

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

FACTORS AFFECTING NEIGHBOURLINESS IN A TERRACE HEIGHTS
NEIGHBOURHOOD IN EDMONTON ALBERTA

By

CONNIE LUSSIER

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submitted to Dr. Emma Pivato

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Abstract

This paper explores factors affecting the frequency and extent of neighbourly interactions in an urban neighbourhood in Edmonton Alberta. Although existing research identifies a wide variety of factors that may influence neighbourliness, opinions vary as to which factors are most relevant. Surveys were completed by 22 residents followed by interviews with a subset of nine residents. A grounded theory method of analysis was used. The research demonstrates that having opportunities for interactions was the most important factor influencing frequency of neighbouring. The nature or extent of interactions was dependent on whether a level of trust could be established and whether neighbours found things in common. Weak ties between neighbours were shown to be important in providing a feeling of home. Neighbours often did favours for each other, and did not expect anything in return. This research offers theories regarding factors affecting neighbourliness, however due to the small sample size; results cannot necessarily be generalized to other neighbourhoods.

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Introduction

Many references point out that our social networks have changed greatly in recent years. “Social networks are city-wide, national, international and increasingly, virtual” (Forrest, 2008, p. 132). Therefore, rather than being limited to communities in terms of geographical proximity, our mobility (both physical and electronic) facilitates development of communities of interest. This may affect neighbouring since residents may view connecting with their neighbours as relatively unimportant. From this researcher’s personal observations and a review of the literature, it is apparent that there are different levels of neighbouring. While some residents have little or no contact with neighbours, others may have casual or opportunistic interactions, such as when walking up the front walk to the door, working in the yard, or while walking the dog. Less commonly, neighbouring may involve “deeply entrenched connections with neighbours, characterized by frequent interactions, high levels of trust and support” (Walker and Hiller, 2007, p 1158). It has been the researcher’s experience that there is little interaction between residents in her particular neighbourhood. It appears that many neighbours are not personally acquainted; although some may recognize each other if they met on the street.

Sometimes there are no external barriers to neighbourliness, but neighbours do not initiate contact because we are cautious about interacting with strangers. There may also be other factors that deter residents from interacting, such as safety concerns or the physical layout of the neighbourhood. Part of neighbourliness involves helping neighbours out when they need it. A good neighbour might be described as “someone who respects others’ rights to privacy but who at the same time makes herself or himself available to be called upon if necessary” (Crow, 2002, p 129).

There is evidence that neighbourly behaviour benefits the individual residents and also the neighbourhood as a whole. “Where people are connected through tight bonds of friendship

and looser yet more diverse acquaintanceship ties, and where people are more active in local communities and clubs, there are fewer muggings, assaults, burglaries, auto thefts, and so forth” (Putnam, 2000, p 314).

Many factors may affect neighbourly behaviour, and the importance of these factors may vary from one location to another (e.g. safety may be a significant issue in one neighbourhood and a non-issue in another). This research involves an assessment of the extent and nature of neighbouring in one particular neighbourhood, and the development of theories regarding specific factors that inhibit or promote neighbourliness in this location.

Research Context

Neighbourly interactions vary across a spectrum, from weak ties or a casual, superficial acquaintanceship (e.g. a friendly chat when we encounter a neighbour on the street, or taking in the mail if the neighbour is away on vacation) all the way to strong ties such as close neighbours and sometimes personal friendship. For residents, weak ties with neighbours provide a ‘feeling of home’, ‘security’ and ‘practical as well as social support’ (Forrest and Kearns, 2001, p 2133). So even though we may place relatively little significance on a casual greeting, or an impromptu discussion while waiting for the bus, these interactions help to tie us to our neighbourhood, and in some cases build a foundation for stronger relationships.

Urban design may influence neighbouring in terms of weak ties, since it affects the frequency with which we encounter our neighbours in routine day to day activities. Houses often do not have a front porch or sitting area and generally have a fence surrounding the back yard where most of the outdoor living often occurs. Houses in suburban areas of the city often have attached garages from which residents can enter the house without ever stepping outdoors. Also, many suburban neighbourhoods are strictly residential and quite a distance from commercial activity, meaning that in order to do any shopping or business residents must travel by vehicle.

All of these factors contribute to a reduction in foot traffic, thus reducing opportunities for chance encounters. Some other factors which the literature indicates may affect the extent of neighbouring include the safety of the neighbourhood, the length of time a person has lived in that location, and the presence of children.

In considering characteristics of a good neighbour, there are many interpretations of what is meant by being 'neighbourly'. In Britain, a study looking at neighbourly relationships identified three characteristics of *good* neighbours; they are "friendly, ready to help when needed, and respectful of privacy" (Perren, Arber & Davidson, p 967). The term social capital comes up frequently in discussions of neighbourhoods and neighbouring. Social capital may be defined as "mutually beneficial social relationships between citizens characterised by interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity" (Walker & Hiller, 2007, p. 1155).

Research indicates that neighbourliness is largely based upon reciprocity in giving and receiving of favours. "Neighbours help each other with the expectation that this help will be returned (either by the recipient or by others)" (Perren, Arber & Davidson, 2004, p 967). However, Perren et al. explain that residents of close-knit communities in the past may have been more supportive. With expansion of the welfare state (and other factors mentioned previously such as increased mobility and communities of interest), dependence on neighbours in times of hardship is less necessary. Some research indicates that concerns about reciprocity and obligation may cause residents to be reluctant to interact with their neighbours. The reluctance may be from a couple of perspectives. On one hand, some may hesitate about helping someone who might end up taking too much of their time or energy. If we help someone once and they come to expect it, this can create an uncomfortable situation, particularly if the person is right next door (Walker & Hiller, 2007, p.1159). From another perspective, some neighbours

(especially older ones) may be hesitant to ask for favours because they feel they cannot offer anything in return. It has been found that “older people who cannot reciprocate (or who are simply not asked to provide a favour) may resist accepting favours because this constitutes a breach of the norms of neighbouring” (Perren, Arber & Davidson, 2004, p.972).

