Low-Income, Racialized Women's Experiences of Housing Access in Lawrence Heights, Toronto, Canada

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the experiences of low-income, racialized women in Toronto's Lawrence Heights during ongoing redevelopment in the early twenty-first century. Grounded in an intersectional feminist urban studies framework, it examines how poverty, gender, and race shape access to affordable housing and employment, and how social networks mediate everyday challenges and sense of belonging. The study draws on qualitative interviews with residents and insights from service providers alongside social network analysis to explore housing search, employment precarity, discrimination in rental markets, housing repair issues, community safety concerns, and participation in revitalization consultations. Findings highlight multiple barriers to securing adequate housing and stable work, while showing how family, neighbours, and community ties provide resilience, mutual support, and locally specific knowledge. The thesis contributes empirically by centering the voices of marginalized women in Lawrence Heights, analytically by linking intersectionality, social networks, place, and belonging in the context of redevelopment, and materially by speaking to debates on social mix policy and urban planning in Canada.

Keywords: affordable housing; belonging; Canada; discrimination; feminist urban studies; intersectionality; Lawrence Heights; low-income women; racialized women; social mix policy; social network analysis; urban redevelopment.

Statement on use of Artificial Intelligence

I acknowledge the limited use of AI software (i.e., Microsoft Co-Pilot) during the preparation of this thesis. My use of AI was restricted to occasional proofreading-type support and did not contribute to the substance or originality of the research. On a few occasions, when I was uncertain about phrasing, I input short phrases or individual sentences into the software to check clarity or grammar. I reviewed all suggestions manually and only incorporated changes that still reflected my own voice and writing style. AI was not used to write, generate, or substantially edit any part of this thesis. It did not produce arguments, analysis, interpretations, conceptual framing, or examples. It did not summarize literature, develop ideas, restructure paragraphs, or draft sections. All intellectual content, including the design of the study, analysis, themes, interpretations, and the full text of every chapter, is entirely my own work.

My use of AI complies with York University's York University's **Guidelines for Graduate Students**, the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies' **Artificial Intelligence: Considerations for Graduate Research**, and the Canadian Tri-Council Federal Research Funding Agencies' **Draft guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in the development and review of research grant proposals**. This thesis is a genuine, original account of the research I conducted. All analysis, findings, and conclusions are my own, and all sources are cited accordingly.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Affordable housing has long been recognized as a cornerstone of individual and collective well-being, yet persistent affordability challenges have intensified in recent years and necessitate scholarly attention. While policy debates and research have long acknowledged the structural barriers facing low-income households, less attention has been paid to how these pressures are experienced at the intersections of race, gender, and poverty. This thesis addresses that gap by examining the lived experiences of low-income, racialized women in Toronto's Lawrence Heights neighbourhood, situating their struggles within both the longer-term trajectories of Canadian housing policy and the more immediate pressures of precarious rental markets. This chapter begins by tracing the broader structural and policy terrain of affordable housing in Canada before turning to the specific ways in which these dynamics are experienced by renters in Toronto.

To frame this enquiry, the study takes up the concepts of place, sense of belonging, and community, which are central to understanding how housing affordability is lived and contested. Place is understood here not simply as a physical location but as a site where material conditions, social relations, and symbolic meanings intersect to shape everyday experiences (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 1994). A sense of belonging highlights the affective and relational dimensions of housing, pointing to how renters negotiate inclusion, exclusion, and recognition within specific neighbourhoods (Antonsich, 2010; hooks, 2009). The term community is likewise complex, often carrying normative assumptions about cohesion or shared identity (Putnam, 2000; Chaskin, 1997). In this research, the concept of community is understood not as a fixed or homogeneous entity, but as a relational and socially constructed field of association. Following Holcomb (2017), community refers to the network of relationships and shared practices that connect individuals to one another and to place, producing a sense of belonging and mutual obligation that is both spatially grounded and socially negotiated. It encompasses the everyday interactions and informal solidarities through which residents in Lawrence Heights sustain connection, cooperation, and meaning amid conditions of uncertainty and change. In this thesis, these concepts are used critically to refer to the social networks, resources and practices through which renters navigate precarious housing conditions and build forms of collective resilience.

Foregrounding these concepts allows the study to move beyond narrow reliance on structural indicators of affordability to examine how broader political-economic forces are lived in everyday urban contexts. Place, belonging, and community provide a conceptual backdrop for interpreting how low-income renters navigate affordability pressures in Lawrence Heights, while also situating these experiences in relation to systemic housing exclusion. The study builds on intersectionality, social mix, and social network analysis to examine how overlapping social positions, housing policies, and relational ties both constrain and enable renters' housing strategies. Together, these conceptual and analytical orientations connect the study's research objectives (outlined below in section three) to the empirical investigations in chapter four, situating affordability not only as a policy problem but as a lived and relational condition.

1.1 Accessing affordable housing in Canada

Affordable housing has emerged as one of the most pressing public issues in Canada as persistent demand has consistently outstripped available supply (Wellesley Institute, 2017).[1] This imbalance is reflected in recent trends. Recent indicators show heightened pressures in the rental market, with apartment starts reaching record highs. due to rising demand for purpose-built rental units while vacancy rates for Ontario and Toronto also rose to 2.7 percent, and 2.5 percent, respectively, an increase from previous years but still below the 3 percent threshold generally considered indicative of a balanced rental market. This suggests that despite slight improvements, residents in Ontario, including in Toronto, continue to face significant constraints in rental housing availability (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2024; CMHC, 2025).[2] These factors disproportionately affect low-income households, (i.e., defined here as households with incomes in the lowest 60 percent of the income distribution) particularly those in the lowest income brackets (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2018). These structural pressures are not abstract, rather, they materialize in the everyday struggles of renter households, who navigate affordability challenges through precarious incomes, systemic discrimination, and gaps in institutional support. The challenges faced by these households can be understood across the three intersecting domains of income insecurity (i.e., unstable employment and limited incomes), discrimination and social disadvantage (including social prejudice and racism), and institutional and support gaps (i.e., limited accord options and uneven access to services) (Walks and Bourne, 2006; Wellesley Institute, 2017). Collectively, these factors compound affordability pressures, producing both material hardship and significant social effects. Studies further note behavioural effects from these barriers, including feeling overwhelmed, and diminished persistence in meeting commitments (Stuber et al., 2008; Ruff et al., 2016; Logie et al., 2018). Yet, despite these realities, existing scholarship has disproportionately centred market dynamics and policy debates, leaving renters, particularly racialized renters, underexamined in both academic and policy discussions.

This gap is especially evident in the intersectional experiences of racialized women, whose housing struggles have often been overlooked despite a considerable body of research documenting broader affordability challenges (Chaleshtari, 2020). Much of the existing scholarship emphasizes structural issues such as poverty and precarity, but few studies examine how these dynamics are lived and negotiated within specific neighbourhood contexts. Public debates on housing often center middle-class concerns, leaving the lived realities of low-income renters underrepresented in both research and policy discourse. This thesis addresses this gap by focusing on Toronto's Lawrence Heights, a community marked by high rates of poverty and a significant racialized population (CMHC, 2006). To understand this group's experiences, the study draws on semi-structured interviews to foreground women's first-hand accounts of accessing affordable housing and the barriers they encounter. In doing so, it highlights the interplay between race, gender, class in shaping housing precarity, and situates these narratives within the broader context of Canada's affordable housing crisis. To situate these lived and

[1] In Canada, use of the term housing affordability derives from a 1990 report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in England. According to this report, housing affordability refers to a situation where the costs for renting and/or owning a home do not place unreasonable pressures on a household's annual income (MacLennan and Williams, 1990).

[2] A "balanced" rental market typically reflects a vacancy rate of around 3 percent (CMHC, 2024).

intersectional experiences within the broader housing landscape, it is necessary to first examine how affordability is conventionally measured at the structural level and how national indicators capture, and how often obscure the pressures faced by low-income renter households.

1.1.1 Low-income renter household experiences with accessing affordable housing

In Canada, affordable housing is typically assessed using the shelter-to-income ratio (STIR), which measures household expenditures on shelter as a proportion of gross monthly income. A household is considered to be in affordable housing if it spends no more than 30 percent of its gross monthly income on total shelter costs (including rent or mortgage payments, property taxes, and utilities; those spending 30 percent or more are considered to be in unaffordable housing. (Statistics Canada, 2022). In 2021, 20.9 percent of Canadian households spent 30 percent or more of their income on shelter costs, down from 24.1 in 2016. (Statistics Canada, 2022). While this modest decline suggests some improvement, a substantial proportion of households continue to live in unaffordable housing. Beyond these headline figures, the vacancy rate shifts and rent escalation documented in this chapter point to affordability pressures that are structural rather than episodic. Taken together, these national indicators reveal the persistence and stratification of affordability pressures across Canada, yet they also obscure important geographic differences across Canada's housing markets. Affordability is particularly acute in major urban centres such as Toronto, which reflects not only extreme affordability pressures but also the broader geography of uneven affordability across Canada, a pattern explored further in the following discussion.

Understanding affordability pressures requires attention to the geographic unevenness of Canada's housing markets. In 2016, the highest average monthly rental costs for two-bedroom apartments in Canada were recorded in large metropolitan areas such as Vancouver ($1,450), Toronto ($1,327), Calgary ($1,258) and Edmonton ($1,229) (CMHC, 2018; Statistics Canada 2017)[3]. These steep costs coincide with large renter populations in Canada's major cities; in Toronto, for example, 34.1 percent of residents were renters in 2017, and a substantial share identified as visible minorities in 2017 (City of Toronto, 2017; BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2018). The Wellesley Institute highlights how renter households in Toronto face additional barriers to secure housing, including lower average wages and fewer material resources than homeowners (Wellesley Institute, 2017). Taken together, these figures show that affordability pressures occur across Canadian cities but are shaped by the intersection of local housing markets, each city's demographic composition and urban-specific housing dynamics. Such disparities illustrate why Toronto, as both a site of concentrated affordability challenges and a highly diverse renter population, is a critical focus of this study.

The intensity of affordability pressures is evident in the persistently high share of renter households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, a pattern that has persisted despite fluctuations in the broader housing market. One of the first analyses of low-

[3] Other data sets from organizations such as the Toronto Real Estate Board (TREB), PadMapper, The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), and the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) were examined. However, the time periods for these data sets varied and many did not have updated information. Therefore, only data from the CMHC and Statistics Canada is discussed due to its higher reliability at the time of writing.

income households' housing experiences in the city found that, "In 2006, 47 percent of renter households were spending 30 percent or more of household income on housing costs (compared to 27.7 percent of owners), and with much lower incomes overall" (City of Toronto, 2012, p. 15). By 2016, two out of three renter households in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area (GTHA) reported unaffordable shelter costs (City of Toronto, 2017). More recent census data reinforce this picture of affordability pressures. In 2021, 28.8 percent of renter households were in unaffordable housing, compared to 13.1 percent of owners (Statistics Canada, 2021). These figures underscore the persistence of affordability stress over time and point to structural conditions rather than temporary market anomalies. When viewed through the lens of core housing need, a measure that encompasses affordability, adequacy (whether housing is in good repair), and suitability (whether housing has enough bedrooms for household size and composition), renter vulnerabilities emerge as systemic and uneven, shaped by household size, income composition, and neighbourhood context. In this sense, lack of housing affordability in Toronto cannot be reduced to household-level deficits but must be understood as the outcome of entrenched policies and market dynamics that continue to constrain renters' options across time and geographies.

These structural dynamics have been compounded by policy decisions and market analyses that have deepened affordability pressures in Toronto. Analysis from the Toronto Regional Housing Data Bank emphasizes the persistent vulnerabilities of renters, showing that "renters are much more likely to be in core housing need than owners" (MarketWired Newsroom, 2014; Evergreen, 2015, p. 35). [4] A 2018 report from the planning firm Malone Given Parsons (MGP) and the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) foundthat over one-third (36 per cent) of households in the GTA were already in unsuitable housing - defined as lacking adequate and affordable one-or two-bedroom dwellings (Malone Given Parsons, 2018, p. 7). Similarly, the Evergreen Housing Action Lab's Missing Middle Working Group found that nearly one-third (31.6 per cent) of renter households in Toronto did not currently live in suitable housing (Evergreen, 2018, p. 15). More recent studies point to the intensifying role of financialization in shaping rental markets. The Financial Landlords study found that corporate landlords charge rents averaging 44 per cent higher than neighbourhood norms, disproportionately affecting low-income and racialized renters (University of Waterloo, 2025). Meanwhile, the CMHC Fall 2024 Rental Market Report recorded turnover rent growth in Toronto of up to 40.7 per cent, illustrating how speculation drives ongoing affordability barriers and tenant displacement (CMHC, 2024). Collectively, these findings underscore that affordability, adequacy and suitability challenges are not temporary issues, but enduring conditions embedded within broader structural processes that constrain low-income renters' access to housing.

Beyond statistical measures, it is also crucial to examine how housing debates are framed and whose voices are prioritized. These public debates often center middle-class concerns, leaving the lived realities of low-income renters underrepresented in both research and policy discourse. Mainstream policy and media discussions, often led by real-estate advocates and policymakers, tend to emphasize homeownership while paying limited attention to the needs of low-income renters. As Tim Richter, President and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH), observes, "when we talk about housing in Canada… we are most often

[4] This is a term used by the CMHC and it is explained in a later section of this chapter.

talking about home ownership and the middle class" (Monsebratten, 2015). This framing sidelines the structural barriers and lived realities of renters, particularly those facing intersecting challenges such as poverty, racism and sexism. A more critical approach requires centering marginalized renters' experiences to capture the full scope of Canada's housing crisis. Civil-society organizations and advocacy groups have increasingly worked to amplify these voices, pushing renter concerns into policy discussions and reorganizing how housing issues are understood. Attending to these discursive dynamics shows why affordability must be analysed not only as a matter of economic strain but as a policy issue shaped by competing interests and unequal power dynamics.

1.1.2 Low-income renter household's access to affordable housing as a policy issue

In recent years, public attention to Canada's housing crisis has grown markedly, with media coverage and advocacy organizations drawing increased attention to escalating affordability challenges. [5] The most significant policy shifts, however, have occurred at the federal level through the introduction of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) in 2017 and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) in 2018. The NHS represented Canada's first comprehensive, long-term federal commitment to housing, framed explicitly within a human rights-based framework. Initially allocating approximately $40 billion over ten years and since expanded to over $82 billion by 2024, it encompasses both new and existing programs (CMHC, 2024; Open Council, 2024; Parliamentary Budget Office [PBO], 2022; Lee, 2022). Key pillars include the National Housing Co-Investment Fund, the Rapid Housing Initiative, and the Canada Housing Benefit, distributed through grants and low-interest loans to build, renovate and preserve affordable dwellings. The NHS also established new governance mechanisms, notably the National Housing Council and the Federal Housing Advocate to provide oversight and accountability (Housing of Commons, 2024). Complementing this, the NPRS established the Market Basket Measure (MBM)[6] as Canada's official poverty line and introduced legally binding poverty reduction targets that call for a 20 percent reduction in poverty in 2020 and a 50 percent reduction by 2030 (relative to 2015 baselines), monitored by the newly created National Advisory Council on Poverty, alongside a composite indicator framework to monitor progress (Statistics Canada, 2022; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020).

Taken together, the NHS and NPRS cemented housing affordability and poverty reduction as integrated national priorities. While the NHS mobilized unprecedented capital investment and accountability structures, the NPRS established poverty reduction as a measurable federal responsibility. These federal frameworks also spurred significant provincial responses. For example, the Government of Ontario launched its Housing Supply Plan in 2019,

[5] For instance, the Housing First model of housing provision was taken up in many public policy networks from 2015 onwards following the Government of Canada's adoption of the model. This result was made possible by a decade of advocacy from various organizations.

[6] MBM is conceptualized as, "…a family is living in low income if it is unable to afford the cost of a pre-defined set of goods and services that together make up a "basket" of necessities for that family size. The basket includes the costs associated with…shelter…" among other expenses (Scott, 2014 p.4). In large urban centres like Toronto, the MBM threshold for a family of four was around $50,000 (Statistics Canada, 2024). In August 2018, the federal government announced that the MBM methodology would be used as the official measure of poverty in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019). As of 2022, 9.9 percent of Canadians lived in poverty according to the MBM (Statistics Canada, 2024).

later reinforced by Bill 97 (the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023) and Bill 185 (the Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024) which aimed to accelerate development approvals and expand supply (Government of Ontario, 2019; Government of Ontario, 2024). Ontario's revision of its housing targets additionally facilitated the unlocking of $357 million in federal funding through the Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund, demonstrating how intergovernmental collaboration can advance housing provision (Ahmed, 2024). These initiatives illustrate how federal strategies cascaded across jurisdictions, prompting provinces to align their own legislative and policy efforts with Ottawa's renewed emphasis on affordability. Despite the loosely coordinated federal and provincial initiatives, implementation challenges remain. Uneven provincial uptake, cost-sharing disputes between jurisdictions, and persistent affordability gaps in high-demand urban areas continue to limit progress (Statistics Canada, 2022; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020). These difficulties point to the limits of relying on governmental frameworks alone, as non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups increasingly step in to advance alternative solutions and reshape public discourse around housing affordability.

The expanded presence of non-government organizations (NGOs) has emerged as a critical complement to government initiatives, widening the range of actors engaged in debates over housing affordability. By bringing diverse forms of expertise and situated knowledge into the policy arena, NGOs facilitate the co-production of policy that is more attentive to equity and inclusion. Organizations within the co-operative housing movement, such as the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHFC), have advanced initiatives aimed at extending access to secure housing for multi-barriered households, while the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) remains a central voice in shaping both public and policy design (Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, 2018). ONPHA's 2025 Conference, Housing at the Heart conference, for example convened leaders from across the sector to deliberate proposals such as acquisition funds to preserve affordable housing stock and strategies for embedding community housing within broader policy frameworks (ONPHA, 2018; ONHPA, 2025; ONHPA, 2025). Yet sustainability of this momentum depends on the availability of reliable and disaggregated housing data. Without timely information, policymakers and NGOs alike are constrained in their ability to design interventions that adequately respond to the complex and uneven geographies of affordability. This persistent data gap represents not simply a technical shortcoming but a structural barrier, underlining the stakes of the discussion that follows.

1.1.3 Issues in collecting information about renters' access to affordable housing

Several barriers complicate the accurate assessment of renters' housing needs, with one of the most persistent and consequential being the availability and quality of housing data itself. Despite the centrality of reliable data for diagnosing affordability pressures and formulating evidence-based interventions, Canada's housing statistics remain fragmented, inconsistent, and ill-suited for capturing the experiences of low-income renter households. These limitations show up in multiple ways: uneven geographic coverage across national, provincial, and municipal levels; collection methods that privilege homeowners or larger urban centres while neglecting smaller jurisdictions; and inadequate disaggregation by income, race, gender, and other axes of social difference. The result is a patchwork of indicators that provides, at best, a partial picture of affordability challenges and, at worst, actively obscures the structural vulnerabilities of renters

most at risk. For policymakers, advocates, and researchers, data gaps severely constrain their capacity to design targeted interventions and perpetuate reliance on incomplete or misleading proxies. Interrogating the data environment is therefore not simply a technical exercise but a critical analytical step for understanding the uneven terrain of rental housing precarity in Canada.

One key barrier lies in the limitations of institutional data sources. Organizations such as Statistics Canada, the CMHC and the Canadian Rental Housing Index produce datasets that differ across both geographic scale and update frequency. For example, Statistics Canada's quinquennial long-form census provides nationwide coverage across all municipalities, but because it occurs only every five years, in years ending in "1" and "6", it cannot capture short-term changes in rental markets. The census results are also released over several months, creating a further time lag for researchers. CMHC, by contrast, conducts its Rental Market Survey every fall and publishes an annual Rental Market Report that focuses on larger urban centres and purpose-built rental buildings. The newer Canadian Housing Survey (CHS) is fielded every two years and asks households about housing conditions and experiences, but it does not include all municipalities. Meanwhile, the Rental Housing Index excludes municipalities with fewer than 4,000 residents (BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2018). These differences in geographic coverage and data collection intervals, combined with inconsistent definitions across sources, constrain our ability to compare and integrate datasets. The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of data, but its fragmentation and incompatibility-conditions that risk reproducing gaps and silences, especially around the experiences of smaller jurisdictions and marginalized renter groups.

A second barrier concerns the inadequacy of standardized poverty measures such as the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO), the Low-Income Measure (LIM) and the MBM, in capturing intersectional and spatial dimensions of housing vulnerability[7]. While these indicators establish official thresholds, they obscure the ways affordability is stratified by class, race, gender and immigration status. For example, census data show that poverty rates in Toronto are higher among racialized groups, non-permanent residents, children and older women (Social Planning Toronto, 2021; Yin, Sheppard and Balusubramaniam, 2024). When affordability pressures are assessed through housing costs relative to income, the disparities intensify: three-quarters of renter households earning less than $60,000 per year in the Greater Toronto Area spend more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter costs, the benchmark for affordability stress, and this figure rises to 87 percent among renter households with incomes below $30,000 (City of Toronto Housing Data Hub, 2024). Racialized groups are over-represented among these low-income households, and they also tend to have lower average employment incomes than non-racialized Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2023). These income gaps help explain why racialized renters are particularly vulnerable to affordability stress and why standard poverty measures underestimate the disproportionate burdens borne by low-income and racialized renters.

[7] LICOs were first rolled out in the Family Expenditure Survey (now the National Household Survey). They identify families that "…spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter, and clothing…" (Statistics Canada, 2017). LIMs are used to "…compare the situation of those at the bottom with those who are in the middle in that same year…" (Scott, 2014). The MBM was developed in 2002 by the federal government organization, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) (Scott, 2014).

A related barrier is geographical: racialized populations are disproportionately concentrated in a handful of high-cost urban centres. Visible-minority households are heavily clustered in census metropolitan areas (CMAs); in 2016, 95.5 per cent of visible-minority households resided in a CMA (Edwards, 2019). Within those CMAs, Toronto alone accounted for 38.9 per cent of visible-minority households, followed by Vancouver (15.5 per cent) and Montréal (13.1 per cent) (Ibid). Among the ten CMAs with the highest rates of core housing need for visible-minority households, seven were in Ontario, and the remaining three were Halifax, Regina and Vancouver (Ibid). These locations also have some of the country's highest rental costs, meaning that racialized renters, already facing lower incomes and higher poverty rates, are more likely to live in markets where affordable housing is scarce. Recognizing this geographic dimension is essential for understanding how race, income and space interact to shape renters' access to affordable housing in Canada's largest urban centres.

Beyond the shortcomings of standardized poverty measures, a third weakness lies in the static nature of income categories within national datasets. Housing precarity is not a fixed condition but a dynamic process, shaped by employment volatility, debt accumulation, and intergenerational disadvantage. As Sowell (2015) observes, individuals often move across income brackets over the course of their lives, shifting in and out of poverty thresholds across census cycles while facing persistent housing insecurity. Yet most available data freeze affordability at discrete moments in time, failing to capture the fluidity of household income trajectories. This static framing obscures how cumulative disadvantage is produced, and how renters remain vulnerable even as their income status appears to change. Without longitudinal and disaggregated data, the enduring and cyclical nature of rental housing precarity remains hidden, leaving policy responses ill-equipped to address its structural depth.

Finally, even when new policy frameworks are introduced their effectiveness is impeded by the absence of disaggregated renter-level data (Newsroom, 2017). Ontario's 2017 Fair Housing Plan (FHP), for instance, was launched amid rising concern about affordability and signalled significant political recognition of the issue. Yet the plan was formulated without sufficiently detailed data on tenure types, household structures, and neighbourhood dynamics, limiting policymakers' ability to assess how interventions affected those most vulnerable to housing precarity. While the FHP sought to stabilize markets through neo-Keynesian measures, such as tempering demand and curbing speculation, its reliance on blunt market instruments revealed the limitations of policy responses crafted without comprehensive renter-level evidence (Blinder, 1979; Pagliaro, 2018). Short-term outcomes, including temporary declines in home prices and reduced rental supply, further illustrate how stabilization measures can produce unintended consequences when detached from the lived reality of renters. Thus, while the FHP marked an important moment of political visibility for housing affordability, it also showed how the absence of granular data continues to weaken the potential of policy interventions to address the structural drivers of precarity.

Taken together, these limitations point to a deeper structural problem, Canada's housing data infrastructure is extensive in volume yet inadequate in analytical scope. Fragmented across jurisdictions, static in its temporal framing, and limited in its attention to intersectional inequalities, it produces a paradox in which data are plentiful, but insight remains partial. For researchers and policymakers, the challenge is therefore not only technical, collecting more

information, but epistemological, interrogating how existing data frameworks systematically obscure the lived realities of low-income renters. Unless restructured to capture the geographic and social complexity of affordability, Canada's data environment will continue to generate distorted pictures of housing need, leaving evidence-based policy short-handed in addressing the structural drivers of precarity.

1.2 The impact of poverty on low-income households' access to affordable housing

The affordability of housing is one of the three core components of housing need (Pomeroy, 2012, p.2). In Canada, 1.5 million fell below core housing need in 2022, reflecting an ongoing gap between incomes and adequate shelter (CMHC, 2022). The conventional 30 percent shelter-to-income ratio, widely used as a benchmark for affordability, reduces a complex set of pressures into a single threshold (Fiedler et al., 2005; Fallis, 2010; Weeks and Leblanc, 2010). While useful for identifying cost burdens, this measure obscures the financial realities of households whose rental payments already consume a disproportionate share of limited income, leaving them little flexibility to absorb other essential costs (Picot and Lu, 2017). As Pomeroy has argued, low-income renters often confront a trade-off between shelter and basic needs such as food or transportation, producing vulnerabilities that extend beyond housing alone (Pomeroy, 2001, p.3). Recent evidence confirms that affordability pressures remain entrenched and disproportionately borne by racialized and low-income groups. A 2024 cycle of the Canadian Social Survey found that nearly half (45 percent) of Canadians were very concerned about their ability to afford housing, and that 81 percent of racialized Canadians experienced at least one housing challenge compared with 63 percent of non-racialized Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2024). Housing challenges were most prevalent among South Asian (90 percent), Filipino (86 percent) and Black (84 percent) respondents (Ibid). The National Advisory Council on Poverty's 2024 progress report likewise noted that cost-of-living increases for shelter and transportation continue to outpace income gains for lower-income households, and that poverty and food insecurity remain highest among female-led lone-parent families (36.5 percent), Black households (31.9 %) and Indigenous persons living off reserve (28.6 percent) (National Advisory Council on Poverty, 2024). Collectively, these findings underscore how the affordability crisis is intertwined with race, gender and immigration status, illustrating the persistent and intersectional nature of housing precarity in Canada.

Poverty mediates access to housing by compelling households to make constant financial trade-offs that erode stability and quality of life. With scarce resources, renters are often forced to prioritize shelter at the expense of food, transportation, or healthcare, a dynamic that amplifies material hardship and constrains social mobility. Empirical evidence from food bank usage and community studies underscores how low-income households remain in overcrowded or deteriorating units or depend on fragile networks of family and friends to meet rent obligations (Toronto Community Foundation, 2012; Daily Bread Food Bank, 2024). These strategies may provide temporary relief but embed households within cycles of debt, stress, and cumulative deprivation (Picot and Lu, 2017). Such patterns reveal how poverty does more than limit purchasing power, it interacts with housing markets to reproduce structural insecurity, positioning affordability as an entrenched and relational condition rather than a discrete measure of income against costs (Fotheringham, 2016). These dynamics, however, are not experienced uniformly; rather, they intersect with the spatial concentration of poverty across neighbourhoods,

with place-based inequalities intensifying the affordability challenges faced by low-income renters.

1.2.1 The impact of place-based poverty on low-income renters' access to affordable housing

Place-based poverty highlights how the spatial concentration of disadvantage magnifies housing insecurity for low-income renters. It is within these formations that opportunities for housing access, social mobility, and belonging are unequally distributed. In Toronto, the geographical clustering of poverty has intensified over recent decades, shaping access to affordable housing in highly uneven ways. A landmark study commissioned by United Way Toronto and York Region (UWTYR) documented that the proportion of low-income households nearly doubled between 1981 and 2001, rising from 17.8 percent to 43.2 percent, with particularly stark increases in neighbourhoods with high proportions of racialized residents (Poverty by Postal Code [PBPC], 2004). These dynamics were not evenly distributed, by 2001, visible minorities comprised over three-quarters (i.e., 77.5 percent) of households in the city's low-income neighbourhoods (PBPC, 2004). During this same period, the poverty rate for racialized, low-income households surged by 362 percent, while the poverty rate for non-racialized, low-income households declined by 28 percent (PBPC, 2004). Such findings demonstrate how poverty is not merely an individual condition and a structural process but also a spatialized process that structures renters' exposure to affordability pressures, with neighbourhood-level disparities amplifying the risks of exclusion and precarity.

Longstanding evidence demonstrates that poverty in Toronto is not only geographically concentrated but also racialized. A 2006 study by York University's Institute for Social Research found that 72 percent of Somali, 60 percent of Afghan, 57 percent of Ethiopian, and 54 percent of Bangladeshi households lived below the poverty line, with 44 percent of the city's low-income households being foreign-born (Ornstein, 2006). Smith and Ley (2008) further noted that visible minorities made up 37 percent of Toronto's low-income population, underscoring how racialized disadvantage was disproportionately concentrated in neighbourhoods with entrenched poverty. More recent evidence confirms and extends these patterns. Between 2020 and 2022, Toronto's child poverty rate rose from 16.8 to 25.3 percent, the highest among Canadian cities, affecting more than 117,890 children (Social Planning Toronto, 2024). These increases were not city-wide but concentrated in particular places: in nine wards at least 30 percent of children lived in poverty, and in 40 census tracts, largely in Scarborough, the northwest inner suburbs, and parts of the downtown core, child poverty exceeded 40 percent. Such evidence shows that poverty in Toronto is spatially clustered in ways that overlap with race, immigration status, and family structure, producing neighbourhoods where affordability pressures and social exclusion reinforce one another. In this sense, poverty's persistence is best understood not simply as an individual condition but as a geographically uneven process that entrenches racialized cycles of housing precarity.

The persistence of these dynamics shows low-income, racialized women's high vulnerability within Toronto's housing landscape. Decades of research show that these women consistently bear a disproportionate share of affordability pressures, not only because racialized households earn less than their non-racialized counterparts, but because women, especially

racialized women, are overrepresented in low-income households and face compounded disadvantages (Wellesley Institute, 2016; Picot and Lu, 2017). Data from the United Way Toronto and York Region (UWYTR) study indicated that racialized Canadians earned only 81.4 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized Canadians (PBPC, 2004), while a Wellesley Institute report found that in Canada in 2011 racialized women made just 88.2 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized women and 56.5 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized men (Block and Galabuzi, 2011). More recent evidence continues this pattern, the 2016 census showed that racialized women had the highest unemployment rate (10 percent) and were concentrated in the lowest-income occupations, with 25.1 percent earning wages in the bottom decile, a rate 66 percent higher than for non-racialized women (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [CCPA], 2018). A Status of Women Canada report further emphasized that female-headed households among racialized poor populations remain particularly disadvantaged (Women in Canada [WIC], 2011). These material inequities are not simply statistical, but shape lived experiences of insecurity. The 2011 UWYTR study noted that racialized women were more likely to worry about meeting monthly rent and to forego other essential needs to prioritize housing costs (Vertical Poverty Report [VPR], 2011). Taken together, these findings reveal how entrenched income disparities and systemic discrimination interact with housing markets to produce enduring vulnerabilities for racialized women, situating them at the sharpest intersection of poverty, gender, and race in the struggle for affordable housing.

