houses. We don't tend to go out too much. Otherwise, we do go to bars, we do go to clubs for sure. Especially now that we're of age, but I got some friends who are really broke right now so most of the time we just hang out at each other's houses and we'll play video games, play board games, drink, smoke whatever you know.

When hanging out with friends they often opted for privatized space, their family homes and backyards, in which they could comfortably host groups of friends, this not always being the case for those of lower income status living in smaller dwellings. The participants' comfortable living situations may continue to solidify, for them, that their attainment of freedom in the urban will be tied to the purchase of privatized space.

### ***Neighborhood Status: Aspirational Consumption of Luxury Homes***

In the city, as I showed in my literature review, the most marginal youth are expelled from and prevented from accessing public space, thus rendered invisible. The less marginal, like the participants in this study, are better able to and have the right to access space. Yet, the right to the city goes beyond having access to public places. Many participants mention looking forward to moving out, having a place of their own to shape and modify to their desire. As mentioned by Harvey (2008), the right to the city also includes the freedom to make and remake the city to our heart's desire (p.23). Participants did not feel that they could or should mold the city. They had a clear understanding of the conceived and perceived limits of suburban space, therefore they did not express the desire to change it. Unable or uninterested in their right to shape spaces and encounters in the urban, they instead dreamt of future privatized space. Participants repeatedly

mentioned looking forward to moving out, after their studies, when it would be financially possible to do so.

Beyond this, an interesting hanging out activity emerged: driving or walking around the upper class neighborhoods of the West Island to look at houses. Nel said: “Sometimes we’ll drive in the richer neighborhoods up near Lakeshore [the road that borders the water on the South side] just because there are houses there and we like to judge them. Sasha does not drive around to look at houses as a primary hobby, but did mention that the only beautiful things she has seen in the West Island were the houses on Lakeshore Rd. Tiffany also liked to look at nice gardens and houses. She did not drive yet, but walked around the Pointe-Claire Village next to Lakeshore Rd. There may be a combination of factors that inspire this behaviour beyond entertainment or an interest in design and architecture. Whole neighborhoods, specific streets, and luxury homes are symbols of status and success. Young people may be motivated to dream of what could be, what is just slightly out of reach for most of the middle class but still within the realm of possibility. Ray (2003) developed the concept of the *aspirational window* to address this forms future oriented musings, namely that a person will draw inspiration from those who have ideal characteristics, but are also within reach or similar enough or ‘close’ enough to them to achieved. Being “close” can to refer spatial, social, or economic proximity. Ray (2003) adds that the aspiration window will be wider if there is greater perceived mobility. For my participants, it is reasonable to believe that they viewed their perceived mobility positively as they their responses conveyed that they hoped to emulate the social and economic success of their middle class contexts. The neighborhoods, streets, and homes that they visited in their spatial vicinity contributing to increase the perception that this lifestyle was within reach and therefore in their aspirational window.

In the same way that online influencers and luxury house tours act as aspirational content, looking at luxury homes can provide the onlooker with something to dream about. Driving around to look at homes within the West Island, fit within the participants' *aspirational window*. Moreover, this practice can be understood as an act of social comparison; i.e., a reminder of their own status versus that of other's and the work that will be necessary to secure this status later in life. For the middle class, in-between rich and poor, the needs or the material possessions set by the bourgeoisie are aspirational. As noted in Lefebvre's (1966/1968) analysis of Marx, the promise is that sacrifice will be compensated (p.83). Young people may not currently have the means to engage in consumption in the same way that full time working adults do, but this aspirational activity is rooted in capitalist practice and consumption.

### ***The Significance of Streets and Cars***

Across the interviews, the car was described as a place, rather than simply a mode of transportation. Young people postpone the ability to accumulate material possessions by working part-time, summer hours, or not at all to attend school. Unable to purchase privatized spaces of their own, it is the car that acts as, not only a tool for mobility, but a vehicle to freedom. Participants described the many activities that they undertook with friends or romantic partners in their cars: going for a drive, watching a movie, getting something to eat or drink, talking, and cuddling. It was also cited as one of the ways to hangout outside the home, at night, without having to spend too much money. Since parks close, participants explained that the car was the alternative. Multiple participants, even those without a car, but with friends who had them, described the car as the ideal mode of transportation, a place to consume, a place to hangout, and a place to play. As Dant (2001) notes, the car has become an extension of the human form (p.2).

This is particularly true for those living in the suburbs, a place that was constructed with the car at the center of its *raison d'être*.

The importance of the car for the creation and the functioning of the suburb is obvious in its construction. In an older city center like downtown Montreal, conceived, in part, before the advent of the automobile industry, cars are less significant than they are in the suburbs due to the availability of public transportation and the challenges of tight or one-way streets, and limited street parking. Moreover, the suburbs appear to be built around highways, wide roads, and ample parking space. The design of the North American suburb is embedded in the widespread access of cars for the middle class. Suburbs are regularly thought of as low density residential areas, located on the outskirts of urban centers. Many authors also associate suburbs with being closely linked to the automobile. As Flint (2006) puts it, the American suburbs are “[...] spread-out, drive-thru, car-dependent, newer-the-better [...] (p.2). Harris (2004) traced the history of suburban living in Canada and pointed to numerous influences such as migration, decentralized employment, and increased use of cars, among other factors. Filion (2018), who also studied the North American suburb, stated:

The article has identified the relationship between landuse patterns and automobile reliance as the defining durable characteristic of the North American suburb. The importance given to this feature stems from its influence on most activities taking place in suburban environments, and hence on most aspects of suburban life (p.7).

Forysth (2012) warns us of the risk of applying broad definitions or assumptions to suburbs as a whole, so we must be precise about the suburbs that we are referring to. Here, I outline some of the key characteristics of North American suburbs and the ways that the car have influenced its use and design. More specifically, I make note of the links between these defining attributes and the results of my interviews. To illustrate, when discussing the spatial dimensions of the West

Island and its zones, it is often discussed in terms of its roads. In earlier sections, I listed the north and south burrows of the area. This division of space is regularly discussed by referring to roads. For example, above highway 40 would mean the north and below the 20 would be the most southern point. One can also talk about city from East to West by mentioning the main roads that cross highway 20 and 40: Sources, Saint-Jean, and Saint-Charles. Participants often opted for this way of mapping the city when describing locations to me. The significance of the car is tied to the significance of streets and how the automobile has altered the way humans experience the streets in cities dominated by cars. Lefebvre (1970/2003) discusses the significance of the street in an urban context beyond “movement and circulation”. He claimed that “[t]he invasion of the automobile and the pressure of the automobile lobby have turned the car into a key object, parking into an obsession, traffic into a priority, harmful to urban and social life. The day is approaching when we will be forced to limit the rights and powers of the automobile” (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p.18). There are few signs pointing to a reduction of the rights and powers of vehicles in the suburban context. Instead, the vehicle dominates the streets in the suburban landscape.

