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Outside Society? The social implications of gated and secured neighbourhoods in Australia

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Abstract

Within and beyond Australia's urban centres a complex archipelago of target-hardened, walled and otherwise secured neighbourhoods and individual homes has risen. In place of traditionally 'porous' suburbs and domestic environments has occurred a tendentious move by some to a built environment that holds implications for patterns of sociability, social networks and mobility. These spatial configurations suggest the rise of community forms preoccupied with social privatism and the withdrawal of affluent households from the institutional and social network flows of cities. We examine national survey data to enumerate the extent of gating and physical security measures in Australian neighbourhoods. We consider the relevance of our findings for those interested in the connections between these spatial configurations and their likely cultural and social impacts.

Keywords: Gated communities, Social privatism, Segregation, Master Planned Community, Neighbourhood

1. Introduction

While planners, geographers and anthropologists have provided a lively commentary on the deeper effect of segregation and walling of residential space by the affluent (for example, Gleeson, 2003; Gwyther, 2002; McGuirk and Dowling, 2007) a consideration of the scale of the most extreme forms of social seclusion via the production of gated residential development has not been identified in the Australian context. This may not be surprising, given the difficulty of producing such estimates, but it does hamper the attempt to consider the relative weight that should be attached to the growth of such development. This is especially so when we consider that gated communities have, in many other countries, attracted significant critique and broader anxiety around the withdrawal of the affluent into protected spaces as well as a social politics played-out around fiscal autonomy and the rejection of the diversity of the broader city (for example, Atkinson and Flint, 2004; Dwyer, 2007). While general patterns of wealth and disadvantage in Australian society remain regular features of commentary, the patterning of segregation has seen less regular analysis. It is to this lacuna that this paper is directed in the context of an internationalised interest in gated communities in urban centres globally (Webster et al, 2002; Atkinson and Blandy, 2005).

In this paper we use national survey data from the 2007 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) to derive estimates of the extent of gated and related forms of protected living and use this data to provide a commentary on the kinds of social changes that might be influenced by such arrangements. We seek to measure these changes by asking about the the relative 'fortification' and physical detachment of developments, both from their surrounding urban landscapes and social connections. The research underpinning our analysis starts from a social problem perspective, asserting that wealth and its spatial distribution may present moral, political and empirically measurable problems that can be linked to the disadvantages experienced by other social groups. Our position is influenced and subsequently structured by Tickamyer's (2000) commentary on the importance of the relationship between space, society and inequality.

The broad thrust of our argument is that affluence and its spatial condensation in Australian cities has often tended to go under the radar of those focusing on urban affairs. Australia's urban history has not generally been marked by the kind of endemic problems of the cities of countries like the US or the UK (Forster, 2006). Rather, its distinctive history has been one of the production of generally open/porous residential areas and related to lower levels of income inequality. Yet it is also clear that strategies are being developed in the pursuit of relative inaccessibility and prestige via the built environment. There now appears to be an overlay between a range of such physical/residential strategies and the desire for largely private, secure and anonymous modes of urban living (Bauman, 2001). Such strategies clearly now include cases of both gated and symbolically exclusive estates that protect or deter entry by non-residents (Kenna, 2007; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009; Dowling et al, 2010).

Debates about the growth and social implications of the gating of residential contexts have begun in Australia (such as Gwyther, 2005), but with perhaps two notable differences from those in the Anglo-American context. First, there has not, to date, been much debate between 'advocates' and those who recognise deeper problems with this solidification of segregation. Second, some of the concerted push against gated communities in Europe and elsewhere is perhaps, in the Australian context, mollified by a recognition that gating and segregated areas of social deprivation are not dominating features of Australian urbanism. To be sure, there are clear distinctions to be made around the distinctiveness of the Australian urban form, its transportation and welfare systems and social geography, all of which provide grounds for a warning against the direct importation of such Anglo-American perspectives. Nevertheless, we also need to understand that debate in Australia has been stymied by a lack of basic data on the prevalence of gated, master-planned and other more or less 'defended' and exclusive built forms. In this paper we seek to address some of these gaps by elaborating on the results of a national survey to which we included questions about the relative 'securitisation' of the dwellings and neighbourhoods of respondents.

The paper is presented in three sections. First, we consider the international and extant Australasian evidence on the scale and impact of gating and the issues for socio-spatial analysis raised by this work. Second, we report on the

results of the AuSSA data that included questions modelled on the American Housing Survey (AHS) which looked at the proportion and demographic composition of households living behind walls, behind secured entry systems, manned by private guards and governed by codes of conduct. We then discuss these subtly different mechanisms of privatism and defence, and attempt to profile these different modes of social withdrawal and segregation. Finally, we reflect on the potential social ramifications of gating and security raised by our results.

2. Gated communities, residential security and social privatism

Australian housing, suburbs and cities can be demarcated in important ways from their European counterparts. One obvious feature is that a lack of land supply constraints has tended to produce extremely dispersed 'suburban' forms of living that, in the case of many cities, such as Melbourne and Sydney, has produced an urban form with extremely low density. Gradual increases in income polarization have been fed through the housing system such that patterns of socio-spatial segregation have become more observable than has traditionally been the case (Kenna, 2007). An obsession with the 'Australian Dream' of home ownership (Donoghue, Tranter and White 2003) has, alongside the easing of mortgage credit restrictions, produced a bloated landscape of McMansions with small gardens, numerous garages and an often featureless non-place urban realm lacking transport nodes and employment opportunities (Dodson and Sipe, 2007). Thus relative deprivation has migrated to edge suburbs or been locked into areas of inner suburban private rental and public housing (Randolph and Holloway, 2005) with increasing reliance on increasingly expensive and ineffective private, and public, transport. Forster usefully summarises the character of Australian cities around a number of such features:

1. Each of Australia's five major capital cities (Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney) are highly suburbanised and of low density.
2. There are high levels of home ownership and automobile dependence.
3. Australian cities are 'doughnut cities' with growing outer suburbs surrounding older areas of population decline or stagnation with significant gentrification in the inner suburbs.
4. They are less socially polarised than cities in many other countries.
5. Despite economic growth, many researchers argue that levels of social polarisation and exclusion have worsened (Forster, 2006).

The research we report on here is complementary to the emerging concern with the relative social privatism and physical distinction of master-planned residential estates that have been the focus of much work in recent years (such as Rosenblattt et al, 2008). Yet our concern here is specifically with the rise of gated and walled residential development (some of which is planned in this way) which raises more concretely normative and political questions about the nature of urban life and the social contract (Atkinson and Blandy, 2005). The sealing-up of residential space continues to generate debate and writers, such

as Webster (2002) and Manzi and Smith-Bowers (2005), have tended to deproblematise, or at least restate, these forms of social retreat and exclusivity as logical responses to the deficits of public and civic life. Cast in this way, gated communities are seen as economic 'club goods' which can be used to provide access to services while excluding non-contributors. It is also clear that gated communities have antecedents in the physical form of urban life of early Europe; they can be located in the fortified cities from which broader notions of protection and obligation stemmed. In contrast, the Australian context has not tended to see gating and walls or private estates. Indeed the ideological result of lower income inequalities and open suburban forms has arguably been shared notions of an open and egalitarian society lacking in many urban divisions found elsewhere in the West.

Sociologists should no doubt be concerned at some attempt to 'read' social relationships from the physical structures of residential and urban space. No doubt we are cognisant of these concerns, yet it is becoming increasingly clear that the combination of growing social inequalities and physical mechanisms of urban partition raise the possibility of emergent and complex influences on sociability, cohesion and social separation. Work by Noonan (2005), to take one example, has traced the implications of physical boundaries in urban spaces on segregation and found significant barrier effects for the black population of Chicago. There is also widespread evidence of the social impacts of gated communities (for an extensive review see Blandy et al, 2003) which have tended to produce socio-economically separate and physically 'fortified' spaces that highlight the desire for social and political escape by affluent households, often driven by fear of crime and social contact. The commodification of public space, amenity and services has become a growing concern in Australian urban studies and similarly presents challenges to notions of the city as an open, democratic and shared space (Gleeson, 2003). Social commentaries in the US and UK have tended to see gated communities (GCs) and common interest development as complementing this broader privatisation of public space and antithetical to how cities *should* be run and experienced (Graham and Marvin, 2001).

The use of gates in residential development has come to dominate discussions centred on the changing socio-physical patterning of neighbourhood life and cities. In this respect gating is one example of the heightened insulation and bunkerisation of domestic life, within defended homes (Atkinson and Blandy, 2007), gated neighbourhoods (Blakely and Snyder, 1997), symbolically demarcated enclaves and socio-legal systems that have shifted the rules by which urban public space is administered and by which higher income groups are sheltered from contact with social problems and relative exposure in public spaces.

The home has often been described as a 'territorial core' (Porteous, 1976) yet the micro patterns of defence offered by GCs are also capable of being used as the building blocks of larger partitioned urban aggregates. Homes can be part of walled neighbourhoods or smaller sub-units, such as blocks of flats/units that can be more or less secured from intrusion, against the threat of crime, casual entry and so on. It is important to recognise, particularly perhaps for the social life of Australian towns and cities, that a further function of gating

and walling can be linked to social prestige and privacy (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Duncan and Duncan, 2004). It is therefore not necessary for urban insecurity, fear of crime and anxiety to predominate for such dwellings and neighbourhoods to appear attractive. Indeed, in combination with a history of self-reliance and dreams of domestic autonomy and self-sufficiency, gating and walling perhaps extend ambitions to achieve affluent self-expression through forms of housing consumption and display. In this context gating and walling can be seen as a further buttressing of property wealth and the conferring of greater privacy on households riding a wave of housing investment equity.

It has become common to suggest that much gated development has been modelled, or borrowed from the US, where such development has risen exponentially over the past forty years in particular (Webster, Glasze and Frantz, 2002). Anecdotally the two key sources of the gated model in the Australian context stem from, firstly, ex-patriot migration to cities like Perth in Western Australia, by South Africans émigrés looking to emulate the security arrangements they have associated with home. Second, on the east coast, patterns of retirement and prestige/leisure developments have been developed, often away from large urban centres, particularly in areas like South-East Queensland, often for older households (Minnery and Bajracharya, 1999).

Dowling and McGuirk (2007) have argued that the range of master-planned communities [1] in Australia suggest differences from the Anglo-American context. In particular the governance mechanisms which are argued to be more publicly engaged and housing markets which operate differentially according to the scale of the community and thus the relative diversity of the social base of the area. Yet for Gwyther (2005) the promise of 'community' in master-planned communities responds in practice to the fears of prospective residents, regularly driven by concerns about security. Such fears can be mapped onto the social geography of 'respectability', public housing and crime in areas like western Sydney (Kenna, 2007).

Over the past decade or so the rise of master planned communities can be connected to Rofe's (2006) concerns with an emerging exclusive neighbourhood landscape, both to non-residents and those on lower incomes. Research in this area suggests that the socio-demographic composition of these spaces is often diverse. However, the rise of MPCs has generated further concern about the way in which these new residential areas are financed and provided by the private sector, or public-private partnerships, as well as being planned by a private corporation rather than government entity and often governed by a privately constituted management organisation. Webster has described such spaces as a 'new genre of modern urban habitat' (Webster et al 2002) that are subject to private micro-urban government at the community level. Many such 'communities' indeed have regulatory frameworks that

[1] Master Planned Communities refer to residential and mixed-used developments that are planned from inception, rather than arising from more ad-hoc development over time. Such a definition may include cities like Canberra or Adelaide but is now more often used by urbanists to refer to coherent, planned and often large-scale development in estates on undeveloped land.

govern the behaviour of residents by creating socio-legal frameworks to govern and sanction behaviour (Blandy & Lister 2005).

A further concern with the kind of physical changes associated with gated communities has been with transport impacts (Burke, 2001) given that new walls tend to produce longer journey times for residents while preventing or slowing pedestrian traffic. Rofe (2006) has added that, within the Australian context, gated communities do not need to rely upon aggressive mechanisms of exclusion, such as gates and walls, to produce exclusive environments. Exclusion can be generated through landscapes that are imbued with prestige, thus dissuading non-residents from entry. Such forms of symbolic exclusion can be connected to a more general process of privatization in Australian cities by which new residential environments are economically, socio-culturally and politically given over to non-state control (Gleeson 2005; Randolph 2004; Macken 2002). In the context of these debates we now present our findings from the 2007 AuSSA before discussing their implications.

3. Residential securitisation and neighbourhood segregation

To assess the range of security arrangements operating at the scale of the household and neighbourhoods we reproduced a series of questions from the American Housing Survey reported earlier by Sanchez and Lang (2005). This enabled the use of measures that had already been field-tested but which also could then be compared without risking difficulties of comparability. These questions attempt to get at different types of security of the home and residential neighbourhoods as follows:

1. Do you live in a residential housing development to which public access is restricted by walls or fences
2. Do you live in a residential housing development that has a special entry system such as entry codes or key cards?
3. Do you live in a residential housing development that is guarded by security personnel?
4. Do you live in a residential housing development that legally requires residents to abide by a common code of conduct?

Each of these questions was given a binary 'Yes/No' response format. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes itself is a biennial survey mail survey which began in 2003, managed by the Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute (ADSRI) at the Australian National University (ANU) and is used to collect data on social attitudes and behaviour covering issues like work and education, government spending and taxes, families and crime. The data we analyse are from the 2007 AuSSA, the third in the series (Phillips et al. 2008). The 2007 AuSSA has a sample size of 2,769 and response rate of 41% and the sample was selected randomly from the Australian electoral roll.

Here we report on the findings generated by these questions in relation to key independent variables as well as the regional-urban and State-Territory location of each of these different types of residential securitization. It is

important to remember that there are several limitations that should be considered in relation to the approach we have taken. The first of these is that we cannot directly infer social isolation or, indeed, the actual number of gated communities from these data. This is because our data are based on household responses, so we know the percentage of people who, for example, live in areas that restrict public access, but not the actual number of those areas.

Second, the survey, rather unusually, was not used to collect data on housing tenure or dwelling type, thus we cannot distinguish between forms of private and public ownership and the distribution of security in relation to these tenures. Third, the classifications of security in housing developments are not mutually exclusive so that we might find some households in several categories at once and others in only one or more. We have treated these as separate strands for the purpose of analysis and later focus in particular on residents in secured developments because of their greater apparent accuracy and relevance to our research questions.

We retain reservations about the estimate of the population that consider themselves to live in walled/gated communities using the AHS question. Given the dramatic estimate that this question produced (18%) we have relied more heavily on the questions around security personnel and entry systems as a more restrictive and indicative measure of residential seclusion and privatism.

3.a. Gated communities, or just homes?

The first form of security we examine is based on the question: 'Do you live in a residential housing development to which public access is restricted by walls or fences?' This question produced an overall figure of 18.2% that appears to be very high (Table 1). The equivalent figure for the USA was 5.9% and it seems certain that Australia does not have more gated and walled developments. What appears to have happened here is that respondents may have interpreted their own walls, fences and gates as mechanisms by which public access is prevented. This creates some problems for an attempt to impute the number of people living in gated communities, but it tells us perhaps that around a fifth of Australian respondents feel that they have this kind of control in their immediate locality.

Table 1: AHS Measures of Gated Communities by Social Background (%)

	Restricted access	Special entry	Security personnel	Code of Conduct
Men	17.4	5.4	1.9	13.0
Women	18.8	6.4	2.2	14.6
X^2 p	*.328*	*.298*	*.596*	*.230*
Age				
18-30	23.8	8.2	3.3	15.3
31-40	21.7	6.7	1.5	13.0
41-50	13.8	4.4	1.4	10.6
51-60	15.7	3.3	0.9	9.2
61-70	16.8	6.7	2.0	13.9
71-80	19.7	6.0	3.3	22.8
80+	22.9	18.5	9.4	40.6
X^2 p	*<.001*	*<.0001*	*<.0001*	*<.0001*
Personal Income				
$0-15,599	21.5	6.1	2.2	16.6
$15,600-36,399	15.6	4.3	2.4	14.1
$36,400-77,999	18.7	6.0	1.1	13.2
$78,000+	14.5	7.6	1.8	9.7
X^2 p	*.015*	*.177*	*.266*	*.034*
Household Income				
$0-31,199	20.4	6.4	2.6	20.0
$31,200-77,999	17.6	3.6	0.5	9.7
$78,000+	16.0	5.8	1.7	9.7
X^2 p	*.052*	*.080*	*.018*	*<.0001*
Size of Town/City				
Country Town population 25,000 or less	14.5	1.7	0.5	8.7
Large town population 25,000 or more	20.5	4.4	1.4	15.3
Outer Metropolitan area of city population 100,000+	17.9	4.3	2.1	12.8
Inner Metropolitan area of city population 100,000+	20.4	11.6	3.6	18.8
X^2 p	*.022*	*<.0001*	*.001*	*<.0001*
Household size				
1 person	19.8	10.7	3.8	29.2
2 people	17.2	7.7	2.0	15.0
3 people	18.6	3.4	0.6	10.2
4 people	16.9	3.6	1.9	6.0
5 or more people	20.5	2.3	2.3	9.8
X^2 p	*.590*	*<.0001*	*.040*	*<.0001*

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2007).

Table 1: AHS Measures of Gated Communities – continued (%)

	Restricted access	Special entry	Security personnel	Code of Conduct
State				
New South Wales	15.9	6.2	1.6	16.4
Victoria	20.4	5.0	1.9	9.6
Queensland	15.0	6.7	2.2	14.6
South Australia	19.4	4.2	0.0	13.4
Western Australia	24.8	8.0	3.6	15.1
X^2 *p*	*.003*	*.329*	*.053*	*.006*
Percentage in full sample	18.2	5.9	2.0	13.8

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2007).

3.b. Secure entry systems

The question asked here was: 'Do you live in a residential housing development that has a special entry system such as entry codes or key cards?' We found that 5.9% of households claimed to live in such developments, again somewhat higher than the reported figure of 3.4% for the US (Sanchez and Lang, 2005). We found little difference in the gender composition of residents in such developments. Unfortunately we lack detail of the tenure breakdown of these kinds of development. Residents of such developments were found overwhelmingly in inner metropolitan areas (11.6%) in single person (10.7%) households. Given the single adult household effects, the age effects (i.e. the youngest and particularly the oldest groups were most likely to live in these places), and the fact that these people tend to be based in inner metropolitan areas of large cities, the special entry system question may well be measuring blocks of flats, and perhaps also residential care for the aged.

3.c. The use of security personnel

Here we asked: 'Do you live in a residential housing development that is guarded by security personnel?' This is a less ambiguous question than that about walls and gates so we can be more confident that the resulting estimate of 2% of households living in such developments is accurate. We suggest that this figure is a significant proportion of households, given the resource implications of living in such developments. The distribution of such households according to gender was also not statistically significant, even at the 95% level. However, this group are more likely to be aged 80 or over (9.4%) and to live in inner metropolitan areas (3.8%), particularly in Western Australia (3.6%).

3.d. Codes of conduct

Our final question asked: 'Do you live in a residential housing development that legally requires residents to abide by a common code of conduct?' Unfortunately, private rental strata title and public housing are likely to be

conflated by this question without some disaggregation by tenure, and this may account for the overall figure of 13.8% households living in developments of this kind. In this instance, such households are again found in inner metropolitan areas (18.8%), most frequently in New South Wales (16.4%), and importantly are very likely to consist of single person households (29.2%) with low levels of household income (20.0%). This may reflect a greater propensity for flats (units) and thereby the generation of higher levels of strata title that tends to control conduct. It is also true to say that the bulk of public housing lies in the major metropolitan areas which would also contribute to this distribution.

Multivariate analysis

Given the potential problems associated with the AHS questions in general and the high levels of responses for the 'restricted access' question, we attempt to measure what we conceptualise as 'gated' housing more narrowly. We approach this by constructing two new variables. For the first dependent variable we select those who live in residential housing with restricted public access (i.e. with walls or fences) who also have a special entry system (i.e. require entry codes or key cards) and contrast these with all other dwellings to create a synthetic variable that can be used to identify gated residential development specifically. This group represents 3.7% of the AuSSA sample which is likely to be a more realistic estimate of those living in gated housing in Australia. This measure tends to exclude units and apartment blocks, given that these do not tend to have walls or fences *and* special entry systems. We therefore viewed this dependent variable to be a more precise measure of 'gated communities'.

Second, we again take those in residential housing with restricted public access (i.e. with walls or fences) who are bound by a code of conduct and contrast them with all other respondents. This is again a narrower conception of 'restricted access' and therefore comprises a smaller sub group for analysis, at 5.6% of the sample. This approach excludes apartment blocks and units, which do not tend to have walls or fences *and* codes of conduct, but is likely to include gated communities.[2]

We model these dependent variables with binary logistic regression analysis and present odds ratios[3] calculated on the basis of regression models in Table 2. This approach allows us to estimate the net association between each independent variable and the dependent variables while holding constant all

[2] We considered constructing additional variables from combinations of questions that included the residential housing developments guarded by security personnel, but the low number of responses to this question result in very small sub samples that produce unreliable estimates.

[3] Odds ratios are presented to facilitate the interpretation of the regression results. An example of their interpretation follows. In Table 2 for the 'special entry' column, those aged 18-30 are 2.98 times more likely than the reference group aged 41-59 to live in residential development with restricted access *and* a special entry system, as opposed to living in any other dwelling. Odds less than 1 indicate negative effects. For example, those in the highest income category are approximately 1.03 times *less likely* than the lower income reference group (i.e. $1 \div 0.97 = 1.03$) to live in a walled residence with a code of conduct, compared to other housing (although this result is very weak and not statistically significant even at the <.05 probability level).

other independent variables in the regression equation. Statistical significance at the 95%, 99% and 99.9% levels is signified by one, two and three asterisks respectively. We examine sex, age categories, household size, place, household income and state as predictors of our dependent variables: living in a household with 'restricted public access' and a 'special entry system' or that requires adherence to a 'code of conduct'.

Table 2: Live in Residential Development with Restricted Public Access and a Special Entry System/Code of Conduct (odd ratios)

Restricted Public Access…	+ Special Entry	+ Code of Conduct
Women	1.01	1.08
Men	1	1
Aged 18-30	2.98**	2.48**
Aged 31-40	1.37	1.26
Aged 41-59 (referent)	1	1
Aged 61-80	1.39	1.92**
Aged 80+	3.13**	3.20**
Single person household	2.80**	2.58***
Two person household (without children)	1.97*	1.04
Other households (referent)	1	1
Live in Inner Metropolitan area of Large City	3.22***	2.22***
Live elsewhere (referent)	1	1
Household Income < $78,000 (referent)	1	1
Household Income $78,000+	1.28	0.97
Queensland	1.84*	1.56
West Australia	2.29**	2.00**
Other States (referent)	1	1
Nagelkerke R^2	.11	.08
N	(2387)	(2374)

* p< .05 ** p < .01 *** p< .001.
Dependent variables: 'Do you live in a residential housing development… with both Restricted Public Access *and* a Special Entry System?' 1 = Yes; 0 = No;
'Do you live in a residential housing development… with both Restricted Public Access *and* Code of Conduct?' 1 = Yes; 0 = No (Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2007)

In the multivariate model, age, household composition and place all show highly significant effects for the first dependent variable. Single persons are almost three times as likely as others to live in walled or fenced households that have special entry systems, while those living in inner metropolitan areas are over three times as likely as those living elsewhere to live in such dwellings. Given the bivariate results in Table 1, younger and older age groups are

contrasted against a middle aged 41-59 year old reference group. The youngest group (18-30) is three times as likely as the reference group to live in restricted access dwellings, while the oldest group shows a result of a very similar magnitude after controlling for other variables in the regression models. Interestingly, household income shows no significant results at the 95% level of confidence, but there are state based differences. Those live in Queensland or West Australia, are approximately twice as likely as people living elsewhere to reside in restricted access dwellings with special entry systems. The percentage of variation in the dependent variable that is 'explained' by the regression model (i.e. R^2) is not large at .11, but of a reasonable magnitude given that we are examining social survey data.

The pattern of effects for the second dependent variable - restricted access dwellings that are walled or fenced and require adherence to codes of conduct - are similar to the first. The age estimates are of similar magnitude, although the 61-80 cohort estimate is stronger and highly significant. Those living in inner metropolitan areas are also about twice as likely to live in such dwellings. The effect for Queensland is slightly weaker and non-significant at the 95% level, although the West Australian effect is similar to that shown for the first dependent variable. The R^2 statistic at .08 suggests that the regression model accounts for slightly less variation in the second dependent variable compared to the first.

4. The changing nature of residential life

While providing an initial snapshot of the status of residential privatisation in Australia, our data provides only an initial viewpoint. Yet our analysis raises a number of issues for the interpretation of physical and social changes in Australian cities. Gating and walls are both the result of social, technological and economic changes, but these manifestations themselves also have impacts upon a range of social phenomena that have generally been underplayed. We organise our final analysis here around two such issues which, we suggest, are critical to further structured investigation in this area and which reflect on the extant theory and our data in this area, using Tickamyer's (2000) comments on the importance of space for social analysis.

Tickamyer's paper sees space in three, related ways. First, as *place*, in the sense of particular locales or settings. Second, as *relational units* that organize ideas about places and implicitly or explicitly enable us to compare locations. Finally, she discusses the importance of *scale,* and the important influence of unit size to the particularised phenomenon under consideration. More pertinently, for our purposes here, Tickamyer raises three central issues, or problematics, for sociological analysis in relation to spatial considerations. Here the key issue relates less to her concerns about scale and measurement (though clearly these are important issues for consideration by social scientists) and more on issues of *advantage* and *meaning*. Tickamyer suggests that a critical element of the consideration of space by sociology relates to the need to focus on the study of inequalities, and the need to investigate the sources of comparative advantage and disadvantage. Secondly, Tickamyer raises the need to consider the socio-spatial linkages of meaning, construction, and control. She suggests that spatial relations have both symbolic and

practical meanings whose construction and control are integral parts of wider systems of inequality. Both of these features of the socio-spatial lend themselves well to an analysis of the kind of changes we are endeavouring to chart in this article.

Vesselinov, Cazessus and Falk (2007) have used Tickamyer's framework to consider the ways in which gating might be implicated in exacerbating inequality. They argue that gated development may enable the reproduction of social stratification and serve to create more permanent senses of differentiation in which gates and other physical urban symbolic systems provide visual evidence of social classification. From this point Vesselinov et al. (2007: 113) suggest that physical barriers carry symbolic meanings that may continue to affect relationships by generating what they term 'new orders of place stratification'. While a wall may not cut-off links to friends, family or to work opportunities, it may influence the scale, extent and frequency of such network linkages by altering the time taken to reach these networks, by affecting the way communication might take place and so on. So the first point we would wish to make in the Australian context relates to the potentially worrying pattern of segregation and solidified socio-physical boundary-making that may be set in place on top of growing social inequalities.

In line with Tickamyer's framework our next point of discussion is the way in which the growth of gated communities may shape social opportunities in the Australian context. Here we contend that, while reflecting the apparently benign choices of individual households, the emergent and complex social relations structured by these choices may have escalating consequences that are woven into and reproduced within these physically bounded arrangements. Research in the US, on the stratification of housing opportunities (Dwyer, 2007), has linked gated communities as significant fields of opportunity that exist in relation to broader opportunity structures. Certainly both the privatization of space and services that may be generated by gating also raises the possibility of entire social fields being encompassed by these community spaces, such that community life becomes more clearly located within these micro states (McKenzie, 1995).

For academic commentators on the traditional advantages of Australian urban life, like Gleeson (2003), the rise of gating reflects the descent of public life into 'privatopias' and urban society more broadly into a pattern of places of advantage and disadvantage. Healy and Birrell (2003) have additionally argued that there is an ethnic component to this process in areas like western Sydney where new residents in master-planned communities which are often symbolically set outside the public streetscape tend to be Australian-born and English-speaking, whereas many of the low income households 'left behind' are of non-English-speaking origin. As Gwyther sums up:

> 'the motive *in esse* included perceived threats associated with public housing enclaves, including crime, incivility and consequent effects on property values; the perceived undermining of a 'common way of life' by new non-English-speaking migrant groups; and the 'economic failure' of Sydney's middle-ring suburbs' (Gwyther, 2005: 65).

These viewpoints appear to be echoed through developer and resident choices which mutually construct needs for household safety, contrasting such aspirations with concern about the quality and dangers of the public realm. An ongoing fascination with some of the larger gated communities has thus yielded anecdotal, yet apparently confirmatory, positions on these points. As a resident of one of the largest gated communities in South-East Queensland, Hope Island, tells reporter Jane Cadzow (2007: 35): 'Go to Labrador, and see some of the gorillas hanging around. You'd want to be in a gated community too. There have been times I've gone out the gates and thought, 'It feels strange to be out here. With all the crazies roaring around''. Writers like Low (2003) have suggested that the hard lines offered by gated communities effectively concretise differences between the social class positions of residents and those others outside these boundaries and that this is based on the symbolic changes and associations between interior and exterior spaces.

Low argues that the apparent increased community activity inside these spaces appear to be come at the expense of relationships outside. In fact this analysis ties-in to that provided by Gwyther (2005) in Australia where she suggests that though these spaces cannot be considered to be total institutions the strong sense of psycho-social splitting between inside/good/safe and outside/bad/danger remains a strong means of considering the nature of community life in these spaces, central motifs developed in the work of writers like Low (2003) in the US context. These points are further echoed by the contrasts offered by Gleeson (2003) in his analysis of Australian cities like Sydney in which affluent community enclaves provide a strong contrast with the increasingly restricted, desocialised and degraded public realms around them.

5. Conclusions

The key debates that have taken place globally around gated residential development and spatial withdrawal of circuits of affluence cannot begin in the Australian context without some indication of the relative prevalence of these built forms. In this paper we have aligned ourselves with commentators seeking to interrogate the social implications of the physical structure of the built environment as this has come to be associated with processes of socio-economic polarisation and privatism. Our contention is that the growing prevalence of gating and walling in some Australian suburbs presents similar prospects to those measured and theorised in states like the US, albeit on an apparently smaller scale. In these respects we suggest that gating presents a potentially problematic aspect of socio-physical relationships as these come to mediate and influence patterns of inequality, opportunity and sociability.

We have presented new data that highlight the extent of gated, guarded and otherwise protected neighbourhood lifestyles across Australia. Such developments appear to shield their residents from unwanted social contact while promoting security, status and internal community formation. Taken on their own terms such developments may well be seen as successes and yet, set in a broader socio-spatial context, a much more perturbing impression may develop in which socio-economic inequalities are aligned and exacerbated by this kind of boundary building. Yet clearly there remains more to be said

about the external-internal dynamics of transportation, social contact and opportunity which we may be able to speculate on (see for example Dowling et al, 2010), but may also find difficult to observe or penetrate via empirical research. Notable exceptions to these difficulties (such as Gwyther 2005, and Kenna, 2007) do, however, suggest that the exclusive and excluding aspects of gating have generated problematic outcomes.

Gated development needs to be critiqued and disentangled in relation to the parameters of social difference and inequality that have become more marked features of Australian urban society. It is essential for political decision-making and planning that we understand more about gated development in order to understand its implications, particularly given its relative permanence as a feature of the built environments. From an applied, sociological perspective a distinct challenge lies in generating both the necessary data and in providing a critique capable of being deployed across the range of state, government and community spheres such that the consequences of these changes are more clearly thought out[4].

[4] The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has become more concerned about the viability of survey methods as increasing numbers of flats (units) with secure entry systems prevents access, another unintended consequence of these arrangements which has made the state potentially more 'myopic' in relation to the qualities and quantities of its citizens.

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