

The Poverty Police: Police-Proxy University Services and Homelessness

by Lynn LaCroix

Abstract: This paper argues for forming a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness. The purpose of this group is to consult on implementing the recommendations made to York University Security Services (YSS) by an expert review panel, submitted in December of 2022 in Toronto, Canada. This paper also argues against empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*—a central matter under discussion by the expert review panel. Grounded theory and critical discourse analysis are used in this paper to observe YSS “incident summaries,” published on YSS’s Community Safety webpage, in conjunction with an analysis of the 2022 *York University Security Services Review: Final Report*. The findings reported in this paper include an approximate 43% overall interaction rate between unhoused people and YSS on the York University campus and a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline leading to the arrest of unhoused people by Toronto police. These findings give reason to reject empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision. These findings also give reason to consult peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness on policing and police-proxies, such as YSS.

Keywords: abolition geography; community policing; critical discourse analysis; grounded theory; homelessness; Mental Health Act; police; poverty; security; Special Constable; Trespass to Property Act; unhoused

Résumé: Cet article soutient la création d’un groupe de travail composé de personnes ayant une expérience intersectionnelle et vécue de l’itinérance. Le but de ce groupe est de mener des consultations sur la mise en œuvre des recommandations formulées aux Services de sécurité de l’Université York (YSS) par un groupe d’experts et présentées en décembre 2022 à Toronto, au Canada. Cet article s’oppose également à ce que les YSS se voient nommer agents spéciaux en vertu de la *Loi sur la refonte complète des services de police de l’Ontario*, une question qui est au cœur des discussions du groupe d’experts. Dans cet article, on fait appel à la théorie ancrée et à l’analyse critique du discours pour examiner les « résumés d’incidents » des YSS, publiés sur leur page Web relative à la sécurité communautaire, ainsi qu’à une analyse de l’*Évaluation des Services de sécurité de l’Université York : Rapport final* réalisé en 2022. Les conclusions présentées dans cet article font état d’un taux d’interaction global d’environ 43 % entre les sans-abri et les YSS sur le campus de l’Université York, et montrent que le passage de la pauvreté à la criminalisation mène à l’arrestation de personnes itinérantes par la police de Toronto. Ces conclusions démontrent qu’il n’y a pas lieu d’accorder aux YSS le pouvoir d’agir en tant qu’agents spéciaux et qu’il faut consulter les personnes ayant une expérience intersectionnelle et vécue de l’itinérance à propos du maintien de l’ordre et des mandataires de la police, comme les YSS.

Mots clés: abolition selon la situation géographique; police communautaire; analyse critique du discours; théorie ancrée; itinérance; Loi sur la santé mentale; police; pauvreté; sécurité; agent spécial; Loi sur l’entrée sans autorisation; personne itinérante

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1. Introduction

In many areas globally, homelessness is an increasing phenomenon. In North America, security services are used to manage issues that are perceived to be related to homelessness (Strathcona Research Group 2005; Bennet 2008; Kennelly 2015). However, there is little literature on policing homelessness on North American university campuses (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 68). This paper constitutes an effort to encourage more dialogue around the issue of policing homelessness by universities. Specifically, this paper considers how campus security responds to homelessness at York University in Toronto, Canada. The argument central to this paper focuses on forming a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness who can make decisions about university policing policies. Universities will continue to grapple with homelessness. However, they ought not to respond with intensified policing of social injustice. As such, this paper is a modest entry into conceptualising facets of these systemic issues. The medium through which this paper’s conceptual work operates is York University’s current revision of its security services.

In December 2022, an internal and external expert review panel released a report detailing many central issues and recommendations concerning York Security Services (YSS). These issues and recommendations included ending racism in law enforcement, developing non-police responses to mental health crises, and defunding and/or de-tasking police services (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 5). Additionally, the report concludes that a “community-centric safety” or a “stakeholder-centric” security model is appropriate for York University. Based on the report’s assertions, I question whether empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act* will lessen policing on the York University campus—a foremost proposal forwarded by the report (54).

In Section 2, I begin by discussing the *York University Security Services Review: Final Report* (“the report”). In Section 3, I give non-exhaustive, definitional explanations of critical discourse analysis and grounded theory. Specifically, I explain how these two research methods are amenable to each other, constituting a relevant mode of blended research in the present context. I use these methods to analyse YSS activities and argue for forming a working group of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness. This working group ought to make decisions about university policing policies. Further, my analysis amounts to an argument against empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision.

In Section 4, I provide an in-depth discussion of the methods used in my research and findings. Specifically, I discuss the rate at which homelessness is penalised through YSS activities and the related concept of a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline. YSS publishes its activities, or “incident summaries,” within Weekly Security Incident Logs on YSS’s Community Safety webpage. Drawing from these incident summaries, I demonstrate an approximately 43% overall incident rate of YSS interacting with, what the report calls “unhoused people.” I then explain how an apparent poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline operates through YSS’s profiling of “unhoused people” as “trespassers” leading to arrest by Toronto police.

In Section 5, I argue for forming a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experi-

ences of homelessness based on the findings reported in Section 4. This group ought to consult on implementing the recommendations made to YSS by the internal and external review panel (the “review panel”). This group ought to also consult on issues beyond the scope of the recommendations made by the review panel. The review panel’s recommendations are based on consultations with what the report calls “equity deserving groups” at York University, gained over one year (8, 33). It is worth noting, however, that although peoples with lived experiences of homelessness comprise an “equity group” discussed by the report, they are not among those consulted (14-15). Importantly, the working group I am arguing for ought to be composed of variously situated peoples with lived experiences of homelessness, including those who interact directly with YSS. The composition of this consultation group is important, given the findings in this paper and that the report is grounded in earlier consultations with various “equity deserving groups.” I finalise this section by arguing against the empowerment of YSS with the *Special Constable* provision.