Beyond the roads constructed for movement of vehicles, there are paths, sidewalks and crosswalks designed for the movement of bodies by foot. For Lefebvre (1970/2003), it is these streets that facilitate unexpected encounters. The street “serves as a meeting place (topos), for without it no other designated encounters are possible (cafés, theaters, halls). These places animate the street and are served by its animation, or they cease to exist” (p.18). The suburbs, more so than the urban core, have streets dominated by vehicles and streets constructed for vehicles in a way that reduces the possibility for chance encounters. This leads to a significant reduction in “[...] the interaction without which urban life would not exist, leaving only

separation, a forced and fixed segregation. And there are consequences to eliminating the street” (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p.18). Fortunately, many participants cited leisurely walks as a hanging out activity, leaving room for encounters to occur. Though, the popularity of the car as a mode of transportation and a hangout spot does reduce the likelihood of encounters of chance when compared to walkable cities. We ought to explore how this continues to affect the lived experiences of young suburbanites, devoid of much socialization outside of the home, school, or work.

### ***Lonely Roads: The Shortage of Third Spaces in Suburbia***

I explored earlier how the private home is central to the suburban neighborhood. Leaving the home is facilitated by cars that allow for movement from one private place to another (Dant, 2001). In the above section, we discussed how cars have been central to the construction of suburban roads and their layout. This exacerbates the separation and segregation of people. Individuals may be sharing the road, a public place, but confined to their private vehicle, eliminating spontaneous interactions with others.

The suburbs are far removed from walkable cities and further isolate people due to the shortage of third places. In his book, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, Ray Oldenburg (1989) discussed the value of a third space or third realm. This is an informal place outside the home (first place) or work (second place) where people can hangout, relax, or people watch. “[...] [T]he third place accommodates people only when they are released from their responsibilities elsewhere” (Oldenburg, 1989, p.32). When these participants are freed from their duties at their part-time jobs, college, and home they can begin to search for places, open beyond the hours of

their daily duties. Furthermore, these places should be within walking distance where one may encounter regulars, neighbors, or familiar faces. Unfortunately, the suburbs have very little to offer in terms of third spaces. Even what might seem like a third space may be missing some of the necessary characteristics to encourage spontaneous socialization with those who reside within the community. To illustrate, I noted a few popular hangout spots that multiple participants cited: fast food restaurants and coffee shops (i.e. McDonalds, Starbucks, etc.), Fairview Mall, the water side along the lakeshore, and bars. In most cases, these places do not meet the requirements of a third space. For one, most people need to drive or use transportation to get to one of these locations. Moreover, these places are often designed to attract people from near and far which reduces the possibility of seeing familiar faces. Some individuals may not live within walking distance of one of these hangout spots, undermining their ability to take form as a “locals spots”. Some of the mentioned places could be third spaces in some communities or for some groups; the elderly who gather at Fairview mall before opening hours to walk laps for exercise or those who gather at McDonald’s or Tim Horton’s almost every morning for a coffee and a chat. Yet, the above mentioned hang out places did not take shape as third places for most of the participants. Only a few examples of third spaces were provided by my interviewees. The public library was a third space for one participant. Josie would go to the library after school while waiting for her father to pick her up. There, she was able to make friends with some students from a different school. She explained how there were not many young people in the library so they ended up talking. This does not necessarily make for much of a vibrant third space for adolescents, if few choose to study, read, or lounge around here but it could have some potential. The local hockey rink or local public pool was also mentioned by a few participants. To illustrate, Emma shared how she enjoyed skating and watching her brother's hockey games at

the rink near her house. She went on to explain how she knew all the workers there and chatted with them. Still, this would not easily facilitate encounters with other locals or people who were wildly different from her (the suburbs are designed in such a way that neighbors are likely to come from the same social class because homes are priced similarly by neighborhood), but it is one of the better examples of third space in the suburbs. Hockey rinks, pools, and parks are more numerous than other types of spaces (i.e. taverns, barbershops, small café) making it easier for more people to be located within walking distance of one, yet it does not eliminate the fact that some will still remain outside of walking distance from one of these.

### ***The Car: Trading Public Third Spaces for Private Space***

As discussed above, third spaces are incredibly rare in cities that are not considered ‘walkable’. As a result, the construction of the suburbs can exacerbate loneliness, broken communities, and the inability to meet “others” different from oneself. The car as discussed above is directly linked to the construction of suburbia, the antithesis of the walkable city. Therefore, the car continues to play a role in reducing opportunities for spontaneous encounters. Oldenburg (1989) said the following about suburbanite’s attachment to their vehicles:

Everyone old enough to drive finds it necessary to make frequent escapes from the private compound located amid hundreds of other private compounds. To do so, each needs a car, and that car is a means of conveyance as privatized and antisocial as the neighborhoods themselves (p.12).

The “antisocial” nature of hanging out was replicated in some of the behaviours described by the participants in my study. As shown above, young people enjoy hanging out with friends in their private homes. However, this privatization of hanging out is replicated by a lived experience shared by many. That is, that the car has become not only a tool for mobility, but a place to

hangout. On multiple occasions, interviewees cited their car as a place of their own and a place to spend time with friends. Hanging out in cars further reduced the ability for young people to meet new people and encounter those beyond their tight-knit circles. Participants described using the car to inhabit public spaces like streets, viewpoints by the water, and parking lots. This is not to say that participants did not also mention sitting in parks or going for walks; they did mention these things, but hanging out in cars remained a popular activity. Jade stated that she enjoyed hanging out in her car. She liked to pick up her friends to go to McDonald's or Starbucks. Rather than sitting in the restaurant, they would pick up their food. They would either remain in the parking lot or sit in the car while they ate or drive to a park to do the same there. Once again, public space becomes private space where friends can spend time together. The popularity of this practice does point to some of the conditions of suburban living: separated, private, and lacking community.

As mentioned in the literature review, *Doing consumption and sitting cars: adolescent bodies in suburban commercial spaces*; Kato highlighted the importance of the car as a space for young people. His sample of younger teens (14-18 year olds) demonstrated that sitting in cars, in commercial space, was an expression of their identity and an activity that deviated from the normative (Kato, 2009); teens used the car as a semi-private space leaving their doors open, at times, to socialize with others who are also in their cars (Kato, 2009, p.62). Though the participants in my study might have engaged in this behaviour, it was not described to me in such a way. More often, participants described hanging out with a friend inside the vehicle possibly to consume food/drink, talk, consume media, or as a transition time between hanging out somewhere and going home. Beyond sitting in cars, participants in my study used the car as a

mode of transportation, a space to play and hang out among close friends, and as a way of privatizing public space when the latter did not offer what they were seeking.

### ***Selective Socialization: Limited Third Spaces, COVID-19, and a Transitional Life Period***

Alongside the topics explored above, I would like to note an important commonality in much of my samples lived experiences in regards to their social circles. A few participants had larger social circles, while others had maintained smaller circles for many years. As mentioned in the findings, Khloe had some acquaintances in her classes but felt that these were not real friends. Rather, she felt most comfortable with her best friends who understood her experience with her mental health and self-esteem. Khloe enjoyed keeping a small social circle: “I feel myself when I’m with them, but not with other people. I feel like I have to be someone else, like better than myself ”.

An interesting pattern emerged when I noticed a few people mentioned a shrinking, tightening, or cleaning up of their social circles. Moreover, multiple participants explained how they were not actively seeking new friendships. This subject could be explored in greater detail in a study on social ties in older suburban youth in a post-pandemic context, though I thought it important to mention to shed light on the context and lived experiences of my sample.

Participants who shrunk their social circles cited the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition from high school to cegep as the primary influence on this decision. As mentioned in the findings, Sasha had been warned that “only the real ones [friends] will stay” once she would attend cegep.