Literature indicates that people may choose to interact if they find that they have things in common such as a shared interest or purpose. For example, a crisis in the neighbourhood may bring people together to work for a common cause. The same level of interaction may not continue after the crisis is over, but connections have been made. Safety concerns can either be a factor inhibiting neighbourly interaction if people are afraid to walk down the street, or it can create something in common with people working together towards a safer community.

Having things in common may be as simple as moving into the neighbourhood at the same time, or being of the same age or culture, or having the same values. Children can also provide a common bond. People who might otherwise never meet a neighbour a few doors down will often get to know that person through their children. Through children, parents may also interact through involvement with organizations that affect their neighbourhood, such as community leagues or amateur sports associations. Neighbours also have opportunities to interact when brought together by a facilitating organization or event. A role of Edmonton community leagues is to “bring neighbours together” (EFCL website). The website for the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) indicates one of the ways this is done is by providing recreation and social programs for its members.

In urban centres, we want to balance a desire for friendly relations with those around us, with our own desire for privacy. As such, neighbourly relations “involve ambiguities that are

inherent in the attempt to combine elements of friendship with the maintenance of exclusive boundaries around domestic life” (Crow, 2002, p 129).

Neighbourly relations, and the factors that facilitate or hinder neighbouring, is the key concept examined with this research. The literature summarized above demonstrates there are many factors which may be involved; however the importance of each may vary from one location to another. This study attempts to determine the factors at play in one specific location, using personal accounts from local residents.

Method

Interviews and surveys were conducted with a small group of neighbours living within easy walking distance from the researcher’s home, in the neighbourhood of Terrace Heights in Edmonton Alberta. This is an area of approximately 80 single-family dwellings. The research involves data obtained by two methods: a survey of 22 residents, and a follow-up interview with a sub-set of nine of these residents. The survey utilized multiple choice and true or false questions designed to obtain data on demographic issues (e.g. how long residents have lived in the neighbourhood, whether they have children at home), and regarding the frequency and type of interactions with neighbours. The interview was a semi structured qualitative interview, no longer than 60 minutes in duration. Open-ended interview questions focussed on more in-depth information regarding residents’ interactions with their neighbours.

Sampling process: Over a two-week period, the researcher went door-to-door in the neighbourhood to speak with neighbours, explain the study, and enrol participants. An introductory letter outlining the study was provided. If no one was home, the letter of introduction was left in the mailbox with a note indicating a follow-up visit would be made. The intent was to enrol the first 20 residents who agreed to participate in the survey. For participants who agreed to participate in the survey and signed the written consent, the survey was either

completed at that time, or another visit was made to pick it up, or the participant dropped it off. In the end, 22 surveys were completed. At the time participants completed the survey, they were advised that a subset of participants would be randomly chosen to do a follow-up interview and asked if they would be willing to participate. For those who agreed, the researcher advised they would be contacted if they were selected for the interview.

Twenty survey participants indicated they would be willing to participate in an interview if asked. The potential candidates for interviewing were randomly sorted, with the intent to interview the first eight to ten people with whom interviews could be set up. If for some reason any of the individuals was unavailable to be interviewed, the next person from the list would be contacted. In the end the researcher was able to interview nine participants from the first 13 candidates on the list. The nine participants were required to sign a separate consent form for the interview, and then the interviews were conducted in person, audio taped with permission, and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms are used in the final report to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Survey results and interview data were analyzed as they were obtained, using the grounded theory method. Transcripts were coded using margin notes, and comparative analysis of the data was done to compare each piece to other data already collected and ideas generated so far, to determine patterns, and commonalities or differences. Memos were used to develop ideas generated from the data. Since the researcher resides in the target neighbourhood, personal observations were incorporated into the analysis where relevant to the project.

Preliminary Biases and Suppositions: All researchers are influenced by previous activities and experiences; therefore the presence of preliminary ideas does not necessarily detract from the research but an awareness of these ideas is important. From a review of literature on this

topic, the researcher suspected the most important factor affecting neighbourly interactions may be having opportunities for interaction.

Limitations: A limitation of this study was its small sample size. Due to the size, this study cannot be assumed to be representative of factors at play in other neighbourhoods although it is certainly suggestive. Also, a major limitation was the inability to get all residents to participate. During the door-to-door canvas, there was no answer at some houses even when there was clearly someone in the house, and some homes had a note on the mailbox indicating no unsolicited mail should be left, so a letter of introduction was not provided. These factors limited the ability to make contact with those residents. No conclusions can be drawn about the neighbours with whom contact was not established, and it is an outstanding question as to whether the people who did agree to participate are, in fact, those who would be considered to be more neighbourly. Another factor which may have had a positive or negative or neutral effect is the fact that the researcher lives in the neighbourhood. The negative aspect would have been if participants felt they could not be entirely open with someone they might run into from time to time. However, it appeared that having a local researcher was an asset, since residents seemed more receptive to a local project than research conducted on a broader scale or by an outside party.

Survey design: Survey question format was either multiple choice or true or false (see Appendix). The questions were designed based on previous research to try to address likely factors affecting frequency and types of neighbourly interactions. Some factors such as income, education, type of employment, and cultural or religious background were not addressed in this research. These factors were not addressed since they were not expected to be as significant in relation to neighbouring behaviour as some other factors. In addition, it would have been

uncomfortable for a local researcher to ask neighbours questions about topics such as income and education.

Interaction between researcher and study participants: None of the neighbours were personally known to the researcher prior to the study except the next-door neighbour who was a casual contact, and another neighbour who was a work acquaintance. In interactions with study participants, the researcher attempted to find a balance between contributing personal observations about the neighbourhood (which often facilitated discussion), and letting the participants tell their own stories. The researcher avoided the expression of strong opinions and encouraged participants to voice their opinions and ideas, and then sought clarification as required.

