TRACING THE ROOTS OF RACIAL PROFILING: GENDER BIAS, SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS, AND POLICE ENCOUNTERS WITH BLACK YOUTH IN TORONTO'S EGLINTON WEST

TENISHA KEYANA NOEL

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Abstract

This study examines how race, gender, and socio-economic status intersect to shape the policing experiences of Black youth in Toronto's Eglinton West, focusing on the Toronto Police Service's 13 Division. Grounded in Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, the research explores how systemic bias, spatial politics, and institutional policing practices contribute to the over-policing and criminalization of Black youth within a historically Black neighbourhood undergoing gentrification. Using a mixed-methods approach combining an in-depth interview with a community worker and census analysis, the study highlights how racialized surveillance practices, including carding, economic marginalization, and the erosion of community spaces, intensify exposure to state violence. A comparative analysis with Jane and Finch demonstrates how differing urban environments shape distinct policing patterns, community experiences, and forms of resilience. The study concludes with policy recommendations emphasizing community empowerment, transformative justice, and structural reform in policing to address racial profiling and systemic harm.

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First and foremost, I give all honour to the Almighty Father, God, the giver of life, health, and strength. He is the source of every blessing and the foundation of all that I am. To God be the glory for the great and marvellous things He has done.

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Memory, Community, and Scholarship

I grew up at 11 Greentree Court in Toronto's Eglinton West corridor, a stretch of Eglinton Avenue West from Dufferin to Marlee known to many as Little Jamaica**.** As a young Grenadian Canadian woman, I knew this place as home. Each morning, I walked past rows of Black-owned shops: patty boutiques, barber shops, hair salons, and corner stores bursting with Caribbean produce. The scent of fried plantain and jerk smoke drifted through open doors; basslines from reggae, dancehall and soca pulsed from passing cars. In this vibrant corridor, "a hub for Toronto's Caribbean community" for decades, I learned that urban space is neither incidental nor inert. These sounds and smells were signals of belonging**.** Even as some storefronts showed signs of disinvestment, Little Jamaica remained "the bastion of Caribbean Toronto," sustaining our shared memory and identity. From the sashaying steel pan notes at festivals to the soft patois spoken by storekeepers, this street mapped out my childhood. It was a semi-public institution of culture and memory, one where being Grenadian, Jamaican, or Trinidadian never made me feel out of place, and where I first understood the meaning of home. As shown in Figure 6, this is the very stretch I used to walk by every day, before it was demolished to make way for the Oakwood LRT station (Swan, 2025).

Figure 6. (Swan, 2025), Eglinton Avenue West at Oakwood Avenue is the future site of the Oakwood LRT station.

Mapping My Routes: Streets, Shops, and Community

Every day I traced familiar routes through this neighbourhood. School mornings began at Regal Road Public School (north of Eglinton) and ended in the alleys and sidewalks where my friends and I played. After school, I'd stop by Triple Triple Wings & Fries, where I used to get cheap pizza and wings. I often passed Manisha for a warm beef patty, one of many Jamaicanowned eateries serving hand-grilled jerk chicken. When I wanted my hair done, I would go to Tina at her salon, a space full of laughter, conversation, and community energy. All these points, home, school, pizza and patty shops, barber shops, and aunties, formed my own living map of Little Jamaica. They were anchor points in a geography of diaspora: the barbershop where men shared news between fades; the corner bodega where I bought cheap DVDs; the street fairs that transformed the avenue into a hub of Caribbean culture, memory, and survival.

This area didn't need a label on a map; in my mind, it was always a neighbourhood that felt like home.

Our community was tightly knit and diverse. We were Grenadian, Jamaican, Saint Vincentian, Trinidadian, Barbadian, Guyanese, and more, part of a Carribean mosaic. My mother's stories about our island home mixed with my neighbours' tales of arrivals from Kingston or Georgetown. I saw people who looked like me walking these streets, stocking shelves or cutting hair, preserving the languages and flavours of home. This diversity was a source of pride. Throughout Little Jamaica, banners now proclaim a "vibrant Caribbean market," and local festivals celebrate reggae beats and patty feasts. I remember when those festivals were rare; now, community events refuse to shame Eglinton West but embrace its rich heritage. Those experiences taught me how profoundly our surroundings shape us. The texture of Little Jamaica, the rhythms, foods, languages- made the streets familiar and safe, even as changes loomed on the horizon.

Policing, Surveillance, and Identity

While I was growing up, my sense of home on Eglinton West coexisted uneasily with the presence of police. As a Black girl, I quickly became aware that the authorities often watched us. I remember once seeing a police cruiser idling outside a patty shop, officers eyeing our gathering. My mother taught me caution: "Smile and be polite, if they stop you and tell the truth." The others in my family exchanged knowing looks whenever they saw a police cruiser; it was common knowledge that Black youth were targeted on these streets. In my own life, I was never formally charged with anything, but surveillance felt constant. I noticed cars following us at night, saw frisking near community centres, and heard friends' stories of stop-and-search on

Dufferin Street. Those experiences were often shrouded in silence, but the fear they instilled was quietly discussed at home.

This reality intersects with my identity. I was not only Black in a Caribbean diaspora, but also a daughter of immigrants and a young woman. When I was in the area or hanging out in the park, I felt the scrutiny more keenly than any of my white counterparts. Sometimes I felt doubly seen, by the community, I belonged, but by the police, I was a suspect. The memories of youth are still raw: the humiliation one friend described when police roughly grabbed her arm as she walked home, or the way my own pulse quickened whenever sirens passed nearby. I carried an inherited dread, too; stories of relatives and neighbours' encounters with police haunted community conversations. These weren't isolated anecdotes but a collective truth: as one person put it, "someone in your family has experienced some trauma with the police… It's a collective experience." This collective memory and my own small encounters inform how I navigate Eglinton West to this day.

From Memory to Inquiry: Framing “Eglinton West”

This personal narrative is not an endpoint but a prelude. It grounds the research in lived experience and situates the inquiry within the social, cultural, and spatial history of Little Jamaica. My story reflects broader patterns observed by many: Caribbean enclaves in Toronto have long thrived as cultural and economic hubs, yet have simultaneously endured neglect, displacement, and erasure. Since 2011, more than 140 local businesses in Eglinton West have closed due to transit construction, gentrification, and rising rents (Swan, 2025). Families have been pushed outward to the suburbs, prompting urgent questions about whether cultural networks can remain intact beyond the neighbourhood. These reflections underscore the complexity of surveillance, policing, and intersecting forms of marginalization, shaping how Black youth navigate urban space and how communities resist pressure and erasure.

I grew up in the heart of Eglinton West, and this lived connection offers a grounded vantage point from which to understand the racial, spatial, and socio-economic dynamics that structure daily life for Black youth in the area. Far from compromising objectivity, this insider position strengthens the research by aligning with Critical Race Theory’s emphasis on lived experience as a legitimate and necessary form of knowledge. My personal and professional commitments, rooted in community advocacy, legal research, and youth-centred work, directly inform my engagement with systemic issues such as racial profiling, socio-economic marginalization, and gender-based inequities. These are not abstract themes; they are realities I have witnessed, experienced, and worked to challenge.

Throughout the research process, I employed qualitative methods grounded in ethical interviewing and trauma-informed practice to support respectful, open dialogue, especially given the study's engagement with sensitive issues such as policing and structural racism. No participant had a relationship with me that could influence their response, and I maintained a reflexive practice through journaling, self-interrogation, and sustained attention to how my identity shaped the research encounter. Consistent with CRT and Intersectionality, I recognize that knowledge production is never neutral; the meaning of law, policy, and governance emerges not only in documents and data but also in the lived textures of daily life, the hum of a barbershop radio, the warmth of a neighbour's greeting, the quiet tension when police cars pass. This narrative invites the reader into a street-level perspective, showing how the sensory rhythms of Little Jamaica shaped both belonging and awareness of structural scrutiny, and why these experiences must remain central to any meaningful analysis of Black urban life.

An Introduction to the Research

Racial profiling has remained an enduring issue within Canadian law enforcement, disproportionately impacting Black communities, particularly Black youth. This demographic faces elevated scrutiny and surveillance. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018) reports that Black youth are significantly overrepresented in Canada's criminal justice system due to discriminatory policing practices that reinforce systemic inequities and deepen marginalization. Racial profiling, defined in this thesis as the targeting of individuals for suspicion of criminal activity based on race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin rather than behaviour or specific evidence (Tator & Henry, 2006), has become a normalized tool of surveillance across urban spaces. In Toronto, the Eglinton West area, or "Little Jamica"", has long functioned as a transnational ethnic enclave and vibrant meeting place where heritage, identity, and social memory converge (Washington & Washington, 2023; Massey 1995). However, despite its historical significance and the deep sense of belonging it provides to the Caribbean diaspora, Eglinton West has received limited scholarly and policy attention regarding state surveillance and policing. Jane Finch, Toronto's 31 Division, which includes the Jane Finch corridor, an area long associated with disinvestment, stigmatization, and economic marginalization, has been the site of extensive police contact practices documented during the period in which carding was in use (Logical Outcomes, 2014). Data from Logical Outcomes (2014) indicates that between 2008 and 2012, officers in Toronto Police Service 31 Division issued over 238,000 contact cards under the now-abolished practice of carding, with Black individuals accounting for approximately 40% of those stopped. These numbers can illustrate the racialized nature of policing and how Black identity is disproportionately criminalized under the guise of public safety. While the experiences of communities in Jane and Finch are undeniably urgent and worthy of redress, this concentrated focus has inadvertently obscured similar patterns of over-policing and neglect occurring in

Eglinton West. Unlike Jane and Finch, which have become synonymous with racialized policing in Toronto media and research, Eglinton West's surveillance and socio-spatial transformation under gentrification receive minimal attention. This comparative neglect undermines a fuller understanding of how racial profiling functions across Toronto's urban geography, and how neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West, despite their cultural and historical richness, are rendered invisible in narratives about anti-Black racism, spatial justice, and community displacement.

Central Research Question

This study examines how practices of policing and surveillance manifest in the everyday lives of Black youth in Toronto's Eglinton West. Specifically, it asks how intersecting identities of race, gender, and socio-economic status shape Black youths' lived experiences between 2014 and 2024, with particular attention to police encounters and how these interactions influence perceptions of criminality, patterns of surveillance and enforcement, and both the short- and long-term outcomes for those affected.

Toronto's 13 Division, located in the city's west-end neighbourhoods, has been a focal point for concerns over racial profiling, particularly in relation to Black youth. This division includes areas such as Yorkdale-Glen Park, Humewood-Cedarvale, and Forest Hill North, which are home to significant racialized communities (Toronto Police Service, 2024). This study has shown that police disproportionately target Black youth in these neighbourhoods. Between 2008 and 2012, officers in the 13 Division issued thousands of contact cards, with reports have documented that Black individuals represented a substantial share of those stopped during police contact initiatives in the area (Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, 2010). These practices contribute to the criminalization of Black identity, where young Black individuals are often treated as suspects based on race, rather than on their individual behavior (Wortley & Tanner,

2004). The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018) further reports that Black people in Toronto, including youth, are overrepresented in use-of-force incidents, reinforcing broader systemic issues in policing practices. Such racial profiling undermines trust between the police and Black communities, exacerbating tensions, and perpetuating systemic discrimination. The over-policing of Black youth in 13 Division, compounded by socio-economic disparities, reflects a broader pattern of racialized policing found in urban centers nationwide.

My research will focus on the Eglinton West corridor, specifically the neighbourhoods that the City of Toronto officially designates as Keelesdale–Eglinton West, Caledonia–Fairbank, and Oakwood Village. I will also draw comparisons to the area the city named Glenfield–Jane Heights, colloquially known as Jane and Finch. These neighbourhoods are central to my thesis because they represent key cultural, social, and economic spaces within Toronto's Black and Caribbean communities. Including Glenfield–Jane Heights offers a valuable point of comparison that helps contextualize broader patterns beyond the Eglinton West corridor, enriching the analysis of how racialized youth issues and cultural preservation efforts manifest across the city.

Keelesdale–Eglinton West

Keelesdale–Eglinton West has historically been home to a growing Black community, which laid the foundation for the neighbourhood now known as Little Jamaica. The Keelesdale–Eglinton West neighbourhood is in the central part of Toronto, with boundaries beginning at the intersection of the Canadian National Railway/Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and Eglinton Avenue West and continuing east along Eglinton Avenue West to the Canadian National Railway.

From there, the boundary extends south to a property line between Rowntree Avenue and Lavender Road, then west along the property line to the Canadian National Railway/Canadian Pacific Railway, and finally north back to Eglinton Avenue West (City of Toronto, 2021). This area is notable for its proximity to Trethewey Drive in North York, a corridor that has experienced multiple incidents of youth violence and racial profiling (City of Toronto, 2021). These include a 2019 shooting at a low-rise apartment where five teenagers were injured (Global News, 2019), a 2017 shooting near Jane Street and Trethewey Drive that hospitalized two teens (Adowney, 2017), and the 2024 fatal shooting of 15-year-old Mario Giddings near Black Creek Drive and Trethewey Drive (Leon, 2023). Understanding the precise boundaries and the social challenges within the Keelesdale–Eglinton West neighbourhood is essential to contextualizing the experiences of local youth, particularly in relation to violence and systemic issues such as racial profiling. This focus provides a critical foundation for developing targeted community interventions and policies that foster safety, inclusion, and empowerment for Black and Caribbean youth in the area.

Figure 1. Demographic Profile of Keelesdale–Eglinton West (Source: City of Toronto, 2021).

Caledonia-Fairbank

Figure 2 shows the Caledonia–Fairbank neighbourhood, located centrally in Toronto. Its boundaries start at the Canadian National Railway, where it intersects Eglinton Avenue West, extending east along Eglinton Avenue West to Dufferin Street (City of Toronto, 2021). The boundary continues south to just south of Rogers Road, then west along a property line back to the Canadian National Railway, and north to Eglinton Avenue West (City of Toronto, 2021). This neighbourhood flows into Oakwood Village and forms a significant part of Toronto's Little Jamaica, an essential cultural and economic hub for the Caribbean Canadian community (Pitter, 2023). The area is especially relevant to this research as it exemplifies the intersection of cultural preservation and urban development pressures faced by Black Caribbean communities in Toronto. Caledonia–Fairbank's evolving demographic and economic landscape sheds light on issues such as gentrification, displacement, and the resilience of cultural identity amid change (City of Toronto, 2021). Moreover, its proximity to adjacent neighbourhoods impacted by social challenges, such as youth violence and economic inequality, provides a critical context for analyzing how cultural districts can serve as sites of both cultural celebration and sociopolitical contestation.

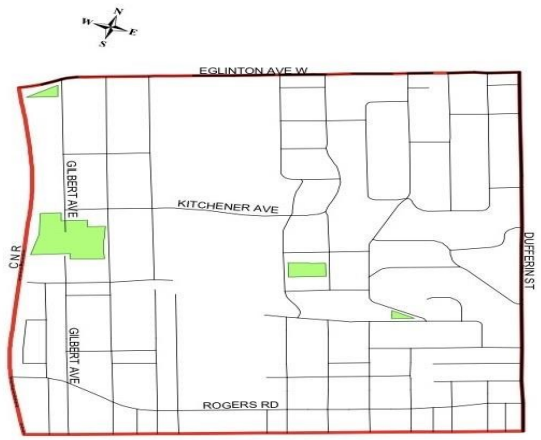

Figure 2. Demographic profile of Caledonia–Fairbank (City of Toronto, 2021).

Oakwood-Village

Figure 3 shows the Oakwood Village neighbourhood, located centrally in Toronto. Its boundaries start at the intersection of Dufferin Street and Eglinton Avenue West, extending east on Eglinton Avenue West to Winnett Avenue, south to Vaughan Road, southeast on Vaughan Road to Arlington Avenue, and south to a property line north of St. Clair Avenue West (City of Toronto, 2021). The boundary then follows property lines westward between Dufferin Street and Westmount Avenue, continuing south of Rogers Road before turning north back to Eglinton Avenue West (City of Toronto, 2021). This area is a key component of the Little Jamaica district and reflects the rich cultural heritage of Caribbean Canadians. This makes Oakwood Village a critical lens for exploring themes of cultural preservation, community empowerment, and the challenges facing Black Canadian communities in metropolitan contexts, where rising property values and gentrification are felt more acutely than in neighbouring areas.

Figure 3. Demographic Profile of Oakwood Village (City of Toronto, 2021).