1.2.2 The impact of gender and race-based discrimination on low-income households' access to affordable housing

The challenges of housing access for racialized and low-income women are deeply entrenched and persist over time. Earlier research has underscored the gendered dimensions of precarious housing, with women experiencing higher rates of landlord discrimination than men when attempting to secure stable housing (Wekerle, 1993; Precarious Housing in Canada, 2010; Snapshot of Racialized Poverty [SRP], 2013). More recent studies reaffirm that these barriers have not diminished but, in many cases, have intensified. A national report highlights the continued housing discrimination faced by racialized and immigrant women, linking these barriers to broader patterns of economic exclusion and gender inequality (Maki, 2023). The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2023) similarly observes that women, particularly racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer women, face heightened risks of housing insecurity, with disproportionate rates of homelessness and precarious tenancy. These systemic disadvantages have concrete and often devastating implications. According to the Toronto Women's City Alliance, Aboriginal, racialized, and immigrant women are more likely to cite the lack of affordable housing as a barrier to leaving violent situations (Santokie, 2015). When discrimination is experienced repeatedly, women may be deterred from pursuing housing opportunities altogether or may withdraw from the search process, reducing their visibility in rental markets and further constraining their access to affordable units (Santokie, 2015). Taken together, these findings reveal not only persistent inequities in housing access, but also how gendered and racialized discrimination intersect with poverty to trap women in cycles of exclusion, vulnerability, and housing precarity.

Looking at Canadian evidence, gendered and racialized discrimination in housing is not incidental but systemic, with compounding effects on women's access to affordable shelter. The

Measuring Discrimination in Rental Housing across Canada study (CCHR, 2025) demonstrates that landlords were significantly less likely to respond to racialized applicants, and when they did, responses were shorter, less accommodating, and more likely to involve demands for intrusive financial or personal documentation. Parallel findings emerge in the Nowhere to Go report (CCHR, 2024), which documents how survivors of gender-based violence, disproportionately racialized, immigrant, and newcomer women, face heightened obstacles in securing private rentals, with their intersecting identities amplifying vulnerability to precarity. Taken together, these studies reveal how systemic inequities not only limit women's access to affordable units but also entrench broader cycles of exclusion, demonstrating that racialized and gendered discrimination remains a defining feature of Canadian housing markets. These dynamics highlight the need for intersectional approaches that can capture how overlapping systems of gender, race and class co-produce housing exclusion, a perspective taken up in the next section.

1.2.3 Intersectional studies on access to affordable housing

The effects of racism cannot be minimized when examining low-income women's access to affordable housing. While earlier scholarship emphasized the relative scarcity of intersectional research in Canada (Khosla, 2003), the past two decades have witnessed a steady expansion of studies that foreground the racialized and feminized dimensions of housing precarity. Seminal contributions such as Wekerle's (1993) examination of gendered poverty and Novac, Brown, and Bourbonnais' (1996) study on discrimination in rental markets first established race and gender as critical axes shaping women's housing exclusion. Subsequent work confirmed these dynamics. Zine (2002) observed that racial discrimination in housing searches restricted options, lengthened search times, and produced stigma, while Murdie (2005) documented recurring barriers for racialized refugees in Ontario, including the limited availability of guarantors and references. Building on this foundation, recent national research has significantly advanced the evidence base. The Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network's Pan-Canadian Survey and the companion report Women, Girls, and Gender-Diverse People in Canada (WNHHN and CHRC, 2021) represent the most comprehensive assessments to date of how gender, race, immigration status, and other intersecting identities shape housing need and homelessness. These studies demonstrate that systemic discrimination continues to structure women's access to affordable housing, even as it manifests in new forms, reinforcing the argument that racism and sexism are inseparable from spatialized housing disadvantage in Canada.

Likewise, the effects of sexism on housing access warrant sustained attention. Khosla (2003) argued that analyses of Canadian housing issues had long been shaped by masculinist assumptions that sidelined women's needs. Within this paradigm, women's housing insecurity was framed through traditional familial norms that positioned economic dependence on male partners as the default means of securing shelter (Novac, 1990, 2002). Such gendered framings obscured the structural barriers women encountered in their own right, narrowing the scope of housing policy debates. For example, Novac (2002) documented how contemporary housing design often included, "dimly lit underground parking garages", or "isolated basement laundry rooms" that many women considered unsafe, while MacArthur (2006) highlighted the exclusionary effects of inadequate proximity to essential services such as daycare centres,

libraries, and health facilities.[8] These studies demonstrate that sexism is not merely an interpersonal problem, but a structural feature of housing design and policy that materially shapes women's access to affordable and secure housing.

In 1991, Wekerle and Novac observed that Canadian housing policies disproportionately disadvantaged low-income, racialized women (Wekerle and Novac, 1991). Dion and Dion (2001) similarly found that low-income women in Toronto reported greater levels of discrimination than men, with Somali women facing the highest barriers. Other studies confirmed these intersecting disadvantages, single mothers were disproportionately denied access to housing (Lessa, 2002); Indigenous women who lost housing also lost access to essential child and family benefits (Klassen and Spring, 2015); and women leaving domestic violence encountered long wait times for housing that perpetuated cycles of precarity (Tutty, 2009). Structural limits embedded in the Indian Act continue to compound these barriers for Indigenous women (Tutty, 2009). The tragic case of Gillian Hadley, murdered by her abuser while still on a waitlist for affordable housing, underscores the life-and-death stakes of these systemic failures. Taken together, these accounts reveal how intersecting forces of sexism, racism, and colonial governance produce enduring exclusions, setting the stage for this thesis's focus on the lived experiences of low-income, racialized women within broader debates on affordability.

1.3. Rationale and organization of thesis

1.3.1 Research questions and findings

Alongside broad debates about accessing affordable housing in Canada, this research situates itself within a critical examination of how affordability pressures are lived at the intersections of race, gender and poverty. The objective of this research is to analyse the impact of limited affordable housing options on the lives of low-income, racialized women in Toronto, with particular attention to how these pressures are mediated through social networks, community ties, and neighbourhood dynamics. To address this objective, the research is guided by three questions:

1. How do low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights experience and navigate housing precarity and redevelopment pressures, and how do these experiences intersect with race, gender and immigration status?

2. How do social networks and community-based organizations function as infrastructures of care, solidarity and collective identity for low-income, racialized women facing housing precarity and redevelopment in Lawrence Heights?

[8] The feminist urban studies literature highlights this trend (Palmer, 1983; Klodawsky, Spector and Hendrix, 1983; McClain and Doyle, 1984; Klodawsky, Spector and Rose 1985; Klodawsky and Novac, 1990, Sayne, 1990; Callaghan, Farhani and Porter 2003; Khosla, 2003).

3. How do the narratives and place-based understandings of low-income, racialized women challenge dominant discourses about Lawrence Heights and social mix, and what do these narratives reveal about the possibilities for more inclusive housing policy?

Lawrence Heights was selected as the case study site because it exemplifies a high-density urban neighbourhood facing entrenched socioeconomic challenges, including high poverty rates, significant racialized populations, and historical underinvestment in affordable housing. The area is also undergoing extensive redevelopment, making it a particularly important context for examining how neighbourhood change intersects with affordability pressures and reshapes the housing experiences of low-income women.

Within this context, the research found that low-income, racialized women had an acute and ongoing need for affordable housing yet encountered recurring obstacles in their efforts to secure stable rental accommodation. These barriers stemmed from the interlocking effects of poverty, sexism, and racism, which together constrained women's access to adequate housing and heightened their vulnerability to housing precarity. Women's support networks were therefore examined to assess the range of informal and formal responses mobilized to mitigate these challenges. To address these questions systematically, the study employed a qualitative research design detailed in the following section.

1.3.2 Methods and methodology

Data for this study was generated through 22 semi-structured interviews conducted in person between January 26 to April 19, 2015. Participants were low-income, racialized women residing in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood of Toronto, many of whom depended on a social and/or affordable housing allowance. The interviews examined women's current housing situations, their efforts to secure affordable rental units, the role of social networks in the housing search process, and the types of support accessed through those networks. These first-hand accounts yielded detailed evidence of how affordability pressures intersected with experiences of poverty, racism, and sexism.

In addition to these interviews, the study included interviews with key informants, specifically staff from two community health organizations located in Lawrence Heights. Their insights situated individual narratives within the institutional and neighbourhood contexts shaping women's access to housing. Grounding women's accounts in Lawrence Heights' broader socio-spatial environment enabled a methodological approach attentive to both structural constraints and relational strategies. This design illuminated not only the barriers that low-income, racialized women encountered in navigating housing precarity, but also the practices of resilience and collective support that sustained them. This allowed the study to capture the multidimensional character of women's housing experiences, providing a strong empirical basis for the thematic analysis developed in chapter four.

As well, the research incorporated two complementary qualitative methods, a small series of guided walks and the maintenance of a reflexive research journal. The guided walks were conducted with participants who preferred to illustrate their housing and safety experiences in situ by accompanying the researcher through key neighbourhood spaces such as sidewalks,

community gardens, and bus routes. These walks offered valuable contextual and embodied insight into how women navigated their surroundings and attached meaning to place (Evans and Jones, 2011). The research journal functioned as an analytic and reflexive tool, recording immediate observations, methodological decisions, and interpretive reflections developed throughout fieldwork. Together, these methods enriched the interpretation of interview data and supported the identification of recurring themes later developed in the empirical analysis

It is important to situate this study within its temporal and spatial context. The data were collected between January 26 to April 19, 2015 during the early phases of the Lawrence Heights revitalization project, a moment defined by residents' uncertainty about displacement, tenure, and the future of their neighbourhood. In the decade since, Toronto's housing landscape has changed, housing costs have risen, redevelopment has expanded across multiple sites, and affordability has reached a crisis point (Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), 2025; Thompson and Globerman, 2025; Waterfront Toronto, 2025). Recognizing this passage of time is crucial for interpreting the findings presented in this thesis. While the interviews capture a specific moment in residents' lived experiences of housing insecurity and social networks, the structural forces they describe have persisted and, in many cases, intensified. The passage of time therefore becomes a methodological lens, and the temporal framing of this research serves as a reminder that women's accounts of exclusion, care, and adaptation are not static but part of an evolving narrative. The following section describes how the thesis examined how these lived dynamics are situated within broader theoretical frameworks of social mix, social network analysis, and intersectionality.

1.3.3 Conceptual approach

To support these inquiries, this research draws on three key conceptual frameworks. First, Social Network Analysis (SNA) was employed to examine the structure and function of women's support systems by identifying both informal sources (such as family and neighbours) and formal sources (such as community workers). This approach provided insight into how women mobilize networks in practice when navigating housing precarity. Second, intersectional analysis was applied to the interview data to capture how overlapping identities of race, gender, and class shape access to affordable housing. Thematic analysis identified instances where women's accounts revealed housing barriers that reflected multiple, intersecting forms of marginalization, including racism, sexism, and poverty. Finally, the framework of social mix, rooted in planning and housing policy debates, was used to interrogate how the integration of diverse socioeconomic groups within urban neighbourhoods has reshaped housing opportunities and reinforced the tethering of women's lives to Lawrence Heights. Taken together, these conceptual tools ground the study's empirical analysis, illustrating how women's lived experiences reveal the entanglement of structural exclusion with everyday survival strategies.

1.3.4 The organization of thesis chapters

Chapter two describes the conceptual approach informing the study. Through a review of relevant literature, the connections between race, gender and poverty are described followed by an outline of women's experiences with accessing affordable housing. The chapter deepens the examination of intersecting forces, showing how the effects of housing precarity, gendered

racism, and policy neglect manifest in the lives of women in Lawrence Heights, making tangible what quantitative data and analysis alone cannot reveal.

Chapter three outlines the feminist methodology that guided this study, following an approach grounded in reflexivity, situated fieldwork, and dialogical interviews. Feminist research emphasizes that methodology is not simply a set of techniques, but a principled orientation that recognizes the power relations structuring knowledge production and insists on accountability in the research encounter. This orientation required me to reflect critically on my own positionality as a racialized woman researcher, and to acknowledge how intersections of race, gender, and class shaped the dynamics of data collection. Fieldwork was understood as an embodied and situated practice, in which research relationships are co-constructed and contextually embedded rather than neutral or detached. Finally, interviews were approached not as extractive encounters, but as collaborative exchanges in which participants' voices and experiences are foregrounded. This tripartite framing of reflexivity, situated fieldwork, and dialogical interviewing, draws on established feminist methodological scholarship (see Peake et al 2024), and provides the foundation for the methods and analysis detailed in the remainder of this chapter.

Chapter four begins by showing that women's day-to-day experiences with accessing affordable housing are informed by mundane confrontations with racism, sexism, and poverty. Such confrontations manifest in the form of struggles to secure affordable housing, provide for their families and negotiate the place-based stigma associated with living in Lawrence Heights. The analysis recognizes the functionality and collectivist nature of women's social networks as women struggled for affordable housing. Women sought support from their social networks for respite from daily challenges and to sustain collectivist camaraderie among women's communities in Lawrence Heights. The sense of camaraderie that helps sustain aspirations for securing affordable housing is described in tandem with a sense of fragmentation between women. This nuance is supported by observations provided by key informants from the Unison Health and Community Services Centre's Lawrence Heights and Keele-Rogers sites. These observations provide grounded insights into how community-based organizations and health service providers have attempted to meet women's needs by offering spaces of solidarity, practical assistance, and collective identity-building in the face of housing precarity. This chapter concludes with a commentary about marginalized communities' desire for ownership, leadership and control over their representation in policy discussions on affordable housing.

The concluding chapter reiterates the aims and findings of the preceding chapters and reflects on the broader implications of this research. By centring the lived experiences of low-income, racialized women, the study demonstrates how affordability pressures intersect with racism, sexism, and policy neglect to produce housing insecurity. In addition to emphasizing the urgent need for strengthened support mechanisms, the research underscores the importance of intersectionally-informed housing policies at municipal and provincial levels. Policy recommendations arising from this work include expanded access to housing assistance programs, targeted anti-discrimination measures in rental markets, and support for community-driven advocacy strategies. Taken together, these contributions position the thesis not only as an account of barriers to affordable housing, but also as a call to reimagine policy and practice through the perspectives of those most affected.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework

This chapter outlines the three central concepts that guide this study: social mix, social network analysis (SNA), and intersectionality. While these concepts originate from distinct disciplinary traditions, together they provide a complementary lens for examining the housing dynamics in Lawrence Heights. Social mix, rooted in urban planning and policy studies, highlights how redevelopment strategies aim to integrate diverse populations, often producing unintended consequences for low-income, racialized residents (Busch-Geertzema, 2007). Namely, while social mix has been widely debated as a strategy for fostering integration in redeveloping neighbourhoods (Lees, 2008; August 2014), few studies have linked these debates to the micro-level relational practices through which low-income women navigate change. Social network analysis, emerging from sociology, emphasizes the ways that women's informal and formal networks shape access to housing and support under conditions of precarity (Marin and Wellman, 2010). Intersectionality, a core concept from gender studies, illuminates how overlapping identities of race, gender and class structure experiences of exclusion and marginalization in housing markets (Hill-Collins, 1998). Each of these concepts is mobilized in alignment with feminist theoretical perspectives to link broader policy shifts with women's everyday strategies for navigating affordability pressures.

While the three conceptual lenses have been developed within different intellectual traditions, their intersection in this study reveals deeper analytical frictions about how urban inequality is understood and acted upon. In urban planning, social mix tends to operate as a normative framework in which proximity among diverse populations is expected to produce social cohesion and upward mobility. Social network analysis, however, complicates this logic by demonstrating that social ties are neither automatic nor neutral outcomes of co-location but are instead structured by power, exclusion, and institutional mediation. Intersectionality extends this critique by situating such relational inequalities within broader systems of race, gender, and class, showing how inclusionary redevelopment efforts can inadvertently reproduce marginalization.

Together, these frameworks expose a set of epistemological and scalar tensions, between structure and agency, policy aspiration and lived experience, and macro-level redevelopment goals and micro-level social relations. The Lawrence Heights case materializes these contradictions, offering a site to examine how planning imaginaries of "mixing" are negotiated through the everyday relational practices of women navigating housing precarity. By putting these frameworks in conversation, this study moves beyond their individual limits to develop a relational understanding of urban transformation, one attentive to the ways structural inequalities are reproduced through both planning discourse and the patterned social networks of everyday life.

It is precisely within these overlapping theoretical terrains that the limitations of each framework also become visible. Each carries conceptual blind spots that, if unaddressed, risk obscuring the social processes this study seeks to make visible - social mix for its tendency to obscure power relations, social network analysis for privileging structure over lived experience, and intersectionality for debates about its scope and operationalization. Attending to these critiques ensures that the concepts are applied critically and remain relevant to understanding the

contemporary housing struggles of low-income, racialized women. The following review situates each concept within its scholarly debates, underscores its relevance to this empirical study, and clarifies how they inform the methodology.

In addition to the three central concepts, this study engages with the interrelated ideas of place, belonging and community, which repeatedly surface in feminist geography and urban sociology literature because they illuminate how spatial relations and social ties shape experiences of home, identity and exclusion (e.g., Massey 1994; Antonsich 2010; hooks 2008). These concepts sharpen the analysis by showing how the abstract dynamics captured through social mix, social network analysis, and intersectionality are lived and negotiated in everyday geographical contexts. The following discussion examines place, belonging and community before turning to the three primary empirical concepts.

In critical human geography, place is not reducible to geographic coordinates, it encompasses the spatial distribution of resources, the social meanings attached to environments, and the everyday practices that make locations meaningful (Cresswell, 2015). Place is also politically charged. Planning decisions and redevelopment strategies produce "place-effects" that shape who has access to housing, services, and opportunities, often reinforcing structural inequalities. In this research, place is conceptualized as both a material and symbolic site where social relations, histories, and identities are co-constituted (Massey, 1994; Cresswell, 2015). In this study, place is not a static location but a relational field shaped by the intersections of housing policy, race, gender, and class. Understanding Lawrence Heights as a "place" foregrounds the spatial politics of redevelopment and how physical transformations also rework belonging and community. In contexts like Lawrence Heights, this understanding highlights how material conditions of housing intersect with residents' symbolic attachments to space, generating tensions between imposed redevelopment visions and lived experiences of home.

Belonging extends this analysis into the affective and symbolic sphere, capturing how people come to feel recognized or excluded within particular spaces and networks (Antonsich, 2010). Belonging is not simply an individual sentiment, but a social process shaped by recognition, exclusion, and claims to legitimacy. Scholars have shown how belonging is mobilized to police community boundaries, as well as how marginalized groups contest those exclusions through everyday practices of recognition and solidarity. In a neighborhood under redevelopment, belonging becomes a crucial lens for understanding how residents navigate displacement pressures, negotiate inclusion, and assert claims to place. In this research, belonging is used here to capture the affective and experiential dimensions of residents' relationships to home and neighborhood. It emphasizes feelings of inclusion, recognition, and attachment that emerge through both policy interventions and daily interactions (Antonsich, 2010; hooks, 2009). Unlike "community," which operates as a collective and often prescriptive category, belonging refers to a subjective, situated process of how low-income, racialized women negotiate social membership amid displacement and redevelopment pressures.

Community is the most contested of these terms. It is often used descriptively, to refer to networks of shared identity or mutual support, but it also carries normative weight as an aspirational ideal (Delanty, 2003). Policy discourses frequently invoke "community" to legitimize interventions, framing redevelopment as a way to build stronger, more cohesive

neighbourhoods. Yet critical scholars caution that such framings risk obscuring power relations by idealizing community while overlooking how it can also be fragmented, exclusionary, and shaped by structural inequalities. In this study, community refers primarily to the socially produced and policy-invoked collectives imagined through urban redevelopment. Within social mix frameworks, "community" is often mobilized as a normative ideal of cohesion, integration, and social order (Delanty, 2003; Amin, 2005). However, this analysis treats community as a contested construct, produced through planning discourses and everyday relational negotiations rather than a pre-existing social fact. This distinction underscores how redevelopment projects invoke "community" to legitimize social engineering, even as residents enact their own, often divergent, networks of relation and solidarity. Within Lawrence Heights, competing definitions of community - those of policymakers, service providers, and residents - illustrate how the term can both unite and divide, depending on whose interests it serves.

These concepts foreground the social dimensions of housing beyond technical or economic concerns. They highlight that questions of affordability, displacement and community are not just matters of policy but are lived as ongoing struggles over recognition, identity and collective belonging. To bring these theoretical lenses together, this study foregrounds social contact and encounter as the mechanisms through which micro-moments of proximity are conditioned and contested. As migration scholar Vertovec (2021) notes, everyday encounters across difference are never neutral; they are shaped by spatial configurations, representational regimes and policy discourses, so casual civility or small talk often remains superficial rather than transformative. Valentine and Harris (2016) likewise caution that many so-called "positive" urban encounters are placatory, defusing tension without fostering deep engagement, and planning scholars following Fincher (2014) point out that designing for diversity and encounter often fails to address underlying power dynamics of access, because contact is mediated by who occupies public space and how those spaces are structured, policed and controlled. These insights link contact and encounter directly to notions of place, belonging and community: because encounters occur in specific places and are mediated by the design and governance of housing, they illustrate how residents come to feel recognised, excluded or ambivalent, how social networks are strengthened or frayed, and how neighbourhoods are imagined collectively or contested. In other words, community, place and belonging are not static descriptors but ongoing social processes shaped through everyday interactions and spatial arrangements. The following sections examine how redevelopment interventions create or constrain these contact zones and, in turn, how the qualities of everyday encounters shape residents' sense of place, belonging and community.

Together, these perspectives suggest that notions of community, place, and belonging are not static descriptors, but ongoing social processes shaped through everyday encounters and spatial arrangements. The literature on social contact and encounter draws attention to how proximity, interaction, and everyday coexistence are mediated by the design and governance of urban space, revealing how informal connections and shared settings can both sustain and unsettle social boundaries. Building on these insights, the following section considers how social mix operates as a policy framework that formalizes these ideas of proximity and interaction, translating them into planning rationales for social integration. Situating social mix in relation to these debates allows for a more critical reading of how redevelopment initiatives institutionalize

particular imaginaries of community and belonging, and how these imaginaries are negotiated and reworked in practice.

2.1 Social mix analysis

2.1.1 Conceptual definition of social mix analysis

Social mix analysis illustrates how planners attempt to reconfigure place by engineering demographic composition, with direct consequences for residents' sense of belonging and the social organization of community. In this study, social mix is treated as a policy-driven concept that organizes urban populations by income and tenure and legitimizes interventions to recompose neighbourhood composition. In planning and housing policy, it is invoked to configure socio-economically heterogeneous populations in shared physical space and to benchmark progress through measurable changes in tenure and income profiles. Social mix helps trace how this rationale translates into instruments such as redevelopment phasing, tenure conversions, eligibility and allocation rules, relocation practices, and how these instruments rework everyday housing conditions for low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights. Thus, social mix is both an object of critique and a lens for assessing the lived effects of revitalization at the site under study.

In the discipline of urban and regional planning, social mix analysis has historically been used to examine the distribution of populations in physical space. Specifically, it was used to configure socially heterogenous spaces that enabled people of different socio-economic backgrounds to live in proximity (Lees, 2008). Proponents argue that assembling diverse income groups yields behavioural spillovers, higher-frequency cross-class interactions, and reduced spatial segregation. They also treat social mix as a useful metric for performance monitoring across urban sectors (Lees, 2008; Shaw, Raisbeck, Chaplin and Hulse, 2013; Savini *et al*., 2016; Barwick, 2018). Empirical studies, however, show the promised benefits are contingent and uneven. When low-income households are co-located with higher-income groups, new inequalities and constraints can emerge around affordability, bargaining power in tight rental markets, and the erosion or rerouting of local support networks-dynamics central to the Lawrence Heights case (August, 2008). This chapter therefore uses social mix to connect policy intent to on-the-ground consequences for women's housing trajectories.

2.1.2 Historical context of social mix analysis: 1960s -1970s

Much of the early discourse on social mix was shaped by British and American reconstructionist-era planning traditions (Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009). British planners observed that clustering low-income households together often limited their socio-economic opportunities, while dispersal across mixed-income neighbourhoods could enhance household prospects (Rose *et al*., 2013). This rationale framed social mix as a strategy to reduce poverty and chronic hardship (Christensen, 2018). Energized by the ideas of urbanist Lewis Mumford, British planning practice positioned social mix as a way to achieve social integration by situating low-income households within proximity to more affluent residents (Sarkissian, 1976; Lee, Chae and Lim, 2016). For planners, the expectation was that exposure to middle-class norms and networks

would enable low-income households to expand social and economic opportunities and, ultimately, move beyond poverty (Tallack, 1997).

In the United States, early social mix debates were influenced by the civil rights movement and rapid urban growth in major cities. American planners initially adapted British approaches, but by the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists such as Herbert Gans (1961) advanced the argument that social mix could address urban inequalities by promoting everyday interactions across racial, ethnic, and class divides (Gans, 1961; Heraud, 1968; Cole and Goodchild, 2000). These early formulations tied social mix directly to the belief that dispersing low-income households into higher-income areas would not only mitigate segregation but also generate tangible gains in social capacity and access to resources (Sarkissian, Forsyth and Heine, 1990; Ponce, 2010; McKee and Phillips, 2012). This framing laid the groundwork for subsequent policy efforts that continue to see social mix as a tool for combating concentrated poverty and promoting urban revitalization.

American sociologist Herbert Gans (1961) underscored the case for social mix by arguing that neighbourhood revitalization programs should be centred on integration principles, since clustering low-income households exacerbated exclusion. His arguments gained traction with civic leaders promoting smart growth and with planning initiatives designed to distribute populations efficiently (Manzo, 2012). By the 1970s onwards, scholars and planners increasingly linked social mix to broader shifts in the urban economy, including the rise of precarious, service-oriented employment and reduced state supports (Musterd and Andersson, 2005; Shirazi and Keivani, 2018). Geographers traced how these changes reshaped opportunities for low-income households and reinforced the significance of neighbourhood composition for access to work and mobility (Musterd and De Vos, 2001; Patulny and Morris, 2012). This period illustrates how social mix was reframed not only as a normative ideal but also as a policy response to structural labour market shifts, foreshadowing later debates about housing precarity and resilience.

Concerns about slum clearance, urban decline, and the concentration of poverty further shifted the framing of social mix. American planners emphasized dispersal as a means of preventing neighbourhood deterioration and managing population pressures in large cities (Bernard and Kaplan, 1975; Hackworth, 2006). These anxieties coincided with the influence of urbanists such as Jane Jacobs, whose *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* challenged abstract, technocratic planning models and emphasized the lived consequences of neighbourhood segregation (Kipfer and Keil, 2002). Jacobs' engagement in Toronto grounded these debates in the Canadian context, where her arguments about ghettoization and neighbourhood revitalization continue to resonate. Situating Jacobs alongside Mumford and Gans highlights how the social mix concept absorbed both technocratic and humanistic rationales, rationales that continue to shape contemporary policy debates and remain highly relevant to understanding the redevelopment of Lawrence Heights.

This new direction abided by the belief that the clustering of low-income households could be reduced through planning techniques that reshaped not only recreational access but also the wider built environment. In her book, Jacobs argued for amendments to zoning regulations that would make it easier for home-building groups to construct mixed-income housing, ensuring

that dwellings were available to households across income levels. She also advocated for shorter city-blocks and pedestrian-oriented design, which she believed would encourage interaction, improve walkability, and signal openness to prospective entrants. Jacobs's vision emphasized that urban vitality depended on the diversity of land uses, density, and the everyday encounters these conditions fostered. The implementation of such measures was intended to encourage socio-economic groups to engage within the context of their immediate surroundings, moving beyond segregationist planning practices. In this framing, the assumption that intimate and heterogeneous urban settings fostered the exchange of experiences and skills was left implicit (Hospers, 2006). Extending this reasoning revealed another latent assumption, that new experiences could improve neighbourhood reputations, attract financial and civic investments, and create new opportunities for low-income groups (Hospers, 2006).

The historical development of social mix analysis demonstrates how the concept has been repeatedly mobilized to address concerns about urban inequality, segregation, and the integration of low-income populations into broader city life. Yet these applications have also revealed significant limitations, particularly in their tendency to frame poverty as a problem of spatial distribution rather than structural exclusion. For this study, the relevance of social mix analysis lies precisely in these tensions. Social mix analysis provides a language through which to trace how planning rationales have shaped housing interventions in Lawrence Heights, while also exposing the shortcomings of policies that assume proximity to higher-income groups will produce equitable outcomes. In this way, social mix serves as both an explanatory and critical lens, allowing the analysis to connect long-standing policy debates to the lived housing struggles of low-income, racialized women and to highlight why these debates remain central to understanding their everyday experiences.

2.1.3 Application of social mix analysis in the context of Lawrence Heights

Jacobs' ideas had ripple effects across disciplines and public policy, shaping Canadian urban planning debates from the late 1960s onward. Under the leadership of Paul Hellyer, the federal government's 1969 report on the state of housing in Canada incorporated aspects of Jacobs' thinking, particularly the emphasis on neighbourhood revitalization and integration (Skelton, 1996). The report proposed that redevelopment should be supported through federal investment and new housing programs, explicitly tying the viability of mixed-income housing to broader questions of equity and neighbourhood renewal (Hellyer, 1962; Axworthy, 1970). In this way, Jacobs' critiques of urban form intersected with Hellyer's vision of socially integrated neighbourhoods, in which planning interventions could mitigate poverty by restructuring housing opportunities. These ideas gained traction in policy and scholarly circles, becoming central to the rationale for redevelopment strategies that sought to engineer diversity in urban space (August and Walks, 2011).

The influence of these debates extended into municipal politics, as Toronto Mayor David Crombie's 1972 city council agenda demonstrated the institutionalization of social mix within Canadian planning (Caulfield, 1994). Crombie's interest was fueled by a coalition of resident groups and reform-oriented advocates who promoted social mix as both an anti-poverty measure and a strategy for neighbourhood stabilization. Proponents argued that proximity between higher- and lower-income households would encourage positive social interactions, expand

social capital, and stimulate investment in urban infrastructure (House, 1976; Klemek, 2008; Walks, 2008). Subsequently, Crombie established the St. Lawrence neighbourhood in Toronto, one of four socially mixed neighbourhoods in Canada.[9] Van Dyk (1995) explains that the socially mixed neighbourhoods of this era, "were of a different nature, they were to be projects in which the poor could live, not projects for poor people". However, despite the spurt of such initiatives, few additional projects came to pass because many of Toronto's planners remained focused on suburban development initiatives, such as addressing sprawl and protecting park lands (CHRA, 2004; Atkinson, 2005; MacLennan, 2006; O'Toole, 2011). At the same time, critics pointed to the limitations of this rationale, noting that the policy tended to overemphasize behavioural change among low-income residents while neglecting deeper structural inequities (Keil and Kipfer, 2002). These tensions remain central to understanding how social mix was applied in Toronto, particularly in Lawrence Heights, where redevelopment initiatives continue to be justified through appeals to integration and neighbourhood improvement.

2.1.4. 1990s -2000s: Re-emergence of social mix analysis

In Toronto, social mix policies regained momentum during the 1990s as federal and provincial governments offloaded responsibility for housing provision to municipalities and emphasized market-led redevelopment (Crombie and Miller, 2003; Malcolmson, 2003). In this shifting climate of austerity and restructuring, Toronto city councillors and local organizations advocated for redevelopment schemes that explicitly promoted social mix, aligning with international trends that framed integration as a pathway to neighbourhood renewal and a solution to address aging public housing stock (Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2005). By the late 1990s, similar policies were being adopted in major U.S. and U.K. cities, where urban planners argued that mixing income groups would address concentrations of poverty, encourage upward mobility, and restore declining urban cores (Galster and Killen, 1995; Kling, Liebman, and Katz, 2007). The unstated assumption of Kling, Liebman and Katz's work was that social mix would foster cross-income friendships and thereby reduce social exclusion. However, some of the literature on social contact and encounter suggests that mixed-income initiatives more often produce superficial interactions than meaningful friendships and thus do not by themselves resolve deeper structural inequities.

In Toronto, this discourse translated into concrete planning instruments whereby mixed-income housing redevelopment became the preferred model for addressing public housing disrepair and social exclusion. According to the CMHC, mixed income housing refers to, "a community or neighbourhood where the residents earn wages and salaries that vary drastically" (CMHC, 2017, p.2). The discourse promoted the introduction of higher-income residents into low-income areas with the expectation that the presence of higher-income residents would yield benefits such as revitalizing declining areas and attracting investment, thereby improving the life chances of low-income households (August, 2014). The effects of mixed income housing are debated. Critics suggest that the framing of mixed income housing in these planning instruments assumes that the outward appearance of a neighbourhood may be a reliable indicator of the neighbourhood's economic viability (August, 2014). Neighbourhoods in a state of disrepair are perceived to have higher rates of poverty and degradation than other neighbourhoods (Littlewood

[9] Other socially mixed neighbourhoods established around this time include LeBreton Flats in Ottawa, Angus Yards in Montreal and False Creek in Vancouver (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005).

and Munro, 1997; Heywood, 1997; Murie and Musterd, 2004; McCulloch, 2003; Michels, 2013). Yet critics have long pointed out that this framing obscures the structural inequalities underpinning poverty and instead places the burden of "integration" on low-income, often racialized tenants (Walks, 2008). These tensions were formalized in the 2006 Official Plan, which advanced social mix as a regulatory tool to legitimize urban redevelopment.

By the 2000s, social mix had become embedded in Toronto's planning landscape. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2006) described redevelopment as a "renewal strategy" aimed at transforming stigmatized neighbourhoods into "communities of choice." Yet the assumption that proximity alone generates social benefits remains largely untested, with evidence from projects in Ottawa and Vancouver showing that mixed-income schemes often reproduce inequalities rather than dismantle them (Lees, 2008; Rose et al., 2013). Lawrence Heights, redeveloped under the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Plan (LARP), epitomizes these contradictions, the policy promises neighbourhood renewal and improved opportunities for residents, but it also raises questions about displacement, social polarization, and the uneven burdens placed on racialized, low-income women. This case provides a localized lens through which to assess the promises and pitfalls of social mix policies.

2.1.5 Operationalizing social mix analysis: Toronto's 2006 Official Plan and Lawrence Heights

The 2006 Toronto Official Plan embedded social mix as a core planning principle, asserting that socio-economic diversity was central to sustaining the city's social, economic, and cultural vitality (City of Toronto, 2010). This orientation toward diversity and inclusion translated into the designation of priority neighbourhoods[10], later renamed neighbourhood improvement areas (NIAs), which were identified as requiring targeted investment due to entrenched socio-economic disadvantage (Horak, 2010; Leslie and Hunt, 2013; Hoark and Dantico, 2014; Fusova, 2018) (see Figure 1, where the blue circle indicates the location of the Lawrence Heights Neighbourhood Improvement Area). Criteria for these designations included limited access to employment and social services, low levels of educational attainment, and a history of underinvestment by both public and private actors (Lindgren, 2009).

Within this framework, Lawrence Heights was formally designated a priority neighbourhood in 2005[11], and in 2008 the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Plan (LARP) was announced (City of Toronto, 2005) (see Figure 2). While framed as a strategy to promote inclusion, the designation also institutionalized social mix as the primary lens forredevelopment, tying neighbourhood renewal to the integration of higher-income residents. Central to the analysis that follows, this positioning underscores how, although social mix policy was framed as a housing reform aimed at revitalizing older stock, it also became a planning rationale for large-scale redevelopment. In practice, these redevelopment schemes have tended to benefit higher-income and non-racialized residents, while displacement and housing precarity have

[10] This designation originated from a joint report conducted by the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto and York Region that measured and evaluated the quality of services, facilities and challenges of 140 Toronto neighbourhoods (City of Toronto, 2011).

[11] As of 2022, Lawrence Heights is no longer considered by the City of Toronto as a NIA in the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy which used updated information from the 2020 census.

fallen disproportionately on low-income and racialized households (Fraser, Chaskin and Bazuin, 2013).

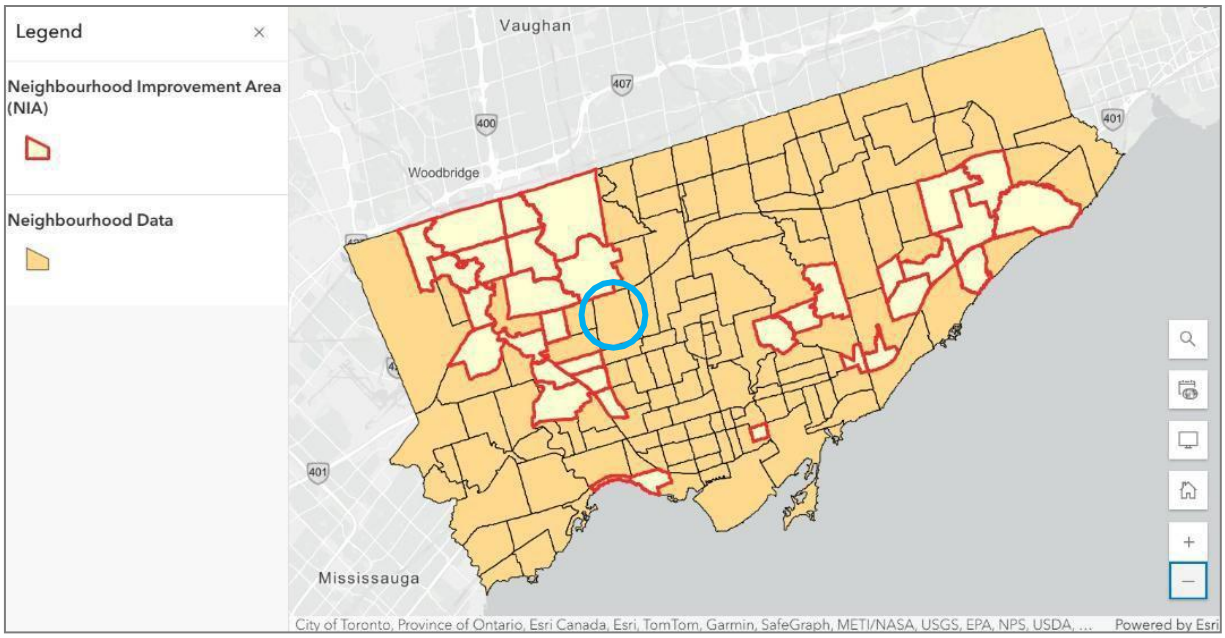

Figure 1. Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) in Toronto. From the City of Toronto's Geographic Information System (GIS) web map of Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Date updated: January 9, 2024.

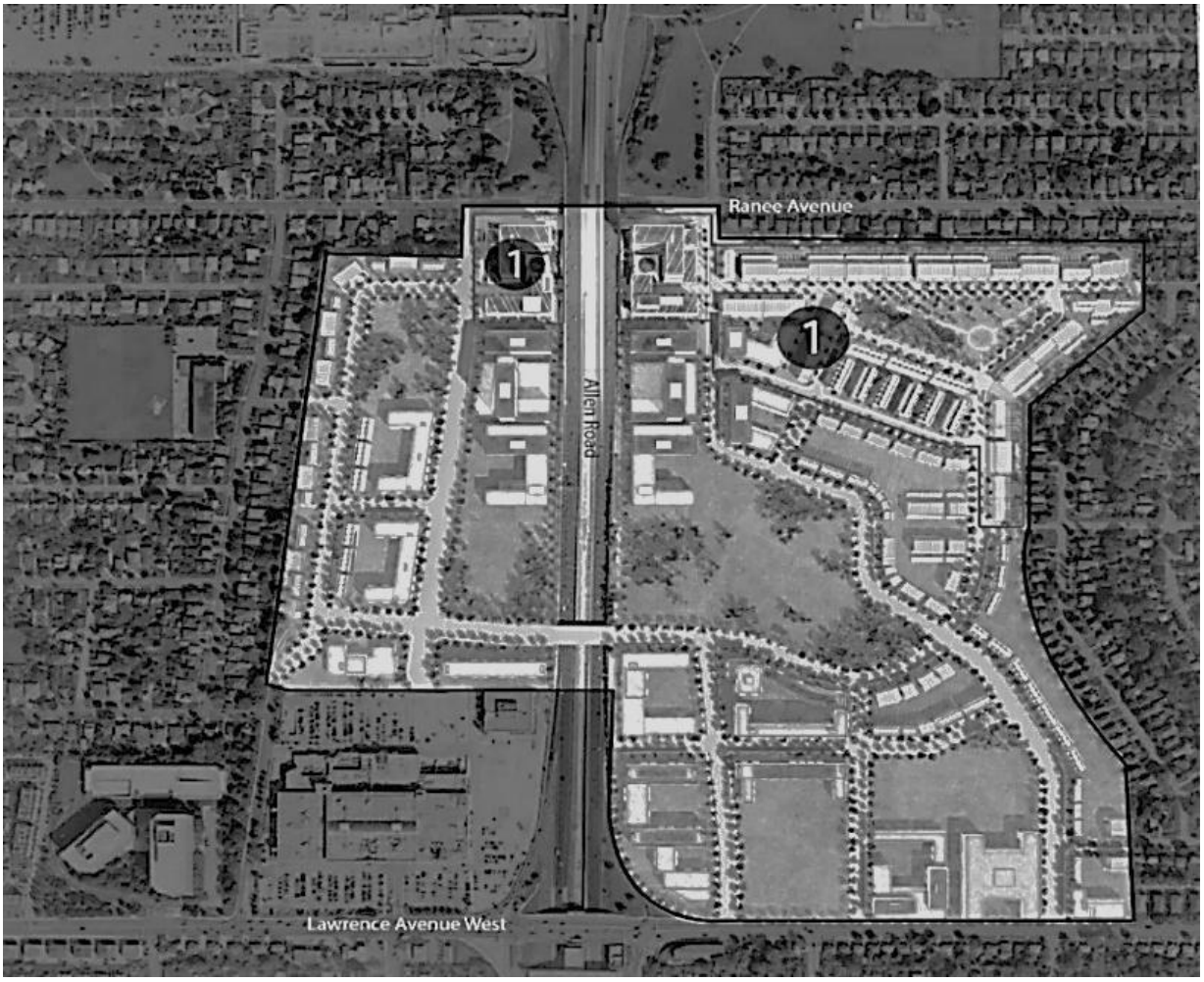

Figure 2. Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Site Plan. Figure from the 2005 City of Toronto LARP Plan.

The LARP envisioned the transformation of Lawrence Heights into a mixed-income community, integrating new housing forms, land uses, and enhanced connectivity through transit and amenities (City of Toronto, 2011, p.1.). The plan encompassed the entirety of Lawrence Heights (see Figure 2) and adjoining sites, including the Baycrest neighbourhood and Lawrence Square Shopping Centre (City of Toronto, 2011., p.2). The project responds to deteriorating housing conditions, underutilized land, perceived missed opportunities for service delivery partnerships, the lack of physical connectedness between apartment buildings on the same block, the deterioration of community facilities, the dearth of streetlights, and underutilized green spaces (LARP Plan). Specifically, it sought to replace deteriorating housing stock, reduce the isolation of social housing blocks, and stimulate local economic activity. Alongside physical redevelopment, the plan introduced a social development strategy designed to mitigate displacement risks and strengthen community ties (Gavan-Koop, 2011; City of Toronto, 2011).

Implementation proceeded in four phases. Phase one involved the demolition of 1,208 Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) units and the relocation of 1,146 households within the community, while new mixed-income housing, combining public and private tenure,

began to take shape (Goffin, 20214, City of Toronto, 2013). Phase one of the project was initiated in 2015 and saw the demolition of the following structures: 1-29 and 111-133 Bagot Court, 1-87 Bredonhill Court, 41-119 Varna Drive, 1-78 Cather Crescent, 1 Leila Lane, 1-11 and 15-45 Zachary Court and 215-251 Ranee Avenue (City of Toronto, 2013). The TCHC stated that they covered residents' moving costs and assisted residents during the moving process, including giving at least five months' notice prior to informing residents of official move-out dates (Landau, 2014). Residents of Lawrence Heights who were relocated for the revitalization were moved to other TCHC units, either temporarily or directly into new replacement units. All residents reserve the right of return; however, residents do not have the option of not relocating.

By 2024[12], 845 private market units had been completed, with further demolition and construction still underway (Toronto Community Housing, 2022). As of 2025, Phase two[13] is scheduled to begin with additional relocations and new housing starts, while Phase three[14] remains in early implementation. Planning has also begun for a potential fourth phase[15]. In this context, TCHC issued a public request for proposals to secure new development partners (Metropia, 2021; City of Toronto, 2021). Across the four phases, the Lawrence Heights revitalization will replace all 1,208 existing TCHC units with rent-geared-to-income housing and add 130 new affordable units, it is anticipated that 4,092 private market units will have been built across 100 acres (ibid). The TCHC states that when the LARP is complete residents will experience the positive benefits of increased social inclusion such as increased income earning potential, improved health outcomes and lower crime rates (TCHC, 2010, p.1). These developments illustrate that social mix is not a single event, but an extended process shaped by evolving institutional arrangements and market imperatives. For low-income racialized women, this prolonged redevelopment heightens uncertainty around housing security, extends periods of neighbourhood disruption, and unevenly distributes the benefits of revitalization. At the same time, the rationale of social mix, that socio-economic diversity fosters inclusion, continues to be invoked to justify these interventions. Together, these dynamics set the stage for critiques that question the gap between social mix's stated objectives and its lived consequences.

[12] In Phase one, 155 replacement units were built and occupied between 2018 and 2021, an additional 71 low-rise replacement units were finished in mid-2024, and tenants started moving into those units in August 2024. A further 29 replacement units are scheduled to be occupied by late 2025. Tenants affected by Phases two and three have not yet returned, as those phases remain in the planning and early-construction stages.

[13] Phase two of the revitalization (scheduled for 2024-2032) will redevelop the Leila Lane, Bagot Court and Dorney Court blocks, include a new community recreation centre, and construct new roads and park space. The approved Initial Development Plan calls for 347 rent-geared-to-income (RGI) replacement units and 30 new affordable rental units (377 social-housing units in total) together with about 692 market units. City Council has directed that 102 replacement RGI units-24 one-bedroom, 26 two-bedroom, 40 three-bedroom and 12 four-bedroom, must be built within four years of demolition and that affected tenants receive relocation assistance and a right of return. Tenant relocations for Phase 2 began in mid-2024, an RFP for a developer partner was slated for late 2024, demolition of the Leila and Bagot buildings will start in fall 2025, and road and community-centre construction is expected to begin in early 2026.

[14] Phase three (tentatively 2028-2035) will replace the remaining aging TCHC buildings north of Phase 2 and is expected to deliver 289 RGI replacement units and 100 new affordable units, 389 social-housing units in total. Detailed design and approvals for Phase 3 have not yet been finalized, but the housing target for this phase has been confirmed.

[15] Phases two and three alone will account for 377 social-housing units and 389 social-housing units, respectively. Together with the 255 units in Phase one, this means roughly 766 social-housing units will be delivered or under construction by the end of Phase two, with more to come in the final, fourth phase.

2.1.6 Limitations and critiques of social mix analysis

While the LARP was positioned as a strategy for social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal, it has also drawn sustained criticism. Scholars argue that the underlying assumptions of social mix risk oversimplifying structural inequality. By framing low-income households' networks as requiring transformation, the approach reduces the causes of poverty and marginalization to individual deficits rather than broader systemic conditions (Poppe and Young, 2015). These assumptions also conflate visible signs of "progress", such as different socio-economic groups sharing space, with meaningful social and economic integration. In practice, the social-mix approach in Lawrence Heights works from a behavioural-assimilation logic, it assumes that if low-income residents adopt what planners view as more "mainstream" habits and norms, often framed as correcting perceived behavioural deficits, those changes will spill over into other spheres of life, leading to social and economic integration beyond the neighbourhood. In other words, proximity to higher-income neighbours is treated as a vehicle for shaping low-income residents' behaviour, rather than addressing the structural inequalities that produce poverty in the first place (Uehara, 1990; Heaney and Israel, 2008; Garshick Kleit, 2010). Critics point out, however, that the actual dynamics of low-income households' networks are far more complex, contingent, and shaped by unequal power relations (Domínguez and Arford, 2010; Shelton *et al*., 2011).

While social mix is often framed in policy discourse as a benign strategy for integration and community uplift, empirical scholarship underscores that redevelopment is rarely uncontested. In Toronto, Jim Dunn's work on Regent Park and mixed-tenure redevelopment exposes how resident experiences resist the simplifying logic of integration. For instance, Rowe and Dunn (2015) trace how residents' attitudes vary sharply, revealing tensions over displacement, voice, and belonging in a "mixed" environment. Dunn's earlier 2012 essay argues that social mix is leveraged as a symbolic technique to rebrand stigmatized neighbourhoods, often obscuring underlying inequalities. Moreover, research on the political consequences of mixed-income redevelopment suggests that tenants' organizational power may erode when subsidized households become a numerical minority or when governance norms shift. Placing Dunn's insights alongside Martine August's case studies and post-displacement and resistance literatures deepens the critique of social mix. It reveals redevelopment as political terrain, where planning imaginaries meet local agency, resistance, and reconfiguration of power.

Given this, many scholars contend that social mix does not reliably foster meaningful integration. Instead, the everyday interactions between residents of different socio-economic backgrounds should be understood as tentative, trial-and-error strategies that people use to negotiate opportunities and constraints in their day-to-day encounters (Brown and Riley, 2005; Hays and Kogl, 2007; Manturuk, Linblad, and Quercia, 2010). Social mix frequently functions as a planning tool that reallocates economic and spatial resources in ways that benefit developers and middle-class residents more than low-income racialized women. In this study, social mix is therefore read as a governing framework rather than an integrative one, a device that reveals how inclusionary ideals can reproduce exclusionary outcomes. This perspective highlights the conceptual limitations of social mix, but also opens analytical space to examine how power, belonging, and exclusion are lived and negotiated within these redevelopment processes. These critiques set the stage for a deeper examination of how redevelopment is resisted and

reconfigured from below, and how residents assert agency within the very structures that claim to integrate them.

These dynamics, where planning logics intersect with lived negotiation of social and spatial relations, directly inform the next conceptual lens: social network analysis, which enables closer examination of how relational ties, support, and exclusion structure residents' everyday experiences within these redevelopment contexts.

2.2 Social network analysis

To address the limitations of social mix, particularly its assumptions about interaction and inclusion, this study turns to social network analysis (SNA) to examine how relationships and resource flows function within marginalized communities. Social network analysis shifts attention from neighbourhood design to the ties and exclusions that shape how individuals experience belonging or marginalization within and across communities. SNA provides a framework for tracing the ties between individuals, households, and organizations, and for visualizing how these ties shape opportunities, constraints, and the circulation of resources (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2000; Chisholm, 2003; Moriah, Rodriguez and Sotomayor, 2007; Kissane and Clampet-Lundquist, 2012). Unlike social mix, which tends to conflate proximity with interaction, SNA directs attention to the specific relationships and connections thatstructure daily life. For example, it makes it possible to assess how ties between households of different incomes influence access to information, services, or support. In this study, the social networks of low-income racialized women in Lawrence Heights are examined, enabling focused analysis of the interactions most relevant to their housing and social experiences.

2.2.1 Conceptual definition of social network analysis

Within social network analysis, relational structures are often examined at the level of dyads and triads (Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Wellman, 2001). A dyad refers to a tie between two actors and represents the most basic unit of relational analysis, allowing close examination of direct support, exchange, or influence. A triad involves three interconnected actors and is analytically significant because it reveals small-group dynamics such as brokerage, mediation, reinforcement, or exclusion that are not visible at the dyadic level. Attention to both dyadic and triadic configurations support a more fine-grained understanding of how support, information, and resources circulate through everyday social networks.

A common insight from SNA is that recurring interactions between entities reveal the channels through which information, resources, and other forms of support are produced and circulated (Wellman, 1999; Tindall and Wellman, 2001; Wellman, 2001; Wallis and Kwok, 2008; Hankivsky and Christofferson, 2008; Hankivsky, Cornier and De Merich, 2009; McPherson, Smith and Brashears, 2009; Hankivsky and Cornier, 2011; Luxton and Sbicca, 2021). By focusing on these interactions, SNA demonstrates how knowledge is shared, opportunities are accessed, and constraints are reproduced within networks. Scholars emphasize that such processes are not limited to individuals, but extend to organizations, households, and institutions (Borgatti and Cross, 2003; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). SNA is therefore especially valuable in highlighting how relational ties structure access to resources, how individuals'

positions within networks affect their capacity to mobilize support, and how patterns of inclusion and exclusion emerge. This conceptual orientation underscores the importance of situating the study of networks within their broader social and spatial contexts, which in this case includes the lived housing realities of low-income racialized women in Lawrence Heights.

In social networks, linkages represent the relationships through which materials, knowledge, and information are exchanged (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). These linkages are often visualized as dyads, or direct ties between two entities, which can then be aggregated into broader patterns of interaction. When linkages occur frequently, they are classified as "common linkages," signalling recurring forms of connection that shape women's social networks. Identifying common linkages makes it possible to pinpoint the types of support that circulate most reliably, the affiliations that reinforce women's sense of belonging, and the information that becomes most widely shared within their networks. For researchers and practitioners, paying attention to these linkages highlights areas where service providers and community advocates can more effectively support low-income, racialized women. Examining common linkages also sets the stage for analysing other forms of ties, which reveal additional dimensions of network dynamics.

Dependent linkages refer to the direct, immediate connections that exist between network actors. These ties are significant for two key reasons. First, they demonstrate how individuals draw on their closest and most trusted relationships when navigating everyday challenges, such as accessing resources, assessing risk, or making decisions about mobility and safety. These proximate interactions illustrate the interpersonal dynamics through which networks are shaped by broader social hierarchies of gender, race, and class. Second, dependent linkages illuminate how social entities collectively respond to structural change or moments of disruption, such as shifts in local policy or neighbourhood redevelopment. Examining these linkages conceptually offers insight into how everyday relationships function as conduits of information, reciprocity, and mutual support under conditions of constraint, thereby setting the foundation for the empirical discussion that follows.

2.2.2 Historical context of social network analysis

Social network analysis (SNA) developed in the mid-20th century when American sociologists examined relationships in prisons, reform schools, and workplaces to understand how social structures shape behaviour (Nakao and Romney, 1993; Freeman, 2004). These early applications focused on mapping flows of resources, tracing the diffusion of innovation in organizations, and analysing the distribution of influence within large groups (Freeman, Borgatti and White, 1991). Over time, these approaches moved beyond institutional settings and were increasingly applied to neighbourhoods and communities, where SNA provided a framework to explore how everyday interactions generate opportunities or reinforce inequalities (Freeman, 2004).

By the 1980s, scholars connected SNA to the concept of social capital, emphasizing how individuals rely on their networks to navigate disadvantage. William J. Wilson's landmark study (1987) in the United States demonstrated that the concentration of poverty, joblessness, and weakened institutional supports in inner-city neighbourhoods restricted residents' access to jobs,

services and other resources, thereby showing that spatial and social isolation were rooted not merely in individual deficits but in structural conditions and network constraints (Wilson, 1987; Lupton and Power, 2004). Building on this work, theorists such as Bourdieu (2001) and Wacquant (2007) argued that social capital refers to the resources and networks people use to improve their lives (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Schneider and Till, 2007). This turn positioned SNA as a critical tool for examining how networks function as both opportunities and constraints, particularly in marginalized communities.

2.2.3 Social network analysis in the context of Lawrence Heights

Canadian applications extended SNA to immigrant and low-income populations, demonstrating that network position affects education, health, and integration outcomes (Pendakur and Pendakur, 2002; Soroka, Banting and Johnson, 2004; Aizlewood and Pendakur, 2005; Eisenberg, 2006; Kazemipur, 2006; Bevelander and Pendakur, 2009; Pendakur and Mata, 2012; Rashid et al, 2013; Mata and Pendakur, 2014). Barry Wellman's work on personal networks and social capital shows how everyday ties in neighbourhoods organize access to help, information, and institutional pathways (Wellman and Wortley, 1989; Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Wellman, 1999). Other early studies of Canadian networks also map how support circulates through small groups and community organizations (Carroll, Fox and Ornstein, 1982; Baron and Tindall, 1993; Veenstra, 2000, 2002; Veenstra et al, 2005; Ross et al., 2000). Together, this literature establishes SNA as a tool for identifying who people turn to, what resources flow through those ties, and where gaps or bottlenecks appear, questions that are central to understanding low-income, racialized women's housing trajectories in Lawrence Heights.

Building on this foundation, this study uses SNA to map the informal (family, friends, neighbours) and formal (community workers, service providers) ties women mobilize when searching for rentals, responding to evictions, or negotiating the redevelopment context. Conceptually, attention is paid to bonding ties that sustain day-to-day care and crisis response, and to bridging ties that connect women to information, landlords, and agencies. Examining the patterns of these ties (who is contacted first, how information travels, where connections break down) enables the analysis to locate points of support as well as the gatekeeping that reproduces disadvantage. This targeted use of SNA clarifies the mechanisms through which poverty, racism, and sexism are relationally experienced in the neighbourhood, directly informing the empirical strategy in Chapter Four. At the same time, SNA is not without criticism[16]. The next section addresses its limitations and how the study mitigates them.

2.2.4 Limitations and critiques of social network analysis

Although social network analysis (SNA) has become an influential tool, it has also drawn critiques for providing only a partial view of social life. Scholars caution that SNA risks becoming a form of shallow resonance, mapping relationships without fully capturing their quality or the shifting contexts in which they operate (Tindall and Wellman, 2001). Zuckerman (2003) similarly argues that while networked visualizations may appear precise, they can obscure

[16] Recent Canadian research involving SNA has begun unpacking how housing relocation policies affect low-income people's social ties (Takhar, 2006; Bryant, 2005; Ghosh, 2007; Murdie and Ghosh, 2010).

the dynamics that make ties meaningful in practice. This concern is particularly relevant when studying marginalized communities, where relationships are often fragile, contingent, and shaped by unequal power relations. Belle's (1983) study of low-income women in Boston illustrates this tension: while social ties offered essential emotional and material support, they also generated conflict and stress. Together, these critiques highlight that SNA is effective in tracing structural patterns of connection, but it cannot on its own explain the lived complexities of those ties, which is an important consideration in how this study applies this method. The following discussion builds on these observations by examining additional critiques that challenge the assumptions underlying SNA and its ability to account for social inequality.

Others challenge SNA's assumption that a person's behaviour and social positions are determined only by their social networks (Borgatti et al., 2009). Sean Safford (2009) offers a more balanced view, showing that while networks can open possibilities, they also restrict them: choices made by actors both shape and are constrained by the structures of their networks. Wellman (1999) similarly questioned SNA's claims, pointing out that most people today rely on loosely bounded, dispersed networks rather than traditional, tightly knit communities. Building on this, Gary Bridge (2002) warns housing researchers against assuming neighbourhood solidarity, noting that communities are more fluid and fragmented. Safford (2009) adds that these layers of networks overlap unevenly, creating points of strength as well as areas of exclusion. Doak and Parker (2002) deepen this critique by highlighting the power geometry[17], of networks, power is not shared equally but is concentrated in certain actors who can influence decisions, control flows of information, or block access to resources. Without acknowledging these asymmetries, SNA risks portraying networks as neutral, when they may reproduce existing inequalities in access and opportunity. Taken together, these critiques suggest that without explicit attention to structural inequities such as race, gender, and poverty, SNA alone cannot fully account for how marginalized communities experience networks in practice (Rutherford and Wekerle, 1988; Allen, 1995; McClain and Doyle, 1984; Palmer, 1983; Klodawsky, Spector and Rose, 1985; Klodawsky, Spector and Hendrix, 1983; Shields, 2008).

On its own, SNA cannot be the sole conceptual approach in this research because it does not sufficiently address the structural barriers emerging from poverty, gender, and race. While networked visualizations allow researchers to observe the movement of flows and exchanges, they lack mechanisms for explaining how racism, sexism, and classism shape those exchanges. SNA's focus on the relational environment also makes it difficult to capture systemic inequalities, such as how power and racism operate through exclusion, gatekeeping, or unequal access to opportunities (Bannerji, 2006; Jiwani, 2006). The relational focus of SNA often neglects how asymmetrical power relationships shape the flow of resources. Van de Ven and Ferry (1980), for example, distinguish between symmetrical ties, where resources move in both directions, and asymmetrical ties, where flows move in only one direction, highlighting how SNA obscures the ways in which unequal exchanges are embedded within broader socio-economic contexts. For these reasons, SNA sheds important light on the relational dynamics of social networks but does not fully account for the systemic structures of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, that shape and constrain those networks.

[17] Power geometry, a concept developed by feminist economic geographer Doreen Massey, illuminates the power brokering role of cliques, gatekeepers, sub-groups and researchers within a social network (Massey 1994).

2.3 Intersectional analysis

The limitations of SHA point directly to the need for an intersectional approach, which better explains how overlapping systems of inequality organize lived experiences of race, gender, and class, mediating residents' ability to claim belonging or participate fully in community life.

2.3.1 Conceptual definition of intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept for analysing how gender and other demographic variables intersect with diverse components of identity, producing unique lived experiences (Hill-Collins, 1998). A hallmark of this framework is that identity cannot be reduced to a single social marker; rather, intersectionality highlights how multiple and overlapping social positions create both opportunities and disadvantages that shape an individual's quality of life (Hill-Collins, 1998). This approach is particularly important for centering the experiences of marginalized women, as it demonstrates how the social construction of identity is bound up with broader systems of inequality and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Emphasizing identity intersections provides a critical lens that directly addresses the limits of frameworks such as social mix and social network analysis, which tend to isolate categories, ignore embodiment and overlook how inequalities operate simultaneously.

Intersectionality guards against the essentialization of difference by highlighting the depth, complexity, and layers of women's identities. Women's day-to-day lives with all their complexity and contradictions serve as a point of departure for intersectional examination. Moreover, intersectionality underscores that groups are collective constellations of people with many different identities, stories, and journeys. It also considers how the social construction of identities makes populations simultaneously visible and invisible. In this way, an intersectional approach provides information about women's experiences with poverty, racism, and sexism, including the barriers that confront and challenge different women in distinct ways.

2.3.2 Historical context of intersectionality

Since the 1990s, the concept of intersectionality has been used to champion historically excluded voices and explain how access to rights, resources and opportunities depend on the social construction of identities within specific spatial contexts (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Valentine, 2007). African American legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw introduced intersectionality in 1989 in her work, *Mapping the Margins*, which examined police reports of violence against black women in the United States. In 1990, the African American sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins deepened the concept by introducing a matrix of domination in her widely acclaimed book, *Black Feminist Thought.* This text also introduced the idea of interlocking systems (a further development of Crenshaw's idea of intersecting systems), a term that described how markers of identity inform, rather than purely connect to, other markers of identity. According to Razack (1998), the term interlocking implies a direct, constitutive effect between identity markers. Gill Valentine extended the concept by arguing that the expression of social markers of identity is inherently spatial (Valentine, 2007). For example, depending on the social and geographical space an individual occupies, they can experience oppression simultaneously rooted in multiple identity markers and this experience repositions in real time as

spatial contexts shift and change (Valentine, 2007). Indeed, intersectionality helps pivot thinking from singular ideations of identity constitution to multiple and intersecting ideas of identity.

2.3.4 Limitations and critiques of intersectionality

Critiques highlight that the literature on intersectionality needs to evolve to better capture the complexity of lived identities. Canadian scholar Ann Denis (2008) suggests that empirical research is not possible in current iterations of intersectionality because there are no empirical guidelines for markers of identity. Leslie McCall (2005) writes that the concept does not account for intracategorical, intercategorical and anticategorical complexities within the constitution of identities. [18] In response to McCall, British sociologist Sylvia Walby (2007) challenged the merit of examining such granular complexities, arguing that doing so makes it challenging to explore empirical questions. Walby also questions additive formulations of identity constitution in which various identity markers are tacked onto a base identity. She argues that this formulation elides consideration of how identity markers shift in real time, often coalescing to produce unique experiences of marginalization. These debates highlight the challenge of researching intersectionality as conventional research methods often flatten these complexities. For example, survey-based approaches typically rely on standardized categories that make it difficult to capture how multiple forms of oppression interact in lived experiences. This limitation however also highlights why an intersectional framework is critical as it illuminates the layered and overlapping nature of disadvantage that large-scale quantitative measures alone struggle to represent.

One promising direction is to develop clearer conceptual linkages that connect identity categories to the processes through which they are constantly negotiated and redefined. Rather than treating race, gender, or class as fixed markers, an evolving intersectional approach emphasizes how these identities are reshaped through social interaction and in relation to broader structures of power. This reframing clarifies how overlapping oppressions are experienced in everyday life and underscores the importance of studying not only categories of identity but also the dynamic relations that produce them. In this way, intersectionality is positioned as a critical bridge to other methodological frameworks, such as social network analysis, that can trace the relational patterns through which power operates. The following section develops this connection, showing how an intersectional approach to SNA enables a more precise account of how marginalized women navigate overlapping systems of inequality. Intersectionality demonstrates how belonging and community are unevenly structured through race, gender, and poverty, laying the groundwork for an integrative approach that guides the empirical analysis.

