FOR THE POWER OF **SHE**

Diasporic Space: Black Women, Storytelling and Performance

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Black women have spent generations in the servitude of white society. Over the centuries, Black women's bodies have become sites of violence, stereotyping, sexual, physical and mental assault. At the same time, Black women were/are expected to be nurturers and caretakers of the world. The legacy of slavery in the Americas has sown the seeds of major identity challenges as Black women continue to find a place to exercise their own creative imagination, care and love.

My research project serves to dismantle the dominant ideology surrounding the mainstream practice of self-care. Using Black Feminist theories, my research project examines how Black women who experience these legacies of violence, access the self-care necessary to overcome this history of violence, decolonize their bodies, reshape their identities and ultimately transform in the spaces in which they live.

Drawing on popular education praxis and strategies from applied drama, I created a three-part arts-based workshop and exhibition and conducted interviews with seven (7) Black women to examine the ways in which they access and practice self-care and how they navigate their Black bodies and Blackness in the white space. From the information obtained from the arts-based workshop and interviews, I created a series of dramatic monologues that are based on their stories and experiences with self-care in the white space.

The purpose of this project is to develop a strategy that can restore to self-care to its political meaning so it can allow for more than self-preservation, enable Black women to continue the process of freeing themselves from the negative constructions placed on their identities and bodies and support them to realize full emancipation.

Keywords: Black women, self-care, slavery, identity, body, space, violence, decolonization, storytelling, applied drama, transformation, survival

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"a deep caring and respect for every other human being, a love that can only derive from secure and positive self-love" – (June Jordan,1995 p.144)

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YOU ARE THE POWER OF SHE

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WA A JOKE TO DE BUTCHER A DET TO DE COW!

1

WHO SHE BE?

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but thrive: and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style" – (Maya Angelou, 2011).

I am a fragile Black woman

Daughter of the Diaspora

The strong, Independent Machine

Skin as dark as my shadow

As smooth as cocoa butter

My accent as thick as honey

I teach

I give

I commit

I transcend

I manifest

I've evolved

And yet… I am hidden.

Invisible.

They say I am hard to love

Different.

That strong, Independent Machine

Can a machine… love themselves?

They say I am filled with anger

Hatred

Self-Loathing

Can a strong, Independent, Angry, Hate-filled, Self loathing Machine

Love themselves?

Can I heal myself?

Care for myself?

Forgive myself?

Love myself?

When will it be my time?

When will I be allowed to freely Love myself?

Where do I even begin….

POINT OF ENTRY

"For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive"
-Audre Lorde, 1978, A Litany of Survival

I am a Black girl. I am a Black Caribbean girl. At the age of six, I migrated to Canada from the small Caribbean Island, St.Kitts, and became a Black Caribbean Canadian woman. My earliest conception of my *Black* self came at the age of seven in the Canadian educational institutions when creating a *self-portrait.* As I picked up the Black pencil crayon provided and began marking the white page in the creation of my self, I saw that *Black* left smudges. It made a mess, tainting the white blank paper. It was harsh against the white paper. It was dirty, leaving marks on the palm of hands. It engulfed my face, covering the features of my eyes. The red of my lips barely visible through the darkness. My smile hidden underneath. The *Black* was everywhere. No matter how hard I erased, the *Black* was still there, lurking as a shadow on the white page. As I struggled to make the portrait, it seemed to me at the time that *Black* was not beautiful. The sight of the charcoal on the white paper made me sad… confused. This was not the self I knew.

As a student within Canadian educational institutions, I experienced the full onslaught of Canadian racisms. The effect of this on my identity caused me tremendous self-doubt. In these Canadian educational institutions, I learned to hate my Blackness. If I had internalized all that was said and done to my self-esteem, I would have thought of myself as an oddity perpetually under scrutiny, ugly and barely human.

In my third year of Undergraduate studies, I was introduced to the practice of self-care. The popular edict on the practice of self-care taught me that if I engaged with physical daily activities, such as; going to the gym, getting a massage, going to the spa, this would equate good health and thus better life experiences. But, this kind of self-care

only created an environment of vanity, luxury and ultimately selfishness for me. Self-care became a practice that I could not engage in as it was a financial burden that was rooted in materialistic short-lived pleasures, that only benefited the outer appearance. Self-care did not result in *better life experiences* as I still faced the same scrutiny and objectification in the Canadian space. I still had to perform the script that enclosed my skin and self. I concluded that self-care as taught in the lecture room that day, was not meant for me. So, I began a new journey of survival of my self.

I searched for Black feminist thinkers who suggested strategies that would enable me to cope personally but also to understand how these racist messages affected Black women and our struggles for social equality. I was driven to locate my self, my roots and, to find a method that would allow me to not only care for my body but begin the process of healing my mind from its mental slavery. On my journey, I came across a quote written by Black feminist thinker, Audre Lorde. It reads, *"*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde 1992 pg.132). I began reading more poetry by Audre Lorde such as; *The Black Unicorn, A Woman Speaks, A Litany for Survival, For Each of You* to name a few. Lorde's work was my introduction to self-love and ultimately self-care. Lorde changed the meaning and practice of self-care, removing it from its materialistic and white consumer roots, and placing it back into my hands. Lorde's work encouraged me to remove the mask of happiness and silence that I wore in public and embrace my own *Litany of Survival,* to reclaim ownership of my *self.* To define and embrace it wholly. To transform it. Lorde's work led me here. I had the knowledge needed, but not the space to execute, practice and share my knowledge with other Black women.

Through the Master of Environmental Studies (MES) program, my sole purpose was to create a space of love and care for Black women, a space where we could be unapologetically and freely our selves. A space where we could share and reclaim our stories and experiences. A space where we could let down our guard, remove our outer masks and connect with other Black women to create social and cultural consciousness. A space where we could continue our journey of transformation in the Canadian space and freely begin to heal, love and care for our bodies and emancipate our minds.

INTRODUCTION

"We have been sad long enough to make this earth either weep or grow fertile. I am an anachronism, a sport, like the bee that was never meant to fly. Science said so. I am not supposed to exist. I carry death around in my body like a condemnation. But I do live. The bee flies. There must be some way to integrate death into living, neither ignoring it nor giving into it"

– Audre Lorde, 1980, The Cancer Journals

As Robin Kelley and others have shown, race and gender are not incidental to the workings of the world in which we live. Race and gender were central to the making of the global system of capitalism and class; and both race and gender remain central to the global systems that organize the way our everyday social lives are lived (Kelley, 2017). Race and gender are a means of structuring power through difference and slavery was one of the most obvious ways in which this took place. Within slavery, Black women were viewed as objects, seen as properties and viewed as less than human. We were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, further down depending on how *kissed by the sun* you are. Over centuries our bodies became sites of violence as a result of the negative effects of white European imperialistic systems.

These negative effects took many forms and one of the forms that it took related to the ideals of beauty. Within this system, white women, both during and after slavery, were presented as the embodiment of beauty that all women should aspire to become. Beautiful, competent women are mainly represented as white. Due to their physical and biological differences in comparison to the ideal white European woman, Black women were considered ugly by Western standards. Black women became bodies that worked and bodies that reproduced children who in turn do more work and make more profits for their owners or employers. In order to accomplish this, they became objects of violence.

After abolition, Black women's bodies continued to signify the place where the memory of colonial violence, history and ideologies, recreated itself in the present and thus future representation and construction of their body and identity. They remained in a constant space which is recreated outside of progressive time. Stuart Hall explains that being Black in Western society is to become "frozen into some timeless zone of the

primitive, unchanging past" (Hall,1994, p.231). Black bodies and Black identities remain in a state of becoming that is located within our otherness in opposition to the Western self (Hall 1994, p.231). Black women, as Fanon has long ago shown, are objectified in the eyes of white society and as a result we internalize this objectification, coming to know ourselves through the way we are seen by more powerful others (Fanon, 1952, p. 9). Black women are represented as superhuman and inhuman, thus eliminating the need for a space for our own self-care and love. In this state, Black women's bodies become signifiers of the coloniality of power. Here I draw on Anibal Quijano's discussion of the coloniality of power in which he argues that colonialization served to assert Eurocentrism and its system as the dominant and centralized power within society and the sole producers of knowledge (Quijano, 2000, p.549). This Eurocentric perspective of knowledge constructs non-Europeans as uncivilized, non-human and inferior to whites, excluding them outside of the democratic and colonial structure of power and relocating their identities and bodies in the past and as sites of violence (Quijano, 2000, p. 552-553). Despite this, Black women have survived and continue to survive violence and abuse within the white Western space. In the context of this history, Black women's self-care is an act of resistance as it goes against accepting the violence and objectification that comes with the identity constructed for us.

My research project will examine how Black women who experience these legacies of violence, access the self-care necessary to overcome this history of violence, decolonize their bodies and reshape their identities and struggle, to transform the spaces in which they live. I will utilize the definition of self-are created by Black Feminist theorists and Audre Lorde, to create a process that empowers Black women to see the value of self-care, not only as an act of political warfare but as a conscious act of overcoming colonial violence and the ways it has been internalized and, in the words of Marcus Garvey, the process will challenge them to imagine what it might mean to emancipate oneself from mental slavery. Self-care, in this usage, becomes critical in unsettling the coloniality of power constructed around the biological, political and social make up of Black woman, if Black woman are to confront and overcome the violence that they face. It is important to transcend and transform the disfigured images of Black women's bodies from Western representations. To do this, it is important that we create

a space within which we can begin to perform acts of self-care and self-love outside of the hostile gaze of white society.

In this research project, I worked with Black women through performance, to create a space within which they could use arts-based processes, composed of visual images, improvisation and interviews, to explore and discuss the following questions:

1. How do Black women understand the effects of racist violence on their bodies and self-image?
2. How Black women carry out self-care for themselves, each other and for their communities?

I drew on the stories and discussions shared within the arts-based workshop space and interviews, to create a series of ethnographic monologues that are based on the stories and experiences of these Black women. I plan to perform this workshop over time to groups of women and in so doing uncover ways of unsettling Western ideologies that construct Black women's bodies as spaces for the enactment of violence.

Key Research Questions

I came to the research questions identified above through a long process of questioning. The questions I asked included:

1. How do Black women in Canada experience the legacies of enslavement in their own bodies? How do they access self-care to overcome violence?
2. How do Black women of different backgrounds (nationalities, races, ethnicities), feel about their own bodies? What representations of Black women are particularly empowering or disempowering to women?
3. What forces enable violence against Black women's bodies? (Forces here refer to institutions and ideologies such as those embedded in the legal system, media, as well as educational, political, cultural, economic systems, derived from racial capitalism)

4. What does self-care mean to Black women? How do Black women access self-care? Can self-care be a strategy for decolonization?
5. How do Black women imagine a future in which their bodies would be valued and cared for?
6. What might a society free from anti-Black racism look like for Black women?

In what follows, I outline the process I have created. In Chapter 2, *Come Ley Arwe Chat!,* I outline the theoretical framework, literature and ideas that I use to inform my approach. I discuss the ideas of scholars such as; Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Sylvia Wynter, Katherine McKittrick, Stuart Hall, Frantz Fanon and others. In Chapter 3, *One Han Cyarn Clap!,* I outline my methodological approach, laying out the principles on which I base my approach to working with Black women. Here, I draw on the work of Paulo Freire, Soyini Madison, Hui Nui Wilcox, Honor-Ford Smith and more. I also use ideas from performance studies, applied drama and visual ethnography. In Chapter 4, *Mi Arms Peets, Yuh Cookin' Pon Gas!,* I give a detailed description of the design for the experiential process. In Chapter 5, *It Tek Time to Foine Ant's Belly!,* I present my discussion of the issues that emerged in the arts-based workshop and from the interviews I conducted. In Chapter 6, *Sensay Fowl Say Pray Fu Long Life Not Fu Fedder!,* I present the conclusion of the research project and outline my final thoughts on self-care.

The ethnodramatic monologues I created based on my findings are appended and I plan to present these at new workshops with Black women in the future.

CHAPTER

COME LEY ARWE CHAT!

2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I argue that the need for self-care has been created by the legacies of slavery which are embedded in the way social identity is enforced and organized. I propose, following the theories of Stuart Hall and Katherine McKittrick, that a spatial response is needed if we are indeed to *emancipate ourselves from mental slavery,* as Marcus Garvey once famously proposed. In order to understand how such a process of emancipation might take place, I draw on practices from applied drama and visual arts as the basis for a workshop design. This methodology, I propose, might enable Black women to create their own space in which they might explore embodied and autobiographical responses to institutionalized images of themselves. I argue that Black women can work to remake images of themselves in this way and in doing so, move toward transforming and recreating our futures.

Literature Review

This theoretical framework and literature review will be organized into three sections.

Section one introduces Black feminist thought and different approaches to self-care. In this section, I discuss Audre Lorde's ideas surrounding self-care and the erotic. Audre Lorde's theories are important to my research project as Lorde's examination of self-care and the erotic is directly linked to my research questions and research argument. Lorde's work does not fully explain the historical reasons why self-care can be of importance to Black women. To understand why this is so, I turn to the work of scholars who explore the legacies of slavery and survival.

Section two briefly discusses the repertoire of stereotypes which have shaped Black womanhood since enslavement. I draw on the work of Bell Hooks, Cailyn Petron Stewart, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl L. Woods, Christina Sharpe and Alexis Gumbs, to explore the legacy of stereotypes of the strong Black woman and discuss how these interconnects with the meaning of self-care, survival and transformation for Black women in Western society.

I also use the work of Harvey Young, Hortense J. Spillers and Frantz Fanon to discuss the specific meanings given by white colonizers to the Black body in the history of enslavement. These scholars provide a framework for a discussion of Black women's bodies and experience in the white space but, they do not explore how Black women might transform identities arising from the violence of enslavement and so I turn to Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick to discuss cultural identity and the transformation of Black women's bodies in white space in **S**ection three. I discuss how performance can offer an embodied approach to the investigation of these issues and suggest that methods from applied drama can allow for those participating in this research project to make conscious what they do not know that they know and having done so evaluate and transform this knowledge. Drama, both as process and product can offer a space in which women can express their ideas both verbally, visually, non-verbally in embodied ways.

BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT AND SELF-CARE

Lorde's work makes Black women her main focal point when discussing her notions surrounding self-care and eroticism. In *A Burst of Light: Essays,* Lorde proposes that self-care for Black women has a political meaning because of the violence to which we have been subjected. Lorde redefines self-care as self-preservation and an act of political warfare, not self-indulgence (Lorde, 1992, p.132). Lorde argues that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", meaning that the methods and constructs of the dominant consumer society, do not destroy the oppressive systems and powers created by the violence of colonization (Lorde, 1992, p.113). For Black women, self-care exists first in decolonizing the social constructs that have become internalized within our minds. Without this first step, decolonization and the social action it requires cannot take place. Decolonization begins in the body because anti-Black racism focuses on the gendered Black body in particular ways.

At the age of six, I migrated to Canada from the small Caribbean Island, St.Kitts, with my family. Growing up in Canada and entering the school system, I quickly learned that I was different. My race, sex, identity and cultural position in the Canadian space made me *different.* This *difference* meant that I would face more hardships, more barriers and face harder critique and judgement and isolation from the space. My mother instilled a sense of strength through her lessons of survival through the

hardships and barriers. She explained that as a Black woman in this society, I would always have to work ten times harder than the white man, the white woman and even the Black man, to gain a fraction of what they obtained here. I was different because of my sex, oppressed because of race, looked down upon because of my culture and geographical origin and isolated because of stereotypes. My mother told me that strength was the only method of survival in the face of these adversities. “Never show *them* weakness” were words that dominated my mind when navigating within the white space. I was not taught to face these barriers, hardships and judgement with strength through self-love or self-care. With this *strength*, came a new identity. I found that I was *harder,* emotionless, and, fearless. Simultaneously I was fearful but ultimately, I became *capable* and *confident* to move through this space with an identity that was, in essence, a method of survival. Here, my inner self found refuge, but there was a cost. I lost a sense of my own vulnerability and tenderness in this struggle to survive.

Lorde’s work helps me understand my experience. She explains that in white society, Black women are isolated and trapped within the negative constructions of their body and womanhood. These negative connotations create a space of hatred and anger for Black women and the Black community. Their bodies are viewed as “abnormal” because ideologies of whiteness and white superiority continue to structure the ways in which we view what is considered socially normative. Black women’s bodies were given meaning by European slaveowners and traders to justify their enslavement and reduction to chattel. The color and shape of their flesh, bodies and their hair, differentiates Black women from white women. In the history of racial thought, this difference has been interpreted as a signifying that Black people are in fact not human and are just a little above the animal. Black women continue to be bumped out of the category of the human as a result of the lingering legacies of this old ideology. All this has worked to justify the treatment of Black women as *other* and as subordinate to the white man or woman.

In *Sister Outsiders; Essays and Speeches,* Lorde argues that to navigate white society, Black women channel their hatred and anger towards themselves to survive within the realms of society (Lorde, 2007, p.150). In white society, the image of the Black woman is distorted in art, literature and media. At the same time, Black women often lack cultural and social consciousness within themselves and community because they are socialized in Eurocentric institutions and are often materially impoverished because of the dispossession engendered by slavery. Myths, stereotypes and

expectations socialize and teach Black women hate and anger instead of ways to love and care for themselves (Lorde, 2007, p.170).

As a Black child socialized in white Canadian institutions and white spaces, I learned painful lessons. My body was treated as something that I should be ashamed of. I am a dark-skinned Black woman and because of my color, was compared to things like tar. Tar is a black goopy substance that is crude in nature and destructive. I was given nicknames such as *BLT (Black Like Tar) Blackie,* to name a few. I was placed in a space that organized and negotiated Black women's bodies, based on anger and hatred, that in turn became internalized. My method to free myself from this space, this anger and hatred, was the lesson of survival: strength.

Lorde's discussion of self-care speaks to me because it calls for a specific and collective practice of self-care with and between Black women. Lorde explains that Black women are silenced and isolated from other Black women, thus collective cultural and social consciousness has never been 'allowed' to form. They are taught to cover up their needs and utilize a language to dismiss their needs and the needs of other Black women. Lorde demands space to form a collective cultural consciousness between Black women to allow for self-care. She argues that centering Black women and starting from there to explore their demands and differences could lead to political action and fighting for change (Lorde, 2007, p.167). She calls for self-care as an act of solidarity between Black women.

In the *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,* Lorde redefines the erotic as a source of personal and political power for Black women. The erotic functions as a pursuit of happiness and joy that can be experienced with other Black women, and most importantly, with oneself. It is a form of empowerment, an affirmation of the life-force of women, that allows Black women to access their spiritual realm and allows for us to find a source of love, and from that love, power. Black women are living in a space based on external directives, instead of internal knowledge. We are conforming to a system that is not based on our human needs, as Black women are seen and constructed as non-human. Lorde explains that Black women and the Black community, do not have the space that allows them to define the self, outside of Western ideological hegemonies. To create and form that space, Lorde explains that Black women need to access their spiritual realm and begin the journey to find their inner erotic self. This 'self' allows Black women to decolonize the violence surrounding their bodies and create a space that

allows them to care and love themselves. To access the spiritual realm, Black women must confront their unexpressed and unrecognized feelings that were constructed based on hate and anger.

The question now becomes *how. How do Black women access this 'spiritual realm' within themselves? Is accessing this spiritual realm a collective practice of the 'self'? Is this process of the self, an individual act, or a community act?* To answer these questions, we must first analyze Black *self-concept and the formation of identity.*

In *The Black Self-Concept: Some Historical and Theoretical Reflections,* William Davis Smith explains that the "self-concept…provides a person with an inner direction, a map or compass as to which route one's life should travel" (Smith, 1980, p.357). The 'Negro' self was formed during colonization by the white man. Smith echoes the ideas of Fanon, as he explains that the 'self' and 'identity' of the Black community was violently stripped away to reflect the Western white man (Smith, 1980, p.357). The Black community acts based on what the white man thinks of them and defines their behaviors and personalities based on what is acceptable to the white man. Having your own 'self-concept' during colonization, was a crime and resulted in death as it was a rebellious act (Smith, 1980, p.357). This is still evident in post-colonial societies as colonization is not over. Rather it continues in both new and old ways.