Glenfield-Jane Heights

Figure 4 shows the Glenfield–Jane Heights neighbourhood, situated in the northwest part of North York. It is bounded by Highway 400 and Finch Avenue West to the north, east along Finch Avenue West to Black Creek, following Black Creek southeast to Jane Street, then north to Sheppard Avenue West, west to Highway 400, and north back to Finch Avenue West (City of Toronto, 2021). This neighbourhood is notable for its proximity to the Trethewey Drive area, which has been a focal point for youth safety concerns and community efforts to address crime and violence. In this research, Glenfield–Jane Heights will be used as a comparative site

alongside the more widely recognized Jane and Finch area. Although media coverage often centers on Jane and Finch when discussing issues involving Black youth and community safety in Toronto, similar challenges occur across various neighbourhoods including Glenfield–Jane Heights. This comparison will help highlight the broader, city-wide nature of youth violence, systemic marginalization, and racial profiling beyond the usual media narratives, offering a more nuanced understanding of how these issues manifest in multiple Black communities throughout Toronto.

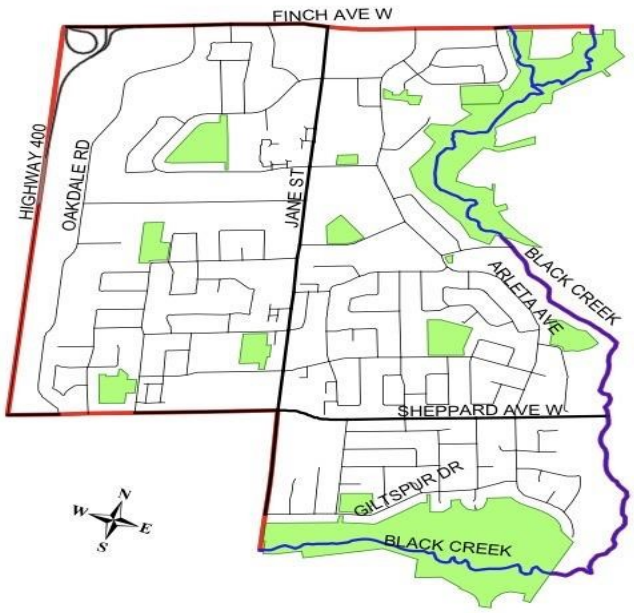

Figure 4. Demographic profile of Glenfield–Jane Heights (City of Toronto, 2021).

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the social and economic contexts within the study areas, I utilize data from the City of Toronto's Neighbourhood Profile to create Table 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Comparison – Eglinton West vs. Jane and Finch (City of

Toronto, 2021). This table presents key indicators across five columns, including the number of total youth population, socio-economic class indicators, housing types, and other relevant demographic factors. By analyzing these data points, the table offers critical insights into the unique characteristics and challenges facing each neighbourhood. For instance, variations in the overall youth populations highlight differences in community composition. Socioeconomic indicators provide context on income levels, employment rates, and educational attainment, while housing data highlights disparities in living conditions and stability that affect residents' quality of life. Presenting this information in a clear tabular format helps readers grasp the differences between Eglinton West and Jane and Finch, grounding the thesis in empirical evidence and emphasizing the neighbourhood-specific dynamics relevant to discussions of youth experiences, cultural identity, and systemic marginalization within Toronto's Black communities.

Table 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Comparison – Eglinton West vs. Jane and Finch

Area / Neighbourhood	Total Population	Total Youth Population (15-24)	Socio-Economic Class (Median Income)	Predominant Housing Type
Keelesdale-Eglinton West	11, 390	1265 (11.1%)	43% of people in this area make between $20,000 to $49,999	4, 380 private dwellings in this area. 38.8% of the neighbourhood lives in a single-detached house, and 40.5% live in apartment buildings.
Caledonia-Fairbank	10,015	1095 (10.97%)	40% of people in this area make between $20,000$49,999.	3, 710 private dwellings in this area, and 45.4% lives in a single-detached house, and 29.8% of the neighbourhood lives in apartment buildings
Oakwood Village	20,710	2070 (10 %)	42% of people in this area make	8,640 private dwellings in this area, and 32% of the

			between $20,000$49,999.	neighbourhood lives in a single-detached house, and 45.2 % live in apartment buildings.
Eglinton West Corridor (COMBINED)	42,115 total amounts of all three areas	4,430 is the total amount of youth and the youth population amounts to 10.5 % of the population	42% of all residents earn between $20,000 and $49,999 per year.	37% of residents live in single-detached houses, while 41% of residents live in apartment buildings.
Glenfield- Jane Heights	30,020	4,355 (14.5%)	48% of people in this area make between $20,000$49,999.	9,995 private dwellings in this area.34% of the neighbourhood lives in a single-detached house, and 45.5 % live in apartment buildings.

Keelesdale-Eglinton West, Caledonia-Fairbank, and Oakwood Village, collectively known as Eglinton West and often referred to as “Little Jamaica” have long been recognized as vibrant cultural and economic enclaves for Black Canadians, particularly those of Caribbean descent (Pitter, 2023; Washington & Washington, 2023). While definitions of “Little Jamaica” vary among scholars and reports, these neighbourhoods are consistently identified as central to the community’s cultural and commercial life. The area has maintained a notable Black Caribbean presence for over a century (Pitter, 2023). The local demographic within these boundaries is notably diverse, reflecting the multicultural character familiar to many culturally rich communities across Toronto. Its role as a site of cultural preservation and communitybuilding reflects broader patterns of diasporic settlement and urban ethnic consolidation in Toronto (Pitter, 2022). The neighbourhood became a focal point for Black communities starting in the mid-20th century, when waves of Caribbean immigrants, primarily from Jamaica, settled in the area (Pitter, 2022). This migration was shaped by broader

immigration policies that facilitated the influx of people from the British Commonwealth, offering new opportunities for individuals who faced limited options in Toronto's more established neighbourhoods (Pitter, 2022). Over time, the area developed into a transnational space, cultivating a strong sense of belonging and cultural expression through businesses, social organizations, and churches, while also becoming a site of racialized labor (Pitter, 2022). However, the dynamics of Eglinton West have shifted dramatically over recent decades. Gentrification, spurred by increased urban development, has led to rising property values, the displacement of long-time residents, and the erosion of community spaces (Barrett, 2023). Concurrently, aggressive policing tactics, often driven by racial bias, have increasingly targeted Black youth, exacerbating existing social and economic tensions (Hayle et al, 2016, p.334).

This research examines the historical and contemporary factors contributing to racial profiling in Eglinton West, particularly how gender, socio-economic disparities, and policing shape the experiences of Black youth. Framed as a prolegomenon to a larger research project in the future, this study foregrounds narrative as a methodological lens, beginning with my own experiences as a young Black woman of Grenadian-Canadian heritage navigating the streets, schools, and community spaces of Eglinton West. These personal reflections illuminate the spatial and intersectional dynamics of surveillance and marginalization, while an extended conversation with a community worker provides one additional voice in a broader dialogue, highlighting systemic inequities without claiming empirical generalizability. By situating the study in lived experience and place, this work underscores that racialized policing is both local and pervasive, and that research must extend beyond widely studied areas, recognizing the multiple "Black spaces" across Toronto.

Issues the Interviews Was Designed to Highlight

While this thesis is guided by a single central research question, the interview was designed to highlight a set of interrelated issues that illuminate different dimensions of Black youths' lived experiences with policing and surveillance in Eglinton West. While Canada often prides itself on multiculturalism and equity, the continued over-policing of Black youth exposes the gap between public ideals and institutional realities. Black youth continue to experience disproportionate surveillance, police stop, use-of-force incidents, and criminalization, phenomena that are often justified under the guise of maintaining public safety but in practice reflect longstanding patterns of anti-Black racism (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011).The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018) has reported that Black individuals are more likely than any other racial group to be stopped by police, subjected to force, or treated with suspicion, even in the absence of criminal behavior. These practices are often associated with racialized, low-income neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West, where the intersection of race, space, and class may make Black youth particularly vulnerable to systemic profiling.

Racial profiling in this context is not the result of isolated incidents or "bad apples" within the police force. The Toronto Police Service's 13 Division, covering Caledonia–Fairbank and parts of Oakwood Village along Eglinton Avenue West between Keele and Dufferin Streets, borders Keelesdale–Eglinton West and has become a focal point for these policing practices. Even after reforms aimed at limiting carding, the practice has continued under different names, contributing to the criminalization of Black identity (Hayle et al., 2016; Rankin, 2014). Although these data do not capture exactly how many youths were directly affected by carding or its successor practices, there is strong reason to believe that police-initiated contact remains disproportionately high in these neighbourhoods, suggesting that youth encounters with law

enforcement continue to be a significant concern. The spatial dimension of racial profiling is crucial to understanding its persistence. Eglinton West became a predominantly Black neighbourhood not by accident, but because of mid-20th-century immigration policy, racialized labour demands, and discriminatory housing practices (Pitter, 2022). Caribbean migrants, particularly Jamaicans, were funnelled into areas with low-cost housing and limited access to services, where their presence was both economically exploited and socially stigmatized (Pitter, 2022). Over time, Eglinton West developed as a transnational diasporic space, rich in cultural expression but marginalized by state neglect. Urban development, gentrification, and transit projects, such as the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, have accelerated the displacement of long-time Black residents in Eglinton West, while police presence in the area has intensified (Barrett, 2023; Washington & Washington, 2023). Despite these pressures, local establishments continue to serve as vital community anchors. Barber shops along Eglinton Avenue provided informal gathering spaces where youth could connect and seek guidance, though they were often closely watched by police. Restaurants such as Randy's Patties and Mainsha served as cultural hubs where youth felt safe, fostering social interaction, community connection, and the preservation of cultural identity, even under heightened surveillance. Having previously lived in Eglinton West, I experienced firsthand how these spaces shaped daily life and community resilience. These spatial injustices are not peripheral to racial profiling; they are central to it. As Massey (1995) argues, space is socially constructed, and in this case, the racialization of Eglinton West as a site of deviance legitimizes ongoing surveillance.

The intersection of gender further complicates the problem. Much of the existing literature and public policy has centered on Black male youth, whose visibility aligns with societal stereotypes of aggression, criminality, and resistance (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011).

Black boys are disproportionately stopped, searched, and subjected to force by police, where behaviors such as walking in groups or wearing certain clothing styles are misinterpreted as signs of criminal intent (Sheehan et al., 2022). These stereotypes are deeply embedded in institutional policies and practices, reinforcing cycles of over-policing, trauma, and social exclusion. However, this focus on Black boys by both the police and researchers often obscures the unique experiences of Black girls.

Black girls and young women are frequently rendered invisible in discussions of policing and criminal justice reform. The #SayHerName movement in the United States, for example, emerged in response to the widespread erasure of Black women and girls from public narratives about police violence (Malone-Gonzalez, 2019). Black females are often perceived by police as "disrespectful" or "non-compliant," reinforcing punitive responses rooted in gendered expectations of behavior and propriety (Malone-Gonzalez, 2019). Adultification bias, the perception of Black girls as older and less innocent than their peers, contributes to harsher treatment in schools, public spaces, and during police encounters (Culyba et al., 2019). This gendered erasure highlights a notable gap in both scholarship and practice, emphasizing the importance of examining how race and gender intersect in shaping experiences and opportunities.

Socio-economic marginalization is a third, equally essential dimension of the problem. The Hidden Epidemic (2014) reports that Black youth and families in Eglinton West in Toronto face high levels of poverty, food insecurity, housing instability, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. These systemic barriers shape how they are perceived and treated by law enforcement. Youth from low-income Black families are more likely to be in public

spaces, on streets, in transit hubs, or in community centers, where they become hyper-visible to police (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011; Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2023). This visibility, coupled with negative stereotypes, increases the likelihood of surveillance and intervention. According to Sheehan et al. (2022), over one-third of Black youth in Canada born between 1985 and 2000 grew up in high-poverty, racially segregated neighbourhoods, compared to just 1% of white youth. Furthermore, 81% of low-income Black students attended segregated, high-poverty schools, conditions that reproduce educational disparities and limit social mobility (Sheehan et al., 2022). These spatial and economic realities exacerbate the vulnerability of Black youth to police targeting further entrenching cycles of marginalization and criminalization.

Although reforms such as Ontario's regulation of street checks and bias training have been implemented, they have failed to produce meaningful change in the day-to-day experiences of Black youth (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018). Informal profiling persists, and police discretion continues to be exercised in ways that reflect underlying racial and gendered biases (Toronto Star, 2010; Gillis, 2022). This disconnects between policy and practice reveals the limitations of reformist approaches that do not address the deeper structural roots of racial profiling. Furthermore, the continued collection and analysis of race-based data, while necessary, has not been matched by comprehensive strategies to dismantle the systemic drivers of overpolicing. As noted by Graziano, Schuck, and Martin (2009) in a U.S. context, public perceptions of police misconduct can be shaped by media narratives. In neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West, however, these disparities are experienced firsthand and reflected in available statistical data, indicating that they are more than constructed impressions.

In addition, this research identifies the problem of racial profiling as one that is institutional, spatial, intersectional, and persistent, manifesting in over-policing of Black communities. It begins with the recognition that Black youth in Eglinton West are subjected to policing influenced by their neighbourhood, appearance, and the societal roles they are assumed to occupy. This study seeks to explore these dynamics in more detail, examining how these forms of policing are experienced in everyday life and how they manifest in specific interactions, practices, and perceptions. These forms of surveillance are maintained by overlapping systems of oppression, racial, gendered, and economic, that must be critically examined if genuine transformation is to occur. While the study is guided by a single central research question, the interviews were designed to explore a set of interrelated issues that illuminate different dimensions of Black youths' lived experiences within policing and surveillance practices. This study seeks to unpack these layers by situating racial profiling within its historical, geographical, and socio-political context.

Objectives of the Research

This thesis has a dual focus. First, it reflects on the neighbourhood streets and school halls that shaped my worldview. Second, it advances research that treats spatial justice as a critical step toward racial equity in Canadian cities. By grounding theory in lived experience, I transform community memories into evidence-based analysis, linking ethnographic observation to policy critique. This exploration culminates in Oakwood–Eglinton, a neighbourhood that embodies the belief that scholarship rooted in embodied knowledge can meaningfully reframe discussions on housing, policing, education, and economic opportunity.

By foregrounding the textures of a neighbourhood that raised me, this research invites academics and policymakers alike to recognize Black urban spaces not as sites of deficit, but as laboratories of resilience and blueprints for more just metropolitan futures. Oakwood–Eglinton demonstrates that when research starts from Black lived experience, it can replace deficit narratives with visions of resilient and equitable communities, particularly for Black youth.

This study critically explores how racial profiling operates as a systemic, spatialized, and intersectional form of state violence affecting Black youth in Toronto's Eglinton West. Using the combined frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Intersectionality, and Spatial Justice, the research focuses on how race, gender, class, and geography intersect to shape the experiences of Black youth in this historically significant, yet academically under-examined, neighbourhood. Alongside existing discussions of policing in neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch, this thesis examines policing practices, neighbourhood dynamics, and socio-spatial factors in Eglinton West, with particular attention to police discretion, gentrification, and urban restructuring.

The first objective of this research is to situate Eglinton West as a historically Black space, shaped by systemic racial exclusion in housing, employment, and city planning. Housing discrimination and immigration policy funnelled these communities into specific parts of the city, including Eglinton West, which became both a vibrant cultural corridor and a site of neglect by urban planners and policy makers (Pitter, 2022). This marginalization was later compounded by gentrification and infrastructure projects, including the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, which displaced residents and intensified policing in the name of "revitalization" (Barrett, 2023). While neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch in 31 Division have been more widely associated with high-profile policing debates, the experiences of Black youth in Eglinton West reflect similar patterns of racialized surveillance and criminalization. Massey (1995) argues that space is socially and politically produced; this research applies that insight to understand how Eglinton West has been spatialized as both a cultural enclave and a zone of state scrutiny.

The second objective is to examine the relationship between socio-economic disadvantages and police targeting in Eglinton West. The neighbourhood, such as others with large Black populations in Toronto, has faced long-standing underinvestment, public service cuts, and institutional neglect (Jabakhanji, 2023).Youth living in these areas are more likely to attend underfunded schools, experience food and housing insecurity, and be unemployed or underemployed, all of which increase their exposure to public space and, in turn, to police scrutiny (Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2023). Gillis (2022) further highlights that Black youth are disproportionately subjected to police force even in situations involving nonviolent offences such as mental health crises, mischief, or fraud. This objective emphasizes that racial profiling cannot be understood in isolation from socio-economic exclusion.

The third objective is to contextualize carding and discretionary policing within broader systems of surveillance and control, especially in underserved and racialized spaces. Despite changes in regulation, Black youth continue to be approached, questioned, and searched under vague justifications such as “community safety” (Toronto Star, 2010; Rankin, 2014). These practices reinforce a criminalized identity for Black youth and foster deep mistrust from police institutions. Wortley and Owusu-Bempah (2011) argue that even in the absence of formal carding policies, discretionary stops persist through police culture and implicit bias. This thesis examines how state power is exercised spatially, with the profiling of youth justified not by individual behaviour but by racialized assumptions tied to specific neighbourhoods.