Sasha:

Since this whole covid thing happened, my social circle has cleaned out a lot, a lot , a lot

Interviewer:

Do you feel like you had a big friend group before and now it's not so big?

Sasha:

For sure, before I was in high school, and then Covid happened right when I started cegep. So most of the people that I knew from high school do not go to John Abbott. Genre, y a des gens que je connais ici et là. But, I wouldn't say it's my friend group. Même si c'était pas des amis qui était super proche, like we weren't tight like this, but still I would have people to go out with, do activities, like let's go to the restaurant, even if it's once a month of something like that.

Cass:

Yah like an acquaintance

Sasha:

Exactly! Exactly. And now, since covid, and also since the big spring cleaning. Les amis que j'ai maintenant dans ma vie there much more quality, there is substance.

Cass:

You kept the friends that you felt like were actually your friends?

Sasha:

C'est ça! I can count on them and all that. At the same time, I don't see them that often. I barely see them. Because, we don't go to the same school. They all live pretty far away.

Jackson also felt that his friend group had shrunk significantly. He describes having lost contact with a lot of people from high school due to the transition from cegep, combined with online school during the pandemic. He also shared how he had not made many new friends at John Abbott while being online or when going back to in-person school for only a few weeks at a time.

Though this study was not designed to collect nuanced data on the number of strong and weak ties of participants, it is interesting to note that some participants have experienced a shrinking of social circles and/or a low motivation to form new ties. I do not aim to make value judgements regarding the number of ties that the participants maintain. Rather, I wish to highlight the lived experience of some of the participants, in a unique context. Furthermore, I wonder about the impact of online leisure on the ability for young people to maintain friendships (that they wish to keep) that will be explored in a later section. I also wonder about the impact that third spaces may have in allowing for the formation of new friendships or the formation of

weak ties<sup>15</sup>. Participants described having made friends in high school, at work, at the pool, or due to their participation in a variety of sports. Some participants appeared to have been selective in their socialization habits, limiting their interactions with new people. Third spaces could allow for some interaction with others without the commitment or emotional labor of maintaining and strengthening new friendships.

### ***House Parties: The Suburban Oasis***

I would be unable to conclude this discussion without addressing partying, drinking, smoking, and illicit drug use as an influence on young adults' hanging out habits. A significant portion of interviewees did not drink or drank very little due to lack of interest or because their friends did not drink. Some had reduced their consumption since the pandemic and others consciously tracked their going out habits. However, other participants provided more accounts of their backyard “chillings”, house parties, and downtown bar/club outings. Even participants who abstained from alcohol and drug use expressed an understanding of the significance of party culture in the lives of young people. As mentioned in the findings, Carla (who does not drink) typically associated clubbing, partying, and drinking with what young adults do for fun.

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<sup>15</sup> Granovetter (1973) introduced the importance of strong and weak ties in social networks. Strong ties refer to relationships between people with whom we have frequent contact. These tend to be our family members, close friends, or coworkers. Other characteristics include: having greater similarities and important emotional connection. On the other hand, weak ties are the opposite of strong ties, often thought of as our acquaintances. In *The Strength of Weak Ties*, Granovetter (1973) introduced the value of weak ties from which we can learn new information, such as job opportunities. Weak ties can also expose us to new perspectives because these people tend to have greater differences from us and our inner circle. Therefore, it can be advantageous to have less homophilous communities. Suburban neighborhoods can be highly homophilous, with most people belonging to the same social class. Inner cities or walkable cities, with more third spaces, can provide greater opportunities for encounters with acquaintances that are different from us.

Moreover, Nel had explained how it was difficult to convince the other lifeguards at her summer job to engage in sober staff bonding activities. She noted how the job has a reputation of being a “party job”. For those who did engage more regularly in partying and consumption of substances, clubbing, bars, and house parties created varied experiences. It was agreed that the West Island had little to offer in terms of drinking space. This further illustrates some of what was mentioned in the earlier section on third spaces. Participants did not mention having a local bar that they regularly attended. To go clubbing, one had to take public transportation, an Uber, or find a designated driver. The expectation was that the activity would be costly. For this reason, Jackson had been enjoying more house parties. Bars were enjoyed and frequented by multiple participants, but house parties were the most popular option when staying in the West Island. This option was less costly, and allowed for more control over the conditions of the party like smoking, games, invitees, and music. Lastly, Nick explained how he preferred house parties because of the familiarity of knowing the guest in attendance, though this was not shared by all as some cited large house parties that had over 200 guests in attendance or house parties in which participants were a plus one, unsure if they would be familiar with the groups who would be present. Though there was a large degree of variation in partying and substance consumption habits, I aim to explore the topic within the scope of this paper.

I begin by looking at partying and consumption of substances through the lens of my Lefebvrian spatial framework. Firstly, there are some more legitimate drinking spaces, bars or clubs, which are clearly defined spaces conceived and perceived with the intention of up charging guests by providing a place to engage in partying, socialization, entertainment, and consumption. Bars and more so nightclubs are created to attract the customers who will spend on drinks, food, cover fees, coat check, VIP tables, and bottle service for the aim of capitalist

accumulation. House parties are less legitimate, regulated, and defined. The primary goal of a house party, in most cases, is not for the host to profit from the event, rather creating an environment for relaxation, fun, excitement, ludic play and encounter.

Furthermore, participants who engaged in more partying versus casual hanging out, cited that police could come to the site of a house party due to a noise complaint or at the request of a parent (home owner) who might be out of town. The policing of house parties could be, in-part, due to their lack of legitimacy. Moreover, the loud noises, disturbances, and ludic events taking place within a house party can shatter the illusion of the suburb as a private space; in which one cannot hear their neighbor, a safe space in which disturbances do not occur, and a ludic place as youth drinking and partying activities may be thought to belong to the downtown core. Therefore, house parties represent some of the lived experience, as bars and clubs may not provide for all the needs of young people who wish to participate in such activities. Furthermore, this discussion illustrates some of what was discussed earlier; namely, that the single family home is at the heart of suburban hanging out.

As a result of the lack of local drinking sports that are walkable and accessible, the house party is one of the few ways that suburbanites may encounter each other in a leisurely context. Those who hang out at home with a tight-knit friend group may be the least likely to encounter others during their unplanned, unstructured leisure time as it mostly takes place in the home “chilling”. Those who commute to the downtown core to experience night life are likely to cross paths with people from all walks of life, opening the door for more spontaneous encounters, though this does not leave much room for encounters with locals, neighborhood and community members, and familiar faces. Rather, it is the local house parties that fulfill more of what third spaces would offer. House parties can be small, private, and homophilic or they can be large,

unorganized, and open to local masses. These types of house parties may offer the possibility to bump into old acquaintances, bond with classmates outside of the academic context, or meet new people. Therefore, the house party can be an oasis for young suburbanites in two ways. It can provide them with more control or power over their partying, giving them the opportunity to shape the outcome of the event in a way that would not be allowed at a commercial drinking location. For those who choose to, the house party or house “chilling” can remain private and closed off to interaction with those who are not members of the group. This can reproduce a common suburban experience of being segregated from others outside of one's inner circle. On the other hand, it can be more ludic, chaotic, and illegitimate, opening the opportunity to move beyond what it conceived and perceived as appropriate in the suburban context and allowing for encounters of chance.