Findings

The researcher went door-to-door to 52 houses, from which 22 residents agreed to participate in the survey (see Appendix for canvas summary). A couple of participants were initially concerned about disclosing information that might identify them or might make them vulnerable. Residents were reassured that personally identifying information would be kept confidential and not included in the final research. Contact was made with residents in 34 of the 52 houses. Of the 12 houses where contact was made but residents did not participate, nine residents stated they did not wish to participate, and three did not respond after initial contact with them. Most of the nine who declined did not give a reason. With older residents in three of these homes, it seemed that perhaps they were wary of strangers and worried that this might be some sort of scam. However, the rest of the residents who declined were younger, and safety did not seem to be the issue. For the other 18 houses, there was no answer at the door, even though in some cases there was clearly someone in the house, and even after a letter of introduction had been previously delivered.

Demographics: Of the 22 survey respondents, 15 are female and seven male (this does not necessarily reflect a certain household composition - often there was a couple in the household, but the survey was more often completed by the female). The age range of those completing the survey is as follows: 20-39 years: three respondents, 40-59 years: 13 respondents, 60-74 years: four respondents, 75 or older: two respondents. 12 of the 22 households have dependents living at home, ranging in age from pre-school to young adult. 18 of the 22 respondents have lived in this neighbourhood for more than 5 years, three for 2-5 years and one for less than 2 years. For the interviewees, the age range is as follows: 40-59 years: six people, 60-74 years: one person, 75 or older: two people.

Overall the demographics of the survey respondents appear to reflect the general demographics of the neighbourhood, with a mixture of ages and single/couple/family status. Of the 12 households for which contact was made but residents declined to participate, eight residents appeared to be in the 20-59 age ranges and four residents were 60 or older. It is difficult to be certain of the age ranges of residents in the 18 households where contact was not made (either residents were not home or did not answer the door), but based on the researcher's personal observations at other times and comments from other neighbours, it is estimated that the majority of those residents were in the 20-59 age ranges. Most residents who are 60 or older were home and answered the door, even if they declined to participate.

In response to the survey question: *Given the opportunity I would like to move out of my neighbourhood*, 21 respondents answered false, and one answered true. All survey respondents indicated they feel safe in the neighbourhood. From personal experience the researcher also has noticed this is a very quiet neighbourhood with little graffiti or crime.

Characteristics of a good neighbour:

Survey respondents were asked to check which characteristics they value in a neighbour from the following options: *keeps to him/herself, is friendly and will say hello or chat with me if I am out in the yard, is willing to help with small things (e.g. bringing the mail in if I'm away), notices if something is wrong in the neighbourhood, or; will offer to help me if I seem to be struggling (e.g. help shovel snow if I am temporarily unable to do so)*. All except one person said they value neighbours who are friendly and will say hello. Only three respondents checked the box for *keeps to him/herself*, and they also checked the box for *is friendly and will say hello*. The interviews clarified what seemed to be conflicting information. Residents felt there is a definite line between being friendly and being nosy. For example, in the interviews, several people commented on an older gentleman in the neighbourhood who used to sit on his front step each day when the weather was good. Residents living near him said that whenever they passed by this gentleman, they would wave to him and he would wave back. Most people never actually talked to him since he was not within speaking distance from the sidewalk. Although he was always watching, all of the residents thought this was *not* being nosy. All appreciated his presence, several people noticed an ambulance come one morning, and missed him when he was no longer there.

Patricia¹ attempted to clarify what *nosy* is: “I don’t mind being friends with neighbours, but I don’t want everybody knowing my business”. Rita echoed this sentiment. Although she appreciates friendly neighbours, she would not like to have nosy neighbours, indicating laughingly: “I’m from a small town, you know, and we don’t want to go back”. Harry provided similar feedback saying that in a previous neighbourhood it seemed like everybody knew everyone’s business. He would like to be able to chit-chat with neighbours “but not have a tea

¹ pseudonyms used to protect anonymity.

party every week”. Neighbours watching out for each other are good for safety, but we “don’t need a neighbour that comes flying out every time somebody new happens to walk up.”

Many residents indicated that they do small favours for a neighbour and vice versa (such as taking in the mail when away for a few days). In her interview Kay indicated that she and her neighbours help each other out by watering each others plants when one of them is away for a few days on the basis that it’s just “so much easier” than having friends or relatives from outside the neighbourhood come do this. When the researcher asked her how it came about that people got to know each other sufficiently to perform this activity for each other, she replied with a laugh that “someone’s got to be friendly.” Kay indicated that getting to know the neighbours starts by “making conversation, and helping somebody with something” and commented that having neighbours show an interest in other neighbours and their neighbourhood is “beneficial to them and to the rest of us.” This resident stated that she is well acquainted with five or six other neighbours in the immediate vicinity (adjacent to her house as well as across the street), including some newer residents. This may be partly related to her length of time in the neighbourhood as she mentioned that she has lived here for many years. However perhaps it is related to her comfort level in approaching new residents. Marie, who lives many houses away has also been in the neighbourhood for approximately the same length of time as Kay, but knows very few neighbours. On this part of the block, several neighbours have moved out over the last few years, including two that she was quite close to, and she has not become acquainted with the newer residents. Although she has a fairly close relationship with one immediate neighbour and has met the other newer neighbour on the other side, she doesn’t know any other neighbours in the vicinity. This is not uncommon in some parts of the block. Harry, who has been in the neighbourhood for approximately 15 years, lives in the vicinity of Marie and also doesn’t really

know most neighbours, not by name (and does not know Marie). He recognizes some of their faces from when people have walked by while he's outside. He says some will say hello to him, and a couple of them did introduce themselves.