The final objective is to demonstrate how insights from one community-based worker can reveal the potential of grounded knowledge to inform anti-oppressive policy recommendations, while recognizing that broader community engagement with multiple key actors would further strengthen these outcomes. Through a conversational exchange with a community worker serving Black youth in Eglinton West, the study gathers practical insight into how police practices impact daily life, education, safety, and emotional well-being. These narratives illuminate gaps in services and highlight the resilience of community networks, even in the face of structural violence. Rooted in anti-oppressive research principles, this thesis positions the community worker as co-constructors of knowledge. The perspectives offered here point to the possibility of recommendations that resist incremental reform and instead envision structural change grounded in care, equity, and self-determination.

Structure of the Thesis

Section One turns to the spatial and historical context of Toronto's Black neighbourhoods, with a specific focus on Eglinton West. It traces how Black communities have been shaped by immigration, housing segregation, systemic exclusion, and cultural resistance. This section contrasts Eglinton West with more widely discussed areas such as Jane and Finch, positioning Little Jamaica as a culturally rich but under-theorized site of state surveillance, displacement, and community resilience.

Section Two explores the broader theoretical relationship between youth, race, and policing. It reviews literature, data, and reports related to racial profiling, carding, and overpolicing in Toronto, while highlighting how such discussions often center Black boys and fail to capture the gendered realities of Black girls. This section situates policing within broader structures of criminalization, state control, and institutional neglect, particularly for youth navigating poverty, school pushout, and public scrutiny and introduces Section Two introduces Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality as integral to this work.

Section Three focuses primarily on the study's methodological framework. It provides a detailed overview of the qualitative methods employed, including conversation design, participant recruitment, thematic analysis, and ethical considerations, as well as the researcher's positionality.

Section Four analyses the qualitative interview, finding themes of over-policing and surveillance, intergenerational distrust, and intersectional marginalization in policing encounters.

Section Five concludes the thesis by synthesizing its central arguments and proposing future directions. This section summarizes the study's contributions to legal, social, and spatial understandings of racial profiling and offers community-informed, anti-oppressive recommendations. It calls for transformative approaches to public safety by reimagining law enforcement through care, accountability, and justice rooted in lived experience.

Section I: Historical and Spatial Context – Eglinton West as a Site of Struggle

Toronto is often celebrated as one of the world's most multicultural cities, although its Black communities have long faced systemic exclusion, underinvestment, and spatial marginalization. In discussions of racial profiling in Toronto, scholarly and public attention has frequently centred on hyper-visible communities such as Jane and Finch, a neighbourhood that has long been oversaturated in media narratives and institutional surveillance. This area is often positioned as the epicentre of youth-related criminality, creating a dense archive of stories where race and space intersect in complex, usually damaging ways. While this focus highlights real instances of systemic injustice, it also minimizes the risks of reinforcing spatialized stereotypes and overlooking broader patterns of racialized policing across the city. The Jane and Finch corridor thus serves, not only as a site of lived experience, but as a symbol of how Black and marginalized youth become disproportionately marked by geography and race within the urban landscape.

It is precisely because of this overconcentration on areas such as Jane and Finch that I have chosen to focus my research on Eglinton West, specifically the stretch known as Little Jamaica (Pitter, 2023). While this neighbourhood holds deep historical and cultural significance for Toronto's Black communities, it has not been known to receive equivalent scholarly or policy attention in discussions of racial profiling and systemic exclusion. Eglinton West represents a critical yet under-examined site where racialized policing, gentrification, and erasure converge. Unlike more "visible" neighbourhoods, its transformation is subtle, marked by the displacement of Black-owned businesses, increased police presence, and shifting demographics under the banner of revitalization (Washington & Washington, 2023). By centering Eglinton West, this research aims to disrupt dominant geographic narratives and shed light on the everyday

experiences of Black youth who navigate both the symbolic and material impacts of urban restructuring and surveillance beyond the city's most frequently cited boundaries.

Eglinton West has been a key site where systemic discrimination, socio-economic conditions, and racial biases intersect. Areas such as Eglinton West ("Little Jamaica") have become pivotal points in conversations about gentrification, often framed as "neighbourhood revitalization" aimed at reducing social exclusion and fostering economic and cultural integration. However, this process frequently results in the displacement of long-standing Black and Caribbean residents and businesses, threatening the community's cultural identity and exacerbating social inequities. According to Rajakumar and Newman (2025), while the Eglinton LRT construction promises improved transit and economic growth, it has also accelerated gentrification, caused the closure of over 140 Black-owned businesses and raised concerns about eroding the historic Afro-Caribbean presence in the area. This tension highlights the urgent need to balance development with the protection of the rich heritage and livelihoods of those who have called the area home for generations. However, as Walks and Maaranen (2008) argue, while gentrification may promote social mix, its effects can vary within neighbourhoods. In parts of Eglinton West, such as south of Vaughan and south of Rogers near Oakwood, gentrification can be seen as more apparent, leading to the displacement of low-income, often racialized residents into lower-quality housing and reinforcing social polarization. However, other areas such as near Keele Street experience less gentrification, highlighting the uneven nature of these changes across the corridor.

In historically Black neighbourhoods, processes such as gentrification, spatial restructuring, and increased surveillance not only threaten housing security but also jeopardize

erasing long-standing cultural and communal anchors (Walks & Maaranen, 2008). Nonetheless, these intersecting forces expose how race and space are co-constructed in ways that entrench inequality and limit the possibilities for safety, belonging, and justice in Black urban life.

This section will examine the development and transformation of these neighbourhoods, such as Keelesdale-Eglinton West, Caledonia-Fairbank, and Oakwood Village, alongside the growing dispersal of Black communities throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). By analyzing demographic trends, historical developments, and institutional policies through scholarly and community-based sources, this chapter explores how space and race intersect in shaping Black life in urban Toronto. It also introduces my personal connection to these spaces as a researcher and advocate who has lived and worked within these very neighbourhoods.

Historical Development of Black Neighbourhoods in Toronto

The historical development of Black neighbourhoods in Toronto originates from the city's earliest days as the town of York, where enslaved individuals and free Black settlers began shaping the community's life despite ongoing systemic exclusion. Enslaved Black and Indigenous people were present in Upper Canada even before its formal separation from Lower Canada in 1791, with slave advertisements in 1793 suggesting the presence of enslaved individuals such as "John" and "Sue" in the Niagara District (Hill, 1984, p. 28). Although the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery, primarily influenced by Lieutenant Governor Simcoe, prevented the importation of new enslaved people and legislated the future emancipation of enslaved children at age twenty-five, it protected the interests of existing slaveholders. Itdid not offer immediate freedom (Hill, 1984, p 28–29). Nevertheless, Toronto's budding Black community began to take root through both formerly enslaved individuals and free Black migrants from the U.S., the Caribbean, and Nova Scotia (City of Toronto Archives, 2025). By 1799, at least fifteen Black individuals were documented in York, with others like Peter Long and his family establishing homes just east of the Don River (Hill, 1984, p. 29).

As Upper Canada became a key haven of the Underground Railroad during the mid-19th century, Toronto emerged as a growing site of Black settlement, shaped by waves of migration from the United States. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 prompted thousands of formerly enslaved people to flee to Upper Canada, with an estimated 35,000 to 50,000 Black individuals settling across the province by 1865 (Hill, 1984, p. 30). Unlike southern Ontario cities with segregated Black communities, Toronto's Black residents often integrated into broader civic life, supported by abolitionists, inclusive churches, and municipal involvement (City of Toronto

Archives, 2025, Hill, 1984, p. 29–30). Early Black Torontonians founded key institutions such as the First Baptist Church (1826) and the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1840s), and notable figures such as William P. Hubbard and Anderson Ruffin Abbott paved the way in politics and medicine (Hill, 1984, p 30–31).

Despite their formal integration into the city, Black Torontonians of the nineteenth century remained subject to constant surveillance, entrenched racial prejudice, and the everpresent danger of re-cature by American slave catchers operating across the border (Hill, 1984, p 30). In response, Black residents organized vigilance committees and turned to the power of the press, most notably The Provincial Freeman, edited by Mary Ann Shadd, the first Black woman publisher in North America, to expose injustices and mobilize collective resistance (Hill, 1984, p. 30).

At the same time, Black-owned enterprises, from barbershops to livery stables and ice houses, proliferated, demonstrating both economic independence and entrepreneurial ingenuity within a hostile environment (Hill, 1984, p. 30). Although early Black settlement was not concentrated in a single enclave, distinct community clusters emerged near the Don River and in central Toronto, sustained by churches, mutual-aid societies, and fraternal organizations that provided spiritual anchorage and social support (City of Toronto Archives, 2025; Hill, 1984, pp. 29–30). Collectively, these networks of activism, commerce, and faith laid a durable foundation for the more spatially defined Black neighbourhoods that would rise in the twentieth century, most prominently along Eglinton West and in Jane Finch, where the legacy of migration, resistance, and continual reinvention remains visible today.

Building on these early foundations of civic life and community resilience, Black settlement in Toronto gradually expanded outward over the decades (Kong, 2023). By the

mid20th century, this expansion began to take a more defined geographic form, especially along key corridors such as Eglinton Avenue West. This area would later become known as Little Jamaica, a neighbourhood whose development as a cultural and commercial hub for Caribbean immigrants was profoundly shaped by both national immigration policy and local communitybuilding efforts (Kong, 2023). Stacy Lee Kong, a respected Canadian writer and editor who has extensively documented cultural and community issues through her work at major national publications and her newsletter *Friday Things*, highlights the ongoing challenges faced by Little Jamaica. As Black communities were displaced from central Toronto due to urban renewal and rising housing costs, they resettled in more affordable neighbourhoods with access to transit and employment. Over time, this corridor became more than just a place of residence; it evolved into a powerful cultural anchor for the Caribbean diaspora. These enclaves became vibrant sites of identity, resistance, and belonging. living testaments to the resilience and creativity of Black communities in Canada.

Little Jamaica and the Spatial Politics of Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto

The consolidation of Black settlement along Toronto's Eglinton Avenue West corridor illustrates how federal migration policy and diasporic place-making interacted to inscribe Black Caribbean presence onto the city's urban landscape (Kong, 2023). This was initiated in 1955, the West Indian Domestic Scheme recruited single women, largely from the Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Barbados, on one-year domestic contracts; upon completing their service, these women obtained landed-immigrant status and, crucially, the right to sponsor relatives (Kong, 2023). Subsequent liberalizations in 1962, 1967, and 1971 accelerated family reunification, producing successive migratory waves that, by the early 1980s, had brought more than 100,000 Jamaican migrants to Canada, a disproportionate share of whom settled along Eglinton West (Kong, 2023).

Affordability, accessible transit, and emerging social infrastructure attracted Caribbean migrants beginning in the late 1950s, but it was the entrepreneurial and communal efforts of these migrants that shaped Eglinton Avenue West into the vibrant cultural and economic hub colloquially known as "Little Jamaica." While the name had long been used within the community, it was officially recognized as a cultural district only in 2020 following sustained advocacy (Kong, 2023). By the late twentieth century, Black owned businesses along the Eglinton West strip were generating local employment through small businesses, facilitating capital circulation within the community, and cultivating entrepreneurial expertise that resonated across the Greater Toronto Area (Kong, 2023). A dense infrastructure of Black-owned businesses in the area that included barbershops, beauty salons, patty shops record stores, and imported groceries emerged, anchoring both local commerce and transnational cultural exchange (Kong, 2023). Shoppers were drawn to Eglinton West for goods and services that both met practical needs and sustained cultural ties: tropical produce and freshly baked Jamaican patties, barbers

who understood Black hair, and a bustling street-corner social life that echoed the rhythms of home (Kong, 2023). By the late 1970s and 1980s, the strip had also become “a global hotbed for reggae,” ranked by cultural historians as second only to Kingston, Jamaica, in recorded output (Kong, 2023). Independent record shops and studios, such as Monica’s and Trea-Jah Isle, fostered new talent, while sound-system clashes and live concerts animated the block (Kong, 2023).

Today, this musical heritage is enshrined in the official naming of “Reggae Lane” and in a series of street murals celebrating Little Jamaica’s artistic legacy (Kong, 2023). Little Jamaica’s stature as a Black cultural and economic hub is further emphasized by its role in community festivals and institutions.

Little Jamaica has long functioned as both an economic hub and a cultural touchstone for Toronto’s Caribbean diaspora. The subsequent trajectory of the district, however, reveals how racialized urban restructuring can threaten the spatial foundations on which such community assets rely.

Even as the neighbourhood endures over a decade of disruptive Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction, with periodic utility shutdowns, blocked storefronts, and diminished foot traffic, Little Jamaica continues to symbolize the resilience of racialized communities to claim urban space and build enduring institutions (Kong, 2023).Construction delays, which have pushed the originally scheduled 2021 completion to now 2024, combined with rising real estate pressures and gentrification, have led to significant challenges for Black business owners. Many have closed or been displaced, and new residents often feel disconnected from the area's Caribbean heritage, forcing businesses to adapt to a changing clientele (Kong, 2023).

Despite residential dispersal, effective and commercial ties to Eglinton West endured. Oral accounts compiled by Heritage Toronto document weekly and monthly return journeys made by former residents who continued to purchase specialty goods, attend religious services, and participate in communal rituals along the strip (Heritage Toronto, 2020). Little Jamaica thereby persisted as a distributed homeland whose cultural gravity exceeded its residential footprint. This resilience nonetheless confronted a qualitatively different challenge after 2011, when excavation for the Crosstown light rail transit project commenced (Heritage Toronto, 2020).Repeated construction delays produced extended interruptions to pedestrian movement, vehicular access, and utility services. Retail revenues contracted, precipitating the closure of numerous long-established firms that had previously weathered earlier cycles of disinvestment (Kong, 2023). While detailed historical data remains limited, Kong observes that concurrent speculative real estate purchases have inflated commercial rents and property tax assessments, exemplifying a classic pattern of transit-induced gentrification. This process threatens to displace the very entrepreneurs and cultural institutions that make the corridor distinctive (Kong, 2023).

Local stakeholders have responded with multi-level strategies designed to secure both material and symbolic safeguards. According to Kong (2023), a coalition of proprietors has pressed municipal authorities to designate the corridor as a cultural heritage district, a legal mechanism that would embed regulatory protections for culturally embedded land uses and enable targeted public investment (Heritage Toronto, 2020). Parallel initiatives within the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit seek to align financial assistance, façade improvement grants, and marketing campaigns with anti-displacement objectives identified by community members (Kong, 2023). Furthermore, recent procedural reforms within Business Improvement Areas demonstrate an emergent willingness to center Black commercial voices that were

historically excluded from formal decision-making structures, although merchants emphasize that consistent institutional backing is still required to achieve meaningful change (Kong, 2023).

The evolving narrative of Little Jamaica provides a critical lens through which to examine the interplay of infrastructural modernization, real estate speculation, and racial capitalism in Canadian cities, while also highlighting both its connections to and distinctions from the broader Eglinton West neighbourhoods that frame this study. Today, Eglinton West and the surrounding communities are home to a predominantly Black and racialized population, with a significant proportion of youth facing economic challenges, reflected in below-average household incomes and higher rates of **(**see Table 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Comparison – Eglinton West vs. Jane and Finch). This demographic reality shapes the community's unique vibrancy and its structural vulnerabilities. The corridor continues to operate as a key node in the translocal Caribbean geography of Toronto, an urban site where music, cuisine, and diasporic sociability coalesce (Kong, 2023).Yet, these cultural expressions coexist alongside persistent economic precarity and cumulative stigmatization, exacerbated by marketdriven redevelopment and infrastructure projects. Thus, it is within this contested context that the lives of the Black youth at the center of this study are unfolding, as they navigate the compounded effects of infrastructural change, displacement pressures, and systemic surveillance in Eglinton West.

The Making and Unmaking of Jane Finch: A different history for a different Black neighbourhood

In this section, I contrast the development of Little Jamaica and the broader Eglinton West neighbourhoods with Jane Finch, a northwest Toronto community often cited in both scholarship and public discourse. This comparison highlights how differing planning histories and socio-spatial stigmas shape the ways Black urban life is represented, governed, and contested.

Conceived in the 1960s by the former Borough of North York as a "model suburb," the larger neighbourhood was constructed according to the modernist planning ethos of the time, which prioritized the integration of high-density housing, open green spaces, and vehicular mobility (Ahmadi, 2017). Central to this vision was the inclusion of a large stock of publicly subsidized housing, intended to accommodate a socially diverse population near urban amenities. High-rise tower blocks were constructed alongside townhouses and scattered single-family dwellings, creating a built environment characterized by wide arterial roads, segregated land uses, and spatial configurations that reflected the principles of postwar Green Cities design (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014).

While this suburban experiment was initially celebrated by planners as progressive and inclusive, the long-term outcomes highlight more complications. The clustering of aging highrise rental towers, particularly around the Jane and Finch intersection and extending along the Jane corridor, became strongly associated with concentrated poverty, precarious housing, and socio-spatial stigmatization (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014). In these high-rise environments, policing is highly visible and pervasive. Driftwood community housing experiences heavy police presence

and frequent stop-and-search practices. The Jane Finch Mall and surrounding community parks are recognized as areas under constant surveillance, while the corridors of local high-rises offer limited community oversight, contributing to feelings of isolation among residents (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014).These dynamics illustrate how systemic bias and urban design intersect to shape the lived experiences of youth and community members in Jane and Finch. Over time, this landscape shaped how Jane Finch was portrayed in the media and public discourse, as well as how residents, especially youth, experienced everyday life. In this neighbourhood, the original planning ideals exist alongside economic challenges, systemic inequities, and uneven public investment, influencing the everyday experiences and opportunities that young people encounter.

Over subsequent decades, Jane Finch became a primary settlement site for multiple waves of immigration. During the 1970s and 1980s, the neighbourhood welcomed large numbers of newcomers from the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica and Trinidad, as well as immigrants and refugees from East and South Asia, various regions of Africa, and parts of Latin America (Ahmadi, 2017). Yet, the promise of diversity has unfolded amid persistent socio-economic challenges. Today, Jane Finch accommodates a disproportionate share of the city's youth, singleparent households, recent immigrants, refugees, residents without secondary school credentials, low-income families, and public housing tenants (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014). The sociospatial clustering of these populations within aging high-rise infrastructure, particularly concentrated at the intersection of Jane and Finch and extending along the Jane corridor, has intensified vulnerabilities related to poverty, precarious housing, and marginalization.

The clustering of racialized and low-income populations within aging high-rises, most visibly at the Jane Finch intersection and along the Jane corridor, has deepened vulnerabilities tied to poverty, precarious housing, and marginalization **(**Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014**).** In

contrast, precarity in Eglinton West emerges less from vertical concentration than from displacement pressures and gentrification. The convergence of high demographic diversity with elevated rates of unemployment, social assistance reliance, and systemic exclusion renders Jane Finch a particularly salient site for examining questions of social cohesion, community resilience, and racialized spatial inequality (Ahmadi, 2017). This dynamic has long been compounded by public and media narratives that frame the neighbourhood through deficit-based lenses, often overlooking the complex strategies of adaptation and solidarity that residents employ.

However, as a socially inclusive suburb that combined public and private housing, Jane Finch was envisioned as a progressive response to postwar needs. However, the reality diverged sharply from this vision, as structural policy failures and chronic underinvestment fostered a racialized reputation for poverty, crime, and youth-related challenges (Ahmadi, 2017). These issues were further exacerbated by systemic racism, discriminatory media portrayals, and the compounded effects of socio-spatial segregation.

Jane Finch is marked by significant socio-demographic disparities that distinguish it from other areas of Toronto. The neighbourhood is home to a concentrated presence of structurally vulnerable groups, including low-income families, single-parent households, newcomers, refugees, and individuals residing in social or subsidized housing (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014). This demographic profile resulted from broader economic and planning processes that concentrated disadvantage within a physically bounded suburban zone. While originally intended to foster diversity and access, the clustering of affordable housing stock without corresponding investment in schools, transit, employment centers, and social services contributed to growing social isolation.

Quantitative indicators accentuate these disparities. The average household income in Jane Finch has remained significantly below the Toronto average for decades, reinforcing the area's association with entrenched poverty (Ahmadi, 2017). In addition, educational attainment levels in the neighbourhood reflect systemic inequalities. A considerable proportion of adult residents have not completed post-secondary education, a factor that correlates strongly with both employment instability and intergenerational cycles of economic hardship (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2013). These socio-economic indicators are further compounded by limited access to culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate services, barriers which disproportionately impact immigrant and racialized communities.

Planning frameworks and municipal decision-making often failed to respond to the evolving needs of Jane Finch's population (Ahmadi 2017). Instead, the neighbourhood was subjected to a deficit-based lens, wherein the presence of racialized poverty was interpreted as a social problem rather than a policy outcome (Ahmadi, 2017). This contributed to a feedback loop: negative public perceptions shaped the designation of "priority neighbourhoods," where investment was often present but insufficient, uneven, or not aligned with community needs. As a result, such approaches sustained the very conditions that gave rise to negative perceptions in the first place.

The public framing of Jane and Finch in media and political discourse has played a critical role in shaping both the neighbourhood's historical trajectory and its socio-spatial marginalization within the broader landscape of post-war Toronto. However, as the area became home to increasing numbers of Black, Caribbean, African, and other racialized immigrant populations through the 1970s and 1980s, the narrative surrounding Jane Finch shifted markedly Sheinin, 2025). Media outlets and public officials began to associate the neighbourhood not with

innovation or inclusion, but with crime, disorder, and decay, obscuring the structural conditions that contributed to these challenges, including chronic underinvestment in education, employment, transit, and social infrastructure (Sheinin, 2025).

By the mid-1980s, Jane Finch had become one of the most heavily stigmatized neighbourhoods in the city. News reports routinely characterized it as a dangerous "inner-city ghetto," despite its geographic location in Toronto's northwest suburbs (Sheinin, 2025). This framing often relied on racialized language and visual imagery that linked Black and immigrant youth to violence, drugs, and welfare dependency. Scholars and community advocates have long noted that race played a central role in this narrative construction, as the visible presence of Black and other racialized populations was interpreted through a lens of fear and moral panic rather than systemic analysis (Sheinin, 2025). These portrayals failed to account for the historical policy choices that concentrated subsidized housing and vulnerable populations in Jane Finch, while systematically withholding the social supportneeded to ensure community stability and mobility.

The neighbourhood did not accept this image passively. Community leaders actively resisted these depictions, challenging the narratives that cast Jane Finch as inherently broken. One of the most notable examples came in 1988, when Sheila Mascoll, then president of the Jane Finch Concerned Citizens Organization, wrote a forceful response to a Toronto magazine article that sensationalized crime and drug activity in the area (Sheinin, 2025). Mascoll's letter condemned the article's failure to acknowledge the many grassroots programs and events that animated the neighbourhood, and she explicitly called out the use of racist tropes and slurs in shaping the public's perception of the community (Sheinin, 2025). Her intervention highlighted

the existence of vibrant local organizing, resilience, and care work that persisted despite structural neglect and media vilification.

These distorted public representations had lasting consequences. They provided ideological justification for the expansion of carceral and surveillance-based responses to poverty, particularly the over-policing of Black youth (Sheinin, 2025). At the same time, they dissuaded investment in services, infrastructure, and job creation, creating a self-fulfilling cycle in which systemic disinvestment was masked by the very stigma it helped generate. Understanding this history is crucial for unpacking the roots of inequality in Jane Finch. It reveals how public discourse, far from being a neutral reflection of social conditions, actively shaped the material realities of the neighbourhood and played a central role in legitimizing the uneven geography of opportunity in Toronto's post-war cityscape (Sheinin, 2025).

Dispersal of Black Communities across the Greater Toronto Area

One of the most significant yet understudied developments in the spatial history of Black life in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has been the steady suburbanization of Black communities over the past four decades. While neighbourhoods such as Jane Finch and Eglinton West have emerged in the postwar period as cultural, political, and demographic epicentres of Black presence in Toronto, the early twenty-first century has witnessed a marked outward migration of Black populations into surrounding municipalities. This geographic shift cannot be understood as a reflection of individual preference or housing market logic; it is a direct consequence of the historical planning practices, disinvestment patterns, and gentrification pressures that have displaced Black communities from the urban core.

Data from the Environics Institute *Black Experience Project* in the GTA illustrates the extent of this demographic redistribution. In 1981, approximately 78 percent of the GTA's Black population resided within the central City of Toronto. By 2011, that figure had fallen to 57 percent, meaning that nearly half of Black residents in the region were now living in suburban municipalities such as Peel, York, Durham, and Halton (Environics Institute, 2017). The suburban municipalities of Brampton and Mississauga in Peel Region, Ajax and Pickering in Durham Region, and Vaughan and Markham in York Region experienced some of the most dramatic increases (Environics Institute, 2017). Peel Region alone saw its Black population grow by more than twenty times between 1981 and 2011, while Durham and York each recorded increases of more than tenfold during the same period (Environics Institute, 2017).

This shift is deeply tied to the structural pressures that have reconfigured historically Black urban neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West and Jane and Finch. As public investment declined and gentrification intensified in these areas, numerous Black families were priced out of

increasingly unaffordable housing markets and pushed to seek alternatives in the periphery (Environics Institute, 2017). The expansion of homeownership opportunities in the suburbs, along with larger lot sizes, newer housing stock, and chain migration patterns, offered a form of relative security and mobility that was no longer accessible within central Toronto. However, as the Environics Institute notes, this migration was not always voluntary or empowering; for many, it was shaped by constrained choices, limited housing options, and the structural exclusion from gentrifying city spaces (Environics Institute, 2017).

In addition, Ajax provides one of the most evident examples of this new suburban concentration. With 16 percent of its population identifying as Black, Ajax now has the highest proportion of Black residents of any municipality in Canada. Similarly, entire neighbourhoods in Brampton have become home to growing Black populations, particularly of Caribbean and African origin (Environics Institute, 2017). These emerging diasporic spaces reflect a continuation of the community-building practices that defined earlier Black enclaves such as Little Jamaica, yet they also reveal new tensions. Unlike historically Black neighbourhoods, many of these suburban areas lack the dense social infrastructure, cultural institutions, and community services that evolved over decades in Toronto's urban core (Environics Institute, 2017).The result is a form of spatial dispersion that can weaken political visibility and limit access to culturally responsive education, healthcare, and civic representation (Environics Institute, 2017).

Moreover, the dispersal of Black communities across the GTA has complicated efforts to sustain collective memory, intergenerational knowledge-sharing, and grassroots organizing. In the absence of a concentrated geographic base, Black-led institutions face challenges in mobilizing resources, coordinating regional advocacy, and resisting systemic anti-Black racism

at a metropolitan scale. The Environics Institute (2017) notes that many Black residents in suburban municipalities report feelings of cultural isolation, social alienation, and reduced access to culturally competent services. These issues are compounded by the fact that many suburban areas were not originally designed to accommodate the kinds of density, diversity, and transit access needed to support marginalized populations. The spatial logic of suburbanization, rooted in car dependency, zoning restrictions, and infrastructural expansion, often works against the development of cohesive, politically empowered Black communities.

The significance of the suburban shift of Black communities lies not in advancing a generalized theory of Black urbanism in the Greater Toronto Area, but in foregrounding the need to examine Black communities within their specific spatial and historical contexts. This approach resists defaulting to Jane Finch as the representative case and instead recognizes the differentiated geographies through which Black urban life is organized and experienced. This transformation disrupts conventional assumptions that equate community vitality with geographic concentration in central urban neighbourhoods. Regional strategies should address the uneven distribution of services, resources, and representation across suburban municipalities, while affirming the historical and ongoing contributions of Black communities, wherever they reside. To do so requires a deliberate departure from practices that have historically facilitated spatial marginalization and erasure. Ultimately, this points to the need to ask: what defines a "Black neighbourhood," and how can we understand its social, spatial, and cultural realities on their own terms rather than as peripheral to broader urban narratives?

Section II: Spatializing Race: Legal Geographies and Intersectional Approaches to Policing

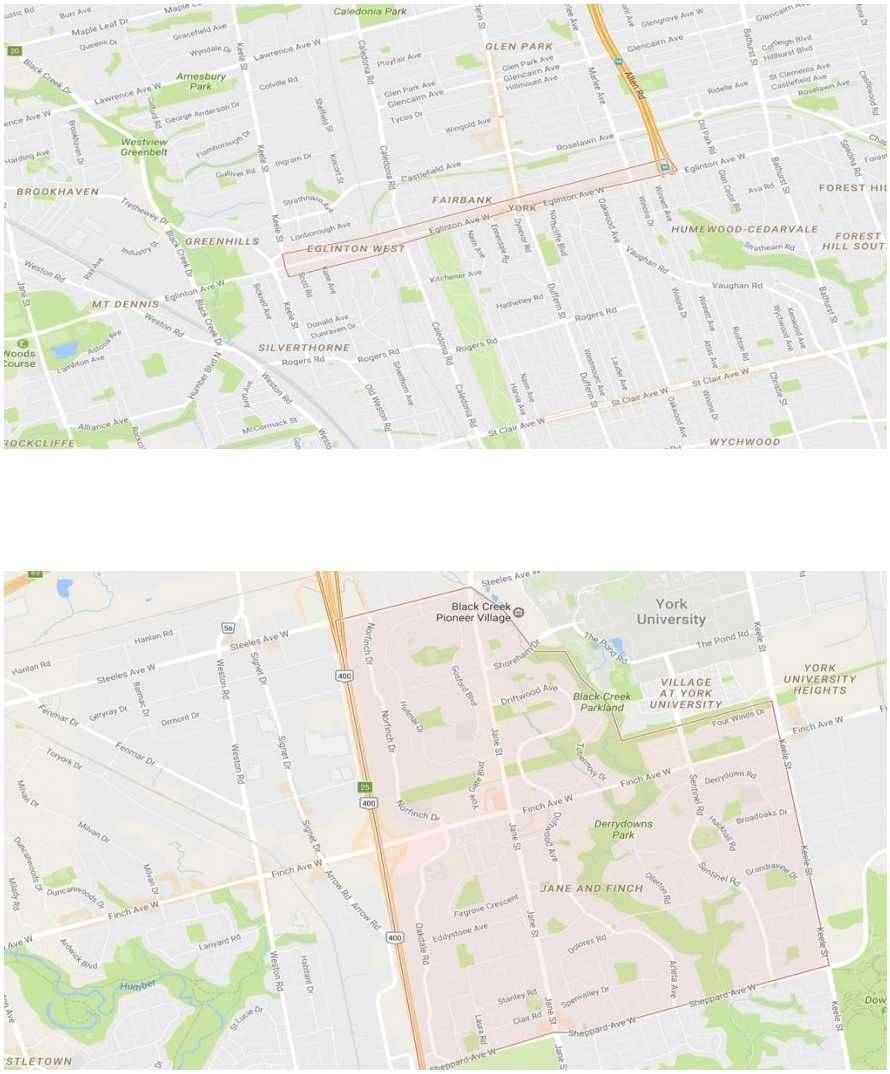

Figure 7. Map of Study Sites: Eglinton West and Jane and Finch, Toronto
A street view map showing the two communities discussed in this thesis. The map illustrates the spatial relationship between Toronto's northwest and midtown Black cultural hubs. (Source: Google Street View, accessed October 1, 2025)

Race and Space as a Theoretical Framework for Understanding Policing in Eglinton West and Jane and Finch

The relationship between race and space provides a foundational lens for my exploration of how racialized youth are policed within Toronto's Eglinton West neighbourhood. I use critical race and spatial frameworks to understand it as a core mechanism through which racial power is organized, enacted, and enforced across urban landscapes. Race and space are not static or isolated concepts; both are historically contingent, deeply contested, relational, and inseparable from patterns of social, economic, and political inequality. Where these forces intersect, they create what Neely and Samura (2011) describe as "racial space," urban environments where systems of inequality are mapped directly onto the lived experience of place (Neely & Samura, 2011, p. 1934–1938).

To spatialize race is to recognize that racial meaning is not only discursive but geographic. Figure 7 situates the two communities at the heart of this thesis, Eglinton West, known as Little Jamaica, in midtown, and Jane Finch in Toronto's northwest. In both spaces, the racialized logics of policing and belonging operate through geography: through built form, through transit routes, and through the symbolic distance that separates how these neighbourhoods are seen from how they are lived. From a street view, Jane Finch and Little Jamaica appear as uniform grids, flattened spaces indistinguishable from any other part of the city. This is the perspective that law and policy sometimes may take: an aerial view that claims neutrality, asserting that justice "falls equally" across the Greater Toronto Area. Yet on the ground, the picture changes. The streets of Little Jamaica tell stories of migration, music, and mutual care; the high-rises of Jane Finch mark both community and containment. To truly

“spatialize race” is to descend from the street view, to trace how race is lived, embodied, and policed through place.

Figure 8. High-rise housing in Jane Finch. Built form as a mediator of surveillance and community. (City of Toronto, 2021)

The contrast between these two geographies is instructive. Jane Finch’s vertical architecture, its high-rise clusters and wide arterial roads may create a built environment that both connects and isolates, as shown in Figure 8. The spatial design amplifies surveillance: police vantage points from elevated positions, security cameras in lobbies, and the visibility of movement through open courtyards. In Little Jamaica, by contrast, the horizontal rhythm of storefronts, barbershops, and patty shops cultivates a semi-public intimacy. These spaces have long functioned as informal community institutions, sites of refuge, gossip, mentorship, and

creativity. In comparison, the logic of observation shapes the architecture of Jane and Finch, while the logic of congregation shapes Little Jamaica's. Each space materializes different racialized experiences of visibility and control, revealing how surveillance operates differently across Toronto's Black geographies while remaining equally tethered to histories of containment.

My study of Eglinton West, a historically Black, Caribbean, and immigrant area in Toronto, is grounded in the recognition that this neighbourhood has long faced not only disproportionate police surveillance but also a broader infrastructure of regulation and exclusion (Washington & Washington, 2023). In this context, routines such as targeted patrols and heightened scrutiny do not simply reflect racial bias but actively create and sustain racialized boundaries of who belongs and who is suspect (Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, 2010; Rankin, 2014). Policing, therefore, is revealed as a spatial practice intimately connected to the ongoing production and maintenance of racial power (Neely & Samura, 2011, p. 1935). Viewing policing through a critical spatial lens exposes both the "where" and "how" surveillance occurs, and the "why" certain communities become sites of intensified control. This project pushes beyond assumptions of colorblind or uniformly applied law enforcement, insisting that the spatial dimensions of policing are shaped by historic and ongoing geographies of race, where regulations, policies, and practices racialize place, and institutional actions reinforce the spatialization of race (Neely & Samura, 2011, p. 1934). By centering this mutual influence, my research not only scrutinizes police interaction with racialized youth but also exposes how the very environments of the city are themselves products of entrenched racial power structures, ultimately arguing that meaningful reform must address these interconnected spatial realities.

Spatial Justice: Development of the Field

This project is partially grounded in a vibrant, multi-disciplinary tradition in Canadian scholarship bringing together geography, sociology, CRT, and urban studies. These fields collectively illuminate how race and space are fundamentally interdependent within the urban context, challenging the myth of cities as neutral landscapes and revealing instead that urban environments are actively shaped by ongoing processes of differentiation, contestation, exclusion, and power.

Kay Anderson (1995) is prominent among these thinkers; her work on Vancouver's Chinatown demonstrates that racialized spaces are the result of intentional municipal actions, policy decisions, public discourse, and day-to-day social practices. Anderson demonstrates how the "idea of a Chinese race became objectified in space and through that nexus it was given a local referent in the minds of Europeans, became a social fact, and aided its own reproduction" (Anderson, 1995, p. 31). The shaping of Chinatown as a visible "other" zone not only enforced boundaries on the ground but also influenced citywide attitudes, media representations, and lived experiences (Anderson, 1995, p. 51). Anderson's historical analysis highlights how designating areas as "different" or dangerous is not a relic of the past; instead, modern urban practices, zoning, policing, and media portrayals continue to mark and manage neighbourhoods in ways that reinforce cycles of exclusion and marginalization (Anderson, 1995, p. 5, 31). Her perspective compels me to question and analyze the origins and evolution of spatial boundaries as central to the experience of race in the city.

Building on Anderson's work, Sherene Razack (2002) situates legal and spatial practices at the heart of the Canadian racial order. Razack demonstrates that Canadian laws and urban plans are deeply invested in the creation and stability of whiteness, making the constitution of

space itself an engine for reproducing racial hierarchies (Razack, 2002, p. 1). According to Razack, the "making and maintaining of a white settler society" is not simply a matter of past injustices, but an ongoing project achieved through the "stabilizing and legitimizing" of power within landscapes and policy (Razack, 2002, p. 1, 5). Employing her concept of "unmapping," Razack urges us to critically identify, analyze, and challenge the policies, narratives, and practices that maintain white privilege and perpetuate the marginalization of racialized groups. Her intervention is especially vital to my research, as it provides a rigorous framework for uncovering how boundaries, both physical and symbolic, are produced, who they benefit, and whose access and belonging they deny.

Moreover, Jennifer Nelson (2008) brings a further necessary dimension, focusing on the subjective and ethical responsibilities of those studying and benefiting from these urban structures. Nelson cautions that "the common sense–making practices that lie behind marginality, dominance, and hierarchy figure in all of our individual and collective histories, albeit in markedly different and unequal ways," warning that erasure or ignorance of histories such as Africville constitutes "complicity in forgetting" (Nelson, 2008, p. 4). Her work demands that I see myself not as a detached observer, but as someone whose identity, privilege, and research are intimately tied to past and present systems of spatial and racial power. She calls for reflection and accountability "as accountable subjects who benefit from racism" and insists that understanding cities' racial geographies requires facing the ways we are all implicated (Nelson, 2008, p. 26).

The field of spatial studies thus emerges from, and continues to develop through, these intersecting insights. While contemporary scholars advance the conversation, their roots can be traced to the post-1960s social movements and the broader intellectual turn toward identity, culture, and the critique of positivist approaches to social phenomena (Neely & Samura, 2011, p.

1934). This evolution reflects an increasing recognition of the entanglements of knowledge, power, and place in shaping urban realities.

By engaging with the works of Anderson, Razack, and Nelson, my research is able to describe patterns of inequality or criminalization, and also to interrogate why and how these power structures endure and manifest spatially. These scholars drive me to ask more probing questions, about the production of space, the manage-ment of difference, and my own relation to these dynamics, as I investigate the lived realities of racialized youth and their communities. Their frameworks ground my inquiry in the understanding that changing urban policing or governance requires not only policy revision but also confronting and transforming the underlying spatial and racial logics that have shaped, and continue to shape, geographical areas such as Eglinton West.

Spatial Justice Framings of Police Interactions

A particularly valuable aspect of this theoretical framework for my research is the racial geography literature on police interactions, which sharpens the focus on how policing practices are not only shaped by race, but also spatially deployed to regulate and criminalize racialized communities. Owens (2024) contends that policing functions as far more than a response to urban crime; it is a mechanism through which racialized geographies are constructed and reinforced within the city. By determining where police are concentrated, how resources are distributed, and whom officers deem suspicious, law enforcement actively shapes the social and spatial boundaries that govern everyday life. This insight is particularly relevant in neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West, where policing patterns are deeply intertwined with the history and experience of Black and immigrant communities.

Racial geography literature highlights that the spatial concentration of aggressive policing is not accidental, but rather the outcome of urban regimes in which specific neighbourhoods and their residents are marked as inherently suspect or problematic. In Eglinton West, repeated incidents of traffic stops and surveillance disproportionately impact Black residents, effectively transforming the neighbourhood into what scholars describe as a “zone of hyper-surveillance” (Maynard, 2025, p. 104). These practices link historical and contemporary forms of racialization onto the city’s spatial fabric, reinforcing boundaries of exclusion and eroding trust within the community. What might superficially appear as routine enforcement is, in fact, both legally and socially an exercise of racialized surveillance and power (Maynard, 2025, p. 104). Addressing these dynamics requires cities such as Toronto to recognize that safety and justice are inseparable from the ways space, race, and state authority intersect. Actual progress will necessitate a fundamental redesign of both physical and institutional landscapes to

ensure that Black youth in Eglinton West can inhabit, enjoy, and shape their neighbourhoods without the constant threat of over-policing. My research aligns closely with these findings: it demonstrates that targeted policing practices not only reinforce negative stereotypes about Black communities but also contribute to a self-perpetuating cycle in which Eglinton West is constructed as a geography marked by suspicion, surveillance, and marginalization. This reality directly impacts Black youths' sense of safety, constrains their freedom in public spaces, and erodes trust in public institutions intended to serve the community (Maynard, 2025, p. 104).

Owens (2024) argues that policing doesn't just react to crime; it is central to drawing invisible lines that dictate who belongs in urban neighbourhoods. My own research, which centers on Eglinton West and the lived experiences of Black youth, demonstrates how these repeated encounters with police are not only disruptive on an individual level but also profoundly shape the community's collective relationship to public space. Families, communities, and lives disrupted or ended represent a form of violence that international research is only beginning to quantify. Black youth and their families become acutely aware that their mere presence in public spaces can trigger suspicion, leading to routine stops, questioning, and even more serious confrontations (Maynard, 2025, p. 125). Black communities continue to experience the violence of surveillance and arrest, and many are forced to spend critical years behind bars, separated from family, burdened with criminal records, and exposed to the trauma and isolation inherent in imprisonment. These consequences result from policies that provide protection or benefit to no one inside or outside of Black communities, yet reinforce cycles of marginalization and surveillance, perpetuating systemic harm across generations (Maynard, 2025, p. 125). Such hyper-surveillance fosters persistent feelings of anxiety, compelling youth to continually

anticipate the threat of police intervention for occupying space in their own neighbourhood (as indicated by my interview later in this thesis).

Theoretical Lenses for Understanding Racialized Policing

In Eglinton West, anti-Black racism is experienced directly, shaping the daily lives and social realities of community members. From the over-policing of our streets to the chronic underfunding of schools and the everyday experience of being treated as a threat in our own communities, these are not isolated incidents of bias but symptoms of something much deeper. As Bledsoe (2020) prompts us to ask, is anti-Black racism about individual prejudice, or is it a structural force embedded in the very institutions meant to protect and serve us? In neighbourhoods like ours, the answer appears to feel evident: anti-Black racism feels systemic, shaped and sustained by overlapping structures of power. To explore this perception, I employ my own experience and an interview with a community youth worker to examine how these forces manifest in everyday experiences and local institutions.

This study applies Critical Race Theory to examine the systemic forces that uphold racial hierarchies and shape the policing of Black youth in Eglinton West. Intersectionality, as a dimension of CRT, is used to analyze how race, gender, age, and socio-economic status intersect to influence these experiences (Gillborn, 2015; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006).

CRT challenges dominant narratives that frame racism as isolated or interpersonal, revealing instead how racism, both overt and subtle, intersects with classism and sexism to structure institutions and policies (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242).This perspective uncovers how policing practices and education systems work together to reproduce racial inequalities, influencing who is perceived as belonging and who is criminalized within the community. Through this lens, I interrogate how institutions, particularly policing, work to uphold systems of

inequality, and how Black youth in Eglinton West continue to navigate, resist, and survive within these realities.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is to challenge dominant legal claims of neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy, which often serve to mask the self-interest of powerful actors in society (Matsuda et al., 1993). While the law is formally presented as applying equally to all, in practice, policing and institutional practices disproportionately affect specific communities, creating uneven patterns of vulnerability across space and time. In historically Black neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West, racialized policing intersects with socio-economic marginalization and cultural realities to produce distinct forms of state violence and resilience. Although prosecutors have limited influence over discrimination at the policing stage, their discretionary powers, such as dismissing or varying charges, accepting or rejecting cases, moving cases through alternative justice programs, and recommending sentences, allow them to intervene once cases reach the court, potentially mitigating or exacerbating systemic inequities (Jacoby & Ratledge, 2016). Together, these dynamics reveal that law and its enforcement are far from neutral, highlighting the importance of a CRT-informed perspective to understand and address the compounded vulnerabilities faced by Black communities in urban Canadian contexts.

Emerging from legal studies, CRT was developed to explore why the law has historically failed to dismantle racial inequality and, instead, often reinforces it. As Obasogie (2013) argues, CRT provides a conceptual and theoretical foundation for understanding how legal systems uphold socially constructed ideas of race to maintain white privilege and white supremacist ideals. More broadly, CRT challenges conventional legal and scholarly norms, interrogating how race and racism intersect with other forms of social stratification, such as class and gender, to

produce and sustain systemic inequities (Obasogie, 2013). In the realm of policing, this framework exposes how institutional practices disproportionately target Black youth. Research has shown that Black youth are more likely to be stopped, searched, and arrested than their White peers, even after controlling for factors like crime rates and socioeconomic status (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011). CRT insists that race is asocial construction embedded in institutions, and that racism is not an aberration but a normalized part of everyday life (Iati & Rufo, 2021).

When applied to Eglinton West, a predominantly Black, working-class neighbourhood (City of Toronto, 2021), Critical Race Theory highlights how structural forces manifest spatially. Census data and demographic reports indicate the concentration of Black residents in this area, illustrating how systemic inequities are geographically embedded, shaping access to resources, public services, and community infrastructure. In this context, policing becomes more than a matter of law enforcement; it functions as a racialized tool of boundary-making and social control, shaping who belongs and who is marked as deviant. Although assertions of racial profiling and systemic racism have long been denied by police leaders, racial profiling has played a central role in constructing criminality, even though so-called criminal behaviour is widespread and evenly distributed across race and class (Maynard, 2025, pp. 108, 125). Oversurveillance, targeted patrols, and racial profiling in Eglinton West demonstrate how these practices reproduce racial hierarchies through space, positioning the neighbourhood and its youth as sites of suspicion rather than safety, and contributing to cycles of trauma, marginalization, and constrained freedom for Black youth and their families (Maynard, 2025, p. 125).

Another key insight I take from Critical Race Theory is Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of Intersectionality, which she introduced in her foundational legal scholarship (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 124). Crenshaw developed the framework of Intersectionality to highlight how systems of

oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, do not operate independently but are interwoven, creating unique and compounded forms of marginalization for individuals whose identities span multiple social categories. Crenshaw critiqued how antiracist and feminist discourses often treated race and gender as separate, single-axis issues, thereby erasing the specific experiences of Black women whose identities are shaped by both (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). As she writes, identity politics "frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences," resulting in frameworks that fail to capture the complexity of lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242).

Crenshaw's work examines how race and class shape violence against women, noting that "ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups," which further complicates efforts to address systemic violence (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Her intervention remains vital because it forces us to recognize that social categories namely race, gender, and class do not operate in isolation but intersect in ways that produce distinct and often more severe forms of discrimination. Intersectionality, therefore, is not simply about acknowledging multiple identities; it is about examining how structures of power produce and reinforce inequality at their intersections.

This insight is crucial for understanding racialized youth experiences in neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West, where issues of policing, poverty, and marginalization cannot be fully understood through a single-axis lens. In such contexts, an intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of how race, gender, and class intersect to shape the day-to-day realities of youth who are often both hyper-visible to the police and invisible in policy conversations meant to serve them.

Integrating Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality

Intersectionality, building on Critical Race Theory (CRT), highlights how systemic racial injustice intersects with other forms of disadvantage, such as gender, class, and disability. While CRT reveals the structural nature of racial inequality, Intersectionality critiques both CRT and mainstream anti-discrimination approaches for insufficiently accounting for these multidimensional, overlapping systems of oppression. Canada's legacy of exerting control over Black life is perhaps most strongly consolidated within the criminal justice system. Today, law enforcement officials, jails and prisons, as well as courts and parole boards, play a significant role in managing Black populations, which, as elsewhere, have historically been rendered disposable (Maynard, 2025, p. 104). In Black communities, policing often functions less as a tool of safety and more as a mechanism of control, disproportionately impacting individuals based on race, gender, and class. By highlighting the full complexity of oppression, frameworks such as Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality provide a foundation for meaningful change, reminding us that dismantling injustice begins with understanding how it has been structurally and historically constructed.

Thus, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality provide powerful tools for unpacking the layered realities of racialized policing in communities namely Eglinton West. CRT forces us to reckon with the ways in which institutions, law enforcement, education, and the legal system, are not neutral but are shaped by and complicit in maintaining white supremacy. It situates racism not as a flaw in the system, but as a foundational logic embedded within it. Intersectionality expands this analysis by revealing how race does not act alone; it converges with other structures of power such as classism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity to create unique and compounded experiences of oppression.

In the context of Black youth in Eglinton West, these theories do not diagnose the problem; they reveal how young people are positioned at the crossroads of multiple systems of marginalization. Critical Race Theory allows us to trace the historical and institutional roots of over-policing, while intersectionality provides the analytical depth to understand how individual experiences are shaped by overlapping identities, including age, gender, class, and immigration status, and intersecting systems of power.

Section III: Methodological Approach and Analysis of Community Insights

This section is focused on the qualitative interview which is one of the pillars of this study. It provides a comprehensive outline of the methodological choices and practices used in conducting this interview which allowed me to explore the manifestation of racial profiling in police encounters with Black youth in Eglinton West, Toronto. It discusses the rationale, methods and limitations. This section aims to describe the methodological steps, but also to reflect critically on the research process itself.

Research Questions

The conversation was designed to provide insight into five key questions that underpin this study.

1. How do Black youth in Eglinton West experience and interpret policing in their daily lives, particularly within a neighbourhood shaped by racialized space, long-standing surveillance, and gentrification?