## **Play**

Another important theme across the interviews was the idea of entertainment, leisure, enjoyment, and play. Manifested in many different sub-categories such as sport, hobbies, and games. Play is linked to human connection, consumption, and acts of resistance. At times, the play mentioned in the interviews reinforced capitalist ideals while also resisting them in some ways. One of the important facets of play is its link to Lefebvre's (1996) description of the right to the city. This includes “[...] the right to meetings and gatherings, places and objects must answer certain ‘needs’ generally misunderstood, to certain despised and moreover transfunctional ‘functions’: the ‘need’ for social life and a centre, the need and the function of play, the symbolic function of space [...]” (Lefebvre, 1996, p.195). Therefore, young people would be demonstrating some of

their agency over the city if their lived experiences (lived space) include accounts of creative play.

I thought it important to mention play in my analysis of older youth as talk on the modernization, urbanization, and renewal of cities is often tied to the ideas of youthful and playful cities. The renewal plan for Fairview Mall even mentioned play, without specifying what type of play it was referring to. Moreover, the suburbs influence play and the way it ought to be according to capitalism.

### **Capitalism and Spaces of Play**

Participants mentioned a wide variety of play activities. Some hobbies were enjoyed alone while others were social in nature; some could be both. The many activities mentioned included, though not exclusively: piano, reading, drawing, writing, crochet, rock climbing, biking, fishing, skateboarding, making music, working out, skating, basketball, Frisbee, volleyball, football, video games, board games and gambling. Participants' level of involvement varied. For example, some were dedicated to a sport, on a team or as coaches, spending many hours a week involved in this activity. Others would engage in play activities with friends in a more casual way; possibly making plans every once in a while. Others would end up defaulting to one of their hobbies when they had free time or felt bored.

Some activities could easily take place in the home while others were more likely to take place in a space dedicated to the particular purpose of the activity. One of the challenges of undertaking activities that took place outside the home was the cost associated with continued or regular involvement. In the name of capitalist profit, entertainment and leisure is sold to

consumers as an escape from everyday life. This type of continuous spending may not be sustainable.

Jackson:

I was going to mention that if you have a niche or like something you enjoy, me and my friends love rock climbing, so we go to a place in Dorval. There's Beta Block Dorval and we go rock climbing there. So there's a hobby where you can hang out.

Interviewer:

How often do you guys do that?

Jackson:

Yeah, so it used to be once...again I have this tight-knit friend group with like three-four friends so before they had car troubles and whatnot, we were going at least I'd say once a week for sure. We had a schedule where it's like always on Tuesdays we would go, but now because of them having a little less money and not wanting to spend so much, we go rarely, maybe once every three weeks or something, like I know we haven't been in a while.

The costs of structured play may also prevent someone from trying something new.

Khloe:

I play piano. That's like my moment when I play piano. But other than that I would love to play sport like a team sport. It's like, cuz sometimes it kind of feels good to be alone, but sometimes like you become lonely[...]

She felt that she would not make a college team, due to lack of experience. We discussed other options outside of school, but Khloe worried about the costs of joining a workout/sports related class. A lot of what surrounds play is centered on its commodification. As cited in Stevens

(2007):

Lefebvre also draws upon play as an example when he looks in detail at the impact of capitalism upon urban space. There are three key features of the transformation of urban space by capitalism. It is homogenized and fragmented, so that it can be exchanged as a commodity, and put in the service of accumulation. This fragmented space is a matrix of 'determinate locations of production and consumption' (Lefebvre 1991b: 341) which 'divide life into closed, isolated units' (The Lettrist International 1996: 44).

Capitalism has made it such that spaces of play are limited or dedicated to specific places where consumption becomes mandatory. One must go to the movie theater to watch a movie, the casino

to gamble, the hockey rink to skate, the restaurant to eat, and so forth. In a later section, I will explore in more detail, the ways that participants have resisted some of the commodification of play by eating and watching movies in cars, gambling outside of casinos, and more.

### ***Virtual Leisure***

Another popular activity was virtual leisure, particularly video games or online games. These games can work to connect people who are physically distant. As Tiffany confided, this was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, and allowed for friends to continue to play together when space was regulated. Further, participants described gaming as a way to remain in contact with friends who lived in different neighborhoods or attended a different school. Jackson did not play a lot of video games at the time of the interview, but if he did it would be for the following two reasons:

The only two reasons I'll play video games is one if I have friends over and usually, we'll play NHL or I even have monopoly on the Xbox so we play a lot of monopoly on there and we just get to pass the remote around and the second option is my friends in the West Island if I can't see them then I'll usually just come on Xbox to talk with them not as much to even play video games with them it's just more of like okay everybody's on here playing their own video game but we can all talk at the same time.

Another participant, John, used gaming for social connection. He described it as being a big part of his life.

John:

I think it's the biggest social activity that I do with my friends since we don't see each other as often in person, well at least the other friends that are that are at other schools right now, and so we tend to play video games together during like every night

Some participants enjoyed online leisure more regularly than others, some played alone while others used it as a way to socialize, some played in public while others played exclusively in the

privacy of their own homes . Overall, these games allowed users to have a significant level of autonomy over the conditions of their activity.

Online leisure can defy normative views and values regarding leisure (Fox & Lepine, 2012). Fox and Lepine (2012) adopt the term *deficient leisure* to describe the ways in which virtual leisure may be understood as illegitimate or lacking some of the virtues of other leisurely activities that take form through traditional socialization and in the “real” world rather than the virtual one. Nonetheless, the lived experiences of those who play online games are clearly dynamic and valuable. This hobby can be enjoyed alone in the comfort of one’s private dwelling. It can also be taken on the go (with phones, laptops, and handheld consoles). To illustrate, John would take his Nintendo Switch to the school library to play animal crossing between classes. It can be played together (in the in-person sense) or online through the games’ server or over Discord<sup>16</sup> (Instant messaging platform used alongside virtual games). At times, this activity may be enjoyed and shared with others in more traditional shared, social, and “real” space alongside the game. At other times, it is entirely virtual. Nonetheless, gaming was a valuable hanging out activity for multiple participants in my study. Dalton enjoyed talking to friends on Discord (as a social platform unrelated to gaming) but enjoyed gaming on school nights or before work. I asked if he played more socially or alone:

Dalton:

Definitely by myself, I guess then just to pass time just to pick away at something right it feels better than just sitting around to watch.. I don't watch movies or TV shows. I play a lot of video games compared to...not a lot a lot.. but compared to the shows and movies I watch. Maybe I just like having the feeling of being able to interact with whatever you're doing rather than just being sitting there being passive picking your nose scrolling through whatever

Interviewer:

Yeah, you're more engaged in a game versus something else maybe?

Dalton:

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<sup>16</sup> Discord is an instant messaging platform advertised as a place to chat, talk, and hang out. This website was used by participants in the study (gamers and non-gamers),

It's something you can manipulate right?

We may even argue that online games allow for young people to have some sense of control and autonomy over their lived experiences, in relation to play and socialization, as online space can be less restrictive, in some sense, than the physical world. It even allows for some spontaneous play as it opens up a new world at the touch of a button. As I will explore in the next section, spontaneous play may be more difficult to find in the suburban context.

