

RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF SUBURBS IN HAMILTON,
ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

The literature on the topic of suburbia is vast. Most studies however, have been written from the point of view of suburban outsiders. Very few scholars have asked suburbanites what they think about the neighbourhoods in which they live. This gap is significant because of our growing awareness of various problems associated with the suburbs, notably those connected to the environment and human health. Focusing on Hamilton, Ontario, this thesis addresses this gap, looking at what suburbanites think about the suburbs in general, as well as their own neighbourhoods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 residents of single-family, detached dwellings in three neighbourhoods in Hamilton that on most criteria would be considered suburban. Most notably, it was found that suburban residents have difficulty conceptualizing suburbia when asked to define it abstractly, but have less difficulty completing this same task when asked to consider a real-world example instead. As well, it appears that most suburban residents have heard very few positive comments about the suburbs from outside sources. Other findings relate to where suburban residents consider the suburbs to be located in Hamilton, what they think about the negative complaints that have been directed at the suburbs by critics, and what advantages and disadvantages they associate with living in a suburban neighbourhood. These results may have important implications for future research on how suburbanites perceive the suburbs, and for policies aimed at reshaping the suburbs to reduce social, environmental, and economic costs of the suburban lifestyle.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“It doesn’t take a PhD to know a thing or two about suburbia- all of us carry images in our heads that encapsulate ideas about the suburbs”

Nicolaides and Wiese, *The Suburb Reader* (2006, pg. 5).

There has been a great deal of research that has been completed on North American suburbs. Researchers have examined everything from suburban commuting patterns, to school test scores, and even lawn care practices. To most, this abundance of information would suggest that we have covered everything possible about the suburbs. However, this is not the case. As will be outlined in the next chapter, the overwhelming majority of the literature on the suburbs has been written from the point of view of suburban outsiders; people who have spent very little actual time in these communities. We know little about what the hundreds of thousands of people who actually live in these communities think. This gap in the literature is significant, and not just because this is something we know very little about. More insight into how suburban residents regard where they live has the potential to help urban planners, policy makers and academics as they struggle with handling suburbia’s contentious future.

For years, North American suburbs have been considered problems. In earlier generations, this was because it was felt the suburbs were too conformist, too homogeneous and too bland for the well-being of not just the people who lived there, but society as a whole. In recent years, other more tangible concerns have been raised. Studies have found that the modern North American suburban landscape is partially

responsible for many problems that have the potential to severely plague our natural environment. The most pressing of these is the relationship low-density suburbs may have to increased greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. Additionally, health researchers have begun to suggest that the suburbs are a leading contributor to the increasing prevalence of many health problems in North America, most notably obesity. Finally, it has been shown that continued suburbanization has, to a certain extent, led to a decline that has paralyzed many inner cities throughout the continent. This problem has been particularly severe in the US, and less so in Canada.

In light of these problems, urban planners, policy makers and academics have set out to transform the current North American suburban landscape into something ultimately more favourable to society's well-being. The most common strategy has been to implement so-called "smart growth" plans designed to both limit the growth of new suburbs and to retrofit older suburbs by increasing their densities. This has been the course of action taken in the province of Ontario. The province's *Places to Grow Act* and *Greenbelt Act*, both enacted in 2006, were designed to limit suburban growth in the populous Golden Horseshoe region by placing restrictions on where new development could occur. Other strategies that have been implemented elsewhere include policies designed to diversify land use in the suburbs, policies designed to make suburban communities more walkable, and policies designed to improve the social mix of the suburbs.

Although most of the strategies that have been implemented throughout North America are quite new, and therefore their effectiveness is not yet able to be thoroughly assessed, preliminary evidence suggests suburban residents are evading them

(Bruegmann, 2005). In Ontario, for example, so-called “leapfrog” developments have appeared just outside of the urban growth boundary the *Greenbelt Act* created (Pigg, 2011). This seems to demonstrate that the measures set forth by the provincial government have done little to curb the desire that exists within the Golden Horseshoe region for traditional, low-density suburban housing.

It stands to reason that the more insight we have into how suburban residents regard the suburbs, the better able we will be to design these plans so that they actually succeed in their intended goal of lessening the problems suburbs pose. Most major corporations thoroughly study their customers in order to ensure the success of their products. The same logic should apply in this situation as well.

Focusing on suburban Hamilton, Ontario, this thesis will respond to this need for more information by addressing the following research question: *How do individuals who reside in the suburbs in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both the suburban landscape that surrounds them and suburban landscapes that exist elsewhere?* The reasons for selecting Hamilton, Ontario as the case will be outlined later on in the methodology chapter.

Although there are many avenues that could be taken to determine how suburban residents in Hamilton perceive the suburbs, the investigation outlined in this thesis will be centered on five main research objectives. They are as follows:

- i) To determine how suburban residents in Hamilton define suburbia;
- ii) To determine where suburban residents in Hamilton consider that city’s suburbs to be;
- iii) To determine whether suburban residents believe they live in the suburbs;

- iv) To determine the extent to which suburban residents in Hamilton understand and agree with common suburban criticisms, and;
- v) To determine the advantages and disadvantages suburban residents in Hamilton associate with living in a suburban neighbourhood.

In addition to the existing literature on these objectives being sparse, all have significant implications for how urban planners and policy makers approach suburbs and the people who live in them. These implications will be outlined in more detail throughout the course of this thesis.

All of the data presented in this thesis was collected via thirty semi-structured interviews with the residents of three neighbourhoods in Hamilton that, on most criteria, would be considered suburban. Since these numbers are small, the amount of detail provided will be somewhat limited. However, this is acceptable since this thesis has been designed as an exploratory study. It is hoped that what is presented will allow for more thorough research to be completed on this very important subject.

Chapter 2: Literature review

As discussed above, the purpose of this thesis is to develop an understanding of how suburban residents in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both the suburban landscape that surrounds them and suburban landscapes that exist elsewhere. While the literature on suburbia is vast, very few studies have considered what suburban residents think about the suburban landscape in which they live. Instead, most scholars have implicitly adopted the point of view of suburban outsiders. This oversight is very surprising, since there has been a growing awareness in recent years of various problems associated with the suburbs, most notably those connected to the environment and human health. It stands to reason that consultation with suburban residents may provide a key to the solution to these problems.

This chapter will provide an overview of what the few researchers who have addressed this gap have discovered, usually through their own conversations with suburban residents. In particular, it will detail what these researchers have found in respect to the following:

- (i) How suburban residents define the term 'suburb';
- (ii) Whether suburban residents are inclined to believe they live in the suburbs;
- (iii) Whether suburban residents understand and agree with criticisms of suburbs, and;
- (iv) The advantages and disadvantages suburban residents associate with living in their neighbourhoods.

This overview will then be used as a basis for the remainder of the discussion found within this thesis.

2.1: Defining the term 'suburb'

Before addressing how suburban residents may define the term 'suburb', it is important to outline how scholars have defined the term. This will provide not only a basis for comparison, but will also help to determine what the term 'suburb' should refer to for the purposes of this study.

The term 'suburb' has been defined in different ways and with some disagreement. The characteristics often used to describe suburbs vary across time and space. Consequently, a definitive definition for the term 'suburb' does not exist within the literature (Forsyth, 2012). Opinions have varied widely, depending on the spatial and contextual dimensions scholars have examined.

In general, most scholars have agreed that 'suburb' should refer to low-density developments located at, or near, the periphery of urban centres. However, there has been considerable debate within the literature as to whether these developments need to be economically and racially homogeneous. As well, scholars have disagreed as to whether the presence of non-residential land uses would negate the designation of a particular location as suburban.

Examining America's post-war suburbs, Jackson (1985) and Fishman (1987), two pioneering scholars in the field, argued that 'true' suburbs were low-density, almost exclusively residential developments located on the urban periphery. Additionally, they asserted that suburbs were socially, culturally, and economically homogeneous, occupied mainly by white, middle-class families. They based this contention on their understanding of suburban history. Both believed that the middle-class had developed

the first suburbs in an attempt to replicate the estates of the upper class, and therefore the quintessential suburb needed to be exclusively middle-class and residential.

In recent years, other scholars, including Harris and Lewis (2001), have challenged Fishman and Jackson's "traditional" definition for suburbs, arguing that this definition does not "capture the totality of suburban life" (Nicolaidis & Wiese, 2006, p. 7). Identified by Nicolaidis and Wiese (2006), as "suburban revisionists", these scholars have emphasized that suburbia should instead refer to any development on the urban periphery, regardless of class or race. They have contended that Jackson and Fishman's traditional definition unrealistically omitted such entities as industry, multifamily housing, blue-collar workers, ethnic and racial minorities, as well as the poor. Demonstrating that these groups have all been present within North American suburbs for at least as long as the middle-class, these scholars have argued that this background needs to be recognized in a comprehensive definition for the term 'suburb'.

When examining the urban system that exists in North America today, it becomes apparent that a more encompassing definition for suburbia is required. Land located on the urban fringe is being utilized more often for non-residential land uses (Nicolaidis & Wiese, 2006). As well, particularly in Canada, census data conclusively demonstrates that the urban periphery is becoming more diverse, in terms of both class and race (Hiebert, 2000; Hulchanski, 2010). Therefore, the most appropriate definition for suburbia would be revisionist, in that any development that exists a significant distance away from the urban core should be considered a suburb. In light of this reality, this will be the definition used within this thesis.

As outlined by Harris (2004), in the US, a place must also typically have its own municipal government to be considered a suburb. However, in Canada, this is not necessarily expected, since the Canadian political system is set up in such a way that it is possible for higher levels of government to amalgamate suburbs with their urban counterparts, forming one municipal government for the two entities. This process has happened fairly frequently in Canada, particularly in recent decades. For example, Hamilton was amalgamated with its suburbs in 2001. The significance of this event will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Frequently, in both public discourse and the academic literature, the term 'sprawl' has been used interchangeably with the term 'suburb'. Although it is true that most suburban development today meets the requirements for sprawl, interchanging these words is incorrect because the term 'suburb' does not refer to the same phenomena as sprawl.

Similar to the term 'suburb', 'sprawl' is a very contentious term and has been defined countless ways. Most of these definitions however have been ambiguous and difficult to objectively employ (Galster et al., 2001). Using data on urban areas in the US, Galster et al. (2001, p. 685) developed a more comprehensive definition for sprawl, defining it as "a pattern of land use in an urban area that exhibits low levels of some combination of eight distinct dimensions". These dimensions include density, continuity, concentrations, clustering, centrality, nuclearity, mixed uses and proximity.

Utilizing this definition for sprawl, it is easy to observe how suburbs can conceivably exist without being sprawl. As discussed above, the only requirement needed to indicate that a particular location is suburban is that it is located at, or near,

the periphery of an urban centre. This standard does not necessarily have to involve any of the eight dimensions of sprawl outlined by Galster et al. Consequently, it is incorrect to assume that sprawl and suburbia have the same meaning. The important distinction between these two terms will be addressed again further on in this chapter.

While the definitions for the term 'suburb' that have been put forth by scholars are of value to this discussion of the literature, they do not reflect its primary aim. This literature review is interested more in what suburban residents have previously said defines the suburbs. In the introduction to their book *The Suburb Reader*, Nicolaides and Wiese (2006, p. 5) correctly declare that "it doesn't take a PhD to know a thing or two about suburbia- all of us carry images in our heads that encapsulate ideas about the suburbs". This statement should be particularly true of suburban residents. They live in the suburbs and therefore must have the most first-hand knowledge of this unique landscape. However, only two researchers (Feldman, 1990; Hummon, 1990) have actually asked suburban residents how they define the suburbs.

Feldman (1990) asked the residents of different communities in Denver, Colorado to come up with definitions for the terms 'city', 'suburb' and 'small-town'. The suburban residents she surveyed defined the suburbs as being in direct contrast to the city. They stated that suburbs have less "social and physical heterogeneity, better maintenance, more nature, less people, cars, noise, crime, stress and concerns for safety" than the city (Feldman, 1990, p. 200). Hummon's (1990) research was very similar to Feldman's. He asked his participants, who were all based in various communities in northern California, to answer the same question. His results too were

similar to Feldman's. He found that "suburbanists portray the suburbs as quiet, natural, secure places, where life centres on home and family" (Hummon, 1990, p. 103).

The only different component to Hummon's definition was the part about how life in the suburbs centres on the home and the family. Family is a prevalent theme within the literature on suburbia. Countless scholars (Donaldson, 1969; Fishman, 1987; Harris, 2004; Jackson, 1985; Nicolaidis & Wiese, 2006) have addressed how families have been drawn to the suburbs, seeking out its family-friendly social and physical landscape. Consequently, it is not surprising that suburban residents used family in their definition for suburbia. The dynamics of the association between family and the suburbs will be discussed in more detail further on in this literature review.

Interestingly, Hummon (1990, p. 106) also noted that suburban residents failed to define suburbia as being homogeneous. He was surprised by this omission, since, at that time, most of the definitions for suburbia that had been put forth in the literature had stressed homogeneity. He hypothesized that this indicated that suburban residents were either embarrassed by, or oblivious to, the social uniformity of their neighbourhoods. However, as discussed above, since this time it has become apparent that those earlier definitions of the term 'suburb' did not take into account the true nature of the North American suburban landscape. Suburbs have always been more heterogeneous than previously speculated. Consequently, it is possible that what Hummon observed was not embarrassment or obliviousness. Instead, the suburban residents he talked to could have been accurately expressing what they had observed in their daily life. Suburbs have become increasingly more diverse in the years since Hummon's study. This thesis

will partly investigate whether this has changed how suburban residents define the term 'suburb'.

2.2: Cognizance of suburban residence

In his study, Hummon also investigated whether the suburban residents he talked to believed they lived in the suburbs. He discovered that most suburban residents did believe they lived in a "relatively typical" suburb (p. 109). However, he found that there were also a small number of suburban residents who thought of their community as a small town, rather than a suburb. Hummon (p. 110) identified these people as "suburban villagers".

According to Hummon, within this group of "suburban villagers" there were three types of people. The first were those people who simply had no conception of what constitutes a small town or suburb. They did not know what either word meant and were unable to identify any examples when asked. The second type were people who conceptualized communities based on only two categorizations- city and country. Even though these people lived in a suburb, they did not recognize what a suburb was. In other words, it was not a "part of their vocabulary of place" (Hummon, 1990, p. 110). These people were typically from a working class or rural background. The third type were people who had an incredibly specific conceptualization of suburbia. This conceptualization did not mesh with those put forth by most social scientists and planners. For example, there were people who considered a suburb to be composed solely of housing tract developments. If a suburb looked different than this, they called it a small town and not a suburb.

While intriguing, Hummon's results are over 20 years old. It is difficult to say whether they remain true today, even in the US. This is unfortunate since the continued existence of these 'suburban villagers' has the potential to have significant implications for how urban planners and policy makers target their efforts to 'improve' the North American suburban landscape. It stands to reason that it would be difficult to convince suburban residents that these improvement strategies are for the best if some do not even realize or believe that they are a part of the problem. Consequently, there needs to be more current research focused on establishing whether suburban residents are cognizant of the fact that they actually live in the suburbs.

2.3: Criticisms and the residents of suburbs

Over the years, North American suburbs have been derided by their critics for various reasons. This section will explore the literature that pertains to these criticisms. In most cases, I will outline what scholars have said both in support of, and in opposition to, these claims. This will be done in order to provide a basis for the discussion that will follow this section, which will outline what researchers have discovered suburban residents actually know and think about these common suburban criticisms.

Suburbs have been criticized for being too homogeneous, in terms of both class and race. Many critics have condemned them for being "a potent arbitrator of social distinctions" (Nicolaidis & Wiese, 2006, p. 1). They have asserted that suburban homogeneity has allowed white, middle-class people to separate themselves entirely from other groups, sheltering them from the needs of the broader population. In the 1960s, Jacobs (1961) and Mumford (1961) were two of the most fervent critics of this. Today, scholars such as Hayden (2004), have continued this charge, insisting that

suburbia “intensifies the existing intersecting difficulties of class, race and gender, by adding spatial separation”. Additionally, critics have argued that this homogeneity is unfair because it has allowed only certain groups to have access to the benefits of suburban living, such as clean air, ample open space, home ownership and good schools (Nicolaidis & Wiese, 2006).

Others have rejected these claims though, insisting that suburban homogeneity has always been a fallacy. As stated above, suburban revisionists, such as Harris and Lewis (2001), have argued that suburban North America has never truly been homogeneous. Other research appears to suggest that this trend has continued into the present day, and suburbs are actually becoming more diverse than ever before. In Canada, for example, Hulchanski (2010) shown that Toronto’s inner-suburbs are becoming populated heavily by low-income families. As well, Hiebert (2000) outlined how immigrant groups have begun to by-pass the inner-city and settle in the suburbs of many major Canadian cities. These observations have led many people to conclude that today’s suburbs are no longer enclaves of white, middle-class nuclear families, as critics have suggested.

Additionally, others have insisted that residential homogeneity has not solely been a suburban problem. Berger (1961) argued that in the city, people’s social lives took place in “areas even smaller than a census tract”, and these areas were typically just as homogeneous as the suburbs. Consequently, he concluded that even people who lived in the city were sheltered from people different from them, negating the role suburbs played in separating classes and races from one another.

In addition to homogeneity, suburbs have also been criticized for being conformist. This criticism was particularly severe in the '50s and '60s, although the notion still remains today, albeit to a lesser extent than before. Whyte (1956) argued that suburbs were occupied by "organization men" who held a belief that "belongingness was the ultimate need of the individual". One of the many examples he utilized to support this argument was that suburban residents had a tendency to follow a particular colour scheme on the exterior of their homes. He posited that nothing could be too out-of-the-ordinary from the rest of the neighbourhood, or else the suburbanites would be in danger of straying too far from the status quo. This was an offense he believed most of them feared greatly. Mumford (1961) was also critical of suburban conformity in the '50s and '60s. He insisted that conformity caused "passiveness and docility" in the suburban population, greatly limiting their tendency to rise up against societal injustices, such as racism, sexism, and classism. During this period, suburban conformity was also ridiculed within popular culture. Malvina Reynolds' popular folk song, "Little Boxes" (1962) condemned suburbs and their "boxes made of ticky-tacky" that "all just looked the same". This song was a slight directed at the perceived uniformity of both the physical and social landscape of the suburbs. Reynolds was implying that, just like their houses, suburban residents desired to look and act the same way. This song remains a popular reference today when people criticize the suburbs, demonstrating the pervasiveness of the belief that suburbs are characterized by social conformity.

In the 1960s, a group of social scientists (Berger, 1968; Clark, 1966; Dobriner, 1963; Gans, 1967) challenged the notion that suburbs were conformist, along with many other suppositions. They argued that the supposed conformity other researchers had

observed in the suburbs was actually a result of social and economic homogeneity in these communities. They insisted that suburbanites seemed to act the same way because they came from the same backgrounds. These scholars argued that if their backgrounds had been varied, their actions would have been varied as well.

More recently, other scholars have contended that the critics of earlier generations failed to notice events that would have suggested that suburbs were “a complicated place, long shaped by conflict and community activism” (Baxandall & Ewen, 2000, p. xvi). Baxandall and Ewen (2000) discovered that the suburbs of Long Island, New York were fraught with tension, even as way back as the 1950s. Residents participated in demonstrations against female oppression and the racial segregation of schools and neighbourhoods, suggesting suburbanites were not as passive and docile as Mumford (1961) contended.

In the '50s and '60s, significant attention was also placed on how isolated women were in suburban communities. Located far from the city, with no access to transportation, women were supposedly ‘trapped’ in the suburbs, forced to spend all their time taking care of the children and the home while their husband was in the city working (Friedan, 1963). Strong-Boag (1991) explored this issue from a Canadian perspective, using a questionnaire to ask suburban women from this time period what their experiences were like. Looking back, some women claimed that they had no problems with the arrangement, stating that they were fulfilled in their roles as homemakers. Their children had thrived, and they had a good relationship with their husbands. Others, though, claimed it was “hell” (Strong-Boag, 1991, p. 503). As one woman stated, “I began to feel as if I were slowly going out of my mind. Each day was

completely filled with child and baby care and keeping the house tidy and preparing meals. I felt under constant pressure” (Strong-Boag, 1991, p. 503).

In the '70s and '80s, women started entering the workforce in progressively larger numbers, and many more had gained access to their own car. While it was assumed that this generally lessened the burden the suburbs had on women, some critics, most notably Hayden (1980), insisted that the suburbs remained oppressive to women, albeit in different ways. Hayden asserted that the city was still laid out in a way that disenfranchised women. Zoning policies ensured services that helped women juggle their competing roles in the public and private sphere, such as daycares and laundry facilities, were far away from the home. This forced women to take more time out of their already busy days to complete the tasks that were considered their responsibility. As well, women continued to rely on public transit more than men. Public transit service was still very limited in the suburbs, and thus this further oppressed the women who lived there. These observations led Hayden to suggest that fundamental changes needed to be made to the lay-out of cities, ensuring women were made more equal to their male counterparts.

Critics have also alleged that the North American suburban landscape is 'placeless' (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000; Kunstler, 1993; Relph, 1987). This means that they believe it has been mass-produced in a way that makes one suburb indistinguishable from another suburb. This in turn stops individuals from ascribing any meaning to these spaces, ultimately lessening the attachments they have to them. The placelessness of suburbia is in direct contrast to other locations in the urban system, for example the main street of a small-town, that are seen as being able to provoke strong

meanings and attachments within people. This is because these spaces are supposedly very authentic.

Others have disagreed with this stance. For instance, Baxandall and Ewen (2000, p. xvii) derided commentators who insisted suburbs were placeless, calling them “anti-suburban snobs”. Instead, Baxandall and Ewen contended that the suburbs should be embraced, primarily because many people enjoy living there, and have contributed significantly to making the suburban landscape what it is. Accordingly, they insisted that this history makes suburbia just as authentic as any other location within the urban system.

In recent years, suburbia has also been denounced as being an unhealthy and unsafe environment for people to live in. In 2005, the Ontario College of Family Physicians released a 41 page report that detailed why they believed suburbs have inflicted “significant harm” on the public health of Ontarian's (Bray, Vakil, & Elliott, 2005, p. 38). Referring to numerous studies that have linked suburbanization to countless health problems, this report urged the Ontario government to implement serious measures aimed at thwarting suburban growth in the province.

Within the literature, suburbia has been blamed for increased rates of automobile-related fatalities. It has been argued that suburbs encourage people to use their cars more, since everything is so spread out, and that this in turn has resulted in more collisions (Ewing, Schieber, & Zegeer, 2003). As well, it has been maintained that a lack of adequate pedestrian walkways in suburbia has resulted in more accidents involving pedestrians (Dumbaugh & Rae, 2009; Ewing, Schieber, et al., 2003).

Auto-dependence in suburbia has also been linked to health problems. Countless studies have attributed suburbanization in North America to increased rates of asthma, obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes in the population (Ewing, Brownson, & Berrigan, 2006; Ewing, Schmid, Killingsworth, Zlot, & Raudenbush, 2003; Lopez, 2004; Strum & Cohen, 2004). In particular, these scholars have alleged that the dispersed nature of the suburban landscape discourages physical activity in its residents and that this ultimately has resulted in an increased prevalence of these afflictions within the North American suburban population.