2. How do race, gender, age, class, and socio-economic marginalization intersect to shape police encounters with Black youth in Eglinton West, as understood by youth, community informants, and advocates?
3. In what ways do broader socio-economic conditions and neighbourhood stigma influence patterns of over-policing and surveillance of Black youth in Eglinton West?
4. How do community workers and youth advocates understand, navigate, and respond to the racialized policing of Black youth in Eglinton West?

5. Why has Eglinton West received comparatively limited attention in academic and media discourse on racialized policing, particularly in contrast to neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch, and what are the implications of this marginalization for community–police relations and intergenerational mistrust?

Methodology Selected

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating analysis of empirical evidence about the space and youth/police interactions within that space with an in-depth conversation conducted with a community worker, a key knowledge holder about the experience of youth in the Eglinton West Neighbourhoods. This combines qualitative insights from a semistructured dialogue with a community worker and contextual data to produce a rich, multilayered understanding of racial profiling in Eglinton West. The qualitative component allows for deep exploration of the lived experiences, perceptions, and strategies of resistance articulated by individuals embedded in the community. These frameworks guide the interpretation of community narratives and observational data in the thematic analysis that follows. This study centers on the experiences of Black youth in Eglinton West through community histories, observational insights, and secondary sources rather than direct interviews. This approach was guided by ethical considerations, particularly the risk of re-traumatization when asking youth to recount experiences of policing and marginalization. While direct youth interviews would offer valuable firsthand perspectives, such engagement is better suited to future research conducted with enhanced support structures and long-term relational trust. Drawing on Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, the study examines how race, gender, class, and age intersect to shape socio-spatial dynamics and patterns of over-policing. In-depth interviewing is a powerful qualitative method that involves engaging in focused, one-on-one conversations to explore participants lived experiences in detail (Boyce & Neale, 2006). For this research, a single semistructured dialogue was held with a frontline community worker with years of direct experience working with Black youth in Toronto's Eglinton West. While small in scale, the depth of insight drawn from this conversation is significant. In qualitative inquiry, particularly research

grounded in CRT and Intersectionality, the goal is not to generalize but to amplify marginalized voices and uncover how structures of power and oppression shape everyday life.

This single testimony offers a uniquely informed, intersectional perspective that is often absent in mainstream discourse, a perspective informed by the participant's direct engagement with systemic issues such as racial profiling, socio-economic marginalization, and gendered policing. This method fosters a relational and conversational space that encourages participants to speak candidly, particularly when addressing sensitive or emotionally charged subjects such as policing, racial bias, and youth vulnerability (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Practical considerations, including disruptions to the research timeline and delays in ethical approval, resulted in only a single in-depth conversation being conducted. However, this limitation does not diminish the methodological value of the approach. Rooted in Critical Race Theory, the conversation prioritizes counter-storytelling and centers lived experience as a vital source of knowledge production. The insights drawn are not anecdotal; they disrupt dominant narratives that routinely marginalize, criminalize, or erase the voices of Black youth. The conversation serves both as a tool for uncovering systemic realities and as a platform for resistance, amplifying the perspective of a community worker deeply embedded in Eglinton West, who bears daily witness to the intersecting impacts of race, class, gender, and systemic policing.

The Interviewee

My interview participant was a frontline community worker with extensive experience supporting Black youth in Toronto's Eglinton West area. He is a Black male community support worker who has been serving youth in the Eglinton West area, specifically in the Keelesdale–Eglinton West, and Oakwood Village area for approximately three years. His work centers on providing direct support to Black youth navigating systemic barriers, particularly in relation to policing, education, and access to resources. His personal lived experience and professional insight offer valuable context for understanding the intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in this neighbourhood. As someone who works closely with youth in Eglinton West and whose own experiences growing up in the community inform this perspective, I knew the participant through local youth programs. The participant offered invaluable insight grounded in both professional practice and proximity to the everyday realities of Black youth. This approach is consistent with qualitative research informed by Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, where the goal is not statistical generalization but the amplification of voices that are too often excluded from dominant narratives.

The Interview

Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview[1], and the participant was assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. No identifying information has been included in the final report to protect the participant's privacy and ensure ethical integrity.

I used a semi-structured interview format in which both the interviewer and the interview questions served as the primary instruments for data collection. The interview was conducted virtually over Zoom included a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions designed to explore the participants' experiences with Black youth in Eglinton West, particularly in relation to racial profiling, policing, and socio-economic challenges. Open-ended questions encouraged reflection and storytelling, while closed-ended questions provided clarification and context where necessary.

The conversation lasted approximately an hour and was recorded. An automatic transcription feature generated an initial transcript of the session, which I then manually reviewed and cleaned to ensure accuracy. I took care to ensure that the cleaned version eliminated information which would tend to identify the participant.

To preserve confidentiality, all files were anonymized, coded, and stripped of identifying details. The participant's identity remains protected, and their testimony is represented with care and respect in alignment with ethical research standards.

[1] Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview. The participant was assured confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time. Ethics approval was granted by the York University Office of Research Ethics, Certificate #: STU 2025-066**.**

Data analysis involved an iterative and reflexive approach to engaging with the data, ensuring that emerging insights were grounded in the participant's narrative while being interpreted through the critical lenses of the study.The conversation was analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used and rigorous method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. As Naeem et al. (2023) note, thematic analysis is particularly effective for working with thick descriptive data and allows researchers to develop nuanced conceptual understandings rooted in participant narratives. This method was well-suited to the study's focus on lived experience, enabling the researcher to draw out themes related to systemic racism, gendered policing, and socio-economic marginalization.

Following Naeem et al.'s (2023) step-by-step approach, I first familiarized myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcript, followed by the generation of initial codes derived directly from the participant's language and context. These codes were then clustered into broader themes that captured the complexities of the participant's experiences. Throughout this process, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality informed both what was coded and how themes were interpreted. Particular attention was paid to how power, identity, and structural inequality shaped the participant's narrative. Thematic analysis, in this context, served as a critical tool for amplifying marginalized voices and uncovering the systemic nature of racialized experiences. The analytic process emphasized both the social construction of knowledge and the ethical responsibility to honor the participant's voice. The final themes were not simply descriptive but interpretive, offering a critical understanding of how community members experience and contest racial profiling in Eglinton West. Through this approach, the analysis remained faithful to the study's constructivist, justice-oriented, and community-grounded research design.

Limitations

All empirical research, particularly within qualitative and critical traditions, is shaped by methodological, epistemological, and ethical limitations. This study is no exception. While the single-case study approach allows for a focused and context-rich exploration of racialized policing in Toronto's Eglinton West neighbourhood, the scope of the data, derived from a single in-depth discussion, inevitably limits the breadth of perspectives represented. The goal of this research is to achieve analytical generalizability and to generate situated insights that may resonate with or be transferable to similar urban contexts marked by systemic anti-Black racism, socio-economic marginalization, and over-policing.

Finally, I acknowledge that my own positionality as a Black woman who grew up in Eglinton West, and as a scholar trained in critical race and socio-legal analysis, has shaped every phase of this research, from the framing of the research questions to the interpretation of the data. While this alignment may have supported trust and authenticity in the interview process, it also introduces the potential for confirmation bias or uncritical resonance with certain narratives. To mitigate this, I engaged in continuous reflexivity through journaling, peer consultation, and the development of a positionality statement. These practices helped ensure that my interpretations remained grounded in the participant's words while honoring the ethical responsibilities of critical, community-rooted research. In aim, this study offers situated, theory-informed insights that aim to disrupt dominant narratives and contribute to broader conversations on race, policing, and justice.

Section IV: Themes from the Interview

Three major themes emerged from the interview:

(1) Over-Policing and Surveillance,

(2) Intergenerational Distrust of Law Enforcement, and

(3) Intersectional Marginalization in Policing Encounters.

These themes are presented as cohesive analytical narratives that combine verbatim excerpts from the discussion with interpretive commentary, highlighting how Black youth in Eglinton West navigate constant surveillance, inherit deep-rooted communal distrust toward law enforcement, and face compounded prejudice when factors such as race, class, religion, and immigration status intersect during policing interactions.

Theme 1: Over-Policing and Surveillance

Surveillance in this context extends beyond technological practices; it comprises constant visibility, psychological monitoring, and routine engagement that position youth as perpetual suspects. The overwhelming police presence described repeatedly by youth in Eglinton West, squad cars stationed on corners, officers on bicycles trailing young people, unmarked vehicles circling blocks, effects what Derrick Bell identifies as the "permanence of racism" (Bell, 1992): Black youth experience over-policing as an immutable aspect of their public lives, embedded in the very norms and practices of law enforcement. Interview-based evidence provides a visceral account of this reality. "What is consistent... yeah, the heavy police presence in the neighbourhood. And like the… surveillance, those are things that youth have told me, it's a daily reality," the community worker explained (Interview transcript on file with author). For many, this "surveillance" is both physical, manifested in regular patrols, stops, and questioning, and psychological, generating feelings of anxiety and a pervasive sense of being watched and judged. The participant also shared that police interactions often involve attempts to accuse youth of actions they haven't committed or to provoke them into behaviour that could lead to trouble: "They may be trying to accuse youth of things they haven't done or agitate them into doing something that could get them into trouble" (Interview transcript on file with author). "I've heard stories of youth saying they're being followed around, maybe by police who ride bicycles," further illustrating the sense of constant monitoring and suspicion faced by young people in the community (Interview transcript on file with author).

"Even when nothing is going on, the police drive by slowly and look at you as if you did something," the community worker explained, recounting how youth in the community describe their encounters with police (Interview transcript on file with author). By using "you," he echoed

their voices directly, conveying how young people themselves narrate the feeling of being treated as suspects even in ordinary moments. Shopping malls can be understood as roofed streets and street corners,spaces where what was once outside is turned inside and public space becomes private space (James, p. 241, 2021). Given Canadian weather conditions, particularly in winter, these covered environments offer much-needed shelter and function as key sites of youth congregation, housing cinemas, video arcades, and fast-food outlets (James, p. 241, 2021). Yet because malls are private property, business owners and mall authorities, through their legal rights and private security agents, are able to regulate behaviour, dress, congregation, and attitude among users who might otherwise fall outside police jurisdiction (James, p. 241, 2021). In this way, private security personnel exercise forms of social control similar to those historically enforced by police on public streets, raising concerns when the right to evict from private property extends to spaces that previously functioned as streets,pathways for movement, socializing, and leisure that youth understand as lawful and legitimate (James, p. 241, 2021). These dynamics align with my earlier discussion of how Black youth experience disproportionate scrutiny and regulation in public and quasi-public spaces such as malls, parks, and housing developments. These spaces are often stigmatized as high-risk and subsequently justified as targets for heightened police presence (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011; Evans & Francis, 2020).

While these disparities are evident across Canada, their effects are felt with intensity in Eglinton West. For many Black youth, over-policing is not an abstract statistic but a constant, lived reality. As the participant explained (Interview transcript on file with author), Eglinton West is marked by an almost omnipresent police presence: “They’re constantly seeing police cruisers

… if they go somewhere else in Toronto … it's seldom that they're going to see one." In Eglinton West, this continual visibility of police creates an atmosphere that feels like constant surveillance. While such presence may vary across different parts of the city, in this neighbourhood, it shapes how youth perceive and navigate their daily environment.

Evans and Francis (2020) identify this very phenomenon as part of a broader pattern in which the criminal justice system develops new mechanisms to intensify over-policing in Black communities. The experience described by the research participant illustrates how these mechanisms manifest on the ground: continuous police presence translating into heightened racial profiling, increased harassment, and the erosion of Black youths' ability to move through public spaces with the assurance that police will serve and protect them equally.

In addition, the community worker described how Black youth in Eglinton West hesitate to contact police, explaining: "For the most part, no, because they're probably worried about what's going to happen when [the police] do come. It's kind of like, 'Oh, I called them, but instead of them helping me, now I'm in trouble'" (Interview transcript on file with author). This reflects a troubling reversal of the intended role of law enforcement. The sense that seeking help can backfire illustrates how over-policing blurs the line between protection and targeting, leaving youth uncertain about whether the police are there to assist them or to scrutinize them.

In practice, police decision-making is often guided by racialized assumptions and stereotypes (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011; Evans & Francis, 2020). These biases manifest in routine interactions, from stop-and-search encounters to targeted patrols in predominantly Black neighbourhoods, creating an environment where surveillance is normalized. These tendencies escalated during the pandemic, when increased public health restrictions permitted police to stop

and question youth at even higher rates, leading to intensified trauma and deepened distrust (Evans & Francis, 2020). As the participant explained, “I’ve heard stories of youth saying they’re being followed around, maybe by the police who ride the bicycles. “So, there’s like surveillance on them” (Interview transcript on file with author). Here, the participant relays youth accounts of being actively followed by police, beyond casual observation. These experiences suggest everyday encounters with law enforcement can make young people feel continually monitored within their own neighbourhoods. Rather than isolated incidents, such patterns reflect a broader climate of surveillance that shapes how Black youth perceive and navigate community spaces.

The impact of intersectional identities was revealed in this discussion. The interviewee explained, “For the program that I’m running, the diversion program, I would say 90% of the clients are male... I don’t get too many females, not to say there aren’t any, but I’m just not getting them. And most of the interaction I do have is with the male clients.” In Ontario, individuals charged with minor criminal offences may be eligible to participate in the Diversion Program, an alternative to traditional prosecution. Successful completion of the program can result in the withdrawal or dismissal of criminal charges (Pyzer, 2025). The program allows the accused to take responsibility for their actions without formally admitting guilt, helping them avoid a criminal record. While specific programs vary, all share the goal of resolving certain offences outside of court proceedings. This approach acknowledges that not all criminal charges are severe enough to warrant a trial or guilty plea and can be understood as a form of restorative justice, providing opportunities for participants to engage in activities that benefit their community or address harm caused (Pyzer, 2025).

The community worker's observations reflect the demographics of his program, which he noted is roughly 90% male. He suggested that the lower number of female clients might be influenced by factors such as the presence of a female caseworker or differences in how young women are referred to or encounter the program. Discussions of racialized surveillance in public and quasi-public spaces often emphasize the experiences of young Black men, for whom merely being present on the street is frequently enough to trigger assumptions of criminality or drug involvement (James, p. 237, 2021). Many youth have suggested that this scrutiny is less severe for females, noting that "it's not so bad for females." However, this perception is increasingly being challenged. Police and mall security personnel are beginning to regard young Black women as potential lawbreakers, subjecting them to heightened surveillance and search practices, often conducted by female officers to avoid allegations of sexual harassment (James, p. 237, 2021). This shift raises important questions about the growing suspicion directed at Black females, including whether their increased visibility in streets and shopping malls reflects broader social changes or an expansion of racialized policing practices. At the same time, Black girls, alongside newcomer youth, continue to encounter police surveillance and systemic bias in ways that are often less overt but deeply embedded in everyday interactions within public and commercial spaces (James, p. 237, 2021). Reflecting on this, the participant recalled, "One thing that I can remember one of the [female] clients saying was that they felt like there was overaggressive behaviour at the time when they were being arrested" (Interview transcript on file with author). Although male clients predominate, this example suggests the distinct harms Black girls face in interactions with law enforcement. Newcomer youth experience these encounters differently as well. As the community worker described, "Especially if you have a youth who's not from Canada, or they just moved, immigrated here with their family, and maybe they're living within the area... they would be told about... the police are gonna be, the police come by.

You know, they might do like maybe surveillance, or potentially... a raid in the community housing, for example, like stuff like that has happened" (Interview transcript on file with author). This reflection points to the way newcomer youth are not encountering police in isolation or experiencing wholly different dynamics; instead, they are immediately brought into a shared community understanding of policing. The act of being warned by family or neighbours illustrates how distrust is transmitted across generations and across borders, ensuring that skepticism toward law enforcement becomes part of their socialization from the outset.

Theme 2: Intergenerational Distrust of Law Enforcement

Distrust of law enforcement is a complex; intergenerational phenomenon deeply rooted in the historical and contemporary realities of marginalized communities in Canada. While scholarly attention often centers on individual encounters, emerging evidence suggests that this mistrust is transmitted across generations, shaped by collective memories, lived experience, and institutional responses to race, gender, class, and immigration status (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1991). As the community worker explained, even children who have not yet interacted with police directly are prepared to distrust them because of what they hear from their families: *"*Even if 15 years pass, a child who is just 2 years old today will still be hearing the same stories by the time they turn 17.*"* This insight highlights that for young people on the social margins, especially those impacted by trauma, discrimination, or displacement, fear and skepticism regarding police are neither irrational nor isolated. Fundamentally, these outcomes result from persistent systemic forces that position law enforcement as an agent of surveillance, control, and exclusion.