In Section 6, I conclude by summarising the pertinent information. The purpose of this summary is to facilitate easier use of this research for potential policy planning at York University and other educational institutions deliberating the continued use of police-proxy security services.

2. Context

This paper draws inspiration from Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s conceptualisation of “abolition geographies” (2023, 480). According to Gilmore, abolition geographies consist of how peoples make provisional freedom, as they imagine their way *home*, against racial capitalism’s self-valorising processes of partitioning and repartitioning (491). Abolition geographies explain how variously situated and ordinary people repeat and re-repeat their capacities, materialities, and lineages to continuously change themselves and their worlds (490-491). Though a constrained and imperfect, yet capacious, process, abolition geographies are an antagonistic contradiction, and a collective negation, of “carceral geographies.” Gilmore uses the term “carceral geographies” to “renovate and make critical what *abolition* is all about” (480). She does this because, by her estimation, the conceptual use of the term “Prison-Industrial-Complex” (PIC) has atrophied instead of expanding our imaginative understanding of both abolitionist and carceral processes of place-making. Instead, she advances a recentering of abolition geographies as shifting reclamations over and above carceral geographies.

At the time of writing, this research intervenes in YSS’s current security model as discussed in *York University Security Services Review: Final Report*, which was produced by the review panel. The report was published publicly on York University’s Community Safety webpage in December 2022, based on the review conducted for the report over that same year. According to the report (2022), the internal and external review panel was composed of York University faculty, staff, and an external consultant (5). Several options for York University-affiliated consultations were also considered by the review panel for the report, including “written submissions, focus-group meetings, and [virtual] town halls, with offerings in bilingual and accessible formats” (12). When I refer to “university affiliates” in this paper, I am referring to individuals broadly involved with the university, such as on-campus business owners, students, faculty, YSS officials, “unhoused people,” student representative groups, faculty groups, maintenance and facilities groups, and administrative groups—including YSS.

Over 38 York University group consultations were conducted for the report. However, again, no housing-related groups who identify as being composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness were consulted, although the report (2022) does recommend commencing further consultations and the formation of various working bodies with “equity deserving groups” (71-72). In the report, “unhoused people” are an “equity deserving group” (14-15, 88). The report also affirms that the review and

resulting report are guided by intersectionality, decolonisation, and an “anti-racism, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion lens” (5, 13) and provides some relevant contextual information and definitional explanations to undergird this assertion.

According to the report (2022), a review of YSS’s current security model emerged in response to a “history of concerns from equity deserving groups about security activity at York University” (5). As such, York University’s Community Safety Department was formed in 2016 in conjunction with YSS. In 2019, the Community Safety Department developed a *Strategic Plan*, identifying themes and areas to improve YSS, including an overarching review of YSS. Additionally, the *Action Plan on Black Inclusion: A Living Document for Action* was produced following consultations about anti-Black racism with Black community members at York University in 2020. These consultations and the action plan also commit York University to a review of campus security, including exploring alternative models for community safety. Notably, a safety audit was also conducted at York University by the anti-gender-based violence/anti-intimate partner violence/anti-domestic violence organisation METRAC. This audit called for a community safety approach in 2010, which later led to the formation of the Community Safety Department at York University (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 8-10).

Although the 123-page report covers many topics, its focus can be broadly summarised as reflecting wider societal concerns with law enforcement (5) and is situated within the larger political climate of the Black Lives Matter movement (23). The following three overarching demands are central in the report:

- A demand to end racism in law enforcement;
- A demand to develop non-police-only frontline responses for mental health crises; and,
- A demand to defund or de-task police services and develop more comprehensive safety responses (5).

Additionally, the report identifies and details several central themes and issues arising from consultations with York University affiliates. These themes and issues inform the report’s overall structure, including the three overarching demands described above. The objective or conclusive result of the report centres on providing recommendations to transition YSS toward a “community-centric safety” or a “stakeholder-centric” security model, which is premised broadly on a “commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and decolonization and the need to serve a highly diverse university community” (6).

According to the report (2022, 38), a “community-centric safety” or a “stakeholder-centric” security model differs from a “law enforcement” or “police-centric” security model. As the report clarifies, “A law enforcement model assigns all manner of campus safety responsibilities to individuals with an enforcement or policing orientation” (40). The report admits that, although YSS is not a police service, “its structure and culture adhere to many police-like patterns of organization” (38). For instance, the entire YSS management team is composed of “individuals with extensive policing backgrounds and appear to have been recruited with this background and experience in mind” (39). Additionally, all YSS officials must have at least a security-guard licence before employment and the “extensive reliance on actual police to support ... security work reinforces the perception that law enforcement best characterizes York’s security model” (39).

According to the report (2022), reliance on Toronto police has increased over the past four calendar years (18-19), with an average of 9.12% of security incidents between 2018 and 2022 involving police (18). This rate of police involvement on the York University campus is disproportionately high relative to all

other universities and colleges in Ontario (17, 41, 102). Although, it is worth keeping in mind that some scholars and activists argue that any rate of police involvement is too high (Khan and Newbold 2018; Maynard 2017; Cole 2020; Palmater 2022).

Moreover, on average, approximately 40% of activity involving police on campus is conducted under the *Mental Health Act* (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 20). Broadly, the *Mental Health Act* (1990) governs the functions of psychiatric facilities in Ontario and outlines the conditions under which police can commit individuals to undergo psychiatric examinations by a physician (Canadian Mental Health Association 2023). YSS, Toronto police, and other York University affiliates can initiate incident reports under the *Mental Health Act*. They can initiate these reports because every incident on campus made aware to YSS is recorded, categorised, and acted on by YSS—i.e., YSS *calls* Toronto police for incidents understood as constituting a mental health crisis.