In addition to ad hoc interactions, another part of being neighbourly is doing favours for each other. 19 of the 22 survey respondents indicated that in the last six months they have either done a favour for a neighbour, or a neighbour did a favour for them, or both. Also, 17 of the 22 respondents answered *true* to the question: *I often help my neighbours with small things, or they help me.* A few residents mentioned helping each other with snow shovelling. Irene says that she shovels half the neighbour's walk if she is out first, and the neighbour does half hers if he is out first "*and it's such a nice thing... because I feel guilty if I haven't done my sidewalk before I go to work.*" However, Rita advised that even with a neighbour she routinely exchanges favours with (e.g. taking in the mail if away for a few days), it's important not to assume or impose on someone. When she would like a favour she still doesn't *expect* it (even after knowing someone for years), and she always has a backup plan. And she knows her neighbour is the same way. Neither one will hold a grudge if the other can't help, because each one knows the other would help if they could. Earl indicated that he generally doesn't need favours from others because his children live close by and they help him out, but he still tries to do favours for others. They don't ask, but he just helps out where he can. He doesn't expect anything in return but says if they want to, they can "reciprocate in whatever way they can".

With regard to the issue of reciprocating favours, the researcher asked interviewees if they felt obligated to do something in response if someone does something for them. Kay said no, "it's not a conscious thing". A neighbour helped her with some snow shovelling one winter, and she then knit their daughter mittens for Christmas, but she did this because she wanted to and

not because it was expected. Harry said his next door neighbour borrowed his ladder in the winter to do some snow removal, and in return the neighbour volunteered to shovel snow off his roof. He didn't expect that or ask them to do this, but he was happy when they volunteered. Frances said her family does quite a bit of yard work for a neighbour they have known for years. They help because they want to and not because of an expectation of repayment in some way – if they're cutting their grass why not cut hers too. She said sometimes their lawnmower has broken down and the neighbour lets them use hers, "so you know, we help each other out".

Other than asking each other for routine small favours, survey results indicate that people generally avoid asking a neighbour for assistance. For the survey question regarding who you would ask for assistance if you needed a second pair of hands with something now and then (e.g. to move a piece of furniture into the house), 17 of the 22 respondents said they would ask a friend or relative, while only four said they would ask a neighbour, and one did not answer this question. One commented that she would hate to ask a neighbour, but if they volunteered that would be great.

Although people seem hesitant about asking a neighbour for assistance, neighbours generally will help when asked, even if the favour being requested is quite significant. One resident mentioned one previous neighbour who came over out of the blue one day and asked them to mow his lawn, giving no explanation as to why. They did it for him. Other neighbours mentioned similar acts. Rita said "You do what you can, to keep the relationship good." This may be part of the rationale many people used in agreeing to participate in this study.

It doesn't appear that people are concerned that neighbours might expect too much if they do assist someone. For the true or false survey question stating: *I don't want to offer to help my neighbours because then they might expect me to help all the time*, all 22 respondents answered

false. When Kay was asked if she was ever worried about having to do too much, she said “you can always say no... I mean, I think you have to know your limitations. You have to know what you can do and what you can’t”. She said she will help if she can and “give it a good try”.

Opportunities for interaction:

The specific location in which this research was conducted consists entirely of single-family homes, most built in the early 1960s. Terrace Heights is a quiet residential area bisected by a major road and with good access to shopping and employment. All houses have a back alley, while a few houses also have a driveway accessed from the front of the house. There is also on-street parking. Although in surrounding neighbourhoods there are some houses with a front porch or sitting area (either as newly constructed houses on infill in an existing neighbourhood, or as a renovation to an older home), none of the neighbour’s houses in the survey area have this feature. All houses have fenced back yards.

Whether or not you offer a greeting to a neighbour when you see him in his yard might seem like a trivial matter. However, the data from this study confirm the importance of these interactions. All survey respondents answered true to the question: *Knowing my neighbours on a casual basis helps me feel like this is my neighbourhood*. The researcher asked Rita if a casual greeting when out for a walk makes her feel like this is her neighbourhood, and she said: “oh yeah, you know, it’s always nice when you come back and you’ve talked to a few people. It’s always a very good feeling.” And when she is working in her yard, “when somebody goes by I always say hi so hopefully that makes them feel good.” In response to the survey question: *In the course of a normal day, how often do you typically speak with any of your neighbours, even just to exchange a casual greeting*: the number of casual greetings varied from at least once a day to once or twice a year. Most respondents indicated either 3 or more days per week or 1-2

days per week. Most often the interactions occurred while working around the yard, and less frequently when walking or biking in the neighbourhood. Occasionally interactions occurred when going over purposefully to talk to a neighbour or vice versa.

The researcher asked some interview participants if they would call on someone new to the neighbourhood to introduce themselves, but most replied that they would not. As Patricia laughingly put it, she would never go to someone's house and "knock on their door and say hello I'm Patricia, how do you like me so far?" Irene also indicated that she will chat with someone she knows, but she is too shy to go over and introduce herself to someone. So the most common experience seems to be to get to know each other *over the fence*. If you're outside and your neighbour is outside, there is an opportunity for casual conversation. People tend to speak to the neighbours that are immediately adjacent to their residence and in some cases across the street. Kay said she thought it might make a difference how many neighbours you can see from your house, i.e. if there are no houses across the street from you but only on either side, you have fewer opportunities to interact with immediate neighbours. She also pointed out that for houses "on the side you're not really seeing them [neighbours] coming and going ... you'd have to be outside".

Neighbours who do not live immediately next-door or across the street from each other may not be acquainted at all. If the neighbour is outside of normal speaking range, this limits the feasibility of having a casual conversation, since people generally will not travel too far a distance to extend a casual greeting. As Patricia stated:

You see them over the fence and you can just go over and you say hi, you know, what are you doing today? ... So we talk to them, and we talk to the ones on the other side. I don't usually, like if I see somebody getting into their car on the

street, when I'm going out to my car I don't usually cross the road to go over to say what's new ... I'll go like, hi, <demonstrates a wave> how're you doing, and then just get into my car to go.

Sometimes neighbours get the impression that someone is not very friendly (i.e. if they smile or say hi and the other person doesn't respond). If a neighbour tries to make overtures and is rebuffed they may give up. As Earl indicated when the researcher asked what if he would do if a neighbour didn't seem very friendly: "if he's not responsive, then leave him alone." But there may be another explanation for the non-response, as the researcher discovered in one case through interview comments. A neighbour mentioned she had tried to wave and say hello a few times to an elderly neighbour in his yard but he did not acknowledge her, so she gave up. Another neighbour subsequently mentioned that this gentleman is quite a nice man but has problems with his vision and is also hard of hearing. So in addition to limitations with physical layout of the neighbourhood there may be other barriers to interaction which are not as visible.

While working in the yard allows you to interact with neighbours living in the immediate vicinity, walking or biking in the neighbourhood could potentially expand the base of contact. However, the researcher's personal experience while walking her dog through the neighbourhood is that very few people seem to be outside, unless it is other dog walkers, or kids at the playground. Due to house design, residents in this neighbourhood generally do not spend much time in their front yards and most outdoor living occurs in the fenced back yards. As far as physical design of the neighbourhood, other than a neighbourhood playground area for small children, there are no destinations that people would generally walk to, e.g. a coffee shop or a park. Rita mentions that in a previous neighbourhood, they used to go for walks and see people outside and start a conversation. Whereas in this neighbourhood: "we go for a walk every

evening and we hardly ever see anybody outside.” Frances also has a dog that she walks, and makes the observation that generally “people are very friendly in this neighbourhood but they keep to themselves which is okay.”

Three of the interview participants also indicated that ad hoc interactions may occur through canvassing the neighbourhood, such as to raise money for a charity. This type of door-to-door activity allows the canvasser to get an opportunity to meet people one might not otherwise run into. It’s not always a positive experience though, as Marie reported that while canvassing for a charity gave her a once a year opportunity to have a good visit with neighbours she’s met before, she has also had “doors slammed” in her face (although not by people she knew).

Opportunities for interacting and perhaps finding things in common are often facilitated through children. Irene said when they moved to the neighbourhood, her kids and the neighbour’s kids were almost immediately playing together. It was “July, and it was warm, and they invited my daughters over to play in the sprinkler as we’re still unpacking stuff. So that was nice immediately”. As Marie stated, “when you have young children the kids get together, then the parents get to know each other because of the kids.” Parents can also make connections with other parents through kids’ sports, e.g. soccer or hockey. Irene said she met some other parents through soccer and found out that they actually lived in the neighbourhood, but she just hadn’t run into them before. Rita also met people attending soccer games. She pointed out that unlike casual interactions walking in the neighbourhood, you may actually develop closer relationships like this because at soccer games “you sit down and talk while the kids are playing, and you get to know that person.”

From the interviews with residents who have lived in the neighbourhood for several years, the local elementary school located in this neighbourhood used to be a very important factor in neighbouring. Both Earl and Marie mentioned that they and their families moved to this neighbourhood because the school was here. Irene mentioned walking her child to this school, “getting to know the kids and the kids’ families ... and really when we first moved here, that was a big part of getting to know people. I’d walk her...to school... and talk to other parents who’d walk their kids to school. And you know, it was really nice.” The school functioned as a social base for the neighbourhood. However, a couple of factors have completely changed the status of this school for local residents. The open boundary policy of the Edmonton Public School Board means that students may attend any school within the system. As Irene pointed out, when kids in the school are from different parts of town, it is more difficult to get to know the other parents because you don’t run into them at all otherwise. Also, and perhaps more importantly, in 2005, the Terrace Heights elementary school was closed and the building now houses the *Argyll Learning Centre* which provides support for distance learning for home-based educational programs, grades 1-12. The designated elementary school for this area is no longer within walking distance. Since local kids are attending a variety of schools, and the local school is not a social base for the neighbourhood, these are factors that work against or preclude neighbourly interactions.

Other factors

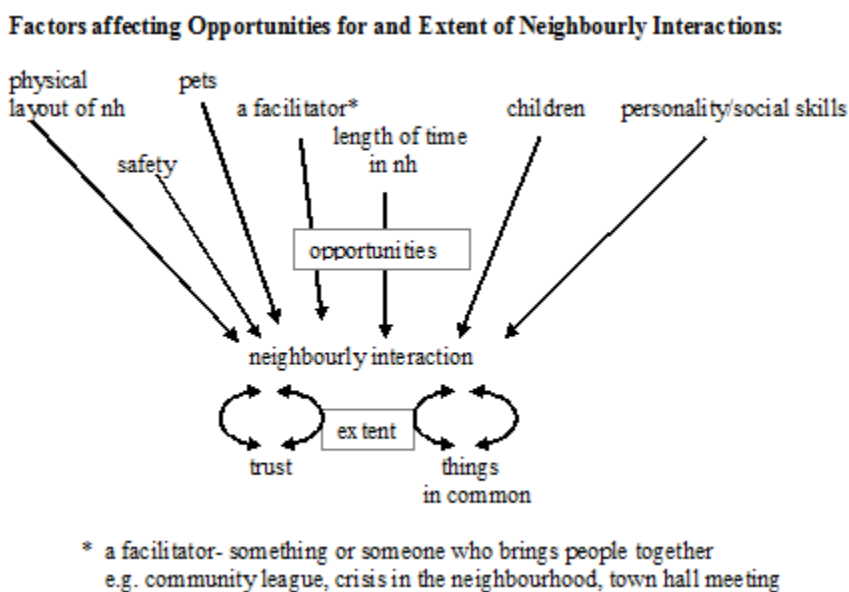
In examining other ways one might speak with a neighbour, this survey question also offered options for *when I have attended an event in the community* or *when introduced by another neighbour*. Three of the 22 respondents checked the box for when attending an event in the community, and only one checked the box for when introduced by a neighbour. Interviewees

clarified that the event in the community was an information meeting hosted by the City of Edmonton in early June regarding future neighbourhood roadwork and sidewalk repair. These types of meetings or events act as a facilitator to bring residents together. Some residents pointed out in the interviews that there is no longer a community gathering place in this neighbourhood. Marie said we used to have a rink shack and a local community association right in the neighbourhood, but the current community league now represents both Forest Heights and Terrace Heights neighbourhoods and the hall is located in Forest Heights. In the old days, Marie said, meetings were well attended and “we used to have potlucks in the rink shack. You could hardly move, but uh, yeah, we’d help with food and we’d take turns with stuff like that.” Kay also mentioned that the communities used to have bonspiels “which were fun adult events”. One of the survey questions asked if respondent belongs to the local community league, or other organization active in the local area. Four of the 22 respondents indicate that they belong to the community league, of which two belong because of soccer or hockey, since a community league membership is required for to participate in these events. Frances said she belongs only because she occasionally works at bingos or casinos, but she does not attend any community events. She said she used to go to the Harvest Festival years ago when her daughter was young. “There was a really good Harvest Festival, uhm, but that sort of changed, because a lot of it is sort of geared to the Forest Heights community league.” Rita said that for community events to really be well attended by Terrace Height residents, it really should be in our neighbourhood, indicating that “if you want to meet people right here, then, you could have something just for this neighbourhood. I think, I think, I’m wondering if they have something over there it’s just more for people that live just around that who tend to go.” Harry also thought that it is very important that community events be held that are just for this community, otherwise it is too big an area. All of

the respondents thought of the community league as an association that would expect adults to volunteer, but not as an association that holds any events for adults to attend, and most said they are already volunteering other places. Kay sees the community league membership more as a donation because she supports the idea of community leagues. But she doesn't see it as a way to connect. Marie felt the current situation is unfortunate and indicated that the community league was a big thing many years ago. In response to the survey questions *if the people who live on my street were planning something in the neighbourhood, I think I'd like to be a part of it*: 17 of 22 respondents answered *true* to this question and one said he was on the fence. Marie commented though: "there hasn't been anything in the community for so long. I don't know who'd come. It'd be interesting to see."

In this neighbourhood, it does not appear that there are many factors that provide opportunities for neighbourly interaction. When interactions do occur, the extent to which those neighbours connect will vary depending on the level of trust and whether you find you have things in common (see figure 1 for overview).

Figure 1:



Extent of Connection

Whether canvassing for a charity, interacting over the fence, or walking in the neighbourhood, the extent of connection between neighbours can vary. With some neighbours it may be strictly casual conversation and never goes beyond that. In other cases, the connection may become a little closer or more intimate but still clearly *neighbours* rather than *friends*. Less often, neighbours may become friends (in this study, friends are considered people who would socialize together both inside and outside the neighbourhood).

When describing neighbourly relations, Kay says that with some people, you “just know who it is”, and there are others that you’re closer to, that you “wouldn’t hesitate to ask almost anything, you know. And that’s a good feeling.” Rita made a similar distinction, indicating that with some neighbours “they know some personal things about us and we know some things about them”. For Patricia, for acquaintances and neighbours she has a more superficial relationship with, there are boundaries related to coming over to the house, and the level of information you know about each other. Irene said that with regard to her neighbours, she is closer to some and knows a couple of neighbours well enough to mention she will be away for the weekend, and she knows they will keep an eye on the house. Patricia indicated that with some neighbours, she knows their names and some stuff about them, but has never really visited with them. They just “you know, talked in the front yard and stuff like that”.

Based on interview comments about relationships, it might be useful to consider the nature or extent of relationships between neighbours on a continuum rather than trying to clearly defined levels. See figure 2.

Figure 2:

Continuum of relationships:

casual ---- more than casual ---- close neighbours ----- occasionally friends

Casual: may know the name of neighbour or may not, exchange casual greetings, perhaps may do small favours for you and vice versa

More than casual: you know some personal things about them, and they know personal things about you

Close neighbours: similar to 'more than casual' but more so. Someone you trust and they trust you. May choose to spend time together.

Friends: socialize with each other

However, even within the relationships that are more than just casual or that are quite close, there generally still a clear distinction between *neighbour* and *friend*. About her neighbours Kay has a great relationship with, she clarifies that "I'm not part of their social friendship, but I'm their neighbour." Earl also is on very good terms with a few neighbours, indicating that "I wouldn't hesitate to call on help from any of them. No, they would offer assistance at a moments notice" however he doesn't "really have a great deal to do with them. They're neighbours, and we talk to one another and we say hi when we meet and so on, but we don't do much else together."

Eleven of the 22 survey respondents indicated that they have some neighbours they get on so well with that they visit² each other, but survey results indicate visiting does not occur that often. From survey response options of: *almost daily, at least once a week, at least once a month or, less than once a month*: five respondents indicated they visit at least once a month, five indicated less than once per month, and one did not specify. Marie indicates that she had two good neighbours who were friends (who have since moved away) that she used to go to exercise class with regularly. They used to take turns driving. But even with those neighbours she says, "we really weren't in and out of each others' houses. We weren't talking every day like some."

² The survey did not define what would be considered a 'visit'.

It can take years for relationships (either good neighbours or friends) to form, however Rita says sometimes you can connect with someone else very quickly when you feel the other person can be trusted, with personal information, around your kids, etc. Respect is also important. “To respect, and know the interest of the other person and ask about it” makes a big difference. Patricia also reflects this sentiment, giving an example with a neighbour who really listens and remembers what you say: “if you tell her, oh was I sick last week, you know, she’ll remember that, you know, and the next week she’ll say are you feeling better? ... She asks you questions about what you said, so you know she cares.” In order for some relationships to evolve, finding things in common also appears to be an important factor. Rita mentioned that with some people “you just don’t want to have anything more than casual. They’re just not the kind of people you would like to spend time with.” Patricia had similar comments, indicating that “you might have neighbours that you know have a lot in common and you guys might get together and do things with your kids or your whole family. But like, if you have a neighbour who is only into certain things... well you don’t really have a lot in common.”

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to look at the extent and nature of neighbouring in this particular neighbourhood and develop some theories as to what specific factors are inhibiting or promoting neighbourliness in this location. This neighbourhood is made up of a wide range of ages and family status, i.e. families with children (ranging from pre-school to young adult) as well as single people, couples without children, and older residents. Many residents have lived in the neighbourhood for several years, so this provides a stability that is helpful for establishing relations between neighbours. Also, all residents indicate that they feel safe in this

neighbourhood, which is a very positive factor influencing the likelihood of people to be out and about.

However, other than safety and the length of time residents have lived in the neighbourhood, this research clearly demonstrates there are not many factors currently facilitating opportunities for neighbourly interactions. There seem to be a couple of pockets of neighbours within the research area who get along well together, one area of approximately 6 or 7 houses, and another of four houses. But generally these residents do not appear to know the neighbours further down the street. Other than these two clusters of neighbours, most other neighbours tend to be acquainted with just one or two immediate neighbours. It is not entirely clear what accounts for the clusters, but it seems to be partly related to the length of time some residents have lived here in the neighbourhood and partly due to personality of some of the residents. Neighbours who are more comfortable interacting with strangers may ensure that newer residents feel included.

House design and the physical layout of the particular neighbourhood surveyed in this study do not encourage interactions. Most people tend to interact only with neighbours living beside them or directly across the street. Although there is a school in this neighbourhood it is not currently functioning as a social hub for the community since it is serving students from outside the neighbourhood in a different learning mode. In addition the open borders policy of Edmonton public schools does not encourage parents to send their children to schools in the area. Organizations such as community leagues may also help to organize events that facilitate neighbouring; however the community league currently does not seem to be offering any types of programs that local residents feel are of benefit to this neighbourhood.

Although residents typically do not know many of their neighbours, it is important to point out that what connections there are tend to be very good. This research confirms how important even weak ties between neighbours are in providing a feeling of home and a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. Overall, the residents here feel very appreciative of their neighbours and their neighbourhood. Current relationships that do exist between neighbours seem to be built on a high level of trust and respect. Neighbours often do favours for each other, and they don't expect anything in return. Almost all neighbours who participated in this study expressed an interest in getting to know other neighbours in the neighbourhood, although at the same time they clearly want to ensure that there is a balance between being friendly and respecting each others' privacy.

It is also important to note that while 22 residents who were contacted agreed to participate in this study, the researcher attempted to contact 30 other residents who either did not want to participate or did not answer the door (even though some were clearly in the house at the time). Conclusions cannot be drawn as to why other residents did not participate; however it is fair to say that one cannot assume that the results of this study reflect the opinions of all residents in the research area. Also, due to the small sample size the results also cannot necessarily be extrapolated to other neighbourhoods. However, this study does provide on-the-ground theories as to some of the factors that affect neighbouring, and this may provide some insight for others conducting similar research.

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Appendix:Results of door-to-door canvas over a two week period from June 20th to July 3rd, 2011.

Cross-ref #	Actions	Final result
1	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction. Resident said come back next day. I came back next day and dropped off survey. Picked up completed survey the third day	Completed survey
2	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction. Survey completed the second day	Completed survey
3	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction. Came back another day and completed survey	Completed survey
4	Missed this house the first day. Came back again, survey completed	Completed survey
5	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction. Dropped off survey the next day. Tried a number of days to pick up, no answer (door is open, music on).	No answer after initial contact
6	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried again, no answer	No answer
7	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction and survey. Came back to pick up.	Completed survey
8	No answer. Notice indicates 'no flyers' so did not drop off letter of introduction. Tried again, no answer	No answer
9	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried second day, no answer	No answer
10	Spoke with residents. Couple seemed reluctant to become involved, stated various reasons – did not have anything useful to contribute, concerns about privacy of information, etc. However, they invited me in, and voluntarily spoke for quite a long time, telling me about their neighbourly interactions. I tried to explain that this is all that I would be asking of them if they would like to participate. They still indicated they did not want to participate.	Not interested
11	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction and survey. Picked up completed survey the second day	Completed survey
12	Spoke with resident – Not interested. She was obviously not feeling well, and did not want to talk.	Not interested
13	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Came back and dropped off survey. Came back another day and picked up completed survey	Completed survey
14	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried again, no answer	No answer
15	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction. came back next day and completed survey	completed survey
16	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Spoke	No time right now

	with resident –won't have time for a few weeks	
17	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried another day, no answer (people are home, car in driveway)	No answer
18	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried another day day, no answer (door is open)	No answer
19	Spoke with teenage child of resident - said come back tomorrow. Spoke with another teenage dependent, dropped off letter of introduction - said to come back later today. Came back later, no answer. Another day spoke with resident who said they were busy right then, come back another day. Came back another day, no answer (door is open).	Seems like not interested (no answer after initial contact)
20	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried another day, no answer	No answer
21	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Did survey second day	Completed survey
22	No answer. Notice by mailbox indicates no junk mail, so did not leave a letter	No answer
23	Spoke with resident, left letter of introduction and survey.	Completed survey
24	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction – said come back another day. Came back and survey was completed	Completed survey
25	Spoke with resident, completed survey	Completed survey
26	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried another day. No answer, people in the house.	No answer
27	Spoke with resident- Said absolutely not interested. Would not let me get beyond the first couple of sentences (that I live in the neighbourhood and I'm working on a project).	Does not want to participate
28	Spoke with resident. Initially reluctant, but took materials to read and it seemed like might be willing. But when I came back the next day resident declined to participate.	Does not want to participate
29	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried again a couple of times. The second day it seemed like someone was in the house.	No answer
30	Spoke with resident who opened door and when I started to talk said: 'no speak english'. I did not pursue any further.	Does not want to participate
31	Spoke with resident, dropped off letter of introduction and survey. Said come back next day. Picked up completed survey second day	Completed survey
32	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried again, no answer.	No answer

33	Spoke with young child (pre-teen) – said come back another day. Came back another day and spoke with resident, left letter of introduction and survey. Came a third time to pick up survey	Completed survey
34	Spoke with resident, survey completed	Completed survey
35	No answer, and no junk mail notice, so did not leave letter. Tried another day, no answer	No answer
36	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Another day spoke with resident who said come back the next day. The next day I spoke with a different resident who was out on the street and was advised to come back the next day. I came by a couple of times the next day (in am and pm) - no answer.	No answer after initial contact
37	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction, tried again another day- no answer (door is open and movement inside)	No answer
38	Spoke with resident, left letter of introduction. Came back another day and completed survey	Completed survey
39	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried another day, no answer	No answer.
40	Spoke with resident, said expecting company- said come back next day, left letter of introduction. Came back next day – he said does not want to participate. I asked if he would say why, said ‘too busy’ but said good luck.	does not want to participate.
41	Spoke with resident, gave letter of introduction and survey. Survey completed that day	Completed survey
42	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Spoke with neighbour who said resident is away. Came back another day and spoke with resident who said come back next day. Went back a third time, survey completed.	completed survey
43	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried another day, no answer	No answer
44	Spoke with resident, said come back next day. Came back next day, no answer. Saw the resident outside another day- said does not want to participate. Did not explain.	does not want to participate
45	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Came back another day, survey completed	Completed survey
46	No answer, no junk mail notice, did not leave letter. Came back another day, survey completed	Completed survey
47	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Another day, spoke with someone in the house who indicated I should come back later to speak with another resident. Came back another day and survey was completed	Completed survey

48	No answer, did not seem like anyone in residence, did not leave letter of introduction	No answer
49	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Spoke with resident who said come back another day. Came back another day, no answer. Came third time and spoke with resident and left survey. Came back again to pick up survey	completed survey
50	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction. Tried a number of days. Seems like away on holidays	No answer
51	Spoke with resident, not interested. Was suspicious of me and did not want to agree to anything. Listened at first but then shook head and shut door.	does not want to participate.
52	No answer, dropped off letter of introduction	No answer

Initially tried doing the door-to-door visits only on weekday evenings. Since a number of people did not answer the door in the evening tried some of those houses earlier in the day. But during the weekdays even less people were home. Overall, Sunday afternoon or weekday evenings seemed to be the best times to find people, but there were still a number of houses with no answer.

Neighbourliness Survey:

1) How long have you lived in the neighbourhood?

- less than 2 years,
- 2 to 5 years,
- more than 5 years

2) Do you have dependents living at home? If so, please indicate their age range(s):

- elementary school age or younger
- high school age,
- adult dependents

2a) If you have children of school age, do they attend a school close by (i.e. within walking distance)? yes no

3) Please indicate your age range:

- 20-39 years
- 40-59 years
- 60-74 years
- 75 or older

4) Do you belong to the local community league, or other organization active in the local area, e.g. Hardisty recreation centre, Capilano seniors group, SEESA, local church?

- yes no

5) Do you generally feel safe in this neighbourhood?

- yes no

6) In the course of a normal day, how often do you typically speak with any of your neighbours, even just to exchange a casual greeting:

- At least once a day
 3 or more days per week;
 Once or twice per week;
 Once or twice a month
 Once every couple of months;
 Once or twice a year;
 Not at all in the last 12 months.

7) If you speak with your neighbours, even if just to exchange a casual greeting, please indicate the circumstances in which this occurs (please check all that apply and number those checked in order of importance, with number 1 being the most common circumstance):

- While walking (or biking) in the neighbourhood
 While working around the house or yard
 When I have purposely gone over to speak with a neighbour (or called them on the phone), or they have purposely come to speak with me
 When I have attended an event in the community
 When introduced by another neighbour
 Other, please explain: _____

8a) In the past six months have you done a favour for a neighbour?

- yes no

8b) And, in the past six months, have any of your neighbours done a favour for you?

- yes no

9) If you need a second pair of hands with something now and then, and there isn't anyone in your household who can assist (e.g. to move a piece of furniture into the house), you would:

- call a friend or relative
 hire someone
 ask a neighbour

10) Do you have neighbours with whom you get on so well that you visit each other?

- yes no

10a) If yes, How often do you visit each other usually?

- almost daily,
 at least once a week,
 at least once a month, and
 less than once a month

- 11) Where do you generally spend most of your leisure time
- at home (in the house or yard),
 - outside of my house and yard but still in the local area (i.e. in the general Capilano area),
 - outside of the Capilano area
- 12) What characteristic do you value in a neighbour? Check all that apply:
- keeps to him/herself
 - is friendly and will say hello or chat with me if I am out in the yard.
 - is willing to help me with small things, such as keeping an eye on the house or bringing in the mail if I am away occasionally.
 - notices if something is wrong in the neighbourhood, e.g. if an elderly neighbour usually goes for a walk each day but has not been seen recently
 - will offer to help me if I seem to be struggling, e.g. will help shovel snow if I am temporarily unable to do so.

Answer true or false to following questions:

1. If I need advice about something I could ask someone in my local neighbourhood.
 true false
2. I often help my neighbours with small things, or they help me. true false
3. I don't want to offer to help my neighbours because then they might expect me to help all the time. true false
4. If the people who live on my street were planning something for the neighbourhood (e.g. a pancake breakfast), I think I'd like to be a part of it true false
5. I can recognize most of the people who live in my local neighbourhood true false
6. I generally notice if my immediate neighbours are away true false
7. I'm polite to my neighbours but I'm not interested in getting to know them true false
8. I'd like to get to know my neighbours better true false
9. Knowing my neighbours on a casual basis helps me feel like this is my neighbourhood
 true false
- 10: I have my own friends outside of the neighbourhood, and I don't feel there is any reason to get to know my neighbours true false
11. I do not have much in common with other people who live on my street true false
12. Given the opportunity I would like to move out of my neighbourhood true false

Please provide any other comments you may wish to add:
