Race and social capital: Examining trust and connection in Toronto

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Introduction

Social capital is a key determinant of health, well-being, and overall quality of life.[1-3] Recent work in the City of Toronto described the city's social capital, and came to a largely positive conclusion: the residents of Toronto seem to have robust levels of social capital, as shown by their high levels of trust in one another, in the city's institutions, and in their frequent social participation.[4] These are forms of social capital that help produce the City's capacity to work collectively to achieve every resident's well-being.[5]

However, this work did not fully explore disparities in social capital, and where the disparities lie. In other words, it did not provide a comprehensive focus on inequalities in social capital. Decreasing inequities in social capital allows the development of a strong civil society where residents can equitably reap the benefits of living in Toronto.

This paper builds upon the previous study, by exploring differences in social capital for different racial and national-origin groups, as one dimension of inequality in access to social capital. The paper focuses on people who identified themselves as White, South Asian, Chinese, and Black– the largest ethnic identity groups in the City.[6]

Methods

Data

The data for this paper came from a cross-sectional survey of social capital for residents living in the City of Toronto. The Toronto Social Capital study was collected in collaboration with Toronto Foundation, TAS Design Build, Community Foundations of Canada, Canadian Heritage, United Way Greater Toronto, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the Wellesley Institute.

Data collection took place between March 12 and July 10, 2018. 3207 people participated in the study. The survey was offered in English, Portuguese, Mandarin and Cantonese.

Respondents were approached in three stages: first through a letter inviting them to participate online or over the telephone, second by telephone follow-up, and third by approaching new respondents through an online panel. The data also included a quota sample of people who identified as Black, South Asian, or Chinese when asked; *"To what racial or cultural groups do you belong?"* and given the following options: White, South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean or Japanese, Aboriginal/Indigenous, Other, Can not say. We grouped this variable into five categories: White, South Asian, Chinese, Black, Multiple groups (those who checked multiple boxes), and all else. Note that we use the term 'race/ethnicity' here since the categories in this question are a combination of racial, national, and region-of-origin, and therefore are structured by multiple social processes. They offer a proxy view of differing social realities in Toronto, but should be approached with caution, and throughout this piece we attempt to speak with specificity in order to signal the need for such caution,[7] especially in the absence of greater specificity in the data, which would be scientifically ideal.[8] Further technical details on data collection and sampling for this survey can be found elsewhere.[4]

Outcome measures

Trust

General trust was measured using a question asking whether most people could be trusted. Respondents were also asked how much they felt they could trust their family, people they went to work or school with, and strangers. Additionally, they were asked how likely it was that a lost wallet would be returned to its owner by someone close by, the police, or a stranger.

Social participation

Social participation was measured using questions asking participants about their engagement with formal groups, associations, and volunteer organizations. Examples of these groups include: a union or professional association, a political party or group, a sports or recreational organization, a cultural, educational or hobby organization, a religious-affiliated group, a service club, a seniors group, a youth organization, or an immigrant or ethnic association.

Confidence in institutions

The confidence that residents place in institutions has been linked with social and economic growth. Participants were asked about the level of confidence they had in the following institutions: the police, justice system, school system, local merchants and business people, local media, City Hall, their local City Councillor and neighbourhood centres serving their community.

Analysis

We used multivariate logistic and ordinal regression analyses, controlling for age, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, education, income, survey mode (internet/telephone), and marital status. We included a squared term for age to account for non-linear associations. Age was mean-centred before producing the squared term, to reduce collinearity.

Note that for tests of significance, we test whether each group was compared to the rest of the sample, in order to avoid comparing respondents to a single reference group.

We also employed multiple imputation with chained equations (20 imputations) to assuage problems with missing data. All outcome variables were included in the imputation process, but cases with missing values on the outcome variable for each regression were excluded, in order to avoid inducing artificial associations. We tested interaction terms between race/ethnicity, and income, immigration status, gender, and age; interactions were passively imputed. All imputation models and estimation models employed survey sampling weights.

For interactions with age, we interacted age, and age squared, with Black, Chinese, and South Asian group identity. We tested for age interactions by jointly testing the interaction of each racialized group with age and age squared, using an F-test (so, for example, to test whether there was an interaction between self-identified South Asian and age, we tested whether the interaction between South Asian identity and age, and South Asian identity and age squared were both equal to zero).

Analyses were carried out with Stata software version 15.[9] Approval for this project was provided by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board, (REB-2019-147).

Results

Sample characteristics. In the Toronto Social Capital study sample, 7.6 per cent of people identified as South Asian, 9.1 per cent as Chinese, and 8.8 per cent as Black (weighted numbers). The sample also largely has at least some post-secondary education, is slightly more female than male, Canadian-born (66.5 per cent), and is 38.8 per cent married. The average age was 47, and a slight majority took part online (53.9 per cent). Details are given in Table 1, on the next page.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

	Unweighted N	Unweighted Pct	Weighted N	Weighted Pct
Race/Ethnicity				
White	1757	57.59%	1627	53.36%
South Asian	222	7.28%	231	7.58%
Chinese	280	9.18%	277	9.08%
Black	203	6.65%	269	8.84%
Mixed/multiple	315	10.32%	353	11.58%
Else	274	8.98%	292	9.57%
Income				
No income	32	1.22%	40	1.53%
<30k	313	11.93%	397	15.12%
30-60k	576	21.96%	672	25.63%
60-80k	379	14.45%	380	14.48%
80-100k	385	14.68%	353	13.47%
100-150k	452	17.23%	405	15.44%
>150k	486	18.53%	376	14.33%
Education				
Less than high school	122	3.89%	219	6.97%
High school	286	9.12%	581	18.54%
College, vocational, or some university	781	24.90%	1189	37.91%
BA or more	1947	62.09%	1147	36.58%
Gender				
Male	1445	45.64%	1424	45.06%
Female	1699	53.66%	1713	54.19%
Else	22	0.69%	24	0.75%
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	2743	91.80%	2675	90.04%
Homosexual	158	5.29%	174	5.84%
Bisexual	70	2.34%	99	3.33%
Not sexually active	17	0.57%	23	0.78%
Immigration status				
Canadian-born	2077	65.11%	2119	66.51%
More than five years	1040	32.60%	986	30.96%
Five years or less	73	2.29%	81	2.54%
Marital status				
Married	1403	45.03%	1205	38.8%
Common-law	238	7.64%	280	9.01%
Never married	925	29.69%	1107	35.64%
Divorced/separated	342	10.98%	337	10.86%
Widowed	208	6.68%	177	5.7%
Mode				
Telephone	1587	49.49%	1477	46.07%
Online	1620	50.51%	1730	53.93%
Age (NB: average)	(51.79)		(47.41)	

Table 2: Group differences in trust

	Race/Ethnicity					
	White	**South Asian**	**Chinese**	**Black**	**Multiple Groups**	**All Else**
General Trust	**61.0%**	54.6%	57.0%	**38.2%**	56.3%	61.9%
Very likely wallet would be returned by: Someone close by	32.0%	**37.8%**	**22.7%**	25.0%	30.9%	32.4%
Very likely wallet would be returned by: Police	**62.7%**	65.0%	59.9%	**40.2%**	62.0%	57.1%
Very likely wallet would be returned by: Stranger	7.8%	7.4%	**5.2%**	6.9%	7.1%	7.2%
Family can be trusted a lot	73.4%	74.5%	76.9%	66.4%	72.6%	71.3%
People at work & school can be trusted a lot	**37.4%**	32.8%	33.0%	**24.6%**	31.3%	35.4%
Strangers can be trusted a lot	**5.8%**	4.2%	4.3%	4.6%	5.4%	4.3%

Legend
■ Significantly lower than all other groups (p<.05)
■ Significantly higher than all other groups (p<.05)

Trust. Table 2 shows that White-identifying respondents generally showed the highest rate of general trust, were also very likely to say a lost wallet would be returned by the police, and trusted strangers, as well as people at work and school, significantly more than all other groups. Respondents who identified as South Asian were significantly more likely than other groups to report that a wallet would be returned by someone close by, but did not differ from other groups in other respects. Respondents who identified as Chinese were significantly less likely to say a wallet would be returned by someone close by, or a stranger. Respondents who identified as Black reported lower levels of general trust, and were notably less likely to say that a lost wallet would be returned by the police, or to trust people at work and school.