During high school and University, I found myself enacting some of Smith's insights. I found myself performing a personality that was based on the constructions of the Western man, I was loud, angry, sassy and submissive because that was the *self* I was constructed to perform in the white space. It was what was expected of me, and thus, I conformed. During this time, I felt that if I did not perform the self-concept, I would be ejected from the space and forced to be alone. I believed that I was, to use Smith's words, only "important… if (I) identified with the master, and that (my) interests and the masters were one and the same" (Smith, 1980, p.358). Black women, including myself, who did not perform this personality, were often excluded from social spaces, isolated and dehumanized by others as a result.

Black bodies find themselves marked as different and subordinate in spaces in which white bodies are the norm. For example, York University claims to operate on values which are multicultural and diverse. In my opinion, multiculturalism is an ideology which masks the fact that there is a racial hierarchy enforced through the materiality of social organization. This places Black and Indigenous bodies at the bottom and white

bodies at the top. The term *multiculturalism* denies the existence of this hierarchy and attempts to appease and placate Black bodies into believing that they are equal to whites because they have access to individual rights and freedoms. In fact, the normalization of whiteness and the ways in which white spaces are marked as the standard norm, results in the exclusion and differentiation of Black bodies. I say that, to assert that institutions that white spaces label and see as diverse and multicultural, I see as another method to hide the fact that whiteness is in fact normative in society, based on the ideology of white supremacy.

In the white space, the Black self exists outside of and away from its collective constructions. Creating spaces which are nurturing of Black women requires the decolonization and transformation of the white space, but this can only happen if the Black self can rebuild itself in safety away from racist constructions.

In *Practicing Love: Black Feminism Love-Politics and Post-Intersectionality,* Nash purports that the rebuilding of the self must be emphasized based on the foundations of love (Nash, 2011, p.3). Nash explains that “love is a politics of claiming, embracing and restoring the wounded Black female self”, transcending the self away from Western construction (Nash, 2011, p.3). Love is “a configuration of the self that labours to transcend the fear of difference” (Nash, 2011, p.11). Black women have been trained to hate themselves from interactions with the white man. Nash calls for Black women to “love yourself regardless”, as self-love is absolute, and the method needed to orient ourselves forward, to exist and construct ourselves in the present and future and not in the past (Nash, 2011, p.11). It is through love-politics that Black women begin to transform the self away from the collective. Nash’s theory of love-politics does not call for romanticizing the colonial self (Love the colonial self), instead Nash calls for the destruction of it. Black women must challenge themselves to dismantle the ‘other’ self. Nash thus situates the Black women in a space of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ to transform the self forward and unsettle the Western self. How did the process of self-hatred described by Nash and so many others come about? In the next section, I will discuss the processes which Nash describes, came about.

LEGACIES OF ENSLAVEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS

Due to their violent history, Black women have a complex and challenging experience assimilating into the Canadian culture and community. Angela Davis, along with other feminist historians such as; Tamara Beauboef-Lafontant (2010) and more, demonstrate that a repertoire of stereotypes regulating the lives of Black women has emerged from the history of enslavement and its contemporary legacies. From the Slavery Era, Black women were portrayed and treated as genderless, animals, machines, their bodies seen as anomalies. The violence towards Black woman's bodies became something that was politicized and served to cement the slave stereotypes, while simultaneously, acting as a tool to (re)assert the heterosexual/hyper-masculine powers and project a patriarchal narrative onto the Black woman's body. Black women were hyper-sexualized, fetishized and racialized within the western space; their space and role in society was always constructed for them. Failure to conform to these roles resulted in a form of violence towards them. However, conforming to these roles and spaces meant refuting the ideologies and notions of caring for oneself.

According to Angela Davis, during the period of enslavement of the Americas, Black women enabled and contributed to the survival of the slave community by embodying the "strong" image required to survive long hours of hard labour in the field. In *"Reflections of Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves,"* Davis explains that if Black women failed to embody the image constructed for them, the community of slaves could not have developed or "progressed" through colonial violence (Davis, 1972, p.10). This is exemplified through the historic figure of 'Nanny'. In *"The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery*," Lucille Mathurin Mair writes about a woman, "Nanny," who was "one of the most outstanding civic and military leaders in the history of Black freedom movements in the New World" (Mair, 2007, p.999). Nanny was a heroine of the Black community, winning a land grant from the British for the Eastern Maroons of Jamaica. Maroons were communities of Africans, who often mixed with Indigenous people who had previously resisted conquest. They refused enslavement and created spaces of freedom at the margins of slave society, often in mountainous terrain or deep in the interior (Dubois, 2008, p.65). They frequently waged war against

colonial powers and in many cases won treaty settlement. Women like the warrior-woman Nanny, served as encouraging figures for the community, helping to maintain their faith in freedom while also leading them in armed struggle for their liberation.

However, this image of “strength”, meant that Black women were depicted as having an inherent capacity for hard labour; enslavers used this image as a justification for slavery. Black women were viewed as having both the mental and physical capacity for labour thus, they were thrust into roles that simultaneously reflected and rejected the social ideals of patriarchal traditions (Davis, 1972, p.7). This is illustrated through ‘The Mammy’ figure, which portrayed the “prototype of [the] acceptable black womanhood” and posed no threat to the white patriarchal social or political order as she “submits to the white racist regime” (Hooks 1982 pg. 85). Or the ‘Oversexed Jezebel’ or ‘Tragic Mulatto’ stereotype, which normalized the sexual abuse of Black women by white males, as it conceptualized Black women as sexualized objects that *desired* sexual relations with white men. These roles and the image and stereotype of the strong Black woman remove Black women from European ideologies of femininity and normalize their bodies as sites for violence.

Like Davis, Cailyn Petrona Stewart discusses in depth the negative impact of the image of “strength” on Black womanhood and body in her work *The Mule of the World: The Strong Black Woman and the Woes of Being Independent.* Stewart explains that the stereotype of the strong Black woman acts as a “colonial chain” that encapsulates the Black woman’s body and mind (Stewart, 2018, p.31). This stereotype feeds on ancestral resilience and survival and serves as a tool of colonial legacy to normalize the dehumanization and trauma faced by Black women presently (Stewart, 2018, p. 32). For example, the image of the Black matriarch, enables violence against the Black woman’s body even as it assists in nurturing the image of ‘strength’. It is through the Black matriarch that the intergenerational lessons of “strength” as a method of survival are passed onto Black girls. The Black matriarch defines the role Black women played during the slavery era and the role they continue to play in the Black community and society. Angela Davis argues that labelling the Black women as a Matriarch, was another tool of the coloniality of power. Davis proposes that “Black woman as a

matriarch is a cruel misnomer because it ignores her trauma and history and experience during the Slavery Era" (Davis, 1972, p. 82). Davis purports that the social, political and economic freedom of the Black Matriarch is a myth, as the economic, political and social freedom of Black woman can never be secured in a white hegemony (Davis, 1972, p. 82). Davis believes it to be a label that reaffirms their inferiority and allows the Black woman's body to be fixed and (re)created in the past in present spaces.

Conversely, although present day Black women do not have to endure the enslavement their ancestors did, there is a need to adapt to the *lessons* of the strong Black woman stereotype, and image of our ancestors as a method of survival. Black women still face the "intersectional stressors (of) racialized sexism and gendered racism" as a result of colonial legacies in Western society (Donovan, 2015, p.386; Stewart, 2018, p.33). Christina Sharpe expounds on Stewart's discussion through her 'wake' work. In *"In the Wake: On Blackness and Being"*, Christina Sharpe argues that the migration of the Black diaspora to Western societies has located them in space that brings "forth the subjection of constant and overt racism and isolation", as violence, Black suffering and Black death are foundational aspects of Western and Black citizenship in Western societies (Sharpe, 2016, p.4). Violence and anti-Black racism towards the Black body is constructed as normative in the white space. Sharpe purports that through Western educational institutions, social structures and systems, we become taught, disciplined and conditioned into thinking "through and along lines that reinscribe our own annihilation, reinforcing and reproducing what Sylvia Wynter has called our 'narratively condemned status" (Sharpe, 2016, p.13). We are living in the *wake* of slavery, having inherited the non/status, non/being and intergenerational trauma from our mothers. To explain, living in the wake of slavery means "living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations", within a space that (re)produces our enslavement in the present and grounds violence, oppression, criminalization and racism as a signifier for everyday Black existence/experience (Sharpe, 2016, p.15). Our bodies become carriers, embodiments and properties of violence, trauma and terror, experienced by ancestors. We are constantly *sitting in the room with history,* our bodies marked by our historical and geographic location.

Alternatively, Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that Black women experience *multiple* forms of oppression. In her article *Mapping in the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color*, she introduces us to the important idea of intersectionality. She argues that race, gender, and class come together to create identity in society and thus *together* shape our experiences (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1). Black women are situated in at least two subordinate groups in white society; they experience multiple forms of oppression and inequality that are produced in and through each other. Their intersectional existence in the white space, alongside the legacy of strength and stereotype of the strong Black woman further create a barrier for selfcare to be practiced. Cheryl L. Woods reports that it decreases their access to selfcare, well-being and healing resources in the white space as there is a lack of understanding of the society of the intersectional role the Black woman's body plays (Woods, 2010). White society is not equipped to provide for Black women outside of their strong Black woman stereotype. The strong Black woman stereotype heightens a Black woman's individual autonomy as it is viewed as transformative and gives the illusion of freedom, however, this results in Black women navigating their bodies in silence.

These lessons on survival through the "strong" image cast Black women in the role of natural endurers of stress and labour and justifies the violence done to our bodies in the past and presently. Consequently, in modern society, the stereotype of the Strong Black woman serves as a double-edged sword. On one side, it is a verbal confirmation and certification of your abilities, knowledge and stability. Black women bend to mold into that stereotype as it is seen as the key to fit into white society and survive and be successful in that space (Stewart, 2018, p. 35). We almost force ourselves to mold and transform into that image of strength, because it means that we are *capable* of survival (Stewart, 2018, p.35). On the other hand, it still maintains its foundational meaning. It still signifies and normalizes our bodies as sites for violence, abuse and trauma. It naturalizes our bodies as being *too* strong to be vulnerable, *too* strong to be in need/deserving of love, *too* strong to need support/help and t*oo* strong to care for herself or feel the need to, before caring for some one else, further removing us from the patriarchal ideology of femininity (Stewart, 2018, p.33).

This image and stereotype of “strength”, alongside the racial and sexualized stereotypes that plague the Black woman, further strip Black women of their culture and identity and creates a barrier to their humanity. Our identities, experiences and devaluation of our womanhood make it almost impossible to develop a positive self-concept. It is my opinion that conforming to these roles, spaces and identities in the face of survival means refuting the possibilities of caring for oneself.

The Formation of the Black Body and Black Identity

Harvey Young provides an in-depth examination of the Black body through a discussion in *Embodying Black experience, stillness, critical memory, and the black body.* Young begins his discussion by first providing a historical overview of the ideological meanings ascribed to the Black body. Young notes that ideas about the Black body were based on white European imperial ideologies and systems (Young, 2010, p.1). These imperial ideologies created an identity crisis among Black subjects while also shaping their self-perception and their cultural politics. Young purports that the Black body can be read as a symbol of a legacy of racial assumptions, stereotypes, acts of violence, racial profiling and physical as well as sexual assault of the Black community (Young, 2010, p.5). The Black body and the Black individual maintain separate entities. Young defines the symbolic Black body as “popular connotations of Blackness [that] are constructed and internalized within Black people” (Young, 2010, p. 7). It is an imagined figure, that projects itself onto the identity of the Black individual, further shaping their socialization within society (Young, 2010, p.7). This project illustrates ‘racial fantasies’ constructed by Western social structures and serves to retell stories and experiences of Black history through Black women. It is my belief that their bodies and identities become trapped in, what Young labels, space of limbo, where “memory and racial mythmaking” created during the enslavement era and enforced in post colonial western societies, operate simultaneously to further keep their experience rooted in the past. This space of limbo exists because of the interrelationship between the history of Black diaspora and white colonialist violence, that further mark Black women bodies as anachronism in the present and keep them in a state of becoming. To explain further, Black women bodies belong/are geographically located to another

period, the slavery era. They will continue to perform the ideologies and constructions formed in the slavery era in the present white society as it is conditioned and a part of their 'narratively condemned status' and the foundation of their citizenship in Western societies.

Notably, Hortense J. Spillers takes Harvey Young's discussion a step further by introducing a distinction between the body and the flesh in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book.* Where Young believes that the body was the space where the stereotypes of Black womanhood and Blackness were produced, Spillers purports the opposite, suggesting the flesh was the foundation to produce Blackness and the Black experience, suturing it to slavery. Spillers explains that the flesh operates as the primary narrative that constitutes and inscribes Blackness as existing in the flesh, transferring it from one generation to another (Spillers, 1987, p.67). As the primary narrative, the flesh becomes the "social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse" (Spillers, 1987, p.67). To explain, the flesh carries the violent colonial markings and branding done onto the Black body during slavery by white colonizers, hidden "to the cultural seeing by skin colour" (Spillers, 1987, p.67). The flesh is the "concentration of ethnicity" that is "seared, divided, ripped-[apart], riveted to the ship's hole, fallen or 'escaped' overboard" operating simultaneously with the body, race and gendered politics of human genres to construct the narrative of the Black body and identity in public spaces (Spillers, 1987,p.67-68). The flesh holds the difference between man and woman and creates the spatial division between gendered violence. Where the Black man's violence (lynching, whipping and more) occurred in public spaces, Black women's violence occurred in both public and private spaces. Spiller explains that,

"the African female subject… is not only the target of rape—in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind—but also the topic of specifically *externalized* acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of *male* brutality and torture inflicted by other males. A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the 'overseer'… has popped her flesh open, adds a lexical and living dimension to the narratives of women in culture and society" (Spillers, 1987, p.68).

The Black woman's flesh is not only unprotected, but ungendered in both private and public spaces. It is through the flesh that language against Black women becomes overdetermined. Black women's self-perception and cultural politics and experience is shaped by the body, whereas the flesh creates, constructs and reinforces cultural politics and experience.

Continuing, Frantz Fanon is a key thinker that provides a theory of the construction of Black identity in the colonial space. It is his work that lays the basis for many of the arguments of Davis and Young. Fanon outlines the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized and explains that "the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty", because of the hostile white gaze which continually sees the Black body through a series of disfigured stereotypes constructed as the opposite of white civilizing rationality (Fanon, 1952, p.110). The white gaze in Western societies intrudes into Black subjectivity shattering ego defenses and substituting the stereotypes through white Black subjects come to know themselves. Fanon purports that the Black body "triply exists" within the white space (Fanon, 1952, p.112). To explain, the Black body must perform and encompass their self-identity and body experience, their race and the self-identity and body experience of their ancestors under the white gaze (Fanon, 1952 p.112). To continue, the white gaze leaves the Black body unable to *be* Black. Fanon notes that the "black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon, 1952, p.110). To explain, the Black man (body) not only has to be Black, but experience blackness in relation to white constructions of blackness. Thus, the Black self and body become trapped in the idle of a "spatial and temporal world", within western society under the white man's gaze (Fanon, 1952, p.111). In relation to Black women, our bodies are living in what Sharpe labels, the wake, in the aftermaths of slavery. In this spatial and temporal world, "we, Black people everywhere and anywhere we are, still produce in, into, and through the wake an insistence of existing: we insist Black being into the wake (Sharpe, 2016, p.11). In the white space and under the white gaze, Black women (re)perform a Black experience/ memory that produces the intergenerational trauma of the past, violence and death onto our bodies and identities.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

How then is it possible to transform these deeply oppressive inheritances? How can these racialized ideas about the Black body and Black identity be transformed? Stuart Hall explains that cultural identity is never complete; it is a continuous process, influenced easily by the past, present and future actions (Hall, 1994, p.223). Hall argues that identity is not fixed or stable but should be viewed as a continuous production that continues to be transformed by social, cultural, individual, economic and political factors and most importantly the role colonial history played in the formation of Caribbean and African diasporic identities. The past and future play a pivotal role in the makeup of identity, as identity continues to transform while simultaneously remaining fixed in the past. Hall purposes colonial history is essential and significant in the (re)formation of the cultural identity. Embracing history and understanding how it has produced the present is essential to recreating cultural identity. Recreated identities are never simply fixed or homogenous, but they can be transformed through resistance and cultural struggle. (Hall, 1994, p.226). Hall proposes that identities shift when they are challenged by social movements. Ideas of blackness, its power and possibility, are reshaped in social and political struggle and the representations emerging from these struggles are hybrid. Identity shifts but it never completely outruns all historical traces. Confronting, critiquing, and transforming representations of blackness past, become the key to forming the present, modern day culture identity (Hall, 1994, p.226).

Sylvia Wynter's work is of paramount importance in extending this discussion of transformation in the Western space. Wynter's seeks to unsettle Western humanism and redefine what we understand by the term "human". Wynter's work is unique to my research project as it asserts that transformation depends on overturning colonial knowledge production. Wynter's work focuses the ideological hegemonies that have produced 'truth'. In *1492 Toward a New World View,* Wynter's highlights the epistemological mistakes that enforce the construction of Western notions of the human, across location, race, time and space. Wynter's explains that what controls the conception of being human and humanism, is the conception of the *Western Man* (the white male bourgeois), that is produced through western ideologies throughout history.

Western society utilizes race as it's focal point to create human order. In this human order, the white male bourgeois man becomes overrepresented and normalized as what it means to be and what is human (McKittrick, 2015, p. 11). To explain, because of the overrepresentation of the white Western man, Black bodies become misrepresented. Those who are different from the conceptions of the Western man, are placed in a *liminal*, deviant status, against the human order (McKittrick, 2015, p. 11). To dismantle the coloniality of power, and the ideas and practices that justify violence against Black bodies, we need to start by analyzing those bodies who have been most misrepresented, the Black woman's body.

To continue, in *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom Towards the Human, Afterman, its Overrepresentation – An Argument* (2003), Wynter further examines the overrepresentation of the Western man through an analysis of Western modernity. Wynter asserts that to unsettle the coloniality of power, Western constructions of the human man must be decolonized and deconstructed (Wynter, 2003, p.270). Wynter's notes that it is due to the overrepresentation and normalization of the Western conception of the white Western man as human, that the Black body has been systemically marginalized and marked as inhuman in the Americas (Wynter, 2003, p.270). Wynter's work is crucial for my research project as her work not only provides the theory needed to challenge the representation of Black women and to challenge and transform stereotypes of Black womanhood by unsettling the western ideologies of racialized 'Man'. It is the Western construction of the human, their capitalist systems, that have labelled Black bodies as non-humans when placed in the Western space. Wynter's work calls for a rewriting of knowledge beyond the 'man', that would allow for not only a transformation, but a rebirth of a 'new science' and thus a new consciousness experience.

In this last paragraph, I will examine the theory of Katherine McKittrick whose work focuses on Black geographies and how Black bodies preserve, map and 'ritualize' our memories of the Black diaspora in space, to (re)shape history in the present/future spaces. McKittrick takes a singular look at Black women geography in Canada and the

ways in which they have transformed white spaces and (re)invent their story of the stereotypes of womanhood. In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), McKittrick illustrates how Black women, through past and present, reshape Canadian white spaces although their presence has been systematically and repeatedly erased from narratives of the Canadian nation. McKittrick introduces a 'new' image of Black women in Canadian spaces that remove them from Western ideals of womanhood. In chapter 4, *Nothing's Shocking: Black Canada,* McKittrick introduces the legacy of Marie-Joseph Angelique. The legacy of Marie-Joseph Angelique illustrates the destruction of oppressive systems, land and geographies in Montreal, New France (McKittrick, 2006, p.91). Angelique, allegedly set fire and burned down majority of Montreal, New France in 1734, to gain her, and ultimately the black community freedom from their Slave masters (McKittrick, 2006, p.91). Angelique's legacy serves to emplace blackness into the land that it was lynched from. Angelique's legacy not only serves to rewrite Canadian history but serves as the first beginnings of transformation and dismantling of the Western system.

The work of Stuart Hall, Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick illustrates that transformation of representations of the Black body must open a spatial continuity between the past, present and future, to not only decolonize the western space, but unsettle Western ideological hegemonies surrounding humanism, to transcend and transform the Black woman's bodies outside the realms of violence, and into the realms of self-care and self-love. The work of these three theorists is vital to my research project as they provide the foundations in *how* to begin deconstructing, decolonializing and unsettling the Western representation of the Black woman's body that allows it to be viewed as sites of violence.