2.4 Applying an intersectional approach to SNA

Given the respective strengths and limitations of SNA and intersectionality, this research employs a hybrid approach that integrates both frameworks. Intersectionality highlights how

[18] Intracategorical complexity refers to the analysis of social groups at neglected points of intersection and is concerned with reconstructing intersections of single dimensions on a micro level. Intercategorical complexity refers to the adoption of existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups. Similarly, anticategorical complexity refers to the consideration that social life is too irreducibly complex to deconstruct and argues against the use of fixed categories.

overlapping systems of oppression shape the lived realities of marginalized populations, while SNA offers the tools to trace the relational patterns through which those systems are reproduced and negotiated in everyday interactions. In this way, the two approaches complement one another, intersectionality identifies the structural dynamics of race, gender, class, and other identity markers, while SNA captures how those dynamics unfold through concrete exchanges and relationships. For example, intersectionality emphasizes that women's experiences of poverty, gender, and race cannot be understood in isolation but must be seen as interconnected, whereas SNA makes visible how these overlapping oppressions shape and constrain women's participation within their networks of support. Put differently, intersectionality draws attention to the social construction and layering of identities, while SNA clarifies how identities and groups are reconstituted as individuals interact within and across networks. This integration provides the conceptual and methodological foundation for analysing Lawrence Heights as a site where both structure and interaction co-produce women's housing experiences.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has developed the conceptual and contextual foundations for this study by tracing the evolution, application, and critiques of three key approaches, social mix, social network analysis, and intersectionality. Taken together, these conceptual lenses highlight the multi-scalar dynamics through which low-income racialized women encounter housing policy, revealing contested discourses about place, inclusion, and belonging. Social mix exposes how redevelopment often carries unintended consequences for communities. Social network analysis illuminates the relational dimensions of support and exclusion within spaces of social mix, while intersectionality foregrounds the structural inequalities that shape women's lives. Critiques of each approach also make clear that no single framework is sufficient on its own, but their combined insights are necessary for interpreting how place, belonging, and identity are configured in Lawrence Heights. This synthesis not only frames the empirical analysis that follows but also clarifies the methodological choices guiding this research.

The discussion of social mix highlighted how policy discourses emphasize integration while often producing structural inequalities. At the same time, it underscored how belonging is constructed through everyday interactions across fragmented networks. Social network analysis offered tools for examining how relationships extend across and beyond the neighbourhood, revealing both opportunities and exclusions. Its limitations underscore the need for intersectional analysis, which reframes identity not as a fixed category but as a set of overlapping and shifting dimensions. Taken together, these insights demonstrate that the complexities of women's lived experiences are best understood by attention to the multiple and dynamic markers of identity.

Lawrence Heights can thus be understood not only as a site of physical redevelopment but also as a space where competing discourses of inclusion, exclusion, and belonging intersect with the lived realities of low-income, racialized women. By integrating insights from social mix, SNA, and intersectionality, this research advances a framework attentive both to the policy rationales driving redevelopment and to the everyday negotiations through which women navigate these transformations.

The following chapter outlines the methodological strategies used to operationalize this framework, moving from conceptual debates to empirical analysis. In doing so, it sets the stage for a grounded examination of how women in Lawrence Heights experience and contest the overlapping structures of inequality that shape their housing and community lives.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter begins by outlining the feminist methodological orientation that frames this research, situating it within broader debates on reflexivity, positionality, and accountability in feminist geography. This orientation recognises knowledge as situated and relational, emphasising the researcher's embeddedness within processes of data production and interpretation. The first section therefore reflects on how feminist epistemologies informed the design of this study, foregrounding the ethics of care, reciprocity, and attentiveness to participants' lived realities. The chapter then turns to a detailed discussion of the methods used to operationalise this framework, including the recruitment of participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and dissemination strategies. It describes the characteristics of the women who participated in the study, the steps taken to ensure ethical engagement, and the limitations encountered during fieldwork. Together, these discussions demonstrate how feminist methodology was translated into methodological practice throughout the research process.

As a researcher, I was always aware that this empirical study was limited in scope and could not provide a comprehensive assessment of the conditions in Lawrence Heights prior to redevelopment. The ten-year delay in writing this thesis, combined with the author's challenging personal circumstances, meant that the redevelopment of Lawrence Heights had advanced significantly by the time the empirical data was analysed. The fieldwork was conducted between January 2 to April 19, 2015, before the most intensive phases of redevelopment began. As a result, the women's accounts capture a critical baseline for how racialized, low-income women understood their housing precarity, neighbourhood belonging, and future expectations at the very outset of the redevelopment process. These narratives are not diminished by the passage of time, rather, they provide essential evidence of how women anticipated, interpreted, and prepared for impending transformations. Situating these early accounts within the broader temporal trajectory of redevelopment demonstrates their continuing relevance. In contexts where redevelopment processes unfold over decades, documenting pre-redevelopment experiences ensures that women's perspectives are not lost amid official narratives of "progress" that often marginalize their lived realities. By framing these accounts as historically specific yet enduringly significant, this study underscores the value of reflecting on women's experiences as both a snapshot of a particular moment and a foundation for understanding ongoing dynamics of inequality, displacement, and resistance. From a feminist methodological standpoint, attending to this temporal gap embodies a reflexive and accountable approach, it requires recognizing how knowledge is embedded in time, how women's voices bear witness to anticipated change, and how the act of preserving these perspectives resists their erasure within dominant, forward-looking planning narratives.

3.1 Research approach

In the research process, feminist-oriented principles function as a methodological orientation that frames research as an ethical, situated, and political practice. Applying feminist principles means rejecting the assumption of detached neutrality and instead recognising that knowledge is always partial, contingent, and shaped by the positionality of the researcher (Leatherby, 2003; Watson and Casey, 2022). This orientation emphasises the social construction of knowledge, requiring scholars to attend to the historical, cultural, and structural contexts in

which research encounters unfold. A key tenet of this approach is the commitment to producing research that does not simply describe women's experiences but interrogates the broader social processes and power relations that structure those experiences. In this way, feminist methodologies insist that women's voices be situated within the dynamics of inequality and precarity rather than abstracted from them. Within this study, such an approach establishes a foundation for examining how racialized, low-income women in Lawrence Heights articulate their housing and community experiences in ways that illuminate broader systemic conditions. Building on this foundation, feminist research also requires careful attention to reflexivity, positionality, and a politics of care, which further guide how relationships with participants are negotiated and how knowledge is co-produced.

Consideration of how structural societal factors and dynamics may impede mutuality and reciprocity in the research context, alongside a duty to prevent harm for participants, is also emphasized (Kirsch, 2005). For example, a feminist consideration of power dynamics in a research exchange may carefully acknowledge how ableism, racism, and sexism inform participants' responses and the researcher's interpretation of them. Importantly, feminist research does not assume that participants' insights are passively determined by structural conditions. Instead, it recognizes participants as agents whose reflections are shaped by, but also actively reshape, the social relations in which they are embedded. To acknowledge agency and the mutability of social dynamics, then, is to view research encounters as reciprocal. Participants contribute to knowledge-making not only by narrating their experiences but also by illuminating the shifting terrain of power, inequality, and resistance in their everyday lives.

3.1.1 Critiques of positivism

In the 1980s, the advocacy of feminist researchers introduced feminist methodologies in many fields of study. Scholars such as Sandra Harding critiqued positivism as a dominant philosophical framework, while others challenged positivism's methodological instrument, quantitative methods, for objectifying research subjects and assuming that scientific insights could be detached from the historical, social, and cultural politics and contexts in which they emerged (Graham, 1983). These scholars criticized positivism for generalizing scientific insights that were presented as part of a continuous intellectual tradition of progress despite being situated in specific social and historical moments. In other words, positivism often assumed that scientific "truths" were timeless - rooted in selective readings of the past and projected forward as if they would remain universally valid. This obscured the partial, situated, and power-laden nature of knowledge production.

Feminist scholars responded by advocating for the application of feminist methodologies to encourage research questions that highlight subjectivity, issues of representation, and the politics of legitimation. Rather than asking what can be known as a universal truth, feminist critiques pushed scholars to interrogate how knowledge is produced, whose experiences count as evidence, and what social relations shape the authority of the knower (Code, 1991; Alcoff, 1998). Such questions destabilize the positivist assumption of neutrality and instead situate knowledge within ongoing struggles over power, identity, and representation.

By unsettling the positivist assumption of neutral, timeless truths, feminist methodologies not only reframe how knowledge is produced but also direct attention to the power relations embedded in research encounters themselves. This shift establishes the basis for examining how dynamics of authority, representation, and inequality shape the interactions between researchers and participants.

3.1.2 Power dynamics in research

When applying a feminist methodology, researchers interrogate the power differentials embedded in the research process itself. These dynamics are not peripheral but constitutive of how knowledge is generated, validated, and circulated. A researcher's consideration of power includes reflecting on the risks of assuming equity in research relationships. Even when equity is prioritized, the organization of data collection, the framing of participants' narratives, and the choices made in analysis and dissemination remain shaped by the researcher's positional authority. In this sense, feminist scholars argue that knowledge production must be understood not simply as a neutral transfer of information, but as an encounter structured by asymmetrical relations of power, requiring transparency about how and why certain decisions are made.

Feminist methodologies also stress that power is not a fixed attribute held by researchers or participants but a shifting, relational dynamic. Even well-intentioned approaches can inadvertently reproduce marginalization. For example, focusing narrowly on a participant's intersectional identity risks reducing them to the burdens of structural oppression, thereby re-inscribing the very exclusions research seeks to challenge. Preventing such tendencies requires an explicit recognition of the ethical dilemmas of representation and the potential for exploitation in research encounters. Rather than treating participants as inherently "disadvantaged," feminist approaches underscore the need to attend to participants' agency and resilience while also acknowledging the material and social constraints they navigate (Cotterill, 1992; Kirsch, 2005). In doing so, feminist methodologies move beyond deficit framings and foreground the uneven yet co-constituted terrain of power within which research relationships unfold.

This recognition of power as shifting and relational also sets the stage for reflexivity, since interrogating how power circulates between researcher and participant necessarily requires ongoing self-examination of the researcher's own positionality and its effects on knowledge production.

3.1.3 Reflexivity and accountability

Reflexivity emerged in the 1990s as a central goal of feminist research, positioned as a response to the structural exclusions and erasures embedded in academic knowledge production. For racialized women scholars, reflexivity was not an abstract methodological preference but a political and epistemological necessity, it enabled them to interrogate how their own social locations shaped both the questions they asked and the authority of their claims. Scholars such as Mohanty *et al*. (1991) illustrated how experiences of exclusion, whether through racism, ethnocentrism, or marginalization in academic institutions, produced not only personal impacts but also insights into the structural conditions that generated them. Reflexivity thus insists that researchers acknowledge the situatedness of their perspectives, recognizing how identity and

power relations shape the very process of knowledge construction. In this sense, reflexivity is more than an exercise in self-awareness; it is a methodological commitment to accountability, demanding that researchers render visible the positional dynamics that underpin both the production and the reception of research findings (Harding, 1991).

Sometimes reflexivity is mobilized not only as self-examination but also as a means of ensuring accountability for how knowledge is produced in feminist research (Hill-Collins, 1998). In this sense, reflexivity underscores that research findings are not neutral observations but situated expressions of the contexts in which they are generated. Donna Haraway's influential articulation of "situated knowledges" highlights that all knowledge claims are socially, culturally, and historically embedded, produced from specific positions rather than from an imagined view from nowhere (Haraway, 1988). Reflexivity, then, entails recognizing the partial and contingent nature of knowledge claims, while accountability demands that researchers make these positionalities explicit as part of the research process. This shifts the focus away from evaluating research solely on criteria of validity or generalizability and toward assessing how effectively it reveals the dynamics of power, inequality, and lived experience within a given context. For this study, reflexivity and accountability work in tandem to foreground how racialized, low-income women's housing and community experiences in Lawrence Heights can only be understood as context-specific, relational, and shaped by broader structures of inequality.

A feminist undercurrent was present in this study from start to finish, grounded in the intersectional orientation of the research questions. Exploring women's social networks through a feminist intersectional lens was critical to understanding how the Lawrence Heights redevelopment affected their experiences, particularly their agency and identity negotiation processes. Intersectionality, as articulated by Black feminist scholars such as Crenshaw (1989) and Hill-Collins (1998), provided the theoretical foundation for examining how women's housing and community experiences are shaped at the intersection of race, gender, and class. This feminist lens ensures that the study remains attentive to women's lived experiences as socially constructed, relational, and embedded within broader systems of inequality. While intersectionality anchored the research theoretically, its integration with the complementary analytical framework of social network analysis enabled a richer, multi-scalar approach. In practice, this meant that findings from women's narratives were not treated as stand-alone accounts but were examined in relation to the relational patterns highlighted by SNA. The feminist orientation therefore foregrounded women's perspectives as central, while SNA, in conjunction with an understanding of the social mix approach to housing in Lawrence Heights, provided tools to situate those perspectives within broader policy and social contexts. Taken together, this approach not only positioned women's voices at the core of the study but also highlighted how their decisions, negotiations, and embodied experiences within Lawrence Heights were shaped through the dynamic interplay of policy, place, and social relations.

The feminist underpinnings of this study also applied to the construction of the overall research design, particularly the data analysis. For example, insights from the data were organized into themes after repeated cycles of inspection, re-arrangement, and scrutiny to ensure that women's perspectives were not reduced to pre-given categories but allowed to emerge through iterative engagement with the material. Data collection methods were likewise shaped by feminist principles, interviews were scheduled with careful attention to participants'

availability, caregiving responsibilities, and other time constraints that structure women's everyday lives. Attending to these dynamics underscored the recognition that research participation is embedded within broader social and familial obligations. By explicitly accommodating these constraints, the methodology sought to redistribute some of the burdens of research encounters, ensuring that women's voices could be centered without demanding the erasure of the social and relational contexts in which those voices were situated.

I applied a reflexive approach by conceptualizing this research as both a research output and a form of consciousness-raising for the women who contributed to the study and for the broader community in Lawrence Heights. Rather than presenting women solely as research subjects, this work positions them as knowledge producers whose insights and experiences shaped the research process and its outcomes. The intention was that the analysis would not simply document women's lives but would illuminate how their accounts reflect and mediate the structural conditions of housing precarity, caregiving responsibilities, and broader forms of inequality. In other words, the research sought to render visible women's lived experiences while situating those narratives within systemic dynamics of policy and redevelopment. As a racialized woman and long-time resident of Toronto, my positionality informed these methodological choices, leading me to prioritize accessibility, reciprocity, and the centering of participants' voices in ways that foregrounded agency and resistance. As a racialized woman, my own positionality further influenced these methodological choices, leading me to prioritize accessibility, build trust, and center participants' voices in ways that foregrounded their agency and resistance. By doing so, the study aimed not only to document women's stories but also to politicize their narratives, highlighting how racialized, low-income women confronted and contested the inequalities embedded in the redevelopment process.

3.1.4 Positionality: insider-outsider

My relationship to Lawrence Heights was shaped by a brief period during which my family lived in the neighbourhood. Although our time there was temporary, this experience gave me an early and embodied understanding of what it meant to live in affordable housing in Toronto, the sense of both community and constraint that such environments can hold. This background positioned me as a partial insider, familiar with the rhythms of daily life, the stigmas attached to social housing, and the importance of informal networks for navigating limited resources. At the same time, my later academic trajectory and professional distance placed me in an outsider role, requiring constant reflexivity about how I engaged residents and represented their experiences. This dual position heightened my awareness of the need to approach the research collaboratively, to avoid extractive practices, and to centre participants' agency and expertise throughout the process.

Overall, efforts to become involved in the community did not yield the anticipated results. I was met with some degree of suspicion and scepticism at meetings with community representatives. The scepticism surrounding my place in the community was expected and understandable, given the extensive volume of research that continues to take place in Lawrence Heights. At the time, some service providers expressed concern that the neighbourhood was over-researched and that little of this work yielded tangible benefits for residents. My proposed study was initially perceived as redundant and potentially burdensome for women participants.

This scepticism did not diminish after I disclosed that I had previously lived in Lawrence Heights; rather, it prompted discussions about how to ensure the research would be mutually beneficial. In response, I regularly reassessed the potential demands of participation and sought to align the research design with the priorities of women living in the community. Although some hesitation persisted among community gatekeepers, my prior familiarity with Lawrence Heights did help me build rapport and communicate an understanding of the neighbourhood's social and spatial dynamics. This familiarity often facilitated trust and openness in interviews, even among participants who were initially cautious about researchers' intentions.

3.2 Researcher-Community relationship

The research timeline is presented below:

Stage	**Date**
REB ethics approval	December 16, 2014
Participant recruitment	January 2 - February 20, 2015
Interviews conducted	January 26 - March 31, 2015
Second and third interviews conducted	April 1 - April 15, 2015
Guided walks	April 16 - April 19, 2015
Data analysis (initial)	May 18 - May 24, 2015
Data analysis (revisited)	January 1 - June 30 2025

Prior to the research starting, in January 2015 I contacted the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to receive permission to conduct research in Lawrence Heights and to begin gathering contacts of staff members who could connect me with residents and provide insight into the housing authority's work. I also reached out to Unison Health and Community Services Centre, a community-based health centre located in Lawrence Heights, and participated in several events that were organized and sponsored by Unison. These events helped me learn about the local community[19], create a visible research presence, and begin to establish trust with residents. In this sense, my initial steps reflected a feminist methodological commitment to accountability and transparency, rather than positioning myself as a detached observer, I actively sought relationships with institutions and organizations already embedded in the neighbourhood, acknowledging their role as mediators of access and gatekeepers of community knowledge.

After connecting with Unison, I presented an overview of the research at a monthly housing assistance program, the "Housing Help Program," facilitated by outreach staff. This presentation, held on January 23, 2015, provided an opportunity to introduce the scope and objectives of the project to other service agencies working with women in Lawrence Heights. Sharing the aims of the study publicly was not only a pragmatic step toward recruitment but also an enactment of feminist methodological principles of accountability and transparency. By situating the project in a community forum, I positioned residents and service providers as audiences entitled to knowledge about the research before any data were collected. This process

[19] In this research, community refers to residents of Lawrence Heights. The residents comprise a group of people that live in geographical proximity to each other within an urban area. However, I do not assume that living nearby each other leads automatically to identification with an urban community.

aligned with a feminist commitment to reciprocity: information was not extracted without explanation but embedded in a mutual exchange that acknowledged the stakes for participants. Following the completion of data collection and preliminary analysis, I met again with Unison staff and several study participants to share emerging results and to discuss how the findings might inform community programming. After the formal thesis defence on January 16, 2026, I plan to organize a follow-up event with Unison to present the final outcomes and disseminate the research more broadly. During the intervening years, this commitment required regular communication and updates with community staff, and I am currently re-engaging with Unison to explore appropriate ways to share the completed thesis. Sharing this work will honour my earlier commitments and, I hope, provide a forum for knowledge exchange and collective reflection within the community.

I also attended the November 14, 2014 launch event for the Lawrence Heights Collective Memory Bank Project, a community-led initiative designed to document residents' stories and preserve collective memory through documents, media, artwork, and music. While the event provided an archive of residents' experiences, it also represented a form of knowledge production grounded in community ownership rather than external expertise. Residents' presentations of their stories and reflections positioned them not only as participants but also as narrators and custodians of the neighbourhood's history. Attending this event highlighted how feminist methodologies intersect with community-led practices of memory-making, the project created space for women and other residents to articulate their experiences of displacement, resilience, and belonging on their own terms. By situating myself as an observer within this process, I recognized that research does not stand apart from community articulations of identity but is embedded within them. In this way, the event reinforced the importance of positioning residents as knowledge producers and validated the methodological choice to privilege community voices in shaping the study.

In January 2015, I also attended the annual general meeting of the Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION). With 24 residents and 15 representatives from service agencies serving Lawrence Heights present, this meeting created an important entry point for situating my project within ongoing community governance structures. During this meeting, I gave a short presentation outlining the scope and objectives of the study, while recruitment posters were displayed at the information table. By the end of the event, seven racialized women had self-identified and expressed interest in participating in the study, providing their contact information. Beyond its practical function as a recruitment exercise, however, the meeting highlighted how research encounters are embedded within the pre-existing social networks and relationships of trust that structure community life in Lawrence Heights. The process of recruitment was not only about securing participants but also about publicly situating the project within these community-based networks, thereby signalling accountability and transparency to both residents and service providers. From a feminist methodological standpoint, this moment demonstrated the importance of entering the field in ways that foreground reciprocity, visibility, and co-presence rather than treating participation as a private exchange between researcher and subject. In this way, the LHION meeting underscored how feminist research design can mobilize existing community relationships to cultivate shared ownership of the research process and affirm the agency of participants from the outset.

Attending the housing help clinic at the Lawrence Heights Collective Memory Project and participating in LHION meetings deepened my understanding of residents' everyday concerns and created opportunities to advertise the study to both community members and agency representatives. These spaces served as crucial sites of knowledge exchange, where residents voiced issues that extended beyond individual experiences to broader structural challenges linked to the redevelopment. After one LHION meeting, for example, I met with the local city councillor, Josh Colle, at his City Hall office to discuss the redevelopment's impacts. He emphasized that safety and displacement were pressing issues for the community and highlighted that women in particular faced significant anxieties about the uncertain trajectory of the redevelopment. By engaging with both residents and municipal representatives in this way, I was able to situate the project within multiple layers of accountability, responding to women's lived experiences while also acknowledging the political frameworks shaping those experiences. From a feminist methodological standpoint, these encounters underscored the importance of grounding research in the situated concerns of participants and refusing to abstract their narratives from the wider socio-political contexts in which they are embedded.

Following a suggestion from Mr. Cole's special assistant, Ms. Penrice, I connected with Ms. Elsie Amoako, a community animator working at the redevelopment office. At the time, she was also a staff member at Unison and coordinated the Resident's First Initiative, a Trillium Foundation-funded program designed to strengthen community engagement, empowerment, and capacity within Lawrence Heights. The program supported residents in sharing their perspectives and participating directly in redevelopment planning by creating a formal position for a resident representative, an appointed community member who sat on local planning and decision-making committees alongside city officials and service agency representatives. Importantly, this role was intended to build the skills and capacities of Lawrence Heights residents themselves, offering both training and employment opportunities while nurturing leadership for future initiatives. By encouraging residents to lead and design their own community projects, the program reflected feminist methodological principles of accountability and reciprocity, situating residents as active knowledge producers rather than passive subjects. During one discussion at an LHION meeting, Ms. Amoako invited me to attend a subsequent launch session on February 9, 2015, which I joined to deepen my understanding of residents' perspectives on the redevelopment process.

I received significant support from Unison staff, particularly one of the health planners, Mr. Andrew Koch, who remained in contact with me throughout the period of my fieldwork. He frequently emphasized Unison's stake in the study and provided constructive feedback on research materials, including the design of consent forms and the distribution of recruitment posters. Mr. Koch was also instrumental in connecting me with other Unison staff who facilitated ongoing contact with residents, assisted with the logistics of booking space at Unison, and circulated recruitment posters to women who might benefit from participating in the study. This institutional support not only ensured that the practical requirements of the research were met but also underscored the relational dynamics central to feminist methodologies. By positioning Unison staff as collaborators in the recruitment process, the research design acknowledged their role as mediators of access and sought to minimize extractive practices by embedding reciprocity and accountability into the project's implementation.

3.3 Sample recruitment and sample size

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, it was important to recruit women characterized by diversity in household size, age, and ethnicity. Of particular interest were women with children, as I anticipated that the planned redevelopment might be especially disruptive for these households. At the same time, it was not feasible to be overly prescriptive in selecting participants. The first technique used to recruit participants was a graphic poster that provided details about the study and my contact information. The poster offered a non-intrusive way to attract participants. With assistance from key informants, on January 23, 2015, I identified key locations at Unison Health and Community Services to display the 8" x 11" black and white posters that included tabs with my contact information that could easily be torn off.

Word of mouth was the second way of recruiting participants. Unison staff were given a copy of the recruitment poster on January 20, 2015 without the tear-away tabs and shared it with residents alongside study details and my contact information. They also informed interested women directly, drawing on their relationships with residents and their knowledge of who might be most willing to participate. In this way, word of mouth functioned not only as a practical recruitment tool but also as a mechanism of trust-building, since my associations with Unison and York University lent credibility and reassured residents that the study was legitimate and worthwhile. Contacting residents through Unison's emails and newsletters further expanded participation, reinforcing the sense that the project was supported by institutions already embedded in the neighbourhood. This combination of personal referrals and institutional backing provided prospective participants with both the confidence and accessibility needed to engage in the study.

A third mode of recruitment emerged through my participation in community meetings such as those organized by the Lawrence Heights Inter-organizational Network (LHION) and the Resident's First Initiative on February 6, 2015. These gatherings created opportunities to engage directly with community leaders and residents, where the visibility of my presence and the circulation of my study through trusted community channels lent credibility to the project. Rather than relying solely on posters or announcements, recruitment was facilitated through recognition and familiarity, Lawrence Heights was a small community where news of research spread quickly through personal networks. Each week I visited, I was greeted by women who had already heard about the study through these meetings or from their peers, reflecting how recruitment unfolded relationally through trust, repetition, and shared community spaces. This process underscored the feminist methodological emphasis on relationality and accountability, situating recruitment not as a one-way invitation but as a co-constructed process grounded in community recognition and endorsement.

Through the combination of these modes of recruitment, in March 2015 I was able to contact, arrange, and complete interviews with 22 participants, 17 self-identified racialized women living in Lawrence Heights and 5 key informants who worked as front-line staff at Unison (see Appendix C). [20] The women participants reflected diversity in age, household size, and ethnic background, with many balancing caregiving and employment responsibilities

[20] Prior to conducting fieldwork in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood, I planned to interview 15 residents. However, due to high interest and quick word-of-mouth, I did not turn away the two additional residents.

alongside the uncertainties of redevelopment. Their accounts provided grounded insights into how redevelopment intersected with everyday life, shaping decisions about housing, family, and community participation.

The five key informants, meanwhile, were Unison staff members who occupied different programmatic and planning roles, including the Housing Help Program, the Diabetes Education Program, and health planning. While all participants in this study were informed of confidentiality protocols, a few key informants explicitly consented to being identified by name in recognition of their professional roles and their desire for their contributions to be publicly acknowledged. Others are referred to more generally to protect anonymity where requested. For instance, Andrew Koch, a health planner, not only facilitated my access to residents but also offered critical reflections on how redevelopment policies intersected with local service delivery. Others worked as caseworkers, coordinators, and facilitators whose daily responsibilities positioned them at the intersection of institutional priorities and residents' needs. These informants were vital because they illuminated the organizational and systemic dimensions of redevelopment, how policy logics and service mandates mediated residents' experiences, and, in turn, how residents' precarities shaped service provision itself. In this way, the key informant interviews extended the study beyond individual accounts, linking women's narratives to broader institutional and structural dynamics.

3.3.1. Sample characteristics

Resident participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to their 60s. Although the research design initially budgeted for 15 interviews, two additional participants were later included, bringing the total to 17 residents. Three women were under the age of 25, while five were over 55. Most participants lived in households that included children younger than 18, and four lived alone. Seven women were married or living with a partner, and the remainder identified as single, divorced, widowed, or separated. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the participants reflected the heterogeneity of Lawrence Heights, six residents identified as Canadian-born and English-speaking, three identified as French-speaking Caribbean immigrants, and eight identified as African or South Asian heritage. Nine of the women were employed either full- or part-time, while others were engaged in unpaid domestic labour, caregiving, or were retired. On average, participants had lived in Lawrence Heights for approximately ten years. Five women reported having lived in the neighbourhood for more than three decades (the longest period being 46 years), while others had moved into the community within the past five years. One household had relocated to Lawrence Heights only a year before the revitalization process began. In every case, households included at least one working-age adult, underscoring the ongoing economic pressures participants faced alongside the social uncertainties of redevelopment.

Key informants were five front-line staff members at Unison Health and Community Services who interacted daily with residents through programs such as health planning, the Housing Help Clinic, and the Diabetes Education Program. Unlike residents, key informants did not live in Lawrence Heights, instead, they commuted into the neighbourhood and often divided their time across multiple Unison sites in Toronto. Their perspectives were shaped less by personal experience of living in the neighbourhood and more by their professional

responsibilities, which involved facilitating residents' access to services, implementing community programs, and witnessing the impacts of redevelopment policies on residents' everyday lives. Their position as external but embedded practitioners provided valuable insight into how institutional processes intersected with residents' everyday struggles, while also highlighting the limits of outsider perspectives in fully grasping the lived realities of the community.

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 Interview type (semi-structured interviews)

Consistent with feminist methodological principles, this study employed a semi-structured interview format to facilitate reciprocal, dialogic exchanges rather than extractive data collection. In feminist research, interviews are understood as co-produced encounters between researcher and participant, grounded in trust, accountability, and an ethics of care (Oakley 1981; Peake et al. 2024). This approach enabled participants to frame their experiences and interpretations in their own terms while allowing me to probe for depth and context as themes emerged. The semi-structured format also reflected my epistemological commitment to situated knowledge, recognising that meaning is produced relationally and that participants are active knowers rather than passive subjects. This flexibility was particularly important in Lawrence Heights, where women's experiences of housing, care, and belonging were complex and varied. By adopting this format, the interview process itself became a space of co-constructed meaning, reflecting the feminist emphasis on relationality, reflexivity, and shared authority within the research encounter (Bryman, 2001).

3.4.2 Interview guide (residents vs. key informants)

Two interview guides were prepared, one for frontline staff and another for residents (see Appendix A). After minor revisions based on a pilot with fellow classmates, questions were designed to be open-ended and were not conducive to 'yes' or 'no' responses. All interviews were conducted in English.

Key informants, frontline workers who interacted with racialized women on a day-to-day basis, played a crucial role in contextualizing the research. These interviews were designed to provide background knowledge about the service landscape in Lawrence Heights and to gain insight into how women accessed and received support through Unison programs and other community networks. The information obtained from key informants offered an institutional perspective on women's everyday experiences of navigating housing insecurity, caregiving responsibilities, and social support systems. This input also informed the development of the resident interview guide, which focused on women's own perspectives and experiences of receiving and providing support within the neighbourhood.

The scope of the resident interview was broader and designed to offer participants opportunities to discuss their own social interactions in Lawrence Heights. This guide included questions relating to women's experiences of giving and receiving social support and their ideas about the proposed redevelopment. Questions were also structured to facilitate discussion about

residents' overall experiences in the neighbourhood, and expectations for the future of the neighbourhood.

3.4.3 Interview coordination and logistics

Residents and key informants signed informed consent forms allowing audio recording of each interview and the use of anonymous quotations in this thesis (see Appendix D for the consent form). Participating staff were also given an information letter regarding the study prior to the interview. In most cases, this letter was given to frontline staff when they were first contacted, well ahead of the interviews (see Appendix A).

The Office of Research Ethics at York University approved all study documents on December 16, 2014, prior to the start of fieldwork. Participants were informed that interviews would be conducted in person at Unison, recorded with their consent, and supported with signed consent forms. Unison was selected as the interview site because of its central location within Lawrence Heights, which ensured accessibility and comfort for both residents and staff. All study materials and communications were prepared in English, after consultation with Unison staff, including Denise Bishop-Earle, a long-term Lawrence Heights resident with several decades of experience in the community who also served as a community liaison during the redevelopment process. It was determined that English-only materials were appropriate and would not pose a barrier to participation. During interviews, I provided refreshments and created a conversational atmosphere to foster trust and ease. Interviews typically lasted around one hour, with some as short as thirty minutes and others extending slightly longer. Situating interviews at Unison and prioritizing accessibility underscored a feminist methodological commitment to minimizing participant burden and embedding research within everyday community spaces rather than external or detached academic sites.