Table 3: Racial differences in social participation

	Race/Ethnicity					
	White	**South Asian**	**Chinese**	**Black**	**Multiple Groups**	**All Else**
Volunteers	36.0%	**49.4%**	**27.9%**	44.4%	40.9%	38.2%
Civic Engagement – Unions/ Professional Associations	28.0%	28.2%	22.9%	**38.3%**	29.1%	22.7%
Civic Engagement – Political Parties/Groups	12.0%	12.1%	8.3%	6.6%	10.7%	7.1%
Civic Engagement – Sports/Recreation	27.1%	24.8%	22.7%	23.7%	25.6%	30.3%
Civic Engagement – Cultural/ Educational/Hobby Organizations	28.3%	29.1%	**19.0%**	34.5%	27.8%	31.4%
Civic Engagement – Religious-Affiliated Groups	**16.7%**	22.5%	**12.7%**	**38.6%**	25.0%	25.6%
Civic Engagement – Service Clubs	9.0%	11.2%	4.3%	**4.2%**	7.6%	10.7%
Civic Engagement – Seniors Groups	**8.7%**	12.8%	9.2%	11.1%	**13.6%**	8.3%
Civic Engagement – Youth Organizations	6.1%	9.2%	**3.7%**	9.8%	9.9%	10.5%
Civic Engagement – Immigrant or Ethnic Associations/Clubs	**4.2%**	7.9%	**2.7%**	8.4%	**9.2%**	8.2%

Legend
■ Significantly lower than all other groups (p<.05)
■ Significantly higher than all other groups (p<.05)

Social participation. Respondents who identified as South Asian volunteered significantly more often compared to all other respondents but showed no differences in forms of social participation. Regarding social participation, self-identified Chinese respondents were significantly less likely to volunteer, participate in cultural/educational/ hobby organizations, religious-affiliated organizations, youth organizations, and immigrant associations and clubs. Respondents who identified as Black showed a higher rate of union and professional association participation and engagement in religious-affiliated groups. They were also less likely to participate in service clubs. People who reported more than one racial category ('checked multiple categories') were more likely to participate in religious organizations, seniors' groups, and immigrant clubs.

Table 4: Racial differences in confidence in Toronto's institutions

	Race/Ethnicity					
	White	**South Asian**	**Chinese**	**Black**	**Multiple Groups**	**All Else**
A great deal of confidence – Police	**32.7%**	30.6%	27.7%	**12.3%**	26.5%	27.7%
A great deal of confidence - Justice System	18.6%	**22.9%**	17.4%	**8.4%**	18.5%	17.3%
A great deal of confidence - School System	16.0%	**22.7%**	15.1%	**10.5%**	16.7%	17.2%
A great deal of confidence - Business People	**18.0%**	14.7%	13.1%	12.1%	14.3%	15.8%
A great deal of confidence - Local Media	11.8%	13.7%	11.1%	8.6%	12.1%	10.8%
A great deal of confidence - City Hall	10.3%	12.8%	11.7%	**7.3%**	11.4%	12.5%
A great deal of confidence - City Councilor	14.0%	14.4%	14.4%	**10.4%**	13.4%	15.1%
A great deal of confidence - Neighbourhood Centre	23.5%	24.1%	**18.2%**	23.7%	22.3%	25.4%

Legend
■ Significantly lower than all other groups (p<.05)
■ Significantly higher than all other groups (p<.05)

Confidence in Toronto's institutions. Respondents who identified as White generally reported significantly greater confidence in the police and businesspeople, compared to all other groups. Respondents who identified as South Asian reported significantly greater confidence in the justice system and school system. Respondents who identified as Chinese reported significantly less confidence in neighbourhood centres. Black respondents reported significantly less trust in the police, justice system, school system, city hall, and city counselors, compared to all other groups.