### ***Ludic Play***

As mentioned above, some activities can take place in less prescriptive places or may involve behaviour that does not adhere to some of the traditional values associated with leisure. When describing their hanging out habits, going against normative ideals of perceived and conceived spaces of place was not top of mind for most participants. The rational, normative, and productive was represented and reproduced more often than the playful, ludic, spontaneous, and non-instrumental. As mentioned by Lefebvre (1996) “[...] the ludic in its fullest sense of theatre, sport, games of all sorts, fairs, more than any other activity restores the sense of *oeuvre* conferred by art and philosophy and prioritizes time over space, appropriation over domination” (p.20). Ludic play requires individuals to go beyond the perceived and conceived nature of space. Place is often so prescriptive, informing its users exactly what type of behaviour is expected and appropriate. Not only is going beyond this, at times, forbidden, but it is also difficult to imagine anything except what has been prescribed. In his book, *The Ludic City: exploring the potential of public spaces*, Stevens (2007) explores ludic design and the ways that cities can incorporate playfulness into the construction of public spaces, suggesting that cities can be sites of play. Though this book was based on observations from larger city centers, the suburbs are constructed

differently, even more fragmented than metropolitan centers. The suburbs are lacking places that allow for such ludic play, therefore reducing the likelihood of such events taking place; though mentions of it were still present among the more legitimate and common forms of play described earlier.

Nonetheless, I was able to make note of some examples of ludic play or play that is less defined by capitalist values. I borrow from previously mentioned ideas of play from Lefebvre (1996) and Stevens (2007):

The definition of play that follows thus does not seek to be exhaustive, but rather to focus on four interrelated ways in which playful behaviour can be experienced as an escape from other aspects of everyday life in the contemporary city:

- play involves actions which are non-instrumental;
- there are boundary conditions and rules which separate play from everyday;
- play involves specific types of activities through which people test and expand limits (competition, chance, simulation and vertigo);
- play in the city often involves encounters with strangers. (p.27).

Some of the examples of play provided by participants did not always perfectly fit within this definition, though these accounts provide us with a view into some of the lived experiences of young people that resist, in some ways, the prescribed normative ways of enjoying time away from home, work or school and the norms for using public or semi-public spaces. I must also note that multiple accounts of ludic play, like fishing and “chilling” under a bridge or exploring abandoned buildings, took place off island. Moreover, Nel mentioned a few times when she purchased rotting discount fruit with a friend to hit with golf clubs. Though this most likely took place off Island, as she mentioned doing this in a field closer to her friend's house who lives in Vaudreuil. One example of ludic play in the West Island was provided by Dalton who talked about a hidden chilling spot that he and his friends started on a roof near campus with abandoned furniture. For some, hanging out and playing in their car could also be categorized as engaging in

ludic play. Those who engaged in online gaming would also fall into the category of ludic play as did those that engaged in gambling, both of which I will explore in greater detail below.

### ***Gambling***

Gambling, an activity grounded in consumption, is associated with more organized and capitalist play while also being controversial. It is an activity with the goal of encouraging individuals to spend their money, with the possibility of winning more, breaking even, or losing it all. Casinos are examples of constructed spaces that have been perfectly crafted to encourage desired patterns of behaviour. Lynch, Howes, & French (2020) studied the Montreal Casino; a place designed to manage moods in hopes of encouraging play and consumption, while also managing risks due to its government association. They described the sights, scents, and sounds in some areas of the casino as carnivalesque. The casino is an interesting space of play, legitimately coercive. On the one hand, the user is aware, to some extent, of the coercive nature of the conceived space, but it also legitimizes the behaviour itself. It is perceived to be appropriate for gambling activities to take place within these clearly defined spaces. The casino is conceived to reproduce and reinforce capitalist accumulation for its owners.

Two of the male participants mentioned gambling as a hanging-out activity. Interestingly, these activities were less likely to take place at the casino or in bars (i.e. slot machines).

Participants cited the costs and the transportation to the casino as deterrents. Jackson explained:

We will go to a casino every once in a while. Two of my friends have car troubles right now so there's sometimes no way to go to the casino. But yeah, we did go, I'd say like two weeks ago or something like that and yeah we'll definitely go every once in a while. We've been to Casino Montreal and then as well as the poker casino in Kahnawá:ke [First Nations Reserve located across from Montreal] . But, I'd say the majority of the time is at home just playing quick games of cards, usually poker or dice. I think that's about it, and

then every once in a while there's like a slot machine at a bar or something, maybe we'll touch it but it's rare.

In Nick's case, he thought that going to the casino 'kinda sucked' because you lost money. He had gone a few times, but had not been for a few months. There was also no mention of online gambling. Rather, these games were played in less prescribed settings like home and school. It appears that the motivation for gambling was to engage in play, competition, and socialization, rather than the hope of winning. These games act as a bonding activity among groups of, mainly, men. In a study on youth gambling in Montreal, Wilson (2008) reported that male participants described gambling as a positive socialization activity. Particularly, games like poker were more interesting as a social event, rather than for the prospect of winning money (p.154). Similarly, Nick mentioned how blackjack and poker would become "a big thing" in the summer months when everyone was "chilling".

These games could also be used to help pass the time. Nick mentioned groups of students gambling in the John Abbott College cafeteria in between classes. He was able to make friends at school by going to the cafeteria and joining-in on the games. He explained how he would not need to text a group chat; there would always be at least 10 people gambling. The activity had since been banned. Nick said:

We'd play blackjack and people would lose money. People would go down hundreds. When people would gather around the table, we'd be like 30 people at a table and they'd get pissed. And then, the security guards would come and they're like: 'Hey, you can't do this'. And then we'd have to meet with the Dean and then some people were put on academic probation. Not academic probation, but like, uh, what's it called? Like behavioural probation.

Nick went on to explain that he had since stopped going to the cafeteria, explaining how the school passed a bill related to the issue and that cards were no longer allowed. He also noted how

each table has a paper saying “no gambling”. Gambling, thus, became illegitimate when played on school grounds. In Wilson’s (2008) study, school officials explained how youth used gambling activities to pass the time. One of the officials in this same study said: “Idleness, idleness is the mother of all vices. When a kid has nothing to do, he’s gonna create himself a game, and the easiest game is to win money” (p.149). This same sentiment could apply to older youth, attending college, as their varied class schedules may have long breaks. Interestingly, such a type of play was seen as less “worthy” or “appropriate”.

More often, we may think of play in relation to childish activities, but play is an integral part of socialization among older youth and young adults. In particular, male participants mentioned gambling and leisurely sports (outside of competitive sports teams or coaching) as hanging out activities. These social activities allow groups to engage in competition and play. In the case of gambling, it also engages them in materialism. In *Gambling as Play*, it is stated that:

Materialism and competition are two distinguishing traits of the American character that are reflected in the games children and adolescents play; and in a world that encourages great expectations while offering diminishing opportunities for fulfillment, the playing of gambling games provides a form of recreation that is a product of and a contributor to prevailing cultural myths (Smith and Abt, 1984, p.).

In some cases, the hopes of winning money may have been a motivation to engage in this type of play. In other cases, it was competition and socialization. Though there was a crackdown on gambling at school, at-home gambling was still an important form of recreation for the participants who mentioned it. Furthermore, the literature reflects the findings from my interviews: it is mostly males who engage in gambling. It was only male participants who highlighted these games as key components of their hanging out behaviours. Moreover, it was specified that these games were preferably played among groups of boys. Jackson went on to say that he preferred that his girlfriend not to attend these social events and that the other friends

girlfriends would often say no to joining these activities. It was implied that there was a lack of interest from the girls and that the boys preferred to reserve these activities for male bonding. Smith and Abt (1984) determined that “...it is more likely for males to gamble than it is for females, primarily because of adult role models and the socialization into acceptable sex roles”(p.127). They go on to cite the work of Goffman (1967) who analyzed the micro interactions of gambling. “ ‘Action’ as ‘activities that are consequential, problematic, and undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake’ ” (as cited in Smith & Abt, 1984, p.126). Furthermore, “Goffman goes on to state that scenes of action are primarily male-dominated and such competition belongs to the cult of masculinity” (Smith & Abt, 1984, p.126).