For the most part, residents were welcoming and spoke freely. On occasion, residents were more reserved and sceptical about the research. Some residents were concerned that criticism of relocation or redevelopment might jeopardize their future housing eligibility. I did my best to assure residents that this would not be the case, although it was clear that some residents were more reticent in interviews. In many cases, residents became more comfortable as the interview progressed. As a result, some important comments were made by residents following the interview, when conversation became more casual. Of the residents interviewed, all met with me for a second interview between April 1 - April 15, 2015, and nearly half participated in a third session during the same period.

Participants received a modest honorarium in recognition of their time and contributions to the study. The honorarium was provided after each interview as compensation for participation-related costs such as time, transportation, and caregiving responsibilities. It was presented as a gesture of appreciation rather than an incentive to participate and was outlined in the consent materials approved through the university research ethics process.

3.4.4 Guided walks

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I conducted a small number of guided walks between April 16 - April 19, 2015, with participants as a complementary method of observation and engagement. These walks emerged organically from the interview process when several residents expressed a preference for continuing our discussions in a more casual and familiar setting. Over the course of fieldwork, three participants invited me to accompany them on their regular neighbourhood walks, routes to the daycare centre, the community garden, or nearby bus stops, so that they could illustrate the issues they had described in interviews. These interactions were not conceived as formal ethnographic "go-along" methods at the outset but became an extension of the research as participants guided me through spaces that were meaningful to them.

The walks offered an important embodied and spatial perspective on women's experiences of Lawrence Heights. Moving through the neighbourhood alongside participants made visible how mobility, accessibility, and safety were negotiated on a daily basis. Participants often paused to point out physical barriers, areas they avoided, or places that fostered connection and trust, narrating how redevelopment and maintenance cycles shaped their sense of belonging. The informal nature of these walks allowed for a conversational rhythm different from the interviews: participants spoke more freely, used humour, and reflected on memories prompted by the landscape itself. This embodied method thus provided a deeper understanding of how the material and sensory dimensions of place intersected with emotional and social attachments to the neighbourhood.

From a feminist methodological standpoint, the guided walks exemplified an ethics of co-presence and situated knowledge (Haraway 1988). Allowing participants to determine the pace, route, and focus of discussion redistributed control over the research encounter, transforming the neighbourhood into a shared analytic space rather than a field to be observed. The method also underscored the relational dimension of feminist inquiry: walking together produced insights that were co-generated through movement and dialogue, revealing the everyday geographies of affordability, safety, and belonging that might not have surfaced in a seated interview (Springgay and Truman, 2017; Rose, 2020; Jackson, 2021). These walks, though few in number, contributed valuable contextual detail to the subsequent analysis, enriching the interpretation of women's narratives presented in Chapter Four.

3.4.5 Journal

Maintaining a reflexive journal was a key component of the research process and an extension of my feminist methodological commitment to reflexivity and accountability. The journal functioned as both a record of analytic decisions and a space for critically engaging with the contradictions, tensions, and uncertainties that emerged during data collection and interpretation. I used journaling to document my immediate reflections after interviews, noting moments of alignment or dissonance between participants' narratives, my own assumptions, and the broader context of redevelopment in Lawrence Heights. These entries helped me trace how my positionality and emotional responses shaped my interpretations over time and provided an ongoing means of questioning my analytical choices. The journal also served as a tool for examining patterns of inconsistency, such as participants' shifting accounts or cautious remarks about housing authorities, not as methodological flaws, but as valuable insights into how structural power and institutional surveillance influence what is said, withheld, or reinterpreted.

In this way, journaling became both a methodological strategy and an ethical practice, bridging fieldwork and analysis while reinforcing the iterative, reflexive nature of theme identification discussed in the following section.

3.5 Identifying themes

The identification of themes followed a process that was systematic yet reflexively attuned to the feminist methodological orientation underpinning this research. I drew on Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni's (2023) articulation of thematic analysis as a structured but interpretive practice. Their model emphasises the value of moving iteratively between familiarisation, coding, and theming, while embedding checks for rigor and reflexivity through strategies such as the "6Rs" for code generation and the "4Rs" for theme consolidation. [21] This framework was particularly generative for my own work, as it underscored that themes do not emerge in a vacuum but are actively shaped through critical judgment, theoretical engagement, and a researcher's ethical orientation. Complementing this, I also drew from Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, and French's (2016) discussion of qualitative analysis in human geography, which situates coding and theme development within broader epistemological debates about representation, interpretation, and the politics of knowledge production.

In practice, the analytic process was both inductive and theoretically informed. I began by immersing myself in interview transcripts, highlighting recurring expressions, moments of tension, and narrative fragments that spoke to central concerns of belonging, housing precarity, and redevelopment. Initial codes were generated through this close reading, with memos documenting why particular words or passages appeared salient. These codes were subsequently revised and regrouped as the analysis progressed, reflecting both the emergent qualities of participants' narratives and the theoretical commitments described earlier in this chapter. In line with Naeem et al.'s (2023) guidance, I treated the refinement of codes into themes not as a mechanical exercise but as a reflexive act of interpretation. Decisions to collapse or separate themes were justified through memo-writing and recursive engagement with the transcripts, ensuring that analytic choices remained transparent and accountable.

The process of theme identification therefore became a site of methodological reflexivity. Rather than seeking a singular or definitive thematic structure, I treated contradictions, overlaps, and silences within the data as meaningful in themselves. Following feminist methodological principles, I resisted the impulse to smooth away inconsistencies; instead, I foregrounded them as analytic entry points into the complexity of women's lived experiences. This approach aligns with Clifford et al.'s (2016) insistence that qualitative analysis in geography must preserve the spatial, social, and relational textures of narratives, rather than reducing them to abstracted categories. In this way, the development of themes was not simply about imposing order on qualitative material but about co-constructing insights that honour the multiplicity of women's voices while remaining attentive to the broader structural forces shaping their lives.

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[21] The 6R Framework refers to six iterative strategies for enhancing reflexivity and rigor in thematic analysis, reflexivity, rigour, relevance, resonance, richness, and reach. The 4R Framework builds on this model by emphasizing four interrelated principles of rigour, reflexivity, representation, and responsibility. These are intended to ensure that data analysis remains ethically grounded and critically engaged with participants' contexts.

3.6 Limitations

The qualitative methods used in this study are intended to illustrate the views and experiences of residents. The findings are not statistically representative and cannot be generalized. Rather, the goal is to secure an in-depth understanding of some residents' views. The diversity of participants in terms of residents' age, ethnocultural background, family structure, building of origin and relocation destination were of fundamental importance to the analysis.

Snowball sampling was an ideal approach for this study despite the potential risk of limiting the diversity of participants. The poster campaign and canvassing at Unison Health and Community Services limited the potential to attract residents from the entire housing development. According to Councillor Colle, Unison staff, LHION representatives and study participants, residents of Neptune and Lotherton, two small buildings on namesake streets were located within the neighbourhood, often had a different sense of attachment to Lawrence Heights. Rather than identifying as living in Lawrence Heights, they identified as living in Neptune and Lotherton. In fact, out of all the women that I interviewed, three identified themselves as 'Neptune ladies.' There were location-specific issues for people residing in the buildings on Neptune and Lotherton, in addition to the issues affecting Lawrence Heights residents as a whole.

Another limitation was that because the resident interview guide was an evolving document, not all residents were asked the same questions. The guide was initially created around what were expected to be the key issues concerning social networking, based on prior knowledge of the redevelopment and a review of the relevant literature. However, as fieldwork progressed, the guide was continually refined in response to emerging insights from participants, evolving community dynamics, and my own growing familiarity with the local context. These revisions were intended to make the interviews more responsive to participants' language, priorities, and lived experiences, while maintaining consistency with the broader aims of the study. It was therefore expected that the interview guide would remain flexible, adapting as new information was gathered from residents. Questions were revised throughout the course of the research, and interviews in the latter half of the study were often longer and more in-depth, allowing for richer discussions of women's opinions, experiences, and interpretations of community life.

The accuracy and coherence of participants' accounts, whether from residents or key informants, present a methodological challenge that is widely recognized in qualitative inquiry. While interview data are deeply valuable for accessing meanings, they are inevitably mediated, participants may reconstruct memory, emphasize different facets of experience over time, or tailor narratives in light of social desirability or strategic concerns (Korstjens and Moser 2017; Ahmed *et al*. 2024). In my study, I encountered instances of internal inconsistency (e.g. participants revising earlier statements), different versions between residents and staff, and selective reticence, particularly around redevelopment and housing policy pressures. Some women appeared cautious about criticizing housing authorities, possibly because they feared that candid interview responses might adversely affect future housing or service access.

Such tensions echo findings in methodological research on contradictions in qualitative data. Dado (2023) argues that contradictory or discrepant accounts are not mere problems to be suppressed, but methodological opportunities to examine power, agency, and context in how knowledge is narrated. To address this, I treated such "deviant" accounts not as errors but as significant data, documenting them during coding and reflecting on why certain discrepancies emerge. Member-checking and reflexive journaling helped me situate contradictory claims within broader power relations of redevelopment, institutional trust, and residents' positionalities (Noble and Smith 2015; Kakar, 2023). Nonetheless, these strategies cannot fully eliminate interpretive uncertainty, and readers should understand the study's findings as partial and contingent, subject to the logics and constraints under which participants narrated their experiences.

The accuracy of the statements of some residents and key informants also raises a concern about the limitations of this study. Just as the researcher's own preconceptions and biases inevitably play a role in the research process, so too is the research affected by the vagaries of residents' and key informants' interpretations of events. Residents did at times provide information that conflicted with information provided by key informants and other residents. On a few occasions, residents were inconsistent in their answers, making comments that were either contradictory or highly unlikely. Some residents were concerned that their interview responses could jeopardize their relationship with TCHC and affect housing decisions in the future. There were likely instances in which information was withheld, despite my best efforts at assuring residents that the research was being conducted independent of the housing authority and that all personal information would remain completely confidential.

Following completion of the resident and key informant interviews, thank-you cards were mailed to participants. A key concern among Lawrence Heights residents and agency staff has long been that researchers often do not return to share their findings or provide accessible updates to the community. Acknowledging the time lapse in completing this research and its implications for accountability, I plan to prepare a concise, one-page summary of the study's key findings written in plain language. I will propose that Unison Health and Community Services post this summary on their website and make printed copies available in the community centre for those without online access. The summary will highlight the major themes and recommendations emerging from the research in a format that is easily understandable and relevant to residents. In addition, a website link to the full thesis, archived in the Canadian Theses Repository will be provided for those interested in accessing the complete document. [22] Through these efforts, I aim to uphold the feminist commitment to reciprocity, transparency, and knowledge exchange by ensuring that the outcomes of this research are shared in ways that are both accessible and meaningful to the Lawrence Heights community. Efforts to reconnect with Unison are currently underway and I hope to add additional knowledge exchange opportunities by the time this thesis is shared for publication.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the feminist-oriented methodology guiding this research brought together reflexive practice, accountability to participants, and sustained engagement with community

[22] Link to access: https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Help/theses

institutions to generate knowledge that is both rigorous and grounded. By prioritizing relationships of reciprocity and transparency, the study sought to resist extractive research logics that often characterize academic work in marginalized communities. Instead, the methodological design was attentive to how women's everyday experiences, when situated within broader processes of urban redevelopment, offered crucial insights into the dynamics of belonging, resilience, and displacement. This framework positioned residents not as passive informants but as knowledge producers whose voices fundamentally shaped the contours of the study itself.

At the same time, the chapter has foregrounded the methodological tensions and limits inherent in community-based research. Issues of representativeness, the partiality of narratives, and the interpretive uncertainties of qualitative data are not treated here as flaws to be corrected but as constitutive of feminist epistemology, which emphasizes the situated and contingent character of all knowledge claims. Decisions around language, recruitment strategies, and the embeddedness of the researcher within the field necessarily structured the knowledge that was produced. Rather than undermining the credibility of the findings, these factors illustrate the methodological commitment to transparency about the conditions under which data were collected and interpreted. In doing so, the research contributes to ongoing debates about how feminist methodologies negotiate questions of accountability, positionality, and power when working within communities shaped by histories of marginalization and redevelopment.

Finally, this chapter underscores the broader significance of documenting women's experiences in Lawrence Heights during a moment of profound urban transformation. The archive produced here is not only an empirical record but also a political intervention that challenges the erasure of women's experiences from planning discourses and redevelopment narratives. By embedding research in reciprocal relationships and everyday community spaces, this methodological approach makes visible how women interpret, contest, and reimagine the changes unfolding around them. These commitments lay the foundation for the empirical analysis that follows in Chapter Four, where women's narratives are examined in detail to show how lived experiences of redevelopment are articulated, negotiated, and resisted. In this way, the methodology developed in this chapter does not simply precede data analysis but actively structures the interpretive lens through which the data is understood.

Chapter 4: Low-income, racialized women's experiences in Lawrence Heights

4.0 Overview

During our conversations, the women of Lawrence Heights shared complex, layered stories that revealed how systemic inequalities shaped their everyday experiences and aspirations for change. Their narratives reflected the dense interplay of housing insecurity, employment precarity, caregiving responsibilities, and social stigma that together formed the scaffolding of everyday life.[23] Rather than describing discrete hardships, participants illuminated interlocking pressures that converged to produce cumulative forms of exclusion. These structural conditions, intensified by the neighbourhood's long history of redevelopment and racialization, were not experienced passively. Instead, women continuously negotiated them, through advocacy, relational support, and the reimagining of home, safety, and belonging.

This chapter presents the empirical analysis of these narratives through the lens of the study's three guiding research questions. The first research question asks, *how do low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights experience and navigate housing precarity and redevelopment pressures, and how do these experiences intersect with race, gender, and immigration status?* This question grounds Section 4.1, Women's Experiences of Housing Precarity, which examines how multiple forms of marginalization, economic, racial, and gendered, shape women's interactions with landlords, service providers, and local institutions. It also explores how women's positions as tenants, caregivers, and community members inform their strategies for survival and resistance.

The second research question asks, *how do social networks and community organizations function as infrastructures of care, solidarity, and collective identity for low-income, racialized women facing housing precarity and redevelopment in Lawrence Heights?* Section 4.2, Social Networks as Infrastructures of Care illustrates how women's interpersonal ties and community-based relationships operate as vital social infrastructures that sustain everyday life. These networks circulated information, material resources, and emotional support, while also revealing their fragilities and exclusions. This section highlights how relationships of reciprocity and collective responsibility compensate for institutional neglect, embodying feminist notions of care as both labour and survival.

The third research question asks, *how can highlighting low-income, racialized women's voices reposition them as key stakeholders in debates about affordable housing and redevelopment?* Section 4.3, Counter Discourses, explores how women's narratives of safety, stigma, and belonging contest dominant policy imaginaries, particularly those embedded in the discourse of "social mix." In reframing safety as a collective, relational practice rather than a matter of policing or control, women's accounts reveal a profound critique of redevelopment logics and a reimagining of community futures grounded in mutual care and social justice

[23] This compounded effect was not unique to any one participant, rather all bar one of the participants' responses reflected encounters with multiple systemic barriers. The participant that did not report personally experiencing multiple systemic barriers reported not directly experiencing the barriers in her own day-to-day. Rather, she reported observing family members, friends and colleagues experience multiple systemic barriers.

Finally, Section 4.4, Intersectional Synthesis, integrates the findings across all three research questions to demonstrate how race, gender, class, and immigration status intersect to structure differentiated experiences of precarity, care, and agency. This synthesis reveals that while Lawrence Heights residents shared many common struggles, their strategies of survival and forms of belonging were profoundly shaped by the intersecting hierarchies of racialization, citizenship, and social position.

Taken together, these four sections demonstrate that the women of Lawrence Heights are not merely subjects of redevelopment but active interpreters, critics, and co-authors of its unfolding process. Through their stories, they construct a situated knowledge of urban change, one that reframes policy debates around housing and social mix through lived experience, community agency, and feminist ethics of care. This chapter thus serves as both an empirical account and a political intervention, foregrounding the relational, affective, and structural dimensions of life in a neighbourhood undergoing continuous transformation.

4.1 Women's experiences of housing precarity and redevelopment pressures

This section examines how low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights experienced and navigated the structural conditions of housing precarity that emerged through overlapping processes of market discrimination, institutional neglect, and redevelopment. It addresses the first research question, which asks how these women's encounters with affordability pressures and exclusion reveal the intersection of race, gender, class, and immigration status in shaping access to secure housing. While the next section (4.2) focuses on the social and relational dimensions of survival, the networks of care through which women mitigate insecurity, this section remains concerned with the structural and material production of precarity itself. Here, housing is treated not only as a physical resource but as a political instrument through which inequality is organized and justified.

Women's testimonies depict a landscape of uncertainty that extends across both private and public housing systems. In the private rental market, participants encountered what several described as "quiet refusals", landlords who stopped returning calls after learning their postal code, or property managers who demanded proof of income far beyond what regulations required. In the public and rent-geared-to-income sectors, the problem was less denial of entry than the chronic erosion of quality. Repeated delays in maintenance, unexplained rent adjustments, and opaque redevelopment notices created an everyday environment of bureaucratic fatigue. Residents described how these overlapping systems positioned them in permanent limbo, eligible but precarious, housed yet never fully secure. As one participant observed, "They say you have housing, but you're always waiting, for repairs, for answers, for the next move" (P17, 65+, Retired, Longest-term resident (46 years in Lawrence Heights).

The analysis that follows unfolds in three parts. Section 4.1.1 ("Discrimination and Exclusion") explores how racialized and gendered stereotypes shaped women's encounters with landlords and property managers, exposing the moral geographies that define who is considered a "good tenant." Section 4.1.2 ("Material and Institutional Precarity") examines how infrastructural decay and administrative opacity within the public housing system transformed maintenance and communication into instruments of control, reinforcing the perception that

neglect was strategic rather than accidental. Section 4.1.3 ("Networks as Survival Mechanisms") considers the informal practices through which women navigated these institutional failures, not as stable infrastructures of care, which are the focus of the second research question, but as short-term, improvised tactics of endurance that reveal the everyday labour required to remain housed.

Together, these subsections show that housing precarity in Lawrence Heights was produced through the entanglement of market logics and state practices that made insecurity a routine condition of life. Discrimination, infrastructural neglect, and the temporal instability of redevelopment constituted a continuum of displacement that women were forced to inhabit and negotiate daily. The following analysis situates these experiences as the foundation for understanding the relational strategies explored later in this chapter, how women turned structural vulnerability into collective resourcefulness without ever escaping the systems that produced it.

4.1.1 Discrimination and exclusion

Women's narratives of discrimination reveal how exclusion operated not as isolated incidents, but as patterned, intersectional experiences shaped by both systemic and interpersonal bias. Across interviews, anti-Black racism, sexism, and xenophobia intersected with economic inequality to limit women's access to housing and employment. These dynamics expose how institutional processes, such as tenant screening, job recruitment, and service provision, reinforce existing hierarchies of privilege while devaluing the knowledge and presence of racialized women. All respondents described having encountered at least one experience of discrimination within the past week, most commonly anti-Black racism and gender bias while navigating employment and housing opportunities. One participant, a 45-54-year-old Black woman living with spouse and extended family and who worked as a caregiver and domestic worker, recalled,

> "I applied for an apartment and the landlord just looked at me and said, 'we don't rent to people like you.' I didn't even get to hand over my application." (P10).

Another respondent, a Somali Muslim woman who was 35-44 years old, a personal support worker, and a single mother of three, described being dismissed at a job interview,

> "The minute I walked in with my hijab, the tone changed. They asked me if I even had the 'right kind of experience.' I knew then they weren't going to hire me." (P05).

Eighteen respondents reported at least two such encounters in the previous week, while four described three or more. These ranged from explicit refusals to subtle exclusions that conveyed a sense of not belonging. As a 25-34-year-old retail assistant who was a single mother with one child explained,

> "They didn't say no outright, but they kept asking if my husband would sign the lease, as if I couldn't manage it on my own." (P03).

Such moments highlight how discrimination compounded the material challenges of living in Lawrence Heights, deepening women's financial and emotional precarity. By framing these

experiences through an intersectional lens, the analysis shows how racism, sexism, and class inequality operated simultaneously to constrain women's housing and employment trajectories, shaping their everyday negotiations of affordability and belonging.

Women's experiences of discrimination extended beyond single incidents to reveal broader, intersectional patterns of exclusion embedded in everyday encounters with housing and employment systems. Many participants described the barriers they faced as routine rather than exceptional, part of an ongoing pattern of racialized and gendered bias that determined who was seen as "deserving" of opportunity. One participant recalled,

> "As soon as I said my address, his face changed. He said the unit was taken, but my coworker called later that day and they said it was still available." (P09, 35-44-year-old cleaner on contract work, Black woman with two children).

Her experience captures how stigma surrounding the Lawrence Heights address operated as a form of spatial discrimination, one that linked neighbourhood identity with assumptions about race, class, and reliability. Another respondent, who had migrated to Canada in her late twenties, described applying for several cleaning jobs but receiving no response,

> "They hear my accent and they hang up. You just know when they're not going to call you." (P06, 35-44-year-old unemployed Somali woman, single mother in a multigenerational household).

These narratives highlight how racialized and gendered hierarchies compound to shape women's access to labour and housing markets, creating material consequences that reverberate through family stability and income security. Eighteen women reported experiencing such treatment at least twice in the same week, with four describing multiple incidents of being rejected or dismissed before even completing an application. As one participant explained,

> "They didn't say no outright, but they kept asking if my husband would sign the lease, as if I couldn't manage it on my own." (P03, 25-34-year-old retail assistant, single mother with one child).

Taken together, these accounts show how discriminatory attitudes intersect with structural inequities to produce cumulative disadvantage. For Black women and other visible minorities in particular, exclusion was reinforced through both overt refusals and subtle cues, tone, body language, or dismissive comments, that conveyed a constant sense of being evaluated and found lacking. These incidents underscore that discrimination was not accidental or episodic, but systemic and enduring, rooted in intersecting forms of racism, sexism, and class-based bias that constrained women's mobility, choice, and access to secure housing. At the same time, they reveal differences among women, reflecting how immigration status, ethnicity, and language proficiency shaped exposure to bias and strategies for navigating it. For example, while Canadian-born Black women described direct, unapologetic anti-Black racism, immigrant and newcomer women noted how accents, names, and perceived foreignness became barriers that limited their credibility with employers and landlords.

This discussion addresses the first research question by demonstrating how affordability pressures are produced and intensified through racialized and gendered discrimination, thereby revealing the social mechanisms that reproduce housing precarity in Lawrence Heights. It also foreshadows the second research question by showing that women's social networks became crucial resources for processing and responding to these inequities. Discrimination, in other words, was not only a structural reality but a relational experience, one that women interpreted, resisted, and navigated through everyday acts of care, reciprocity, and community-building.

Not every experience of discrimination reflected overt instances of anti-Black racism or sexism. For many women, exclusion operated through more subtle, spatialized biases tied to their neighbourhood identity. Several respondents described what might be understood as territorial stigma, negative assumptions about Lawrence Heights that shaped how others perceived them before any personal interaction occurred. Across interviews, women described discriminatory encounters most often involving individuals from outside Lawrence Heights, landlords, employers, or service providers, whose perceptions of the neighbourhood were shaped by stigma and misinformation. As one participant observed,

> "People hear you're from Lawrence Heights and they already think they know you." (P12, 45-54-year-old community volunteer, long-term resident of Lawrence Heights [30 + years]).

And as another participant explained,

> "They think everyone from here is trouble. It doesn't matter what you wear or how you talk." (P09, 35-44-year-old cleaner on contract work, Black woman with two children)

Another woman explained that potential employers or landlords often treated her with suspicion once she mentioned her address,

> "It's like they think we all bring problems. You don't even get a chance to explain yourself." (P06, 35-44-year-old unemployed Somali woman living in a multigenerational household).

These discriminatory encounters reflected not individual malice but the social circulation of neighbourhood reputations. Participants reported being told that barriers they faced were simply "how things are" for residents of Lawrence Heights, an everyday reminder that inequality was naturalized through place-based assumptions. Such experiences reveal that discrimination was as much about where women were from as who they were. The symbolic geography of Lawrence Heights intersected with race, gender, and class to constrain women's mobility across the city's social and economic landscapes. These experiences reveal that discrimination was not limited to individual prejudice but embedded in spatial hierarchies that linked race, class, and place. By marking women from Lawrence Heights as undesirable tenants or employees, these biases constrained their access to essential life opportunities and reinforced the association between social identity and urban marginality. These findings highlight how affordability pressures were compounded by racialized and gendered discrimination, demonstrating that the barriers to housing and employment were not simply economic, but moralized and territorialized.

Foregrounding these experiences extends the analysis beyond formal instances of racism or sexism to include the moral geographies through which exclusion was rationalized. These findings speak directly to how women navigated affordability pressures amid intersecting systems of discrimination. Women's social networks, as explored below, became vital infrastructures for navigating and resisting these forms of exclusion, playing a crucial role in mediating and countering these stigmatizing narratives by providing both validation and strategic knowledge for negotiating access to jobs and housing.

4.1.2 Material and institutional precarity

When asked why they were looking for housing and employment outside Lawrence Heights, most respondents, apart from two long-term residents who were not seeking to leave, framed their responses around improving their perceived quality of life. For many, moving was not only about relocation but about reclaiming dignity within a deteriorating built environment. One newer resident, who had lived in the neighbourhood for two years, explained that she wanted to live somewhere that felt less burdensome,

> "A place where you can enjoy the area itself, not just rely on the people to make it livable." (P12, 45-54-year-old community volunteer, long-term resident of Lawrence Heights [30+ years])

Her comment reflected a broader frustration with the uneven quality of life in Lawrence Heights, where women's sense of community was often sustained through personal relationships rather than through the material comfort or safety of their surroundings.

The search for alternative housing was often driven by exhaustion with substandard units and the emotional toll of living amid infrastructural decline. As one woman explained,

> "[…] Have you ever been inside some of the units? For the people who have social housing assistance. […] It's not made for enjoyment. It feels like it was designed just to store our things and cook some food. It's not designed for living. […] I've gone to the community meetings for the revitalization and shared my thoughts about this. […]". (P15, 55-64-year-old homemaker living with spouse and adult children, long-term resident of Lawrence Heights)

These accounts demonstrate that housing for these women represented far more than physical shelter. It was bound up with belonging, safety, and social legitimacy. Many saw participation in the revitalization process as a way to assert agency and demand dignity through improved housing design and maintenance. These narratives speak directly to how women negotiated affordability pressures through both critique and participation, transforming dissatisfaction into civic engagement and positioning themselves as co-constructors of neighbourhood change rather than passive subjects of policy.

The deteriorating quality of housing emerged as a persistent concern among participants, underscoring the everyday implications of disinvestment in public housing. By February 13, 2015, six out of seventeen participants, representing 35 percent of the sample, had submitted

repair requests that had not been acknowledged by the TCHC in the preceding two months. Another three participants reported similar delays over the previous quarter, describing prolonged periods without essential maintenance. One respondent recounted a particularly distressing experience of living with structural decay that threatened her family's safety and mental well-being,

> "[…] We live in a row house where there is an attic available to us. For months, there is a bathroom near my children's rooms that I have known is not right. The ceiling in it sinks down towards you when you stand in that room. […] One time my youngest daughter was inside of this bathroom and the ceiling collapsed near her. […] I ran into the area where she screamed and held her close to me. Three raccoons were in the bathtub and against the wall. I screamed and so did my daughter. […] Then I once again called TCHC and told them about my situation explaining what happened and that there were three live raccoons in the bathroom. …] ". (P05, 35-44-year-old personal support worker, Somali single mother with three children).

This testimony exposes the severity of infrastructural neglect faced by women tenants, where the physical decay of their housing not only compromised safety but also symbolized a broader institutional disregard toward low-income residents. The participant's repeated appeals to TCHC reveal both the emotional labour and resilience required to secure basic living conditions, reflecting how women's housing experiences were structured by intersecting vulnerabilities of gender, class, and race. For single mothers and newcomers, prolonged delays in repair exacerbated existing economic and caregiving burdens, while older residents, many of whom were Canadian-born Black women, interpreted the deterioration of their homes as part of a longer history of racialized disinvestment in public housing. These overlapping conditions meant that women's negotiations with housing authorities were rarely straightforward: each interaction required balancing the risk of being ignored, the fear of reprisal, and the emotional exhaustion of advocating for change. By situating these experiences within an intersectional framework, it becomes clear that housing insecurity in Lawrence Heights was not merely a question of poverty, but a lived expression of how race, gender, and class hierarchies converged in the everyday politics of maintenance, safety, and dignity.

Such accounts illustrate how affordability pressures and bureaucratic inertia intertwined to deepen marginalization, effectively transforming maintenance issues into mechanisms of exclusion. Yet, they also reveal women's persistent agency, the act of reporting, documenting, and advocating for repair itself became a form of resistance against neglect. This insight ties directly to the chapter's broader argument, that women's responses to housing precarity were not passive, but deeply political practices of survival and assertion within systems that routinely devalued their well-being.

All participants expressed a shared desire to see the quality and functionality of existing housing structures improve during the process of redevelopment. This common interest was not limited to concerns over comfort or convenience, rather, it reflected a broader aspiration for dignity, safety, and recognition as deserving residents within a system that often devalued their living conditions. Women's calls for improved housing design and maintenance frequently emerged from lived experiences of overcrowding, inadequate design, and a lack of consideration

for family life within public housing units. As one participant (P12, 45-54-year-old community volunteer, long-term resident of Lawrence Heights [30+ years]) previously explained, describing her apartment as "not designed for living," these frustrations became a catalyst for civic engagement, as residents participated in redevelopment consultations to advocate for livable, inclusive housing environments.

Her reflection illuminates the affective dimensions of housing injustice, the sense of being spatially contained rather than accommodated. By characterizing her unit as "not designed for living," she underscored how material neglect translates into emotional marginalization, rendering public housing a site of both residence and alienation. Yet, the very act of attending community meetings signified a form of everyday resistance, where critique and advocacy became tools to reclaim space and assert voice within the redevelopment process. This example underscores how women's agency operated through both individual and collective strategies, transforming dissatisfaction into participation, and using their experiential knowledge of housing precarity to contest inequitable urban design. This aligns directly with the chapter's broader argument that women's negotiations of affordability pressures extend beyond economic survival, functioning also as political acts of reimagining inclusion and belonging within the built environment.

While attending in-person interviews with prospective landlords, women encountered not only logistical obstacles but also layered experiences of racism, discrimination, and prejudice that directly shaped their access to housing. Of the 17 women interviewed, nine (53 percent) reported that prospective landlords refused to provide further information about available units after reviewing proof-of-income documents. Four of these women (approximately 40 percent) noted that they anticipated being turned away even before the interviews, based on stories shared through their social networks about landlords' biases against residents from Lawrence Heights. These interactions reveal how racialized and gendered assumptions became institutionalized within private rental practices, reinforcing women's exclusion from desirable housing markets. Moreover, these experiences illustrate how women's awareness of local reputations - circulated through their networks, produced a form of anticipatory discrimination, in which they internalized and pre-emptively adapted to expected rejection. One participant's experience demonstrates how these intersecting stigmas of race, class, religion, and place combined in face-to-face encounters with landlords, translating systemic inequities into embodied acts of dismissal and humiliation.

> "[…] I wore hijab so I knew this would look negative about me. I brought my friend Joan who doesn't wear hijab with me to the in-person interview, and it didn't work. It seemed to work until the landlord asked to see my proof of income. […] I showed it to him, and his face darkened. […] Then he asked where I lived, and I hesitated to say at first because I know how the neighbourhood is perceived by others. […] Then he said thank you for coming but he remembered that the unit, which had three bedrooms, was already going to someone else. Then he asked us to leave. […]". (P05, 35-44-year-old personal support worker, Somali Muslim single mother of three children).

A different woman, who was brown skinned, described an experience of being rejected outright at a rental office,

> "[…] I called beforehand asking if they had any three-bedroom units to show and the lady on the phone said they did, and we scheduled a time when I could come visit. On the day of the visit, I went to the rental office to meet with the person who would show me where to go. As soon as she saw me, she said out loud in the lobby for everyone to hear, I'm sorry we do not rent to people like you we have enough of you here already. I was so humiliated […]". (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children).