The intersectional analysis deepens this understanding by situating race alongside factors like age, neighbourhood, and socio-economic status. The community worker observes, "I don't think it applies necessarily to the youth. I think that's something that comes up with just living in the neighbourhood, right? I like hearing from people who are older about how things were with the police. So then, I think younger people tend to adopt that." Intersectionality, as theorized by Crenshaw (1991), insists that we pay attention to how various social identities and axes of oppression operate together, not separately. Here, the intersection of youth, Blackness, and esidency in a marginalized area creates a particular context in which distrust of police is nearly inevitable, even for those who have not themselves suffered direct harm. "Unfortunately, the

police don’t do that themselves any favours in time to build trust with the community” (Interview transcript on file with author). The participant’s observation highlights how ongoing patterns of surveillance, criminalization, and institutional neglect shape distrust toward law enforcement. Rather than isolated frustrations, this distrust reflects a rational response to historical and structural conditions in which Black communities have repeatedly been overpoliced and under-protected. As CRT scholars note, negative experiences with law enforcement are shaped by systemic rather than individual dynamics, where policing practices continue to reinforce racialized hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1991; Tyler & Trinkner, 2018). The mistrust described here is therefore not merely interpersonal; it is embedded in broader social and legal structures that have long failed to serve Black communities equitably.

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens reveals that community experiences with law enforcement are shaped not only by individual encounters but also by the deep-rooted history of racial discrimination embedded in policing practices. As the community worker highlights, the significance of vicarious experience cannot be overstated: “If a young person has a family member that's been involved with the criminal justice system, that can also inform how they get to hear about the police.” For many youths in this community, such family involvement is not uncommon, meaning that knowledge of police practices is often inherited through stories of parents, siblings, or relatives. This reflects the phenomenon of legal socialization, where understandings and perceptions of law and law enforcement are collectively formed and transmitted, often well before a person’s first direct interaction with the justice system (Tyler, 2006).

Within many Black families and neighbourhoods, narratives of police mistrust are not simply individual opinions but vital survival tools, passed down through generations. These stories serve as cautionary lessons, warning youth about the realities and risks of over-policing and systemic bias. This intergenerational transmission of mistrust, from parent to child, neighbour to youth, embodies a core CRT concept: that knowledge, awareness, and resistance to racial injustice are cultivated through shared experiences and communal storytelling. These narratives do more than inform; they foster a collective consciousness that challenges dominant legal structures and creates spaces for empowerment and resilience within marginalized communities.

At the same time, CRT asserts that simply reforming procedural practices without attention to broader patterns of systemic exclusion will never root out the causes of community distrust. The participant puts this succinctly: “I don't think the police will ever have the trust of the community if they don't try to meet the community where they are, instead of always like criminalizing the community.” This statement directly challenges popular reformist rhetoric and echoes CRT critiques of superficial changes in policing (Brunson & Miller, 2006). It makes clear that the problem is not a lack of effort at the individual officer level alone but a lack of institutional willingness to see and support communities, complex, and deserving of dignity. Trust cannot be established in an environment where the default is suspicion and where stories of criminalization are constantly retold.

Critical Race Theory provides the language to recognize these stories as counternarratives, forms of community resistance that document and challenge dominant accounts of police as always benevolent or fair (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By circulating these stories, communities claim agency and offer survival strategies, even as they anticipate little change absent fundamental transformation. As the community worker insists, “the police don't do that themselves any favours in time to build trust with the community,” pointing not just to strained present-day relations but also to how these failures are remembered and passed down. Such patterns underscore that mistrust is not limited to one generation’s experience but is reproduced as younger community members inherit the same caution and skepticism their parents and elders have voiced. CRT scholarship maintains that until law enforcement institutions address their role in reproducing racial and class hierarchies, this intergenerational mistrust will remain not only understandable but justified.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that while the conversation reveals deep skepticism towards law enforcement, it also implies the possibility of transformation, if and only if, police institutions change how they relate to systematically marginalized communities. The community worker’s comments that genuine trust will only emerge when police “try to meet the community where they are” encapsulates the core demands of CRT and intersectional scholarship: meaningful engagement, structural reform, and genuine recognition of collective harm. This entails shifting not only policies and behaviours but fundamentally reimagining the relationship between police and communities as collaborative and restorative, rather than adversarial.

Thus, the provided conversation excerpts, analyzed through CRT, Intersectionality, and socio-economic theory, reveal that intergenerational police distrust among Black youth is a rational, socially transmitted, contextually nuanced phenomenon. It is rooted in the transmission

of lived experiences and community memory, exacerbated by poverty and structural racism, and perpetuated by the institutional failures of law enforcement to engage as equal partners rather than enforcers. Comprehensive change, as the conversation and theory both insist, can only be achieved by reckoning with these intersecting realities, by listening to and validating the stories shared across generations, and by transforming policing from criminalization toward genuine, equitable partnership.

Theme 3: Intersectional Marginalization in Policing Encounters

Intersectional marginalization describes how policing harms emerge from the confluence of multiple social positions rather than from any single axis of identity, and this dynamic is central to the accounts gathered in Eglinton West. The participant observes, “the community … has a lot of people … of Muslim faith … parents … saying the police are criminalizing their children … making the assumption … they’re up to no good” (Interview transcript on file with author). While the participant mentions religious identity in passing, this study does not treat it as direct empirical evidence. Rather, literature on Intersectionality and policing indicates that faith can interact with race, immigration status, socioeconomic position, and gender to shape how communities experience surveillance and enforcement (Yazdiha, 2020; Schwarzenbach, 2020). This illustrates the value of an intersectional lens, which emphasizes how overlapping identities co-constitute the social conditions under which policing harms occur.

The community worker’s testimony exemplifies more than a localized grievance; it reflects a broader pattern by which race, newcomer status, gender, and socioeconomic location combine to shape expectations, encounters, and consequences with police (Interview transcript on file with author). This perspective highlights how youth in Eglinton West are not only responding to individual interactions but also to structural conditions in which surveillance and criminalization are unevenly distributed across social identities and neighbourhood contexts.

Intersectionality helps make sense of the participant’s account of policing in Eglinton West. The participant described parents saying that officers were “criminalizing their children” and assuming they were “up to no good.” This is not simply about race or class in isolation; it is about how overlapping identities co-constitute experiences in a specific neighbourhood context.

Literature suggests that, in similar contexts, Somali Muslim youth growing up in lower-income, heavily surveilled neighbourhoods may experience their faith as intertwined with racialization, immigration status, and gendered assumptions (Yazdiha, 2020; Schwarzenbach, 2020). These intersecting identities shape how young people are noticed, approached, and judged in public spaces, creating a climate where suspicion is constant and unavoidable (Crenshaw, 1989; Yazdiha, 2020). The community account remains important as a reflection of broader intersectional processes that structure policing encounters.

Consistent with Critical Race Theory (CRT), the community worker's account of parents seeing police "criminalize their children" serves as a counter-story, challenging official narratives and revealing how institutional practices lead to disproportionate stops, surveillance, and escalation for certain youth. My own experience suggests that the emotional and psychosocial toll of intersectional policing in Eglinton West is profound. Persistent surveillance and routine stops **can** create an atmosphere of hyper-vigilance and chronic stress, and **may contribute to** internalized expectations of hostility from law enforcement. Over time, these conditions **can lead** some young people and their families to withdraw from public spaces and disengage from civic life. As the community worker reflects, "Right? So, I guess it depends on what your… what is the person's experience with the police? What is the community experience with the police? That's going to really inform if somebody's going to trust or distrust the police" (Interview transcript on file with author). Embedded within cycles of surveillance is the way youth perceptions come to mirror police perceptions of them. While it may seem redundant to ask which comes first, youth are often placed in a reactive position due to discriminatory treatment by law enforcement, the a priori negative assumptions that shape such encounters, and their broader treatment by society (James, p. 240, 2021). Against this backdrop, many youths describe

their actions as simple and ordinary, travelling independently or socializing with friends on the street, yet these same behaviours are frequently interpreted by police as suspicious or disorderly (James, p. 240, 2021). This perspective moves beyond a simple trust–distrust binary, emphasizing that trust is produced through lived histories and repeated interactions rather than isolated incidents. Over time, institutional practices normalize these patterns, and once distrust becomes embedded, it shapes community behaviours in ways that police may misinterpret as confirmation of risk, thereby perpetuating cycles of intensified surveillance and over-policing (James, p. 240, 2021). Unfortunately, as the participant notes, "the police don't do themselves any favors in time to build trust with the community." Moreover, if a young person has a family member involved with the criminal justice system, that connection further informs their perceptions and experiences with law enforcement (Interview transcript on file with author).

Section V: Structural Inequities and the Over-Policing of Black Youth

The purpose of this qualitative study, grounded in Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, was to examine how gender bias and socio-economic factors intersect to influence racial profiling in police encounters with Black youth in Toronto's Eglinton West, leading to a deeper understanding of the systemic forces that shape these experiences. This section discusses the major findings, reflects on the relationship between Eglinton West and Jane Finch, explores implications for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, and advocates seeking to address systemic discrimination, connects to broader theories of structural inequality. The section with a discussion of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the key insights gained.

Connections to Existing Literature

The findings of this study both demonstrate and extend existing scholarship on racial profiling and the criminalization of Black youth in Toronto. Previous studies by Wortley and Tanner (2004), as well as the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018), have consistently demonstrated the disproportionate police contact experienced by Black communities. Participants in this study echoed these patterns, describing police encounters as routine, anticipatory, and deeply racialized. These narratives support the claim that anti-Black racism in Canadian policing is systemic, not incidental. By situating these findings within the broader literature, it becomes clear that Eglinton West exemplifies, rather than deviates from, the documented realities of racial profiling in Toronto.

Scholarship on racial profiling in Toronto has consistently documented the disproportionate surveillance of Black men and boys, who are rendered hyper-visible to law enforcement and frequently constructed as inherently criminal (James, p. 236, 2021). Within this framework, young Black males are perceived as violating the cultural norms of streets and shopping malls simply through their presence and everyday actions, whether alone or in groups. As a result, they become routine targets of police officers and mall security personnel who operate within dominant constructions of Black youth as "up to no good," security risks, and potential lawbreakers (James, p. 236, 2021). Testimony from this study aligns with these patterns, as a community worker emphasized that young Black males are disproportionately stopped, questioned, and scrutinized in public and quasi-public spaces. Together, these accounts make evident that racialized assumptions that shape patterns of surveillance and enforcement directed at Black youth in Toronto (James, p. 236, 2021). At the same time, this study complicates that narrative by revealing how Black girls tend to be both overlooked and

adultified. While the literature on Black masculinity in policing is extensive, less attention has been paid to the gendered dimensions of racial profiling that render Black girls invisible until they are stereotyped as hostile or prematurely mature. My own experience growing up as a Black girl in Eglinton West further illustrates this dynamic. I can recall being stopped by police during routine moments, walking to the store, heading to school, or simply moving through the neighbourhood. I was often called "fass", a Caribbean term for being too forward or too nosy, told I was growing up too fast for my age, and even once advised by an officer to "stay in my lane." These everyday experiences highlight the tension between curiosity, visibility, and surveillance in the lives of Black youth. Although these interactions were unsettling, they were not as aggressive or physically confrontational as those described by my Black male friends, who often spoke of being stopped more brutally and under heightened suspicion. For me, invisibility did not translate into safety, but rather into a denial of protection, recognition, and care.

In reviewing the literature, the Canadian context often appears overshadowed by scholarship on U.S. policing, even though many parallels exist. The findings of this study contribute important specificity to the Canadian experience by showing how the stories from Eglinton West both resonate with broader Canadian research and highlight the lack of attention given to neighbourhoods beyond Jane and Finch. As Tecle (2019) observes, Jane and Finch have frequently been positioned in political and media discourse as the archetype of Toronto's "Black problem," a framing that has left other racialized communities, such as Eglinton West, underexamined. By centring this neighbourhood, the study begins to address that gap, suggesting that systemic over-policing is not confined to one geography but extends across racialized spaces throughout the city.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps clarify the significance of the participant's observations. He described how young people in his diversion program, the majority of whom are Black males, often feel targeted and followed by police. This account resonates with CRT's claim that racism is not incidental but embedded in everyday practices of institutions like policing (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). What the literature frames as "disproportionate contact" becomes visible here through lived experience: young people adjusting their movements and expectations because surveillance is constant. The convergence between his observations and existing scholarship underscores that these experiences are not isolated anecdotes but reflect structural realities.

At the same time, the findings point to complexities that some strands of the literature, which focus primarily on race, may not fully capture. Intersectionality, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, suggests that identities cannot be understood in isolation. My own journey as a Black woman from Eglinton West reinforces the importance of attending to these intersections. Without such nuance, scholarship risks oversimplifying diverse experiences into a single narrative of racial profiling, which may limit our understanding of the broader scope of systemic harm.

The alignment between participant testimony, my lived experience, and prior scholarship makes clear that racial profiling in Toronto has not diminished despite decades of reforms and public outcry. Research by Wortley and Tanner in the early 2000s documented the same dynamics that Black youth in Eglinton West continue to face today: disproportionate stops, surveillance in public spaces, and the routine criminalization of everyday behaviour. The persistence of these patterns highlights the structural nature of anti-Black racism in policing. The findings of this study not only corroborate these long-documented realities but also extend the

literature by highlighting gendered and socio-economic dimensions that remain underexplored. It draws attention to the under-examined experiences of neighbourhoods beyond Jane and Finch. By weaving in my own reflections, this study affirms that the literature on racial profiling is lived daily in the bodies, memories, and streets of Black communities.

Comparative Insights: Eglinton West and Jane Finch

When examining racial profiling in Toronto, Jane and Finch has often been treated as the city's central case study, a neighbourhood synonymous in media and political discourse with crime, poverty, and over-policing. This focus has produced a substantial body of research, but it has also created a singular narrative that overshadows other communities. Patterns of intensive police contact have been especially pronounced within Toronto's 31 Division, which encompasses the Jane Street and Finch Avenue West area,one of the city's most economically marginalized corridors (Logical Outcomes, 2014). An analysis of police interactions between 2008 and 2012 reveals that officers in this division generated 238,640 contact cards, with Black residents accounting for approximately 40 percent of those documented, a figure far exceeding their proportion of the local population (Logical Outcomes, 2014). These patterns unfold within a broader context of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage, where concentrated poverty and limited access to social and economic opportunities disproportionately affect Black youth, further constraining pathways to upward mobility (Logical Outcomes, 2014). While these patterns reveal the depth of racialized policing in Jane and Finch, they should not eclipse realities in other areas. As this study shows, Eglinton West has also experienced systemic over-policing, socio-economic marginalization, and cultural stigmatization, despite this it remains underexamined. Comparing these neighbourhoods highlights both shared dynamics and distinct trajectories, offering important insights into how racial profiling operates across Toronto's urban landscape.

The participant in this study emphasized that youth in Eglinton West often felt as though they were under constant surveillance, a reality that mirrors what has been documented in Jane and Finch. Everyday activities, standing outside a store, waiting for the bus, or simply walking

home, were described as moments that could draw police attention. As the participant reflected "So, when something happens somewhere near Jane and Finch, the media almost always labels it as happening *in* Jane and Finch, even if it's actually a few blocks away. They keep saying 'the Jane and Finch community,' and that ends up giving the whole area a bad name. Youth feel that. They carry that stereotype with them, and it shapes how they see themselves and how others see them." (Interview transcript on file with author). From my own experience, this sense of being persistently monitored was a defining part of growing up in Eglinton West. Like their peers in Jane and Finch, Black youth in Eglinton West were frequently cast as "inherently suspicious," though their experiences received far less public attention. This comparison illustrates how racial profiling in Toronto is not tied to a single neighbourhood but reflects broader patterns of policing across Black communities in the city.

Despite these similarities, there are important distinctions between the two communities. Jane and Finch's reputation as a "high crime" area have paradoxically made it more visible in academic and policy circles. Eglinton West, by contrast, has often been reduced to its cultural identity as "Little Jamaica." While this cultural framing has celebrated aspects of Black diasporic life, it has simultaneously masked the realities of systemic discrimination. As one community worker noted, Toronto once designated areas such as Jane and Finch and Eglinton West as "priority neighbourhoods" in recognition of their need for resources, but more recently has rebranded them as "needs improvement areas," a shift in language that reflects bureaucratic labelling rather than structural transformation (Interview transcript on file with author). These rebranding's obscure the persistence of inequality, reducing complex histories of marginalization to technocratic categories. The construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, which displaced over a hundred Black-owned businesses, has further complicated Eglinton West's identity,

erasing the neighbourhood's cultural landmarks while intensifying socio-economic hardship (Freeman & Hume, 2015). Scholars have shown that transit development in Toronto is not neutral but part of a neoliberal urban agenda, where projects like the Crosstown are used to accelerate gentrification and reconfigure urban space in ways that privilege middle-class, often white residents while displacing immigrant and low-income communities (Freeman & Hume, 2015). Unlike Jane and Finch, where state neglect has been widely acknowledged, Eglinton West's struggles have been more subtly hidden behind narratives of "revitalization." This distinction matters: invisibility in public discourse can make systemic inequities harder to contest.