To conclude, the casino was not the preferred place to engage in gambling. Rather, it was among friends when the opportunity to fill the time arose, at home or at school (before the ban). The school became an illegitimate space for gambling. This illustrates some of the ways in which ludic play may be labeled as illegitimate. It may also raise questions about the ways that play can be integrated into spaces that are not originally or normally conceived for it.

### **Reimagining Public Space in the Suburbs**

The participants might not have expressed the idea or thought that they actively did much to resist or reimagine suburban space beyond the perceived and conceived. Yet, the act of sharing their lived experience provided valuable accounts to explore the ways in which the construction of suburban public spaces are failing to make for lively, vibrant, social, and beautiful places. In this section, I will discuss some of the literature on the construction of social space in the city in order to compare and contrast it with the lived experiences of young people from my sample.

In a more abstract and theoretical way, the work of Lefebvre and his Marxist influence has been used throughout this text to allow for an analysis of young adults' experiences in suburban spaces from the perspective of the spatial triad. Here, I also integrate some works on public city spaces that provide some practical examples of the urban planning that helps shape spaces that people want to be in. The chapter by Whyte (2009) in *Common Ground?: Readings and Reflections on Public Space* explores small city spaces, focusing on the plaza and the streets. Through observation, which can be viewed in the documentary *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Whyte, 1980), Whyte (2009) determined that sitting space, water features, food, sun/light, and trees all played an important role in determining what would make one plaza more occupied than another. Moreover, the plaza's relationship to the street was the greatest indicator of its success (p.36). Streets and corners that were populated made for a good social environment, a place for people watching, a place for encounters, and a vibrant mixing of people within the plaza. This liveliness was not found in most suburban public space because, as discussed above, the suburban street is populated by cars, making it less likely for green spaces, parks, and most of the waterfront to be vibrant public spaces.

Some of the participants communicated what they found unappealing, unattractive, or uninteresting about suburban spaces. For one, Sasha explained how she preferred the lively downtown parks and green spaces. She described the parks in the West Island as being dead, meaning devoid of people, action, and encounter. As mentioned in the findings, Sasha described parks in the city as hang out spots, unlike the ones found in the West Island's residential neighborhoods. She compared the two:

J'ai l'impression que quand tu vas quelque part qui est plus un vibe. You could just grab a bite, go outside and it's enough. Ici, j'ai pas envie de passer du temps dans l'air. Il y a presque pas d'air/parc et quand il y'en a it's just not fun.

This ‘vibe’ that she described is what attracted her to these public spaces closer to the metropolitan center and kept her away from green spaces in the suburbs. This liveliness was surely missing from most outdoor spaces in the West Island. One of the most lively places that I could think of, was the one that was mentioned most often by participants. Participants enjoyed going for walks, getting ice cream, or parking their cars by the water. The Pointe-Claire Village, bordering Lake Saint-Louis, attracts more crowds of people to the sidewalk. People can walk along the streets passing various small businesses and shops, most likely grabbing an ice cream from Wild Willy’s, then walking towards the waterside to find a place to sit under the trees, at a table, on a bench, or on the ledge of the retaining wall. There is lots to offer in terms of people watching: kids in the school yard or park, soccer practice, baseball games, wind sailing, pedestrians, and people sitting in cars. Even in the winter, they set up a christmas tree with an ice rink and benches around it. This may not compare to the hustle and bustle of city life, but it holds more potential than the more often deserted parks sprinkled across the various housing projects of the West Island. As the West Island continues its expansion, it would be valuable for planners to consider the implications of the construction of roads, sidewalks, residential areas, and public spaces to build better hubs for lively communities.

## Chapter VII: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored some of the dualisms of hanging out as a young adult who must negotiate spaces based on some of the following intersections between: consumption and non consumption, legitimate and illegitimate, private and public, social and isolated, spontaneous and planned, in the “real world” and the virtual one. I conclude this analysis by looking back on the key findings and contributions of this work. I also review its limitations, and suggest possibilities for future research. I wish to begin by acknowledging the ways in which the scope of my analysis evolved over the course of the research process. Before my proposal, I was inspired by personal experience and the literature on urban sociology and youth geographies to explore marginal youth in a suburban context using Henri Lefebvre’s theories. After having explored this possibility, it became quite clear that this would prove difficult considering, not only, the scope of a Master’s Thesis, but the ethical, methodological, and time restraints. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic made it so that my research design would need to be flexible and adaptable to the ever changing regulations on in-person contact and travel. After careful consideration and another review of the literature, I noticed other gaps, yet to be filled. From there, I set out to engage in a primary analysis of a subpopulation of middle class older youth in the West Island suburbs. I had constructed my methods in a way that set out to capture a sample that was representative of some of the variation in the population. In particular, I chose the location of my study carefully, as John Abbott College would allow for the most variation within my sample. I chose this place rather than a youth social service center (which would be the most marginal), a public highschool (which are mostly location based and ran the risk of recruiting students living in the same zoning area) or a private school (which ran the risk of limiting my sample to those from higher social classes). As mentioned in my discussion of methods, unexpected

circumstances impinged on my data collection. This forced me to have to make quick decisions while in the field, which meant that I would be conducting more interviews to allow students the chance to participate in the study as a homework replacement, as offered by their professor. I was then forced to terminate the data collection process due to having exceeded the number of interviews I had set out to do and because of the time restraints. As a result, I had to use the 12 first interviews conducted (with the expectation of one). This impacted the type of sample and the variations I had hoped to sample for. This, alongside the small sample size, is one of the limitations of this study. As I began to transcribe, study, and analyze the data, I quickly realized that I had not collected a sample of people that could be compared against each other in the way I had expected (the more marginal vs the less marginal). Rather, I had collected a sample that was more representative of a middle class group; I would therefore be unable to draw conclusions from my findings about older suburban youth in general. The scope of my research quickly started to shift. As I looked back at the literature, it became even more obvious that my sample was not well represented in prior research. Therefore, I would be unable to draw too many links between marginal youth and the marginality of youth in the same way that I had hoped. Instead, I allowed for the words of these students, as intended, to guide me. I coded the interviews based on recurring ideas and concepts. Then, I went back into the literature and looked for what was missing. The participants from my study did not describe feeling marginalized, policed, or on the “outside” of society in the same way that the literature on youth geographies that focused on the most marginal, had described. Though these ideas were discussed, I had to explore other concepts and patterns. . Despite these ‘lived’ methods and the need to dive back into the literature, the influence of Lefebvre’s work never left the scope of my analysis. It was his work that allowed for a back and forth between disciplines, concepts, and

ideas. Despite the addition of new concepts, as required by my findings, Lefebvre's methods for understanding the production of space and the way that it holds influence over us was never lost. In the end, this thesis focused on the same questions, without a comparison of the most marginal and the least marginal. Rather, as participants discussed with me, the focus turned to how these individuals experience and perceive suburban spaces and the ways that resistance may look different for them.