Suburbs have also been criticized for hastening the economic deprivation of inner-cities. This process is related more to continued urban sprawl, however, as discussed previously, suburbs are often seen as being interchangeable with this process. Therefore, these concerns are also very pertinent to this investigation. In particular, critics have alleged that sprawl wastes resources that would be better spent within the inner-city (Blais, 2010; Duany et al., 2000; Hayden, 2004; Orfield, 2002). According to these critics, it is unnecessary and irresponsible to construct new infrastructure, including electrical and sewer lines, roads, and services such as schools, on the urban fringe, when this infrastructure already exists within the inner-city. Consequently, these critics have insisted that municipalities invest their resources on revitalizing their urban core, instead of using it to provide assistance to new development on the urban fringe. They have attributed the decline many North American inner-cities have experienced in recent decades to a general dismissal of this strategy.

In response, Bruegmann (2005) has contended that this argument was based on an unfair assessment. He argued that it costs more to renovate existing infrastructure in the city than to build new infrastructure on the urban periphery, and therefore it makes perfect fiscal sense for North American municipalities to direct resources to the urban periphery as opposed to the inner-city. According to Bruegmann, reversing this trend would have a disastrous impact on the financial resources of most municipalities.

The harshest criticisms that have been directed towards the suburbs in recent years have centered around the environmental degradation they supposedly cause. These criticisms have been particularly prevalent in popular media, likely bringing these issues to the public's attention. Critics have complained that urban sprawl has destroyed viable farmland (American Farmland Trust, 1994) and the natural habitats of many forms of wildlife (Nicolaidis & Wiese, 2006). As well, suburbs have been linked to increased pollution, most notably greenhouse gases, which have been shown to cause global warming (Fuller & Crawford, 2011; Hoorweg, Sugar, & Gomez, 2011; VandeWeghe & Kennedy, 2007). Similar to the health and safety concerns discussed above, critics have argued that this increased pollution is the result of how dispersed suburbia is. People are entirely dependent on personal automobiles to travel from place to place because the suburbs lack efficient public transit systems. This traffic subsequently causes more pollutants to be released into the atmosphere.

While most of these claims have generally remained unchallenged, Bruegmann (2005) has been one of the few scholars to insist, albeit rather feebly, that these environmental complaints are unfair. He argued that the evidence that has been used to support them is unreliable at best, particularly in relation to global warming. There

remains considerable uncertainty about how this process actually works, let alone if it has been hastened by suburban automobile dependence. Additionally, Bruegmann contended that critics have exaggerated the threat suburbs pose to productive farmland. Insisting that there will not be any food shortages caused by suburbanization, he has alleged that critics are just reacting based on aesthetic and symbolic concerns.

According to Bruegmann, their worries are directed more towards the loss of the quaint, wholesome family farm, as opposed to a decline in the food supply.

2.3.1: Suburban residents' understanding of suburban criticisms

As detailed in the section above, critics have maintained that North American suburbs are harmful to not only their residents, but society as a whole as well. However, in spite of these assertions, many millions of people continue to live in, and move to, the suburbs. This situation raises doubt as to whether suburban residents are aware of, or agree with, the condemnations that have been leveled against their neighbourhoods. Surprisingly however, very few researchers have actually investigated whether this is true or not. This section will outline the small amount of research that has previously focused on this topic, in an attempt to provide a basis for the inquiry that will be presented in this thesis.

Talen (2001) investigated how accepting suburban residents were to criticism of their neighbourhoods. She surveyed the residents of an affluent suburb located just outside Dallas, asking them to state whether they agreed or disagreed with a list of criticisms that have been put forth about suburbia, primarily from the proponents of New Urbanism. New Urbanism rejects traditional suburban development on most of the grounds detailed in the section above. Talen (2001, p. 199) found that the suburban

residents she surveyed were generally very attached to their neighbourhood, and were “unlikely to accept criticisms of their suburban lifestyle”. The only criticisms they were likely to accept were those that affected them in very practical ways, such as their limited access to services and amenities. For example, almost one-half of the respondents indicated that they spent too much time in a car (Talen, 2001, p. 208). Conversely, nearly three quarters of those surveyed disagreed that suburbs were harmful to the environment, and only a quarter of them believed that suburbs were racially and economically homogeneous (Talen, 2001, p. 211).

Interestingly, nearly three quarters of the suburban residents Talen surveyed claimed that they had never heard any negative views expressed about suburban development (p. 208). Whether this was actually true or not was hard to determine, since it was possible that the respondents had lied to make themselves seem guiltless, especially in light of the revelations outlined above. Nevertheless, this result was surprising to Talen given the intensity of anti-suburban rhetoric in the popular media.

While Talen’s results are intriguing, it is possible that they do not reflect the thoughts of the average North American suburbanite. The neighbourhood she surveyed was very affluent. Only 21.6% of the residents had an income that was less than \$100,000 (Talen, 2001, p. 199). As well, the neighbourhood was primarily white. 95.1% of the residents identified themselves as Caucasian (Talen, 2001, p. 199). In light of the racial and economic diversity that exists in North American suburbs today, it is reasonable to conclude that this suburb was far from typical, calling into question whether Talen’s results were typical as well. Additionally, it is important to note that Talen’s study was undertaken over ten years ago. Some of the strongest criticism

against the suburbs has come in the years since, and therefore, her results may no longer hold up as well as they once did.

More recently, Gocmen (2009) surveyed residents in several different suburban communities in Michigan in an attempt to determine what suburban residents understood about the environmental impact of suburban development. Unlike Talen, she focused her research solely on environmental criticisms, and did not explore how well suburban residents understood other criticisms that have been directed towards suburbia. Presuming that suburban development destroyed farmland, wildlife habitats, forests, open-space, and increased air pollution levels, Gocmen found that suburban residents generally had a mixed understanding of these facts. The people she surveyed tended to know that suburban development destroyed farmland, forests and open-space. However, very few knew that it was also detrimental to the protection of wildlife habitats, and that it increased air pollution levels. As discussed above, many of the criticisms that have been leveled at the suburbs are controversial. Even scholars disagree as to whether they are in fact accurate. Gocmen based her work on the assumption that the environmental impacts she had identified were correct and, unlike Talen, did not question whether the suburban residents she surveyed disagreed with this position.

As discussed previously, Hummon (1990) explored whether suburban residents believed they lived in the suburbs. He identified three types of suburban residents who did not believe they lived in the suburbs and termed them “suburban villagers”. In relation to the issue of whether suburban residents comprehend suburban criticisms, he found that the third type of these “suburban villagers”, those who defined the suburbs as

solely referring to housing tract developments, typically only attributed suburban ills to this tract housing. He suggested that this was a technique they used to deflect criticism directed towards their way of life. Hummon's findings may help to explain both Talen's and Gocmen's results, since they indicate that suburban residents' understanding and acceptance of suburban criticisms may be tied in some way to how they define what a suburb is. This is important to note moving forward in this investigation as well.

2.4: Advantages and disadvantages of living in the suburbs

In the 1960s, several social scientists (Berger, 1961, 1968; Clark, 1966; Dobriner, 1963; Gans, 1967) conducted in-depth, qualitative research studies of suburban neighbourhoods in an attempt to challenge a number of popular stereotypes that had come to incorrectly define the suburban way of life during this time period. The primary aim of these social scientists was to illustrate what the suburban way of life really entailed, however their work was also notable because they asked suburban residents what they thought about their neighbourhoods. This was something that was unique then, and has not really been done since, which is unfortunate because modern suburbs are very different from those of the 1960s. In particular, it would be very useful to know what modern suburban residents like and dislike about their neighbourhoods, primarily because this would offer urban planners and policy makers an insight into how suburban retrofitting should function and what changes are likely to be acceptable. The following section of this literature review will provide an overview of what the social scientists from the 1960s discovered. This discussion will, when possible, be interjected with additional research from the present day that may suggest whether these findings still hold true. This will be done in an attempt to predict what this particular study will

discover in regards to what modern suburban residents like and dislike about the suburban landscape.

All of the social scientists from the 1960s discussed how evident it was that many suburban residents considered the suburbs to be the best place to raise a family. In interviews, the suburban residents spoke about how the suburbs provided children with more space to play (Berger, 1961, 1968; Clark, 1966; Dobriner, 1963; Gans, 1967). As well, children did not have to be supervised while outside of the home, since many of the “dangers” that were present in the city were not present in the suburbs (Gans, 1967). The suburban residents also noted that living in the suburbs allowed them to spend more time with their children (Gans, 1967). The primarily residential nature of suburbia limited the availability of leisure activities outside of the home, and consequently, children and adults tended to remain home more often than they had when they lived in the city.

Closer to the present day, Hummon (1990, p. 101) discovered that suburban residents still typically considered the suburbs to be “especially good for children”. Suburbs were viewed as an “ideal middle ground” in which residents were still offered access to the city, but they were able to avoid the “dangers” of city life (Hummon, 1990, p. 102). Suburban residents did express concern over burglary and other crime in the suburbs, however they still believed that the suburbs offered more security than the city. Hummon talked to several people he called “suburban-urbanists” (Hummon, 1990, p. 113). These were people who wished to live in the city, but lived in the suburbs instead, primarily because they felt the suburbs were best for their children. Hummon did not specifically state why this was, however it is reasonable to conclude that the avoidance

of urban danger (as well as more open space) was an important consideration in their decision as well.

In the 1960s, most of the suburban residents the social scientists talked to considered family-friendly attributes to be the primary reason why they observed the suburbs to be concentrated heavily with families. However, Gans (1967) and Clark (1966) demonstrated that this assumption was largely inaccurate. Most people were moving to the suburbs during this time period simply to find affordable home ownership. Population growth had made it impossible to find anything in the city, unless a family was very wealthy. New suburban housing, on the other hand, was less expensive and therefore more attractive, specifically to young families who had less assets than their older counterparts.

Home ownership was appealing to suburban residents because “the acquisition of a house gave to many a suburban dweller a sense of having moved up socially” (Clark, 1966, p. 193). Suburbanites could easily rent housing in the city, however home ownership made them seem to be on a higher social plane than those who rented. Accordingly, an improved social status was one enticing advantage to living in the suburbs in the 1960s.

Today, rental properties are found throughout North American suburbs. Densification schemes have resulted in the construction of townhomes and low-rise apartments in many suburban areas. As well, many older, single-detached homes have been converted into rental accommodations (Baxandall & Ewen, 2000). Consequently, it is likely that this perceived advantage to suburban living may no longer exist in the present day.

As discussed previously, many critics today associate the suburbs with automobile dependence. This is not something new; critics were deriding suburbs even as far back as the 1960s for their reliance on personal transport (Gans, 1967). Of particular concern at this time was the suburban commute. Critics alleged that the long and monotonous commute to and from the suburbs made suburban workers incredibly stressed (Donaldson, 1969). Surprisingly however, the work of the social scientists from the 1960s indicated that suburban residents generally did not consider a long commute to be a disadvantage of suburban living. Gans (1967) and Clark (1966) observed that most suburban residents actually enjoyed this part of their day. Gans (1967, p. 222) theorized that this was because it was “one of their few moments of total privacy” and was thus a “relaxing transition between the social demands of the job and family”. According to Gans (1967, p. 222), women were less inclined to take pleasure in their husband’s need to commute, primarily because it took their husband away from the family. However, these concerns were ultimately futile because few suburban residents indicated that a shorter commute would convince them to move back to the city (Clark, 1966, p. 150).

While suburban commute patterns were very concerning to critics as early as the 1960s, very little notice was placed on how inaccessible certain amenities, such as shopping facilities, can be in the suburbs until more recently. Accordingly, the social scientists from the 1960s generally focused little attention on what suburban residents thought about the availability of different amenities in the suburbs. Gans (1967, p. 272) was the only one to note that suburbanites generally did not like the lack of “urban facilities” in the suburbs and that they wanted “more stores, entertainment and cultural

facilities” located nearby. His discussion of this perceived deficiency did not go into any more detail, making it difficult to assess its actual significance to the suburban residents he talked to.

Today, very little research has focused on whether suburban residents dislike their supposed dependence on automobiles to travel both to work and to shopping and other facilities. This is very surprising in light of all the criticism that has recently been directed towards this aspect of the suburban lifestyle. Talen (2001) has been the only researcher who has explored this issue. Asking suburban residents whether they agree with popular criticisms of suburbia, she discovered that many modern suburban residents dislike having to rely so much on automobiles to get around (p. 208). This thesis will attempt explore this issue further.

2.5: Conclusion

As outlined above, the existing literature that has examined how suburban residents perceive the suburbs is extremely limited. We need to know more about how modern suburban residents define suburbia, whether they believe they live in the suburbs, whether they are aware of and agree with suburban criticisms, and finally what advantages and disadvantages they associate with living in their neighbourhoods. These gaps in our knowledge are significant because they could possibly help urban planners and policy makers understand how they should go about fixing the “suburban problem”. In light of this predicament, this thesis will attempt to address these gaps, hopefully providing more insight into what suburban residents think about the suburbs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As discussed previously, this thesis will explore how suburbanites perceive the suburbs. This will be accomplished by focusing on how suburban residents of Hamilton, Ontario perceive both their own neighbourhoods and suburban neighbourhoods that exist elsewhere. The majority of the data that will be presented was collected by way of semi-structured interviews. This chapter outlines this process, detailing the reasons why Hamilton was selected as a case, and how the research was designed and analyzed.

3.1: Case study approach

By focusing on the perceptions of suburban residents in Hamilton, Ontario, this study is utilizing a case study methodology. A case study is defined as an intensive and holistic study of one or more particular cases, as opposed to a less comprehensive study of how a phenomenon manifests itself in a larger context (Baxter, 2010). In this regard, a case is a single example of a larger process. Suburban Hamilton, Ontario, its residents and their perceptions of suburbia are the case being investigated in this study. The reasons for selecting this particular case will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Yin (2008, p. 18) states that case studies are useful when certain contextual conditions are “highly pertinent” to the phenomenon being studied, primarily because case studies allow for a more thorough look at how a phenomenon is impacted by contextually-based circumstances. This is why I chose to utilize a case study methodology in this study. It stands to reason that many of the opinions held by suburbanites are highly dependent on place-based characteristics. By focusing on

Hamilton, Ontario, I will be able to more thoroughly understand what this relationship entails.

3.2: Hamilton, Ontario and its selection as a case

Hamilton is located on the western shore of Lake Ontario, about 70 kilometers southwest of Toronto. It is part of the Golden Horseshoe region. Figure 3.1 displays Hamilton's location and its surrounding area. According to the 2006 census, Hamilton has a population of 504,559 people. This population is distributed amongst six communities: Hamilton, Flamborough, Stoney Creek, Ancaster, Glanbrook and Dundas. Their boundaries can be seen in Figure 3.2. These communities were originally independent of one another, however they were amalgamated together to form one city, the "new" city of Hamilton, by the provincial government in 2001. The process of amalgamation was, and continues to be, controversial, especially in those areas that had once been suburbs. Many people in these areas feel they were forced into an arrangement that is not equitable. They feel the "old" city unfairly benefits economically from the resources of the suburbs, and that the availability and quality of their municipal services has declined significantly. Whether this has actually occurred is debatable since there has not been any systematic study completed on how the balance of tax revenue and service allocation in Hamilton has been effected by amalgamation. Nevertheless, it remains a very controversial topic within the city.

Hamilton is characterized by a unique physical geography. The Niagara Escarpment crosses the city, creating a natural barrier that almost splits the city in two. It can be seen in Figure 3.2. Extending from the bottom of the escarpment out to the



Figure 3.1: Map of Hamilton, Ontario and its surrounding area (Source: Google Maps).

lake and harbour, the lower part of the city was the site of the Hamilton area's initial population growth. Following WWII, when automobile ownership greatly increased, settlement began to extend to the upper part of the city. This upper part of the city is known by many residents as the 'Mountain' and is where most of the city's growth has continued to occur in recent decades. Therefore, most of the housing stock here is newer than in the lower part of the city. Additionally, density levels are lower here, and there tends to be greater separation between different forms of land-use, primarily because this part of the city was constructed during the automobile era. Household income on the Mountain also tends to be higher than it is below the Mountain. This can be seen in Figure 3.3, which displays median household income in 2005 by census tract. The outer part of the city generally has a higher median income than the inner part of the city.

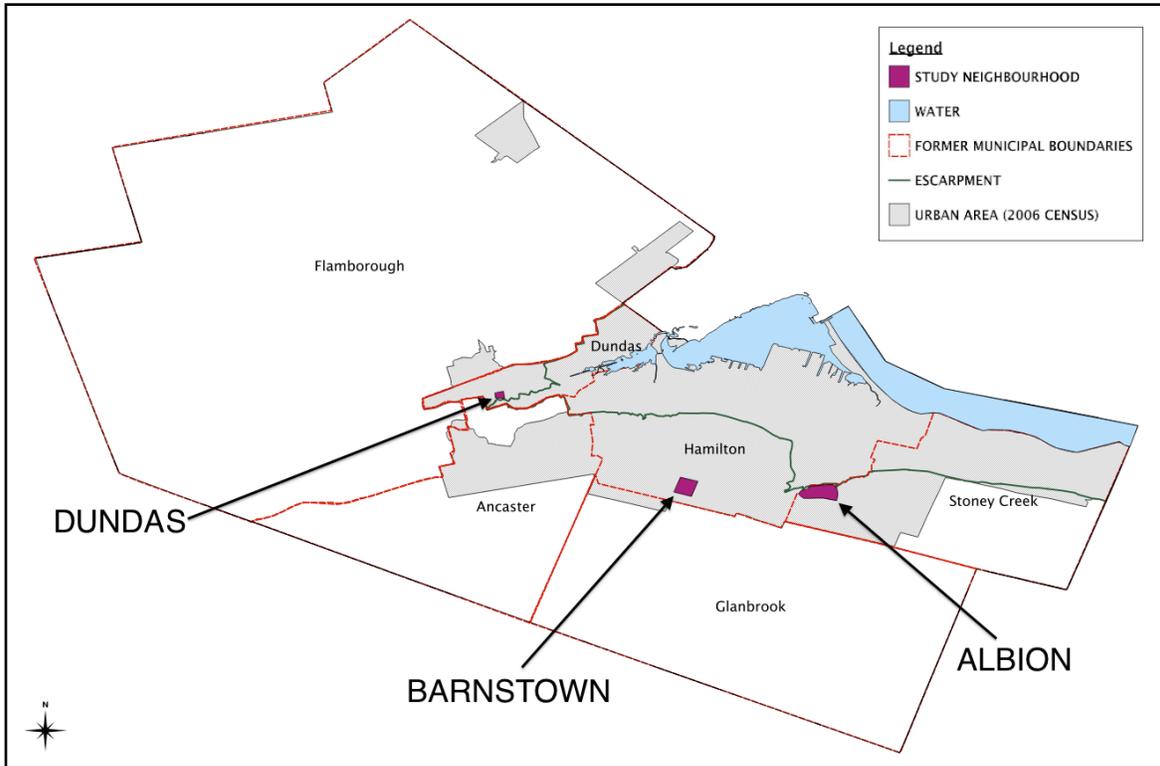


Figure 3.2: Hamilton, Ontario and the location of the study neighbourhoods (Shanks, 2012).

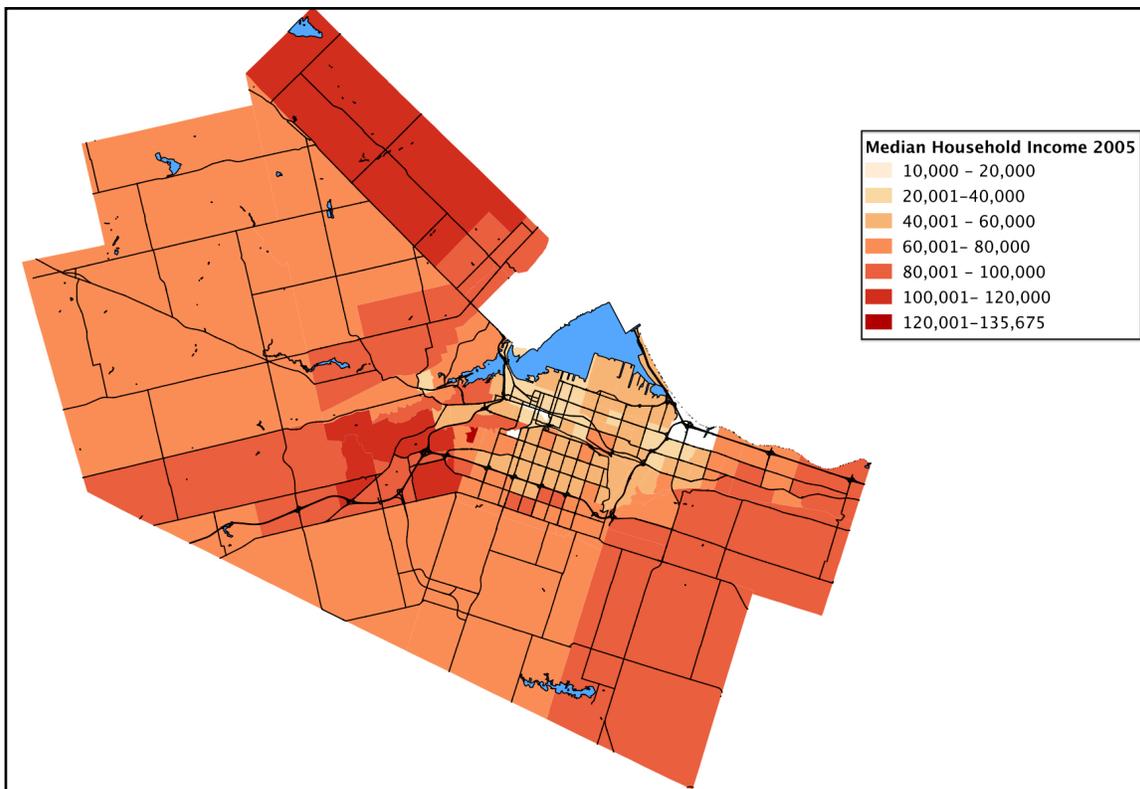


Figure 3.3: Median household income, Hamilton, Ontario, 2005 (\$). (Source: 2006 Census of Canada).

While downtown Hamilton is generally seen as the “core,” the suburbs each have their own downtowns. These downtowns are significantly smaller, less dense, and focused more on small-scale retail than Hamilton’s downtown core. Hamilton’s downtown has experienced a significant decline since the 1980s. This is partially related to the development of new “big-box” shopping centres away from the urban core, most notably Limeridge Mall on the Hamilton Mountain, and the Meadowlands area in Ancaster.

Hamilton was selected as the case of this study because its urban structure is very similar to that of most North American mid-sized cities. Like many mid-sized cities, Hamilton's urban core is generally less wealthy, and has a lower socio-economic status than its outer suburbs. As well, since WWII, Hamilton has continually experienced an extensive expansion of its urban boundary out into the urban periphery, driven primarily by new suburban development. This is also very common throughout North America. As noted by Baxter (2010, p. 86), a case cannot be viewed as being “entirely representative of a phenomenon,” mainly because it is impossible to know whether a theory applies to other cases without studying them first. In this sense, the purpose of a case study is to “generate theoretical concepts and explanations that potentially resonate in other (as yet unstudied) contexts” (Baxter, 2010, p. 95). Hamilton’s normality should serve to improve the ease in which this can be accomplished. Since Hamilton is so similar to other North American cities, it should be easier to transfer the design of this study to other contexts. As well, it is more likely that the results will hold true in these other situations.

However, it is important to recognize that Hamilton is still unusual in some respects, and that these abnormalities may interfere with the transferability of this study. First, Hamilton is unusual because of amalgamation. Although the process of amalgamation has been quite common in recent decades in certain parts of Canada, most notably in Ontario and Quebec, it is not ubiquitous throughout North America. In fact, it is practically impossible in the US due to jurisdictional restrictions (Harris, 2004).