CHAPTER 3

ONE HAN CYARN CLAP!

METHODOLOGY

Through this chapter, I outline the process and theories utilized to design the methodology. I discuss my approach to popular education with Black women and then explain how I work with techniques from applied drama and dramatic processes, tools and techniques utilized in the creation of the arts-based workshop/exhibition, interview and ethnodramatic monologues.

Enormous theoretical progress has been made by Black scholars who have worked to outline and pinpoint systems that oppress the Black woman's body. Wynter argues that we must first unsettle the notion of the Western "Man" to decolonize the Black body. Frantz Fanon purports that the Black body "triply exists" within the white space thus performs their body under the white gaze. Ultimately, Fanon argues that we suppress our *Black identity* under a *white mask* in order to navigate and survive in the white space. Continuing, Audre Lorde proposes that the Black body must first access its spiritual realm to access their erotic self and thus engage with selfcare and selflove. Hall argues that representations of the Black body which gives rise to Black identity can be challenged and transformed through analysis of the power which created them through cultural and political spaces and social movements, which challenge, in reference to Wynter's, the notion of the Western "Man". Similarly, Katherine McKittrick reminds us that Black bodies preserve, map and "ritualize" our memories through past and present, to reshape white spaces and to redefine Black bodies within a white society, that has an extended history of erasing/ retelling Black narratives from the dominant culture's perspective, rather than that of the oppressed. Wynter, Fanon, Lorde, Hall and McKittrick provide foundational theories surrounding the Black body and Black identity and they offer theoretical tools for thinking about *how* to begin to understand the ways in which colonization has interpreted the Black body and Black identity, freeing us from a location which is interrelated with violence.

I also discussed the work of Black scholars who theorize the long-lasting effects of enslavement and colonization on the lives, identities and bodies of Black women. Harvey Young argues that although separate entities, the Black body and Black identity were created based on European imperial ideologies and systems. Based on these

arguments, I questioned *how* these racialized and sexualized ideas about the Black body and Black identity might be transformed? Hall's discussion of cultural identity begins to answer this question. Hall asserts that the representation of the Black body and Black identity can be transformed and reshaped through social, cultural and political space and movements.

Although their work is of paramount importance, they write their ideas in disembodied print. My research was to take place with live embodied human beings. The question now became *how* I was going to translate the ideas and theories discussed above into a workshop with the body. To confront, critique and transform the Black identity and Black body in the workshop design, I utilize Hall's theory of cultural identity, combining it with the principles of four (4) scholars, Paulo Freire, Soyini Madison, Hui Nui Wilcox and Honor-Ford-Smith. The principles I drew on for my design were, (1) Freire's Popular Education Praxis, (2) Madison's approach to performance theory, (3) Wilcox's embodied pedagogies and (4) Ford-Smith's concept of decolonization and embodied performance.

Popular Education Praxis

I decided to bring Black women together to critically engage in the notion of self-care and self-love to explore and reflect on how they navigate their body through its location of violence to access and engage in self-care within the white space. The integration of popular education as a praxis and critical pedagogical approach to the workshop allows for both action and reflection to occur in the space. Paulo Freire popular education praxis challenges traditional education that is designed to maintain dominant and oppressive social systems. Popular education is a dialogical method and process that creates a space of co-learning between "teacher" and "students" to allow them to "come together, to reflect on themselves, their place in the world, current needs and issues" to begin the process of social change (Purcell & Beck, 2010). Popular education praxis removes knowledge production from the "Banking system" of education, which Freire argues is rooted in rooted in bourgeois values, racism, sexism,

class exploitation and imperialism, and places it in the lived realities and experiences of its students (participants) (Hooks, 1994, p. 28). Paulo Freire's approach operates through three phases that focuses on reflection, vision, planning and action, as its method creates a critical space and forms social and critical consciousness (Purcell & Beck, 2010). These phases allow for participants to reflect on their realities, analyze these in relation to the social structures which produce their experience. Based on this analysis they can identify the needs and demand social change and action.

Mary Breunig explains that popular education functions as a form of experiential learning and critical pedagogy as it engages with learners to encourage critical thinking and reflection on their lived experiences as a new method of knowledge production (Breunig, 2005, p.108). Through the model, Reflection – Vision – Planning—Action, participants can critically view themselves in society based on their experiences within the space. Through this new method of knowledge production which values lived experiences. Education becomes a transformative process and a practice that centers students as the new agents of knowledge production and allows them to implement their visions of change and action. This serves to demystify reality to effect social change and transform/dismantle oppression intuitions and social systems (Breunig, 2005, p.109).

In *Teaching to Transgress Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Bell Hooks views this method of knowledge production as a practice of freedom. Hooks argues that Freirean approach to education, which she labels "engaged pedagogy", places education as a practice that emphasizes "well-being" and serves as a "process of self-actualization" for both teachers and learners (Hooks, 1994, p.15) It places teaching as a performative act and the classroom as" a space of change, invention ad spontaneous shifts. This form of education and knowledge production thus serves to transform the minds and beings of both the teachers and students. Knowledge production through lived experiences and realities becomes a method to deconstruct and dismantle dominant systems (Hooks, 1994, p.15).

Popular education is an integral part of my research design as it creates a space for participatory learning and social action. It allows the participants to learn from

interactions with each other and collectively generate new knowledge that is rooted in their everyday experiences and lived realities. It allows them to critically view themselves in society, demystify reality to effect social change to challenge and dismantle the colonial 'universal' knowledge placed onto their identity and body.

Performance and Embodied Pedagogies

Popular education praxis focuses primarily on the role of the *mind* in the process of social action and social change. It does not necessarily factor the role of the body within its paradigm. For my workshop design, it is of paramount importance that *body* be an inscription of social knowledge. To do that, I draw on performance theory and embodied pedagogies.

In *Performance is a Promiscuous Lover* Soyini Madison defines performance as a "metaphor for spectacle sister stories and mourning the dead" (Madison, 2010, p.200-201). Performance is radically democratic "in her excesses of bodies/embody[ments]" in the journey towards love (Madison, 2010, p.199). Performance creates a space where (re)performance and (re)shaping of bodies and identities occur through the act of storytelling. Madison poetically explains that;

"Performance wraps himself around the secrets two secret sisters share in deep, clandestine, quiet sister-talk. The ritual of the nightly phone call. Mundane but performed magnanimously. You dial your sister's number, 7087b 705697. It is a common ritual. Talking on the phone. A performance, barely seen, a small gesture. Personal. Ordinary. Lights down. The Performance begins" (Madison, 2010, p.200).

Here, Madison views performance as storytelling between bodies. Performance and storytelling serve to disrupt a space and allow for social change. In relation to my workshop design, Madison's theory of performance is useful as it places storytelling at the forefront to reshaping and transforming identities and bodies between Black women. Storytelling becomes a collective embodied act, that is first lived through the body and identity of a woman (past or present) and then reformed through embodied interactions. Saidiya Hartman explains the importance of storytelling as a method to awaken memories that are often forgotten, abandon or misplaced in the gaze of survival.

Storytelling allows the women to “tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction” (Sharpe, 2016, p.8). Hartman explains further that storytelling is “not a personal story that folds onto itself. It’s not about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at historical and social process and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes as an example of them” (Sharpe, 2016, p.8). Through my workshop, I am creating a space that gathers Black women’s personal stories and experiences with the goal of healing ourselves. Our personal stories and experiences act as a tool that allows us to begin to dismantle the social forces as we are beginning to position and individualize our stories and cement them in the *present* and not *past.* Storytelling becomes the method for the women to understand their bodies and identities relation to the white space. It is also a collaborative act, that allows for the women to connect and engage with another women, who share similar experiences or realities. It creates a form of social and cultural consciousness between the women and allows them to collectively communicate and begin the journey towards love and self-care, reshaping and transforming space and time.

Additionally, I draw on embodied pedagogy as another method to place the body as a form of social change and social action alongside the mind. In *Embodied Ways of Knowing, Pedagogies and Social Justice: Inclusive Science & Beyond,* Hui Niu Wilcox defines embodied pedagogies as “an epistemological and pedagogical shift that draws attention to bodies as agents of knowledge production” (Wilcox, 2009, p.105). It centers feminist theories of the body to explore and investigate the body’s representation and relationship to the white space (Wilcox, 2009, p.105). It challenges the “universal” knowledge placed onto the Black woman’s body. Wilcox states that lived bodily experiences are an embodied practice as it illustrates how racialized and sexualized bodies interacted/interacts with the white space and becomes its “subjects” (Wilcox, 2009, p.106).

Similarly, Honor Ford – Smith reminds us that colonization excluded the enslaved from written archives of knowledge production. In this setting, the body functions as a “field of inscription of power, a floating signifier, that can both inhabit and subvert the dominant representation” (Ford- Smith, 2019, p.155). Those who were denied access

to knowledge production created their own narratives of memory and experience in "acts of transfer" (Taylor, 2003, p.2). That is, they enacted knowledge. Embodied performance becomes a site of knowledge, that is mapped throughout time and space and transmitted in the way experiences and stories are shared (Ford-Smith, 2019, p. 154). It is the repeated everyday actions and lived experiences that "transmit social knowledge, memory and invoke identity" (Ford-Smith, 2019, p.154). Thus, embodied performance functions, as Diana Taylor purports, as "vital acts of transfer" that "functions as both analytical method and analytical object" (Taylor, 2003, p.2; Ford-Smith, 2019, p. 154). Embodied performance places the body as an agent of knowledge production that functions alongside the mind as a pedagogy.

Embodied pedagogies and performance theory are important in the design of the workshop because it removes the mind/body hierarchy. It places the body, alongside the mind, as an agent of transformative change. It allows the women to critically reflect on their bodily experience and bodily intelligence/knowledge and performance collectively and individually, to further explore and address the notions of the Black woman's body. Performance becomes the method to disrupt dominant scripts about both the self and body in the white space.

Applied drama and Performance

Methodologically, I adapt these theories by drawing on applied drama to create the workshop, exhibition space, interviews and ethnodramatic monologues. Applied drama is an umbrella term for a series of dramatic practices. Here, I feel it is important to make a clear distinction between *applied theatre* and *applied drama*, as the two frameworks are usually used synonymously by scholars. Although both frameworks are umbrella terms that host dramatic activity and practices, *applied theatre* encompasses the *performance* aspect of these activity in front of an audience (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.xi). It is the *viewing* of the performance in a distinct space/stage that targets the *audience* more than the *performers* (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.xi) My goal is to use applied drama to generate material in the workshop which could then be drawn on

to create the ethnodramatic monologues. The ethnodramatic monologues would be applied theatre as it is a performance- based practice (Nicholson, 2015, p. 4). On the other hand, applied drama is a process-based practice (Nicholson, 2015, p.4). Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton explains that applied drama, "is a field of dramatic arts practice that is process-based, one in which spectatorship and performance happen within communities in ways that are private" (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.1). They emphasize that this dramatic work is done *for* the *participants* and *not* for the *audience.* (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.1) The work itself is the process done with the participants in the workshop and interview space and not the outcome (monologues).

I chose applied drama because I felt that it was the method that would allow my participants to embody, discover and explore who they are in relation to what is being investigated – the meaning and act of self-care. Prendergast and Saxton remind us that, applied drama helps to create a space of reflection, embodiment and consciousness that allow for interdisciplinary and "multiplicities" of thinking to occur through the dramatic activities (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.3). Using applied drama allows me to use/create dramatic processes, activities, and use *improvised* performance that confronts issues while still maintaining my creativity and position as the facilitator to further the dialogue between the women. Essentially, I felt that using this framework helped me to create a space where our minds, memories and bodies can work together to bring critical consciousness and help us work through the fictional situations introduced to delve deeper into our identity and self-care.

Visual Ethnography

I also integrate elements of visual ethnography into the space to confront participants with historical and present images and writings. I understand visual ethnography to be the production and use of images, audio-visual media, digital culture to express the perceptions and social realities of people (2018). By exhibiting images, I solicited embodied and improvised responses from the participants thus combining visual methods with applied dramatic strategies.

I chose to do this because of the dearth of images of Black women in Toronto. Ask yourself, *where can I go to learn Black history in Toronto? In Canada? Where is Black history being archived? Where are the images of our ancestors? Where are their narratives being held? Why are they only widely visible in February? Can the reclaiming and transformation of the Black woman's body in the white space occur without dismantling the white persons dominant ideology?*

I have lived in Canada for 18 years and have yet to find a space where Black history – especially the history, experiences and narratives of Black women are showcased permanently in the Canadian space. To learn about our history, I tend to rely on American rather than Canadian experience. Where are our stories? It is a different kind of labour to research Canadian Black history. You must dig and dig and dig and dig just to find a singular source pertaining to Canadian Black history. This is in large part to Canadian Black history, enslavement and narratives being displaced and erased from the white space. Often, when I find a source, I am left to wonder *who* is behind the narrative of this story. Whose truth is being told?

Nonetheless, Black Scholars such as, Afua Cooper and Camille Turner, continue to work to address the erasure of Blackness in Canadian spaces and locate Black history and enslavement in Canada. Cooper describes Canadian Black History as a "drama punctuated with disappearing acts" (Cooper, 2007). Cooper notes that "slavery is Canada's best kept secret" (Brown, 2019).

This exhibition of images was my way to materialize the stories and experiences of *past* and *present* Black woman, emphasizing the stories and experiences of the seven (7) Black women who partook in the workshop, in the white space. The exhibition was placed in the middle of a primarily white institution and only open to the public after the conclusion of the workshop. Audience who viewed the exhibition were able to see images of Black women of the past and present, hear poetry performed by Black women through the multimedia screen and read/ view the current experiences and stories of present-day Black women in the white space and their journey to self-care and reclaiming their body. This exhibition served as my last strategy to disrupt white

narratives about the Black body and Black women. I wanted the audience to *see* the effects of colonial legacy through past and present bodies.

It is important to emphasize that this exhibition was created for Black women. To connect all Black women. The choices I made privileged a specific audience. This allowed me to develop a tight focus and to make use of my research and personal experience to develop the emphases in the exhibition and exercises. Focussing on a specific audience and thinking through a creative strategy in relation to them produces nuanced work which does not preclude others who can be drawn into the story being told. The more carefully assembled, the more possible it is for others to enter a relationship with the content. The clearer the focus and the more specific the relationship, the greater the potential for believability, for critical thinking and for broad intervention. I therefore hoped that other social groups – racialized people who are non-Black and white audiences, who entered this space and who viewed the exhibition could also begin the process of decolonizing their thinking and *gaze.*

Dramatic Processes

Dramatic processes are fictional/non-fictional activities through which participants can explore a critical issue within community (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.12-13). These are activities that serve the purpose of engaging the participants in embodied performance, role-play or improvisation to further assist them in reflecting and exploring their position on issues.

Dramatic processes, tools and techniques were used in five (5) different parts of the workshop in the form of performance activities. These parts are; (1) the photo-images on the wall and multimedia screen, (2) the quotes and objects, (3) the mask exercise, (4) the mirror exercise and (5) the reclaiming your body exercise.

These dramatic processes will be further expanded on in Chapter 4, Mi Arms Peets, Yuh Cookin' Pon Gas!

The Interviews

Where the workshops create the space and environment for the Black women to share their stories, the interviews serve the purpose of deepening these findings. In his article *The Reflexive Interview and a Performance Social Science* (2001), Denzin explains that “Interviews are part of a dialogic conversation that connects all of us to the larger moral community” (Denzin, 2001, p.24). Interviews are an ethnographic method that allow individuals to give their thoughts and opinions freely without structure to “produce knowledge about society [and self-]” (Denzin, 2001, p.27). Taking the interviews, a step further to create an authentic space, I aim to utilize what Denzin labels “reflexive interviews”. Denzin explores reflexive interviews as a transformative and discursive method that allows the interviewee and interviewer alike to exchange shared experience and reshape language and words (Denzin, 2001, p.24). Reflexive interviews allow me, as the interviewer, a space to reflect and critically self-evaluate my positionality with the project and research. Utilizing reflexive interviews through an interpretive framework allows and situates these women in a transformative and active space.

Ethnodramatic Monologues

All the workshops and interviews were audio taped, transcribed and coded. I drew on the work of Patricia M. Davidson and Elizabeth Halcomb to analyze and transcribe the workshop and interviews to create a script consisting of ethnodramatic monologues, based off the stories and experiences of the seven (7) Black women. Ethnodramatic monologues are an extension of the narratives of the characters (Saldana, 2011, p.63). It is a “linear structural arc of storytelling” that tell the stories of real people, stories and experience to reveal both personal and social insight on the issue being addressed (Saldana, 2011, p.67-68). The ethnodramatic monologues created, consist of both standard dramatic prose and poetic arrangement in the telling of the Black women’s stories (Saldana, 2011, p.73).

This script is entitled *For the Power of **SHE*** and is appended in the appendices.

The Making of the Ethnodramatic Monologues: Verbatim Theory and Dramaturgical Coding

Patricia M. Davidson and Elizabeth Halcomb defines verbatim transcription as the, “word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of the audio recorded words” (Davidson & Halcomb, 2006, p.38). Verbatim transcriptions serve as the “vehicle (to) producing performance texts and performance ethnographies” (Denzin, 2001, p.24). To further enhance the verbatim transcription process of the interviews, I utilize dramaturgical coding. In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,* Johnny Saldana defines a code as an “qualitative inquiry [that is] most often a work or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of the language based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p.3). Dramaturgical coding was instrumental in helping me to implement gestures and emotion into the ethnodramatic monologues. Additionally, it assists in organizing and condensing the information collected and pinpoint the issues within the Black women’s stories and experiences, to create and showcase the characters and issues in the monologues. This process further allows me to process and reflect on the full narrative of the Black women, to ensure that the full ownership of the stories and experiences remains with the Black women.

Ethics

There is an immense responsibility in the re-telling of people’s lives with the use of their personal stories and experiences. Using a verbatim framework in the creation of the ethnodramatic monologues, brought forth ethical issues and concerns. As the facilitator and producer of this work, I have an ethical duty to represent the stories and experiences of these women in a truthful light. At the same time, it is my responsibility to balance my own interpretation of the women’s stories with the needs of the women to be fairly represented in ways which they want to be portrayed. To negotiate these issues, I chose to use dramatic narrative as a method to create the ethnodramatic monologues. Rather than reproducing the women’s words literally, I chose to balance

my views and the women's experiences by creating fictional narratives. I achieved this by merging shared experiences to create one character and put the stories and experiences, brought up in the workshop, in dialogue with one another, while preserving the women's anonymity.

The ideas, experiences and stories illustrated in the ethnodramatic monologues, entitled *For the Power of SHE*, are *based* on the ideas, experiences and stories shared by the women. *For the Power of* ***SHE*** is *not* a word-for-word re-telling of their stories and experiences. The intention of the ethnodramatic monologues is not to solely illustrate the issues faced by the women in the white space but to show how the practice of self-care can be used to transform their identities and body to (re)create a new reality for themselves. I plan to implement these ethnodramatic monologues as a performance and script within future workshops. I plan to perform this workshop in the future to groups of women implementing these ethnodramatic monologues as a new site of knowledge production to continue to dismantle ideologies that construct Black women's bodies as spaces for the enactment of violence.

CHAPTER 4

M1 ARM PEETS, YUH COOKIN' PON GAS!

THE DESIGN

In this section, I will discuss the process of designing and facilitating the workshop and exhibition space. I will outline my approach to the design, the sample sized use, recruitment of participants and objective of each section of the workshop.

The Sample

A community-based sample of Black women, between the age bracket of 18-35, living in the Greater Toronto area were selected. Initially, the proposed number of participants was five (5) Black women, however an additional two (2) women were interested in being apart of the research and workshop, which brought my total sample size to seven (7). I was committed to working with millennials because it is my opinion that millennials, especially Black women, are at the forefront of challenging racism and sexism and engaged in conversations surrounding the ways our bodies are affected by the systems and structures in white society. Black women and Black millennials, like myself are committed to dismantling space, to decolonize and change the way in which the Black body is constructed in the white space. We have Black women like Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors (who identifies as queer), Janaya Khan (who identifies as queer) and Yusrs Khogali, who are the co-founders of Black Lives Matter and respectively Black Lives Matter Toronto movement.[1]

As a current University student, I wanted to prioritize the experience of Black University students as I have seen and experienced first hand how large white institutions deal with Black bodies, especially the Black woman's body.

In 2018, when leaving the Second Cup located at my University, I was stopped by a community member who threw wood strips at me and proceeded to call me racial and derogatory slurs. The community member acted as a barrier between myself and the exit, preventing me from leaving the coffee shop. What I remember about that day was that it was another Black woman in the store that mobilized the workers to call security and acted as a barrier between myself and the community member, reassuring and comforting me until security guards came. I remember the questions of "Are you Okay"

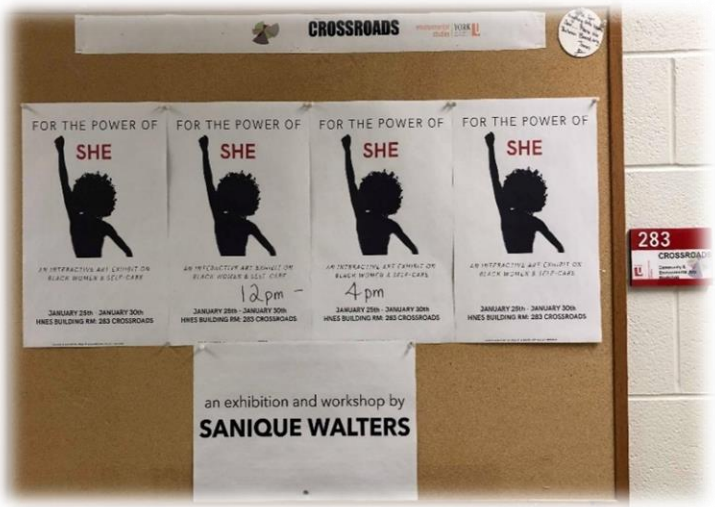
[1] Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an international social and political movement whose mission is to build local power and to intervene when violence, anti-Black racism was/is inflicted onto Black community members. This movement serves to connect Black people around the world to fight for justice against inequality, injustices and deliberate violence inflicted on the Black body by the state.

and the temporary looks of sympathy when the security guards arrived. I remember being surprised when told that the community member would be transported to a near-by hospital for the night as they believed they suffered from a mental illness. I remember feeling scared when told that the community member would only be kept off the campus for the night. I remember feeling numb knowing that nothing would be done, and this situation can happen again the next day. I remember feeling angry when told by other Black students at the University that this was not the first time this community member acted violently towards another Black student. I remember feeling detached knowing there was nothing I could do to stop situations like this from happening again. I remember feeling bewildered that an institution with so much privilege and power can only offer an "are you okay" towards issues pertaining to Black suffering and violence.

I wanted to explore that further by engaging with women who are/were members of these large white institutions and who have first hand experiences of the specific racialized challenges present. Additionally, I felt that having a sample of women with similar age and education background, would assist in creating a space of community and that the women in my workshop would be able to move from experiencing their "problems" as individual isolated experiences to seeing how they share similar concerns and through this develop comradery and an understanding of how their experiences are systemically produced. I wanted them to feel comfortable sharing their stories and experiences.

The principles of this approach come from Freirean popular education praxis, which places significant on creating a dialogue, which starts from images of working-class experience. I am also drawing on Black and Caribbean feminist Joan French who discusses and adapts popular education strategies to the needs of working-class Black women. In her article *Organizing Women Through Drama in Rural Jamaica,* Joan French argues that women begin by identifying their own individual concerns and then, through discussion and dialogue based on questions, they move from the personal to an understanding of this experience as one which is collective, and one which is produced by the class and race factors that give rise to it (French, 1985,p.3-4). French further demonstrates how women then proceed to identify an issue on which they can take action given their own capacity and organize to address that issue.

Recruiting Participants



During the month of December 2018, I obtained the sample of Black women by personally reaching out to women I have encountered throughout my time at York University. I enlisted the assistance of *Nia Centre for the Arts,* a Toronto-based not-for-profit organization that supports, showcases, promotes and mentors individuals of the Black Diaspora, to help advertise for the Workshops through their list serve. Posters were distributed around York University, strategically placed in the Health, Nursing and Environmental Studies building, to which the workshops would be held. Additionally, I used the social media platform *Instagram,* as a form of advertisement. Prospective participants were informed about the research prior to their involvement. I had one on one conversations with the seven (7) women who showed interest in being a part of the workshops and interviews. The workshop took place between January 25th – January 30th, 2019.

Note: After the completion of the workshop on January 30th, the space remained opened as an exhibition for other Black women to view and engage in throughout February in honour of Black History Month.

The Participants

Seven Black women, based in Toronto, age ranging from 22-28, participated in the workshop and interview process. Below I have created a chart that outlines part of their identity, focusing on their age, ethnic group, language, family, education, social class and ability/disability. Participants are listed from 1-7, to keep their names confidential.

	AGE	ETHNIC GROUP	LANGUAGE	FAMILY	EDUCATION	SOCIAL CLASS	ABILITY/ DISABILITY
1	**28**	Ghana/Ashanti	English/TWI	Single (Raised by her mother)	Bachelor's Degree *(Currently working towards a degree in teaching)*	Lower Class	Able-bodied
2	**24**	Fulani	English, French, Spanish, Fulani	Nuclear	Bachelor's Degree	Middle Class	Able-bodied
3	**24**	Caribbean (Trinidadian and Bajan	English	Nuclear	Bachelor's degree, *Currently working towards a Law Degree*	Lower Class	Able-bodied
4	**24**	Caribbean (Jamaican)	English, French	Nuclear/Single	Current University Student	Lower Class	Able-bodied
5	**24**	Ethiopian African/Canadian	Amharic, English	Nuclear	Current University Student	Upper Middle Class	Able-bodied
6	**22**	African, Nigerian	English, Yoruba	Nuclear	Bachelor's Degree	Middle Class	Able-bodied
7	**23**	African, Congolese	French, English	Nuclear	Current University Student	Middle Class	Anxiety

THE WORKSHOP

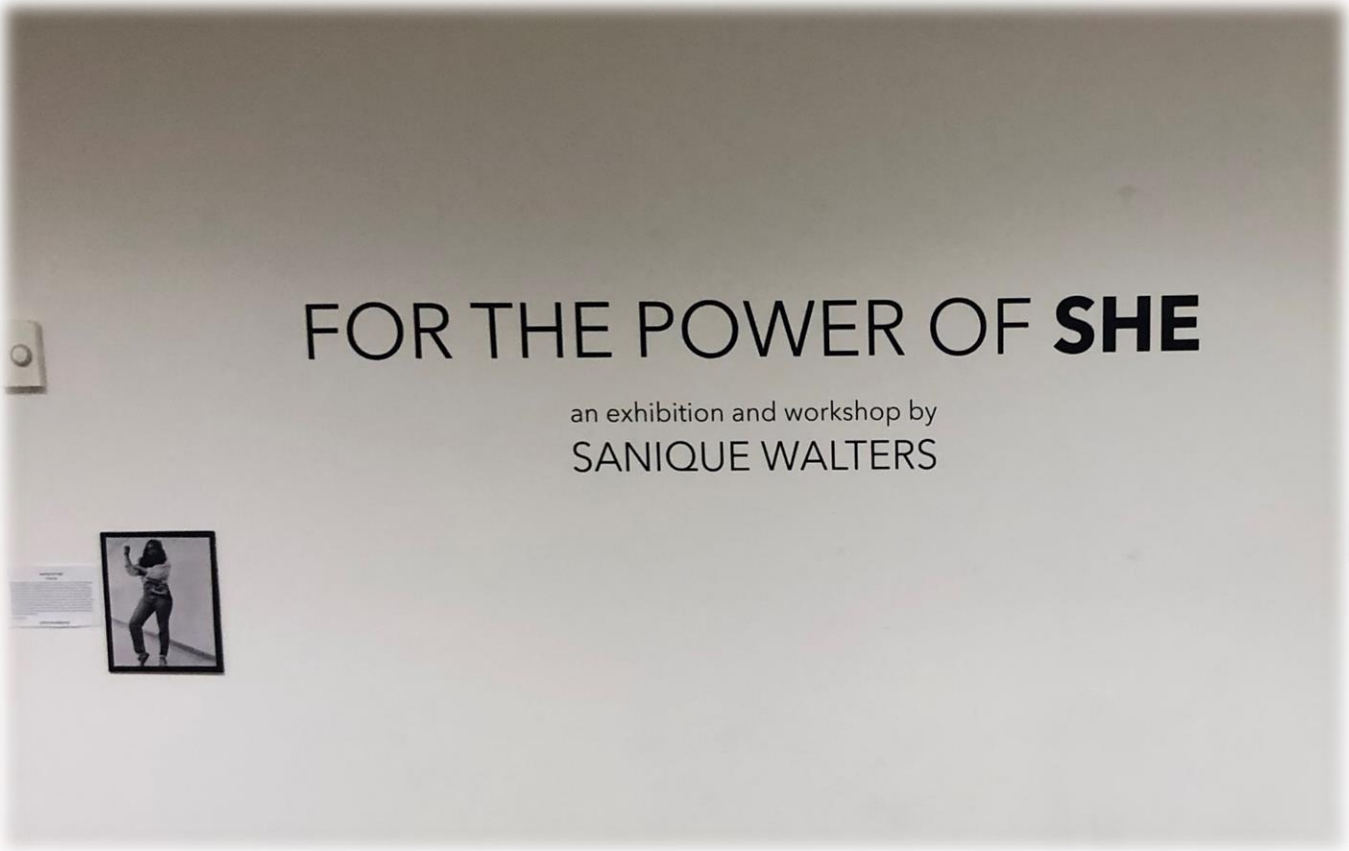
Space: The Room

The creation of the workshop space was of paramount importance to me. The construction of the space of the workshop took several months of planning and one week of designing. The workshops were held in Crossroads, a room located in the Health, Nursing and Environmental Studies building at York University. As the space of the University is normatively white, I wanted to transform the room to make it normatively Black. By that I mean that I wanted to create a space in which the women who entered the room would immediately see their concerns, their bodies and their experiences reflected to them.

I transformed the room to remake it a space for reclaiming and transcending inherited colonial identities. The goal was to ensure the Black women felt welcomed, connected, safe, comfortable, and empowered.

Upon arrival, participants were given two copies of the Informed Consent Form to complete. One copy was for their personal use, and the other was given to me. I was visible throughout this process to answer any and all questions. I reminded participants about the purpose of the study before engaging in the workshop.

IMAGES OF THE WORKSHOP



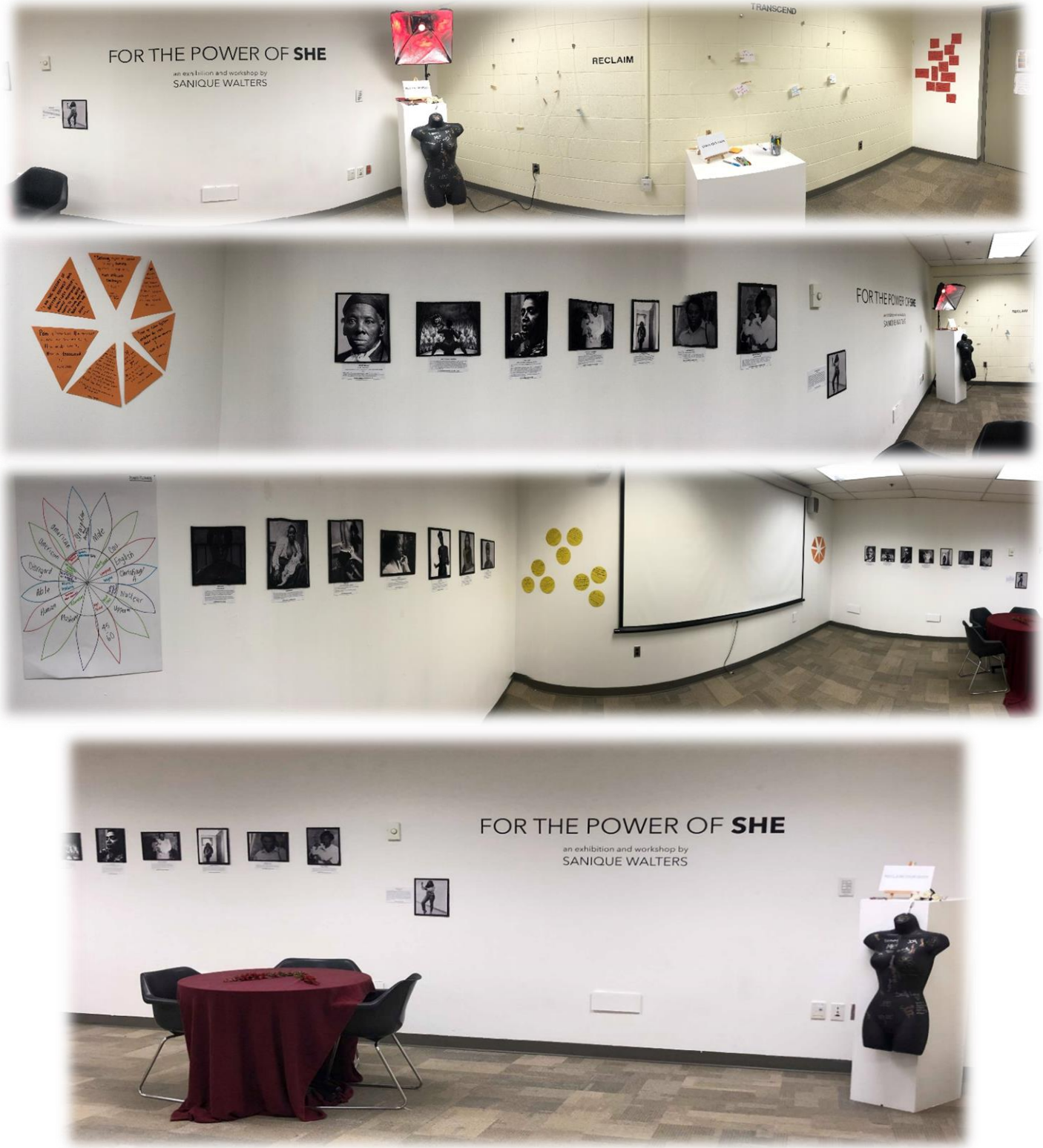
This image shows the title of the workshop and exhibition. On the left side of the title, there is a self-image of myself, with a blurb of who I am and the purpose of the workshop.

This image shows the red table. This is where the stories, experiences and lived realities of the women where shared.

This is an image of the right side of the room. The orange triangles (left side) illustrate quotes (discussed below). In the middle sits seven (7) images of Black women, which I will further discuss below.

This image illustrates the left side of the room. The table was utilized to showcase the objects that were used for the first ice breaker. Above the table sits the self-care board, where the participants wrote the methods they used to self-care. Next to the self-care board, is the power flower, which depicts the social identity of who the women believed to wield the most power in society. Next to the power flower is the images of seven (7) Black women (discussed below). The yellow circles next to the images depict quotes (discussed below).

A Panoramic view of the workshop space



The Images on the Wall

These women on the image wall were my source of empowerment throughout life. They changed the epistemological representation of the Black woman's body and Black identity and were agents of change in the way I viewed my body, my dark skin and identity. The gave me the power to be my self in the public space, unapologetically.

I used the images to engage with Katherine McKittrick's discussion of how our bodies are mapped through time and memory. The images recement their bodies, stories and experiences in the spaces and played a vital role in the design of the workshop space. Multiple images of Black women, from past and present, were displayed around the space. The images not only served as a form of visual ethnography, but as a site of memory and 'act of transfer' (Taylor, 2003, p.2).

The images operated as a site of memory and knowledge which connected the past and present and allowed for personal and cultural/social memory to be shared in the space (Taylor, 2003, p.2). They also showcased where the knowledge and violence surrounding the Black woman's body originated. I wanted to situate the past stories and experiences of Black women and silently give a voice to them in the present space, to invoke a space of memory. In *The Body and Performance in 1970s Jamaica: Toward a Decolonial Cultural Method,* Honor Ford-Smith explains that "memory is made and remade across time" and it was important for me to showcase that (Ford-Smith, 2019, p.150). I wanted to illustrate the history surrounding the Black woman's body being a site of violence and to encourage the participants to explore the ways that memory constantly recreates itself through time in our present lifetimes. I also wanted to show what took place in the past and what is still taking place in the present. I selected images which overlapped with contemporary images so that I could dramatize for the participants the importance of the past and disrupt linear ideas of time. With the assistance of Professor Lisa Myers, I learned the technique of montage and how to stage these memories in the space, to allow for interpretation and interrogation of their meaning(s). I consciously placed past images such as Nanny beside present-day images of Imani Love and Issa Rae, so that each image would comment on the other and provoke interpretations in the viewer. The images show below are all in

conversation with each other across time and so they destabilize fixed notions of temporality, enabling us to see the ways in which meanings migrate across time. The images served as a “return to the past” and encourage an “active practice of remembering” (Ford-Smith, 2019, p.151) (Kuhn, 2007, p.284). From this starting point, they could identify how past representations of Black women continue to be lived in the present and how they could be disrupted in dominant thought in the present.
(See images and descriptions below)

Wall One: Depicts images of seven (7) Black women. From left to right, Harriet Tubman, Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman, Audre Lorde, Agnes ‘Molly’ Richardson, Sandra P. Richardson, Debra Richardson & Donna Richardson followed by a short description of who they were/are and represented in the space

Harriet Tubman: Tubman was the first Black women that was taught to us during Black History Month during elementary school. Harriet Tubman led hundred of enslaved people to freedom through the route of the Underground Railroad. She dedicated and risked her life to help impoverished former slaves and the elderly. She devoted her life to fight for racial equality and women’s rights. As a young girl, learning about Harriet Tubman made me feel powerful to be a Black and woman. I remember feeling unstoppable and feeling like I could do anything I wanted because she paved a way for me to succeed.

Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman: Saartjie Sarah Baartman was a Khokhoi woman who was exhibited in science fairs and “freak” shows in Europe. Baartman’s body was fetishized by the European society because of the differences in her size and features in comparison to the white woman. Baartman was deemed inhuman and unfeminine because her body. She was labelled the ‘Hottentot Venus’, the Greek God of fertility. She was sold, subjected to science studies and forced to live in inhumane conditions. Saartjie Sarah Baartman died at age 25 in 1815. She was returned to her hometown and laid to rest in 2002.

Saartjie’s story is a representation of the sexualization, racism and fetishization that occurs on the Black woman’s body under the white gaze. I first learned about Baartman in my fourth year of Undergraduate studies. I remember sitting in my seminar room, in shock and anger, learning about what was done to her. She was criminalized, sexualized, fetishized and placed on display for white audience entertainment. She was viewed as an object, a science project and treated as an animal because of her body. I saw my body in Baartman’s. I was reminded that although I exist in a different time and space, the representation of the Black woman’s body has not changed.

Audre Lorde: Audre Lorde identified herself as a Black feminist lesbian mother poet. Lorde expressed that her identity was based on many divergent perspectives that society perceived as incompatible. Lorde’s work gave voice to issues of race, gender and sexuality. Audre Lorde’s work has been inspiring to me and has helped me build the foundation for this workshop and exhibition. Lorde reminds us that “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare” (Lorde 1992 pg.132).

Agnes “Molly” Richardson, Sandra P. Richardson, Debra Richardson, Donna Richardson: These four women are members of my family. They are the women that raised me and created the foundation of who I am today.

Agnes “Molly” Richardson: This is my grandmother. She was the sole matriarch and breadwinner of our family, raising five children on her own on the small island St.Kitts. She worked alongside her mother, on the Sugar cane field. My grandmother always

ensured that her children, her grandchildren, friends and family were well looked after and worked to provide for us all.

Sandra P. Richardson: This is my mother. I have seen my mother micronize barriers faced in her male dominated profession. She continues to spark conversation and uses her platform in her community to create new pathways for Black women in her profession. She provides opportunities and guidance to friends, family and community members. She has always taught me the importance of loving and caring for myself through her actions in her Caribbean community.

Debra Richardson: This is my mother. She has changed the way I view *strength*. Strength is not solely about the physical aspect of how much you can carry or hold. It is about embracing and accepting your weaknesses, your pain and still standing firm, with your head held high in your authentic self. It is facing fear, negative representation, stereotypes, power systems, head on, not allowing them to change who you are or how you move in the world. Strength is being true to who you are.

Donna Richardson: This is my auntie. She has always lived a life of integrity. She uses her profession as a Professor to insight change in her students, family, friends and community member lives. She motivates, empowers and encourages those around her to be their authentic selves and to follow and never give up on their goals. She reminds us that it is important to “take it easy” on ourselves, to remember that we are human and that it is never too late to start.

Wall Two: Depicts images of seven (7) Black women. From left to right, Viola Davis, Nanny, Imani Love, Issa Rae, Leslie Jones, Michelle Obama, Maya Angelou followed by a short description of who they were/are and what they represented in the space.

Viola Davis: "You know the scene in 'The Exorcist' where Linda Blair is tied to the bed clearly possessed by demons and has 'Help Me' written on her stomach? That's how I feel everyday in this Hollywood community and in my life in trying to live my authentic life… We (Black women) have to be maternal, we have to be the saviour, we have to make that white character feel better*"* (2018) Viola Davis is an actress and producer. She was one of the first Black women I saw in a leading role in a movie/television show. This role was not for *comedic* relief, it did not hyperbolize the Black woman's stereotypes. In this role, she was the leader and in a room of white men, they came to her for directions and answers. She utilized this role create new representations of Black women. They did not have to wear a *weave* or put on *makeup,* hide themselves, to be heard and respected in the white space. Davis uses her platform to discuss the importance of portraying Black women in art and works to dismantle the *socially accepted* Black woman's image.

Nanny: Nanny was a maroon and military leader in this the history of Black freedom movements in the New World. She was a heroine of the Black community, winning a land grant from the British for the Eastern Maroons of Jamaica. Jamaican Maroons

were former African slaves, who often mixed with Indigenous people who resisted colonial conquest (Dubois, 2008, p.65). They were the first to develop and establish free communities in Jamaica.

Women like Nanny, perhaps survived domestic and field labour, and then escaped enslavement to serve as encouraging figures for their community, helping them to maintain their faith in social and political freedom movements. Growing up, I never heard the stories of women like Nanny. Black men were the central focus when speaking about civil rights or social and political freedom movements. I wanted the women to learn and see this part of our history that went untold/unnoticed.

Imani Love: Love utilizes her art to reflect on her experiences as a Black woman in Western spaces. Her work provides a pathway to create change on social disparities. The image I chose was apart of a collaboration piece with *Daniel Stewart and* illustrates the fetishization of Black women's bodies.

Issa Rae: During my high school tenure, there wasn't a day that went by that my friends and I didn't watch Issa Rae's YouTube series on being *The Awkward Black Girl.* During a time where my friends and I were figuring out our identity and place in society, Rae convinced us that it was okay to be *awkward,* to not fit into a space and the value of being your unapologetic self regardless of backlash. She empowered us to move freely in our truths.

Leslie Jones: I have watched over time as Leslie Jones navigates her Blackness in the Arts & Entertainment field as well as white dominated spaces. She has faced racist, misogynist abuse from Western society as a result of her dark skin. She was not being the socially accepted version of Blackness, which impacted the spaced in which she was hired and the jobs she received. Like Jones, my skin color is not the *ideal* Blackness that western society has constructed to be beautiful. Jones has inspired me as she continuously stands strong in the face of this adversity and continues to celebrate her Blackness, becoming a success in her career field.

Michelle Obama: To me, Michelle Obama is another Black woman who models' the power and strength of Black women. She broadened the role of First Lady by bringing

awareness to the oppressed circumstances that many Black women face. She powerfully and emotively utilizes her voice to advocate, teach and create change in the lives of Black women and Black girls.

Maya Angelou: “Now you understand just why my head’s not bowed. I don’t shout or jump about or have to talk real loud. When you see me passing, it ought to make you proud. I say, it’s in the click of my heels, the bend in my hair, the palm of my hand, the need for my care. ‘Cause I’m a woman. Phenomenally. Phenomenal Woman. That’s me” (Angelou, 1978).

My University tenure was spent listening to poetry by Maya Angelou. I was immersed in a space where my identity, culture, body, Blackness made me feel small and inferior. I was constantly working to prove my self deserving of being in the space. Maya Angelou’s art showcases Black beauty. Her work inspires me to keep pushing forward in the face of adversity and to use my voice as a pathway to my freedom.

The Quotes and Objects

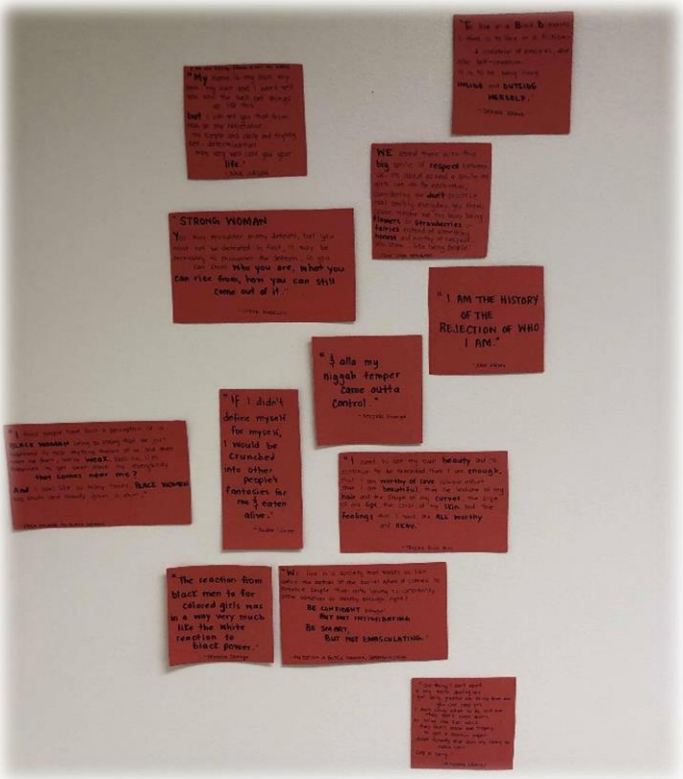
I used the quotes and objects as a method to ritualize our memories and stories. The quotes and objects operated as embodied performance to assist in putting the images in dialogue with the space and dramatic activities. Through the quotes and objects, the Black women were able to share personal or social knowledge and memory about their identity into the space. They were used to further assist the participants in putting their own memory into improvised performance. The quotes and objects served as a *passing* on of this knowledge and memory to begin the process of decolonization.

Additionally, the quotes were my method to implement Black feminist thought and thinkers into the space. All quotes are written by Black women. On this journey, I was inspired work, poetry, statements and affirmations of women such as; Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Carol Moseley Braun, Ntozake Shange and many more, who use their platforms to address issues of race, sex, gender, stereotypes and the representation of the Black woman’s body and identity. These Black feminist and thinkers have empowered me on this journey of reclaiming the Black woman’s body and exploring self-care. These quotes signify another form of written history and narrative told by

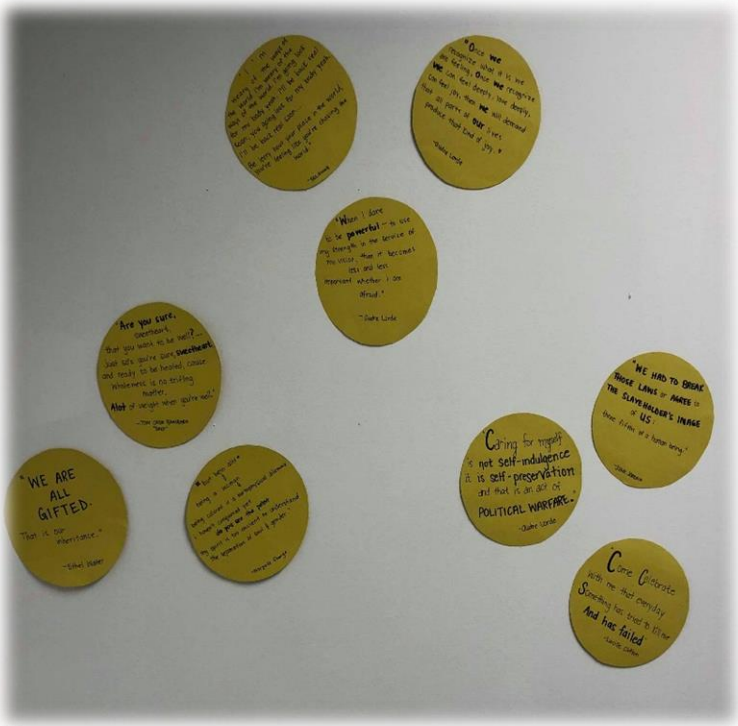
Black women on the experience of what is means to be a Black woman in the white space. These quotes are taken from different times and space, yet still have the same underlying theme. These quotes help me to map out the history of racialization, sexualization, identity crisis and fetishization experienced by Black women.

The quotes were consciously displayed strategically and organized into three distinct parts, shown below. The women were asked to choose a quote, and object, that resonated with them and share why. As the facilitator, this helped me to understand where they situated themselves with the practice of self-care.

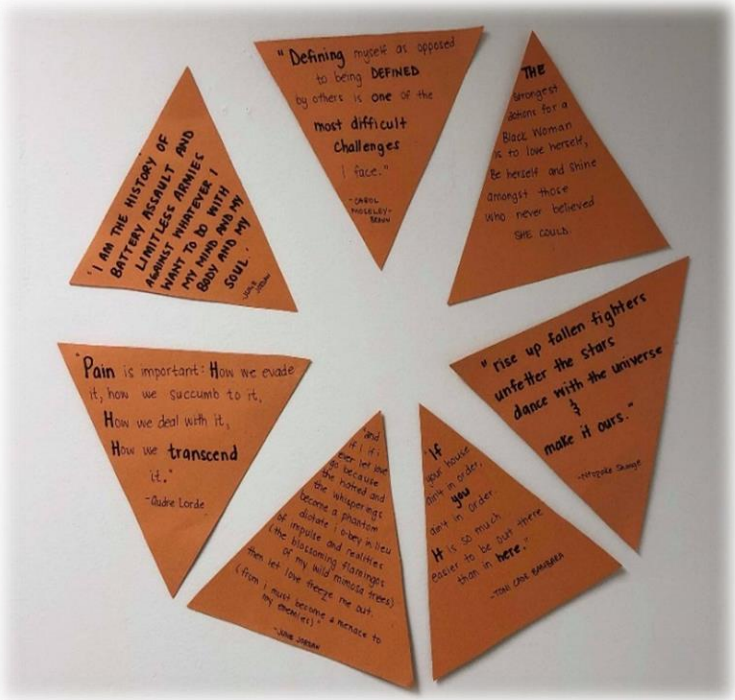
Below, I have displayed the images of the quotes.



The quotes in the red colored square/rectangles signify the experience and stereotypes projected onto the Black woman's body by white society.



The quotes in the yellow circle signify the journey to reclaim and transform self-care and the Black woman's body outside of the realms of its constructed meaning in the white space.



The quotes in the orange triangle speak to the journey of self-recovery, identity, healing and self-love. They signify the pain and fight to decolonize the body and reclaim one's self in the white space.

A list of the quotes used is appended in the appendices.

This is an image of the object table. From left to right, Satin Cap, Make- Up, Red Nail Polish, Black Hair tie, Sage, Hair Curlers, Navy Yarn, Mirrors. These objects were chosen based on things I utilized in my everyday life.

Workshop Procedure

I designed and facilitated a three-part participatory workshop that focuses on identity, self-care and the Black woman's body. The workshop was approximately 2-2.5 hours.

Findings of the workshop will be discussed in the Chapter 5, It Tek Time to Foine Ant's Belly.

Introduction to the Space

After consent forms were signed, I instructed the women to get familiar with the space. I asked them to walk around the room and pick a quote from the wall and an object from the table that resonated with them. In the background, a multimedia video was playing. This video showcased various images of Black women. Additionally, poems such as *A Woman Speaks and The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde, *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou and *To This Black Woman Body pt. 1,* by Alyesha Wise played in the background behind the images of the Black women. My use of poetry behind the

images of Black women is not meant to be luxury nor used as a tool to romanticize the bodies and experiences of these Black women. I use poetry as a tool of political warfare and self-preservation of the experience and lived realities of Black women that are often silenced and erased in the white space. In *We Can Learn to Mother Ourselves: The Queer Survival of Black Feminism 1968-1996,* Alexis Pauline Gumbs, using Audre Lorde's 'Poetry is Not Luxury' framework, redefines poetry "as the process of genealogy, a creating a process where 'She! She! and She!' can emerge from a biological genealogy, characterized and silenced through history and white colonialist rape of enslaved African women" (Gumbs, 2010, p.409). Meaning that poetry becomes a tool of decolonization and a new knowledge of production of transforming and (re)shaping the identities and bodies of Black women. Gumbs further explains that poetry is a response to violence that is "reinforced through the impact of language" (Gumbs,2010, p.409). Poetry becomes the method to intervene into colonial language of normalized violence, placing Black women as the solo voice of this new language and knowledge (Gumbs, 2010, p.410). The four poetry pieces chosen to illustrate the inconsistencies in how Black women are represented and viewed in the white space and her battle to (re) shape and (re)define herself outside of colonial social norms. These poems serve to remove the biological genealogy placed onto the Black woman's body during enslavement. These poems reaffirm the Black women's power and worth and showcases her vulnerability in the white space as a result of the legacies of enslavement.

When the multimedia video concluded, I invited the women to stand in a circle with me. I explained the purpose of my research project to them and welcomed them to the space. I asked the women to introduce themselves utilizing the objects and quotes chosen and tell the group why they chose that object and quote. After the introductions, we played two icebreakers.

Ice Breaker One

The first ice breaker allowed us to simultaneously create a safe space. The

women would create a beat using only their hands and legs and as they performed their beat, they would speak statements into the space that aligned with what they needed to feel safe. I chose to do this ice breaker because it was important that the women and myself feel comfortable in the space to begin to talk and discuss issues that are not normally spoken about. Malcolm Harris defines safe space as a space “where people could find practical and resistance to political and social repression” (Harris, 2015). The ‘space’ I am referring to here, differs from the physical space/environment of the workshop. The idea of creating a ‘safe space’ is to put an end to the physical space and create/manifest a new space “created by the coming together of women searching for community” (Harris, 2015). This is an imagined space that is formed by the social and cultural consciousness of the women and serves to bind them together. Through this icebreaker, the women worked together to create an ideal space where they would feel comfortable engaging with the topic.

During this icebreaker, the women expressed that they needed; sisterhood, openness, love, understanding, truthfulness, fun, laughter, Blackness, community, culture, melanin, beauty and much more, in the space.

Icebreaker Two

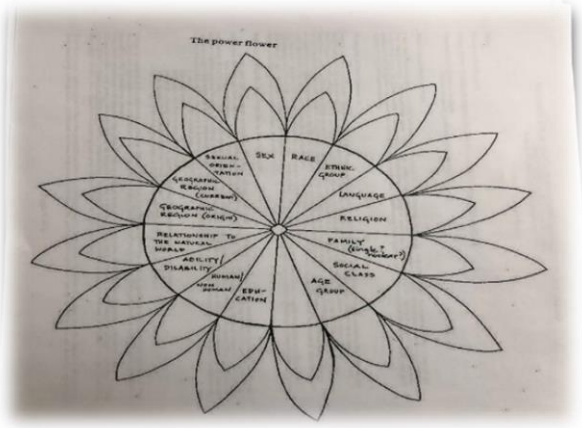
The second ice breaker was a writing exercise. I instructed the women to engage and answer the questions *How do you self-care?* and *What does self-care look like for you?* They would write their answers on sticky notes and stick them onto the wall. The women were then asked to share what they wrote.

After the completion of both ice breakers, I invited the women back in the circle where we did a breathing exercise before starting part one of the workshop.

Part One of the Workshop: The Body and Identity

The objective of part one of the workshop was to explore how Black women cope with Black stereotypes that define their Blackness. The question of this part of the workshop was *How do Black women navigate their body under the white gaze?*

Power Flower Exercise:



To engage with the question of part one of the workshop, I used the Power Flower. In popular education studies and radical social theory, the 'power flower' is a tool utilized to look "at who we are in relation to those who wield power in society" (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin & Thomas, 1991, p.23). Popular educators explain that the outer petals of the flower are used to describe the dominant social identity whereas the inner petals are used to describe "the social identity of the individual", in the case of my project, the Black women (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin & Thomas, 1991, p. 23). Each petal represents an aspect of the dominant Canadian social identity (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin & Thomas, 1991, p. 25).

Using the power flower as a tool, I asked each woman to locate themselves in the Canadian society. It is critical that their self-knowledge be in constant conversation with the space and self-care. Without the self-knowledge of their identities, we won't be able to effectively engage with the issue of self-care. Each woman was asked to fill out a power flower individually to locate their social identity. However instead of filling out the dominant social identity petals on the same sheet as their social identity, I created a bigger power flower that was placed on the wall in front of them. As a collective, I had the women work together to create the dominant social identity on the bigger power flower. We then engaged in a discussion surrounding the social identity that they created in their individual power flower, and the dominant social identity created on the bigger power flower.

The Mask Exercise

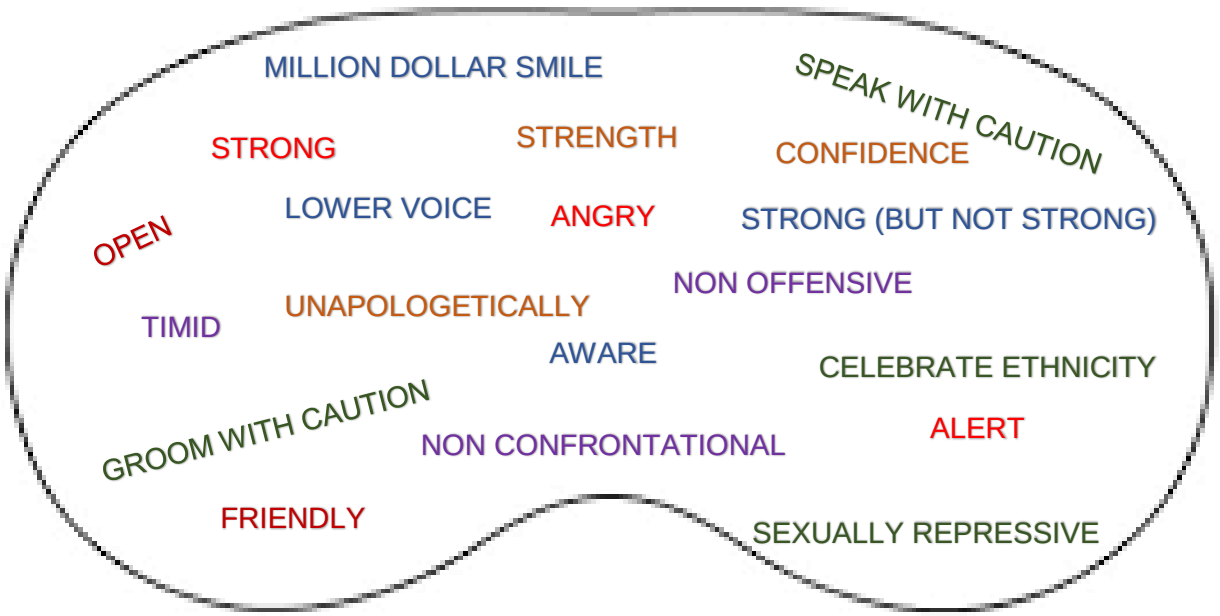
The practice and performance of mask and masking has been around for centuries. Masks have been used in ritualized practices, practical and performance purposed and ceremonial and religious works to name a few. Sears A. Eldredge explains that “Mask(s) can… symbolize concretely what… must be regarded as transcendental, or, as an observation, not of outer, but inner nature” (Eldredge, 1996, p.5). Eldredge outlines five major functions of Masks. These are; (1) mask-as-frame, (2) mask-as-mirror, (3) mask-as-catalyst, (4) mask-as mediator, (5) mask-as-transformer (Eldredge, 1996, p.4). For the purpose of my workshop, I utilize masks to explore Black identity and the self, as a method to delve deeper into the consciousness of Black women in the white space. I wanted to explore what happens to Black women and their self when placed into white spaces. I draw on Eldredge mask-as-a mirror and mask-as-transformer function and Frantz Fanon’s phrase Black skin, white mask as a foundation to further explore this. Eldredge explains that mask-as -mirror and mask-as-transformer allows the individual to not only see the surface reflection of them self and the world, but “see through into another reality”, where they can transform their self from the dominant realities and (re)create a new reality (Eldredge, 1996, p.5). Further, Fanon explains that Black people have donned a *white mask* or ego to cope with the historical and philosophical narratives which condemn Black subject to notions of the savage, the primitive and the sexual. In his chapter “The Fact of Blackness” (1952), Fanon draws on Hegel as well as historical narratives to dramatize the weight of colonial representational practices of the Black unconscious (p.101). However, Fanon elucidates that putting on this *white mask* and, in a sense, fleeing the ideals of Blackness, causes the Black body and Black identity to lose their sense of self and agency in the space. I wanted to further explore Fanon’s theory in this exercise. *Do Black women still adapt a white mask in the white space? Are we hiding parts of our identity in the face of white culture? Do our bodies navigate differently in white spaces?* Through this exercise I was able to further explore these questions and Fanons theory.

Following the power flower exercise, I gave each women a printed-out mask.

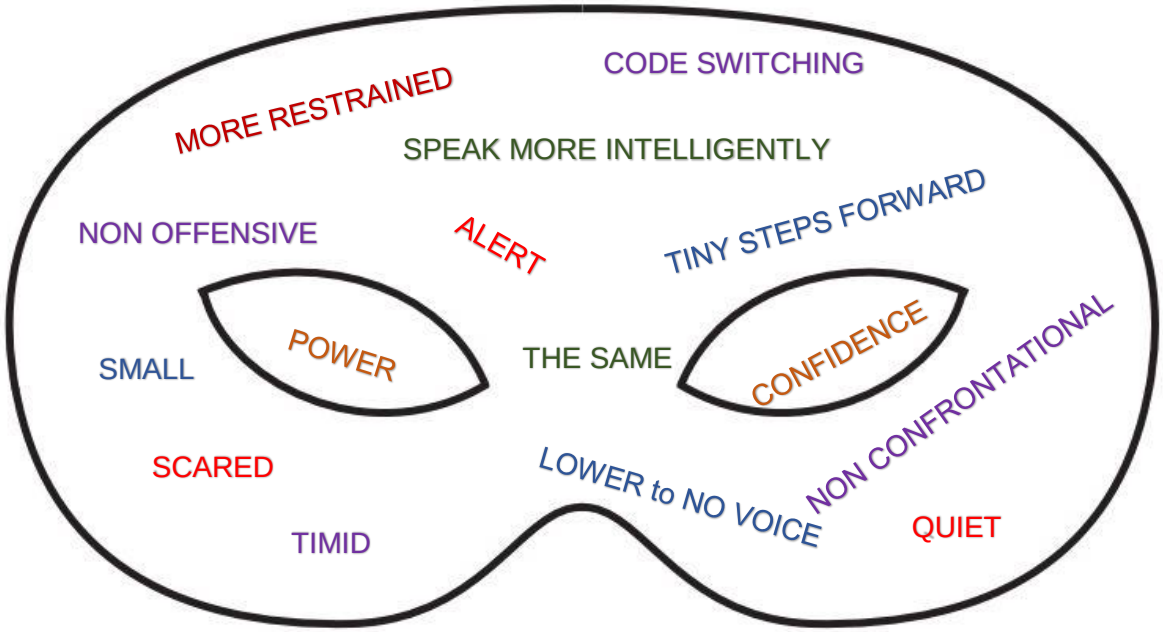
On the back of the mask they were asked to reflect and write characteristics of the ways that they currently navigate and walk through society. When they were finished, I asked them to flip the mask over and reflect and write characteristics of the ways they would navigate and walk through society if surrounded by the identity they previously created as a group on the Power flower. After this was completed, we engaged in a discussion. I asked the women three questions; *Was there a change in the way you would navigate in society based on the identity? -, Why or why not? How do you think this identity you created perceives you? Would you change your behaviour or identity in front of this person? Why or Why not?*

Below, I have created a diagram that displays what the women wrote on the back and front of their masks.

*What the women wrote on the **BACK** of their mask*



*What the women wrote on the **FRONT** of their mask.*



Part Two of the Workshop: Shade and Self

The objective of this part of the workshop was to explore shade and the self-concept. I have seen firsthand how society has created and enforced a *socially acceptable* Black woman as being one of lighter-skinned. As a result, Black women who have darker-skin become dehumanized. It is my opinion and belief that skin tone can serve as a barrier to not only how Black women access self-care but *how* they practice it. Self-care has been constructed based on *white ideals* and *white survival* and perseverance. A darker-skinned Black woman without access to whiteness may find it difficult to penetrate the realm of self-care as she may not see it as a practice for *her.*

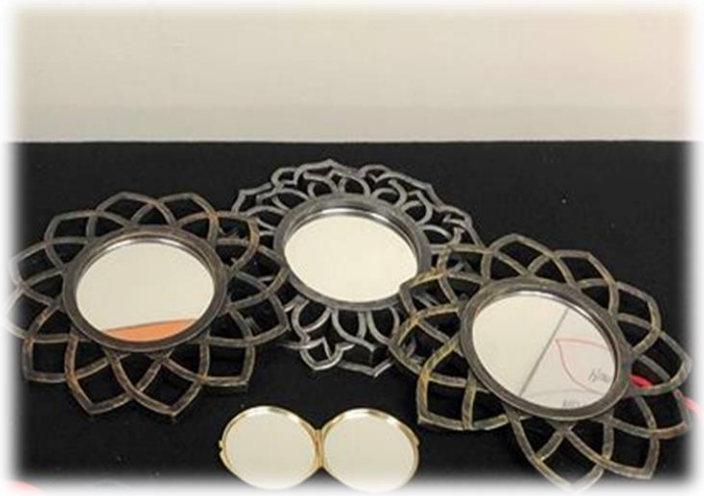
To explore shade and self, I delve deeper into the discussion of shadeism/colorism and how it creates a barrier in how we navigate in the white space and ultimately how we access and practice self-care. For the purpose of my workshop, I utilize Theresa Anzovino definition of shadeism/colorism. Anzovino outlines that shadeism/colorism is “a form of intra-racial discrimination that is privileging people with

lighter skin tones" over people with darker skin tones (Anzovino, 2014, p.68). Shadeism has become a globalized issue in various communities, especially the Black community. As a result, a social hierarchy, that is based on race and skin tone, has been enforced, placing lighter- skinned tones on the top of the hierarchy and darker-skinned tones at the bottom (Anzovino, 2014, p.68). In *The Legacy of Colorism Reflects Wounds of Racism That are more Than Skin Deep,* DeNeen L. Brown explains that having a darker-skinned tone signifies Blackness whereas having a lighter-skinned tone signifies whiteness (Brown, 2009). Brown notes that in Black women, age thirty (30) or younger, there is almost a fixation on being lighter- skinned because it is seen parallel to accessing beauty, power, white privilege and ultimately *humanness* (Brown, 2009). Survival and success in the white space as a lighter-skinned Black woman is easier, because having a lighter- skinned tone allows one to access the powers of whiteness (Brown, 2009). Similarly, Verna M. Keith explains that "in a society where whiteness of skin is a highly esteemed dimension of idealized beauty, women with darker skin and Afrocentric features are at a disadvantage" (Keith, 2009; Glenn, 2009). Darker-skinned tones carry "symbolic racial meaning", which deviates from the attributes that are "considered acceptable" in the white space (Keith, 2009; Glenn, 2009). Keith argues that skin tone determines one's self image, self-concept and ideal of beauty and femininity (Keith, 2009; Glenn, 2009). Being of a darker -skinned tone in communities, creates a space of self-rejection, self-contempt and otherization.

Continuing, this part of the workshop questioned *does the shade of Black (lighter, brown, darker,), mean access to different privileges? Does it change how a Black woman accesses and practices self-care?*

To engage with the topic of shade and self, I posed four (4) questions to the group. (1) What is Black beauty? (2) What event/experience made you realize your skin tone or shade of Black? (3) Does the shade of your skin tone change the ways in which Black women need to selfcare/selflove? (4) Does the shade of your skin tone change the way you would navigate your body in the white space?

Mirror Exercise



The mirror exercise was my method of engaging Stuart Hall's cultural identity and transformation theory and Audre Lorde's self-care theory and put them into practice. To examine and explore representation of Black women's bodies and self and begin transformation outside of its colonial realm, I placed the women into pairs. Through this exercise, the women embodied mirrors. Looking at each other, they took turns to move together, mirroring each other. They then communicated to their partner what they saw. Essentially, they would gaze at one another and describe attributes of their partner to them. This exercise served to reclaim and transform the Black woman's body. It also started the process of organizing, building relationships and enforcing solidarity as they access self- care. Audre Lorde explains that Black women, lack cultural and social consciousness of each other, and, this has played a role in their ability to self-care and self-love. Black women need to come together in the practice of self-care and form a bond of solidarity with one another. In my experience, Black women often gaze at one another with anger or hate because they are often silenced and isolated from one another. We don't *see* each other. Social and cultural consciousness has not been given the space to form. The purpose of this exercise was to give Black women the space to see one another and begin the process of forming social and cultural consciousness. This activity allowed the participants to come face to face with something new—the empathic gaze of a Black woman and to imagine what this empathic gaze might evoke. In this way, participants began to think about how they might transform their identity, body and self, as a result of this enactment of self-care.

In the second part of this exercise, I had the women look at their reflection in a mirror. This was done individually. The purpose of this exercise was to create a space

where the women can begin/continue to build a relationship with self-care to help them understand how their *self* needs to be cared for. Indigenous writer, Leanne Simpson explains that “being in a meaningful relationship with another being is recognizing who they are, it is reflecting back to them their essence and worth as a being, it is a mirror. Positive mirroring creates positive identities, it creates strong grounded individuals” (Simpson, 2015). It is important for Black women to recognize themselves away from negative images and stereotypes.

The Mirror exercise begins an ongoing practice with themselves on their journey to self-care and self-healing. What we see in others is often a reflection of what we see in ourselves. Through this activity, we were able to change the gaze placed onto their body. Positive mirroring operates as a method to access Audre Lorde’s *spiritual realm* to access their erotic self and begin to practice self-care.

Reclaim Your Body Exercise

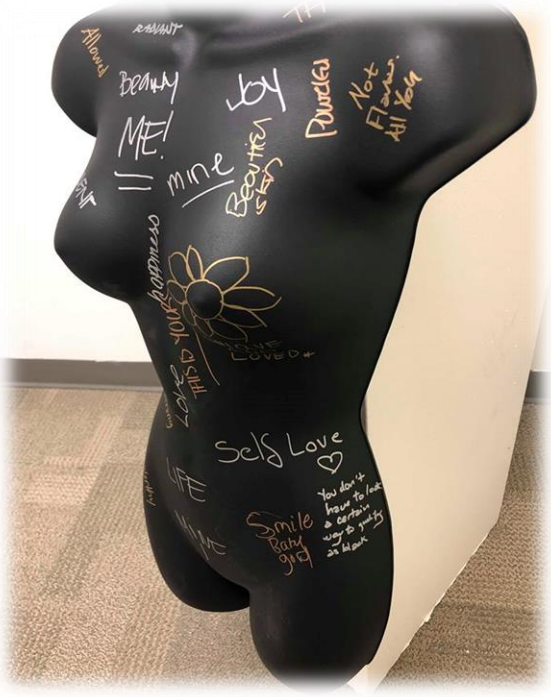
In the final exercise, I implore the theories of Sylvia Wynter’s. After the mirror exercise, I asked the women to write how they felt about their bodies, how they wanted their body to be represented and how they wanted the world to *know* about their body on the Black mannequin body. This exercise served to overturn what Wynter’s refers to as *colonial knowledge,* that has been produced in the white space and replicated and (re)enforced throughout history. I provided a physical Black woman mannequin body and directed the women to write their *truths* about their body on the Black mannequin body. Through writing, the women where able to dismantle the colonial knowledge and begin to create a new *truth* and *knowledge* for and about themselves. This exercise served not only to embody/ create new knowledge, but as a method to decolonize the image of the ‘Western Man’ image that has been placed onto the Black woman body throughout history. This exercise dismantled the coloniality of power, their transformative writing serving as their truth and a new production of knowledge.

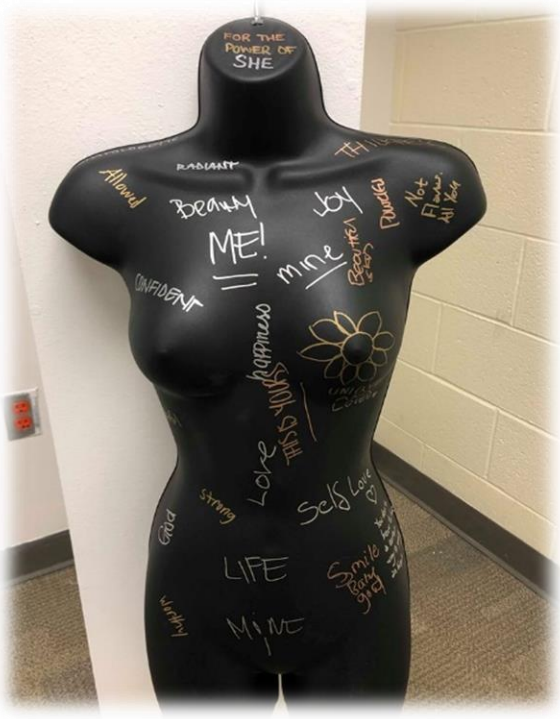
(After part two of the workshop, participants were given a 10-minute break. Refreshments were provided.)

Images of the Red Table & Reclaim Your Body Section

This image showcases the red table and the reclaim your body section. The red light utilized symbolizes the "gaze" that is placed onto the Black woman's body. I chose red as the color to signify the "gaze", because I view the colour red to be one of power, strength, love and emotion. These are all traits that I use synonymously when describing the Black woman's body. This section was one of reclaiming and transformation. Through this light, I began transforming the gaze of negativity, danger, inhumanness, that is placed onto the Black woman's body.

A closer look at the “Reclaim Your Body” Section and the women interacting in the space.





What the Women wrote: *“You don’t have to look a certain way to qualify as Black.” “Not Flaws, All you.” “Me” “Mine” “Joy” “Allowed” “Life” “Beauty” “Radiant” “Unapologetic” “Thickness” “Beautiful Skin” “Powerful” “Happiness” “Confident” “Strong” “Worthy” “Able” “Wonderful” “Smile” “Self-Love” “Love”*

For the purpose of the exhibition, audience members were able to see how these women wanted to be represented and what their Black body and Black identity meant to them. The words written onto the Black mannequin body served to transform and

reshape the Black woman's body and Black identity from a Black woman's narrative and construction, away from the Western construction.

Part three: Self-Care

Part three of the workshop took place at the red table. The objective of this part of the workshop was to reflect, transform and reclaim self-care and the Black woman stereotypes. Sitting around the table, we engaged in a discussion. I posed six (6) questions to the group. These questions are; (1) What effects does repeat experiences of racism have on your ability to selfcare and selflove? (2) What provokes your need for selfcare? (3) How do you digest Black stereotypes? (4) How do you take ownership of your body? (5) What do the moments when you are feeling inhuman look like? What do you do when the spa, the massages, the salons etc. are not enough? (6) What might a society free from Anti-Black racism look like?

Wrapping up

After the final part of the workshop, I asked the women to join me a standing circle. I thanked them for being in the space, being open and sharing their stories and experiences with one another.

With the red string ball (*image shown on the left);* I led the group in the final activity. Holding the red string ball, I asked the women to say how they are feeling right now, then pass the ball to another person while still holding on to a part of the string. This activity was meant to connect us in that space and time. After we all had a piece of

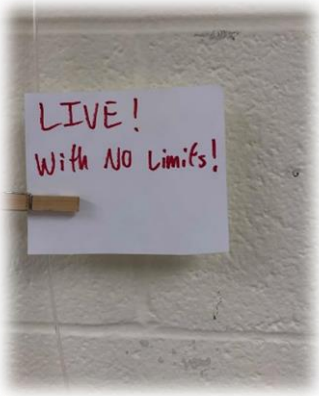
the red string, I asked the women to repeat after me, *I am beautiful, I am powerful, I am worthy, my skin is beautiful, my skin is powerful my skin is worthy.* When the activity was finished, I told the women to cut a piece of the string and keep it with them to remember the work done today. I then led them in a breathing exercise, then encouraged the women to leave a message on the *Transcend* wall.

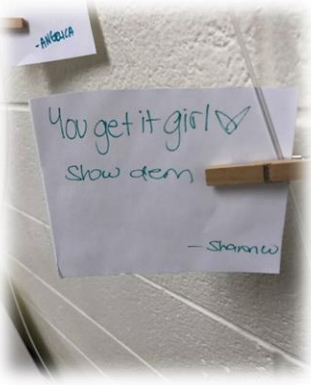
Images of the Transcend Wall

These images illustrate the Transcend wall. The participants were welcomed to "leave their mark", using words of wisdom, advice, affirmations or images about how they felt after the workshop.

Participants who were a part of a different workshop, were able to read the words written by other women prior. This served to connect them as one and continued the social consciousness and solidarity between the women. Additionally, audience who viewed the exhibition had the opportunity to view a part of the narrative told by the Black women.

A closer look at the messages left on the Transcend Wall.





CHAPTER 5

IT TEK TIME TO FOINE ANT'S BELLY!

FINDINGS

At the start of this project I asked: how do Black women who experience these legacies of racial violence access the self-care necessary to overcome this history of violence, decolonize their bodies and reshape their identities, to transform the spaces in which they live. How do Black women understand the effects of racist violence on their bodies and self-image? How do Black women carry out self-care for themselves, each other and for their communities?

I worked with seven Black women from seven different ethnicities with seven different stories. Yet, each Black woman shared a similar experience in the Canadian space. These experiences were structured through their relationship to those who hold the most social, political and economic power in the society -able-bodied, upper middle-class white men. Three themes united the stories told by the women about how they care for and value themselves. First, women often live the experience of anti-Blackness through shadeism. The shade of their skin mediates the amount of privilege they experience both publicly and privately and it also structures the ways in which they internalize their own sense of self-worth.

Second, they asserted that the enduring image and stereotype of the strong Black woman mediated their self-concept and often prevented them from accessing supports. Self-care in this light, became a laborious practice to engage in. Third, it was clear that the effects of anti-Blackness were experienced both locally and globally through different emphases in different places and that these effects were often traumatic, sometimes causing withdrawal from social activities.

Dominant Social Groups and Black women

All the women were united in their description of the dominant social identity. I was surprised at how quickly they identified this social group. Initially, I had set aside five (5) minutes for this exercise. The women worked together and completed this

exercise in under 30 seconds creating a portrait of an upper class educated straight white heterosexual Christian male.

(See table 1 below for the dominant social identity created by the women)

Table 1

Dominant Social	**Identity**
Sex	Male
Race	White
Ethnic Group	Caucasian
Language	English/French
Religion	Christian
Family	Nuclear
Social Class	Upper Class
Age Group	45-60
Education	BA, Masters, PhD, No education
Ability/Disability	Abled Bodied
Geographic Location (Origin)	European, American
Geographic Location (Current)	North America, Canada (Everywhere)
Sexual Orientation	Straight

These women further explain, that the more similarities a person held to the dominant social identity, the more privilege they gained. While men most often fit this description, dominants can also be women. These groups are often represented in the media, and, have the power to make decisions for and about racialized groups, and tend to sexualize Black women. Their power is often unquestioned by others like them, as well as by those who are subordinate to them. They elaborate as follows:

"Those are the ones who like to make decisions. Who think (pause) yeah those are the people who like to make decisions for Black people and those are the ones who also at the same time are the number one who fetishize Black women on top of that for sexual desires" (Participant One, 2019).

"I think you know just reading the news, watching tv, the idea of people with power in society and the way that they are portrayed whether fiction or non-fiction is very similar to those traits that are up there" (Participant Six, 2019).

"These are people who we know. This is who society shows us who has the power. We have been conditioned to believe these are the shot callers, it's a white man in a suit with

a lot of money and fit. They are the ones with the most space to speak their mind and be heard regardless of where they come from or if they are speaking sense. Or if they are even in the right space to be saying what they are saying, they are taken more seriously in the room. Everyone else's credibility is questioned more, there's the least" (Participant Five, 2019).

Participant Four: "and your credibility is questioned more based on how many of those categories that you oppose compare to that powerful man. For example, a Black woman. We are opposite on every front. You have to give justification for every one of those others" (Participant Four, 2019).

They propose that the more similarities a person held to the dominant social identity, the more privilege they gained within white society. Their experience in comparison to this group is materialized through colour and shade.

Shadeism

The theme that unites their stories in a profound way is their shade of their skin and experiences with shadeism. Shadeism refers to the social power and value ascribed to someone as a result of the shade of one's skin. For these women in my workshop, the shade of their skin not only impacts their Black experience in the Canadian space but shapes it. Shadeism mediates their sense of well-being and value. They believe that if they were perceived as a lighter shade of Black by their community, their Blackness would be easier to navigate in the Canadian space. If they were perceived a darker shade of Black by their community, they were further othered in the space, making their Blackness significantly more difficult to navigate in the Canadian space. This shade hierarchy was constructed based on who wielded the most power and held the dominant social identity in the Canadian space.

The premise of my workshop and research was not to examine and engage in-depth with the topic of shadeism. However, when conducting the workshop, shade and shadeism became the dominant topic discussed alongside self-care. For some, shadeism is a barrier in accessing and practicing self-care. After the conclusion of the workshop and during the analysis process, I realized that to address and examine self-care in-depth, I had to first look at shadeism and its effects on Black women and Black community. The questions that arose during my analysis process were (1) Where did

shadeism come from? (2) Why is it so ingrained in the Black community? (3) Why does it play a role in the thoughts and construction of the self?

The Origin of Shadeism

Shadeism is not unique to African diasporic communities. In the documentary *Shadeism: Digging Deeper,* Nayani Thiyagarajah explores the issue of shadeism and its origin. She defines shadeism as a form of discrimination against people of color (Thiyagarajah, 2015). Thiyagarajah explains that from a young age, she was taught to hide from the sun as "it makes us darker, and in my culture, dark ain't lovely" (Thiyagarajah, 2015). Her family members labelled her the "Light -skinned wonder child" when she was born. Her lighter- skinned tone was deemed synonymous with beauty. As she grew older, and her skin got darker, she noticed how having a darker-skinned tone was not perceived as beautiful. She was no longer the "Light-skinned wonder child" (Thiyagarajah, 2015). Thiyagarajah roots the origin of shadeism in pre-colonial societies. Through interviews, Thiyagarajah learns that in countries, such as India, shadeism was already present prior to colonialism. For example, the Ancient scripture of the Ramayana "tells a tale of a fight between Rama, a noble fair-skinned Northern King and Ravana, an evil dark-skinned King from the South" (Thiyagarajah, 2015). These cultural texts and imagery suggest that having fair-skin is synonymous with being good, and having dark-skin was bad (Thiyagarajah, 2015). This imagery and symbolism have become normalized in Western society. European whiteness is held at the top of the social hierarchy and perceived as the ideal beauty. The further away your shade differentiates you from European appearance, the further down you are placed on the social hierarchy (Thiyagarajah, 2015). Individuals who were darker -skinned began to lighten their skin using, skin bleaching cream or lightening regiments, as a method to change their social identity on the hierarchy and move them up (Thiyagarajah, 2015).

While I agree with Thiyagarajah that shadeism can be found in many societies I propose that it has a specific root in the African diaspora and this root is historically linked to the plantation which was organized around a hierarchy called a pigmentocracy. At the top of this hierarchy were whites, in between were mixed race or "brown" people and at the bottom were those of Black African descent who made up the majority of field

workers. This organization developed over time during the long slave period and privileges were dispensed according to where human subjects were on this pyramid. White men produced children with Black women and then either freed them to become free coloreds, if they recognized them, or gave them less arduous tasks in the labour hierarchy. In the Americas, lighter skinned mixed-race people came to amass considerable social power and to mediate relations between the social groups above and below them. Patricia Mohammed (2000) has shown that, women who were brown came to be idealized as beautiful and sexualized. They were imagined as combining the most desirable aspects of both white and Black races (Mohammed, 2000, p.23). As they often had powerful fathers, mixed race women could mediate the access of white male newcomers to power and they could also endow Black men with greater social power for the same reason. Buju Banton puts it succinctly when he chants;

"Mi love mi car
Mi love mi bike
Mi love mi money and ting
But most of all mi love mi browning" (Banton, 1992)

Participant One reveals that her family members equate lighter-skin with beauty and because of her darker-skinned tone, she is not perceived as beautiful by family members or society. In the past, her family members often expressed to her their fears of judgement by the community because of her appearance. To them having a lighter-skinned tone would allow them/her to fit into society and have a *better life* (Participant One, 2019). Participant Seven explains that there was a strong pressure from family members, to become lighter. They live in a community where "you are used to being surround(ed) by people who are either white or people that are light-skinned" (Participant Seven, 2019). She understands the desire to be lighter because she sees through friends and community members how being lighter or white allows people to 'live' and do things differently in comparison to herself (Participant Seven, 2019). These participants were introduced to skin bleaching/lightening regimen by family members and while they themselves rejected the practice; it is well documented that skin bleaching is common in many societies.

Similarly, Participant Five reveals that she noticed a difference in the treatment of darker- skinned Black people versus lighter -skinned Black people. In the society that she grew up in, part of her identity derived from the shade of her skin. She explains that you were either seen as *dark, middle* or *yellow* (Participant Five, 2019). She reflects that when she was younger, she was pale and resembled a whiter person. When visiting Montreal, Canada, her mother would be stopped on the street by strangers and they would question where she got her and her sibling from (Participant Five, 2019). Their skin tone was viewed with fascination and praised by these strangers. Participant Five states that she further learned the value placed onto skin colour in grade school. She reflects that at a young age she loved playing in the sun and as a result, got darker. She began to receive criticism due to her darker- skin. Being darker was viewed as *"ruining her skin"* by others (Participant Five, 2019). It was from this commentary that she learned the value placed onto lighter- skinned tone versus that of darker -skinned tone. As she grew older, Participant Five notes that she began to see the difference in how people with darker skin tones were treated and different hardships they faced. She shares that she,

"did not have to do as much as some of my darker- skinned friends/cousins. If I felt like I had to be twice as good, they felt that they had to be three times as good because they were a shade darker than me. This is when I realized that people care about this" (Participant 5, 2019).

Continuing, most women expressed that having a lighter shade of Black, changes the way one navigates white space, as it makes it *easier*, than if you were a darker shade of Black. Participant Two explains that the lighter a Black woman is, the closer she is to being perceived as white, thus unconsciously reaps those benefits and privileges (Participant Two, 2019). She states that it puts them in a space where they are less likely to face opposition and makes it easier for them to walk through a white space without fear or judgement (Participant Two, 2019).

Continuing, Participant Six (6) proposes that,

"the negative stereotype for Black people somehow seems to fade slightly before they touch the light skin people. They, (*referring to stereotypes*) are put down more harshly on people that look like us (darker skin Black women) and the things we have to do to compensate for those stereotypes are greater for people who look like us (darker skin).I

think light skin people are forgiven certain behaviors that we are not afforded…. and it has nothing to do with anything except how we look. Maybe they are like closer to white so people would think they are more attractive. *Pretty Privilege… light skin privilege.* The way people speak with you and I think even what is defined as attractive for light skin people versus dark skin people. You have to be super pretty as a dark skin person to be recognized as attractive and on the other side it is not the same, all you have to do is be light skin" (Participant Six, 2019).

Interestingly, Participant Two asserts that Black males desire women with lighter skin or white women over dark-skinned women. She turns our attention to dating. As a darker- skinned woman, she has heard many men disclose that they wouldn't date a *dark-skinned* woman because of the stereotypes that plague her. The Black woman is described as "too masculine". She has 'too much attitude". She's "ghetto, ratchet" etc. and not deemed feminine in the gaze of a male (Participant Two, 2019). Participant Three echoes Participant Two, asserting that although she does not consider herself a light skinned Black woman*,* she is praised and 'congratulated' for having a lighter skin tone. She explains that she has been a part of conversations where men praise her for being light and relate her shade of Black to its beauty and attractiveness. Her shade of skin becomes the thing that makes her beautiful and her sole identifier (Participant 3, 2019).

Conversely, Participant One and Participant Seven argue that despite a Black woman's shade, they still face oppression and fetishization because in the white space, they are still labelled Black. Participant One explains that she,

"feel(s) that (although) dark skin (women get) fetishized… our light skinned sisters also get fetishized, in the sense that (they are viewed as having) a hint of Black in (them). I understand that they have a privilege, but that privilege becomes a (representation of their identity). It's a burden on them, they are fetishized and not just in the gaze of white men, but they become fetishizes by all races of men" (Participant One, 2019).

Comparatively, Participant Seven reiterates the same thought stating that,

"They (lighter skinned Black women) also have their own problems. Yes, it does make it easier for them to navigate because they have some white in them, but they are still considered Black. They get privileges because they are lighter. They can fit into the crowd and blend in with being white because you know the lighter you are (easier it is to do) certain things. But then like, they also have that internal struggle" (Participant 7, 2019).

Participant Seven believes that this internal struggle leads to them feeling like outsiders in society, further questioning where they fit in society. This can make it harder for them to "belong" in both communities—white and Black. The idea is that they are "too white to play a role in the Black community and too Black to play a role in the white community" (Participant Seven, 2019).

Is there a desire to be white? After conducting the workshop and interviews, listening and understanding the stories and experiences of these women in relation to shade and shadeism, the simple answer is no. There is no desire to be white. However, I purport that there is a desire to be freed from everyday racism and the many forms of exclusion, differentiation and exploitation that it brings with it. The women explain that repeat experiences of racism leave them feeling inhuman. They tend to forgo the practice self-care as result and further withdraw from society and themselves. Practicing self-care becomes difficult as they are exhausted, both physically and mentally. Participant One reveals that she used to give herself constant *self prep talks* before entering a space, as to avoid exhaustion. She explains that living in the Canadian society has taught her the "ins and outs of what you have to encounter (and) what's going to happen" when she enters a room (Participant One, 2019). Although her *self prep talks* give her the confidence needed to navigate certain spaces, they also make her accept the way she is treated in these spaces. She explains that she doesn't mourn, cry or self-care because she has accepted that there is no space for her to do that. She states,

"I always feel that for white people they have safe spaces where they can off load, and we don't. It's like you're moving, you are dealing with this outside then you go home and that's a total(ly) different thing where you can't even get that time to (reflect or process) what I experienced today. It's mentally draining. (You begin to wonder) who is equipped to talk to you about it, because everyone is going to tell you (to) suck it up, it's the way of life, this is how we move, its just how it is" (Participant One, 2019).

Continuing, the ideology of femininity, humanness and beauty remain rooted in whiteness. Due to the legacy of enslavement, this privilege, femininity, humanness and beauty are not held synonymous with Black women. Participant Six explains that there

is a greater deliberateness to Black woman being/calling themselves beautiful. It is something that they must constantly make themselves conscious to. It is a social consciousness, whereas with white beauty, it is something that is known. It is apart of a white person's biological inheritance.

From the conversations, I conclude that shadeism is rooted in whiteness and white values. Having lighter- skin comes with privileges and greater legibility to white society, but these privileges can be a mixed blessing as they can lead to eroticisation and exclusion. Although globalized within the Black communities and practiced by both Blacks and whites, the roots of it lie in dominant white racial ideology as do ideas about the strong Black woman which participants point to as an enduring ideology.

Strong Black woman: Barriers to self-care

In the literature review, I discussed how the stereotype of the strong Black woman, constructed the Black woman's body and identity as having an inherent capacity for physical and mental labour. It was my belief that the legacy of this stereotype further creates a barrier for self-care as white society is not equipped to provide or care for the strong Black woman. For Black women, embodying this stereotype gives an illusion to freedom and survival in the white space, however I purport that it creates a barrier to them caring for their individual self, and causes self-care to become an act of labour.

Through the interviews, I wanted to explore the stereotype of the strong Black woman and if it acted as a barrier in the practice of self-care. I asked each woman to describe what a strong Black woman looked like to them. Below, I have outlined their answers.


WHAT DOES A STRONG BLACK WOMAN LOOK LIKE TO YOU?
PARTICIPANT ONE
"a strong Black woman, honestly looks like a woman who is unapologetic, a woman who is a woman in all aspects. She can feel, she can hurt. She can feel every feeling. She can express every feeling without ramifications at all. Like she doesn't have to cater to anybody but her"
PARTICIPANT TWO
"Someone that's not afraid to stand up for herself stand out in this patriarchal society and against and most importantly accept herself as she is all while knowing that her melanin's not a threat"
PARTICIPANT THREE
"My mothers, my aunts, my ancestors, woman who thrive despite their oppression not only looking out for their own needs but also the needs of those who rely on them"
PARTICIPANT FOUR
"Me. Someone who has a lot of things going on but is still able to push through and get everything she needs to get something completed. Someone who makes the best of her situation, despite the odds against her"
PARTICIPANT FIVE
"Unapologetic in every sense of the word. She owns her strengths, her weakness, her visions and her fears"
PARTICIPANT SIX
"She looks like someone forging her own path regardless of pressures from anyone. Someone who has the strength to be strong but also the strength to be weak"
PARTICIPANT SEVEN
"I think of a warrior. Like with a large, like, like those arrow sticks and like makeup under her eyes and stuff like that Well the particular woman that I am thinking of was a warrior. A woman that freed a bunch of people that were gonna get captured to become slaves in Congo and she like disputed with like the white people that came to Congo. She fought them off and won and she was the woman that was recognized to lead a huge pack of men and women, so she had to like hide weakness. She had to be that strong person that can hold herself up even if like there was a bunch of white people. She still had to show her people like we got this although there might be sometime where she was down or wasn't working but she still made it through."

The women describe the image of a strong Black woman as someone who navigates freely in a space despite intergenerational trauma and oppression. She is someone that cares for her community and does not show weakness. She, as these women propose, forges her own path outside of racial oppression, and does not shield her identity from the world in the public space. She embraces her Blackness, her history and identity. The image of the strong Black woman is something that these women identified with and characterized themselves as.

Following this question, I asked the women if having the title of a strong Black woman prevented them from accessing self-care? Five out of the Seven women answered yes. Participant Four and Six argue that although they can see how it could, having the title of a strong Black woman does not change or create a barrier in the ways that they practice or access self-care. Participant Six confides that she tends to separate self-care from stereotypes and the image of the strong Black woman. She states, “I don’t often really think of things I do for self-care in those terms while I’m doing them, so there’s no weakness stigma [that] I have to overcome in order to do so” (Participant Six, 2019).

Alternatively, Participant One, Two, Three, Five and Seven explain that embodying the image and stereotype of the strong Black woman is something that is preconceived and pre-accepted when they enter a space. This image and stereotype places expectations onto your identity. These women express that often because of the roles they are fulfilling and with the label of being the strong Black woman, they suppress emotions such as sadness or pain, or anything that is “deemed to be weak” (Participant Two, 2019). Participant One shares that she didn’t have a choice in whether she was the *strong Black woman.* It was something she always knew before she was taught it’s meaning. Her identity as the strong Black woman is held parallel to how much trauma she can deal with. She explains;

“its one of those things where someone is telling you, you have to be strong and you want to ask why you have to be strong and then the answer is because you’re Black. You endured so much pain, like your ancestors endured so much pain and therefore you have to continue to endure this pain, that’s why you are strong. And with all of that, you are supposed to excel all the time. Its like, I can’t excel all the time and it does not

excuse or justify why I have to go through trauma in order to be considered strong. Like how much shit I can take is not supposed to equate to my strength" (Participant One, 2019).

For Participant One, the more pain and trauma a Black woman experiences, the stronger she is. Participant Five claims that the perception and construction of the strong Black woman has blocked their ability to care for themselves. She states that;

"how society has defined that word definitely creates a barrier. In an attempt to compliment us [it] has stripped us of our humanity. We can't be fragile or scared or wounded because we're 'strong Black women'. You see it especially in medical care. Black women are always undermined, our pain never taken as seriously" (Participant Five, 2019).

Participant Five further explains that seeking help within the white space as a Black woman is difficult. Her issues are often pushed aside, and services don't become accessible to her as a result. She is usually left to create her own methods of self-care.

Interestingly, for some of the Black women, the strong Black woman stereotype was taught and reinforced within the white space. Participant One explains that when navigating white spaces, she unconsciously adapts to this stereotype as it acts as her shield. She states,

"Honestly, its like an instant thing that, you know when you walk, and then you see the eyes, then you are like, you just know the presence is there and you just switch" (Participant One, 2019).

For others, it is the opposite. The stereotype of the strong Black woman was taught through family members, reinforced through their community and practiced in the white space.

However, even though the stereotype of the strong Black woman is a strategy for survival in the white space, many women express that it is difficult to accept. Accepting the 'strong' image, as well as the other stereotypes that plague the Black woman's body means accepting that you don't have a place within society. The women reminded me that our stereotypes are designed to 'other' us and place us in a space of *unrecognition* in relation to our authentic self. Participant Six explains that digesting our stereotypes is a double-edged sword. When we do, we are accepting our socially *constructed place* in society whereas when we don't accept the stereotypes, it is seen as an act of

resistance, which still results in us being othered in society. She believes that at times we are not given a *choice* in the acceptance of our stereotypes, so we begin to internalize them and act on them. When we try to other from them, society finds a way to still place them onto us. She explains that,

"there is no way to call them out on it without seeming like you're being on the attack. Now you are affirming what they are saying and now you are put in this spot where you can't agree with it, but you also can't disagree with it because by disagreeing with it, (you are still accepting the stereotypes)" (Participant Six, 2019). Our bodies and identity exist in a weird juxtaposition (Participant Six, 2019).

Similarly, to Participant Six, Participant Four confides that "it is hard to escape these stereotypes because at times when we don't conform, we lose our blackness from the community. It becomes (the conversation of) 'you are not Black enough' and you lose your position in the Black community" (Participant Four, 2019). Participant Five continues the discussion stating that digesting Black stereotypes in a white space, means accepting the identity that they have created for you. We must be and represent this *singular* thing (Participant Five, 2019).

The Globalization of Whiteness: Toward an analysis

How can we analyze the causes of the issues identified above? Shadeism and conforming to old stereotypes are symptoms of deeper systemic racism. I argue that the women's stories reveal that colonial legacies of violence and the racism to which it gives rise, continue to circulate in ways which thwart the practice of freedom and the valuing of our collective lives as Black women. In *Layers of Blackness: Colorism in African Diaspora*, Deborah Gabriel explains that colonial societies and western societies are "automatically socialized and accultured into whiteness" (Gabriel, 2007, p. 95). The dominance of whiteness is evident in every dimension of the social order and the creation of space. She argues that the 'isms' (classism, racism, sexism, shadeism), are a part of colonial legacy and a lasting impact of the "oppressive nature of white supremacy" hidden within the foundation of Black communities and Black identity (Gabriel, 2007, p.105). Gabriel explains that "many non-whites seldom consider whiteness to be the ideal that influences thoughts about the self", however the presence

of whiteness makes its home in Black imagination, creating and (re)shaping the Black self-concept (Gabriel, 2007, p.91). Gabriel views whiteness as a social identity, one that is multi-faceted and constructed to serve and maintain the ideals, power and legacy of white supremacy (Gabriel, 2007, p.91). Gabriel characterizes whiteness as the invisible tool for racial, social and colonial oppression (Gabriel, 2007, p.91). It is important to view whiteness not just as a social position or a skin tone, it is not solely a location of social difference. Whiteness was/is located, constructs and shapes economic, social, cultural, and political systems. It acquires privilege through perception and its *gaze*, (re)producing violence.

George Lipsitz also argues that "there isn't any Negro problem; there is only a white problem" (Lipsitz, 2009, p.1). In *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics,* Lipsitz explains that white power secures its dominance through its invisibility in the construction of racial and social hierarchies. Lipsitz argues that racial hierarchies and identities are applied to "non-white groups in order to stigmatize and exploit them, while at the same time reserving extra value for whiteness" (Lipsitz, 2009, p.3) This possessive investment in whiteness constructs Blackness and Black experience as synonymous with slavery and violence, and whiteness as synonymous with freedom, privilege and power. Lipsitz purports that whiteness gains its power by pitting people of colour against one another, most notable in the principles of shadeism. Whiteness cements itself in the 'presence of mind' of Black people and racialized groups and (re)shapes their public and private lives (Lipsitz, 2009, p.2). To Lipsitz, the Black person and Black communities are not free as they still operate and (re)shaped based on the principles of whiteness and "our failure to acknowledge the interrelations and construction of whiteness in the foundation of Black community and policies in Black countries prevent us from transforming the present space" (Lipsitz, 2009, p.23).