As the focus shifted from marginality, policing, and the reproduction of economic inequality in city spaces, it was the other side of the issue that emerged from the participants' accounts. As educated middle-class participants, they shared a unique perspective on suburbia. Based on the analysis section of this thesis, several conclusions can be drawn on the complex spatial experiences of the participants in this sample of older youth from the suburban West Island. According to their shared experiences, the spatial design of the West Island, and the suburbs in general, are highly separated, divided, and private. Young people do not have an abundance of hangout spaces. Most of what is offered are places of constant consumption. The other options, third spaces or illegitimate places are lacking. Few of the alternative spaces mentioned were located in the West Island. The rigid nature of suburban planning leaves little room for in-between spaces to exist. Despite this, the participants did not feel overtly marginalized, nor did they actively resist the limitations of the suburban environment, not least because they possibly saw themselves as more a part of this system that they believed had been shaped in their favor. It could explain some of the lack of overt resistance, since the participants aimed to follow a normative path to secure their place as middle-class adults by maintaining the structures that allowed for the survival of consumption practices that this presupposed. Though the participants may feel like they have a right to access public spaces, the importance of privacy

and the value of the single family home is illustrated by two behaviours: driving around to look at luxury homes and hanging out at home as a primary activity. The activity of driving around to look at luxury homes may also be an act of aspirational consumption. As I argued, privacy and separation from “others” is a characteristic of suburban hanging out. The car was the next “private” hanging out place that I discussed. Cars, rather than people, dominate the suburban streets. The popularity of the car as a mode of transportation and hangout spot reduces the likelihood for chance encounters on the streets. A combination of the above mentioned factors, account for a shortage of third spaces. This exacerbates the isolation and segregation of individuals, often confined to hanging out with those they already know within private homes and cars. Moreover, some participants mention a shrinking of their social circles due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition from high school to college. The suburb, as the antithesis to the walkable city, lacks abundant gathering places where people might encounter familiar faces, weak ties, and “others” who may differ from those in their social circle. At times, house parties offered young adults with some of the benefits of third spaces, though other suitable places included the library, the public pool, or the local hockey rink.

Play, leisure, and entertainment is another important point of influence. Capitalism has commodified play and limited the spaces where it can occur, though some participants did resist this by engaging in ludic play. One of the latter was virtual leisure, which allows for social connection beyond physical distance. In fact, this was one way in which participants could deal with the effects of COVID-19. Another activity was gambling. The casino, being a legitimate space of consumption, did not meet the needs of my respondents. Therefore, male participants engaged in competition and bonding by playing these games of “action” at school or in their homes.

In the final section of the analysis, I explored the failures of spatial design that negatively affect the way that participants described their enjoyment of public spaces. Suburban green spaces often failed to be vibrant, social, and beautiful places. Careful consideration and construction of public suburban spaces would allow for more lively and enjoyable public spaces.

Though this case study cannot allow us to draw conclusions on the population of older youth in the West Island as a whole, it provides multiple illustrations of concepts from the literature and provides a theoretical framework that can be applied to future research. Some of the broader implications of studying youth in this way points to a marginality, not arising from belonging to traditionally marginalized groups. It demonstrates the importance of studying broader groups of people rather than only focusing on those who are most negatively affected by a social issue. Despite their middle class status, their youth affects their interactions in the suburban environment and some of the challenges they face. Additionally, the study of suburban youth contributes to our understanding of the reproduction of capitalist middle-class values, which has important implications for the understanding of social hierarchies and capitalism as a whole. Moreover, this thesis also provides urban planners and architects with more context to understand the potential impact and influence of conceived suburban spaces. Future research may also consider studying the impact of more successful suburban spaces, like the Pointe-Claire Village, to inspire future suburban planning projects in the West Island. By addressing future development, we can gain further insights into the experiences of young people, and ultimately foster more inclusive, accessible, beautiful, and healthy communities.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Interview Guide**

#### **Interview Questions**

**Introduce confidentiality to participants and summarize the process of the interview**

**Demographic Questions (completed on a google form prior to the interview)**

Pseudonym: Allow participants to choose their own

Language:

Age:

Gender:

Sexual orientation:

How do you describe your ethnicity/culture?:

Birth place:

Parents jobs:

Siblings:

What HS did you attend? :

#### **Current living situation**

City of residence:

Dwelling type:

Are you currently employed? :

**Interview Questions** (This is a semi-structured interview/all secondary questions may be used to ask for clarification, but will not be necessary to each interview)

### **A) Lived Space**

- Describe the last time you went out on the weekend.
- Where did you go?
- What did you do here?
- Who did you see here?
- How did you get there? Is this normally how you travel to meet friends?
- Was this a typical weekend for you?
- If not, what is a typical weekend?
  
- What are some of your favorite places to hang out?
- Why?
- With who?
- What do you do?
  
- Before Covid, what did you do on a typical after school evening?

### **B) Perceived Space**

- Do you feel that you have a space of your own?
- Do you feel that you have a space of your own outside of your home?
  
- Do you feel like there are places in the West Island for teenagers or young people to hangout?
- What are these places?
- Do you go here?
  
- What are your thoughts about some of the changes being made in the west island (REM/ Fairview Pointe-Claire mall) [familiarize participant with such topics by showing pictures of plans]
  
- Do you hangout in more places that are located in the south or north of the West Island?
- Why?
- Do you do different things in the N/S?
  
- Do you hangout anywhere that might not be considered a typical spot to hangout?
- What are these spots?
- How do you use them?
- Have you ever gotten in trouble for this?

### **C) Constructed Spaces**

- Have you ever gotten in trouble for hanging out somewhere you were not supposed to be/were not allowed to be?
- Have you or your friends ever been removed, kicked out, or banned from a place you hangout at?
- North or South
- Tell me about a time when you have encountered police or public security while hanging out?
- Have you ever been watched, asked to leave, or ticketed by police or public security while hanging out?
- North or South

### **D) Right to the City**

- Are there places that you used to go to that you can not go to anymore?
- What would be your ideal place to hangout?
- Do you think that the city cares about having places for youth to hangout?
- Have you ever felt like you need to leave the West Island to have a place to hangout?
- Do you feel like the city would look different if more young adults/teens had a say in urban planning?
- Do you ever feel like you have nowhere to go or nothing to do?
- How often do you feel this way?
- Do you feel like you need money to hangout?
- Where do you go to hangout that is free or does not require you to spend?
- What have you been doing during the pandemic to hangout with friends?
- How has the pandemic affected your ability to hangout or see friends?
- What alternatives have you found?

## Appendix B: Invitation Email

Hello,

I invite you to participate in a study on the ways that young people use suburban spaces. The questions in the interviews are intended to help us gain information about hanging out behaviors in young people from the West Island. All data collected in the interview will also be used for research and publication purposes. Participants will be selected on a first come first served basis.

In order to be eligible to participate in the interview, you must:

- 1) Self-identify as an adolescent or young adult
- 2) Speak English or French
- 3) Live or spend leisure time in the West Island (including Pierrefonds, Dollard-Des Ormeaux, L'Île-Bizard, Roxboro, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Sainte-Geneviève, Senneville, Pointe-Claire, Kirkland, Beaconsfield, Dorval, and Baie-D'Urfé).