Additionally, it is possible that the controversy surrounding amalgamation may have impacted the participants' responses, particularly when discussing what they think about other parts of the city. In order to account for this possibility, several questions regarding amalgamation were included in the interview guide. As well, the study neighbourhoods were chosen from different parts of the city, allowing for a comparison of how the different political situations impacted the participants' responses. These measures and their results will be discussed further later.

Hamilton is also unusual because of the Niagara Escarpment. As mentioned above, this landform plays a unique role in demarcating the upper and lower parts of the city. These divisions may play a role in determining how people identify the suburbs within the city, which is ultimately something that would be very distinctive to the context of Hamilton. Thus, this situation may also limit the transferability of the results of this study.

In spite of these limitations, Hamilton was still selected as the site of this study. This is primarily because of convenience. As well, having grown up and lived in the Hamilton area my whole life, I felt Hamilton was the best site for this study simply because I have a detailed, first-hand knowledge of the city and its geography. This

helped when it came time to select which neighbourhoods the data would be collected from, since I had an inherent understanding of most areas of the city and could easily identify which ones complied with the prior specifications I had chosen.

Although helpful, this familiarity may have also impacted my objectivity throughout the project. Having grown-up in Hamilton, I undoubtedly have formulated unconscious assumptions and opinions about the city that are very difficult to recognize. While an objectivity problem like this is not unusual in qualitative research, I still needed to take measures to limit the impact it would have on this study. I ultimately decided to follow a course put forth by Dowling (2010). She recommends that researchers keep a research diary throughout their study, in which they should practice being critically reflexive. According to Dowling, being critically reflexive entails continually “analyzing your own situation as if it were something you were studying” (Dowling, 2010, p. 31), paying particular attention to how that situation is influencing the data. This involves taking notes about “your thoughts and ideas about the research process, its social context and your role in it” (Dowling, 2010, p. 31). This is ultimately what I did throughout all stages of the research. It hopefully helped me to realize the times where my own personal opinions were encroaching on how I was collecting or interpreting the data, ultimately ensuring the integrity of the results.

Being critically reflexive, it is important that I note before moving forward that I am not a ‘suburban outsider’. I have lived in a suburban neighbourhood not far from one of the neighbourhoods used in this study for most of my life and I am therefore a suburbanite. As such, I likely possess a perspective on the suburbs very similar to those expressed by the participants in this study. Just as with my relationship to Hamilton, I

have made every effort to remain objective in spite of this perspective, hopefully ensuring the integrity of the results.

3.3: Selection of study neighbourhoods

The revisionist definition of suburbia was used for this study, since it is the most accurate definition today. As discussed previously, this meant that a suburb was considered to be anything located a significant distance away from Hamilton's urban core. Due to the subjective nature of the term 'significant' however, it was very difficult to identify where exactly this would be. As a general rule, it was decided that anything located on the Mountain, and anything located in Hamilton's former suburbs, could reasonably be considered to be suburban. Therefore, in this study, these will be the areas termed to be 'suburban Hamilton'.

As well, this study only investigated how the residents of single-detached houses perceive the suburbs. While it is true that the housing styles found in today's suburbs are more diverse than they were in the post-war period, it was decided to only investigate the residents of single detached houses because they are the 'traditional' suburban home, and are the ones most people consider when they conceptualize suburbia. Additionally, it was important to focus on this group because they have been the target of most of the densification strategies put forth by planners.

I worked with an undergraduate student who investigated how townhouse residents perceive the suburbs. Her study was designed the exact same way as mine, the only difference was that she studied townhouse residents while I studied the residents of single-detached homes. Our studies were even completed in the same neighbourhoods. None of her results will be referred to in this thesis.

Due to time constraints, it was decided that the data presented in this study would be collected primarily from the residents of two suburban neighbourhoods in Hamilton. While it would have been possible to interview suburban residents scattered throughout the city, it was decided not to do this, primarily because the recruitment process for this would have been too time-consuming. A third neighbourhood was added later, to ensure the results collected from the original two neighbourhoods were reliable. This decision will be discussed further below.

To ensure the data collected closely reflected the conventional suburban character of Hamilton, these two neighbourhoods would have to be 'typical' suburban neighbourhoods. This meant that they would be located a significant distance away from the urban core, their streets would be laid out in a cul-de-sac fashion, they both would have ample amounts of green space and they both would have higher income levels than most other parts of the city. Additionally, to ease comparisons between the two neighbourhoods, there were other specifications made. The chosen neighbourhoods would have to be similar in terms of their income levels, ages and housing styles. Additionally, one neighbourhood would have to be located in the "new" part of the city (i.e. one of the former suburbs that had been amalgamated), while the other would have to be located within the former boundaries of the "old" city. This was specified in order to see whether the controversy surrounding amalgamation had an impact on the responses. Finally, the chosen neighbourhoods were required to have some townhouses within them, in addition to single-detached houses. As mentioned above, I was only investigating the opinions of residents of single-detached homes in the suburbs. However, I was working alongside an undergraduate student who was

studying how townhouse residents perceive the suburbs. For comparison purposes, we planned to complete our research in the same areas, thus necessitating the need for townhomes to be present as well. It is important to note that this specification made the study neighbourhoods somewhat atypical. Many suburban neighbourhoods in Hamilton do not contain townhomes. This may have biased some of the results to an extent.

In order to select the neighbourhoods, data from the 2006 Census of Canada was consulted. As well, a brief field study was undertaken, during which several potential neighbourhoods were examined to determine which complied the most with our specifications. The two neighbourhoods that were ultimately chosen were Barnstown and Albion. Their locations can be viewed in Figure 3.2. Their boundaries, which can be seen in Figures 3.4 and 3.5, adhere to those used by the City of Hamilton in official planning documents.

Barnstown is situated on the central mountain, and is part of the 'old' city of Hamilton. It is located a short distance away from Limeridge Mall, a major shopping centre. Figure 3.6 displays images of the housing found in this neighbourhood. Albion is situated further east, in Stoney Creek, one of the annexed suburbs. The junction of the Red Hill Creek Expressway and the Lincoln Alexander Parkway, two major thoroughways in Hamilton, is located directly adjacent to this neighbourhood. While this has brought new retail development to the area in recent years, the amenities located here are still very limited compared those found in and around the Barnstown neighbourhood. This difference will be explored later. Figure 3.7. displays some images of the housing found in the Albion neighbourhood.

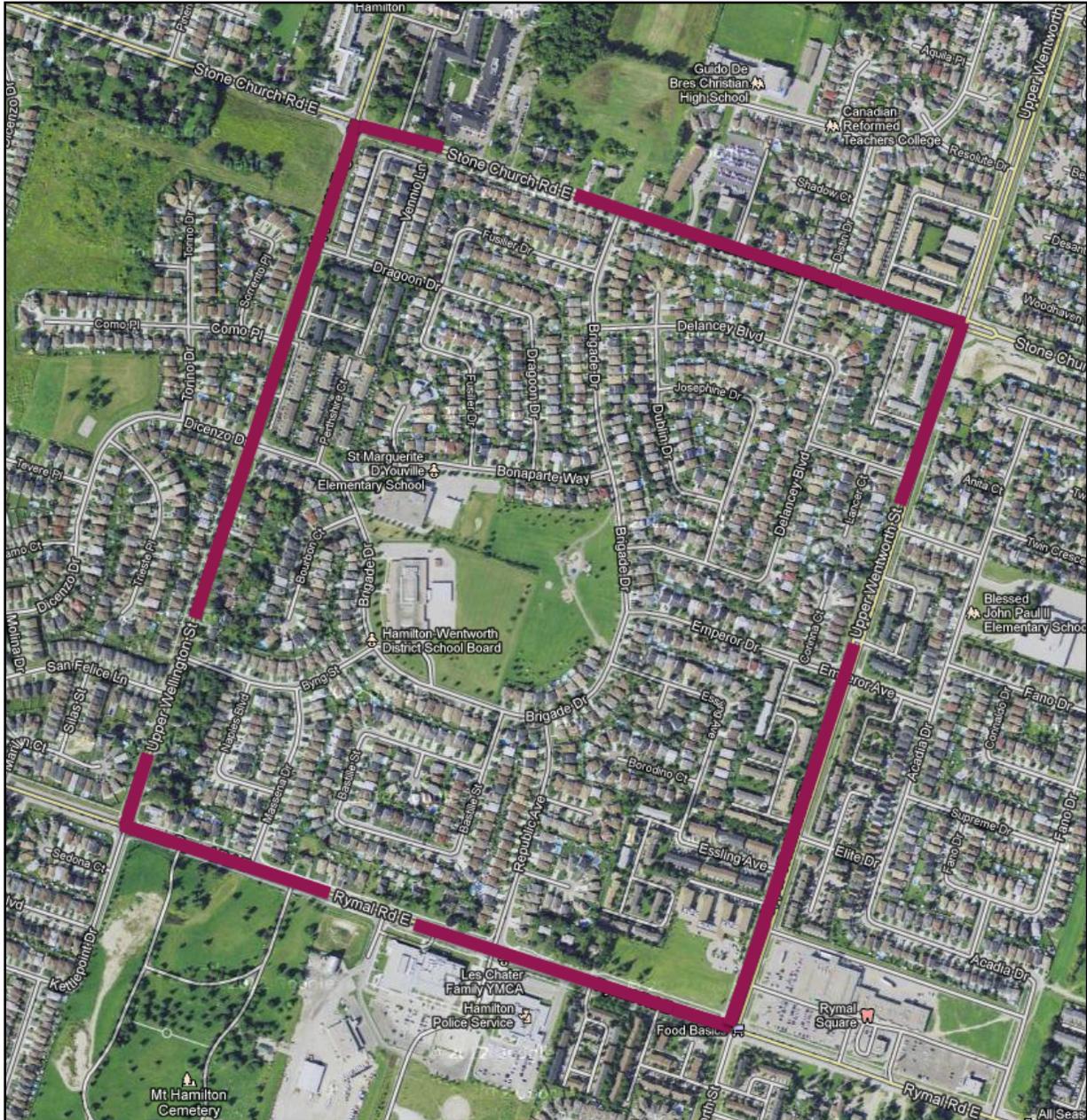


Figure 3.4: Barnstown neighbourhood boundaries (Source: Google Maps).



Figure 3.5: Albion neighbourhood boundaries (Source: Google Maps).

Table 3.1 displays relevant 2006 census data for these two neighbourhoods¹. As specified in the guidelines for neighbourhood selection, both neighbourhoods are fairly similar to one another in terms of income levels and age. Barnstown's median household income is slightly higher than Albion's, however this difference, which is about \$7000, is ultimately small when compared to other census tracts in the city. Additionally, their average housing values are very similar, further indicating that income levels are relatively the same in both neighbourhoods. According to the census, 61.6% of the dwellings located in the Albion neighbourhood were built prior to 1986, compared to only 11.9% of the dwellings in Barnstown. Although this makes it seem as if the dwellings in Albion are older than those in Barnstown, this is not entirely accurate. Both



Figure 3.6: Typical single family homes found in the Barnstown neighbourhood (Shanks, 2012).

¹ The boundaries of the sample neighbourhoods do not conform with census tract boundaries. The census tracts are slightly larger than those of the sample neighbourhoods. Therefore, households that are not found within the bounded sample neighbourhoods are also included in these tallies.



Figure 3.7: Typical single family homes found in the Albion neighbourhood (Shanks, 2012).

neighbourhoods were developed primarily in the 1980s. As evidenced in Figures 3.6 and 3.7, the housing styles in both neighbourhoods are also very similar to one another. This is most likely due to their similar age.

3.3.1: Dundas

Once it was felt that saturation had been reached in the data collected from the original two neighbourhoods (this process will be discussed further below), it was decided to briefly investigate another suburban neighbourhood in Hamilton. This was done primarily to verify whether perceptions of suburbia vary elsewhere in the city. It was decided to complete this additional investigation in Dundas. The reaction to amalgamation in Dundas has been very intense and the community has remained more

	Census Tract, 2006		
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas (study site)
Population characteristics			
<i>Population</i>	5,866	4,110	3,946
<i>Median age of residents</i>	35.0	35.1	48.8
<i>Median household income, 2005 (\$)</i>	\$84,660	\$77,657	\$72,611
Dwelling characteristics			
<i># of private, occupied dwellings</i>	1,675	1,355	1,290
<i>% single detached houses</i>	72.8%	59%	58.9%
<i>% dwellings constructed pre-1986</i>	11.9%	61.6%	57.7%
<i>% dwellings constructed between 1986 and 2005</i>	88%	39.1%	42.2%
<i>Average value of owned dwellings (\$)</i>	\$279,433	\$274,113	\$383,620

Table 3.1: Census tract data for the study neighbourhoods (Source: 2006 Census of Canada).

insular than the other suburbs have, potentially resulting in different results than those obtained from the two primary study neighbourhoods.

A neighbourhood in Dundas was chosen using the same criteria and methods used to select the two primary study neighbourhoods. Its location can be seen in Figure 3.2. Its boundaries can be seen in Figure 3.8. Unlike the other two neighbourhoods, it has not been assigned a name by the city. It will therefore be referred to as 'Dundas'. It is situated a short distance away from Highland Secondary School and is about a five minute drive/thirty minute walk from downtown Dundas. Figure 3.9 displays images of the housing found in this neighbourhood. As can be seen in Table 3.1, the income level and age of the dwellings in this neighbourhood are very similar to those of both



Figure 3.8: Dundas neighbourhood boundaries (Source: Google Maps).



Figure 3.9: Housing found in the Dundas neighbourhood (Coates, 2012).

Barnstown and Albion. The average housing value is slightly higher, but this is expected given that housing values in Dundas are generally higher than those found elsewhere in the city.

3.4: Interviews- design and recruitment

The data was collected by way of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with residents of single-detached homes in the three sampled neighbourhoods. Anticipating difficulties in recruiting a large number of participants for this study, I used interviews, as opposed to some other more extensive form of data collection. It was felt that interviews would result in rich and detailed data that would more than compensate for the small number of participants being recruited.

The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for personal flexibility of questions. The interview guide is shown in Appendix A. It consisted of 18 questions. Most of these were open-ended, allowing participants to answer in any way they wanted. They reflected the research objectives of this study. Participants were asked what they liked and disliked about their neighbourhoods, whether they thought their neighbourhood was a suburb, how they would define a suburb, what characterizes suburban residents and the suburban lifestyle, as well as questions about amalgamation, in order to determine whether their responses were impacted by their feelings on this issue. Prior to beginning research, the interview guide was pilot tested on several individuals, including graduate students who were knowledgeable in both urban geography and qualitative research methods. This ensured that the questions were worded properly and would likely produce appropriate and detailed answers.

The interview guide also included a question in which the participants were asked to label a map of Hamilton (Appendix B). On this map they were asked to indicate which areas of the city they considered to be suburban. Many participants had a hard time answering this question. They expressed confusion as to where certain areas of the city were. Since I was reluctant to influence their responses, I did not help them with this, ultimately resulting in maps that were not complete, or very inaccurate (see Figure 3.10). Additionally, some participants did not spend a lot of time labeling their maps, choosing instead to just circle the names of the former suburbs that comprise the 'new' city of Hamilton (see Figure 3.11). These problems made me initially hesitant to report on the results obtained from the maps. However, after spending some time considering their content, I was persuaded to do so. It is my belief that, despite these problems, these maps still provide some insight into where the participants considered the suburbs to be located in Hamilton.

In order to display the data obtained from the maps, they were georeferenced and digitized using GIS software. In instances where participants shaded or outlined specific areas, these boundaries were traced. In instances where participants simply circled the names of the former municipalities, the boundaries of these entire entities were outlined, since it was assumed this was what they were indicating. All of this information was then combined, and the number of times a specific area was identified as a suburb was tallied, producing a composite map.

Before the recruitment of participants began, ethical approval for this study was given by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. This ensured that all aspects of the study would result in minimal risks to the participants.

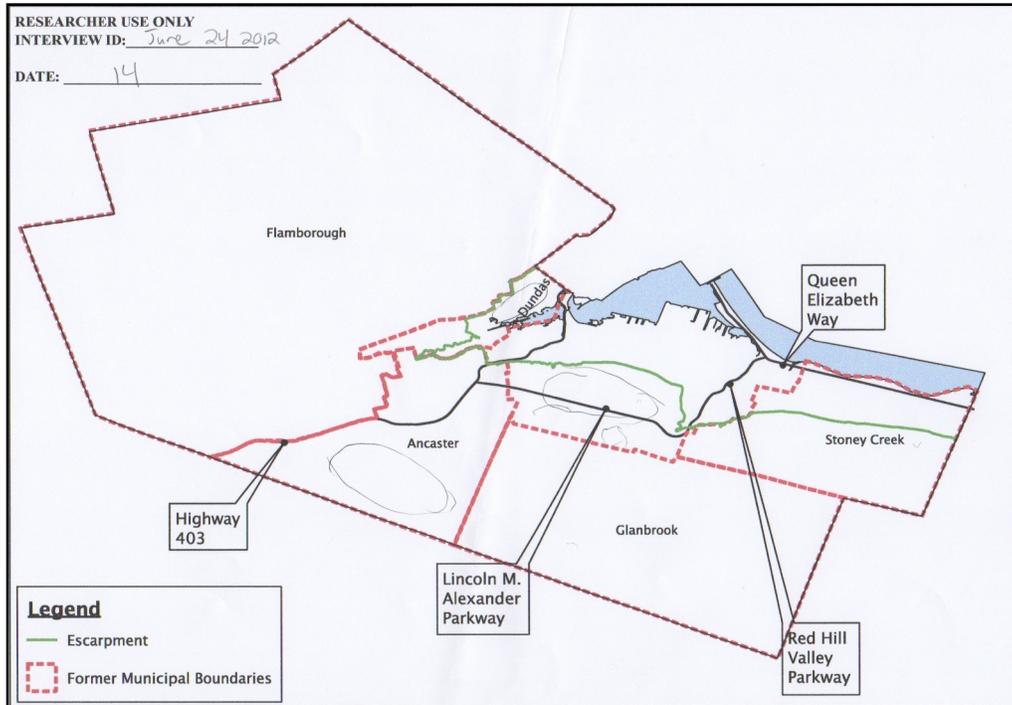


Figure 3.10: Example of a map that was completed by a respondent who was confused as to where certain areas of the city were. The areas circled in pencil are those they indicated as suburbs. (B9).

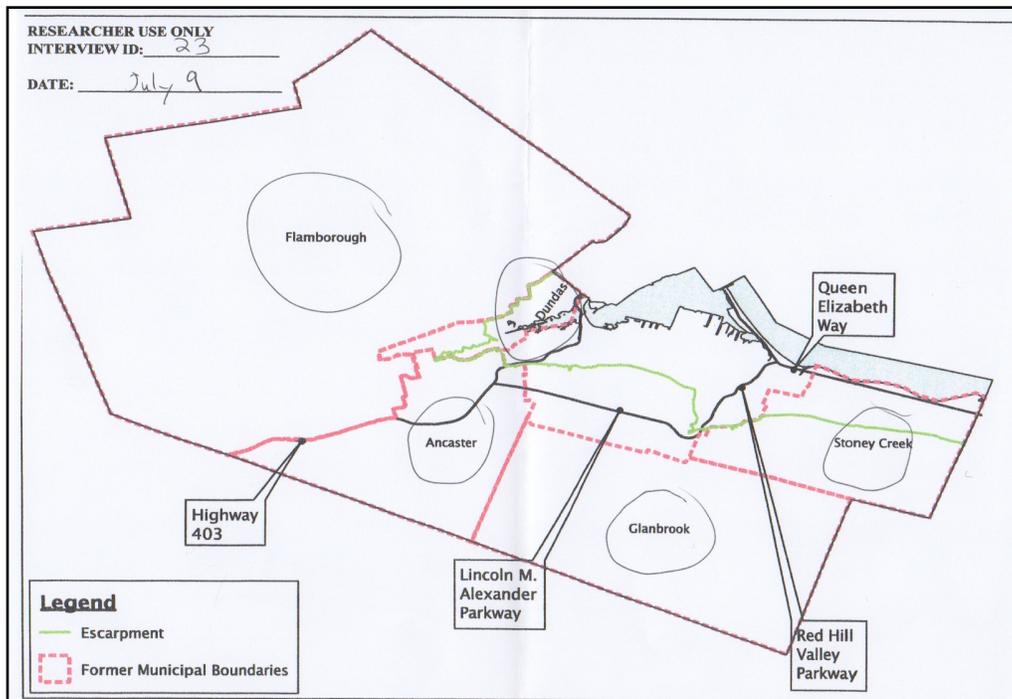


Figure 3.11: Example of a map that was completed very quickly. The respondent only circled the annexed suburbs that comprise the “new” City of Hamilton (A11).

To ensure my safety, I was required to bring along a “buddy”. This was the undergraduate student I was working with. She accompanied me whenever I was recruiting participants or conducting an interview with a participant. Although she was there simply for safety purposes, she did assist me somewhat in these activities, mainly with developing a rapport with the participants.

In order to recruit participants, we went door-to-door in the three sample neighbourhoods. In total we contacted 354 households. Of these, 305 were given a brochure which detailed the purpose of the project and what their involvement would entail if they volunteered to participate (Appendix C). This brochure was either hand-delivered in-person, or it was left in their mailbox or front-door if they were not home at the time. Those households that did not receive a brochure either had a sign indicating that they did not wish to be bothered by solicitors or strangers, or indicated to us that they did not wish to be given a brochure when we asked them. In addition to the brochure, individuals who answered the door were given a short explanation about the study and what their involvement would entail. They were then asked if they would like to participate in an interview. As will be discussed below, most interviews were conducted with people who responded to this initial, in-person request for an interview.

The recruiting materials all stated a slightly different purpose for the project than the one stated above. Instead of informing participants that I was studying how suburbanites perceive suburbia, I told them that I was studying how “people in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both their own neighbourhoods, and other neighbourhoods in the city”. There was no mention of suburbia. This deception was necessary because mentioning the real purpose of the study might have biased the responses, especially to the open-

ended question: "What type of neighbourhood is this?" (see interview guide, Q#4).

Respondents might have stated that they live in the suburbs because I had told them that I believed they lived in the suburbs, and not because they believed it. I wanted to give them an opportunity to respond to this question without any previous influence.

This deception was ultimately not harmful, since the study was technically still about neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, in order to comply with ethical requirements, we were required to inform the participants of the deception at the end of their interview. They were also required to verbally re-consent to their participation in the study once they were informed of this deception. Recruitment occurred between May 26, 2012 and July 24, 2012. Initially, we alternated between recruiting in Barnstown and Albion.

Recruitment in Dundas did not begin until we had finished in these two neighbourhoods.

In order to ensure the sample was as diverse as possible, every effort was taken to vary the days and times that we recruited. However, due to conflicts in our schedules, this was not always possible. This may have introduced some bias into the results. Our recruitment schedule can be seen in Appendix D.

Thirty interviews were conducted in total. Of these, twenty-nine were completed immediately after initial contact was made with the participant by knocking on their door. Only one participant contacted me after the fact to schedule a time for an interview.