YSS officials cannot legally apprehend individuals experiencing a mental health crisis under the *Mental Health Act* and, therefore, they respond by calling-in Toronto police. This does not mean that YSS officials cannot apprehend individuals. Indeed, arrests can be made through YSS “interventions.” However, these “interventions” cannot be conducted under the *Mental Health Act*. Nonetheless, “interventions” can be made under the provision of other acts, for example, the *Trespass to Property Act* and many other York University policies and procedures (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 18-19). The *Trespass to Property Act* (1990) empowers land “owners” to issue written or oral notice to unwanted individuals, to arrest and detain individuals, and to call the police for the immediate arrest of individuals (Ontario Federation of Agriculture 2021).

According to the report (2022), YSS’s inability to apprehend individuals under the *Mental Health Act* and Toronto police’s disproportionate presence on the York University campus have a common cause (17-19). Namely, unlike other educational institutions in Ontario, York University does not employ “special constables” under the controversial *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*; nor does York University contract full-time private security guard agencies (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 16-19). The *Special Constable* provision empowers institutional entities with many of the same powers as the Ontario police (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 86; Ontario Special Constable Association: Special Constables in Ontario n.d.). As such, with the *Special Constable* provision in place, YSS could become empowered to apprehend individuals under the *Mental Health Act*, thus, “reducing” police presence on the York University campus (i.e., by empowering YSS as *de facto* police).

The report does not offer a definitive position as to whether YSS officials ought to be empowered under the Special Constable provision of the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act. Rather, the dilemma is characterised as follows: “The disproportionate involvement of police on campus, which is an issue of concern for some equity deserving groups, can only significantly be reduced by involving some security staff empowered with special constable powers, which itself is also a concern for some equity deserving groups” (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 53-54 emphasis mine). The report (2022) resolves that York University should proceed cautiously with this dilemma and a safety resolution needs to be identified with “the buy in of the entire University community and especially equity deserving groups” (53). As such, the report offers “Recommendation 1.8. York should conduct a focused review and consultation to consider limited deployment of security staff with enhanced special constable powers” (54).

By virtue of its medium, the report can only go so far as to determine that a “community-centric safety” or “stakeholder-centric” security model is better suited to York University and offer recommendations to aid in achieving this end. Beyond the recommendations to achieve a “community-centric safety” or “stake-

holder-centric” security model, the report offers information from historical and report-based research, statistical analysis, and consultations conducted with various groups at York University. This information is offered because the function of the report is to do just that: *report*. This function is important to consider because it highlights that the recommendations in the report occupy the tenuous position of being useful or not useful, to various degrees, depending on the groups or peoples who choose to continue advocating for or against them.

According to the information presented in the report, York University and its affiliates may yet choose to implement a “community-centric safety” or “stakeholder-centric” model while empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision. Especially given that Recommendation 1.8 entertains the possibility of at least *some* YSS officials being empowered as “special constables.” However, this recommendation is a false dilemma: police presence on campus cannot *only* be significantly reduced by empowering some YSS officials with “special constable” powers, especially insofar as there is a possibility of exploring alternative means for reducing police presence on campus. A working group of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness may help determine these alternatives.

3. Methodology

To form my argument, this research uses critical discourse analysis and grounded theory methodologies. In the following, I give non-exhaustive, definitional explanations of these methodologies. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, vii), grounded theory “improve[s] social scientists’s capacities for generating theor[ies] [and conceptual frameworks] that will be relevant to their research.” Rather than verifying existing theories, grounded theory is concerned with theory creation through the analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 2016). Typically, objectivist grounded theorists have held that the canons of rigorous science ought to be retained (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 4). However, pragmatist grounded theorists assert that these canons require *redefinition* to “fit the realities of qualitative research and the complexities of social phenomena” (4). A redefinition of canons can mean a redefinition of their *concepts*, such as significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalisability, consistency, reproducibility, precision, and verification. However, this mode of redefinition is not necessarily foremost for grounded theorists working from more pragmatic perspectives. Rather, grounded theory can be *procedural*, developing unique integrated concepts to explain the social phenomena under study. In other words, grounded theory can explain redefinitions of canonical concepts, such as those in the above. Or it can *describe* the application of subsequent redefined iterations (of original redefined concepts). It is the latter approach that the research under discussion takes, primarily through the blending of grounded theory with critical discourse analysis.

From a pragmatist perspective, Corbin and Strauss (1990, 4) assert that there are two *principles* typical of grounded theory. First, phenomena are not understood as static. Rather, they are iterative relative to continuously changing conditions (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). Therefore, “an important component of the [grounded theory] method is to build change, through process, into the method” (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 5). Second, grounded theory rejects the determinism/non-determinism dichotomy. Rather, “actors are seen as having, though not always utilizing, the means of controlling their destinies by their responses to conditions” (5). Here, actors make relatively accurate choices according to their perceptions about their options. Therefore, “grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions” (5).

These two grounded theory principles—(1) phenomena as changing and (2) rejecting the determinism/non-determinism binary—blend well with the two objectives of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with surveying the structures, strategies, and properties of transdisciplinary

texts, language, and other discursive and communicative forms, all of which give rise to modes of social power, injustice, and resistance (Katz et al. 2020; Wong 2016; El-Lahib 2016; van Dijk 1993). In practice, critical discourse analysts identify cues within a discursive medium that prime a reader “to view the world in one way or another, and consequently to take action in one direction or another” (Katz et al. 2020, 603). As such, critical discourse analysis can function as a *pre-emptive* measure by giving coherence to the “ideological white noise” embedded with a discursive piece (603). However, critical discourse analysis is also *interpretive* since it is motivated by current social issues oriented towards influencing change. Generally speaking, critical discourse analysts take an explicit stance relative to value and action with the aim of “a) critiquing discursive moves that undermine these goals; and b) mitigating future harms” (603). These processes may be complemented by drawing on social and cultural theory (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002) and considering socio-political, racial, and economic contexts.

The first objective of critical discourse analysis, pre-emptive coherence, is amenable to the first principle of grounded theory, which embraces change as iteratively ubiquitous to its methods. As such, when critical discourse analysis acts as a pre-emptive (or “stopping”) measure by giving coherence to the “ideological white noise” embedded within a given discursive piece (Katz et al. 2020, 603), this forces the change that grounded theorists are concerned with. In other words, through a close reading of a communicative form, critical discourse analysis constitutes an *interruption* to the trajectory of a given discursive piece.

In this way, the second objective of critical discourse analysis, interpretation, lends itself to the second principle of grounded theory: rejecting a deterministic/non-deterministic binary. Recall that critical discourse analysis not only pre-emptively interrupts but also provides an iterative spin. That is, critical discourse analysis confounds certain narrative pathways grounded in nascent determinism *through* interpretation. In other words, critical discourse analysis proffers another story or narrative medium instead of continuing to say: “This is how things are, and they have always been this way.”

However, in the same vein, any indication of a non-deterministic view is also thwarted. Critical discourse analysis is transparent about its socio-political goals. As such, there is no replacing one truth with another or hiding behind abstraction. There are no non-deterministic leanings about critical discourse analysis; critical discourse analysis is not random. Instead, critical discourse analysis says: “Here is yet another interpretation, another layer, and it is value-laden and oriented toward matters of socio-political, racial, and economic justice.”

The research in this paper blends grounded theory and critical discourse analysis. It borrows the rigour and redefinition inherent to theory creation of grounded theory and the interpretive socio-political goals of critical discourse analysis. Moreover, it presents an amendable amalgam of methodologies that is appropriate for the qualitative phenomena under study, while also aiming toward socio-political change.

4. Findings

This research analyses 1,698 YSS incident summaries between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023. Incident summaries appear in Weekly Security Incident Logs publicly available on the YSS Community Safety website. This research uses open coding to derive a series of commonly appearing categories and subcategories or codes arising from YSS’s incident summaries. Open coding is concerned with comparing interactions for similarities and differences and grouping them into categories and subcategories under conceptual labels (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 12). Grouped categories and subcategories are then used to analyse further the data under study, i.e., the initial 1,698 incident summaries. Following open coding, my analysis leads to 733 unique incidents that broadly pertain to homelessness, as found within the initial 1,698 YSS incident summaries.

More specifically, all 733 instances—or an average of approximately 43% of all 1,698 incident summaries analysed—use *anti-homelessness* or *anti-poverty* coded language. What I mean by “anti-homelessness” or “anti-poverty” coded language is a stigmatising language that YSS uses to profile “unhoused people” and their related activities on the York University campus. For instance, a more recognisable example might be a stigmatising report of “panhandling.” However, less apparent instances also appear within the summaries.

For example, an incident summary may document an individual “acting in a concerning manner,” which appears comparatively vague to a report of “panhandling.” Additionally, this descriptor could refer to peoples who are “housed,” “unhoused,” or somewhere in between, or anyone else labelled non-normative for that matter. Indeed, research indicates that feminised, racialised, ethnicised, disabled, queer, and trans peoples are disproportionately and unjustly criminalised (Cohen 1997; Kinsman and Gentile 2010; Ware et al. 2014; Sepulveda 2020). Moreover, recall that the report responds to concerns from “equity deserving groups,” specifically Black and racialised peoples (York University 2021; Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022). And York University is located near the Jane and Finch community, which is understood as a disproportionately and inaccurately criminalised Black and under-resourced/low-income community (Tobias and Joseph 2018, 449; The Jane and Finch Community Research Partnership, 2021; Rebeena 2024). As such, this research recognises that a significant proportion of the 733 incidents discussed likely pertain to racialised peoples with intersectional experiences. That is, there is a history of anti-Black racism in North America, including at York University (Paradkar 2020; The Fifth Estate 2021; Rosen 2023), which is likely reflected in YSS’s data.

However, YSS’s incident summaries are limiting because they do not provide demographic indicators apart from subjective and unreliable gender labels determined by YSS. As such, my analysis is constitutive of an interpretation of incident summaries and attempts a forced change through an explicit stance to bring peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness into the conversation. That is, the current research seeks to understand the relevant conditions around York University concerning homelessness, determining how YSS responds to contextual changes and how they may conceive of their actions relative to these changes. In other words, this research coheres with critical discourse analysis and grounded theory thinking since it interprets phenomena as subject to continuously shifting conditions.

Of note, an admitted limitation of engaging with “face-less” data and a report that understands intersectionality through the logic of “equity deserving groups,” is that this paper’s discussion tends to portray peoples with lived experiences of homelessness as relatively homogeneous. However, while the report’s language is used in this paper, its limited deployment of intersectionality is contested, and it is recognised that there is no agreed-upon terminology from within lived experience communities. As such, the terms “unhoused” and “people with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness” are used in this research but are admittedly insufficient placeholders.

To mitigate some of the issues of “face-less” data, I analyse less obvious incident summaries—such as reports of “acting in a concerning manner”—holistically within the context of their entire log. As before, a summary may contain other stigmatising and co-constitutive cues that refer to an unhoused person, such as their location (e.g., in a stairwell), a further description of what they are doing (e.g., sleeping), the time of the incident (e.g., 1:00 am), whether they were cautioned or issued a trespass notice, or if they were forcibly removed from campus. That said, the log for a given summary can also provide context. For example, if a summary seems somewhat ambiguous but appears within a given log category (e.g., *Trespass to Property Act*), this can also be informative, especially since, through the iterative analysis I conducted, it became apparent that YSS often annexes unhoused people to the trespassing category in the logs.

Given the variability of incident summaries within these logs, creating a unique data set that specifically

tracks anti-homelessness or anti-poverty coded language was necessary. The specified data set includes a spreadsheet of colour-coded subcategories or codes and analysis memos. Analysis memos are an important grounded theory tool and are necessary for tracking changes arising within incident summaries across time. Memos are also necessary for conducting a comparative analysis that can help mitigate bias (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 9). Ultimately, creating a specified data set makes it possible to organise and conduct a deeper analysis of YSS's activities, particularly those concerning unhoused people.

To create a unique data set, I observed some common categories within the initial 1,698 incident summaries. Categories observed pertain to YSS-inflicted themes of deviance and otherness—i.e., stigma. For instance, I noted the following deviance-themed categories in YSS incident summaries: (1) action-based deviance, (2) psychosomatic deviance, and (3) instances of deviant presence. *Action-based deviance* often presents as reports and removals of individuals who are loitering, smoking, or sleeping in university stairwells, basements, and washrooms. *Psychosomatic deviance*, as recorded by YSS, commonly pertains to individuals causing a disturbance, acting in a concerning manner, acting belligerent, or experiencing a medical crisis. *Deviant presence* appears in YSS incident summaries as harm reduction materials, cigarette butts, alcohol containers, garbage, and other personal items strewn in a stairwell, basement, or washroom.

Importantly, these are not categories that I perceive as deviant. YSS records these instances as deviant, especially given other kinds of stigmatising language paired with these three categories. For instance, a fourth category that became apparent during analysis is the demarcation between *persons language* versus *anti-persons language*. That is, language that is othering due to negation. To demonstrate, examples of persons language might include terms such as: community member, guest, visitor, family member, driver, patron, etc. In contrast, anti-persons language may include terms such as: previously trespassed non-community member, non-community member, unknown individual, known trespasser, former community member, and so forth.

Using these four overarching categories, I created six subcategories or codes to re-analyse the initial 1,698 YSS incident summaries and formulate a unique data set. I chose subcategories and code components based on common terms and comparative points of interest. For example, the term “previously trespassed non-community member” occurs more frequently than “known trespasser.” An example of a comparative point of interest includes focusing on police involvement, without the inclusion of other “policing oriented” or carceral entities such as the Toronto Fire Department, emergency responders, Toronto Transit Commission “special constables,” and other Toronto city workers. Approximately 3% of incident reports between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023, involve police. This percentage is different from the percentage the report conveys, which averages 9.12% over the last four years (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 18). Besides the sample size, the difference can be explained (at least in part) by variations in estimated occurrences. Whereas the report conveys every instance of police involvement occurring in incident summaries, I only count instances where police respond without the presence of other officials. Estimated occurrences and percentages of each subcategory or code from the initial 1,698 incident summary pool are bracketed and documented in Table 1.

Subcategory	Occurrence	Proportion
previously trespassed + non-community member + deviance themes	377	22%
non-community member + deviance themes	139	8%
unknown persons or former community members + deviance themes	199	7%
groups + deviance themes	87	5%
deviance themes only	11	1%
police + deviance themes	43	3%
Total (Excluding double-counts)	733	43.17%

Table 1: Estimated occurrence and proportion (percentage) of each subcategory (code) from a corpus of 1,698 incidents reported between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023.

Using these subcategories or codes, 733 of 1,698 incident summaries are identified that appear to involve unhoused people and YSS. Note that the “total” row in Table 1 is not merely a summary of the “occurrence” and “proportion” columns because some instances are counted in multiple categories. For example, a single incident summary that includes both a subcategory or code composed of “non-community member” + “deviance themes” *and* “police” + “deviance themes” would be counted once toward the total since it is documented as a single event by YSS. All 733 instances use anti-homelessness or anti-poverty coded language. These 733 instances constitute a unique data set that tracks YSS’s profiling of unhoused people at York University. In plain language, my analysis indicates that approximately 43% of all YSS activity between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023, consists of penalising homelessness on the York University campus.

Though grounded theory primarily focuses on phenomena and not tracking divergent categories of individuals (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 8-9), critical discourse analysis is explicitly concerned with group dynamics (van Dijk 1993). Blending critical discourse analysis with grounded theory makes sense for this kind of research and the purposes of accurate data collection precisely because I am interested in tracking phenomena directly tied to individuals. For instance, a subcategory or code that combines the categories of “previously trespassed non-community member” with “deviance themes” appears to capture incidents that involve unhoused people with a higher degree of accuracy than more ambiguous cases. More ambiguous cases, for example, may include the categorical blending of “groups” with “deviance themes” or, simply, “deviance themes only”—i.e., without any individual(s). For instance, items used for basic living, such as clothing and sleep gear, left in a washroom overnight.

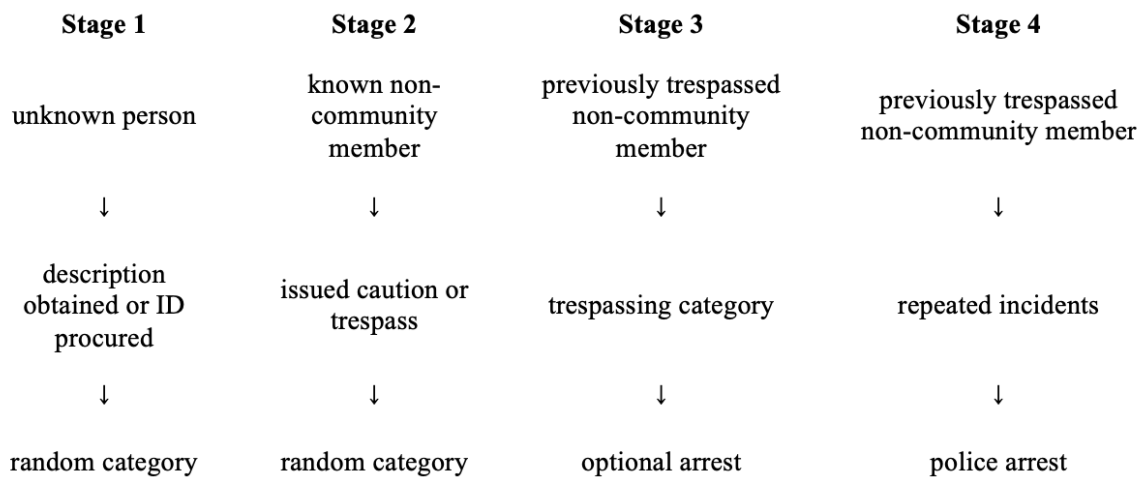
Blending critical discourse analysis with grounded theory also makes sense for observing phenomena about how YSS understands and conducts *their* interactions with unhoused people. That is, through critical discourse analysis, a power-laden anti-homeless or anti-poverty story arises. From a grounded theory perspective, that story appears as a replicating phenomenon, especially given the relevant conditions of how YSS actors respond to changing conditions of homelessness and the consequences of their actions (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 5). Alternatively, conceptualising these changes through a blended approach makes apparent the phenomenon of a *poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline*.

In broad strokes, an analysis of multiple incident summaries within Weekly Security Incident Logs, with the use of subcategories or codes garnered from open coding, exhibits a pattern. During the first stage, an individual present on campus may come to be profiled as unhoused or an “anti-person” by YSS. Cohesive with the information given in the report (2022, 30), it seems such an individual is then induced to provide identification of some kind. Alternatively, perhaps, YSS obtains a description of the individual, given that unhoused people may not have access to identification cards. Next, an individual is evidently placed under a YSS log category that best describes the incident according to YSS.

During the second stage, or upon a second encounter, it seems YSS will “know” an individual, i.e., through identification, and they become labelled as a “known non-community member” or just “non-community member.” YSS issues caution or trespass notices to individuals with this label, in accordance with the *Trespass to Property Act* (1990). These individuals are then logged under a category of YSS’s choosing.

During the third stage or encounter, an identified and known individual becomes labelled as a “previously trespassed non-community member.” Such an individual is evidently designated within YSS logs’s *Trespass to Property Act*. Once a *Trespass to Property Act* (1990) is invoked, arrests are at the discretion of YSS, whether by calling-in Toronto police or through YSS “interventions” (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 19). “Interventions” are YSS-speak for arrests (20) although YSS often appears to “escort” or remove unhoused people off campus during this stage.

However, during the fourth stage, it seems any subsequent encounters result in an individual, labelled as a “previously trespassed non-community member,” being viewed as consistently trespassing on the York University campus. Within the incident summaries, this stage appears as the poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline’s endpoint, where individuals effectively exit the pipeline via Toronto police. At York University, Toronto police responses to the *Trespass to Property Act* (1990) result in custody or arrest unless an individual “flees” or “leaves” before police arrival (The York University Community Safety Department. n.d). To summarise, a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline within YSS Weekly Security Incident Logs appears to follow this pattern:



5. Discussion

It is possible that a sample size of 1,698 YSS incident summaries over seven months is insufficient to determine conclusively that a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline exists at York University. Certainly, additional data may need to be collected and analysed to develop a more nuanced depiction of the relations between YSS and unhoused people at York University. Additional data collection can, of course, arise from sources beyond YSS Weekly Security Incident Logs. The tentative conclusion of this paper, however, gives relevant reasons to consult peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness on the present research and any further related research.

At the very least, this research points to unhoused people interacting with Toronto police and a definitively carceral YSS. Recall, the report (2022) affirms that “law enforcement best characterizes York’s security model” (39). As such, YSS interacting with any number of unhoused people is ultimately untenable, especially given the inequitable power dynamics existing between unhoused people, YSS officials, and police. To be sure, however, an approximate 43% average rate of YSS involvement with unhoused people within one academic year is resolutely unacceptable. Suppose this percentage is representative of the socio-political, racial, and economic climate at York University. In that case, it is likely that unhoused people compose one of the largest “equity deserving groups” (79) subject to YSS law enforcement. This is a problem because the report (2022) admits that unhoused people are an “equity deserving group” (14-15) but does not consult or include the perspectives of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness.

Moreover, recall that, compared to other educational institutions in Ontario that do utilise the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*, York University experiences a disproportionately high rate of external police involvement (17, 41). The report (2022) asserts that, over four years, an “average of 9.12 percent of security incidents involved police” (18)—a percentage that is incommensurate when compared to other Ontario educational institutions. Approximately 40% of this activity falls under the *Mental Health Act* (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 20). Under the *Mental Health Act* (1990), anyone experiencing a mental health crisis can be immediately apprehended by Toronto police. This 9.12% rate of police involvement is compounded by an approximate 43% rate of unhoused-penalising YSS activity, amounting to a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline. In short, the “equity deserving group,” which I have been referring to as unhoused people or peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness, is subject to an inordinate amount of policing at York University.

Given that unhoused people are an “equity deserving group” that is subject to YSS and Toronto police inflicted harms, it is problematic that this “group” was not consulted during the making of the report and its recommendations. The report decisively focuses on over-policing at York University from Toronto police and the law enforcement quality of YSS. However, it does not consult any peoples from this “equity deserving group.” As such, I suggest that some effort at York University be directed toward cultivating a working group of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness, including those interacting directly with YSS and police. This group ought to be involved in determining the shape, structure, culture, and fate of YSS.

This response appears particularly pertinent given the recommendations conveyed in the report, specifically that YSS officials ought to become empowered under the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*. This measure will certainly affect unhoused people and peoples in the immediate and surrounding areas (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 79). Recall that the report conveys correlations between YSS “special constables” and the reduction of police presence on the York University campus. However, it remains dubious whether such a prophylactic meas-

ure will result in any of the projections conveyed in the report. Moreover, the long-term implications of the *Special Constable* provision may invariably outweigh any short-term benefits, if there are indeed any at all. Ultimately, employing this provision means equipping an already “law enforcement”-oriented YSS with similar powers to that of Toronto police.

The report primarily functions to convey consultation data and provide recommendations based on these data for transitioning YSS to a “community-centric safety” or a “stakeholder-centric” security model. However, this function makes it such that the report is subject to a certain degree of *equivocation* on some important issues; for instance, an overarching concern regarding whether or not YSS more closely approximates police. Though the report (2022) asserts that YSS is definitively aligned with “law enforcement” (39-40), it also provides data that *differentiate* YSS from police. For example, the report offers differing “intervention” rates between Toronto police and YSS from data collected between 2018 and 2021. These data indicate more Toronto police “interventions” than YSS “interventions.” However, these data are then taken a step further, interpreted as signifying a qualitative difference between police “interventions” and YSS “interventions.” This is to say, a material difference between police “law enforcement” and YSS “law enforcement.” This kind of semantic equivocation—i.e., whether YSS is “police-like” or not—has implications for important decisions at York University, for instance, whether YSS ought to be empowered with the *Special Constable* provision.

However, Black feminist, transformative justice and abolitionist scholar-activism indicate that differentiations, such as the ones given in the report, are superficial and inaccurate portrayals of systemic injustice. These differentiations are superficial and inaccurate because police and security do not operate in respective vacuums. Rather, they are enmeshed within carceral geographies, as Gilmore (2023) calls them. Recall that carceral geographies are described by Gilmore (2023, 480) as that which is negated through abolition geographies. Abolition geographies are capacious. As such, I use abolition geographies in conjunction with the Critical Resistance definition of the Prison-Industrial-Complex (PIC) since I think the latter concept has some utility.

According to Critical Resistance, the PIC consists of “the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems” (Critical Resistance 2024). The neoliberal North American university is a paradigmatic example of a punishing institution representing government and industry interests (Althusser 2001, 85–126; Oparah and Okazawa-Rey 2009, 17-35; Ahmed 2019, 103-134). As such, the oscillation and massification of policing *simpliciter*, through YSS and in conjunction with Toronto police, makes sense within PIC-thinking or carceral geographies. Additionally, the data I discuss in this paper further bolster that there is little substantive difference between YSS and Toronto police, especially given YSS’s “police-like” behaviours, including the extensive surveillance, profiling, documentation, and spatial-material control of unhoused people. This research, combined with the report’s admittance of a “police-like” quality to YSS, despite a degree of equivocation, gives reason to conclude that YSS is most certainly a policing entity or a “police-proxy.”

Additionally, what the report mentions but leaves underdeveloped is *how* YSS interacts with Toronto police. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, one way is through the logic conveyed in the report: the most suitable way to substantially decrease police involvement on the York University campus is to empower YSS with the *Special Constable* provision (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 54) specifically so that YSS will no longer “need” to call Toronto police for the “incidents” they determine.

However, YSS’s control relative to Toronto police appears to have been overestimated in this equation. Even if we suppose that YSS discontinues calling-in Toronto police as “special constables,” it does not follow that Toronto police will stop coming to the York University campus or the surrounding areas. I do not

mean that it does not matter whether YSS calls the police or not—it does matter. Rather, Toronto police already over-police the area, specifically the nearby Jane and Finch community, due to the criminalisation of race and poverty (GoPaul 2023). It is precisely for this reason, and the fact that York University affiliates are highly diverse (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 8), that YSS ought not to call the police. Notably, however, Toronto police have no reason not to act with impunity, relative to any area. Indeed, it appears impunity is their mandate (Goldhawke 2020; Brockbank 2023; Fagan 2024) and, certainly, some areas and peoples are more impacted by police presence than others (Donahue 2015; Gilmore 2017; Riddle 2020). This is to say, there is little guarantee that Toronto police will view the York University and surrounding areas differently following the instantiation of the *Special Constable* provision. It seems overly ambitious to assume that “special constables” constitute a limit on Toronto police, especially when YSS has contributed to over-policing in the area for quite some time. According to Ruha Benjamin (2019, 77-84), police rely extensively on technology and data sciences to achieve their purported purposes. If there is data precedent of a “high incident” area—say, through multiple 911 calls from YSS—police will increasingly return there. This interplay between reliance on data and policing results in the effective production of “crime” since looking for “crime” and finding it is perpetually circular (Benjamin 2019, 77-84). In other words, the conditions have been set for Toronto police, not for those proximate to York University.

These conditions, informed by digital technologies, are especially relevant since “special constables” have access to the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database. The CPIC is a “national information-sharing system that links criminal justice and law enforcement partners across Canada and internationally” (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 34-35). The problem is that databases, even the supposedly secure ones, are not infallible, and those who input information may be biased. For instance, in 2011, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada conducted an audit of selected Royal Canadian Mounted Police operational databases and found that the CPIC contains “extensive sensitive personal information that, if improperly used or disclosed, could have significant impact on the rights and freedoms of individuals as well their reputations, employability and safety” (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada 2011, 3-4). Specifically, the audit showed that CPIC data has been subject to several security breaches, including improper police agency dissemination of convictions, discharges, and pardons to employers (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada 2011, 3-4). Moreover, several scholars and activists have pointed out that discriminatory information input can follow people across algorithms and platforms through breaches, affecting them in other areas of their lives (O’Neil 2016; Coombes et al. 2022; McQuillan, 2022). In other words, not only do databases encourage policing in specified areas, they also create a context whereby penalties can follow a person digitally. That is, the collaborative interplay between “special constables,” Toronto police, and data technology can constitute the production of “crime” that Benjamin (2019, 77-84) discusses.

It is worth mentioning that though YSS is predominantly implicated in the calling-in of Toronto police, they are not alone in this endeavour. Students, faculty, facilities workers, people at on-campus businesses, and so forth can also make independent calls to the police. This does not mean that one ought not to take YSS’s role in calling police on campus seriously. YSS is centralised specifically to find, document, and report “incidents” in the interest of York University. As such, it is highly unlikely that individual persons outweigh the impacts that YSS has on the area, including calls to police, among other harms. Notably, the report (2022) indicates that, until 2021, calling the police has been left to the discretion of YSS officials. However, at the time of writing, officials call-in police only when they perceive an “imminent concern for safety” or obtain “supervisor” permission (52). The report does not indicate how an “imminent concern for safety” is standardised or how consistently YSS adheres to this measure; nor does it explain which persons at York University constitute a “supervisor” under any given circumstance. As such, it is possible that Toronto police are being called by both individual YSS officials and their supervisors—some of whom may

be other administrative bodies at York University apart from YSS. Therefore, it is possible that Toronto police presence may be reduced by way of York University administration ceasing and sanctioning the calling of police onto campus.

Nonetheless, it would be irresponsible to neglect mention of York affiliate involvement with YSS and police. Indeed, curbing policing around campus is neither the sole responsibility nor the purview of YSS. YSS is ill-equipped to respond to the needs of any community and likely ought not exist. However, YSS “special constables” certainly cannot reduce policing on or around the York University campus. Indeed, the report’s shrewd acumen that policing can be substantially reduced through the *Special Constable* provision is unsustainable and an affront to communities interacting with York University, ones actively working against carceral geographies on an ongoing, day-to-day, and lived-experience basis. As such, it seems impulsive to conclude that empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision will lessen policing on the York University campus and surrounding areas.

6. Conclusion

This paper argues for creating a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness, including those who have interacted directly with York Security Services. This group’s purpose is to consult on implementing the recommendations made to YSS by an internal and external expert review panel, submitted and published in December 2022. Beyond consulting on the implementation of these pre-established recommendations, this group can also consult on the shape, structure, culture, and fate of YSS. This working group ought to be majority-led and majority-representative and be financially well compensated to avoid performative labour done for York University.

Consulting on campus policing is especially relevant since, on average, approximately 43% of all YSS activity involves penalising unhoused people. Additionally, a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline seems apparent at York University, leading to the arrest of unhoused people by Toronto police. As I have described here, a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline affects unhoused people. However, this problem also affects different people in various ways. A poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline points to ongoing issues *and* indicates further issues that can arise following the potential implementation of the *Special Constable* provision under the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*.

Notably, although unhoused people comprise a large “equity deserving group” which interacts with YSS, they were not among those consulted during reviews conducted for the *York University Security Services Review: Final Report*. This lack of inclusion is despite the fact that several components of the report advance a community approach to restructuring YSS through an intersectional, decolonial, “anti-racism, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion lens” (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 5, 6, 12, 38, 57-58). Based on these principles in the report, a community approach to restructuring includes contributions from “equity deserving groups” (34, 41, 54). And yet, for all intents and purposes, York University, the review, and the report have neglected substantive engagement with “unhoused people.” Peoples with intersectional, lived experiences ought to be involved in any decisions regarding policing. Certainly, those involved in decision-making efforts may decide that policing, including YSS policing, be abolished. Peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness can be and are leaders and decision-makers in ongoing and collective efforts to defund, dismantle, and abolish police.

Ordered according to racial capitalism, the utter abandonment of people with intersectional, lived experience constitutes the partitioning and repartitioning logic of carceral geographies, as explained by Gilmore (2023). As such, any liberatory efforts must remain cognisant of potential recapitulations of these logics.

Specifically, seizing on available capacities ought not to devolve into “the problem of innocence” (Gilmore 2023, 482-448). This problem partitions some as “vulnerable enough,” and so *undeserving* of criminalisation, relative to some more *criminally deserving* “other” (Gilmore 2023, 482-488). According to Gilmore (2023), such distinctions can lead to “saturation policing,” such as “stop-and-frisk; broken windows; and various types of so-called “community policing”” (486); and “police humanitarianisms,” which “target... vulnerable people with goods and services that in fact everybody needs—especially everybody who is poor” (Gilmore 2023, 487)—yet, these needs are only ever offered through carceral collaborations that perpetuate the partitions disputed in the first place. Indeed, the “community-centric safety” or “stakeholder-centric” security models discussed in this paper constitute a form of saturation policing, obscuring the “unhoused other.” As such, peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness ought to be wise to carceral subsumptions into mechanisms of saturation policing and police humanitarian tactics.

Responses to poverty and homelessness continue to be tenuous in many areas globally. Therefore, meaningfully responding to these issues and their intersecting phenomena requires genuine engagement with peoples who have intersectional, lived experiences, not policing. Policing and police budgets often exacerbate issues related to poverty and homelessness (Zarum 2020; SURJ et al. 2024; SHJN 2024). This exacerbation is reflected in the socio-political, racial, and economic climate in many areas, including Toronto and York University (Green 2023; York University Staff Association/Association Du Personnel De L’Université York, n.d; Cole 2023). As such, this paper aims to contribute to an ongoing, multi-issue, variously localised effort to involve lived experience peoples in decision-making processes, especially decisions regarding policing.

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