Both neighbourhoods also share a legacy of intergenerational mistrust of police. In Jane and Finch, decades of raids, surveillance, and negative media coverage have produced a deep collective memory of distrust. In Eglinton West, similar experiences of over-policing and community harassment have created a parallel culture of caution. As I reflect on my upbringing, I realize that my earliest lessons about navigating police presence mirror the warnings given to youth in Jane and Finch: walk carefully, speak respectfully, avoid confrontation. These are not isolated strategies, but community-wide forms of survival, showing that despite their differences, both neighbourhoods teach Black youth to live under the presumption of criminality.

At the same time, it is essential to note that Jane and Finch and Eglinton West each have unique sources of resilience. Jane and Finch have cultivated a strong network of community advocacy, with organizations and activists who have long challenged the criminalization of their neighbourhood. Eglinton West, while less visible in research, has fostered resilience through

cultural preservation, diasporic identity, and entrepreneurial spaces like barber shops, restaurants, and community hubs. Having grown up immersed in that cultural vibrancy, I know firsthand how those spaces provided sanctuary from the outside gaze of surveillance. These distinct forms of resilience demonstrate that while the neighbourhoods share systemic struggles, their responses are rooted in unique histories and identities.

This comparative analysis also reveals the consequences of selective public attention. By focusing predominantly on Jane and Finch, policymakers may risk reinforcing stereotypes of pathology, while simultaneously neglecting neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West that face parallel challenges. The invisibility of Eglinton West in policy discourse reflects a broader pattern of disregarding specific Black communities until a crisis emerges. My research pushes back against that invisibility, asserting that Eglinton West deserves equal scholarly and policy attention. This is not only a matter of representation but of justice: policies cannot effectively address systemic racism if they overlook the full range of communities affected.

Ultimately, comparing Eglinton West and Jane and Finch demonstrates that racial profiling is not unique to one neighbourhood but is a structural feature of policing in Toronto. Both communities reveal how race, class, and geography intersect to shape youth experiences, though in ways inflected by distinct histories of stigmatization and resilience. As a community member and researcher, I see this comparison as crucial: it situates Eglinton West within the broader narrative of systemic discrimination while also affirming its unique story. To understand racial profiling in Toronto, we must resist the temptation to single out one community and instead recognize the systemic patterns that span across Black neighbourhoods.

Challenging Systemic Racism: Implications for Policy, Policing, and Community Practice

The findings of this study point to urgent implications for policy and practice across multiple sectors, policing, education, urban planning, and community development. Despite decades of reforms, the persistence of racial profiling demonstrates that surface-level changes such as bias training, community policing models, or the rebranding of "priority neighbourhoods" as "needs improvement areas" have failed to alter the structural dynamics of anti-Black racism. The testimonies from Eglinton West, together with my own lived experiences, show that Black youth remain disproportionately targeted by surveillance and criminalization. Any meaningful response must therefore move beyond symbolic gestures toward policies that address the deep-rooted intersections of race, gender, and socio-economic inequality.

Rooted at the intersections of race, gender, and socio-economic inequality, the data suggest that racial profiling in Toronto is not a matter of "a few bad apples" but a systemic feature of law enforcement (Tator & Henry, 2006). Proponents who frame misconduct as the result of isolated officers risk obscuring the broader institutional patterns and potentially alienating established allies. Consequently, reform strategies that focus solely on officer training or community relations are insufficient. Effective policies should center on accountability mechanisms, including transparent race-based data collection, independent oversight, and meaningful consequences for officers who engage in discriminatory practices. From my perspective as someone who grew up internalizing survival scripts around police encounters, the most urgent policy question is whether the current model of policing is compatible with equity at all.

A second implication lies within the education system, particularly in neighbourhoods such as Eglinton West and Jane and Finch, where schools have historically been both underfunded and over-policed. This combination has contributed to what scholars identify as the school-to-prison pipeline, in which disciplinary practices disproportionately channel Black youth toward the criminal justice system (Kunjufu, 2011). Addressing racial profiling in policing cannot be fully effective without parallel educational reforms that position schools as sites of empowerment rather than surveillance.

Reflecting on my own schooling, Black youth were often perceived as "trouble" before being recognized as students, a dynamic shaped by teachers' biases that frequently mirrored those of police. This adultification and lowered expectations reinforce systemic inequities, limiting students' academic and social development. Without meaningful curriculum reform and a commitment to culturally sustaining education, schools could risk reproducing the same racialized surveillance and marginalization that Black youth experience in policing.

Nonetheless, this study follows others which conclude that racial profiling in Toronto cannot be reduced to the misconduct of individual officers or the shortcomings of isolated institutions. Nonetheless, it reflects a systemic pattern of anti-Black racism sustained through overlapping structures of policing, education, and community governance. Taken together, the findings suggest that the central policy challenge is whether those systems, particularly policing as currently mandated, are compatible with equity at all. Addressing this question requires a shift from symbolic reform toward structural transformation, where accountability, curriculum reform, and sustained support for community organizations are embedded within broader strategies to dismantle systemic racism and to cultivate safer, more just futures for Black youth in Toronto

Theoretical Implications and Contributions to Understanding Racialized Policing

The findings contribute substantively to Critical Race Theory (CRT) by demonstrating how racial profiling is structurally embedded and normalized within policing practices in Eglinton West, capturing CRT's central tenet that racism is systemic and institutional. Additionally, the study highlights why Eglinton West receives comparatively limited attention in academic and media discourse relative to neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch, addressing the fifth research question.

The study contributes to Intersectionality scholarship by highlighting how race, gender, and socio-economic status combine to produce distinct policing experiences for Black youth. Specifically, young Black men face heightened criminalization and surveillance, while young Black women encounter forms of invisibility and restrictive stereotypes, with socio-economic marginalization intensifying these layered oppressions.

By situating youth experiences within broader structural, historical, and socio-economic contexts, the study clarifies how policing practices operate and why specific neighbourhoods remain overlooked in public discourse. Moreover, the frameworks illuminate how community actors respond to and mitigate these systemic inequities. In conclusion, the theoretical implications demonstrate that the research questions were meaningfully addressed and offer nuanced contributions to both CRT and Intersectionality, suggesting refinements that consider the spatial, temporal, and intersectional dimensions of racialized policing.

Boundaries and Silences in the Research

Every study carries its boundaries, and this project is no exception. These limitations do not undermine the value of the work but instead highlight areas where future scholarship and advocacy must go further.

The most significant limitation lies in the absence of direct testimony from Black youth themselves. The purpose of this study was to explore the intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in police encounters, and yet the voices of those most affected, the young people living these realities, are filtered through the perspectives of community and youth workers. While these intermediaries offer invaluable insight, they cannot fully capture the immediacy, nuance, and emotional texture of lived encounters. As a researcher and as someone who grew up in Eglinton West, I am acutely aware of this absence. The silencing of youth voices in research reflects a broader societal tendency to speak about Black youth rather than listen to them directly.

Another limitation concerns the scale of the study. Due to time and resource constraints, the research is based on the insights of one participant. Although the single perspective was rich, layered, and deeply informed by years of frontline work, it cannot fully represent the diversity of experiences within Eglinton West. Each youth worker, parent, and community member would carry their own stories and strategies of survival, and the limited sample size inevitably narrows the scope of the findings. From an academic standpoint, this restricts generalizability. From a personal standpoint, it reminds me that the story told here is part of a much larger tapestry of narratives that remain undocumented.

The geographic scope of the study also constitutes a limitation. By focusing primarily on Eglinton West, the research highlights dynamics that are deeply contextual and specific to that community. While comparisons were drawn to Jane and Finch, the study does not engage other Black neighbourhoods in Toronto or across Canada that face similar systemic dynamics. This narrow scope allows for depth but also leaves unanswered questions about how racial profiling may operate differently across urban, suburban, or rural settings. These gaps point to the need for broader comparative research that situates Eglinton West within the more expansive geography of Black experience in Canada.

From a methodological standpoint, the choice of a qualitative approach brings both strengths and challenges. Critical race theory and Intersectionality provide a framework for interrogating systemic inequities and centring the lived realities of Black communities, offering insights that quantitative methods often overlook. At the same time, the absence of large-scale statistical data makes it difficult to track the prevalence of racial profiling across neighbourhoods or assess changes over time, particularly because police data in Toronto is not made readily accessible. For example, the Toronto Police Service does not consistently disclose whether the individuals they stop are Black, concealing information that would make systemic patterns undeniable. This concealment itself reflects an institutional reluctance to acknowledge racism, as making such data public would expose the depth of racial disparities. Still, the absence of numerical breadth does not diminish the validity of the narratives presented here. Moreover, it highlights the tension between what institutions deem legible through data and what Black communities live and know through their everyday experiences. This disjuncture highlights why qualitative accounts are essential: they resist erasure, challenge the silences in institutional data, and demand recognition of realities that are deliberately concealed or dismissed.

Finally, the study is limited by the boundaries of access. Engaging Black youth directly requires navigating issues of ethics, consent, and trust, which were beyond the scope of this project. While this decision was necessary to protect vulnerable participants, it also means that the voices most central to the research question are absent. As a Black woman who once held the position of those youth, I feel this gap acutely. Their absence is not a flaw in their willingness to speak but a reflection of the systemic barriers that prevent them from being heard, by researchers, policymakers, and the public alike.

The limitations of this study serve as productive sites for future scholarship. Each limitation gestures toward critical areas of inquiry that remain underexplored. The absence of youth perspectives highlights the imperative of centering the voices of those most directly subjected to racial profiling, while the narrow geographic focus signals the value of comparative research across Toronto's diverse urban contexts. Furthermore, methodological constraints, compounded by the opacity of police data and the institutional reluctance to disclose race-based stop information, to foreground the structural barriers that hinder efforts to hold systems of power accountable. Nonetheless, these silences illuminate the necessity of continued research, advocacy, and counter-storytelling to disrupt the epistemic erasure of Black experiences and to advance a fuller understanding of racial profiling in Toronto.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study open pathways for future scholarship that can deepen, expand, and challenge our understanding of racial profiling, gender bias, and socio-economic marginalization in Toronto and beyond. By identifying what could not be fully captured here, new research can build on these findings to amplify voices, broaden scope, and push further toward equity-focused knowledge production.

First, future research must prioritize the voices of Black youth themselves. While this study drew on the testimony of a youth worker, providing valuable insights, it did not directly center the experiences of those most affected. Conducting interviews, focus groups, or participatory action research with youth in Eglinton West would offer a more immediate and nuanced understanding of how racial profiling shapes their daily lives. Such research must adopt trauma-informed approaches, recognizing that many individuals who engage with behavioral health or social services may have histories of trauma that they do not fully recognize or discuss, and that service providers may not always elicit or be equipped to address these experiences effectively (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Second, future research should expand beyond Eglinton West to conduct comparative studies across multiple Toronto neighbourhoods and other Canadian cities. Black communities such as parts of Scarborough, Rexdale, and regions outside the GTA, have received less attention despite facing similar challenges. Comparative studies would help clarify how geography, municipal policy, and community resources intersect with racial profiling, and challenge the narrative that profiling is limited to a few “problem areas” rather than reflecting systemic patterns across the city and nation. As highlighted during interviews, the City of Toronto once designated areas such as Jane

Finch and Eglinton West as “priority neighbourhoods” to recognize their need for resources. In March 2014, the city formally identified 31 Toronto neighbourhoods as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) under the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 (TSNS 2020) to support targeted interventions, producing NIA profiles for each area and providing methodological documentation on how these designations were determined (City of Toronto, 2021). By expanding research across multiple neighbourhoods, scholars can capture the diversity of Black youth experiences and the structural factors influencing local policing practices, providing a more comprehensive foundation for policy and community-based interventions. Ultimately, understanding the broader landscape is essential for developing strategies that address racial profiling not as isolated incidents but as part of systemic patterns that require coordinated, city-wide responses.

Third, further research is required to examine the gendered dimensions of racial profiling. While extant literature and the findings of this study emphasize the heightened surveillance of Black boys and young men, the experiences of Black girls remain largely underexplored. Future investigations should consider how processes such as adultification, disciplinary practices in schools, and hyper-sexualization influence Black girls’ interactions with policing and educational institutions. From a positionality perspective, as a Black woman, I recognize that invisibility can be as consequential as hyper-visibility. Incorporating Black girls’ narratives into research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of systemic racism and align with intersectional frameworks that resist reductive analyses. The limited discussion of Black female experiences in the present study highlights the necessity of engaging directly with this population to capture their perspectives and lived realities.

Lastly, there is a pressing need for longitudinal studies that track how racial profiling impacts Black youth over time. Much of the current research captures a snapshot of experiences but does not trace the cumulative effects of surveillance on educational outcomes, employment opportunities, or mental health. A long-term study following youth into adulthood could reveal how encounters with policing shape life trajectories. From my own experience, I know that early encounters with over-policing do not fade with age; they linger in memory, shaping selfperception and trust in institutions well into adulthood. Therefore, documenting these long-term effects would underscore the urgency of systemic change.

Taken together, the limitations of this study highlight both the complexity of racial profiling and the critical avenues for future research to enhance understanding of its multifaceted impacts. Prioritizing the perspectives of Black youth, conducting comparative analyses across diverse neighbourhoods, investigating the gendered dimensions of policing, and implementing longitudinal research are essential strategies for capturing the breadth and depth of these experiences. Centring youth voices, employing trauma-informed methodologies, and addressing systemic inequities will enable scholarship to move beyond documentation of disparities toward the development of evidence-based policies and interventions that advance equity and social justice. In this context**,** advancing this research constitutes both an academic and ethical imperative, as it amplifies historically silenced voices, exposes structural patterns of oppression, and provides a foundation for meaningful systemic reform.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced how racial profiling operates as a spatialized, gendered, and socioeconomic phenomenon in Toronto's Eglinton West, revealing how systemic inequalities continue to shape Black youths' encounters with police. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Spatial Justice, this research demonstrates that racial profiling is not a product of isolated misconduct, but an institutional pattern embedded in the geography, governance, and policing of racialized neighbourhoods. By situating Eglinton West within the broader context of urban transformation and gentrification, and by comparing its dynamics to those in Jane and Finch, this study exposes how redevelopment and surveillance work in tandem to sustain the criminalization of Black identity across different Black urban spaces.

The findings highlight three intersecting dynamics. First, the over-policing of Black youth in Eglinton West reflects broader patterns of racialized surveillance that mark Black presence in public spaces as inherently suspect. Second, gender plays a critical yet underexplored role, as Black girls experience unique forms of invisibility and adultification that shape their interactions with law enforcement and institutions. Third, socio-economic marginalization reinforces vulnerability, as low-income Black youth face heightened police scrutiny precisely because structural inequities constrain where they live, study, and socialize. Together, these findings demonstrate that race, class, and gender cannot be disentangled in understanding the everyday realities of policing and community life.

The comparative analysis with Jane and Finch aims to sharpens these conclusions. While both neighbourhoods experience racialized policing and community distrust, the manifestations differ. Jane and Finch's high-rise and subsidized-housing environment concentrates surveillance and intensifies visible poverty-based stigmas, whereas gentrification, displacement pressures,

and the erasure of cultural infrastructure shape Eglinton West's experience. However, despite these differing urban forms, both geographies produce similar outcomes, including curtailed freedom for youth, heightened institutional suspicion, and diminished trust in public authorities. This demonstrates that spatial form mediates but does not dissolve the racialized logic of policing.

This study also accentuates the importance of space as both a site of belonging and a terrain of state control. Little Jamaica's erasure through gentrification and its simultaneous hyper-surveillance by police illustrate how racialized urban spaces are both commodified and criminalized. However, within these same spaces, Black communities continue to generate resistance, care, and cultural continuity, reminding us of that survival itself is a form of political practice.

By grounding theory in lived experience through personal reflection and communitybased insights, this thesis contributes to scholarship that reclaims narrative as a mode of knowledge production. The conversation with a community worker illuminates how racial profiling affects youth not only materially but emotionally, shaping their sense of safety, identity, and trust in public institutions. These insights call for reimagining public safety beyond policing, rooted in equity, community empowerment, and structural transformation rather than punitive control. Nonetheless, this work affirms that addressing racial profiling requires more than reforming police procedures. It demands confronting the socio-economic and spatial systems that sustain inequality. The future of justice in Toronto's Black communities depends on policies that recognize lived experience as expertise, invest in the cultural and economic infrastructure of racialized neighbourhoods, and protect the right of Black youth to move through their city

without fear. In doing so, we not only challenge the roots of racial profiling but also begin to imagine new geographies of freedom, belonging, and collective care.

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