Most of the interviews were completed on the participant's front porch. A few were completed inside the home as well, particularly on hot days when people did not feel like spending time outside in the heat. Before the interview began, the participants were presented with a letter of information (Appendix E). They were asked to read it over and to ask if they had any questions. After they were finished with the letter, they

were presented with a consent form (Appendix F) and asked to fill it out. By signing it, they indicated that they understood what they were being asked to do, that they were over 18 years of age, and that they had been given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had about the study. They were also asked on this form to indicate whether they were willing to have the interview audio recorded. If they indicated that this would be allowed, the audio recorder would then be started and the interview would begin. Four participants did not agree to have the interview audio recorded. In these cases, I was only able to compile written notes on the responses, limiting the amount of detail available for analysis.

It was decided to audio record the interviews in order to ensure that the record of the interviews were as complete and accurate as possible. Written notes were also taken during the audio-recorded interviews. These notes were primarily on any non-verbal data that would not have otherwise been recorded with the audio recorder.

Each interview took about 10 to 20 minutes to complete, depending on how much detail the participant provided in their responses.

3.5: The participants

As mentioned above, thirty interviews in total were completed in the three sample neighbourhoods. Of these, twelve interviews were completed with people residing in Barnstown, thirteen with people residing in Albion, and five with people in Dundas (Table 3.2).

Immediately following their interview, each participant was assigned a unique identification code for reference purposes. This was required since the participants' responses were to remain confidential. The identification code is prefaced with the first

letter of the name of the neighbourhood the participant resided in. The participants are then numbered sequentially based on the order they were interviewed in. For example, the first participant interviewed in Barnstown is identified as B1; the last person interviewed in Dundas is identified as D5. These codes are used throughout this thesis when referring to particular participants and their responses. A complete overview of the various demographic characteristics of the participants can be seen in Appendix G. Based on these demographics, it appears as if the sample is fairly typical of each area. The gender balance (Table 3.2) is pretty much even. Fourteen of the participants are male, while sixteen are female. The ages of the participants also varied considerably (Table 3.3). Of particular note is the number of participants I was able to talk to who were under the age of 30. Seeing as how this is the generation that will conceivably occupy the suburbs in the future, their viewpoints have the potential to be especially significant. Finally, the number of years the participants have lived in Hamilton (Table 3.4) and have lived in their current house (Table 3.5), also vary. This should also serve to improve the diversity of the sample.

Most participants had been born in Canada (Table 3.6). This is fairly typical, since the Canadian suburban landscape tends to be filled with non-immigrants. However, as documented by Hulchanski (2010), this is changing and suburbs are becoming more diverse. Therefore, the lack of diversity in the participants' backgrounds may complicate the generalizability of the results.

Additionally, 12 of the participants were either retired, did not work, or worked from home (Table 3.7). I initially believed this to be related to the fact that we had spent quite a bit of time recruiting participants during late-weekday afternoons. However, I

<i>Gender</i>	<i># of participants</i>			
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas	TOTAL
Male	8	5	1	14
Female	4	8	4	16
TOTAL	12	13	5	30

Table 3.2: Number of participants from each of the three sample neighbourhoods and their gender distribution.

<i>Age</i>	<i># of participants</i>			
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas	TOTAL
18-30	2	2	1	5
31-40	1	4	1	6
41-50	1	2	1	4
51-60	5	1	1	7
61-70	1	2	1	4
71+	2	1	0	3
Median age	55	39	47	49.5

Table 3.3: Age distribution of participants

<i># of years lived in the Hamilton area</i>	<i># of participants</i>			
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas	Total
< 1 year	0	0	0	0
1-5 years	0	2	1	3
6-10 years	2	1	1	4
11-20 years	2	2	0	4
21-40 years	2	3	2	7
40+ years	6	5	1	12
TOTAL	12	13	5	30

Table 3.4: Number of years lived in the Hamilton area

then realized that some of these participants were also recruited during weekday evenings and weekend afternoons. Therefore, it is likely that their over-representation in the sample is caused by the fact that these people had more time to participate in an interview, as opposed to people who work and prefer to spend their free time doing

<i># of years lived in current house</i>	<i># of participants</i>			
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas	Total
< 1 year	0	0	1	1
1-5 years	0	5	1	6
6-10 years	3	1	0	4
11-20 years	4	2	2	8
21+ years	5	5	1	11
TOTAL	12	13	5	30

Table 3.5: Number of years lived in current house

<i>Born in Canada?</i>	<i># of participants</i>			
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas	Total
Yes	10	11	3	24
No	2	2	2	6
TOTAL	12	13	5	30

Table 3.6: Number of participants born in Canada

<i>Employment Status</i>	<i># of participants</i>			
	Barnstown	Albion	Dundas	Total
Works away from home	6	9	3	18
Works from home	1	0	1	2
Retired	4	3	1	8
Unemployed	1	1	0	2
TOTAL	12	13	5	30

Table 3.7: Employment status of participants

other things. This pattern may also serve to complicate the reliability of the collected data.

Since this is primarily a qualitative research study, the total number of participants is ultimately not as critical as it would have been in a quantitative study. What ensures the integrity of the results in qualitative research is “the richness of the information, its validity, and its meaning (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010, p. 76). The

decision to stop recruiting participants from each of the three neighbourhoods was thus ultimately not based on numbers, but on the content of the data that had been collected. In particular, it was decided to stop research when I had felt saturation had been achieved. Defined as “the point in the data-gathering process when no new information or insights or being generated” (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010, p. 387), saturation is a method commonly used by qualitative researchers to determine when to stop gathering data. In this case, I felt saturation had been achieved when I failed to be presented with new and/or unique viewpoints in the interviews.

3.6: Data transcription and analysis

Transcription of the audio files of the interviews was manually completed using a word-processing program. This was undertaken immediately after the interviews to ensure accuracy. The written notes I had compiled in the interviews were also transcribed and included alongside the audio transcripts. As mentioned previously, each participant was assigned a unique identification code. This was affixed to all of the materials associated with that participant, including the transcript of their interview and the map they had completed.

Following transcription, the data was coded using a process of latent content analysis (i.e. thematic coding). Since I was relatively inexperienced with qualitative data analysis, this coding process was completed manually. This involved me combing through the interview transcripts and identifying the over-arching themes. I then used these themes to help recognize what details I would explore in this thesis.

Additionally, I categorized the responses to each question. Similar attributes the participants discussed were grouped together. Since most participants referred to more

than one attribute in their answers, the responses were often placed in more than one category. For example, when defining the term 'suburb', participant B8 answered with the following: "houses with lots of shopping centres where people don't work (...) they go somewhere else to work". This answer was placed in two categories: 'purely residential' and 'presence of shopping centres'. The number of responses in each categorization were then tallied via a spreadsheet application. The tallies allowed me to recognize the frequency in which certain responses were used by the participants.

3.7: Rigour

In order to be considered 'trustworthy', qualitative research projects need to ensure rigour (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010). Baxter and Eyles (1997) identify four criteria that determine rigour. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Steps were taken during this research project to guarantee all of these criteria were met.

Credibility involves ensuring the research findings reflect an "authentic representation of experience" (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p. 512). The purposeful sampling of the three neighbourhoods was intended to accomplish this goal, assuring that multiple possibilities of the suburban experience were recorded. Transferability requires the research to be easily transferable across multiple spatial and contextual dimensions. This is typically accomplished through a thorough disclosure of the research methods used, so that other researchers can replicate the research in other settings. I believe this methodology chapter accomplished this in this case. Dependability involves determining whether the results are reliable and consistent. There are several strategies used to accomplish this. In this project, dependability was assured by a consistent

research process, and close supervision of all aspects of the research process by an experienced researcher, my supervisor, Dr. Richard Harris. The final criteria, confirmability, involves examining “the extent to which biases, motivations, perspectives and interests of the researcher influence interpretations” (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p. 512). In this research project, this was accomplished through the use of a reflexive research journal, in which I made a consistent effort to identify any influence I may have had on the research process.

Chapter 4: Conceptualizing the suburbs

The next two chapters will present the results obtained from the interviews conducted with the study participants. The discussion will be focused on five issues:

- i) How the suburban residents I interviewed defined the term 'suburb';
- ii) Where these suburban residents considered the suburbs to be located in Hamilton;
- iii) Whether they thought they lived in suburbia;
- iv) How much they knew about popular suburban criticisms and whether or not they agreed with them, and;
- v) The advantages and disadvantages they associated with living in their suburban neighbourhood.

This chapter will focus on the first three objectives, while the next chapter will focus on the remaining two. Ultimately, the purpose of this exploration will be to answer the question, 'How do individuals who reside in the suburbs in Hamilton, Ontario perceive the suburban landscape that surrounds them and suburban landscapes that exist elsewhere?'. As discussed earlier, due to significant gaps in the literature, an answer to this question is important because it will help urban planners, policy makers and academics understand how they should approach the suburbs and the so-called "suburban problem" in the future.

4.1: Defining suburbia

As discussed previously, one of the problematic gaps in the literature on suburbia entails the understanding of how suburban residents define the term 'suburb'. Although there have been countless definitions put forth by scholars for this term, only two

studies have explored how the people who actually live in these environments define it. Both of these studies are now over twenty years old and it is doubtful whether they are even still applicable today. They are also both American.

Therefore, it was one of the objectives of this study to determine how the suburban residents interviewed defined the term 'suburb'. During the interviews, the residents were asked, 'In your opinion, what is a suburb?'. The answers received were highly variable, with a myriad attributes being used to define suburbia. It quickly became clear that there existed very little consensus on a definition for suburbia. To display the multitude of ways the participants chose to define suburbia, their responses were

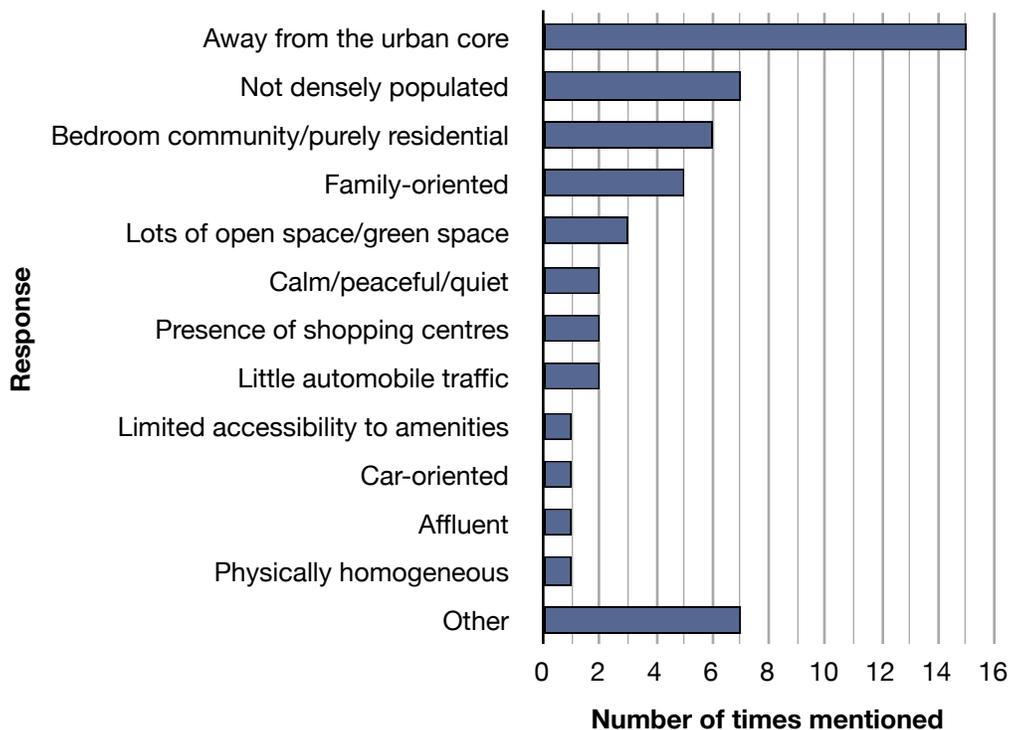


Figure 4.1: A chart displaying the frequency of different responses to the question 'In your opinion, what is a suburb?'. These responses come from the participants in all three study neighbourhoods ($n=30$).

categorized and tallied (Figure 4.1).

As can be seen in Figure 4.1, the most common attribute used to define suburbia, by far, was distance from the urban core. Participants stated that a suburb is “far away from the city” (A5), “a little while away from (the city)” (B12), and “a certain distance away from downtown” (D3). The second most frequently mentioned attribute was low density. In these instances, participants declared that suburban homes have “larger properties than in the city” and more “wasted space” (D5). As well, some talked about the style of housing, emphasizing that suburbs contain “detached single homes, rather than apartment buildings” (A13). These two criteria correspond to those often used by academics. As discussed earlier, scholars have generally agreed that the term ‘suburb’ should refer to low-density developments located away from the urban core.

Participants also considered several other attributes to be indicative of a suburb. Some talked about how a suburb is an area that is primarily residential. For example, one participant stated that suburbia is “just houses” (B3). As well, several participants talked about how this residential character makes suburbs bedroom communities where, “people don’t work (...) they go somewhere else to work” (B8).

Suburbs were also defined by several participants as being family-oriented. For example, one participant stated that suburbs are “where families live” (A13). In a couple of instances, this relationship was connected to amenities located within suburbia. For example, one participant drew attention to the fact that in suburbia “there are schools everywhere” (A12).

Another defining attribute identified by several participants was an abundance of open space/green space. These participants talked about suburbs being a place “where

you would have more (...) open space” (B10). Connecting this to suburbs being more family-oriented, one participant emphasized that suburbs are different from the city because they have “more playgrounds” (A6).

Two participants talked about how calm and peaceful a suburb is in comparison to the city. They both emphasized that this is because a suburb is “not (...) crowded” (A2), and there is not as many “people bustling around” as in the city (B3). A couple of participants also stated that suburbs are defined by their lack of automobile traffic, claiming that suburbs are locations where you “can’t hear traffic 24/7” (B12), and “there’s no four-lane traffic” (B2). Additionally, two participants suggested that the presence of shopping centres defined a suburb (B8, A6).

Several other attributes were identified by individual participants. One participant emphasized that suburbs are “further away from” amenities (B2). Another participant claimed that they defined suburbia by how dependent everyone is on cars to travel around, stating that, in suburbs, “most people own a car ‘cause it’s the only way to get around” (A5). Another participant defined suburbia solely based on physical homogeneity. A recent graduate of an environmental studies undergraduate program, this participant was quite critical of the physical homogeneity he perceived as defining suburbia, claiming that the fact that suburbs are “just rows and rows and rows of the same house (...) scares” him (A1). Interestingly, his neighbourhood, which he declared was “definitely” a suburb, does not conform to this criteria. The housing styles are actually quite varied there, making his selection of this criteria quite baffling. Finally, another participant identified affluence as an attribute that defines suburbia (B5).

Responses that were obscure or vague were placed within an ‘other’ category. These included “nice” (A2), “private feel” (A4), “homes built out of nothing” (A4), “everything that’s not rural or urban” (B7), “smaller community” (D2), “farm-ish property” (D4) and “a bit more rural” (A7). These last two responses are intriguing, because they suggest that these participants might associate suburbs with qualities most would relate to rural areas. The significance of this will be discussed further below.

Figure 4.2 divides the responses outlined above by study neighbourhood. Discrepancies between the responses received from each neighbourhood may indicate that the responses were impacted by geographical differences. However, it would be inappropriate to place too much significance on this, seeing as how the sample sizes were so small (particularly in the case of Dundas). This issue must also be kept in mind throughout the remainder of this chapter.

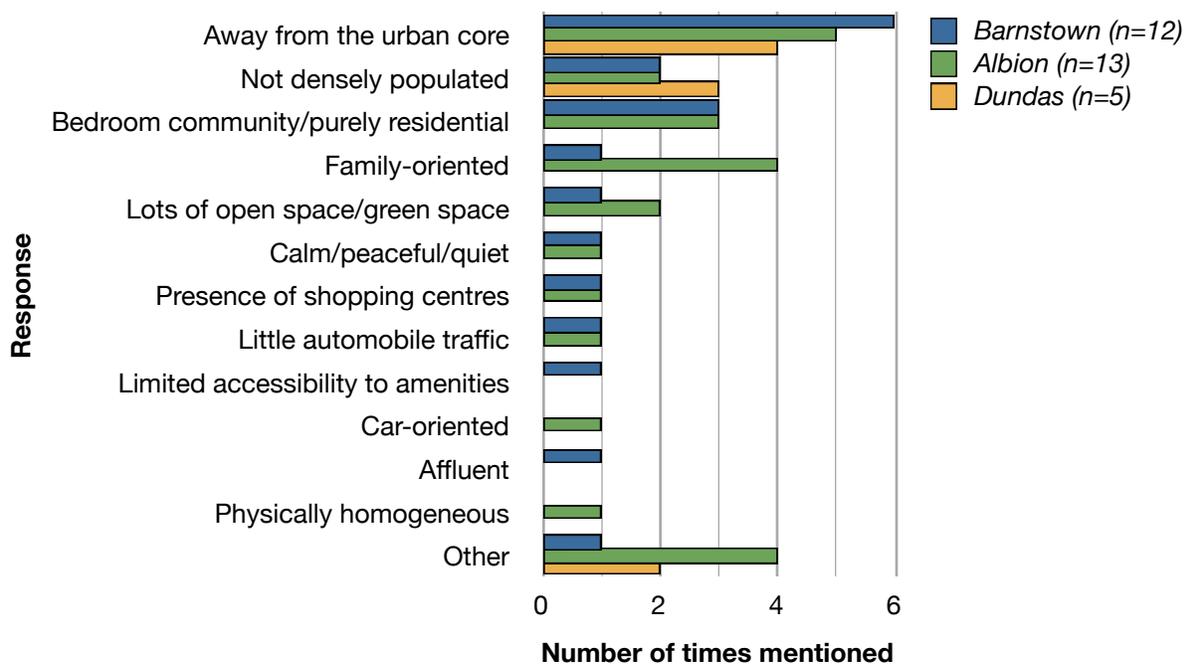


Figure 4.2: A chart displaying the frequency of different responses to the question ‘In your opinion, what is a suburb?’, separated by study area.

As can be seen in Figure 4.2, responses obtained from each of the three neighbourhoods were fairly similar. The only significant difference was in the family-oriented category. Four Albion residents defined suburbs as being family-oriented, compared to only one Barnstown resident. Whether this was result of any inherent differences between the two neighbourhoods, or just an outcome of sampling bias is unknown. However, it is still important to highlight, especially seeing as how the other responses from these neighbourhoods were so similar.

Other than the two rural responses, none of the responses received to the question 'what is a suburb?' were surprising. They all closely reflected how suburbia is characterized in both the media and the academic literature. However, it is important to note that many of these responses differed significantly from what Feldman (1990) and Hummon (1990) discovered in their investigations into how suburbanites define suburbia. While these researchers did find that suburbanites conceptualize suburbia as being quieter, more family-oriented, more natural, and less congested than the city, they did not comment on any of the other attributes listed above. Additionally, both Hummon and Feldman were told repeatedly that suburbs are characterized by their safety. None of the suburbanites I talked to mentioned this as being something that they believe defines a suburb.

These discrepancies are possibly the result of the time period between this study and Feldman's and Hummon's studies. As stated previously, many social, environmental, and economic problems associated with suburbia have become more prevalent in the public consciousness in recent years. As such, it is possible that many of the attributes put forth by my participants were formulated with these concerns in

mind. This would explain why many of these attributes correspond to popular suburban criticisms, such as being far removed from the urban core, having lower densities, being heavily dependent on cars for transport, and having to travel farther distances to access certain amenities.

Differences in geography may also account for these discrepancies. This is especially likely in the case of Hummon's and Feldman's observations on the significance of suburban safety. Both Hummon and Feldman completed their studies in US cities. US cities generally have higher crime rates than Canadian cities (Ouimet, 1999). Therefore, it is plausible that the issue of safety was not as relevant to the people I talked to than it was to the people Feldman and Hummon talked to.

Interestingly, no one I talked to claimed that suburbs are locations defined by their social homogeneity. This is intriguing because, as discussed previously, this has been a characteristic some scholars, and many suburban critics, have referred to frequently in their discussions on what characterizes suburbia. Hummon encountered this omission as well and hypothesized that it indicated that suburban residents were either embarrassed by, or oblivious to, the social uniformity of their neighbourhoods. However, I would argue that this explanation is not entirely accurate. Suburbs have never been entirely homogeneous, and have become increasingly more diverse in recent years, especially in Canada. Therefore, it is possible that by not mentioning social homogeneity in their answers, the suburban residents I talked to were accurately expressing what they observe in their daily life.

During the interviews, it became clear that defining the term 'suburb' was not an easy task for many people. Several participants struggled to articulate a definition. Many

second-guessed themselves, questioning afterwards whether they were correct. For example, one participant answered by saying that a suburb was “a small community, right?” (A11). Participant B7’s answer was perhaps the most confused:

“(A suburb) is everything that’s not rural and I don’t know, urban, I just don’t know whether I have.....urban I’m thinking as being the centre, as being downtown Hamilton, I don’t know whether that’s right”.

This respondent never seemed to find a way to effectively express what he thought. He also stated at the end that he was not really sure whether what he had described was in fact correct.

Responses like this were surprising. I had assumed that most people would be able to easily define the term ‘suburb’, but this was obviously not so. Although this might have been caused by the immediacy with which the participants were asked to come up with an answer, and might have been different if they had been allowed more time to think it over, this still suggests that conceptualizing suburbia is a lot more difficult for some people than what many would assume.

As discussed briefly above, I also encountered a couple of participants who seemed to confuse suburbs with what most people would consider to be rural areas. When asked to define suburbia, one participant said that suburbs contained “farm-ish” property (D4), while another said that suburbs are “a bit more rural” (A7). While it is possible that these people simply did not understand the question, or had a difficult time coming up with answers right on the spot, these responses were still intriguing because they indicate that the public’s understanding of what a suburb is may not necessarily be what experts assume.

Associating suburbs with rural characteristics was not something that only occurred when participants were discussing how they would define a suburb. On other occasions, several participants, and not just the two discussed above, made statements that would usually indicate that they were referring to a rural location. For example, when asked what lifestyle characterizes suburbia, one participant insisted that some suburbanites “are like literally the farmers” (A2). Another, when asked about housing styles in the suburbs, described his grandmother’s 78-year-old farmhouse (B12).

Participant A2, who, as outlined above, described suburbanites as “farmers”, commented at the beginning of her interview that English was not her first language. Therefore, it is possible that a language barrier impacted how she responded to this question. This explanation can most likely only be attributed to her though. All of the other participants who referred to rural qualities in their answers appeared to have no problems with their communication skills and did not profess to having any problems with the English language. This indicates that their unusual responses should be attributed to something else. Unfortunately, the participants in question were not asked to explain why they associated suburbs with rural qualities, and therefore it is impossible to say with certainty why this is.

4.2: Locating suburban Hamilton

After being asked to define the term ‘suburb’, the participants were asked to label the parts of Hamilton they considered to be a suburb on a map of the city (Appendix B). This was done in order to determine where the participants considered the suburbs to be in Hamilton.

As discussed earlier, there were some problems with the maps. Many participants had a hard time identifying where certain areas of the city were. As well, some did not spend a lot of time labeling their maps, choosing instead to just circle the names of the former suburbs that now comprise the 'new' city of Hamilton. Since they took so little time, it was difficult to ascertain whether this was their true understanding of what areas are suburban in Hamilton, or whether they were just trying to answer the question as quickly as possible. Initially, these problems made me initially hesitant to report the results obtained from the maps. However, after spending some time considering their content, I was persuaded to do so. I believe that despite, and to some extent, because of these problems, these maps provide insights into where the participants considered the suburbs to be.

In order to display the data obtained from the maps, they were georeferenced and digitized using GIS software. In instances where participants shaded or outlined specific areas, these boundaries were traced. In instances where participants simply circled the names of the former municipalities, the boundaries of these entire entities were outlined, since it was assumed this was what they were indicating. All of this information was then combined, and the number of times a specific area was identified as a suburb was tallied, producing a composite map (Figure 4.3).

As can be seen in Figure 4.3, almost every part of Hamilton was identified as a suburb by at least one participant. Surprisingly, one participant (B7) labelled most of the downtown core as a suburb. This participant was the person identified above as having the most confused answer when asked to define a suburb. Therefore, it is likely that

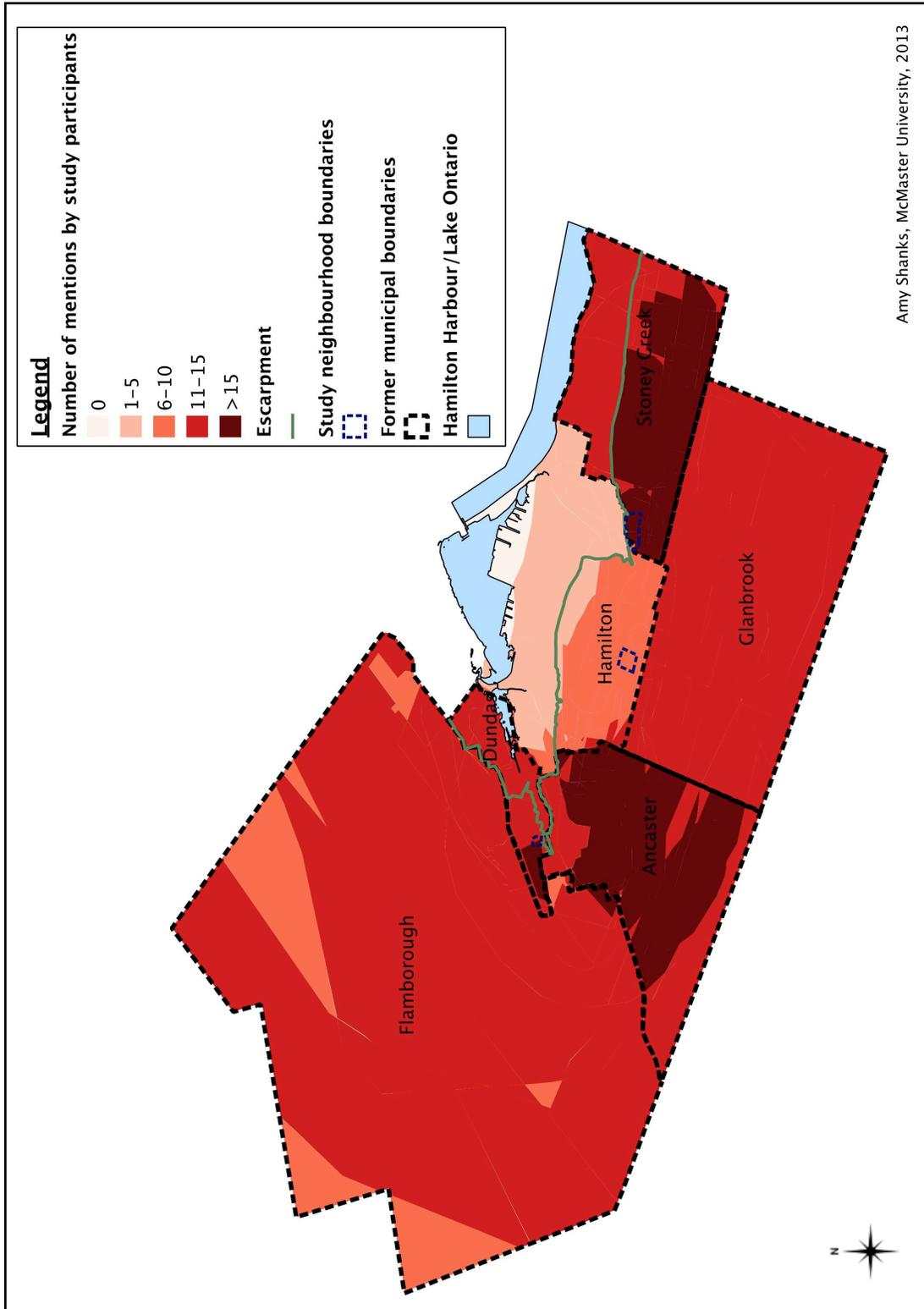


Figure 4.3: Composite map displaying the frequency with which specific parts of Hamilton were identified as suburban by the study participants. This data comes from the participants in all three study neighbourhoods ($n=28$) (Shanks, 2013).

their identification of the downtown core as a suburb was a result of uncertainty and doubt, and not some radical conceptualization of Hamilton's urban structure.

Unsurprisingly, the parts of the city that were most frequently identified as suburbs were all located within the annexed former municipalities. Parts of Dundas, Ancaster and Stoney Creek were commonly singled-out, while Flamborough and Glanbrook were less so. Flamborough and Glanbrook are mostly rural, with only small pockets of fairly recent residential development, so this was not unexpected. In fact, many participants commented on this rurality when filling out their map. For example, one participant stated that both these areas contain "mostly farms" (A5). However, many were also aware of the recent development that had occurred in these areas. For example, one participant gestured to these areas and said that "everything is creeping out (there)" (B5). This awareness could explain why several participants still labelled parts of these communities as suburbs. Additionally, several of the individuals who seemed to associate rural qualities with suburbia unsurprisingly labelled parts of Flamborough and Glanbrook as suburban.

In comparison to Flamborough and Glanbrook, the other ex-suburbs of Ancaster, Stoney Creek and Dundas are considerably less rural. Continued growth has pushed suburban development out past the borders of the 'old' city and into these communities within the last few decades. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that parts of these communities were those that were most frequently labelled as suburban by the participants.

Interestingly, throughout the interviews, one theme that was very prevalent in the participants' responses was that Ancaster should be considered a quintessential suburb.

Although participants would label Stoney Creek and Dundas as suburban alongside Ancaster on their maps, they would single-out this particular community in their discussion. Most of their opinions centered around Ancaster's perceived wealth. They would often suggest that this wealth indicated that Ancaster was a suburb. For example, one participant equated the "big giant mansions" they see in Ancaster with suburbia (B1). Others talked about the type of people who supposedly live there, and how this supposedly epitomizes suburbia. For example, one participant said that the residents of Ancaster "think they're a little bit better off than most people" and that this "snootiness" is indicative of a suburb (B7). This emphasis on affluence was intriguing because, as discussed previously, when asked to define suburbia, only one participant alluded to affluence in their answer. When considering where the suburbs are located in Hamilton though, many more suggested that affluence was representative of a suburb. It is difficult to determine what caused this inconsistency. One possibility is that my participants had a much easier time expressing what they thought a suburb was when they were presented with a real-world context. They knew it when they saw it, so to speak. The significance of this possibility will be discussed further below.

Compared to the annexed municipalities, the Hamilton Mountain, which comprises the part of the 'old' city of Hamilton located above the Niagara Escarpment, was not frequently identified as being suburban by the participants. It was relatively surprising to see this because many of the neighbourhoods found in this region of the city are almost indistinguishable in terms of appearance from those located in parts of Dundas, Stoney Creek, and Ancaster. This is particularly true in the case of those located south of the Lincoln Alexander Parkway because they were developed at

approximately the same time as many neighbourhoods found in these annexed municipalities. This exclusion may therefore be related to other considerations. Unfortunately however, in most cases, participants were not asked to explain the boundaries they drew and therefore a definitive explanation for this exclusion is not available.

In order to identify any differences between the maps obtained from each of the three study neighbourhoods, composite maps were created for each neighbourhood (Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6). The patterns displayed in these maps are fairly similar. There are small differences between them, but there is really nothing significant that would suggest that the responses had been influenced in a dramatic way by geographical differences. The only interesting inconsistency between the three neighbourhoods was that people in Barnstown were more likely to identify parts of the Hamilton Mountain as a suburb. While several Barnstown participants labelled parts of this region as suburban, none of the participants from Dundas, and only a few from Albion did so.

One possibility could be that unfamiliarity caused the participants from Dundas and Albion to believe this area to be different than it really was. As well, it was possible that amalgamation played some role in this inconsistency. Perhaps the participants from outside the borders of the 'old' city were more likely to view the annexed municipalities as being suburban because of their experiences with this process.

Unfortunately, the answers received to the questions asked about amalgamation did not really clarify this connection. Only one participant indicated that amalgamation changed the way they thought about their neighbourhood. As well, when asked to

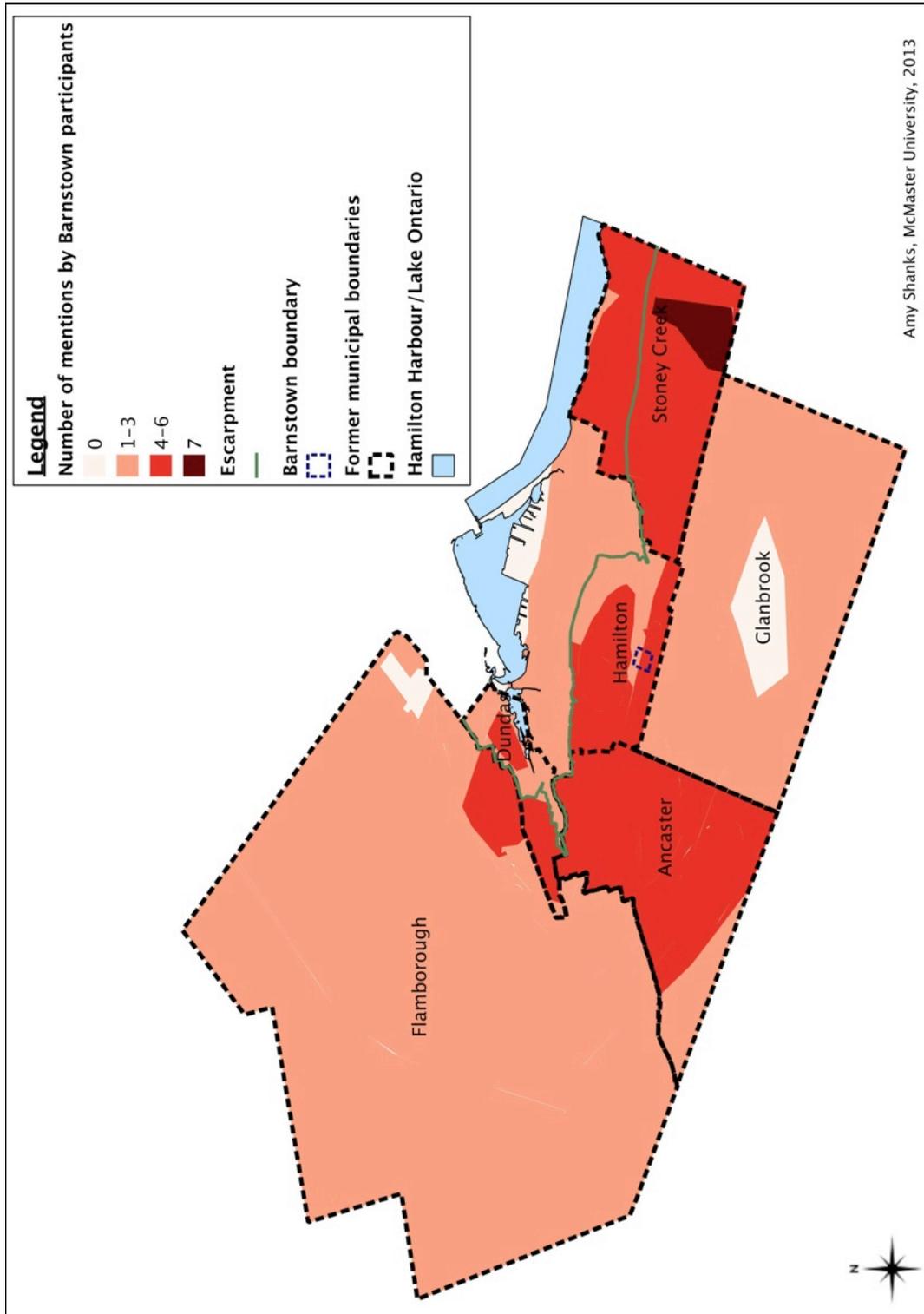


Figure 4.4: Composite map displaying the frequency with which specific parts of Hamilton were identified as suburban by study participants in the Barnstown neighbourhood ($n=10$) (Shanks, 2013).

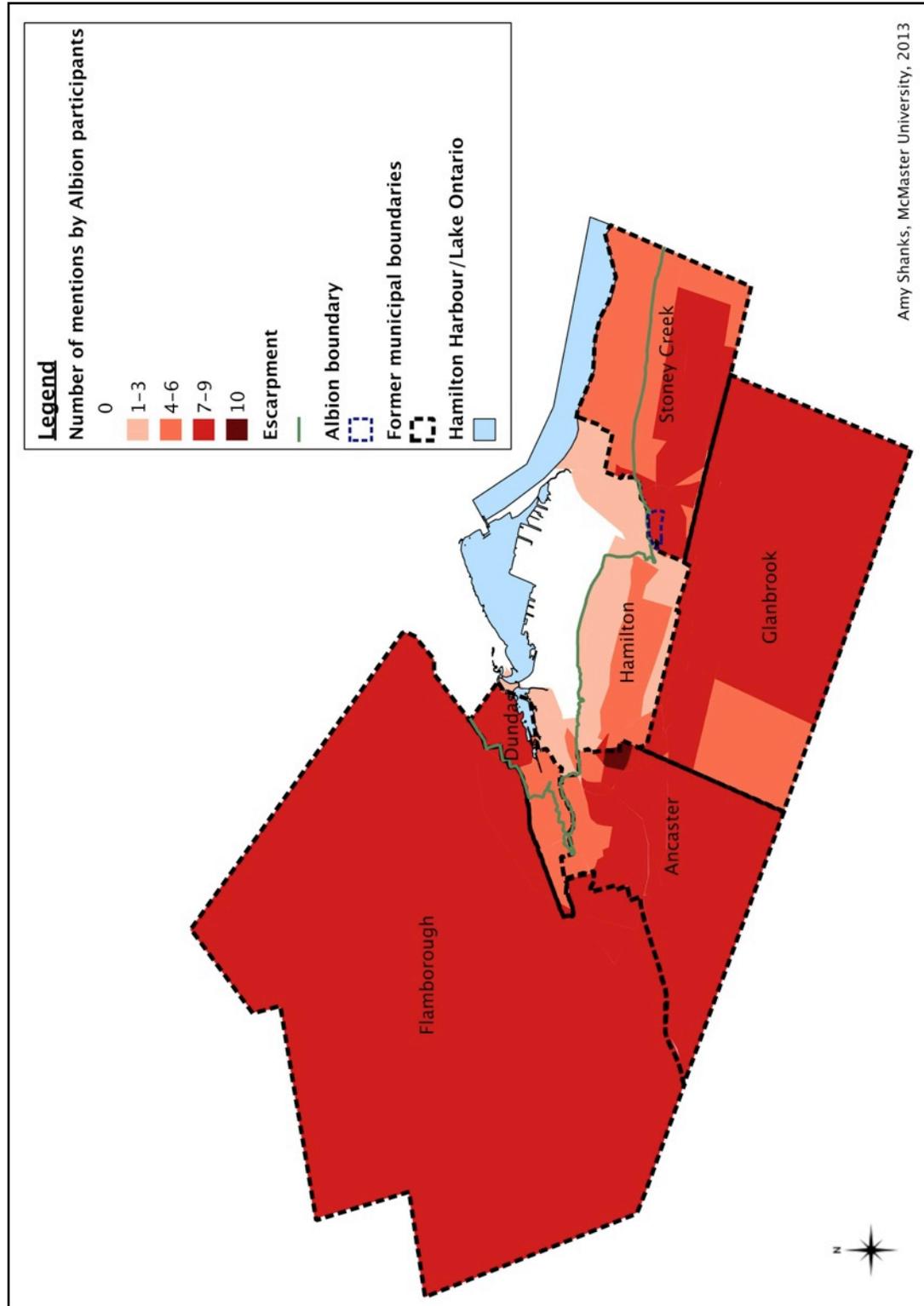


Figure 4.5: Composite map displaying the frequency with which specific parts of Hamilton were identified as suburban by study participants in the Albion neighbourhood ($n=13$) (Shanks, 2013).

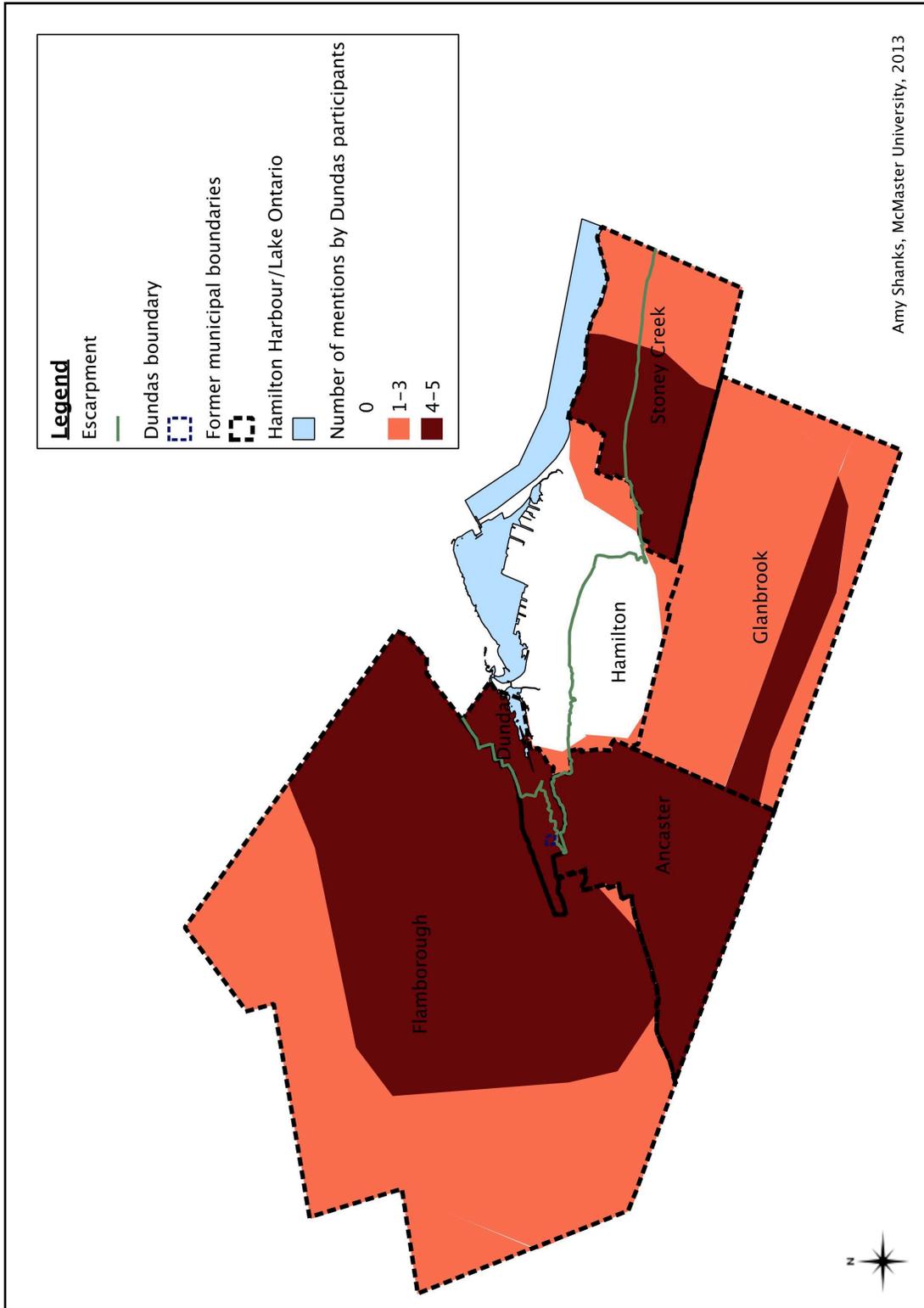


Figure 4.6: Composite map displaying the frequency with which specific parts of Hamilton were identified as suburban by study participants in the Dundas neighbourhood ($n=5$) (Shanks, 2013).

comment on whether or not amalgamation changed the character of other areas in the city, the participants tended to be uncertain. Some would answer the question affirmatively, but then not really be able to explain how this had happened. Many took this as an opportunity to disparage the tax increases they had experienced following amalgamation, stating things like “taxes went up” (A11). While it was clear that participants outside of the ‘old’ city did not like amalgamation, it was unclear how they thought it had altered the character of not only of their own community, but that of other communities in the city as well.

Overall, the maps I collected from the participants suggest that opinions on where the suburbs are located in Hamilton vary slightly, but ultimately, this variation is not that considerable. To sum up, most participants expressed the following:

- i) Below the Mountain is not a suburb;
- ii) Flamborough and Glanbrook are either not suburban or are only just becoming suburban;
- iii) Ancaster (and to a lesser extent, Stoney Creek and Dundas) should be considered quintessentially suburban, and;
- iv) The status of the Mountain is ambiguous.

This consistency is intriguing because, as outlined in the section above, the definitions the participants had verbally put forward for the term ‘suburb’ were considerably less consistent. As well, as demonstrated by what they indicated about Ancaster’s affluence and how this makes it a quintessential suburb, the claims they made about suburban Hamilton did not necessarily match up with their definitions.

Once again, it is important to note that the map results were possibly impacted by error, uncertainty and haste. However, I believe that they demonstrate that while most suburban residents know what a suburb is, they have a hard time putting this into words. They find it easier to identify real-world examples instead.

4.3: Cognizance of suburban residence

In order to determine whether the participants thought they lived in a suburb, they were asked the question ‘what type of neighbourhood do you think this is?’. Figure 4.7 displays the responses. Nineteen out of thirty participants indicated they lived in a suburb, seven believed that they lived in the city, two participants viewed their neighbourhood as a mixture, and one participant had no answer to the question. This last participant, no matter how they were prompted, kept insisting that their neighbourhood was a “friendly” neighbourhood, and never indicated one way or another whether they thought it was a suburb or the city (B6). None of the participants indicated that they lived in a rural area.

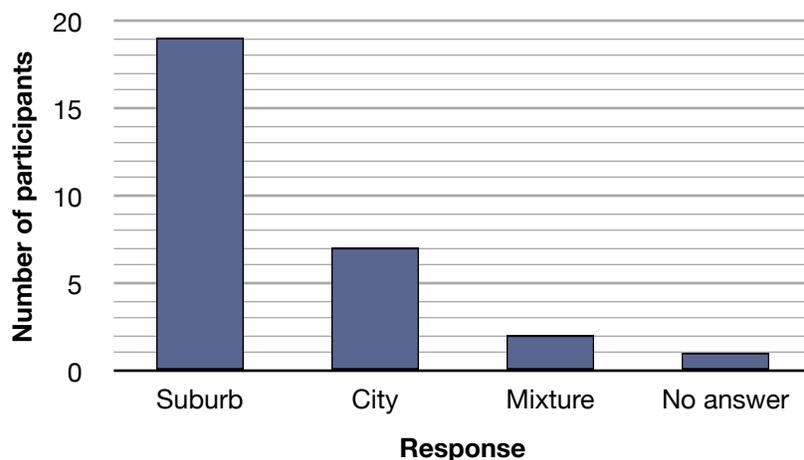


Figure 4.7: A chart displaying the frequency of different responses received to the question ‘what type of neighbourhood do you think this is?’. These responses come from participants in all three study neighbourhoods ($n=30$).

Figure 4.8 displays the responses broken down by study neighbourhood. As can be seen in this figure, 33% (four) of Barnstown participants, 85% (eleven) of Albion participants, and 80% (four) of Dundas participants indicated that their neighbourhood was a suburb. Conversely, 33% (four) of Barnstown participants, 15% (two) of Albion participants, and 20% (one) of Dundas participants indicated that their neighbourhood was the city. The responses received from Barnstown were intriguing. Why did so many of the participants here consider themselves to live in the city and not a suburb? This matter will be explored further below.

The participants were asked to provide a reasoning for why they considered their neighbourhood to be either a suburb, the city, or a mixture of both (see Figure 4.9). The process I used to compile this data was the same that I used to display the ways the participants defined suburbia in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. The responses were categorized,

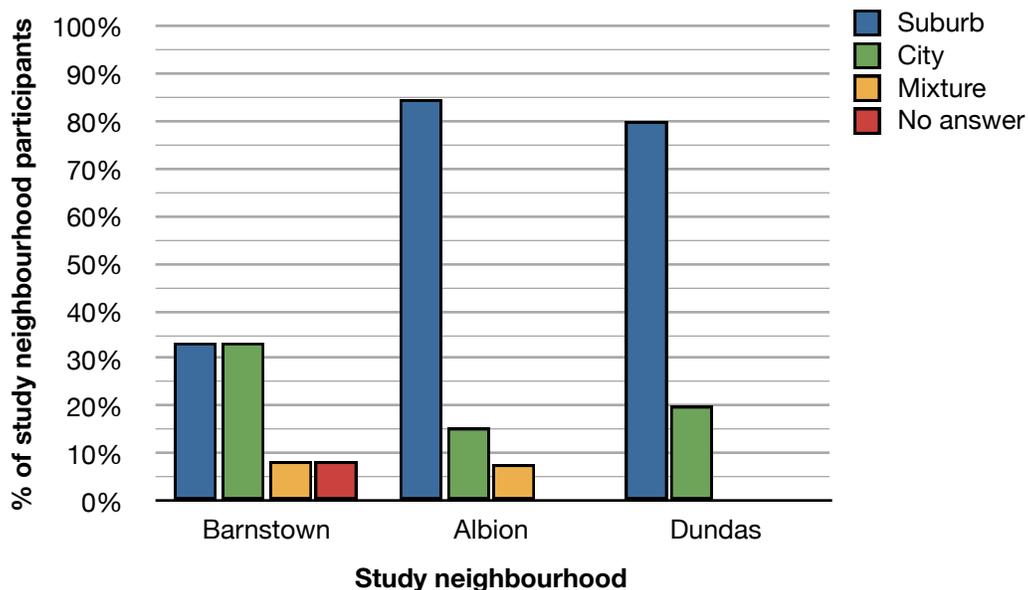


Figure 4.8: A chart displaying the frequency of different responses received to the question ‘what type of neighbourhood do you think this is?’, broken down by study neighbourhood.

similar attributes were grouped together, and then the number of times they were mentioned was tallied.

Unsurprisingly, most of the traits that were cited by the participants as indicating that they lived in a suburb matched those that they used to define suburbs in general. The most frequently mentioned trait was distance from the urban core. Several people stated that their neighbourhood was a suburb because it was “away from downtown” (B5), “not really in the downtown area” (A13), and “not really close to the city” (D3). The second most frequently mentioned trait was the area being purely residential. In these instances participants stated that their neighbourhood was a suburb because it was “100% residential” (A1) and contained “just houses” (B3). Participants also frequently mentioned that a low population density indicated that their

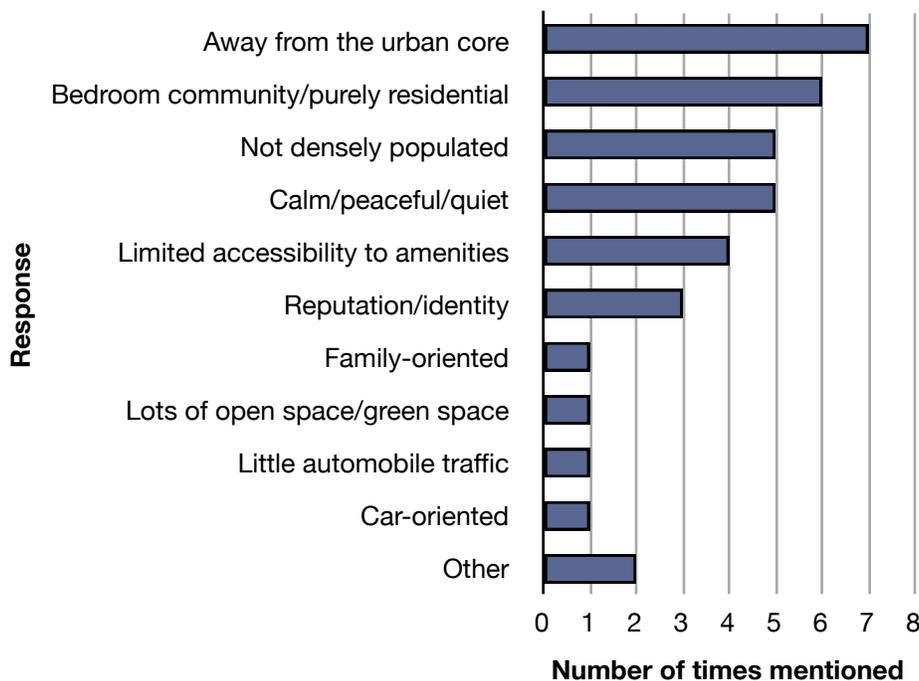


Figure 4.9: A chart displaying the frequency of different reasons given as to why the participants thought their neighbourhood was a suburb. These responses come from participants in all three study neighbourhoods (n=19).

neighbourhood was a suburb. For example, one participant from Barnstown bluntly explained that “it’s the density” that made their neighbourhood a suburb (B10).

The fact that their neighbourhood was calm, quiet and peaceful was another quality participants associated with a suburban character. For instance, one participant said that their neighbourhood was a suburb because “it’s not overly busy, but then at the same time it’s not (...) totally dead either, like if you were living in the country” (B7).

Another talked about how their neighbourhood was “kind of removed from the hustle and bustle” and how this indicated that it was a suburb (A13). Several participants also talked about how their limited access to “amenities” influenced their decision to characterize their neighbourhood as a suburb (A1, B9, A12, D5).

Three participants also stated that their neighbourhood’s reputation and identity indicated that it was a suburb. This was a new attribute that was not cited at all when the participants were asked to define suburbia earlier. In these instances, the participants claimed that their neighbourhood was a suburb because “it always had the reputation” of being one (A4), or they had “always thought of it as a suburb” (A9).

Several individuals also cited various other suburban attributes when explaining why their neighbourhood was a suburb. One participant said it was a suburb because it was “family-oriented” (A5). Another associated their neighbourhood’s green space with suburbia, referencing the Mountain Brow, a natural area that is located on the edge of the Niagara Escarpment in Hamilton, in their answer (A7). Another participant talked about how the “traffic is liveable” in their neighbourhood, and that this was one reason why it was a suburb. Finally, one participant suggested that the fact that “you can’t walk anywhere that’s worth a damn” in their neighbourhood indicated that it was suburban

(A1). Just as before, responses that were obscure or vague were placed within an 'other' category. These included "off of the highway" (A9), and "smaller population" (D2).

As noted earlier, seven of the thirty respondents believed that their home lay within the city. Their reasonings varied in interesting ways and so I decided not to summarize them. Instead, I will go through each one individually, hopefully revealing what made these participants choose such a curious classification for their neighbourhood.

In the Albion neighbourhood, one of the two participants who said that her neighbourhood was the city was participant A2. As discussed earlier, she seemed to believe rural qualities were associated with suburbia. She had earlier claimed that some suburbanites "are like literally the farmers". Therefore, it made sense that she would consider her neighbourhood to be the city and not a suburb. Her reasoning, however, was quite vague. She stated that she considered her neighbourhood to be a suburb because it was a "new developed area" where most people "are well-educated" and have "nice jobs". How this relates specifically to urbanity is difficult to ascertain, although it would make sense if she was contrasting it with farmers.

The other Albion participant who indicated that their neighbourhood was the city also gave a rather unclear explanation for his characterization. It was hard to determine whether he had understood the question because they placed a lot of emphasis on political distinctions. He talked about the decline in services his area had received following amalgamation, lamenting that it seemed Hamilton "didn't care" (A11). The role this played in his conceptualization of his neighbourhood's character was obscure, and as such, it is difficult to say one way or another what he was really talking about.

The one Dundas participant who indicated that her neighbourhood was the city was participant D4. Again, this was one of the participants discussed earlier who seemed to associate rural qualities with suburbia. She had said that suburbs contain “farm-ish property” when asked to define suburbia. In light of this characterization, it was not surprising for her to consider her neighbourhood to be the city instead of a suburb. The reasoning she provided for this classification was the fact there is “lots of houses around”. It is easy to see how a rural conceptualization of suburbia would influence this reasoning, since there are not a lot of houses typically found in rural areas.

In Barnstown, participant B1 indicated that their choice to label their neighbourhood as the city was based on something instinctive, stating that they felt this way because they “grew up believing that”. Participant B2, on the other hand, said they based their reasoning on the social heterogeneity and the housing styles found in their neighbourhood. They said that it was “very ethnic” and that there were lots of townhomes nearby, and that these qualities would not be found in the suburbs. Participant B4 said they based their decision to classify their neighbourhood as the city on the fact that the neighbourhood was only “five minutes from downtown”, while their “idea of a suburb is significantly out of town”. Participant B12 said that their neighbourhood was the city because it was located too close to “everything”. However, this was another participant who had previously associated suburbia with rural qualities, and therefore, it was unclear whether they had considered an ordinary conceptualization of suburbia when coming up with this answer. Finally, participant B11 gave a very confusing answer for why they thought their neighbourhood was the city, stating as follows:

Ok the culture of the city is not the culture of the....they are not so close that the country people are. They know from every thing in your family, so they have a, city distance from each other. They expect a distance from each other. And they are not involved in everything in their life.

It is impossible for me to understand what they were talking about here, and therefore, I can not determine what qualities they had tried to attribute to classification they made.

As mentioned above, two participants chose to maintain that their neighbourhood was a mixture instead of stating definitively that it was either entirely suburban or urban. The first to do this was participant B8. He stated that his neighbourhood was ‘suburban-ish’ because, while it did not contain the industry typically found in a city, the presence of nearby shopping centres precluded it from being considered totally suburban. According to this participant, a true suburb is an area that is “just houses”. The second participant who claimed that their neighbourhood was a mixture was participant A10. Terming their neighbourhood “semi-suburban”, he focused on its distance from the downtown core: “hop on a bus and in seven minutes you’re downtown”. However, at the same time, it could not be urban because it’s “also kind of out there a bit”.

As outlined in the paragraphs above, not everyone I talked to thought they lived in the suburbs. This was especially the case in Barnstown, where just as many participants indicated they lived in a city than those who indicated that they lived in a suburb. This corresponds somewhat to what Hummon (1990) found in his own study on suburbanites. As discussed previously, he encountered several individuals who thought of their community as a small-town rather than a suburb. While I did find people who were reluctant to say they lived in a suburb, none of these people said they lived in a

small-town. Most were adamant that they lived in the city. This was surprising, particularly in the case of Dundas, because, as briefly discussed earlier, this area tends to have more of a 'small-town' character than other parts of the city. The divergence between Hummon's results and my results could possibly be related to differences in our research methodologies. However, it is also likely that the contexts were different. Over twenty years separated our studies. As well, we studied very different locations. Hummon's study focused on several communities in northern California, while mine focused on Hamilton, a mid-sized city in Southern Ontario. Unfortunately, Hummon did not thoroughly describe the reasonings his participants provided for their classification, making a comparison between my results and his nearly impossible.

That is not to say however that my results on their own are insignificant. If some suburbanites fail to realize that they live in the suburbs, how are urban planners and policy makers going to target their efforts to 'improve' the North American suburban landscape? It stands to reason that it would be difficult to convince suburban residents these improvement strategies are for the best if they do not even believe that they are a part of the problem. The implications of this dilemma will be explored further in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5: Assessing the suburbs

5.1: Understanding of suburban criticisms

As discussed earlier, both scholars and the popular media have greatly criticized the modern North American suburban landscape, alleging that it is harmful to not only its residents, but society as a whole as well. However only two researchers (Gocmen, 2009; Talen, 2001) have explored whether suburban residents know about these complaints, and whether or not they agree with them. This is surprising because, without this information, it is difficult to assess why these people chose to still live in this type of environment when others insist that it is so detrimental.

One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether the residents were aware of any of the criticisms that had been leveled at suburbia in recent decades, and to explore how they felt. Participants were asked, 'Over the years, people have had different opinions about the suburbs. Some have been good and some have been bad. Have you heard or read people expressing opinions about the suburbs?'. If they responded affirmatively, they were then asked to explain what they had heard, and whether or not they agreed with these assertions.

Figure 5.1 displays the responses to the question, 'Have you heard or read people expressing opinions about the suburbs?'. Nearly half of the suburban residents indicated that they had never heard or read anything, either negative or positive, about the suburbs. Although, as discussed previously, Talen (2001) had discovered a similar pattern, this was surprising. The views that have been expressed about suburbia in the popular media have been abundant, and it was hard to imagine that they could be overlooked. Apparently this was not the case. Either these suburban residents were not

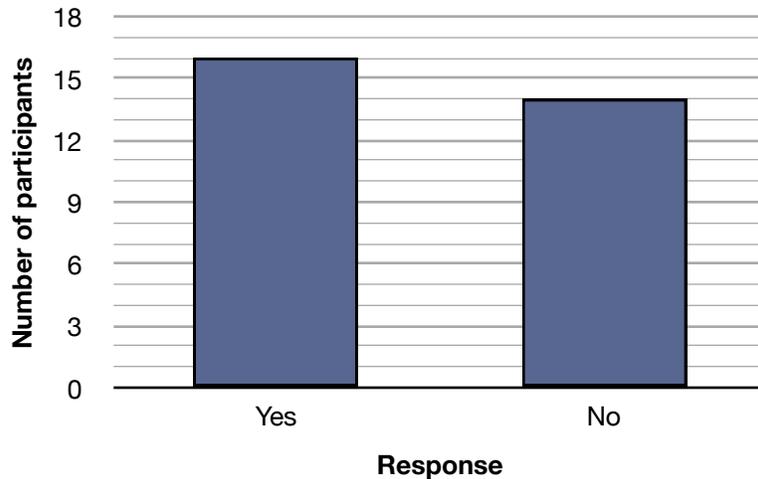


Figure 5.1: A chart displaying the responses received to the question, 'have you heard or read people expressing opinions about the suburbs?'. These responses come from participants in all three study neighbourhoods ($n=30$).

exposed to these opinions, or they chose to ignore them or subconsciously suppressed them.

Unfortunately, which option is true is difficult to establish. Most participants simply answered 'no', offering no explanation. One did state that "if there are opinions (...) I never pay attention to them" (A4), but she was the only one to elaborate on this situation. Furthermore, the participants who answered 'no' did not appear to be demographically distinct in any way. Both the 'no' and 'yes' groups contained people of varying ages. As well, the 'no' group contained the same number of immigrants as the 'yes' group, invalidating any argument that could be made surrounding the issue of English literacy. Finally, the 'no' responses were evenly distributed throughout the three study neighbourhoods. Just under half of the participants in all three neighbourhoods responded with a 'no'.

More research would therefore have to be completed to explore the issue further. Nevertheless, it is important recognize that, regardless of the reasoning, this finding is

quite significant, particularly from the point of view of those suburban critics who have put great effort into demonstrating how detrimental the modern North American suburban landscape is. It seems as if their arguments are not getting across to many suburbanites.

Those who answered 'yes' to the question 'have you heard or read people expressing opinions about the suburbs?' were asked to explain what exactly they had heard and whether or not they agreed. Although, for the purposes of this study, I was more interested in what negative details the participants had heard about suburbia, I still asked them to comment on any positives they had heard mentioned. Interestingly however, very few participants suggested any positive attributes. One participant talked about how he had heard people praise the "wide open spaces" in the suburbs (A5), and another mentioned how he was always hearing that the suburbs have "good schools" and have fewer "crime and safety factors" than in the city (D3). These were the only positive features mentioned. Many were adamant that they had not "heard anything all that great" (B3) about living in the suburbs.

Figure 5.2 summarizes the responses I received when the participants were asked to elaborate on some of the negative details they had heard or read about the suburbs. As can be seen in this figure, they identified in their responses many of the complaints that critics have raised.

Suburban homogeneity was the most commonly mentioned complaint. Participants discussed both the economic and cultural homogeneity that academics have said supposedly defines the suburbs. In terms of economic homogeneity,

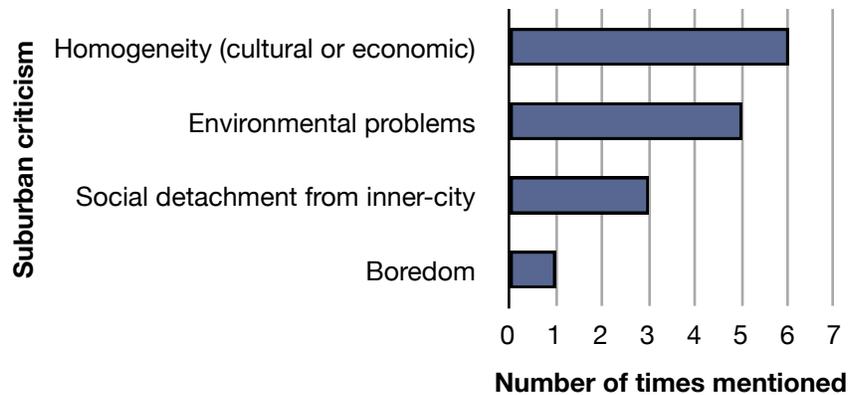


Figure 5.2: A chart displaying the frequency in which certain criticisms of suburbia were referenced by the study participants. These responses come from participants in all three study neighbourhoods who answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘have you heard or read people expressing opinions about the suburbs?’ ($n=16$).

participants talked about how people say the suburbs are full of “middle-class people who want everything perfect” (B3). One participant contextualized this to Hamilton, discussing how it is often claimed that “people who live on the mountain (...) are better” than those who live downtown (B7). Cultural homogeneity in the suburbs was also mentioned by several participants. For example, one participant discussed how people claim that the people who live in the suburbs “tend to be (...) not integrated with other types or nationalities” (B2). Another talked about how people say that “there’s not much culture” in the suburbs (A5).

All of the participants who discussed either cultural or economic homogeneity ultimately rejected these claims. For example, when talking about economic homogeneity, one participant said that she felt “there’s not sort of a big discrepancy” between the suburbs and the inner-city (D4). Another used gentrification to dispel these claims, singling out Toronto as an example of a place where “the really wealthy homes” are in the city “because of historical value” (A2). Suburban cultural homogeneity was

also dismissed by participants. For example, participant B2, who had talked about how people say that the suburbs are not “integrated”, asserted that this belief was “not quite as true as it used to be, ‘cause (...) you’ll run into all types in Ancaster and certainly Stoney Creek and even Binbrook” (B2). These responses correspond to what Talen (2001) described. As discussed previously, most of the suburbanites she surveyed also did not believe the suburbs were as culturally and economically homogeneous as critics have alleged. Ultimately, I was not surprised to discover that our findings in this regard matched up so closely. As outlined above, none of the suburban residents I interviewed identified cultural or economic homogeneity as a defining characteristic of a suburb. It stands to reason that they would consequently reject anyone who suggested otherwise, therefore explaining the responses detailed above.

Several participants also discussed how they had heard that the suburbs are harmful to the environment. For example, participant B8 said that he had recently read an article that discussed how suburbanization is the main driver of urban sprawl and how this is “too much” for our environment to handle. Participant A1 talked about how people think suburbanites do not care about the destruction of natural areas to build their homes, stating that people think suburbanites “see a massive field getting developed and they think ‘oh cool, more houses!’”. Finally, several participants discussed how they had heard the automobile oriented nature of the suburbs hastens the destruction of the environment (A2, B9, D5).

Interestingly, three of the five participants who mentioned these environmental criticisms were under the age of twenty-five. I only interviewed five suburban residents in total who were under the age of twenty-five, so this proportion was quite

considerable. This may have had something to do with their recent educational backgrounds. Two of the three had recently graduated with a university degree, while the other was still in the process of obtaining one. They could have come into contact with these criticisms during their studies. It is also possible that their awareness is related somehow to their ages. Perhaps young people are more mindful of the environmental problems of suburbia than older people are. It is also possible that this supposed increased awareness was related to some sort of recruitment bias. It is conceivable that younger people who are aware of the environmental problems that plague suburbia would be more willing to participate in a study that partially explores this predicament than those younger people who are not.

Unlike the concerns surrounding suburban homogeneity, several of the participants who discussed environmental criticisms of suburbia seemed to generally be in agreement with them. The only participant who was not in agreement was participant A2, who insisted continued development in the suburbs would eliminate suburban car dependence eventually. She did not elaborate on how exactly she thought this would happen.

The fact that so many of these participants agreed with these environmental criticisms runs counter to what Talen (2001) found in her study. As discussed previously, nearly three-quarters of the suburbanites she surveyed disagreed that suburbs were harmful to the environment. There are several possibilities that may explain why our results differed in this regard. Firstly, it is possible that this divergence was related to differences in how our studies were carried out. Talen asked everyone she surveyed whether they thought the suburbs were harmful to the environment, while I relied on my

participants to bring this issue up themselves. In this sense, it is possible that the people who were in agreement were the only ones to raise these concerns with me. It is also possible that this divergence may be related to the time difference between our two studies. Talen's study was completed nearly fifteen years ago, and certain environmental concerns about the suburbs, such as those surrounding global warming, were not as prevalent then as they are now. This increased prevalence could have ultimately caused my participants to be more aware of the role the suburbs may play in the destruction of the environment than Talen's participants had been.

Although the differences between Talen's study and my study are intriguing, what is really significant about these findings is the implications they could have for our understanding of why suburbanites chose to live in the suburbs. If the suburbanites I interviewed think their neighbourhood is destroying the environment, why are they still living there? Some of the findings I discussed earlier, particularly those relating to whether suburbanites think they live in the suburbs, may provide part of the answer to this question. If suburbanites do not think they live in the suburbs, they most likely will not see anything wrong about living where they live. Interestingly however, of the four participants who said they agree with what they have heard said about how bad the suburbs are for the environment, three said they lived in the suburbs. There therefore must be something else that has convinced them to remain where they are. What exactly this is remains to be seen.

A handful of participants also claimed that they had heard people talk about how socially detached suburbanites tend to be from the rest of city. One participant explained this as follows:

When I was growing up, I know suburbs were often seen as people being more aloof. Like, you lived in your suburb which was nice with homes, with different things, and the reason you went to the big city was either to work and you'd often just commute there or drive in, drive out, or to maybe shop. You weren't in touch with all the stuff that was going on (A3).

Other participants echoed similar claims.