Interactions. Individuals have many different identities, not just their race/ethnicity, and the intersectional nature of identity means that associations between race and social capital can be modified by other factors. To address this, we explored statistical interactions between racialized identities, and gender and income. We found the following statistically-significant associations (we report only findings significant at p<.05):

• *Interactions with gender*.
  o There was a positive interaction between female gender, and South Asian identity, when predicting participation in a service club.
  o There was a similar positive interaction for participation in immigrant clubs.
  o There was a negative interaction between female gender, and Chinese identity predicting membership in a union.
  o Similar with confidence in neighbourhood centres.
  o Similar with trusting one's family.

- *Interactions with income.*
  - o There was a negative interaction between income and South Asian identity when predicting participation in a union.
  - o Similar for membership in a service club.
  - o There was a negative interaction between income and Chinese identity when predicting trusting people at work and school.
  - o There was a positive interaction between income and Black identity when predicting membership in immigrant clubs.
  - o There was a negative interaction between income and Black identity when predicting confidence in the police.
  - o Similar with the justice system.

One caution here is the large number of statistical tests that we carried out (25 outcomes, three groups, two interaction tests each; 150 tests). With this many tests, we would expect about seven to eight tests to be significant merely by chance. We received 11 significant interactions, not much more than we would expect as a matter of randomness. Some of the associations may invite further speculation, such as the negative interaction between female gender and Chinese identity for three forms of social capital. However, these speculations should be approached with caution.

Discussion

The findings strongly suggest that there are differences in social capital across racial groups in the city of Toronto. They also imply that there is an opportunity for specific institutions to better interface with the three communities of interest. These improved relationships would not only build positive social connections between these communities and institutions but would also better connect community members to each other.

The results were not the same for all racialized populations, and each showed a distinct pattern of associations, discussed below.

Those who self-identified as part of the Black racialized group
The clearest signal in these data is that those respondents who self-identified as Black do not feel as much confidence in the police or justice system compared to all other groups, and this is the finding with the most support from other studies.[10–13] Informed through surveys on public perceptions of police and resulting recommendations, the Toronto Police Service is currently working to strengthen the relationships between the police and communities.[13] Hopefully this study will help to contribute to that work.

The low confidence in the school system shown by the Black respondent group is aligned with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Student Census finding showing that compared to the overall student population, Black students are less likely to feel that staff respect their background, or that school rules have been fairly applied to them.[14] Therefore many of the same concerns about the police could also be raised with the school system. Less well-documented in the literature are the high levels of union participation, and this could be a very important site for the formation of social capital.

Respondents who identified as South Asian
There were relatively few associations between South Asian identity, and social capital. The two clearest were that respondents who identified as South Asian volunteer more compared to all other groups and have more confidence in the school and justice systems.

Literature covering South Asian newcomer experiences speak to social capital generated through volunteering and community organization engagement.[15,16] This may account for some of the associations documented above.

The finding surrounding confidence in the school system also corresponds to that of the TDSB's Student Census, which shows that South Asian origin students were just as or more satisfied with their overall school experience and the support they received, when compared to the overall TDSB student population.[17]

Respondents who identified as Chinese
Compared to self-identified White respondents, respondents who identified as Chinese were less likely to trust strangers, or believe they would return their wallet. They also reported lower levels of confidence in business people and neighbourhood centres. This is commensurate with other work in the Canadian context, which found that Chinese origin respondents were less likely to report high levels of interpersonal trust.[10]

Recommendations

The data presented here do not provide a path towards specific interventions that would be effective in mitigating inequities in social capital. Here we outline steps for forthcoming projects that aim to design such interventions.

Central to our recommendations is that researchers and practitioners work to develop a *theory of change* that treats equity in social capital as a primary outcome. It is not enough to develop programs that will enrich or sustain the city's social capital as a whole - such work is too likely to benefit those who already have the means to participate in civic life and feel served by its institutions. We must centre equity to avoid this potential pitfall, and also to ensure that we understand inequities in social capital not as *deficits in populations*, but rather as the outcome of *historical and structural conditions* that have left some racialized groups under-served, or even mistreated.

To that end, a theory of change may wish to consider the following principles, drawn from various organizations in the GTA:
• Moving beyond tokenistic numerical representation of racialized persons in organizations, towards changing the power dynamics between institutions and racialized communities.[18]
• Creating not only mentorship programs for racialized persons in school and work settings, but also sponsorship, where the sponsor is evaluated, and held accountable, on whether they measurably contributed to the advancement of racialized persons.[19]
• Allocating person-hours to build and maintain positive relations with community, including parents in the case of schools. This could be done through extension of existing job descriptions, or the creation of new specialized positions. Such positions could also create new relations among community members through events that bring communities together or build bridges across many communities.
• The formation of new social structures that build stronger connections between organizations and racialized communities, potentially on the model of community benefits networks,[20] or community backbone organizations, which have the responsibility of increasing network connections among community members, among service agencies, and building connections between the two domains.[21]

This list is of course not exhaustive, but may serve as a point of departure for that necessary work in the future.

Limitations and next steps

Although this study was able to consider social capital with a wide variety of measures, in a high-quality dataset, there are limitations that prevent some analyses.

First, by only considering these large, aggregate racial categories, we necessarily obscure the within-group differences. The groups represent a range of different communities, in some cases from widely different cultural backgrounds, and with varying histories with immigration to Canada. The categories correspond to those used in the census, to describe 'visible minorities' and therefore to the Employment Equity Act. The United Nations has levied criticism against the 'visible minority' construct, as potentially homogenizing of diverse communities' experiences,[22] and future work would ideally use more, or different, measures. It may be there is as much variability within these groups, as between, and a more disaggregated analysis would allow for exploring this. However, with only a few thousand respondents, the number of cases in each of these smaller categories would soon become too few for any meaningful tests. A much larger dataset would be necessary for this analysis.

Second, as suggested in the introduction, there are many ways to think about social capital, and the direction taken in this piece is largely focused on the communal aspects of the concept. However, social capital is also a key factor in the reproduction of inequality, where some people can use their connections to advance themselves, while others may be similarly skilled, but lack the relationships to meet their full potential.[23–25] Many of these helpful relationships are formed among the wealthy and powerful, and are still called 'social capital' – but the kind that helps some people, and not others. Future projects should seek to understand this vertical dimension of social capital.

Finally, these data do not necessarily tell the whole story of social capital in Toronto, due to biases in survey participation. Although the Toronto arm of the study was offered in multiple languages, Toronto is a highly linguistically diverse city, and language barriers may have prevented many people from participating. Low response rates among people who were unable to communicate with the survey team could also have biased the sample towards people who are relatively like one another, thus further reducing the possibility of representing the true range of Toronto residents. Future work in Toronto should consider new strategies for reaching diverse respondents, including but not limited to racialized respondents.

Conclusions

The results suggest that the social capital of Toronto is fractured, but also show where there may be opportunities to bridge the city's social divides. The results point towards serious deficits in the way the City's institutions are serving racialized populations, including the police, the courts, and the school system. These bonds of trust between Torontonians need to be strengthened through deliberate action on the part of these institutions. These organizations are recipients of public money, and possess legal authority over many aspects of residents' lives. They also have the potential for great positive change using the powers granted to them. Therefore, they have a responsibility to make the changes needed to better serve Toronto residents, and strengthen the city's civic life.

In terms of where to begin, the results also point towards kinds of organizations that could spark new partnerships. Unions, religious organizations, and voluntary organizations all show great potential as bridges between formal institutions and racialized communities. For institutions, one first step could be to remodel the roles of public service workers, especially those interacting with equity-seeking groups, to have a greater emphasis on enabling social networks.[26] These workers, could work to connect community members with one another, but also to connect them with service providers, such as health care providers and legal clinics.

Disparities in social capital can produce urban inequality, but building communal bonds can also help to reduce it. The findings outlined above should therefore encourage us to undertake new work to make the city's social capital work well for all its residents.

Acknowledgements

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