If you are interested in participating in this research project or if you want more information, please email Cassandra Hope Sydor, Master's student at uOttawa, here:

[REDACTED]

All your information will remain confidential. Participants will receive a consent form after emailing the above address. All forms must be signed by the participant before the start of the interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please share with your friends.

If you have any questions for me or would like to participate in this study please email me at the address below.

Cassandra Hope Sydor  
University of Ottawa

[REDACTED]

## Appendix C: Class Presentation

### WHAT AM I GOING TO PRESENT TODAY?

1. The World of Academic Research
2. My Thesis Research



#### My Background

**JAC**  
SOCIAL SCIENCE

**BISHOP'S UNIVERSITY**  
Honours Sociology:  
Criminology, Law, and  
Social Policy  
  
Minor: Psychology

**UOTTAWA**  
Master's Thesis in  
Sociology

### The Possibilities in Academic Research

- All areas of interest can be researched
- Opportunities in academia and on the job market
- Flexibility to choose something that you are curious about and a method that you prefer



## My research:

### Negotiating Alternative Public Spaces: The Spatial Encounters of Young People in the West Island of Montreal

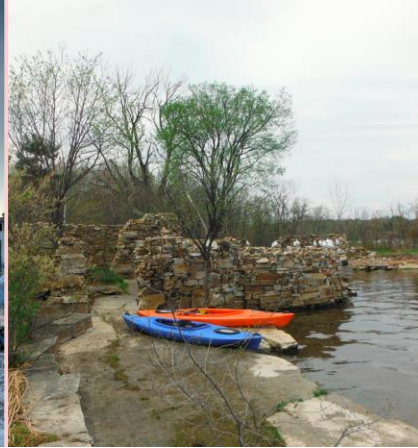
#### My Area of Research

- Urban Sociology and Youth geography

#### What is Urban Sociology

- Movement from rural to urban society (capitalist society)
- The city and its parts can be studied to understand more about the dynamics of urban life
- How does the environment impact us?





## PURPOSE OF MY RESEARCH

My research is focused on the ways that suburban older youth navigate the streets and its public spaces. I wonder what suburban older youth do when they are out of school. More specifically, I wonder how various demographic groups of suburban youth from the West Island, a suburb of Montreal, find ways to hang-out, play, and form their identities in the urban sprawl.

Allison James (1986) interviewed teenagers and described them as:

“‘being nothing’ defined as ‘not adults’ and/or viewed as entirely dependent on adults; ‘having nowt to do’ – missing from the agendas of service providers; and having ‘nowhere to go’ – young people’s presence outside the home seen as problematic, and so young people were absent from consideration in the design and planning of public spaces” (as cited in Evans, 2008, p.1659).

## EXCLUSION IN PUBLIC SPACES

- The study of exclusion: the impact of age biases on young people's ability to access spaces
- Adult values, laws, and public perceptions have been shown to regulate the spatialized experiences of adolescents (deMontigny, 2013, p.20)
- Youth = 'not adults'



## CREATIVE USE OF ALTERNATIVE SPACES

- Young people find ways to "[...] use the city creatively on a temporal (often at night) or a spatial (less overtly public locations) basis: carving out special niches where social gathering and identity formation can take place" (Matthews et al., 1998; Ward, 1978; Hopkins, 2010, as cited in Van Blerk, 2012, p.557).
- Bus stops, empty lots, abandoned buildings, and unsupervised parks can all become spaces of inhabitation by young people (Mitchell, 2003, p.21). These spaces come to be associated with illegitimacy where it is thought that they will engage in illegitimate behaviour.

This leads me to wonder about the policing of these alternative spaces, the policies that keep young people out of these spaces, and the alternatives that they continue to carve out of these conditions

### Research Questions

How is the West Island designed spatially?

What are the lived experiences of adolescents and the ways that they interact with suburban spaces in the West Island?

What are the commonalities and differences in perceived lived experience for young people in the city?

What has been the impact on young people's use of public, semi-public, and alternative spaces and their exclusion from these in a pre and post pandemic context?

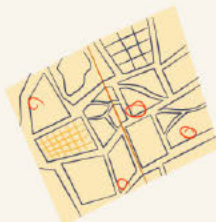


## METHODS

### 1. Interviews



### 2. Mapping activities



## ACTIVITY



## YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE

Contact information:

Cassandra Hope Sydor



**Any questions?**



## Appendix D: Consent Form

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

### Consent Form

**Title of the study: Negotiating Alternative Public Spaces: The Spatial Encounters of Young People in the West Island of Montreal**

Master's Thesis  
Cassandra Hope Sydor  
School of School of Sociological and  
Anthropological Studies,  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Ottawa

Supervisor  
José Lopez  
School of Sociological and  
Anthropological Studies,  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Ottawa

Faculté des sciences sociales  
École d'études sociologiques  
et anthropologiques

Faculty of Social Sciences  
School of Sociological and  
Anthropological Studies

sciencesociales.uOttawa.ca  
socialsciences.uOttawa.ca

120 Université / University  
(10005) 10<sup>e</sup> étage / 10<sup>th</sup> floor  
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5  
Canada

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Cassandra Hope Sydor, in the context of a master's thesis, under the supervision of José Lopez

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to learn more about young people's experiences in suburban public spaces. The goal of this research is to learn more about the commonalities and differences between young people based on their hanging out habits. Lastly, this study aims to learn more about the exclusion of young people from public, semi-public, and alternative spaces in a pre and post-pandemic context.

**Participation:** My participation will consist of attending one interview session for 60 minutes during which I will participate in a google maps activity (duration: 5 minutes) and answer interview questions (duration: 50 minutes). This interview has been scheduled for (place, date, and time of each session). I will also be asked to answer demographic questions on a google form prior to the start of the interview (duration: 5 minutes). The interview will be audio-recorded.

**Risks:** My participation in this study will entail that, in some cases, I volunteer personal information about private or sensitive topics related to hanging out (illegal acts, encounters with law enforcement, exclusion, etc.) and this may cause me to feel some emotional or psychological discomfort. The following information will not be shared or reported to the police or any other authorities. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks (individual interview, pseudonym, private room).



**Benefits:** My participation in this study may be beneficial to me as I may share my experiences and opinions on the topic of spatialized experiences in the city. This may allow for future improvements in policing, urban planning, and policy.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for this master's thesis and that my confidentiality will be protected using password protection for all information gathered in the interviews. All paper documents will be locked and shredded once they are entered into the password-protected system.

**Anonymity will be protected in the following manner:** All participants will be given a pseudonym and all identifying demographic data will remain password protected. All personal locations that may be mentioned in the interview or mapping activity will remain unspecific in the publication. Participants will not map their homes on google maps. This research uses Google Forms and Google Maps which are United States of American (USA) companies. Consequently, USA authorities under the provisions of the Patriot Act may access the survey data. If you would rather participate with an email or paper-based survey, please contact the researchers. The identity of the participants will not be revealed in publications. To further protect your information, data stored by the researcher will be password protected.

**Conservation of data:** The data collected in the consent forms, interview notes, and audio recordings (for transcription purposes) will be kept in a secure manner. Written records and consent forms will be kept in a locked drawer until transcription. When transcription is complete, and password protected, paper documents will be shredded. The data will be kept indefinitely and will always be password protected.

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

**Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Cassandra Hope Sydor of the (School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa), which research is under the supervision of José Lopez.

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

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

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

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date: