

Residential Satisfaction and Neighbouring in Toronto's Inner Suburbs: Exploring the Interconnections in Rexdale-Kipling

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Community Partner/s	Confirmed Partner: Federation of Metro Tenant Associations (FMTA) Potential partners include: Action for Neighbourhood Change, Albion Neighbourhood Services (especially the Housing Help Centre); Attwell Social Services; YWCA Toronto Bergamot Apartments Housing and Support; Rexdale Women's Centre, and Rexdale Community Legal Clinic

1. Rationale & Potential Policy Relevance

The proposed research aims to explore the interconnections between residential satisfaction and neighbouring among residents of Rexdale-Kipling, a neighbourhood at the north-west corner of the City of Toronto characterized by a mix of housing forms, tenures, income levels and ethno-racial groups.

Until recently, few ethnographic studies have been conducted on neighbouring, particularly in the Canadian context. Even though some scholars have examined neighbourhood social practices, much of this work is neither ethnographic nor current. Often in these studies, survey data are presented statistically in order to "model" social networks in neighbourhoods, and several studies list "good" and "bad" neighbouring practices. Arguing that these judgments are often based on "*a priori* morals or transcendental ethics [...and] dystopian versions of community imposed by a social theorist" (Laurier et al. 2000: 364), both Laurier et al (2000) and Van Eijik (2012) seem to agree that neighbouring should be judged based on the criteria given and used by an actual community. [See Appendix for full discussion]

It is important to broaden this area of research in order to contribute to the ongoing debates on how "good communities" can be created in immigrant receiving societies like Canada where, arguably, the promises of multiculturalism overshadow the realities of the socio-economic-political isolation of minorities (Gilbert and Dikec, 2008; Goonawardena et al., 2008; Milgrom, 2008).

Hypotheses:

- (1) **There is a positive correlation between residential satisfaction and neighbouring.** Residential satisfaction will tend to be high among those residents who engage in everyday neighbouring.
- (2) **Residential satisfaction will vary *within* a neighbourhood based on the nature of neighbouring.** For instance, whether the residents are involved in everyday symbiotic relationships (e.g., providers and clientele of informal daycares) or they just take part in collective activities occasionally (e.g., participating in annual Block Parties or summer barbecues) will govern the nature of neighbouring between them, and thereby influence their residential satisfaction.
- (3) **The nature of neighbouring will be influenced by at least three interrelated factors:**
 - a. Residents' household characteristics, including 'race', age, gender, immigrant status, economic class, length of time in the neighbourhood, and life cycle stage of the household members;
 - b. Residents' housing situations, including housing structure, type, tenure, and housing conditions (e.g., need for repair, living arrangements); and

- c. Neighbourhood characteristics, such as the location, institutional completeness, and the social composition of the neighbourhood.

2. Research Questions

An exploration of residential satisfaction:

- (1) In what ways does residential satisfaction in Rexdale-Kipling vary by household characteristics? (e.g., 'race', age, gender, immigrant status, economic class, length of stay in the neighbourhood, and life cycle stage of the household members)
- (2) In what ways does it vary by residents' housing situation? (i.e., by structure, type, housing tenure, number of persons in the household, and housing conditions such as the age of the building)
- (3) In what ways does it vary by neighbourhood characteristics? (e.g., social and economic composition of the neighbourhood, and available formal and informal services in the neighbourhood)

An exploration of the nature of neighbouring:

- (4) What are some of the common neighbouring practices of this neighbourhood?
- (5) How do these practices vary within the neighbourhood by:
 - resident characteristics (ethnic and religious groups; immigrants and non-immigrants),
 - housing structures (among residents of high-rise and low-rise buildings),
 - housing tenures (between renters and owners; and between those living in social housing and private market rental), and
 - neighbourhood characteristics (social and economic composition of the neighbourhood; available formal and informal services in the neighbourhood)?

3. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions

The study aims to identify the everyday social and economic practices of residents of Rexdale-Kipling, and the effects (good and bad) of those practices on their residential satisfaction. This study will fit specifically into two themes outlined in the NCRP proposal: (1) Immigrant settlement, immigration status, and integration/marginalization and (2) Adequate housing and high-rise neighbourhoods.

It addresses three key NCRP objectives: identifying neighbourhood trends and processes; describing the consequences of those trends; and identifying interventions that can make a difference

4. Research Design & Methods

For this research project, 'mixed' methods will be used to explore the research questions. Activities will include:

- **Field observations** to assess housing forms and conditions, formal services (e.g., medical clinics, drug stores, grocery stores) and informal services (e.g., daycare facilities, language classes) within high-rise buildings and in the broader neighbourhood.
- **Secondary data analysis** using 2006 census data at the dissemination area (DA) level to examine fine-grained differences below the neighbourhood scale and create resident profiles of high-rise and low-rise areas. City data will be used to determine the age, conditions and maintenance of low-rise and high-rise buildings. We will also seek permission to use data gathered by the United Way Toronto in their Vertical Poverty survey to examine residential satisfaction among high-rise residents.
- **Key informant interviews** with 10 knowledgeable leaders in the neighbourhood, to gather information about the residents and the nature of neighbourhood activities to promote social interactions among residents. The key informants will also be asked to discuss the criteria given and used by the members of the community in evaluating their residential satisfaction.

- **Focus groups and interviews with residents** to further elaborate the connections between residential satisfaction and neighbouring. Participants will be purposefully varied by demographic characteristics, housing situations (e.g., those living in high-rises and low rises) and tenures (e.g., renters and owners). The protocol for semi-structured interviews will be developed with reference to themes that have emerged from the focus group conversations. We aim to engage a total of 60 residents in these conversations: 30 in focus groups and 30 face-to-face interviews.

5. Role of Community Partner/s

In order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ensure that the research meets community needs, we will convene an advisory board that will include representatives from agencies and tenant associations in Rexdale-Kipling, as well as NCRP researchers and partners. The advisory board will provide input at all stages of the project: planning, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Initial contact has been made with some potential partners.

6. Role of Students / Research Assistants and Contributions to Training

Student research assistants (undergraduate and graduate) and a community-based researcher will be trained to conduct field observations, community networking, literature review, analysis and mapping of census data, GIS, interview protocol design, note-taking, transcription, qualitative coding, and data analysis.

7. Schedule (timeline of research tasks, including deliverables submission dates)

Project timeframe 18 months: February 2015 – June 2016

- Recruit the Research Advisory Board (February – April 2015)
- Secondary data analysis and maps/charts (February- May 2015)
- Literature review (February-May 2015)
- Field observations (February – May 2015)
- Primary data collection, concurrent transcription, preliminary analysis (June - December 2015)
- Final analysis and writing (January – June 2016)

8. Outcomes / Deliverables

Report to the NCRP team; Plain language research bulletin and presentation for community partners; One Conference Presentation – National; one Journal Article. Additional innovative options will be considered.

9. Budget Explanation

\$16,200: wages for one undergraduate student, two graduate students, and one community researcher; honoraria and other research costs; supplies; and departmental lab-use fees.

Graduate student 1: 120 hours, Feb - June 2015.

- Conducting literature review, producing an annotated bibliography on neighbouring
- Carrying out data analysis (census, City, and United Way) field observations, and inventory of community resources; producing maps

Graduate student 2: 120 hours, June 2015 – April 2016

- Assisting with design of interview and focus group protocols; and ethics review
- Recruitment of key informants and residents for interviews and focus groups
- Note-taking; transcription, coding & analysis

Undergraduate student: 120 hours, Feb 2015 – April 2016

- Note-taking and administration; transcription

Community-based researcher: 100 hours, Feb 2015 – April 2016

- Community networking, informing partner organizations about the study
 - Convening Community Advisory Board
 - Recruitment of key informants and residents for interviews and focus groups
 - Arranging locations and refreshments for advisory meetings and focus groups
 - Participation in data analysis
 - Organizing community dissemination event
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- ❑ Sent to the NCRP's Research Advisory Board for comment: date _____ deadline: _____
- ❑ Funding approved by the NCRP's Board: \$ \$16,200 date 13 February 2015



Approved.

SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
Personnel costs				
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Undergraduate *	2500			
Masters *	6500			
Doctorate *				
Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Postdoctoral				
Other Community-based Researcher	2500	2500 (in-kind)	Staff time of five community organiza- tions for participation on advisory board	
Travel and subsistence costs				
Applicant/Team member(s)				
Canadian travel				
Foreign travel				
Other expenses				
Non-disposable equipment (specify)				
Other expenses (specify)				
Departmental lab fees	500			
Honoraria for resident focus groups and interviews (60 residents x \$50)	3000			
Transit faresw; hospitality for focus groups, advisory board meetings, and presentation of results	700			
Printing, supplies, & miscellaneous	500			
Total	16,200	2500		18,700

Hourly rates for research assistants:

- Undergraduate student: one @ \$21/hour x 140 hours
- Graduate students: two @ \$27 per hour x 140 hours
- Community-based researcher: one @ \$25 per hour x 100 hours
- All rates include 10% MERCS

APPENDIX: An Extended Rationale and Explanation

Toronto's inner suburbs were purposefully designed in the 1960s and the 1970s to be socio-economically 'mixed' (Searle and Filion, 2011). They were planned on the principals of a Keynesian welfare state, encouraging mixed housing developments -- high-rises built alongside low-density, single-family homes and following transportation arteries (Searle and Filion, 2011). This led to the massive development of high-rise complexes in Toronto's inner suburbs, particularly the 1960s and 1970s. The planners had envisioned that constructing these high-density residential blocks (mainly rental apartment buildings) within neighbourhoods of low density low-rises (mainly single family owned homes) would lead to the much desired socio-economically mixed neighbourhoods.

As a result of that progressive planning, many of Toronto's inner suburb neighbourhoods contain a diversity of housing structures (e.g., high-rises and low-rises) and tenures (e.g., private and public rental and ownership). Even though the residents still have distinct socio-economic characteristics (e.g., economic classes and household compositions), their ethno-cultural diversity has dramatically increased since the mid-1990s, when large numbers of immigrants from non-traditional source countries came to settle in these neighbourhoods.

In the last three decades, Toronto's neighbourhoods have become increasingly unequal and polarized (Hulchanski, 2010). During this time, many neighbourhoods in the inner suburbs have emerged as sites where "race and deprivation coincide with housing" (Jacobs, 2006). What is even more problematic is that urban inequalities also exist within these neighbourhoods. For instance, a majority of the residents living in the now aged rental high-rises are not only racialised minorities but they are also economically impoverished (United Way Toronto, 2004, 2011) and on the verge of homelessness (Paradis, 2014).

Within this broader Toronto context, a few recent studies portray an unlikely narrative. These studies indicate that even though the residents of the inner suburbs live in dwellings that are unaffordable, inadequate and unsuitable, many of them express high levels of residential satisfaction (see e.g., United Way Toronto, 2011). In trying to explain this apparent contradiction, some researchers allude to the interconnections between residential satisfaction and neighbourhood characteristics – its location, institutional completeness (Breton 1964) and social composition (e.g., One Millionth Tower, National Film Board of Canada; Ghosh, 2014). These studies emphasise that, even though they are not expected to do so renters of high-rise buildings develop close social, economic and psychological bonds with their neighbours, through numerous everyday social and economic practices, which are often facilitated by the housing structure such as high-rise buildings (Ghosh, 2014). These practices are referred to as "neighbouring."

Neighbouring may include a wide range of social and economic practices in neighbourhoods (Gans, 1972; Laurier *et al.*, 2000; Fortier, 2007; Guest *et al.*, 2006; Van Eijik 2012), such as casually keeping an eye on each other's children after school, or owning and using various informal services like grocery stores, daycares, and beauty parlours.

In the housing literature renters in general and especially those living in high-rises are not expected to develop strong connections with their neighbourhoods. The literature in fact asserts that neighbouring predominantly occurs among residents of low-density low-rises (e.g., town homes, semi and single detached homes) most of whom are owners. Van Eijik (2012) points out that residents of 'problem' places are less likely to engage in neighbourly practices: in neighbourhoods where criminal activity is high, neighbourliness tends to be less. But the recent studies cited above would appear to contradict these assertions.

Using a mixed-methods ethnographic approach, this study will explore these apparent contradictions in Rexdale-Kipling, a low-income neighbourhood. It would address three key NCRP objectives:

Identify neighbourhood trends and processes: Census data and previous studies have already established that Rexdale-Kipling is a neighbourhood where lower-income, racialized immigrants live very poor housing conditions with little access to transit and services. Our study will nuance this understanding by identifying trends of inequality, segregation and polarization that may exist *within* the neighbourhood, between households differentiated by household characteristics, and housing structure and tenure.

Describe the consequences of these trends: For instance, by specifically studying the interconnections of neighbourhood conditions (e.g., infrastructural, social and demographic changes) and residential satisfaction, the study will identify how these changes affect the social attitudes of the residents, especially their socio-psychological attachment and sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

Identify interventions that can make a difference: By identifying specific everyday social and economic practices which positively affect residential satisfaction in Rexdale-Kipling, the study will be able to assist local organizations to support and foster such practices among residents of similar 'problem' areas where 'race', poverty and deprivation coincide with unsatisfactory housing conditions.

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