Their agreement with these claims was inconsistent though. Participant A3, whose quote is referred to above, did not agree with what she described, but this was primarily because of her unique personal situation. Unable to drive because of a medical issue, she uses the bus for transportation, and this forces her to go downtown "all the time". Therefore, she insisted that she is "certainly in-tune with Hamilton", contradicting those claims others have made about suburbanites being detached from the inner-city. However, she stated that she could see how it could be "very easy to become detached from the main area of the city" if her situation was not the way it was. Conversely, another participant explained how a recent teaching rotation in downtown Hamilton made her realize that "you kind of get caught up in your own world and your not familiar with the issues that are going on in the downtown core" (A13). Finally, there was one participant who outright rejected these claims because she was "just as involved in the city" as she was in the suburbs (A12).

Participant D3 was the only person who talked about how people often associate the suburbs with boredom. She stated that people think moving to the suburbs means "giving up the party lifestyle or having fun". She did not agree with these beliefs though,

claiming that this perceived lack of fun was instead the result of people's typical stage of life when they move to the suburbs.

Although the participants alluded to many of the complaints that have been directed at the suburbs by their critics, they did not touch on them all. No one mentioned anything about suburban conformity, female inequality, 'placelessness', health problems, or the economic deprivation suburbs supposedly cause to the inner city. The lack of knowledge exposed on suburban conformity and female inequality was likely a result of the time period. As mentioned earlier, these criticisms were very prominent in the '50s and '60s, but are less so today. Additionally, it is likely that the issues surrounding suburban 'placelessness' were too obscure for these suburban residents to have knowledge of. Most of the discussion on this subject has largely remained outside of the popular media. However, it is notable that no one commented on the health and economic concerns that are associated with continued suburbanization because these are fairly prominent today.

5.2: Advantages and disadvantages of living in a suburban neighbourhood

As discussed previously, since the work of a group of social scientists in the 1960s, very little research has been done that has looked at what suburban residents like and dislike about their neighbourhoods. This is unfortunate because more modern insight would offer an understanding into how suburban retrofitting should function and what changes are likely to be accepted by suburban residents. This section will attempt to address this gap in the literature by outlining what the suburban residents interviewed had to say about the advantages and disadvantages they associate with living in their neighbourhood.

A prevalent theme in the research from the '60s was that suburbanites considered the suburbs to be the best place to raise a family. The responses received from the suburban residents interviewed suggests that this is still true today. Several of the participants said that their neighbourhood was family-friendly and this was something they liked. For example, one participant stated, "we raised our kids here and they loved it" (B8). Another said, "I have a family (and) it meets my needs" (B4).

Another similarity to the findings of the '60s was that the suburban residents seemed to attribute this family-friendliness to the amenities located nearby. For instance, participant A12 discussed how, for the sake of her children, she liked "being close, like walking distance to the school". Participant B4 also talked about the importance of the nearby family-friendly amenities, stating, "the pool over at Walker's, the playground and the school's there, the soccer field, everything's close". Participant B8, on the other hand, attributed the family-friendliness of his neighbourhood to the open space, claiming that his children "loved it out here 'cause things are spread out". This last response is noteworthy because an overabundance of open space is one aspect of suburbia many planners are very eager to change.

Over the course of the interviews, no one was encountered who could definitively be classed as one of Hummon's (1990) "suburban-urbanists". As discussed previously, a "suburban-urbanist" is someone who wishes to live in the city, but lives in the suburbs instead, primarily because they feel the suburbs are best for their children. Participant B8 did remark to me that many people do not live in the city because the suburbs are "where you'd like to bring (kids) up", but he did not specifically relate this to his own situation in a way that convinced me that he was a true "suburban-urbanist". This is not

to say though that the results disproved the existence of these “suburban-urbanists”.

People were not asked specifically if they would prefer to live elsewhere, thus limiting my ability to comment comprehensively on this matter.

As discussed previously, both the social scientists from the 1960s and Hummon (1990) believed one of the primary reasons suburbanites preferred to raise their family in the suburbs was because they thought the ‘dangers’ of the city were not present in the suburbs. Only one of the participants discussed safety in the suburbs in relation to her family’s well-being. When asked if she thought her neighbourhood was safe she said yes because, “I don’t mind the kids playing in the front yard where I can see them. I don’t have any issues. There’s never any creepy people hanging around or you never hear anybody crying or breaking into anything” (D3). Although they did not specifically discuss the well-being of their families, the majority of the rest of the participants said their neighbourhood was safe as well. Figure 5.3 displays the responses received to the question, ‘Do you think your neighbourhood is safe?’. As can be seen in this figure, only one participant said their neighbourhood was not safe. When asked to explain this classification, he would only say that this was based on the “issues” his kids had experienced (B10). He would not elaborate on what these issues were.

Two participants remarked that their neighbourhood was only “somewhat” safe. One talked about how the low-income townhomes located nearby would, from time-to-time, “get some bad actors in” (A4). She also discussed a “drug house” that was located neighbourhood being only somewhat safe mentioned frequent car break-ins as his reason for this classification (A11).

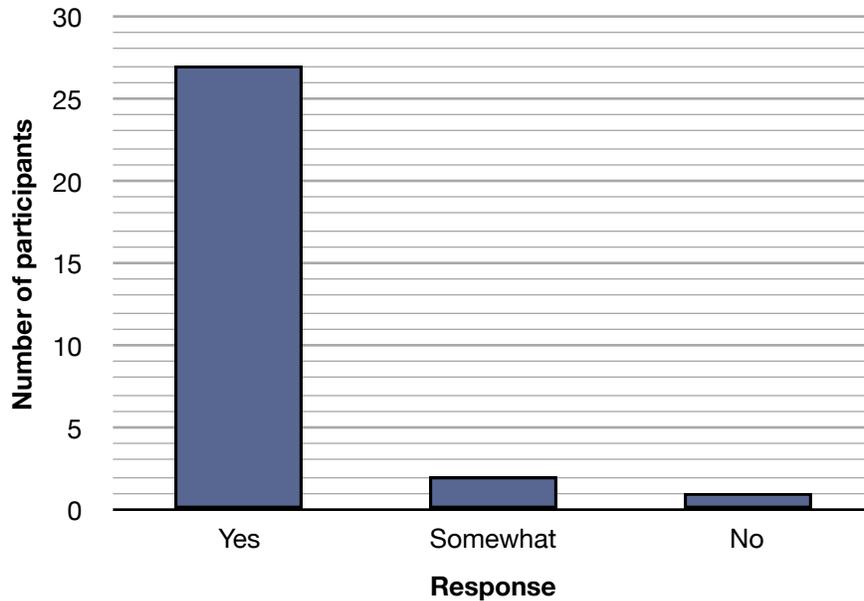


Figure 5.3: A chart displaying the responses to the question ‘Do you think your neighbourhood is safe?’. These responses come from participants in all three study neighbourhoods ($n=30$).

Interestingly, many of the other participants mentioned similar problems that had occurred in their neighbourhood, but unlike participants A4 and A11, said that their neighbourhood was safe. For example, when asked to explain why she thought her neighbourhood was safe, participant A12 said that she “had some minor issues” with people breaking into her car, but she still thought of it as a safe area. Participant B3 provided an even more surprising explanation for his classification. He described several incidents, including a bomb going off in a housing unit behind him and someone burning his neighbour’s house down, but still stated “I don’t find (this neighbourhood) not to be safe”.

These descriptions correspond to what Hummon (1990) discovered. As discussed previously, he found that while suburban residents do express concern over crime in the suburbs, they still believe that the suburbs offer more security than the city. Although none of the suburban residents interviewed specifically mentioned Hamilton’s

downtown core in their discussions on safety, I could tell this is what many of them were implying. For example, participant D2 talked about how her neighbourhood was safe because “people in this area have relatively good jobs, (...) a lot of stable families with (...) maybe a higher standard of upbringing”. While it is difficult to say for certain where she would think this would not be the case, it is reasonable to conclude that the city may be one possibility. In recent decades, Hamilton’s downtown core has had a reputation of being run-down and unsafe.

Research from the ‘60s also suggested that there was a connection between people living in the suburbs and their desire to improve their social status. Gans (1967) and Clark (1966) determined that most suburbanites in this time period had moved to the suburbs simply to attain affordable home ownership. They wanted this because this would put them on a higher social plane than those who rented. In the literature review of this thesis, it was hypothesized that this situation was no longer accurate today. Unlike in the ‘60s, when rental properties were only found in the city, today’s suburbs contain a large assortment of rental properties. This would therefore negate any connection that had existed between suburbia, home ownership and social status.

Unfortunately, none of the suburban residents interviewed said anything that would definitively support or refute this hypothesis. No one stated specifically that they liked or disliked their home or neighbourhood because it made them feel successful, wealthy or ‘better’ than others. Admittedly, this was not surprising though since this is a subject most people do not typically discuss and they were never asked a question that would have made them address this.

Several participants did deride the rental properties that were in their neighbourhoods though, identifying these properties as being the source of most of the problems in their neighbourhood. For example, as discussed above, participant A4 stated that “bad actors” who lived in the low-income townhomes located near her house made her neighbourhood only ‘somewhat’ safe. I also heard remarks from other participants about these housing developments. In her interview, participant B1 said “unfortunately area-wise (...) there has to be so many townhomes or geared-to-income homes”. Participant A6 talked about how the low-income housing in her neighbourhood made her “a little nervous”. Finally, participant B10 went as far to say that the one aspect of his neighbourhood that he disliked the most was “the class of people” in the “lower income” rental properties. The relationship these opinions may have to these suburban residents’ thoughts surrounding their own social status remains to be seen. They are still noteworthy however because, as discussed earlier, urban planners and policy makers are striving to make lower-income rental properties even more prominent in the suburbs, primarily to address concerns over suburban economic homogeneity. If suburban home owners feel this way already about these properties, what is their reaction going to be if even more are placed in their neighbourhood? Obviously, this situation is something urban planners and policy makers need to be aware of moving forward.

Many of the suburban residents interviewed also expressed displeasure over their reliance on automobiles. This can be seen in Figure 5.4, which displays the answers received to the question, ‘Do you think you are too dependent on a car?’. As can be seen in this figure, twenty-one participants answered ‘yes’ to this question,

compared to only nine who answered 'no'. This result was not surprising, since it corresponds to what Talen (2001) had previously discovered. As discussed earlier, she found that many modern suburban residents dislike having to rely so much on automobiles to get around from place to place in the suburbs.

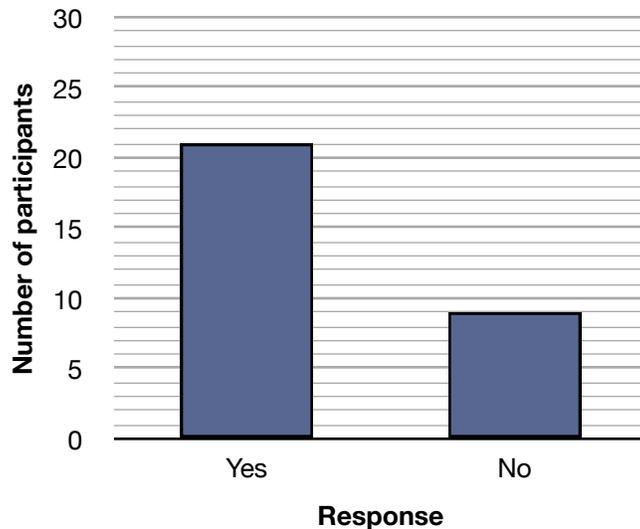


Figure 5.4: A chart displaying the responses to the question 'Do you think you are too dependent on a car?'. These responses come from participants in all three study neighbourhoods ($n=30$).

Figure 5.5 breaks down the responses received to the question 'Do you think you are too dependent on a car?' by neighbourhood. As can be seen in this figure, all of the participants in Dundas, 58% (7) of the participants in Barnstown, and 69% (9) of the participants in Albion said they were too dependent on a car.

It is difficult to place much significance on the unanimity of the responses from Dundas, since the sample size of this neighbourhood was much smaller than the other two neighbourhoods. This does not mean that this unanimity should be ignored though, because it could in fact indicate that something is different here than in the other two study neighbourhoods. Based on the responses received from the participants in

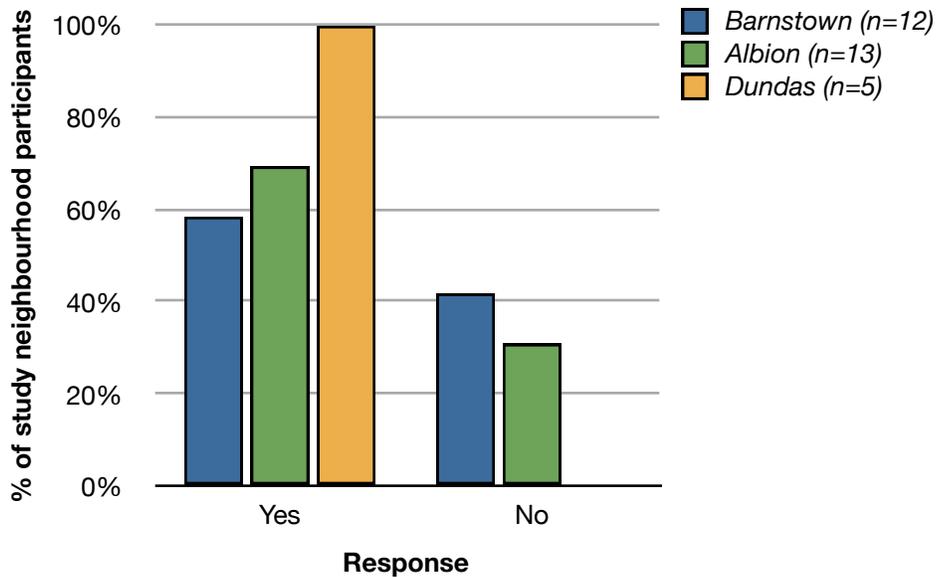


Figure 5.5: A chart displaying the responses to the question 'Do you think you are too dependent on a car?', broken down by study neighbourhood.

Dundas, it is reasonable to conclude that if this difference does exist, it is most likely related to the availability of public transit in this area and/or its proximity to retail amenities. In terms of public transit, participant D2 said that the reason she felt she was too dependent on a car was because “public transit in Dundas really isn’t that great (...) it only runs at peak times” and it “doesn’t even go where it’s supposed to”. The other participants from Dundas talked about their proximity to retail amenities, placing particular emphasis on how far they were from grocery stores. For example, participant D4 remarked, “Dundas doesn’t have a lot of major shopping stuff. We have to always drive for groceries”.

In Albion, most of the participants who said they were too dependent on a car to travel around echoed similar complaints to the participants in Dundas. Interestingly, once again, these participants were most concerned about how far away they were from the nearest grocery store. For example, participant A3, who, as mentioned earlier, could not drive a car due to a medical problem, stated, “I can take a bus to the Fortinos, which

isn't bad, but it takes me time, and then it limits how much you carry (...) so if it was around the corner I could take a wagon, or I could go a couple of times to get more things". Participant A12, on the other hand, remarked, "there's no grocery store anywhere near here (...) the closest one would be Fortinos and a) I don't want to go to Fortinos and b) it's still really far away". It is intriguing that so many participants in both Dundas and Albion related their answers to their proximity to the nearest grocery store. While it is possible that this was simply the first amenity to pop into the participant's head when the question was asked, it is also possible that there could be some added significance to this choice. Perhaps this would be the retail amenity suburban residents would welcome most to their neighbourhoods? This could potentially have significant implications for suburban retrofit plans that call for more retail amenities to be placed within suburban communities.

In both Albion and Barnstown there were also participants who attributed their car dependence more to their own habits than anything else. For example, participant B7 said that, while he "knows there's buses" in his neighbourhood, he "just couldn't see" himself on one. Participant A11, on the other hand, talked about how her car dependence was "laziness, that's all", explaining that "you just get in the habit" of driving everywhere. Interestingly, participants in Barnstown referred to this habitual reasoning more frequently than participants in Albion did. I believe this has something to do with the differences in geography between the two neighbourhoods. As discussed earlier, Barnstown is more centrally located and is closer to more retail amenities than Albion is. As well, bus service is more frequent in this area of the city. It is therefore not surprising that residents of this neighbourhood would associate their car dependence to their own

behaviour rather than to the other attributes brought up by the residents of Albion and Dundas.

Unlike Dundas, there were a handful of participants from both Albion and Barnstown who answered 'no' to the question, 'Do you feel you are too dependent on a car?'. In light of the situation described above, it was not surprising that there were people from Barnstown who answered this way. It was surprising however to have so many people from Albion answer 'no', primarily because it seems as if this neighbourhood is laid out in a way that would have not generated this type of response.

What was interesting about the 'no' responses from Albion was that they directly contradicted what the other participants from this neighbourhood had claimed. For instance, participant A10 said that, "buses run all the time" in the neighbourhood, making it easy to get around without a personal automobile. In regards to proximity to amenities, participant A9 discussed how the only thing he needs his car to do is drive to work. Everything else is close enough that driving is apparently not necessary for him and his family.

The reason why these responses were so contradictory to the others that were collected from the residents of this neighbourhood is impossible to determine. This contradiction does demonstrate however that suburban residents can and often do have very different perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of living in the suburbs. The significance of this reality will be discussed further in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Unfortunately, since many of the participants who were recruited either worked from home or were retired, it was impossible to obtain any sort of conclusive data that

demonstrated how suburban residents feel about their journey to and from work. This was somewhat disappointing because there has not been any research completed specifically on how suburban residents feel about their commute since the 1960s. Nevertheless, I feel that my analysis of the responses I received to the question on car dependence partially addressed this gap. Traveling to and from work presumably comprises a large portion of the time people spend using their automobiles, and therefore this should be covered at least somewhat by the answers received to the question on car dependence.

5.2.1: Young people and the suburbs

Five of the suburban residents interviewed were under the age of twenty-five and were still living with their parents. It was previously discussed how these younger suburban residents seemed to know the most about environmental criticisms of suburbia. This section will outline what these younger participants had to say about what they like and dislike about their suburban neighbourhoods. I have chosen to present these responses separately because their situation made these younger participants unique. They had not wholly chosen to live in the suburbs; their parents had. As well, their generation represents the future of suburbia. They will be the ones to occupy the suburbs in the years to come and it therefore stands to reason that some of the things they had to say may provide clues as to what this future may hold.

Out of all the suburban residents interviewed, participant A1, who was twenty-three years old at the time of his interview, seemed to be the most frustrated with suburbia. He spent most of his interview deriding his neighbourhood and the people who lived there. For example, he disparaged how dependent he was on a car, stating

that he wanted to live in a place where he “can walk to somewhere that’s worth walking to and it’s not a gas station”. Emphasizing this point further, he declared that, in his neighbourhood, “if you don’t have a car, good luck, it sucks”. Participant A1 also expressed disappointment over the interaction he had with his neighbours. He remarked that he wished “some people were a little more friendly”, describing how people in his cul de sac “don’t even look, say goodbye, say hi or wave. They’re just like ‘I don’t care. I’m going wherever I’m going’”. As mentioned earlier, participant A1 was a recent graduate of an environmental studies program and it is my belief that his experience in this program influenced some of these critical views. Although he did not explicitly express this was the case, I left his interview with the impression that he was very eager to leave behind the suburbs as soon as he was able. His situation and beliefs could always change, but based on what he said in his interview, I doubt he would ever willingly move back to the suburbs in the future either.

Participant D5, who was also twenty-three years old at the time of his interview, also expressed displeasure over certain aspects of his suburban neighbourhood. He alluded to the fact that his neighbourhood could be quite boring, stating that “there’s not much that goes on (here) in the suburbs”. He also said that he “couldn’t survive without” his car living in this location. Despite these assertions, participant D5 was ultimately not as irritated by his living arrangement as participant A1 was. At the end of his interview he remarked, “I wouldn’t exchange my suburbs for urban living”. This statement certainly made it seem as if participant D5 would be quite happy living in the suburbs for years to come.

Unlike participants A1 and D5, the other three participants who were under age twenty-five did not mention any complaints they had about living in a suburban neighbourhood. Of particular interest is the fact that all three of these participants said that they were not dependent on a car living in the area they were residing. They all insisted that they could get around just fine using alternative forms of transportation, such as biking (B9) and public transit (A8, B12). These responses were intriguing because they indicate that there could exist a disconnect between how younger and older suburban residents assess suburban car dependence. As discussed previously, many of the older suburban residents interviewed insisted these alternative forms of transportation were not viable options in their neighbourhood. Unfortunately, the data collected was not comprehensive enough to say why this disconnect may exist. More research would therefore need to be completed to explore this issue further.

These three younger participants also spoke fondly of their experiences growing up in their neighbourhoods. For example, participant B9 spent a great deal of time explaining how the children in her neighbourhood were “really close” when they were younger, and how much fun this had been at the time. Positive experiences like this one could influence these participants to live in the suburbs once they have families of their own. They may want their children to have the same experiences and may view the suburbs as being the best place for this to occur. This would be a very intriguing association to examine more closely though, since, as discussed above, these younger people represent the future of suburbia. They will be the ones shaping the suburban landscape in the years to come, and therefore we have a lot to gain from understanding what they think about the suburbs.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to answer the question, 'How do individuals who reside in the suburbs in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both the suburban landscape that surrounds them and suburban landscapes that exist elsewhere?'. Several important findings came out of this research but two were most significant. First, while suburban residents have difficulty articulating what they think a suburb is when they are asked to define it abstractly, they have considerably less difficulty completing this task when asked instead to consider a real-world context. This has implications for strategies aimed at getting suburban residents on board with plans to transform suburban North America. Residents may need to be provided with real-world examples in order to get them to really understand what exactly needs to happen and why.

Second, it appears that most suburban residents have heard very few positive comments about the suburbs from outside sources. This suggests that very few positive opinions have been expressed by friends or in the media, or that suburban residents have paid much more attention to negative opinions. Research into how the media portrays suburbs could potentially shed light on which option is true.

Other important results have emerged. For example, maps may be the most effective way for City officials to gain a better understanding of where residents consider the suburbs to be located within the city. This should assist them when designing plans focused on helping the City meet targets set by the province's *Places to Grow Act*.

Additionally, the discussion on whether suburban residents believe they live in the suburbs is also significant. Many of those residents interviewed said their neighbourhood was suburban, utilizing explanations that, for the most part,

corresponded to the definitions they provided for the term suburb. However, several said their neighbourhood was instead a part of the city, or was a suburban-urban mixture. This suggests that not every suburban resident in Hamilton believes they live in a suburb. It indicates that demonstrating to suburbanites that their specific neighbourhood is problematic may not be very straightforward. Suburbanites may first need to be convinced that they live in a suburb before anything else can occur. This finding also indicates that perhaps planners should avoid the term 'suburb' entirely, as it may ultimately not be very helpful to what they are trying to accomplish.

Previously, it was noted how significant it was that so few of the suburban residents interviewed had claimed to have heard anything positive expressed about the suburbs. This thesis also explored their perception of negative comments. Nearly half claimed that they had never heard or read anything critical. This corresponds to what other studies have found, indicating that even though such criticisms have been widely shared by researchers they have had only limited popular impact. More thought needs to be given to communication, and persuasion. Therefore, there needs to be more emphasis placed on accomplishing this if critics truly want suburban residents to be aware of these issues.

The suburban residents interviewed who had said they were aware of suburban criticisms provided a variety of examples. Several mentioned that some people think suburbs are too ethnically or economically homogeneous; others talked about environmental concerns surrounding the suburbs; a few discussed the idea that suburban residents are socially detached from other parts of the city. One talked about how people associate the suburbs with boredom.

While these examples were diverse, these participants ultimately did not touch on some of the most divisive ones, such as the argument that continued suburbanization drains the inner-city of resources, and has a negative effect on population health. It is difficult to say whether these omissions were truly significant, given that this study was designed in such a way that the participants could have avoided discussing these criticisms even if they were aware of them. This would therefore be something I would recommend further research on.

In terms of these participants' agreement with these criticisms, the responses were mixed. All of the participants who noted suburban homogeneity rebuffed the charge, stating that they simply were not a true reflection of modern suburbs. The participant who had discussed boredom in the suburbs was also adamant that this criticism was incorrect. However, several participants conceded the importance of environmental issues and the significance of social detachment. This raises the question of why these people were living in the suburbs. Mostly, the answer was not that they did not think they lived in the suburbs. Most had stated that their neighbourhood was a suburb when asked. Unfortunately, the data was not comprehensive enough to indicate what other explanation was likely. Further research would be needed to determine this.

This thesis also outlined the advantages and disadvantages suburban residents associate with living in a suburban neighbourhood. The responses indicated that many consider family-friendliness and safety to be key advantages of living in the suburbs. Suburban reformers would do well to ensure that any plans designed to transform the suburbs preserve their child-friendly features.

In terms of disadvantages, the responses received indicated that many residents are not fond of low-income housing. This finding is significant because many suburban retrofit plans are calling for the suburbs to become more socially diverse, and this is primarily being accomplished by placing more low-income housing in suburban communities. It is likely that many suburban residents would not be keen to see this strategy implemented.

Many of the suburban residents who were interviewed expressed dislike for car dependence. In particular, they emphasized that they did not appreciate the distance they had to travel to get to the nearest grocery store. It is unclear how significant this issue is. It could have been that this was simply the first amenity the participants thought of. However, it could also be that this amenity is the one suburban residents desire the most. More research would ultimately be needed to determine which scenario is the most likely. Nevertheless, these responses related to car dependence suggest that suburban reformers may be able to use this characteristic as a way to get suburban residents to go along with suburban retrofit plans. If they were to emphasize that these plans would ultimately lessen suburban car dependence, they may ultimately be more successful.

The responses from five participants who were under the age of twenty-five were examined separately. This was done in order to gain some insight into the future of suburbia, since their generation will be the one to occupy the suburbs in the years to come. One of these younger participants seemed to want to get away from the suburbs as soon as he was able, but the rest appeared to be quite comfortable there. With one exception, they all said that they did not feel they were too dependent on a car living in

their neighbourhood. This obviously contrasted with the views of the older participants, raising the possibility that somehow younger suburbanites perceive car dependence differently than their older counterparts. The younger participants also spoke quite fondly of growing up in the suburbs. Their experiences may influence them to live in the suburbs once they have families of their own.

6.1: Policy recommendations

In the introduction to this thesis, it was stated that the goal of this study was to provide useful insight that would help urban planners and policy makers better design plans aimed at transforming the suburban environment. Above all else, the results obtained indicate that urban planners and policy makers need to be more attune to not only how suburban residents conceptualize the suburbs, but also how they feel about them. This would likely involve consulting more with this group before designing and, most certainly, implementing, any policy changes involving the suburbs.

Most significantly, I think planners and policy makers need to be more aware that most suburban residents generally like living in these neighbourhoods that have been so derided by critics. There is a reason they are living where they are and decision-makers need to be mindful of this moving forward.

6.2: Limitations and future research

These conclusions may not accurately reflect the true state of affairs within Hamilton. Results could have been impacted by a sampling bias. Only thirty people in three neighbourhoods were interviewed. Of particular concern is the number of people who were interviewed who were retired or working from home. This could have biased

the results because these peoples' lifestyles, and subsequently their relationship with the suburbs, are different from those who work outside of the home.

Another potential source of bias is the neighbourhoods that were sampled. All three contained townhomes, in one case including publicly-subsidized housing. As discussed earlier, this was required in order to allow for complementary research. This might have biased the results. There are suburban neighbourhoods in Hamilton that do not have any townhomes located nearby, and therefore some of the responses detailed in this study may not reflect what exists in these other neighbourhoods. This is particularly conceivable in the case of the discussion on how many of the residents interviewed openly disapproved of the townhomes in their neighbourhoods. It stands to reason that this discussion would not come up in other neighbourhoods without townhomes because they would not have contact with this housing type.

In regards to individual results, the ones that are most concerning are those relating to the maps. Although I feel confident that what was observed via them was authentic, it is impossible to be certain. So many participants had such a difficult time filling them out, and the rest completed them so quickly, that it is possible that what was described does not accurately represent their full understanding of the character of Hamilton's suburbs.

The results were also limited by what was not asked in the interviews. They would be more complete if I had followed up with the participants on several matters, many of which have been identified in the paragraphs above. In particular, it would have been useful to hear more about why the participants had considered the areas they had labelled on their maps to be suburban. This would have possibly lessened some of the

validity problems associated with the maps. Additionally, it would be useful to have obtained some explanation for why so many participants associated rural qualities with the term 'suburb'. Finally, it would have also been useful to understand more about how aware the participants were of opinions expressed about the suburbs. Why were the overwhelming majority of the opinions discussed negative, rather than positive? As well, why did nearly half of the participants claim to have never heard anything at all expressed about the suburbs before?

In many ways, this was an exploratory study. Future research could usefully examine in more detail several of the issues that it addressed only in general terms. As has been discussed numerous times throughout this thesis, the existing literature that has looked at how modern suburban residents regard the suburbs has been very limited. Therefore, any additional research on these issues would ultimately be beneficial.

Of particular importance however is attaining more of an understanding of how suburban residents conceptualize suburbia. An intriguing disconnect was observed in this study when the participants were asked to conceptualize suburbia abstractly, compared to when they were asked to conceptualize suburbia utilizing a real-world example. More needs to be known about why this disconnect exists, and what implications it may have for planners and policy makers attempting to transform the modern suburban landscape.

This thesis very briefly touched upon the relationship young suburbanites have with the suburbs. More research into this topic would also be beneficial because this generation represents the future of suburbia. By knowing more about what they think

about the suburbs, planners, policy makers and academics should be able to better plan for the future.

It would also be important to know more about how the residents of non-traditional suburban homes (i.e. townhomes and apartments) perceive the suburbs. This study was focused solely on the perceptions of residents of traditional, single-detached suburban homes. While this group is very important, seeing as how they are the ones most people picture when they consider suburbs, and the ones that have been the target of most of the densification strategies put forth by planners, they are not the only group that occupies the modern suburban landscape. Therefore, in order to provide a more thorough understanding of how *all* suburbanites perceive the suburbs, the data that was presented in this thesis would need to be compared and contrasted to similar data collected from non-traditional suburban homes.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

DATE: _____

INTERVIEW ID#: _____

Introduction (Read by interviewer)

#1: Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. This study is concerned with how people in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both their own neighbourhoods, and other neighbourhoods in the city. It is also interested in understanding how these perceptions are connected to the local municipal political situation, as well as how they correspond to the thoughts of certain experts in the field of urban planning. It is hoped that what we learn from this study will help city planners better understand what people want from their neighbourhoods.

This interview should take about forty minutes. Do you have any questions before we start? Is it ok if I start the tape recorder now?

Let's begin by talking about your neighbourhood.

Q#1: What do you like most about your neighbourhood?

1a.) Do you think it's safe? YES _____ NO _____
Why/Why not?

1b.) Does it have lots of open space? YES _____ NO _____
Do you like this?

Q#2: What do you like the least about your neighbourhood?

2a.) How about the distance it is from your work? Is it too far away,?

YES _____ NO _____

Do you enjoy the journey to and from it? YES _____ NO _____

2b.) Do you have access to a car? YES _____ NO _____

Do you feel you're too dependent on a car? YES _____ NO _____

Why/Why not?

2c.) How much interaction do you have with your neighbors?

Do you wish you had more, or less, or maybe it's about right?

Q#3: Does this neighbourhood have a name?

(If yes) What is it?

Q#4: What type of neighbourhood is this? CITY__ SUBURB__ OTHER_____

(Prompt: Do you live in the city, the suburbs, or perhaps you consider it to be something else?)

Q#5: Why do you say this?

(Prompt: What do you think makes this area a city/suburb/rural/etc.?)

I'm now interested in finding out what characteristics you attribute to different parts of the city. In particular, I'm interested in which parts of Hamilton you consider to be suburban.

This is a blank map of the City of Hamilton (See Appendix B). The lake and the bay, the escarpment, the "built-up" area and the major highways are all labelled on it. Using this pencil, please shade-in which areas of the city you consider to be suburban. Take as much time as you need.

There is no right or wrong answer to this question. Everyone will have a different perspective. I am simply interested in your opinion.

(Once completed) Thank you for doing that.

We're now going to ask you some questions about the municipal government and how it relates to that map you just drew.

Q#6: Are you aware that, about ten years ago, the province of Ontario amalgamated the City of Hamilton with a number of surrounding municipalities?

6a.) Were you living in Hamilton at this time? *(If no, interviewer skips to Q#8).*

YES _____ **NO** _____

Q#7: Did amalgamation change the way you think about your neighbourhood? How?

Q#8: Do you think amalgamation was a good idea? **YES** _____ **NO** _____

Why/Why not?

Q#9: In your opinion, has this amalgamation changed the character of those municipalities which used to be independent from the city?

(Prompt: Have they gone from being suburban to urban, or have they remained suburban?)

Why/Why not?

Now we're going to ask you about your opinions on suburbia in general.

Q#10: In your opinion, what is a suburb? *(Prompt: What does it look like?/What kinds of housing does it have?- apartments, townhomes, single-detached houses?)*

10a.) Are there particular types of people who tend to live in the suburbs?

10b.) Is there a particular type of lifestyle that goes with suburban living?

Q#11: Over the years people have had different opinions on the suburbs. Some have been good and some have been bad. Have you heard, or read, people expressing opinions about the suburbs? *(make sure the comment on both good and bad aspects).*

YES _____ **NO** _____

11a.) (If yes) What sorts of opinions have you heard about?

11b.) Do you agree with any of these opinions?

(If yes) Which ones?

11c.) Do you disagree with any of these opinions?

Why/Why not?

Finally, we're going to ask you some general demographic questions about you and your home. These will be used to provide some context for your answers to the previous questions.

Q#12: How old are you?

Are you between the ages?:

18 to 25

26 to 35

36 to 45

46 to 55

56+

Q#13: How many people live in this house? _____

Q#14: How many residents are over the age of 18? _____

Q#15: How long have you lived in Hamilton? _____

Q#16: How long have you been living in this house? _____

Q#17: Were you born in Canada? YES_____ NO_____

(If not) Where were you born? _____

Q#18: Can you think of anyone else in this area who might be interested in participating in this survey?

Thank you for your time.

As I'm sure you can probably guess from some of the questions we just asked, this study has a more specific purpose than what we originally told you before the interview began. We are looking specifically at suburban areas of Hamilton and how the residents of these suburban areas perceive both their own neighborhoods and other suburban neighborhoods throughout the city.

The reason we didn't specify this purpose before the interview began is because we felt that this may have unintentionally biased your responses to our questions, ultimately negatively impacting our final results.

We are sorry we were not able to tell you about our true purpose before the interview began. Do you have any questions about why we didn't tell you more about this? Do you have any other questions about the study?

According to protocol set forth by the McMaster Research Ethics Board, we now have to ask you to re-consent to participating in this research study. This needs to be done because the consent you gave us earlier, when you signed the original consent form, was based on information that was not specific. By re-consenting, you are saying that you understand the true purpose of this study, and you will allow us to use your responses in this study. You may choose not to re-consent, however, if you do this, we will have to delete the interview, and we will not be able to use your responses at all.

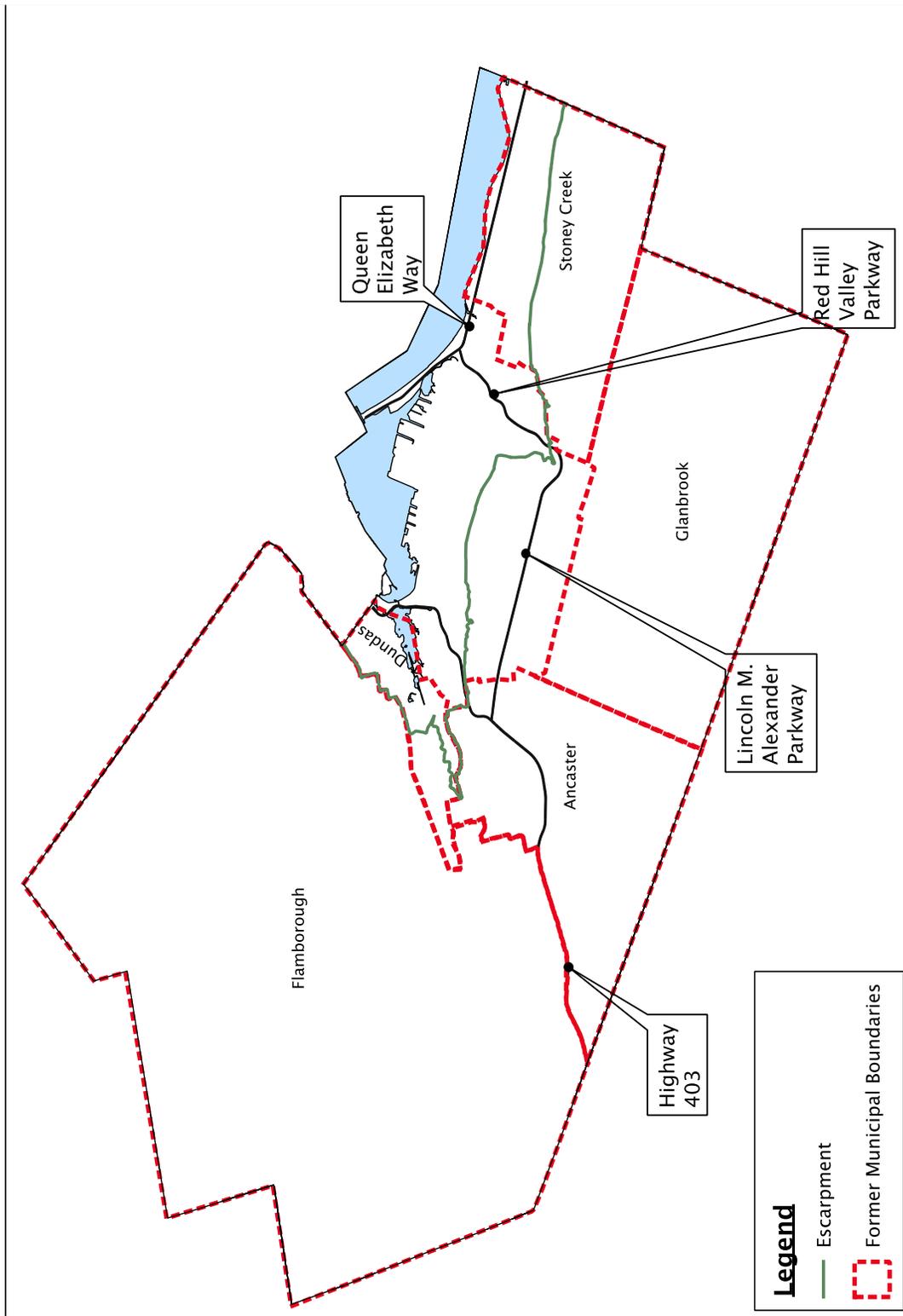
Do you re-consent?

(If yes) Thank you. Please sign this form stating that you have given re-consent (see appendix 8).

(If no). Ok. We will delete the interview from our tape recorder and destroy all our written materials.

Thanks again for your time

Appendix B: Map



Appendix C: Recruitment Brochure

**What do you think about your neighbourhood?
What do you like about it?
What don't you like about it?
WE WANT TO KNOW!**

We are currently looking for people over the age of 18 interested in taking part in an interview about their neighbourhood this summer.

This interview would take place at a time and place that is most convenient to you. It would take about 20 minutes to complete. Your participation would be voluntary.

It is hoped that our study will influence future planning decisions made not only by the City of Hamilton, but also other municipalities throughout Canada.

Your participation would greatly benefit this outcome.

This study has been reviewed cleared for research ethics by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics
Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for
Administrative Development and
Support

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

The faculty supervisor for this project is:

Dr. Richard Harris
School of Geography and Earth
Sciences

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario
905-525-9140 ext. 27216
Email: harrisr@mcmaster.ca



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

**A study about
neighbourhood
perceptions in
Hamilton, Ontario**

Research Investigators:

Amy Shanks
Masters Student

Victoria Coates
Undergraduate Summer Researcher

School of Geography and Earth
Sciences

McMaster University
Hamilton, ON

Compensation:

Your participation will be voluntary and you will thus not be compensated. We thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Confidentiality:

All answers will be confidential. No information concerning specific addresses or identities will be recorded. No one but the investigators of this study will know who participated.

About the study:

This study is concerned with how people in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both their own neighbourhoods, and other neighbourhoods in the city.

It is also interested in understanding how these perceptions are connected to the local municipal political situation, as well as how they correspond to the thoughts of experts in the field of urban planning.

For more information about this study, or to arrange an interview time, please contact:

Amy Shanks

Email:
shanksa@mcmaster.ca

Phone:
(289)-775-9474

Appendix D: Recruitment schedule

Date	Time	Neighbourhood
Saturday May 26, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Barnstown
Monday May 28, 2012	6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Albion
Monday June 4, 2012	7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Barnstown
Sunday June 10, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Albion
Tuesday June 19, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Albion
Wednesday June 20, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Barnstown
Sunday June 24, 2012	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Barnstown
Tuesday June 26, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Barnstown
Wednesday July 4, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Albion
Saturday July 7, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Albion
Monday July 9, 2012	3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Albion
Tuesday July 10, 2012	3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Barnstown
Thursday July 19, 2012	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Dundas
Monday July 23, 2012	7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Dundas

Appendix E: Letter of information

DATE: May 1, 2012



LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT A study about neighborhood perceptions in Hamilton, Ontario

Investigators:

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Richard Harris
School of Geography and Earth Sciences
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905)-525-9140 ext. 27216
Email: harrisr@mcmaster.ca

Principal Investigators:

Amy Shanks
School of Geography and Earth
Sciences
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(289)-775-9474
Email: shanksa@mcmaster.ca

Victoria Coates
School of Geography and Earth
Sciences
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(289)-775-9473
Email: coatevm@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study

This study is an academic research investigation concerned with how people in Hamilton, Ontario perceive both their own neighbourhoods, and other neighbourhoods in the city. It is also interested in understanding how these perceptions are connected to the local municipal political situation, as well as how they correspond to the thoughts of certain experts in the field of urban planning.

This project is a part of our studies at McMaster University.

Procedure

Your contribution to this study will involve participating in an interview that will take about forty minutes to complete.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your neighbourhood, such as what you like, and like the least about it, and what character you think it has. Additionally, you will be asked about amalgamation, and how this has impacted your thoughts on your neighbourhood. As well, you will be asked to detail your thoughts on what planning experts have said about neighbourhoods similar to your own. You will also be asked to label a map of Hamilton, outlining what character you attribute to different parts of the city. Finally, in order to obtain some context for your answers, some demographic questions about you and your own home will be asked.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. Written notes will also be taken.

All participants must be 18 years of age or older.

On the attached consent form, you will be asked to indicate whether or not you might wish to participate in a follow-up interview. Follow-up interviews will be undertaken if the

researchers feel they need to obtain further clarity on certain parts of the study. You can always choose not to participate in a follow-up interview, even if you indicate so on the consent form.

Potential Risks

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. The questions are asking primarily about your opinions and therefore there are no right or wrong answers.

Potential Benefits

The research will not benefit you directly. It is hoped that what we learn from this study will help city planners better understand what people want from their neighbourhoods. As well, this research has the potential to better inform the literature on how people perceive their neighbourhoods.

Confidentiality

All answers will be confidential. No information concerning your specific address or identity will be recorded. No one but the investigators of this study will know whether you participated.

The information/data that you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Only the researchers associated with this project will have access. The data will be destroyed one year after the study is completed.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time, even partway through the study, without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, any information you provide will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. Withdrawal will no longer be possible after the data has been analyzed however.

As stated previously, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable.

Study Results

This study is expected to be completed by approximately August 2013. If you wish, you may request to receive a brief summary of the research findings once the study is completed. This can be done so on the consent form attached. You may also contact one of the researchers listed below.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact:

Amy Shanks

shanksa@mcmaster.ca

(289)-775-9474

or

Victoria Coates

coatevm@mcmaster.ca

(289)-775-9473

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Appendix F: Consent form

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Amy Shanks and Victoria Coates of McMaster University.

I am over 18 years of age.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded Yes No

2. Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address:

Or to this mailing address:

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I wish to be contacted about the possibility of a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

Yes. Please contact me at (email or telephone): _____

No.

Appendix G: Demographic information of participants

Participant	Neighbourhood	Gender	Age	Born in Canada? (Y/N)	Country of birth (if not Canada)	Employment status	# years lived in Hamilton	# years lived in house	# people in house	# people in house over age 18
A1	Albion	M	23	Y	-	Works away from home	23	23	5	5
A2	Albion	F	39	N	Pakistan	Works away from home	8	7	6	2
A3	Albion	F	49	Y	-	Works away from home	30	4	2	2
A4	Albion	F	55	Y	-	Works away from home	55	23	2	2
A5	Albion	M	19	Y	-	Works away from home	19	11	4	3
A6	Albion	F	28	Y	-	Works away from home	4	1	3	2
A7	Albion	F	65	Y	-	Retired	49	22	3	3
A8	Albion	F	36	Y	-	Unemployed	2	2	5	2
A9	Albion	M	37	Y	-	Works away from home	15	4	4	2
A10	Albion	M	78	N	Malta	Retired	61	31	2	2
A11	Albion	M	69	Y	-	Retired	69	28	4	4
A12	Albion	F	31	Y	-	Works away from home	31	4	4	2
A13	Albion	F	47	Y	-	Works away from home	47	19	4	2
B1	Barnstown	F	51	Y	-	Works away from home	47	12	4	4
B2	Barnstown	M	74	Y	-	Retired	74	21	2	2
B3	Barnstown	M	40	Y	-	Works away from home	12	6	4	2
B4	Barnstown	F	54	N	Scotland	Works away from home	46	22	5	2
B5	Barnstown	M	60	Y	-	Retired	60	23	3	3
B6	Barnstown	M	65	Y	-	Retired	65	20	2	2
B7	Barnstown	F	56	Y	-	Works away from home	7	7	4	4
B8	Barnstown	M	60	Y	-	Works from home	7	7	4	3
B9	Barnstown	F	21	Y	-	Works away from home	21	15	3	3
B10	Barnstown	M	50	Y	-	Works away from home	50	22	5	5
B11	Barnstown	M	81	N	Iran	Retired	25	25	2	2
B12	Barnstown	M	18	Y	-	Unemployed	18	17	5	3
D1	Dundas	F	63	N	Czechoslovakia	Retired	43	26	2	2
D2	Dundas	F	47	Y	-	Works from home	24	12	4	2
D3	Dundas	F	31	N	Guatemala	Works away from home	6	0	4	2
D4	Dundas	F	60	Y	-	Works away from home	5	4	6	3
D5	Dundas	M	23	Y	-	Works away from home	23	20	5	5