It appeared that there was a high incidence of racism, prejudice, and micro-aggressions in women's experiences as they sought alternative rental housing outside Lawrence Heights. The majority of these experiences occurred beyond the neighbourhood itself. For example, one participant recounted a telephone conversation with a prospective landlord that began civilly but ended abruptly once she disclosed her Lawrence Heights address, she sensed immediate stigmatization and silence in response. In each case, respondents felt shunned simply for residing in Lawrence Heights. Rejecting prospective tenants on the basis of place alone evokes what Murdie and Novac have described as systemic place-based discrimination, where neighbourhood identity becomes a proxy for other ascribed devaluations in the housing market (Novac *et al*. 2002; Teixera, 2007).

Some participants shared feelings of anxiety due to their limited understanding of Toronto's housing market and a perceived lack of trustworthy information channels. As one woman explained,

> "It feels like there's a system everyone else knows about, but we're left guessing, no one tells you what's fair rent or what to watch for." (P06, 35-44-year-old unemployed Somali woman, single mother living in a multigenerational household).

Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying,

> "Every time I called a landlord, it felt like I was doing something wrong, like I was missing a rule everyone else knew." (P03, 25-34-year-old retail assistant, single mother with one child).

These reflections illustrate how uncertainty was not only informational but emotional, producing a sense of being "backed into a corner," as several respondents described it, when navigating housing searches or interpreting lease conditions.

4.2 Social networks as infrastructures of care

This section illuminates the research question concerning the role of women's social networks, rather than passive connections, these networks functioned as active infrastructures of resilience, mitigating the compounded challenges of poverty, racialization, and housing insecurity. Through an intersectional feminist lens, I conceptualize these social relations not simply as informal support systems but as urban care infrastructures, dynamic, gendered, and racialized formations through which women navigate bureaucratic exclusion, economic

constraints, and the moral geographies of belonging. As the following analysis shows, women's everyday practices of information sharing, emotional support, and mutual aid were essential to sustaining life within conditions of structural neglect, demonstrating that care itself operates as a mode of survival and means of achieving spatial justice.

At the start of interviews, most respondents asked whether I preferred to be addressed formally or informally. After I indicated that being informally addressed was my preference, nearly all respondents echoed that informality was also their preference, emphasizing that it contrasted with the formality of recent community engagement sessions regarding the redevelopment. In this context, respondents explained that they preferred to build connections with neighbours in everyday, informal ways, through casual encounters in shared spaces, spontaneous conversations, and mutual exchanges of support, rather than through highly structured or externally organized activities. This orientation toward "organic" interactions reflected both their skepticism of formal consultation processes and their reliance on established social practices of trust-building within the neighbourhood.

One respondent described feeling distrustful of incoming neighbours expected to arrive after the redevelopment, reasoning that newcomers would not share the familiarity cultivated among residents who had already lived in Lawrence Heights for several years. She offered her own experience as an example. Having arrived from Ghana six years earlier, it had taken her and her family two years to form trusting relationships with nearby neighbours.[24] This personal history, rather than the six-year mark itself, served as her benchmark for why incoming residents might struggle to integrate. She added that while neighbours were generally quick to learn basic details about her and her family, it took time before she trusted them enough to share more sensitive information, such as her chronic kidney disease. Although she noted that neighbours were receptive to inviting her to social activities, childcare responsibilities and exhaustion after long workdays often limited her ability to accept such invitations.

Another respondent identified as a newcomer but described a somewhat different trajectory of settlement. Having lived in the neighbourhood for two years after arriving from Somalia, she emphasized the importance of proximity to two adjacent Somali households who had themselves lived in Lawrence Heights for three and four years respectively. Their presence mitigated the difficulties of navigating a new country and neighbourhood. These neighbours not only accompanied her to medical appointments for her four-year-old son but also collaborated in sharing everyday responsibilities, rotating weekend meal preparation, managing food costs, and translating medical information from doctors and nurses. Beyond domestic support, the three women demonstrated solidarity by attending revitalization consultations together, seeking to present a united voice in discussions about community life.

This pattern of mutual aid resonates with findings from Grand Rapids, Michigan, where low-income African American women likewise developed cooperative household networks that challenged the racialized (and patriarchal) organization of urban space (Peake 1993). In both contexts, mutual support functioned as a counter-narrative to structural exclusion, reconfiguring care and kinship as collective forms of resistance. Yet, the Somali woman's experiences also extend Peake's analysis by introducing the layered complexities of migration, language, and

[24] She referenced neighbours living directly adjacent and across the street to her home.

cultural identity. Their shared background provided an immediate scaffold for belonging, but integration within the wider community required negotiating religious, generational, and cultural boundaries, illustrating how intersectional hierarchies continue to shape who is able to participate fully in networks of mutual aid. In this way, the Lawrence Heights accounts echo Peake's argument that everyday solidarities among women transform marginal urban spaces into sites of care, while also revealing how transnational migration adds new dimensions to these geographies of belonging.

The Somali woman's reflections also revealed the limits of belonging, particularly when she contrasted the support of her immediate neighbours with interactions in other parts of the community. She described a group of residents who held outdoor gatherings, playing loud music and loitering, which she perceived as disrupting the family-oriented atmosphere she valued. When she asked them to move their gatherings elsewhere, her request was brushed aside. This experience differed from that of the previous respondent, who also identified as a newcomer but whose integration into the neighbourhood was shaped more by gradual recognition from established neighbours over a six-year period. In comparison, the Somali newcomer experienced both strong internal solidarity within her immediate network and sharper boundaries with those outside of it.

This juxtaposition reflects the broader dynamics identified in *Changing Neighbourhoods*, which documents how social and spatial polarization in Canadian cities can produce neighbourhoods that are simultaneously sources of inclusion and sites of exclusion (Grant, Walks and Ramos, 2020). While the respondent's immediate network offered a scaffold of belonging and mutual aid, the sharper boundaries she faced underscore that newcomers' trajectories are highly mediated by the kinds of networks she can access, a theme that the report finds to be critical in understanding why some residents integrate more easily than others. For some, shared cultural identity offers immediate scaffolding for belonging; for others, integration depends on slower processes of trust-building with longer-term residents (Grant, Walks and Ramos, 2020). In this sense, the respondent's experience illustrates how neighbourhoods like Lawrence Heights can function as both sites of solidarity and arenas in which exclusion is reproduced, a dual dynamic central to understanding how women navigated affordability pressures and their social worlds.

A resident who had lived in the neighbourhood for ten years shared insights about the development of trust between neighbours. These insights included the usefulness of "catch-up" discussions between neighbours. She would often be late to her destination because she found herself spending time chatting with neighbours on the sidewalk path. She even considered leaving earlier to arrive at her appointments on time due to the number of interactions along the way. We had two interview sessions, and between these sessions her reflections about the value of these mundane interactions became vivid. During the first session, we met in an interview room at Unison. During the second session, we met in the parkette outside the community centre. After the second interview, she asked me to walk with her to her next destination. As I accompanied her, we were stopped three times by neighbours who flagged her down and initiated conversations. These encounters demonstrated how seemingly casual discussions, exchanging greetings, sharing updates, or voicing concerns, served as everyday practices through which familiarity deepened, and trust was incrementally built. For this long-term resident, trust

was not constructed through formal mechanisms or official community initiatives, but through the accumulation of repeated, ordinary encounters that sustained neighbourhood ties and mutual recognition.

At the same time, I noted that this participant had lived in the area for ten years, in a central location, and from her description of the two activities she had participated in at the community centre seemed socially engaged in the community. During our first interview, she remarked that newer residents tended to keep to themselves and did not often join in sidewalk discussions. She viewed these casual exchanges as vital opportunities to stay informed about what was happening in the neighbourhood and to maintain a sense of connection with others. Without such interactions, she felt that newcomers were opting out of the relational practices that long-term residents relied upon to build familiarity and trust. Although she appreciated that everyone requires time to feel comfortable, she emphasized that newcomers should recognize that Lawrence Heights is a place where it helps to know what is happening with neighbours. During the second interview, she explained that residents living close to one another could help keep each other safe, using the example of raccoons, a common nuisance frequently discussed in sidewalk conversations. She described an incident where three raccoons were observed going through garbage in the green space outside her home while she was away. Her next-door neighbour later informed her about the event, prompting her to return home and check her doors and windows. This experience reinforced her sense that informal networks of exchange, what she described as an "everyday neighbourhood watch", provided security and reassurance, while also deepening her trust in the social fabric of Lawrence Heights.

An interview with a resident who had lived in the neighbourhood for 19 years revealed how women's longstanding presence shaped different approaches to making connections with others. This participant recounted how a mother in a neighbouring family asked her to intervene in a financial matter, specifically, to communicate with banks on the family's behalf. The request stemmed from a language barrier, the parents spoke limited English and therefore relied on their children, aged fourteen and seventeen, to handle financial responsibilities. The participant noted how this dynamic reversed typical hierarchies of authority within the household, placing significant pressure on the children to act as intermediaries between their parents and formal institutions. Her reflections revealed that such arrangements were not uncommon, as women in the community frequently mobilized informal networks to mediate bureaucratic processes, advocate for neighbours, and share information about available services. These accounts underscore that social networks were not only a means of building trust and reciprocity among neighbours, but also mechanisms through which families attempted to navigate structural barriers tied to affordability, language, and access to support. The participant's intervention underscores how women in the community often assumed informal but crucial roles in mediating between households and institutions, a pattern echoed in broader research on immigrant families, where youth and women frequently bridge cultural and linguistic divides to negotiate daily life in Canada (Anisef and Kilbride, 2003).

She continued to share her observation of power dynamics within the family, noting how the children's wider connections with acquaintances, friends, and colleagues outside the neighbourhood contrasted sharply with their parents' much more limited social networks, which remained largely confined to their home. As she explained,

> "When the children pick up the language and start learning how to handle things like banking or dealing with offices, they suddenly have more knowledge than the parents. The parents choose not to learn, and so the children end up holding that power." (P11, 45-54-year-old unemployed mother receiving disability support, living with her adult daughter).

This reflection highlighted how linguistic ability and external social connections shifted authority within the household, often placing children in positions of responsibility that parents could not easily assume.

The example illuminated the challenges of establishing trust in neighbourhood settings. The respondent was drawn into a private family matter because neighbours saw her as a known and available resource, a role she had earned through years of visible presence. This visibility also highlighted how trust moves unevenly across community instances. In each case, residents accessed community membership through multiple, distinct pathways, some via localized, place-based engagement (such as longtime residence, attendance at community meetings, or mutual acquaintances) and others through employment networks or service provider relationships that extended beyond the immediate neighbourhood.

For example, one participant (P03, 25-34-year-old retail assistant, single mother with one child) who worked part-time at a nearby grocery store described how her job provided a bridge between residents and outsiders, enabling her to share information about affordable rental listings and local employment opportunities with other women in Lawrence Heights. She explained, "At work, I hear about things before anyone else does, like when the bakery across the street needs help or when someone's moving out. I always tell the ladies here first." Her story illustrates how economic participation fostered social reciprocity, where paid work blurred into informal care networks. These employment connections were particularly significant for women balancing caregiving responsibilities, as they offered not only modest financial support but also access to information and mobility within an otherwise spatially constrained environment.

Similarly, another woman (P10, 45-54-year-old caregiver and domestic worker, Black woman living with spouse and extended family) recounted how trust was built through her long-standing relationship with a community health nurse at Unison. After struggling to access subsidized childcare, the nurse personally connected her to a municipal social worker, fast-tracking the approval process. The participant reflected, "If I had just filled out the forms myself, it would have taken forever. She made a call, and suddenly they called me back the same week." This example underscores the importance of institutional relationships that move beyond bureaucratic procedure into personalized advocacy. These interactions reveal how racialized women navigated the intersection of formal systems and informal trust, where the willingness of certain service providers to "bend the rules" was often shaped by shared experiences of gendered care work, empathy, or recognition of systemic barriers.

Together, these accounts demonstrate how intersecting identities of race, gender, class, and migration status mediated women's access to both economic and institutional resources. Women who were employed or connected to sympathetic service providers leveraged these

relationships to navigate the structural inequities that shaped daily life in Lawrence Heights. For racialized women, particularly those balancing childcare, part-time work, and limited mobility, such networks functioned as both practical and political tools, redistributing resources and affirming their capacity for mutual care in spaces where formal systems often failed them. By contrast, newcomers without language fluency or social connections encountered additional barriers, illustrating how the uneven layering of privilege and precarity determined who could most effectively mobilize support.

Viewed through an intersectional feminist geography lens, these employment and institutional relationships reveal how systems of inequality are reproduced not only across economic or bureaucratic hierarchies but also through spatial and social boundaries. The geography of care in Lawrence Heights was therefore neither uniformly supportive nor entirely exclusionary; rather, it was textured by the intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, class, and migration that governed everyday relations of reciprocity and trust. In this sense, women's networks operated as infrastructures of survival and solidarity that both exposed and contested the relational geographies of neglect produced by redevelopment. They exemplify how, under conditions of austerity and uneven investment, marginalized women collectively reconfigure urban life through affective labour, community mediation, and the spatial practice of care.

4.2.1 Dyads and triads: relational structures of support

Building on the preceding discussion of women's everyday social connections, this section examines how interpersonal relationships were organized through dyads and triads, the small-scale relational infrastructures that anchored women's lives in Lawrence Heights. Dyadic and triadic relationships were identified through thematic coding and relational mapping of interview transcripts. When participants described direct, recurring support ties between two individuals, these relationships were coded as dyads. When accounts described three actors connected through mutual support, coordination, or shared problem-solving, these were coded as triads. This interpretive approach allowed small-scale relational structures to be identified from participants' narratives and examined as building blocks of broader support networks.

These dyadic and triadic formations structured access to emotional and material support, enabling women to navigate systemic exclusion while reinforcing collective resilience. Women's relationships were shaped by length of residence, shared cultural or linguistic background, and proximity within the neighbourhood, reflecting the intersectional nature of care in a community defined by both solidarity and difference. Together, these dyads and triads reveal that care operated as both a personal and political practice, situated at the intersection of race, gender, class, and migration.

Dyadic relationships were typically intimate and reciprocal, marked by trust, familiarity, and routine interdependence, whereas triads broadened the scope of care and information exchange. Triads operated as micro-networks that extended women's reach to additional resources and perspectives. The following examples illustrate how these infrastructures of support transformed women's everyday experiences of precarity into shared acts of survival and knowledge exchange.

Women's accounts suggest that dyadic relationships often involved more direct and individualized assistance, while triads and larger clusters tended to centre around shared routines or collective activities. This was not a rigid distinction but a reflection of the fluid and situational nature of women's support practices. For instance, one woman spoke of walking her neighbour to medical appointments, translating conversations with doctors, and checking in on her when she was unwell, examples of the intimate, one-to-one support that characterized many dyads. Others described preparing communal meals or attending revitalization consultations together, activities that relied on broader, loosely organized groups. In this sense, the contrast between dyads and triads was less about scale than about the texture of support, how care circulated through different social formations depending on need, proximity, and availability. These varied arrangements highlight the adaptability of women's networks and the intersectional realities that shaped them, long-term residents, mothers of young children, and newcomer women each navigated distinct forms of social visibility and obligation, producing overlapping geographies of care and reciprocity. One participant described a dyadic relationship with her neighbour who routinely accompanied her to medical appointments for her four-year-old son and helped translate medical information from doctors and nurses. As she explained,

> "She comes with me to the doctor because I don't always understand what they say." (P05, 35-44-year-old personal support worker, Somali Muslim single mother with three children).

Another participant recalled how she and a neighbour shared gardening knowledge and exchanged plants, a small but meaningful dyadic support that connected them through everyday practices. A third participant described her reliance on a close neighbour who alerted her to raccoons entering her yard while she was away, an act that not only secured her home but deepened their trust through direct reciprocity.

In contrast, when women discussed triads or larger clusters, the support often expanded into broader, more collective exchanges, such as pooled meal preparation among three families, coordinating childcare schedules, or attending revitalization consultations together, where shared time and labour reinforced social cohesion and mutual responsibility. One participant reflected on this, noting,

> "When the three of us cook together, it's easier. Everyone brings something." (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children).

In another example, a participant described how the triad of mothers she belonged to regularly exchanged advice on navigating childcare subsidies. While I interviewed only one member of this triad, she explained,

> "I didn't even know you could apply online until they showed me, I would've missed the deadline". (P02, 25-34-year-old part-time childcare worker, single mother of two children.)

Similarly, one participant described how the group of three long-term residents she belonged to regularly shared strategies for negotiating with landlords about rent increases. As she explained,

> "We compared letters, and I copied the wording from hers so my landlord would take me seriously". (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children.)

These exchanges demonstrate how triads provided not just companionship but actionable knowledge that addressed affordability pressures.

Another instance involved a triad formed around language support, where two English-speaking women routinely helped a newcomer write emails to her child's school. She recalled,

> "They would check every letter I sent, so I didn't feel embarrassed". (P05, 35-44-year-old Somali Muslim personal support worker, single mother of three.)

This story illustrates how informational capacity extended to bridging linguistic barriers, an outcome less likely in dyads where shared linguistic struggles might limit resources. Likewise, women who were part of triads connected through church activities described pooling information about part-time jobs and training opportunities. One participant said,

> "I heard about the cleaning job because one sister told the other, and then she told me". (P11, 45-54-year-old unemployed mother receiving disability support, living with her adult daughter.)

Importantly, while dyads often facilitated deep trust and tailored emotional care, triads broadened the horizon of possibility. The quality of connection in triads was sometimes uneven, participants noted occasional exclusion or the dominance of one voice, but the capacity to share diverse knowledge outweighed these tensions. As one respondent summarized,

> "Even if I don't agree with one of them, I still learn something new". (P15, 55-64-year-old homemaker, long-term resident living with spouse and adult children.)

These findings affirm that women's social networks functioned not only as spaces of intimacy but also as platforms for expanding collective knowledge.

Triads, by widening the channels of information exchange, enabled women to mobilize resources in ways that dyads alone could not. This broader informational capacity speaks directly to the research questions by showing how women's everyday practices of connection produced resilience in the face of affordability pressures and neighborhood change. At the same time, these accounts foreshadow the limits of social networks, while triads expanded access to information, they could not fully offset the systemic barriers to employment and housing, a tension examined in the next section.

These examples illustrate how the size of a social grouping shaped not just the type but the texture of support, ranging from individualized care in dyads to shared responsibility in triads and networks.

If a woman is a member of a dyad or triad with a long-term resident of the community, the resources and support she receives may extend across multiple aspects of her life. By long-term residents, I refer to women who had lived in Lawrence Heights for over 10 years and whose accumulated experience, extensive networks, and familiarity with local institutions allowed them to mobilize support in diverse ways. For example, one respondent described how a neighbour who had lived in the community for 19 years consistently supported her over a three-year period by helping her secure a family doctor for her child, accompanying her to parent-teacher meetings once her child entered junior kindergarten, and assisting with the resolution of a personal issue at the start of the school year. Other long-term residents were also frequently named during interviews as people who provided similar kinds of practical and emotional support, demonstrating how experience in the neighbourhood translated into a capacity to guide others through multiple life transitions. Such networks were not incidental but intentionally cultivated. The embedded knowledge of long-term residents enabled them to function as anchors of support within women's social networks, reinforcing their role in mitigating everyday challenges tied to housing and family life.

The intentional, social dynamics became clear when respondents described the specific ways that neighbours supported one another. At first glance, many exchanges appeared ad hoc, arising from incidental encounters in hallways, at bus stops, or outside community centres. For example, three participants explained that their friendship began from repeatedly seeing each other on the school run, but what started as brief greetings grew into a shared routine of helping with childcare pickups and sharing hot meals during Ramadan. One remarked,

> "We didn't plan it, but after a while, we depended on each other like family." (P08, 35-44-year-old general contract worker, married mother of two children, living in Lawrence Heights for over ten years).

This account demonstrated how everyday proximity translated into support that addressed both immediate needs and longer-term responsibilities.

By contrast, long-term residents who had lived in Lawrence Heights for at least ten years emphasized a broader vision of community that reflected their accumulated knowledge of how to survive and thrive in Lawrence Heights. A woman who had lived there for 19 years described how she routinely introduced newcomers to local service providers, such as the community health centre, the housing office, and Unison's employment resource desk, and explained the unwritten rules of neighbourhood life, from where to find sympathetic landlords to which bus routes were safest at night. She explained,

> "If you're new here, you can get lost, literally. I try to show people the paths, both on the streets and in life." (P15, 55-64-year-old homemaker living with spouse and adult children, long-term resident of Lawrence Heights).

In network terms, her actions did not just create dyads but actively linked them into larger webs of support, increasing what I identify as the informational capacity of the neighbourhood, the range of practical knowledge and strategies that circulated among residents. Specifically, I refer

to the ability of a network to circulate not only emotional support but also knowledge, practical strategies, and connections that extend beyond a single household.

Informational capacity was further illustrated in the ways residents shared strategies for managing state institutions and service providers. One participant recounted that she only learned how to challenge a denial of housing repairs after a neighbour walked her through the appeals process.

> "I didn't even know you could appeal a repair denial until my neighbour told me, 'Don't just accept it, ask for the form and make them explain why.' She walked me through it step by step." (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children).

Another explained that she was told by a more experienced resident how to apply for a hardship grant from the city to cover utility arrears, something she had never heard of before. As one respondent put it,

> "The system doesn't tell you these things. The women do." (P11, 45-54-year-old unemployed mother receiving disability support, living with her adult daughter).

Taken together, these accounts illustrate that women's social ties operated as infrastructures of knowledge, labour, and care. Dyads provided emotional intimacy and moral reassurance, while triads extended these relationships outward, enabling women to pool information, share resources, and collectively navigate bureaucratic systems. Across both configurations, women transformed their everyday struggles into acts of mutual instruction and survival. Their informal expertise, how to complete online forms, negotiate with landlords, or apply for hardship grants, circulated through networks of trust that substituted for institutional guidance. In this way, care itself became a vehicle for learning, adaptation, and empowerment within contexts of systemic neglect.

Yet these care infrastructures were never evenly distributed. The capacity to mobilize or mediate information was shaped by intersecting hierarchies of race, class, gender, and migration status. Long-term residents often occupied central roles as mentors and information brokers, while newcomers and women with limited English proficiency relied more heavily on these networks for access and legitimacy. This uneven geography of care underscores the intersectional nature of women's survival strategies, revealing how collective resilience emerged not in spite of difference, but through it. Building on these interpersonal dynamics, the next section explores how these same networks extended into the spatial and emotional geographies of safety and belonging within Lawrence Heights.

These relational networks, rooted in dyads and triads, did not exist in isolation but were woven into the physical and emotional geographies of the neighbourhood itself. The same relationships that circulated knowledge, trust, and care also shaped how women navigated public space, perceived safety, and negotiated belonging. Understanding these spatial dimensions of care reveals how women's social networks were materially embedded in the built environment of Lawrence Heights, extending interpersonal ties into the textures of streets, sidewalks, and shared community spaces.

4.2.2 Networks as survival mechanisms

In this vein, it appeared that such moments of frustration and confusion created fertile ground for women's social networks to step in as alternative infrastructures of support. Through conversations with friends and neighbours, women exchanged critical advice about reliable landlords, rent expectations, and rights under tenancy laws. One participant (P07) a 35-44-year-old early childhood educator, married and living with spouse in Lawrence Heights, for instance, shared that she "learned from another mom on the block that I could call the tenant hotline before signing anything," underscoring how experiential knowledge circulated informally yet strategically within the community. These examples reveal that social networks not only mitigated informational gaps but also functioned as collective mechanisms for reasserting agency within structurally constrained housing systems.

Other respondents described turning to friends and neighbours to assist with rental housing searches, job applications, childcare during viewings, and even navigating bureaucratic appointments. These forms of social contact extended beyond emotional reassurance to become instrumental resources for survival in a housing market structured by exclusion. Nearly every woman had at least one trusted contact, and half reported more than one person they could rely on for housing or job-related assistance. In triads, these relationships carried an ethos of reciprocity captured in the phrase one woman used "help when and if you can" where support was mobilized collectively and flexibly according to circumstance. Dyads, by contrast, tended to emphasize depth over breadth, a single reliable relationship that offered moral validation or tactical advice at critical moments.

Within this landscape of constraint, social networks functioned as both affective and practical infrastructures. Women described relying on each other to interpret official documents, share warnings about discriminatory landlords, and provide moral support after rejection. As one respondent explained,

> "After that interview, I came home crying, but my neighbour said, 'You'll try again, don't let them make you small." (P03, 25-34-year-old retail assistant, single mother with one child).

Such exchanges demonstrate that women's social networks did not merely compensate for institutional failure, they represented collective strategies of care and adaptation that allowed women to navigate housing precarity and sustain everyday life under conditions of constraint.

This finding underlines how women's reliance on networks was not simply a matter of proximity or friendship but a deliberate strategy for negotiating structural injustice. Dyads and triads created channels for expressing shared grievances and circulating both emotional and material support. For instance, when one respondent (P06, 35-44-year-old unemployed Somali woman, single mother living in a multigenerational household) ran out of money for the week, the other two women in her triad pooled their limited funds to help her, an act she described as "proof that even when the system forgets you, someone remembers." These practices reveal that solidarity within women's networks was a social technology for countering systemic inequities,

offering not only practical aid but also emotional affirmation. Through mutual encouragement, humour, and shared recognition of injustice, these relationships mitigated the negative experiences that many participants described elsewhere, moments when housing authorities dismissed their concerns or employers questioned their worth. In these exchanges, women reconstituted dignity and collective strength, transforming feelings of vulnerability into everyday acts of affirmation and belonging.

Recurring, organized programming across Lawrence Heights, such as LHIONS, Unison's professional networking and health promotion sessions, and community-based advocacy or education initiatives like Pathways to Education, provided women with structured spaces for support and learning. These programs offered valuable information on topics ranging from diabetic care and prenatal support to employment readiness and self-advocacy. Yet, despite these robust, place-based services, many women still struggled to gain stable employment or secure improved housing. Respondents frequently described being underemployed or employed in positions that did not align with their skills or long-term aspirations, reinforcing their continued precarity within the housing market.

One woman (P05), a 35-44-year-old personal support worker who is a Somali Muslim single mother with three children) had participated in several Unison and LHIONS sessions reflected that, even after attending employment workshops and completing a self-advocacy program, "it still wasn't enough to get a steady job, they say experience, but how do you get experience if no one hires you?" Her frustration echoed that of others who felt that program participation did not guarantee mobility out of Lawrence Heights but rather highlighted the gap between institutional promises and structural realities. These accounts suggest that formal supports, while vital, were not fully equipped to overcome entrenched market and systemic barriers, including discriminatory hiring practices and housing gatekeeping that disproportionately affected low-income women of colour living in a stigmatized neighbourhood. At the same time, women's experiences of these failures were differentiated by their intersecting social positions. Black and Caribbean women often described how racial stigma compounded gendered expectations around caregiving, while newcomer women, particularly those with limited English proficiency or precarious immigration status, faced additional obstacles navigating institutional bureaucracy and labour markets. Such intersectional variations demonstrate that the burdens of structural inequality were not distributed evenly but were lived and negotiated through the overlapping hierarchies of race, gender, class, and citizenship.

At times, women's exasperation became an analytic lens for understanding how institutional limitations intersected with spatial stigmas, as seen in earlier examples of renters denied opportunities because of their Lawrence Heights address. Such moments illuminate how residents' experiences of discrimination and exclusion were embedded in the very geographies of housing and employment. The constellation of services, advocacy programs, and informal social networks therefore operated as partial remedies rather than comprehensive solutions to these structural inequities. Yet amid these intersecting pressures, women's responses also revealed everyday practices of survival and care. Rather than existing as isolated actors within precarious systems, they drew on informal networks of mutual aid, trust, and shared knowledge. These networks, rooted in collective experiences of exclusion, form the basis of the following section,

which examines how social connections functioned as infrastructures of care in Lawrence Heights.

4.2.3 Spatial dimensions of care and safety

Building on the interpersonal networks discussed above, women's experiences of care also unfolded through the physical, affective, and sensory dimensions of neighbourhood life. In Lawrence Heights, care was not limited to domestic or interpersonal contexts but extended into the textures of streets, sidewalks, and shared community spaces. The geography of the neighbourhood itself shaped how care and belonging were lived, as women continually navigated the tension between familiarity and exposure, protection and precarity.

In 2015, the neighbourhood's physical layout could be described as predominantly residential, with townhouses of up to four storeys, a small number of five to nine-storey apartment buildings, communal lawns, and a network of parking lots, fences, and playgrounds that marked the separation between buildings. The Lawrence Heights Community Centre, nearby schools, and Unison Health Centre formed vital points of gathering and interaction. Several parks, including Ranee and Flemington, served as informal meeting spaces but were bordered by major roads that carried the constant noise of traffic. The arterial routes that cut through the area, particularly Lawrence Avenue West and Allen Road, provided access to transit and employment but also symbolized vulnerability and surveillance. The absence of visual buffers such as trees, benches, and shading reinforced a sense of openness that many women described as both exposure and recognition, "You always see and are seen," as one woman explained, "but it's not always the kind of seeing that feels safe" (P08, 25-34-year-old community college student, living alone).

Women's reflections revealed that Lawrence Heights' spatial design was not experienced as neutral but as a moral and emotional landscape that inscribed hierarchies of class, race, and worth. Everyday routes through the neighbourhood were marked by sensory cues that conveyed these differences, light, noise, the texture of pavement, the visibility of fences and barriers. For many, walking through the neighbourhood made safety, mobility, and belonging visible as ongoing negotiations. One respondent observed that even minor infrastructural conditions carried symbolic weight: broken sidewalks, missing benches, or unpainted crosswalks were seen as reminders of the city's indifference. "You can tell how much they care by what they fix," (P08, 25-34-year-old community college student, living alone) she said. These observations made clear that physical neglect and social marginalization were intertwined.

Safety concerns were not limited to fear of crime but encompassed the embodied sense of being exposed, watched, and morally evaluated. One respondent, a 25-34-year-old community college student, explained that walking through the neighbourhood was rarely routine, "It's not the distance that makes you tired, it's how you feel when you're walking." She described her route home as simultaneously familiar and unsettling, "You feel like you're on display, like people are watching from cars, bus stops, windows. You keep your head down, but you still feel it." The openness of the streets, she said, created a sense of being "too visible," while the absence of trees or enclosed spaces eliminated any feeling of protection. "You just walk fast,"

she added. “There’s nowhere to pause or lean.” Her comments captured how physical design translated into emotional exhaustion, linking exposure to social precarity.

This woman compared her experience in Lawrence Heights with walking through Lawrence Manor, the adjacent neighbourhood across Lawrence Avenue. There, she said, “the streets feel narrower, the houses closer, and people say hello.” Her comparison revealed that physical differences in the built environment, sidewalk width, lighting, the presence of greenery, mapped onto social distinctions of race and class. “Over there,” she explained, “it feels cared for. Here, it feels like we’re being watched.” For her, safety was not only about risk or protection but about being recognized as someone who belonged. She interpreted the absence of municipal attention, the broken light, the delayed repairs, as a sign of moral neglect. Her reflections illustrate what feminist geographers describe as moral geographies of belonging, where space conveys judgments about who matters.

Other residents echoed this entanglement of physical and emotional unease, adding further sensory detail to their accounts. One woman who lived near a four-way intersection described the soundscape of her street as an ongoing source of anxiety, “You hear everything, the cars, the brakes, the buses turning, even the animals running” (P17, 65+, Retired, Longest-term resident (46 years in Lawrence Heights). The noise of traffic, she explained, “gets inside you; it makes you alert even when nothing’s happening.” From her kitchen window, she could see cars swerving at corners, sometimes colliding with curbs or fences. She described the stress of constant vigilance, “You can’t relax even inside your own home.” Her account underscored the intimate relationship between bodily tension and environmental design, between fear and familiarity.

She recounted one incident that had stayed with her: “A car hit a dog once. Everyone screamed, but no one knew what to do. The driver just kept going.” The event, she said, symbolized how danger was normalized and how little institutional accountability existed. When she raised these concerns at a redevelopment consultation, she was advised to call City Hall. “They told me it’s not their department,” she said, shaking her head. “You stop asking. You just live with it.” This response, which transferred responsibility for structural problems onto individuals, epitomized what many women described as the privatization of risk. Safety, in this context, became a personal burden to be managed through caution, community, and constant awareness.

Many residents extended these reflections to the condition of sidewalks, curbs, and street furniture. Cracked pavement, uneven walkways, and a lack of seating were described as physical manifestations of systemic neglect. Several participants mentioned avoiding certain blocks altogether after dark because of poor lighting. “You just wave from across the street,” one woman said, “because you can’t stop” (P08, 25-34-year-old community college student, living alone). Another added, “There’s nowhere to sit, so you don’t stay, and if you don’t stay, you stop seeing people” (P02, 25-34-year-old part-time childcare worker, single mother of two children). These details reveal how infrastructural decline eroded the sociability that once defined community life. Yet participants also identified moments of adaptation. They met at bus stops, lingered by daycare fences, or paused outside local shops, small acts of presence that transformed public space into shared space. Women described creating impromptu gathering

spaces on sidewalks, near benches, and outside community centres, transforming what were otherwise ordinary or inhospitable spaces into sites of social connection. One participant noted,

> "Even if the sidewalk is cracked and narrow, we still stop there to talk because that's where we see each other every day after school drop-off." (P02, 25-34-year-old part-time childcare worker, single mother of two children).

In this sense, the built environment became a site of both exclusion and endurance.

The ways women navigated safety thus highlight how care extended beyond domestic or interpersonal spheres. Collective awareness and informal cooperation were critical to mitigating insecurity. Many described walking each other to bus stops, texting neighbours to confirm they had arrived home safely, and warning others about unlit streets or areas with poor visibility. "We all know which blocks to avoid," one woman explained. "If you don't tell someone, they could get hurt" (P17, 65+, Retired, Longest-term resident (46 years in Lawrence Heights).These small practices of communication, checking in, waiting, watching, constituted what I describe as relational vigilance: an ethic of care enacted through everyday attentiveness. This vigilance was not about surveillance but about solidarity. "We look out for each other," one participant said. "Not because anyone told us to, but because no one else will" (P17, 65+, Retired, Longest-term resident (46 years in Lawrence Heights).

These shared routines of vigilance transformed public spaces into affective infrastructures of care. The same sidewalks and intersections that exposed women to danger also became sites of connection through mutual presence. "If someone doesn't answer," one woman said, "you knock. If a light's off too long, you ask." These gestures sustained a quiet but profound form of community maintenance. Safety, in this sense, was not a fixed condition but an ongoing process, collectively produced and sustained through women's networks of attention.

The deficiencies and inequalities embedded in the physical environment also produced wider social consequences. Poorly maintained public areas and unsafe design features constrained mobility and discouraged sociability, yet women continued to reclaim them through routine acts of care. "You see someone enough times," one woman said, "and you start talking" (P12, a 45–54-year-old community volunteer and long-term resident of Lawrence Height (30+ years in Lawrence Heights). Benches outside the Unison Health Centre and shaded areas near the community garden emerged as recurring meeting points, where waiting became an opportunity for connection. These micro-encounters restored a sense of collective visibility that countered the anonymity imposed by redevelopment. They also revealed how women's affective labour, being present, listening, remembering, made the neighbourhood livable despite structural neglect.

Belonging in Lawrence Heights was not simply interpersonal but spatial, embedded in the embodied familiarity of the environment. Respondents described how everyday routes, between homes, bus stops, playgrounds, and community centres, formed a moral and emotional map of care. Through repetition, these paths accumulated meanings of safety, memory, and mutual recognition. "You know where to slow down, where to look, who to wave to," one long-term resident explained (P17, 65+, Retired, Longest-term resident (46 years in Lawrence Heights). Over time, these embodied practices transformed ordinary infrastructure into a living

archive of community life. Each repaired crack, each uncut patch of grass, and each conversation at a crosswalk testified to an ongoing process of making place through care.

Ultimately, these narratives demonstrate that survival in Lawrence Heights was collective, spatial, and profoundly political. Women's everyday acts of walking together for safety, translating bureaucratic information, and offering companionship transformed vulnerability into recognition. Their everyday vigilance was not only a response to marginalization but also a moral practice, a means of asserting presence and dignity in spaces of exclusion. In this way, care became both spatial and moral infrastructure, layering endurance, connection, and hope onto a landscape of disrepair.

These embodied practices, of walking, watching, and attending, established the moral and emotional foundations for the counter-discourses explored in the next section. As women's reflections on safety, mobility, and belonging deepened into critiques of redevelopment and social mix, their spatial practices of care became the groundwork for a broader politics of recognition in Lawrence Heights.

4.3 Counter discourses

Building on the preceding analysis of social networks and spatial care, this section examines how women's everyday practices of safety, communication, and vigilance evolved into counter-discourses that challenged dominant representations of Lawrence Heights. This addresses the third research question by examining how women's narratives of safety and belonging resist official representations of Lawrence Heights as a space in need of renewal. Whereas the previous section traced care as a form of survival and belonging, here the focus shifts to care as critique, how women's reflections on danger, stigma, and redevelopment redefined what safety and community mean in a racialized and rapidly changing urban context.

Women's concerns about safety and security in Lawrence Heights revealed a deep awareness of how perceptions of crime intersected with broader issues of stigma, fear, and belonging. Respondents described being acutely conscious of the neighbourhood's public reputation, particularly in relation to occasional reports of gang activity and street-level violence. According to staff working for the local councillor, incidents such as street shootings did occur periodically, and these events consistently provoked strong emotional reactions from residents. Three women recalled witnessing the open sale of narcotics near their homes, while another recounted being a bystander in a physical altercation between two women just a week before our interview. The respondent with the longest tenure in the neighbourhood, having lived there for thirty years, described such incidents as distressing but not defining of daily life, remarking that

> "Things happen sometimes, but it doesn't mean we stop talking to each other or caring for each other." (P14, 55-64-year-old retired long-term resident of Lawrence Heights, living with spouse and adult children).

Her comment confirms that moments of violence, while unsettling, did not erase the informal social codes that governed everyday life in Lawrence Heights. Women emphasized that these codes, rooted in friendliness, mutual vigilance, and the inclusion of newcomers, played a

vital role in maintaining a sense of community amidst marginalization, discrimination, and uncertainty. Residents interpreted acts of violence not only as isolated disruptions but as challenges to the moral and social order of the neighbourhood. Their responses, shaped by empathy and community-mindedness, demonstrate how collective norms functioned as a form of social regulation, countering fear through solidarity. This opening tension between fear and resilience establishes the analytical foundation for this section, which examines how women transformed concerns about safety into opportunities for collective reflection, dialogue, and localized action.

I learned that violent incidents were almost immediately followed by community-led discussions about improving safety in Lawrence Heights. These meetings were often organized by residents and community leaders who wanted to prevent neighbours from withdrawing from public life out of fear. One resident with a ten-year tenure described how these gatherings produced "very strong responses," from proposals to increase police visibility and create mentorship programs for youth, to awareness campaigns about the effects of radicalization and isolation. Across different age, racial, and gender groups, women emphasized that these discussions reflected not only collective solidarity but also the intersectional dimensions of community resilience. Long-term residents and recent newcomers, younger mothers and older retirees, each brought different social locations and experiences of marginalization to these dialogues, shaping how safety was defined and enacted. For some, the emphasis was on racial profiling and visibility in public space; for others, it was about the safety of children and the loss of familiar routines. These overlapping yet distinct priorities illustrate how intersectionality functioned as both a lived condition and a framework for collective action, informing how women negotiated belonging, visibility, and protection within a racially and economically stratified urban context.

According to one woman who had been a bystander in a violent altercation, the aftermath extended beyond the event itself. She explained,

> "When someone leaves after something like that, it changes the balance. They were part of things, the meetings, the school events, and suddenly that's gone. It's like a piece of the neighbourhood is missing." (P02, 25-34-year-old part-time childcare worker, single mother with two children.)

Her account captured what she referred to as a power vacuum, the social and emotional gap left when a familiar presence was removed from community life. This absence, she reflected, created both uncertainty and an opportunity; uncertainty because it disrupted established relationships of trust, and opportunity because it prompted others to step forward, take responsibility, and reconstitute that trust through renewed collective action. In this way, women's reflections on safety were also reflections on social continuity, showing how everyday acts of organizing and participation functioned as a community's quiet assertion of resilience.

The ways women responded to safety concerns in Lawrence Heights often depended on the structure of their social networks, whether they were embedded in dyads or triads. This distinction mattered because it shaped both the flow of information about neighbourhood incidents and the emotional strategies available for coping with fear. Women in triads tended to

respond collectively, coordinating their routines and neighbourhood practices to manage uncertainty, whereas women in dyads often relied on more individualized or reciprocal forms of vigilance.

Some of the women in triad formations shared that their initial responses to violent or unsettling events were to prioritize their own safety and that of their immediate circles before addressing broader community perceptions of Lawrence Heights. Triads often engaged in preventive actions such as avoiding certain routes after dark, checking in with one another before and after outings, or organizing informal "watch systems" that combined practical care with emotional reassurance. As one participant (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children) explained, these triad networks became "like a mini safety net, if one person didn't show up to the meeting spot or call home, someone else would go check." These everyday acts reinforced social accountability while building confidence to remain present in shared spaces.

Women in dyads, by contrast, tended to process incidents more introspectively, often discussing them within the pair but rarely extending their concerns into collective action. One respondent in a dyad with her neighbour reflected on how her anxiety about recurring safety concerns made her wonder whether "we need more police, or maybe just more people watching out for each other." Her comment captured a tension between fear and trust: she questioned whether more formal surveillance, additional police patrols or cameras, would actually make residents feel safer. At the same time, she pointed to the practices that already did so, neighbours texting when they arrived home, walking each other to bus stops after dark, checking if a porch light stayed off unusually long, and warning others about trouble spots. I refer to these small, reciprocal acts as relational vigilance[25], safety built through mutual attention and care rather than formal control.

Together, these responses highlight how safety in Lawrence Heights was not simply a matter of policing or crime prevention but of relational capacity, of the ability of women's networks, structured as dyads or triads, to transform fear into forms of care, communication, and presence. This analysis engages with how women's social networks mediated their sense of security and belonging within spaces marked by stigma and uncertainty.

The complexity of how women imagined and experienced Lawrence Heights was shaped by the intersection between the social structures of dyads and triads and perceived safety. Women who were part of triads often described safety threats as collective challenges that required coordination, whereas those connected only through dyads tended to experience such threats as isolating or destabilizing. For women in triads, the presence of multiple points of contact fostered a sense of integration with the broader community, they frequently organized or joined neighbourhood safety meetings, encouraged outdoor social gatherings, and mobilized others to maintain visible community presence after incidents of violence. In contrast, women in dyads, particularly those newer to Lawrence Heights or from diasporic communities underrepresented in the area, often perceived a rupture in social cohesion. Their responses reflected both anxiety about their limited social reach and ambivalence about the informal safety systems already in place.

[25] By relational vigilance I mean every day, reciprocal watchfulness enacted through ties of trust (e.g., check-ins, escorts, informal alerts) rather than through formal surveillance systems.

These differences also reveal how social network configurations mediated women's relationship to the neighbourhood's evolving identity. Long-term residents in triads often expressed pride in Lawrence Heights' history of collective care and viewed participation in community watch initiatives as an extension of that legacy. Their enduring presence and neighbourhood familiarity enabled them to mobilize support more easily, sustaining trust across households and generations. In contrast, women connected primarily through dyads, particularly newcomers, single mothers, and those from racialized diasporic communities underrepresented in the area, often encountered intersecting barriers of exclusion. Their experiences of classed precarity, linguistic difference, and racialized surveillance complicated their ability to establish trust, producing tensions between inclusion and mistrust that intensified in moments of insecurity. These intersectional dynamics underscore that women's safety practices were not uniform but mediated by positionality: race and immigration status shaped visibility and vulnerability in public space, while gendered expectations of care compelled women to remain engaged despite fear. Yet across all interviews, women emphasized that safety depended not only on surveillance or policing but on the preservation of transparency, communication, and collective responsibility as everyday moral obligations within the community.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that women's responses to safety concerns were deeply relational, their sense of security and belonging was produced through the structure and quality of their social networks. This insight connects directly to the next discussion, which examines how these same networks informed women's reflections on the redevelopment of Lawrence Heights, revealing how visions for the future of the neighbourhood were grounded in everyday experiences of care, solidarity, and social repair.

Women's discussions about the forthcoming redevelopment of Lawrence Heights revealed that they viewed it not only as a physical transformation of space but as a social process that would directly affect the social networks sustaining their everyday lives. This section examines how participants anticipated and sought to shape the redevelopment in ways that preserved existing relationships and community norms.

Many women recognized that the construction period would disrupt social ties as long-term residents temporarily relocated and new households moved in, creating uncertainty about how neighborhood trust, reciprocity, and informal codes of conduct would be maintained. The woman with a thirty-year tenure expressed concern that "during the time of construction, people will likely feel less connected to the community," emphasizing that maintaining continuity of relationships mattered as much as the quality of housing itself (P12, a 45–54-year-old community volunteer and long-term resident of Lawrence Height (30+ years in Lawrence Heights). Her worry reflected broader tensions identified in the literature on housing redevelopment in Toronto, where formal "placemaking" strategies often aim to engineer social cohesion through design interventions or mixed-income integration. However, as August (2014, 2015) and Poppe and Young (2015) argue, such top-down placemaking approaches in Toronto's redevelopment projects frequently reproduce rather than repair social fragmentation by prioritizing aesthetic renewal and densification over the lived, relational infrastructures that sustain belonging. In contrast, the women in Lawrence Heights articulated a bottom-up form of placemaking grounded in everyday sociability, greeting neighbors, checking in on one another during relocations, and maintaining familiar routines, that they saw as essential to re-weavingthe

social fabric through the transition. For these residents, redevelopment was not merely about housing improvement but about preserving the relational continuity that underpinned their sense of home.

I understood placemaking in the context of the redevelopment project as the formal, institutional design process through which the physical form of Lawrence Heights was being reimagined, an effort to "tether" public and private space to its future users through technical planning and community consultation. However, when women in the community spoke about placemaking, they described something much more relational and affective: an ongoing process of communal sensemaking. Through everyday acts such as greeting, sharing updates, resolving disputes, and caring for neighbours, women collectively interpreted and responded to the uncertainties produced by redevelopment, demolition, relocation, and the arrival of new residents. These relational practices were not only about adapting to change but about maintaining the moral and emotional continuity of community life amid structural disruption. In this way, sensemaking became the social counterpart to placemaking, producing belonging and meaning in spaces that were being physically unsettled.

The women identified in earlier sections as long-term residents figured centrally in this process. Drawing on their deep local knowledge and longstanding social networks, they anchored community life during redevelopment by mediating information, coordinating outreach, and modelling relational continuity. Other residents deferred to them not out of hierarchy but from recognition of their experience and reliability, a form of social trust that ensured communication and cooperation during moments of uncertainty.

> "When things change around here, we still make sure to check on each other. I tell my neighbours, 'Don't wait for someone from the city to come tell us what's happening, we can talk to each other first.'" (P14, 55, 64-year-old retired long-term resident, living with spouse and adult children.)

This deference served a practical purpose, it helped circulate information quickly, resolve conflicts, and sustain the neighbourhood's shared codes of conduct.

> "If there's a problem on the block, we sort it out before it gets bigger. People come to me or my husband first, they know we've been here a long time and that we'll listen." (P15, 55-64-year-old homemaker, long-term resident, living with spouse and adult children.)

Thus, placemaking in Lawrence Heights was not confined to spatial design but extended into the social practices that reproduced community cohesion and belonging through the very process of change.

The women who participated in this study emphasized that community elders, many of whom were long-term residents, played an essential role in sustaining social cohesion during redevelopment. Yet they also noted that these elders' authority was open to dialogue and even challenge from younger residents, reflecting a dynamic and participatory local culture rather than rigid hierarchy.

> "We try to keep the community meetings friendly, everyone should feel they can speak. The older ones like us remind the younger ones that this place always had a spirit of helping, not fighting." (P14, 55-64-year-old retired long-term resident, living with spouse and adult children.)

Younger people were welcomed and encouraged to join community discussions, a practice that women saw as crucial to replicating the social vibrancy of Lawrence Heights in the redeveloped neighbourhood.

> "It's good to see the young ones getting involved now. They've got new ideas, and we've got the history. When we sit together, it feels like the neighbourhood has a future again." (P07, 35-44-year-old early childhood educator, living with spouse.)

Women wanted to ensure that networks of mutual support, such as those organized through LHIONS and Unison, continued to serve as everyday infrastructures for connection and problem-solving. One respondent described these programs as vital for "plugging the gaps" in day-to-day life when formal systems of support fell short.

Women also expressed hope that the redevelopment process would preserve residents' capacity for collective action and neighbourhood self-organization. For example, a respondent who was part of a dyad acknowledged ongoing tensions and limitations in local organizing but highlighted the community's ability to "come together fast" in response to need. Such reflections underscored women's broader concern that redevelopment might weaken, rather than strengthen, existing networks of care and cooperation. They wanted newcomers to appreciate and build upon the neighbourhood's established relationships, not to dismiss them as outdated or irrelevant. As one participant observed,

> "People already know how to work together here; they just need to be given the chance." (P05, 35-44-year-old Somali Muslim personal support worker, single mother of three children).

Unfortunately, these insights into the relational dimensions of redevelopment were largely overlooked in stakeholder meetings, where discussion tended to focus narrowly on physical amenities and design features rather than on the social infrastructures that made the neighbourhood more livable.

The collaborative decision-making that respondents were accustomed to in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood sharply contrasted with the seemingly top-down approach that characterized the stakeholder meetings about redevelopment. Across all respondents, women perceived that these meetings focused narrowly on specific project objectives, such as desired amenities for new housing, art installations in lobby areas, and other visible upgrades, while paying little attention to current residents' perspectives or visions for the neighbourhood's future.

> "They talk about what the neighbourhood should look like, but not about who's going to live here or how we'll stay connected. The meetings are about buildings, not about

> people." (P14, 55-64-year-old retired long-term resident, living with spouse and adult children.)

There was less emphasis on meaningful engagement with women and other community members' insights about how social interactions and collective practices could shape redevelopment. One respondent agreed to join stakeholder engagement sessions because she believed that her thoughts about the merits of redevelopment would be considered. However, she quickly became disillusioned when it became clear that redevelopment was proceeding regardless of residents' input.

> "After a while, I stopped going. They asked for our opinions, but nothing changed. It felt like they just needed our names on a list to say we were 'consulted." (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children.)

Another respondent appreciated being able to ask questions about the ratio of social to private housing units and the height of the new towers but felt that her concerns were brushed aside. She was particularly frustrated that plans for the neighbourhood had not been finalized or clearly explained during the meeting, which left residents feeling uncertain and excluded. She commented that the engagement sessions seemed more about diffusing residents' resistance than genuinely addressing their critiques or incorporating their visions.

> "We already have systems that work here, people share food, check in on each other, raise each other's kids. They should learn from that instead of trying to start over like nothing existed before." (P05, 35-44-year-old Somali Muslim personal support worker, single mother of three children.)

Ultimately, the women who participated in this study emphasized that true engagement should reflect the participatory norms already embedded in Lawrence Heights, where collaboration and mutual accountability had long guided community life, and that the new neighbourhood should build on these practices rather than replace them.

At the engagement sessions, the low-income, racialized women in this study challenged the underlying assumption that Lawrence Heights lacked diversity or vitality. They argued that the neighbourhood was already socially, culturally, and ethnically diverse, and that redevelopment narratives emphasizing "social mix" and upward mobility ignored the dynamism already present among current residents.

> "They talk like nothing good is happening here, but we already have life in this community, kids playing outside, women helping each other, people saying hello every day. That's the energy they don't see." (P11, 45-54-year-old unemployed mother receiving disability support, living with her adult daughter.)

One woman observed that while planners portrayed redevelopment as a means to bring "new energy" into the area, such imagery implied that vitality could only come from outside, particularly from higher-income newcomers, rather than from within the existing community.

> It's like they think we need saving, like the neighbourhood needs outsiders to make it better. But we've been saving each other here for years." (P09, 35-44-year-old contract cleaner, Black woman with two children.)

This framing, she suggested, reinforced a hierarchy of value in which long-term residents' contributions were rendered invisible.

The women's critique illuminated how dominant redevelopment discourses positioned mobility, diversity, and "social mix" as inherently positive, while obscuring the racialized and classed assumptions embedded within those ideas. Women recognized that the language of social mix often operated as a coded form of respectability politics, suggesting that "good" diversity required the arrival of middle-income, often white or non-immigrant residents to stabilize the community. This racialized framing erased the cultural and social vitality already present in Lawrence Heights' predominantly racialized and immigrant population. Participants noted that the discourse of "bringing new energy" implicitly devalued the lives and practices of those who had sustained the neighbourhood through care work, informal economies, and community organizing. They worried that these narratives, while presented as progressive, would fracture long-standing social networks by layering a new moral and social hierarchy over existing relations of solidarity. As one woman explained, the redevelopment process risked privileging the visibility of newcomers while rendering the contributions of long-term racialized residents invisible. Her critique underscored that true renewal could not come from external influxes of capital or population but from recognizing the infrastructures of care, belonging, and mutual support already built within the community.

The respondent with a 30-year tenure, for instance, recalled that engagement sessions often emphasized attracting middle-income residents to "balance" the social mix, but rarely considered the lived forms of solidarity already evident in initiatives such as the Memory Bank Project (see Chapter Three).

The Memory Bank Project exemplified how women in Lawrence Heights used collective storytelling and creative documentation to reclaim neighbourhood histories, counter redevelopment narratives of decline, and assert continuity through practices of memory and care. For many participants, the installation was both an act of pride and protest. The layering of images and voices reclaimed the narrative of Lawrence Heights from external definitions of decline or blight, insisting instead on the area's vibrancy and belonging. As one participant noted, the project "showed what we already built here," a statement that reframed redevelopment not as the creation of something new but as recognition of what already existed. This act of visual and narrative reclamation linked directly to women's broader efforts to sustain their social networks throughout the upheaval of redevelopment, embodying a grassroots form of placemaking rooted in memory and care.

Finally, the Memory Bank Project also served as a rhetorical device, a way for residents to engage with the redevelopment process on their own terms. By highlighting shared histories and emotional geographies, it provided a platform for residents, especially women, to voice a collective vision of Lawrence Heights grounded in relational continuity rather than spatial redesign. While the project's digital documentation was incomplete, its resonance was enduring.

It marked a moment in which residents turned the uncertainty of redevelopment into a collaborative assertion of belonging, one that continues to shape how the neighbourhood will be remembered.

By drawing attention to the richness of Lawrence Heights' existing social life, these women redefined what "renewal" meant in practice, not the importation of outside values, but the recognition and strengthening of community bonds that already functioned as anchors of stability and care. In doing so, they reframed redevelopment not as a break from the past but as an opportunity to sustain the social infrastructures that had long supported women's resilience and collective agency.

4.4 Intersectional synthesis

The counter-discourses explored in the previous section reveal that women in Lawrence Heights did not merely respond to redevelopment, they theorized it through lived experience. Their critiques of safety, belonging, and "social mix" were not only forms of civic participation but also embodied analyses of power, inequality, and recognition. This section draws these threads together into an intersectional synthesis, demonstrating how race, gender, class, and migration status were not peripheral identity markers but interlocking structures that shaped every dimension of women's lives, from housing access and care networks to community participation and moral worth. What emerges is an understanding of intersectionality as both an analytic and an infrastructure, a relational field through which women sustained life, produced knowledge, and reimagined the city under conditions of persistent marginalization. The synthesis in this section also interprets women's narratives not only as resistance but as a form of situated policy critique, articulating what inclusive housing could look like when informed by everyday expertise.

The data show that intersectionality in Lawrence Heights was not an abstract theoretical principle but a material and emotional condition of everyday life. Women's accounts of being denied housing, subjected to racial profiling, or stereotyped as "unreliable tenants" expose how the social order of redevelopment was underwritten by gendered and racialized logics of respectability. Anti-Black racism, islamophobia, and classist moralism converged to define who was viewed as legitimate within the city's moral geography of worth. These encounters were cumulative, producing what participants described as exhaustion, a continuous labour of having to prove competence, cleanliness, and civility in spaces that implicitly rendered them suspect. The analysis reveals that intersectionality here is not simply descriptive, it names the very mechanism through which urban inequality is reproduced and normalized in the everyday transactions of housing, employment, and belonging.

Intersectionality also structured the forms of care that women built in response to institutional neglect. Dyads and triads were more than interpersonal support systems; they were micro-geographies of interdependence forged within conditions of constraint. In dyads, women cultivated intimacy and moral solidarity that buffered them against bureaucratic indifference, while triads extended these relations outward, enabling the circulation of knowledge, translation, and survival skills. When women edited each other's letters to landlords, shared food across households, or accompanied one another to service appointments, they enacted an intersectional

politics of care: practices that converted precarity into competence and isolation into belonging. These networks were never fully equal, linguistic fluency, citizenship status, or mobility determined who could help and who depended on help, but this unevenness was precisely what made the networks functional. The care systems women created were not idealized communities of solidarity, they were improvisational infrastructures shaped by asymmetry, obligation, and resilience.

Spatially, women's narratives of safety demonstrate that intersectionality is lived through the body's movement across unequal terrain. Visibility and vulnerability were distributed along lines of race, gender, and age. Younger Somali women spoke of hyper-visibility and fear of surveillance, while older Caribbean residents described a slower, cumulative fatigue from decades of being watched and misread. Yet across these differences, women developed what can be described as relational vigilance, a feminist reimagining of safety rooted in mutual care rather than surveillance. Everyday practices such as texting neighbours after night shifts, escorting friends to bus stops, or pausing on sidewalks to talk and watch over children were acts of spatial agency that re-inscribed belonging where the built environment failed to do so. These embodied rituals transformed precarious public spaces into affective corridors of safety and connection. Intersectionality, in this sense, was not an obstacle to solidarity but its very medium, difference became the ground on which care was enacted.

The findings further reveal that intersectionality was deeply embedded in women's interpretations of social mix, the policy framework driving redevelopment. The rhetoric of diversity and renewal masked a racialized value system in which whiteness and middle-class respectability were equated with progress, and long-term racialized residents were positioned as the objects of improvement. Women recognized that this language of "new energy" implied that vitality and civility were to be imported from outside, rather than acknowledged as already present. Their counter-discourses dismantled this assumption, reframing diversity as something historically lived and maintained through the cultural, emotional, and economic labour of women themselves. By asserting that community life already existed through acts of care, memory, and advocacy, participants exposed how planning discourse enacts what might be called racialized displacement through recognition, a process that praises inclusion while erasing the very people who embody it. This critique positions intersectionality as a diagnostic of urban power, a lens for seeing how racialization is embedded in the aesthetic and moral rationalities of redevelopment.

The data also reveal that intersectionality in Lawrence Heights operated through time as much as through space. Intergenerational relationships between elders, mothers, and youth carried the emotional and political weight of community continuity. Older women, often long-term Caribbean and South Asian residents, acted as custodians of collective memory and informal governance, while younger residents, many from newcomer or mixed-heritage families, contributed digital fluency, energy, and new vocabularies of justice. These intergenerational exchanges transformed intersectionality into a living pedagogy, a process through which knowledge, affect, and survival skills were transmitted and renewed. Humour, storytelling, and collaborative problem-solving functioned as modes of intergenerational translation, linking personal histories of migration and racialization with contemporary experiences of redevelopment. In this interplay, intersectionality became a dynamic resource, a way of holding together difference without collapsing it into sameness.

Women's everyday negotiations also reposition intersectionality as an epistemic practice, a mode of knowing produced through relational experience. The Lawrence Heights data show that residents were not passive subjects of policy but theorists of their own condition. Through care work, advocacy, and storytelling, they generated what feminist geographers term situated knowledges, partial, embodied insights that challenge abstract logics of policy and urban design. Their narratives reveal that intersectionality functions simultaneously as critique and as method: critique, in revealing how systems of race, gender, and class operate through the micro-politics of space; and method, in modelling how to build solidarities across asymmetrical positions. When women contest stereotypes of dependency or disengagement, they enact a politics of visibility that reframes their everyday expertise as legitimate urban knowledge. Intersectionality thus becomes not just an interpretive tool for researchers, but a vernacular theory articulated and lived by residents themselves.

Ultimately, the intersectional synthesis of women's experiences demonstrates that identity in Lawrence Heights is not a static label but a relational process continually reconstituted through care, struggle, and imagination. Few participants named "intersectionality" as a framework, yet their narratives embody it as a structure of possibility: a way of making life livable amid conditions of constraint. Belonging was negotiated through daily acts of endurance, managing fear, sustaining humour, caring for neighbours, and mentoring youth, that collectively produced an alternative urbanism grounded in dignity and mutual accountability. The empirical synthesis across sections 4.1-4.3 thus reveals that survival in Lawrence Heights was sustained by an intersectional politics of care, a feminist urban praxis through which racialized women convert structural inequity into relational abundance. In their networks, memories, and shared moral geographies, intersectionality is not merely endured, it is enacted as the architecture of hope itself.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how women in Lawrence Heights negotiated the overlapping pressures of affordability, discrimination, and neighbourhood redevelopment, revealing that their struggles were also sites of knowledge-making and collective resistance. Addressing the research questions, the findings demonstrate that:

- Women's experiences of housing precarity were structured through the intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, class, and migration;
- Social networks functioned as infrastructures of care that transformed vulnerability into collective strength; and,
- Women's counter-discourses reimagined safety, belonging, and redevelopment through intersectional, feminist frameworks of solidarity and relational responsibility.

Together, these insights show that exclusion and endurance were co-produced, women were not simply subjects of policy but active agents who theorized and remade the social world from within its constraints.

Across each section, women's accounts illuminated how affordability was never solely an economic condition but a deeply social one, mediated through the racialized and gendered politics of respectability. Barriers to housing access and employment revealed enduring hierarchies of moral worth, yet women met these exclusions with adaptive, cooperative forms of social organization. Within dyads and triads, they edited each other's letters to landlords, shared job postings, coordinated childcare, and offered emotional labour that compensated for institutional neglect. These everyday collaborations materialized as living infrastructures that sustained belonging amid chronic instability. Acts that might otherwise appear routine, walking one another home, translating documents, preparing meals, emerged as the connective tissue of community life. They transformed precarity into participation, demonstrating that social reproduction under austerity can itself be a mode of political action.

Women's experiences also showed how social networks mediated encounters across the intersectionality of racialized and gendered exclusion. In the face of anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and stigma tied to the Lawrence Heights address, these networks became interpretive and protective structures, mechanisms through which women collectively processed injustice while affirming dignity and competence. Within this matrix of constraint and creativity, social relations became a counter-architecture: one that upheld women's moral economies of care, systems of value that privilege empathy, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility over market or institutional logics (Lawson 2010; Tronto 2015). These moral economies were not sentimental but political, rooted in daily acts of trust, solidarity, and recognition that sustained communal life under precarity.

The analysis further revealed that these relational infrastructures shaped women's responses to safety and redevelopment. Moments of insecurity were met not with withdrawal but with intensified sociability: neighbours texting to check in, escorting one another to bus stops, or gathering at corners to talk through incidents. Such gestures reaffirmed local ethics of empathy and accountability that countered state narratives of disorder. This relational vigilance carried into the redevelopment process itself, where long-term residents drew on collective memory and neighbourhood expertise to mediate official consultations. Their interpretations of "placemaking" diverged from professional planning logics. For women, making place was not about aesthetic renewal but about safeguarding the moral and relational fabric of the community that had always existed beneath the rhetoric of "social mix."

Women's commentaries on redevelopment revealed the racialized nature of those planning discourses. They identified how the language of diversity and "new energy" re-centred whiteness and middle-class respectability as the measure of improvement, rendering long-term racialized residents peripheral to the vision of renewal. In response, participants advanced counter-narratives that repositioned Lawrence Heights as already diverse, vibrant, and self-sustaining. Through initiatives such as the Memory Bank Project, women asserted the continuity of local life and refused the erasure embedded in redevelopment's moral hierarchies. These practices exemplified epistemic resistance: the production of alternative knowledges that recognize community vitality as a product of care, not capital. In doing so, women reframed renewal as recognition.

The findings also highlighted the intergenerational and intercultural character of women's networks, an often-overlooked dimension of intersectional urban research. Across interviews, collaboration between youth and elders generated unexpected forms of joy, humour, and playfulness that disrupted the gravity of precarity. Elder women, drawing on long experience, mentored younger residents in advocacy and translation; younger participants introduced new technologies and vocabularies of activism. This intergenerational interplay functioned as a living pedagogy of intersectionality, showing that solidarity is sustained not through sameness but through the transmission of knowledge, care, and creativity across difference. These affective practices, laughter, storytelling, shared meals, expanded the analytic of intersectionality from critique to pedagogy, situating resilience within the emotional architectures of community.

In this context, women's everyday social relations constituted a relational system that both sustained and reconfigured urban life. Rather than existing as residual or compensatory, these infrastructures of care, communication, and mutual accountability were generative: they redefined what counts as expertise, agency, and governance. Through acts of maintenance and meaning-making, women enacted an urban politics grounded in empathy, reciprocity, and relational ethics, a feminist urban praxis that insists the social cannot be separated from the spatial. These findings collectively demonstrate that the neighbourhood's survival is not accidental but the outcome of intentional, intersectional labour performed by women who navigate, reinterpret, and resist structures of inequity every day.

Ultimately, the chapter affirms that women's agency in Lawrence Heights is a form of social and epistemic production. Their practices of care, vigilance, and advocacy reimagine community not as a static identity but as an evolving process of belonging shaped through difference. Intersectionality here is both a condition of struggle and a source of political imagination: it exposes how urban renewal reproduces inequality, yet also reveals how women cultivate continuity, solidarity, and possibility in its midst. These findings address the research questions directly by showing that housing precarity, care infrastructures, and counter-discourses are intertwined expressions of an intersectional urban politics that transforms marginalization into collective meaning. The final chapter builds on this argument, drawing out the theoretical and policy implications for feminist urban geography and equitable redevelopment.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter synthesizes the main findings of this research on low-income, racialized women's experiences of housing precarity and affordability in Lawrence Heights. It builds on the conceptual frameworks of feminist urban geography, social network analysis, and intersectionality introduced in chapter two to situate women's lived experiences within broader debates about equity, governance, and belonging in cities undergoing redevelopment. Specifically, the chapter revisits the three research questions outlined in Chapter One:

- How do low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights experience and navigate housing precarity and redevelopment pressures, and how do these experiences intersect with race, gender, and immigration status?

- How do social networks and community-based organizations function as infrastructures of care, solidarity, and collective identity for low-income, racialized women facing housing precarity and redevelopment?

- How do the narratives and place-based understandings of low-income, racialized women challenge dominant discourses of Lawrence Heights and social mix, and what do these narratives reveal about the possibilities for more inclusive housing policy?

Across the analysis, this study demonstrates that women's everyday social interactions, whether in housing searches, employment negotiations, or community participation, were not passive responses to marginalization but key mechanisms for navigating structural inequality. The findings extend existing debates on social networks by revealing them as dynamic, adaptive systems of relational knowledge and care rather than static exchanges of information. Women mobilized emotional and moral resources to navigate discrimination, bureaucracy, and uncertainty, transforming care into a form of urban expertise. These insights contribute to feminist geography by emphasizing the social, affective, and epistemic dimensions of inequality, showing how relational infrastructures not only mitigate vulnerability but also generate belonging and meaning.

This chapter therefore moves from synthesis to implication. It re-articulates the study's findings in relation to the research questions, drawing out their theoretical and practical significance for understanding urban change, care, and intersectionality. The discussion highlights how women's narratives of survival and solidarity advance intersectional theories of urban life by revealing how care, mobility, and social reproduction are shaped by the racialized moral geographies of redevelopment. The chapter concludes by outlining how these insights contribute to feminist urban geography and inform policy discussions on equitable housing, community engagement, and inclusive planning. In doing so, it situates the social networks that women build, through care, reciprocity, and persistence, as indispensable to understanding both the lived transformations of Lawrence Heights and the moral economies that sustain life within precarity.

5.2 Summary of findings

This section synthesizes the empirical insights from Chapter Four and explicitly connects them to the study's three research questions. Taken together, the findings reveal that women in Lawrence Heights live and theorize intersectionality as an everyday condition, one that structures access to housing, produces care infrastructures, and gives rise to counter-discourses that contest the moral and spatial hierarchies of redevelopment. Across all domains, women's practices of care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility transform precarity into relational resilience, demonstrating that the social fabric of the neighbourhood is neither accidental nor residual but the outcome of sustained, gendered labour.

5.2.1 Navigating housing precarity and discrimination

Women's narratives reveal that housing precarity in Lawrence Heights was experienced as both a material and moral crisis, where affordability was inseparable from racialized and gendered discrimination. Participants described being denied viewings, asked for additional documentation, or told that units were "no longer available" once their postal code or family structure became known. These encounters exposed how the private rental market reproduces anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and class prejudice under the guise of bureaucratic neutrality. For single mothers and newcomers, the intersection of gender and immigration status compounded these exclusions, positioning them as simultaneously dependent and suspect.

Yet, within this environment of constraint, women mobilized informal tactics that re-asserted agency. They exchanged information about sympathetic landlords, alerted each other to exploitative agents, and collectively developed an archive of "street-level housing intelligence." These actions reframed the process of seeking housing from an individualized struggle into a collective strategy of survival. Importantly, participants interpreted these experiences not merely as acts of personal bias but as systemic expressions of urban inequality that naturalize racialized poverty. By situating their experiences within broader critiques of the city's redevelopment agenda, women linked discrimination in housing to the moral economy of urban renewal itself, revealing how the politics of "deservingness" determine who is allowed to inhabit the redeveloped city.

5.2.2 Social networks as infrastructures of care and solidarity

Women's networks in Lawrence Heights operated as adaptive infrastructures that sustained everyday life under austerity. Dyads and triads provided tangible and emotional support, editing appeals to landlords, coordinating childcare, sharing food, and offering translation, but they also enacted an ethics of relational accountability grounded in empathy and reciprocity. These networks substituted for absent institutions, performing the very functions of care, mediation, and advocacy that redevelopment policies claim to institutionalize.

The study found that these care infrastructures were intersectionally organized: long-term residents acted as cultural brokers and informal mentors, while recent immigrants brought new languages, energies, and transnational solidarities. This unevenness did not fracture collective life; rather, it produced an economy of interdependence in which differences became resources.

Through these networks, women transformed dependency into competence and invisibility into recognition. Their actions reveal care as a political practice, a relational technology that mitigates structural neglect while asserting women's authority as the moral custodians of community wellbeing. In feminist geographic terms, these networks exemplify how the social reproduction of life within marginalized urban spaces is itself an act of resistance to neoliberal rationalities of self-reliance and scarcity.

5.2.3 Counter-Discourses of safety, community, and redevelopment

Women's reflections on safety and redevelopment advanced a profound critique of how urban policy imagines danger, renewal, and community. Safety, in their accounts, was not a condition guaranteed by policing or surveillance but an affective relation produced through attentiveness and mutual care. Practices such as walking one another home, texting after night shifts, and pausing to talk on the sidewalk redefined safety as a shared, embodied accomplishment. These informal rituals of protection constituted what can be called relational vigilance, a gendered geography of care that resisted the state's framing of the neighbourhood as disorderly.

In the context of redevelopment, women recognized the racialized politics embedded in the discourse of social mix. The promise of "bringing new energy" was understood as a euphemism for gentrification that equated whiteness and middle-class respectability with progress. Against this narrative, participants articulated counter-discourses that reclaimed Lawrence Heights as already vibrant and diverse, asserting that renewal should begin from recognition rather than erasure. Through community meetings, storytelling, and projects such as the Memory Bank, women transformed stigma into testimony, producing what feminist scholars describe as epistemic resistance, knowledge generated from lived experience that challenges official urban imaginaries. These counter-discourses reposition racialized women not as beneficiaries of policy but as theorists and narrators of the city's moral geography.

5.2.4 Intergenerational and intersectional dynamics of engagement

Another key dimension of the findings concerns the intergenerational and intercultural ties that animate women's networks. Collaboration between elders, mothers, and youth ensured continuity across periods of rapid transformation. Older women, many of whom had lived in Lawrence Heights for decades, embodied moral authority and institutional memory, mentoring younger residents in advocacy, translation, and safety practices. Younger participants contributed new tools, such as digital communication networks and social media organizing, expanding the temporal and technological reach of community activism.

These exchanges reveal intersectionality in motion: difference becomes a bridge rather than a boundary. Humour, storytelling, and shared acts of care transformed uncertainty into connection, demonstrating that intergenerational relations are themselves infrastructures of social reproduction. This vitality reframes intersectionality as a living pedagogy, a way of teaching and learning across asymmetrical positions. By holding together memory and innovation, these relationships exemplify how feminist urban praxis endures through the transmission of affect, knowledge, and creativity.

5.2.5 Synthesis: intersectional geographies of survival and resistance

Across these domains, the findings converge to show that the everyday geographies of Lawrence Heights are shaped by intersectional labour: the cumulative work of negotiating inequality while sustaining life and community. Housing exclusion, care infrastructures, and counter-discourses are not separate phenomena but interdependent systems that produce what might be called a politics of maintenance, an ongoing practice of keeping community intact within disintegrating structures. Through relational vigilance, shared care, and intergenerational cooperation, women re-defined survival as a collective ethic and resistance as the continuation of everyday life.

These empirical insights contribute to feminist urban geography by situating intersectionality as both analytic and infrastructure: it is simultaneously the framework for interpreting inequality and the mechanism through which marginalized women make cities livable. The Lawrence Heights case therefore extends theoretical debates on social networks and care by foregrounding racialized women's relational agency as a transformative force within urban governance. Their everyday labour of continuity, maintaining networks, memories, and moral economies, reveals how intersectionality operates not only as a condition of constraint but as a structure of possibility, turning precarious urban worlds into architectures of endurance and hope.

5.3 Limitations

This study's scope was deliberately bound by the parameters of a master's-level qualitative project. With a small sample size of 22 participants, the research was designed to generate interpretive depth rather than statistical generalizability. The cross-sectional nature of fieldwork limited the ability to capture changes in women's networks or housing conditions over time, but it provided a valuable snapshot of lived experiences within a specific moment of redevelopment in Lawrence Heights. The analysis therefore focuses on processes and meanings rather than frequencies or trends. Because of the small sample, the insights drawn from thisstudy cannot be generalized to all residents of Toronto's social housing communities. The small sample size and the study's cross-sectional nature also restricted the ability to contextualize women's accounts within broader community changes over time. However, the findings contribute to a broader understanding of how low-income, racialized women navigate structural constraints and community-based supports in contexts of housing insecurity and urban renewal. By foregrounding the complexity and situated nature of these experiences, the study offers conceptual rather than representative insights, findings that deepen the discussion of women's agency, local knowledge, and the social infrastructure of care in marginalized urban spaces.

Some limitations that became evident during and after fieldwork relate to the study's cross-sectional design, the homogeneity of participants' social networks, and the constraints imposed by focusing on a single service partner. Because the study was not longitudinal, it cannot capture how women's social networks or housing situations evolved over time, nor can it account for unobserved heterogeneity in trajectories of mobility or network change. For instance, most networks described by participants included primarily women of similar demographic profiles; none reported male network members or people from markedly different socioeconomic

strata. The focus on a single service provider, Unison, further limits the findings' interpretive reach, while Unison's programs informed part of participants' experiences, comparing its service scope and utilization rates with those of other community agencies might have shed light on differences in institutional responsiveness, outreach strategies, or gaps in provision that could help explain variation in women's access to supports.

Another limitation arises from the passage of time. Since data collection between January 26 to April 19, 2015, affordability pressures have intensified in Toronto's housing market and the availability of social housing units has declined. In the past decade, private rental housing has been increasingly financialized with corporations replacing small landlords and raising rents as rapidly as regulations allow. According to the Inclusionary Zoning Assessment Report (City of Toronto, 2021), in 2021, 23 percent of renter households were spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing, and Toronto's subsidized housing waitlist has ballooned in recent years. Nationally, Canada's stock of social and affordable rental units has also declined as a share of total dwellings, to only 3.5 percent in 2022. The Toronto Vital Signs report notes that 76 percent of low-income renters now spend more than 30 percent of gross household income on housing, exceeding the threshold for affordable housing. Housing challenges in 2024 or 2025 appear even more severe than those captured in this study raising important questions about how low-income racialized women are faring currently. The heightened housing challenges also mean that the empirical findings reported here should be interpreted within their temporal context rather than as static generalizations.

Some methodological considerations arose during data analysis, particularly regarding the limited representativeness of women's social networks and the challenges of interpreting their narratives on public safety. Women's networks appeared "contained" in the sense that most ties were geographically and socially concentrated within Lawrence Heights, often bounded by family, friends, and neighbours who shared similar socioeconomic and racialized positions. While this provided rich insights into localized systems of reciprocity and care, it limited women's exposure to perspectives and resources extending beyond the neighbourhood's borders, such as those from the adjacent Neptune area or Lawrence Manor.

During fieldwork, especially in sessions with LHIONS and consultations with the city councillor's office, public safety emerged as a recurring concern. However, women's discussions of safety focused on everyday experiences of surveillance, inter-neighbour tensions, and youth conflicts rather than on the formal policing issues that the service provider and municipal actors prioritized. This divergence likely reflects the study's focus on individual and community-level perspectives rather than long-term institutional monitoring. When I met with the councillor's office, public safety was discussed as a matter of area-wide reputation and policy oversight, whereas women localized these concerns to interpersonal relations and immediate spaces of residence. This difference in framing underscores how the scale and positionality of residents and policymakers shape what is emphasized or overlooked in narratives of neighbourhood safety.

5.4 Contributions to theory and practice

The concept of social mix has become a dominant framework in North American and European urban redevelopment policy, grounded in the assumption that fostering socio-economic diversity within neighbourhoods will lead to greater social cohesion, reduced concentrations of poverty, and improved life chances for low-income residents (Bridge et al., 2012; Lees, 2008; Rose, 2004). In Toronto, this logic has informed public housing revitalization initiatives such as those in Regent Park and Lawrence Heights, where physical redevelopment is coupled with mixed-tenure housing strategies. However, as scholars such as August (2014, 2020) and Walks et al. (2017) have shown, social mix policies often rest on a narrow understanding of community formation. They assume that proximity among residents of different income levels will organically generate social interaction and mutual understanding, without adequately addressing the structural inequalities, stigmatization, and displacement such projects often reproduce.

This study contributes to these debates by showing that in Lawrence Heights, social integration and belonging were not outcomes of planned physical mixing, but of relational practices embedded in women's everyday networks of care, reciprocity, and trust. Women's networks, structured as dyads and triads, functioned as informal infrastructures that mediated between public institutions and private households. These relational forms of social cohesion challenge the policy assumption that social diversity alone is sufficient to build community. Instead, they reveal how belonging and cooperation are actively produced through emotional labour, place-based familiarity, and mutual responsibility. In this way, the findings extend the critique of social mix by emphasizing that the "social" in social mix cannot be engineered through redevelopment alone but must be sustained through recognition of existing social infrastructures.

The study further demonstrates that women's social networks in Lawrence Heights displayed different qualities, some bureaucratic, tied to institutional intermediaries like Unison or TCHC meetings, and others generative, rooted in informal mutual support. Both forms were crucial to navigating redevelopment and public safety concerns, yet neither is acknowledged within the formal metrics of social mix planning. By documenting these distinctions, this research contributes a gendered perspective to urban planning debates, illustrating that women's relational work constitutes an alternative form of community-making that complicates the dominant social mix paradigm.

The study highlighted the commitment of women in Lawrence Heights to community decision-making through relational forms of engagement. Women worked to sustain collective dialogue by creating connections across households and generations, particularly around issues of housing, safety, and neighbourhood redevelopment. For example, the inclusion of young people in decision-making spaces about public safety events, such as those facilitated through LHIONS meetings, was repeatedly mentioned as a source of pride. Seeing multiple generations of community members speak in these meetings, from youth to parents and long-term residents, underscored how women's leadership extended beyond advocacy to mentoring and translation work. Older women frequently supported younger residents in interpreting redevelopment plans or in voicing safety concerns, which helped maintain the continuity of local knowledge across

age groups. These practices exemplify the relational, process-based nature of community engagement in Lawrence Heights: connection was not a policy outcome but a form of everyday pedagogy and mutual care.

The intergenerational quality of women's engagement also revealed an important and often overlooked dimension of intersectionality in urban life, an observation that emerges from my analysis rather than the women's own framing of their experiences. Across interviews, residents described how collaboration between youth and elders brought an unexpected sense of playfulness and joy to discussions that were otherwise shaped by uncertainty and precarity. This vitality was evident in projects like the Memory Bank and neighbourhood events organized to prevent youth violence, where humour, storytelling, and shared meals helped bridge generational divides. These moments of joy, while not named by participants as "intersectional," illustrate how the affective dimensions of intergenerational care create continuity and solidarity across difference. I interpret these practices as a living expression of intersectionality, not only a framework for analysing multiple inequalities, but also a collective process through which resilience and belonging are continually produced. Recognizing this intergenerational and affective dimension contributes to feminist urban theory by showing that care, creativity, and humour are integral to how marginalized communities navigate structural change.

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The study also underscored the complexity of how women's intersectional identities mediated their housing and employment experiences, revealing that identity was situationally expressed rather than uniformly foregrounded. For many participants, especially those who were both newcomers to Canada and new to Lawrence Heights, experiences of settlement were mediated more through social and economic vulnerability than through overt references to ethnicity or race. Their narratives highlighted the difficulties of navigating unfamiliar institutional systems and limited social networks, rather than consciously identifying with a single marker of difference. While women occasionally referred to being racialized or to speaking a particular language, these aspects emerged as context-specific identity markers rather than as primary identity frames. This finding reflects the broader intersectional insight that categories such as race, class, and migration status interact fluidly in everyday experiences rather than operating as fixed determinants.

What was most striking across interviews was how rarely women described their experiences through a single axis of identity. Instead, their accounts emphasized the immediacy of everyday needs, repairing housing, finding stable work, or feeling safe, as the sites where identity and structure met. Only in discussions about the redevelopment project and public safety did more explicit reflections on difference appear, as women debated how "community" was represented and whose voices were being heard. This context-specific articulation of identity reinforces the argument that intersectionality, in applied urban research, is not only an analytic framework but also a lived process of negotiation. In Lawrence Heights, the specificity of women's experiences, shaped by migration, tenure, and social position, demonstrated how belonging and exclusion are relationally produced through everyday encounters, not predetermined by identity labels alone.

5.5 Recommendations for future studies

There are several promising avenues for future research that could deepen and extend the insights developed in this study. One key trajectory would be to expand the analysis of social mix as both a planning objective and a lived experience. While the goals of social mix are often compelling on paper, in practice, such as in Lawrence Heights, this study observed limitations in how those aims are realized at the relational level. A useful comparative strategy would involve longitudinal and comparative studies of different redevelopment sites. In the Toronto context, for instance, Jim Dunn's (2012) longitudinal work on the Regent Park revitalization has tracked resident health, neighborhood satisfaction, and social outcomes before and after mixed-income redevelopment using quasi-experimental methods. By positioning Lawrence Heights alongside Regent Park in empirical comparisons, future research could test whether patterns of network resilience, relational care, and bounded belonging replicate or diverge across contexts. Such comparative, longitudinal work would help discern which dynamics are site specific and which might generalize to other mixed-income redevelopment settings.

Another promising direction for future research lies in examining how women's participation in community-based organizations such as LHIONS and Unison influences institutional culture and governance. While this study found that women's involvement enriched dialogue and strengthened social networks, it did not appear to fundamentally transform the power structures or decision-making practices of these organizations. Future studies could explore this question directly, assessing whether and how sustained, gendered participation might reshape the terms of community engagement and accountability within such agencies. This line of inquiry would deepen understanding of the institutional limits of "participatory" redevelopment and identify opportunities for genuinely transformative collaboration between residents and service providers.

A broader possibility for supporting the concept of social mix would be to undertake a more nuanced, contextual analysis of the economic and institutional dynamics that influence how housing redevelopment is experienced by low-income households. While the current study offers insight into the relational and network dimensions of social mix in Lawrence Heights, it does not capture how the market, subsidy regimes, or institutional policies shift over time. Future research could trace how low-income households negotiate access to market-rate housing, retention of subsidized units, or relocation outcomes after redevelopment. Comparative longitudinal research would be especially valuable in light of critiques offered by August (2008, 2016) of mixed-income redevelopment in Toronto, which show that social mix policies often mask power asymmetries and fail to deliver equitable outcomes for original tenants. Similarly, Walks and Maaranen's (2008) work on social polarization suggests that mix may generate new forms of exclusion unless carefully mediated. Deploying such comparative work in Lawrence Heights, Regent Park, or other Canadian cases could help expose when and where social mix interventions succeed or exacerbate structural inequality.

Future research could benefit from deeper engagement with the housing trajectories of low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights, both those remaining through redevelopment and those who relocate elsewhere. Longitudinal, qualitative research could trace how these women's housing circumstances, social ties, and mobility decisions evolve over time,

particularly as redevelopment phases continue to reshape the social and physical landscape. Employing social network mapping or temporal network analysis could illuminate how the structure and strength of women's ties shift during critical moments, such as relocation, new tenancy, or re-entry into redeveloped housing. Combining these methods with participatory workshops would not only reveal how women's relational practices mediate exclusion and belonging but also capture how these relationships change in response to redevelopment's institutional and emotional pressures. Integrating participatory workshops into longitudinal and qualitative research could further mobilize women's collective expertise by positioning participants not merely as informants but as co-researchers in the production of housing knowledge. Such workshops would enable women to articulate lived experiences of exclusion and adaptation in real time, linking everyday struggles with policy mechanisms and institutional practices. In doing so, participatory methods could operate as both analytical and political interventions, sites where feminist methodologies actively reshape how urban governance engages with questions of equity and care.

In addition, future studies could more explicitly connect these relational dynamics to spatial outcomes, clarifying how the built environments of Lawrence Heights and adjacent neighbourhoods like Lawrence Manor affect opportunities for housing mobility and employment access. This would help qualify the spatial dimensions of "social mix" policies by tracing how design, planning, and policy decisions translate into concrete possibilities, or constraints, for residents. Examining processes such as homophily within women's networks, and whether service providers and policymakers recognize and address these network effects, could deepen understanding of how inequities in information or resources persist. Finally, a comparative framework that includes other Toronto redevelopment sites, such as Regent Park or Alexandra Park, would help identify patterns in how redevelopment restructures women's social worlds. Such comparative, longitudinal inquiry would open further possibilities for policy interventions that strengthen connections between communities and reduce the barriers that limit low-income women's access to secure housing and stable employment.

5.6 Closing

This study examines how low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights negotiate housing and community life through intersecting structures of inequality and care. It illuminates the intricate and adaptive strategies through which women navigate the dual pressures of social housing redevelopment and everyday survival. By situating women's narratives within their personal and neighbourhood-level social networks, this research reveals that belonging is not a given condition but a continuous practice of endurance and repair. The evidence from Lawrence Heights demonstrates that belonging is produced through intersectionality itself, through the interwoven dynamics of race, gender, class, and migration that shape women's access to housing, their moral economies of care, and their participation in collective life. These findings underscore the limitations of current social mix policies, which too often overlook the lived, situated dimensions of women's social worlds. Rather than assuming integration as a natural outcome of physical redevelopment, this study shows that community cohesion must be understood as the product of sustained, intersectional labour, care, reciprocity, and local knowledge exchanged across time, culture, and social ties.

The findings call for a rethink of how urban redevelopment is conceptualized and implemented. Women's stories show that social cohesion cannot be engineered solely through design or tenure mix but it must be sustained through recognition of existing social infrastructures and the everyday relational practices that underpin them. The participants' capacity to leverage long-standing trust networks, while simultaneously adapting to new social arrangements, reveals a form of community-making that complicates technocratic notions of renewal. Thus, this study's contribution extends beyond describing women's resilience; it reframes women's agency as a collective and ongoing form of social and political participation, one that demands recognition within planning processes.

Ultimately, this call to action emphasizes the need for redevelopment initiatives to embed lived knowledge and place-based understandings into decision-making frameworks. As earlier chapters demonstrated, women's participation in groups such as LHIONS and Unison provided crucial spaces for information exchange, advocacy, and mutual support, but it did not necessarily feed into the institutional structures of those organizations. Rather, women's involvement highlighted the limitations of participatory models that invite engagement without redistributing power. Their contributions enriched community dialogue and sustained informal infrastructures of care that bridged institutional and social divides, yet decision-making remained largely bounded by professional hierarchies and external mandates. The neighbourhood was shown to be, and to remain, a deeply familiar and sociable place, its vitality drawn from residents' capacity to reproduce and reinterpret community through everyday acts of connection. Recognizing and strengthening these forms of relational knowledge should therefore be a central goal of inclusive redevelopment, while future research might examine how institutional partnerships such as LHIONS and Unison could evolve toward genuinely transformative collaboration.

At the same time, this project underscores that not all residents experience belonging in the same way. Attention to the intersectional dimensions of tenure length, migration background, and caregiving roles reveals how exclusion can operate subtly even within communities marked by solidarity. Therefore, future redevelopment efforts must consider how planning processes can genuinely integrate the insights and capacities of long-term residents while avoiding symbolic inclusion. As this study has shown, residents already possess the tools, relationships, and practices necessary to build and sustain community life. What is required is for policy and planning frameworks to learn from and invest in those capacities, rather than overwrite them.

While necessarily limited in scope, this research contributes important insights into urban planning and policy debates about redevelopment, community engagement, and the gendered dimensions of social infrastructure. It invites planners, policymakers, and community organizations to recognize relational forms of knowledge as essential to achieving equity and stability in social housing contexts. The Lawrence Heights case reveals that building equitable urban futures requires not only bricks and mortar but also investment in the social, affective, and historical bonds that hold communities together.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guides

Interview Guide: Participants

Introduction

- Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. This interview is part of a research project that seeks to understand women's lived experiences in Lawrence Heights during the ongoing redevelopment.
- The discussion will focus on your perspectives, daily routines, and community relationships.
- Everything you share will remain confidential; your name or identifying information will not appear in the final research. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time.

Opening

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself and your connection to Lawrence Heights? How long have you lived here?
2. How would you describe your everyday life in the neighbourhood?

Questions

3. In what ways has the redevelopment affected your daily routines, family responsibilities, or sense of stability?
4. What kinds of support do you provide to others, and what forms of support do you receive (from family, neighbours, or community organisations)?
5. Have you noticed changes in how women in the neighbourhood connect with or support one another since the redevelopment began?
6. What challenges have you faced during this period of change, and how have you navigated them?
7. What do you feel are the most important aspects of women's experiences here that outsiders, such as policymakers, service providers, or researchers, need to understand?

Closing

8. Is there anything important about your experiences that we have not discussed?
9. Do you have any questions for me, or anything you would like to see come from this research?

Interview Guide: Key Informants

Introduction

- Thank you for participating in this interview. This project aims to document how service providers and community workers understand women's experiences in Lawrence Heights during the redevelopment.
- Your insights will help situate women's perspectives within broader institutional and service delivery contexts.
- The interview is confidential; no identifying information will be published. Participation is voluntary, and you may decline to answer any question or stop at any time.

Opening

1. Could you describe your role at Unison (or your organisation) and how it connects to Lawrence Heights?
2. How long have you been working with residents in this neighbourhood, and in what capacity?

Questions

3. From your perspective, what key challenges have women in Lawrence Heights faced because of the redevelopment?
4. How have women responded to these challenges, either individually or collectively?
5. Which services, resources, or forms of community support do you consider most significant for women currently?
6. In your view, what gaps or unmet needs remain in addressing women's everyday concerns during redevelopment?
7. What should researchers, service providers, or policymakers understand more fully about women's daily lives in Lawrence Heights?

Closing

8. Is there anything we have not covered that you feel is important for me to know?
9. Do you have any questions for me, or suggestions for how this research might best serve the community?

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

This study has been reviewed and approved by the York University Research Ethics Board.

Women's Experiences of Housing and Community Life in Lawrence Heights

Are you a woman living in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood? Would you like to share your experiences about housing, community, and neighbourhood change?

About the Study

This research study explores how women in Lawrence Heights experience housing, employment, and community relationships during the neighbourhood's redevelopment process. The study focuses on women's everyday experiences and the ways social networks support housing access, safety, and belonging.

Participation involves one-on-one, confidential interviews lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews will be audio-recorded with your consent and held in a private meeting room at: Unison Health and Community Services, 12 Flemingdon Road, Toronto, Ontario, M6A 2N4.

Participant Information

- You must be 18 years of age or older.
- You currently live in the Lawrence Heights area.
- You identify as female.
- No prior experience with research is necessary.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

Compensation and Refreshments

Participants will receive a small honorarium as a thank you for their time. Light refreshments will be provided at the interview session.

Interested in Participating?
To learn more or to schedule an interview, please contact: Raushan Bhuiyan, Researcher
Email: raisa521@yorku.ca Phone: 416-832-3402

Appendix C: Participant Characteristics

Participant ID	Age Range (Years)	Occupation / Employment Status	Household Size	Notes
P01	18-24	Unemployed / Recent high school graduate	4	Lived with parents and siblings
P02	25-34	Part-time childcare worker	3	Single mother with 2 children
P03	25-34	Retail assistant (part-time)	2	Lives with child
P04	25-34	Homemaker	5	Lives with partner and children
P05	35-44	Personal support worker	4	Single mother with 3 children
P06	35-44	Unemployed	6	Multigenerational household
P07	35-44	Early childhood educator	2	Lives with spouse
P08	35-44	Student (community college)	1	Lives alone
P09	35-44	Cleaner (contract work)	3	Lives with 2 children
P10	45-54	Caregiver / Domestic worker	5	Lives with spouse and extended family
P11	45-54	Unemployed / Disability support	2	Lives with adult daughter
P12	45-54	Community volunteer	1	Long-term resident (30+ years)
P13	45-54	Part-time retail / service	4	Single parent household
P14	55-64	Retired	2	Long-term resident
P15	55-64	Homemaker	3	Lives with spouse and adult children
P16	55-64	Unemployed / On assistance	1	Long-term resident (46 years)
P17	65+	Retired	1	Longest-term resident (46 years in Lawrence Heights)
KI1	35-44	Health planner (Unison)	N/A	Key informant
KI2	25-34	Community animator (Unison)	N/A	Key informant
KI3	45-54	Program coordinator (Unison)	N/A	Key informant

Participant ID	Age Range (Years)	Occupation / Employment Status	Household Size	Notes
KI4	35-44	Outreach worker (Unison)	N/A	Key informant
KI5	35-44	Diabetes education program staff (Unison)	N/A	Key informant

Appendix D: Consent Form

Project Title:

Low-Income, Racialized Women's Experiences of Housing Access in Lawrence Heights, Toronto, Canada

Researcher:

Raushan Bhuiyan
Master's Candidate, Graduate Department of Geography
Liberal Arts and Professional Studies York University
Email: raisa521@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Study

This study explores how low-income, racialized women in Lawrence Heights experience belonging, social networks, and redevelopment. It aims to understand how housing policy and neighbourhood change shape women's everyday lives, relationships of care, and access to community resources. The research is part of a master's thesis in [discipline, e.g., Geography and Urban Studies].

What Participation Involves

If you agree to participate, you will take part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes.

You will be asked about your experiences of living in Lawrence Heights, your interactions with neighbours, and your thoughts about the redevelopment process.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded.

You may choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time without penalty.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point before data analysis begins (e.g., three months after your interview) by contacting the researcher. If you withdraw, your interview data will be deleted and will not be used in the study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All information you share will be kept confidential.

Pseudonyms will be used in all publications unless you have explicitly agreed to be identified by name (for example, key informants who have consented to public acknowledgement of their professional roles).

Audio recordings and transcripts will be stored securely on a password-protected device.
Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

Potential Risks and Benefits

There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Some questions may raise personal or emotional topics related to housing or community change; you may choose to skip any question or take a break.

Benefits may include the opportunity to share your experiences, contribute to community-based knowledge, and help inform future research or policy discussions related to affordable housing and redevelopment.

Use of Research Findings

Findings from this study will be included in a master's thesis and may be presented in academic publications or community reports. A plain-language summary will be shared with Unison Health and Community Services and made available to participants upon request.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions about the study, please contact: Raushan Bhuiyan: raisa521@yorku.ca.

Consent Statement

I have read and understood the information provided above. T

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: _____ Signature:_____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____