In my view, both Lipsitz and Gabriel help us to see the extent to which racial difference structures the social and the extent to which this affects the privilege and pain we experience everyday life and how we value or fail to value each other. Overcoming

racism can only finally occur if power ceases to be structured hierarchically through difference.

CHAPTER 6

SENSAY FOWL SAY PRAY FU LONG LIFE NOT FU FEDDER!

CONCLUSION

"I am still working it out. I am uninsured and unaffiliated and living a life that overflows with love shared across space and time. I survive, not because I am barely alive, but because I am flagrantly alive in the sight of my ancestors. The universe loves us. And we sell ourselves cheap when we forget. Our ancestors are teaching us what we deserve. May we never sell our legacy for a mess of ego and scholar-styled swag. May we refuse to exploit our legacy in order to earn more exploitation. May we remember who we are" - (Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 2012, p.5).

What does self-care mean to me now?

I started this journey with the goal of creating a space of love and care for Black women, where we can begin to reclaim our stories, experiences, identities and bodies from colonial construct. I defined self-care, along the same lines as Audre Lorde, as self-preservation and an act of political warfare. By unearthing the stories and experiences of seven Black women, through performance, memory, arts-based processes and interviews, I now define self-care in four ways.

1. ***Self-care as a transformative practice for the mind****:* The narratives of the Black women in this research project suggest that self-care can be a method for transforming and freeing the Black woman's identity from colonial construct. Self-care here, acts as the production of knowledge that allows them to critically reflect on their lived realities to form individual, as well as social, consciousness. Self-care allows the women to create/ transform reality away from past violent constructs.Through workshop activities such as: (1) the power flower exercise, (2) the mask exercise and (3) the mirror exercise, self-care became a method in transforming and emancipating their minds from mental slavery and allowed them to (re)shape their identity moving forward. Self-care helps to remove the mind and identity from a space of constant 'becoming', transforming it in a space of 'belonging' in present and future spaces.

2. ***Self-care as a method of decolonization:*** First, decolonization is the deconstruction and change of the dominant social order.[2] It is the breaking and dismantling of colonial ideologies, stereotypes and constructions created by the oppressor. Decolonization brings a sense of cultural, social, political and individual self- consciousness to the minds of those who have been colonized.[3] Through the workshop and interviews, I learned that self-care also operates as a method of survival and the beginning point of the process of decolonization. In the workshop, decolonization occurred through embodied pedagogy, performance, images, quotes and the exercises aimed at reclaiming the body. The Black women in the space were able to learn about their ancestral history and cultural traditions that assisted in grounding and rooting their identity and body in present spaces instead of situated in the past.

   Self-care, so explored, allows Black women to decolonize their bodies and identities outside of colonial violence, as they gain that embodied awareness that are the sole creators of their bodies and identities. They are the knowledge producers of their own experiences and stories, and this then further assists them towards social action and social change.
3. ***Self-care as a therapeutic practice:*** I found that this occurred mainly through dialogue with other Black women. The workshop served as a space for back and forth dialogue between the women. They shared their stories and experiences with one another, often time-sharing, giving advice or offering emotional support, that, they had not experienced in other spaces. They were connected through dialogue and were able to organize and build a sense of community and camaraderie with one another. Through dialogue, the women began to reflect and confront past experiences or stories that were often silenced or forgotten. After the back and forth dialogue with other Black women, many women expressed that they felt rejuvenated and light. They gained a new sense of 'strength' and began seeing themselves with a new empathetic gaze from the

[2] Fanon, F. (1968). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press. (Fanon, 1968, p.36).

[3] Fanon, F. (1968). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press. (Fanon, 1968, p. 36).

conversations had. Dialogue helped to not only transform how they saw and *identified* themselves in white spaces but served as an act that united them.

4. ***Self-care as a process of physical and emotional labour:*** The practice of self-care can be laborious act that involves dialogue, healing, physical body work and organizing for change. It can be especially difficult to practice in the face of everyday racism, sexism, exploitation and oppression. The women revealed that when they experience these things, it places them in an inhuman state, where they are both physically and mentally exhausted. Self-care becomes a hardship for them because they cannot access it when they are in a space of exhaustion.

Recommendations for Future Research

The methodology utilized for this research project produced many rich results. Through popular education, applied drama, dramatic processes, embodied performance and interviews, I was able to connect the past and present, to allow for critical reflection towards transformation. The methodology used allowed the participants to work together towards social change and the creation of new knowledge.

For future research, I recommend the following;

- Removing the sample-size age bracket, opening the research to younger Black girls and older Black women. It is important for all Black women, regardless of their age, to not only learn about the practice of self-care but to have access to a space where they can share their experiences and stories with other Black women. The participants also shared that it was crucial that younger Black girls be included in these spaces, to assist them in navigating through spaces, especially in their educational institutions, where identity and a sense of self is developed.
- Exploring shadeism further in relation to the racial hierarchy. It is important to examine how the Black race has expanded to differentiate *Light, Brown*, and *Black* and how these three shades, have now become races, as seen in the Jamaican or Ethiopian society for example.

- Inclusion of mixed race/ lighter-skinned Black women. I felt that this research lacked the perspective of a lighter-skinned/mixed race Black women. I believe that having their narrative moving forward would be beneficial for the research.

To conclude, it is my belief that learning to love and care for our selves, as Black women, moves us beyond the simplistic and romanticized ideals of love and self-care. It is more than an appreciation of the physical self. The practice of self-care for Black women is a radical act that can be a tool for cultural, social and individual self-consciousness and emancipation from mental slavery.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Quotes

Appendix 2: For the Power of **SHE** monologues

Appendix 1: Quotes

Quotes in the red square/ rectangle:

These quotes signify the experience and stereotypes placed onto Black women and how they are viewed by others. They speak to ways Black women are supposed to navigate and act in the white space.

QUOTES	BY
"& allah my niggah temper came outta control"	Ntozake Shange
"The reaction from Black men to for colored girls was in a way very much like the white reaction to Black power."	Ntozake Shange
"One thing I don't need is any more apologies I got sorry greetin me at my front door you can keep yours. I don't know what to do wit em they don't open doors or bring the sun back they don't make me happy or get a mornin paper didn't nobody stop using my tears to wash cars cuz a sorry."	Ntozake Shange
" I need to see my own beauty and to continue to be reminded that I am enough, that I am worthy of love without effort, that I am beautiful, that the texture of my hair and the shape of my curves, the size of my lips, the color of my skin and the feelings that I have are all worthy and okay"	Tracee Ellis Ross
"To live in a Black Diaspora, I think is to live in a fiction- a creation of empires and also self-creation. It is to be being living inside and outside herself."	Dionne Brand
"I am the history of the rejection of who I am."	June Jordan
"We stand there with this big smile of respect between us. It's about as real a smile as girls can do for each other, considering we don't practice real smiling everyday, you know, cause maybe we too busy being flowers or strawberries or fairies instead of something honest and worthy of respect you know… like being people."	Toni Cade Bambara
"I am not wrong: wrong is not my name. My name is my own my own my own and I can't tell you who the hell set things up like this, but I can tell you that from now on my resistance my simple and daily and nightly self-determination may not very well cost you your life."	June Jordan
"We live in a society that treats us like we're the bottom of the barrel when it comes to romance. Couple that with having to constantly prove ourselves as worthy enough, right? Be confident baby girl, but not intimidating, be smart but not emasculating."	Gabrielle Union

"I think people have such a perception of a Black woman being so strong that we just supposed to take anything thrown at us, and then when we don't, we're weak. Well, no, I'm supposed to get beat down by everybody that comes near me? And I feel like so many times, Black women say stuff, and nobody gives a shit."	Keke Palmer
"Strong woman you may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."	Maya Angelou
"If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."	Audre Lorde

Quotes in the Orange triangle:

These quotes speak to the journey of self-recovery and identity, healing and self love. These quotes signify the pain and fight to decolonize the body and reclaim one's self in the white space.

QUOTES	**BY**
"If your house ain't in order, you ain't in order. It is so much easier to be out there than in here."	Toni Cade Bambara
"The strongest actions for a Black woman is to love herself, be herself and shine amongst those who never believed she could"	Unknown
"rise up fallen fighters unfetter the star dance with the universe and make it ours."	Ntozake Shange
"I am the history of battery assault and limitless armies against whatever I want to do with my mind and my body and my soul."	June Jordan
"and if I if I ever let love go because the hatred and the whisperings become a phantom dictate I o-bey in lieu of impulse and realities (the blossoming flamingos of my wild mimosa trees) then let love freeze me out. (From I must become a menace to my enemies."	June Jordan
"Defining myself as opposed to being defined by others is one of the most difficult challenges I face."	Carol Moseley-Braun
"Pain is important: How we evade it, how we succumb to it, how we deal with it, how we transcend it.""	Audre Lorde

Quotes in the Yellow Circle:

These quotes signify the journey to reclaim selfcare and the Black body for Black women outside of the realms of its origin meaning in the white space.

QUOTES	BY
"Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?... Just so's you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is not trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well"	Toni Cade Bambara
"We had to break those laws or agree to the slaveholder's image of us: three fifths of a human being"	June Jordan
"I'm weary of the ways of the world. I 'm weary of the ways of the world. I'm going look for my body yeah. I'll be back real soon, you going look for my body yeah. I'll be back real soon… Be leery bout your place in the world, you're feeling like you're chasing the world"	Solange
"Come celebrate with me that everyday something has tried to kill me and has failed"	Lucille Clifton
"We are all gifted. That is our inheritance"	Ethel Water
"Once we recognize what it is we are feeling, once we recognize we can feel deeply, love deeply, can feel joy, then we will demand that all parts of our lives produce that kind of joy"	Audre Lorde
"But being alive and being a woman and being colored is a metaphysical dilemma I haven't conquered yet do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul and gender"	Ntozake Shange
"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare"	Audre Lorde
"When I dare to be powerful- to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid"	Audre Lorde

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FOR THE POWER OF SHE

MONOLOGUES

FOR THE POWER OF SHE

Characters In order of appearance

Grey

Angela

Raina

Tricia

Shadima

Dez

ACT ONE

SCENE TITLE: THE DIASPORIC WOE OF THE FRAGILE BLACK WOMAN

CHARACTERS

Grey

(Grey enters the scene and takes center stage. She slowly looks up and stares at the audience)

GREY

When I look into the mirror, I see a diasporic woe
Sucked dry of its cultural values
Inflated with the West
Lost behind the white man's imagine
Its gaze disconnected.

When I look into the mirror, I see my diasporic woe
Where my absence has resulted in my cultural exile,
Where my body
My dialect
My colour,
has caused my otherization.
Forced to choke on my silence
To walk blindly through lost history
To perform my ancestors' stories
In front of white eyes that stare
Black eyes that neglect
My eyes glazed over.

See, when I look into the mirror
I am living my diasporic woe
I'm hidden under identities that don't represent me

I’m hidden under the white mask that suffocates me.
I’m buried under building that have erased me!
Code switching everywhere I go,
so those Black eyes don’t glare
And those white eyes won’t fear,

THIS BLACK GIRL!

That’s kissed twice by the sun
Whose voice carries a loud twang
Whose face is hard, not out of anger
But because,
She feels those eyes that glare,
those eyes that stare.
Her eyes that have already been judged.
Her Baartman shaped body
That’s held prisoner to his truth.

When I look into the mirror,
I am lost in my diasporic woe
Haven’t they noticed that I am missing?
That Black girl who shines
‘cause she’s kissed twice by the sun,
Who moves to the beat of her ancestors drums
Whose smile is hidden
Behind those eyes that glare
Those eyes that stare
Those eyes that fear
Those eyes that just can’t see
This Black Girl…
Who’s tired of living in her diasporic woe.

See mama… they didn't tell you
This path to success
This to happiness
This path to the '*Dream Life'*
This path to my freedom…
Would result in my diasporic woe.

(Grey pauses and takes a breath. She then closes her eyes in front of the audience and walks off stage)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

SCENE TITLE: 10 SECONDS

CHARACTERS:

Angela

(An alarm clock goes off. Angela runs into the room, still wearing a robe and hits the off button of the alarm clock. She plugs in her phone into her portable speaker and begins playing music)

ANGELA

(Towards audience)

Ouuuu, what y'all know what this song?!

(Begins singing and dancing to Bogle by Buju Banton)

It's a new year, new style, new dance a lick

Fling your hands inna di air, then rock, then you dip

Move to the drum and make your body kick

Step forward and come back quick

Dat a the new style weh the whole place a do

Ayyyyyyye!

Ain't nothing sweeter than some Buju in the morning.

(Angela to the audience)

I see some blank faces. Buju! Banton! Legendary Jamaican reggae, dancehall artist! Currently touring around the Caribbean, taking everyone on his *Long Walk to Freedom!* Telling the world, the untold stories…

(Angela imitates Buju Banton's voice)

Be strong,

Hold a firm mediation

One day things must get better

Don't you go down

Keep your head above the water

(Towards the audience)

I see some of you getting into it!

(Angela laughs and walks towards her vanity humming. She takes a seat. She opens the vanity drawer and removes a brush, hair ties and hair. She sets these items in front of her and then looks at herself in the mirror. She stops humming)

(Whispers to herself)

8 hours. 8 hours. Come on Angela, its just 8 hours and then its done. 8 hours and then you can come home. 8 hours. Come on you got this girl!

(To the audience)

Y'all want to know a secret? Between you and me? Listen closely…

(Angela leans closer to the audience)

I'm tired.

(She lets out a breath)

Completely exhausted! Let me tell you, if I didn't have bills to pay and my expensive habits to support, I would quit my job in a heartbeat. It's just… a lot. And I'm not talking about the work. It's the space… the people….

(turns towards her vanity)

You know…. there are days when I just stand outside of the office door. My salty puddles of comfort, threatening to make an appearance and take me away from the self I'm supposed to be. But I always will them away. Can you imagine what would happen if they seen a Black girl just crying openly for all to see? Have any of you ever seen that?

(whispers)

I wonder what they would do.

(Angela looks back towards to mirror and stares for while and then stands and faces the audience)

You ever had those 10 seconds? Those 10 seconds when you first look in the mirror. And in those 10 seconds, all you see is you. Your face is yours. Your hair is yours. Your body is yours. You give yourself a little smile, a wink like '*hey you got it girl, look at you go.'* And then in a blink of an eye,

(she snaps her fingers)

its gone. Like it never happened. Suddenly, your face is not yours. Your hair is not yours. Your body is not yours. You now must mold them in what they should be. You begin to wonder if they were ever yours or just something you imagined.

(Pause)

Do you want to know another secret? In my 10 seconds, I like to dream… imagine a longer 10 seconds. A 10 seconds where I don't have to slick my hair back in the tightest inconspicuous bun, so I won't have to worry about those wondering eyes. Those eyes that touch before asking.

(Angela stands and walks towards her closet, pulling the door open)

A 10 seconds where I open my closet door and the clothes reflect the person inside and not the image, they want me to be.

(Angela turns towards the audience and begins walking)

A 10 seconds where my walk of confidence is not seen as *sassy, arrogant, boujee, rude*. A 10 seconds where I am not constantly fighting the urge to shrink myself down. Averting my eyes downwards.

A 10 seconds where I can express my feelings and not be that *Angry Black Girl…* whose *'niggah temper came outta control'*. So out of control that I get the police instead of the store manager.

A 10 seconds where I am HEARD! Because no matter how loud I yell, screaming at the top of my lungs, my hurt, my anger, my tiredness… they still can't hear me. You see that's the problem, they are not conditioned to hear us. But I bet they heard that eyeroll huh?

A 10 seconds where I don't have to relinquish my power, my autonomy… so they can wonder. Fulfil their desire. Their fascination. Their fetishes.

A 10 seconds where I am an equal in the workplace and not just a thing, they needed to check off their Diversity policy list. So, they can show the world how inclusive they are.

A 10 seconds where I see myself in those positions of leadership. Where my work ethic, skills, experiences, qualifications, education, DEGREES… *plural*…are my shining factor and not the things that *might* just let me ring the doorbell of the corporate house.

A 10 seconds where my intellect is not questioned because YES, I DO know how to use those big words in a sentence. And NO, I'm not farouche because I'm *that Black girl.* I'm farouche because when I walk into this office, I feel your eyes that grow with discomfort. Am I not what you expected to see is it? Is my head held too high? Is hair meticulously styled too much?

Imagine… a Black girl who walks with strength instead of fear, wears her smile and confidence for all to see. Lets words like *farouche* slip easily from her thick glossed lips when she's conversing with you. Not cowering behind your powerful eyes.

(Angela walks closer the audience)

Je peux sentir votre merveille et votre surprise d'ici. Inconfortable?

A 10 seconds where I am not *sweetheart,* because suddenly ANGELA is to hard to pronounce.

A 10 seconds without your microaggressions.

A 10 seconds where the Black men that I grew up with love me, lift me up, cherish me, labour over me! Showering me with the love and labour I so freely give to them. A 10 seconds where these Black men don't see me as a reflection of their hate.

A 10 seconds where my sister in skin in the workplace, sees me as a friend and not competition.

(Angela looks down and whispers)

A 10 seconds where my sister in skin doesn't see me as a reflection of her hate… her anger.

A 10 seconds where we stand tall together. Lifting each other up. Cherishing each other. Giving each other the love that we deserve.

A 10 seconds where they understand.

A 10 seconds without wonder. Without surprise.

A 10 seconds without hearing your apologies. Because I don't need anymore. I've gotten enough apologies to feed my children's children and hell even their children with.

A 10 seconds where I own my strength in the form of my tears.

A 10 seconds where I own my weaknesses in the form of my tears.

A 10 seconds where I own my tears! Letting them fall freely, engulfing me in their salty stories, reminding me that I'm human.

A 10 seconds where the world doesn't condemn me before I've even had a chance to take my first breath.

(Angela takes a breath)

1…2…3…4…5….6….7….8…9….10. Are these 10 seconds too much to ask.

(Angela gets up off her knees and slowly walks back over to her vanity. She sits down and stares at her reflection in the mirror.)

But instead…those 10 seconds vanish before my eyes. Instead, I sit here and fix myself into the person they want to see.

(Angela acts out her words)

Hair gelled back into the smoothest, tightest, inconspicuous bun. Not a strand out of place. Face concealed under layers of makeup. Making sure that the dark spots are all covered up.

(Angela stands and removes her robe, revealing Black trousers and a white button-down shirt)

Clothes ironed. Emotions in check. Shoulders straightened. head held high… but not too high. My masked smile as my only accessory… because God forbid, I don't walk with my smile.

(Releases a breath)

And then I'll come home. To my sanctuary. Where my dream 10 seconds go on and on in my place that needs no pretenses. My place that I can be fully and unapologetically be myself. I can wear what I want. Act how I want. Do what I want. Say what I want. I will play my music on the highest volume, dancing and singing around the house. Cook myself a meal out of the new cook book I just purchased. I will spend some time painting my nails, any colour of my choosing then I will immerse myself in the images of Black literature. Watching those words and images on the page show me, a new world. My utopia. Wishing so deeply that those images and words will come to life, bringing their comfort, love and power with them.

(Angela stands)

But until then… I have 8 hours. Just 8 more hours then I can return to my 10 second dreams. 8 Hours. 8 Hours. You can do this.

(Facing the mirror, Angela holds her gaze for a final 10 seconds. She takes a deep breath. The audience begin to see her shoulders straighten, her head growing higher, her mouth straightens into a slight smile. Turning, she picks up her purse from the floor and walks confidently out of the door.)

End of Act Two

ACT THREE

SCENE TITLE: FAMILY FEUD pt.1

CHARACTERS

Raina……Daughter

Tricia…….. Mother

(Raina screams and comes storming into the living room. Tricia is startled and looks up towards her daughter)

TRICIA

Raina, what is the prob…. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FACE?! WHAT IS GOING ON?! OH MY GOD!!

RAINA

You happened! I finally gave in and put the *'special cream'* on my face! Now look at me! LOOK AT ME!

(Raina walks across the room and looks at herself in the oval mirror on the wall. She gently touches her face, a tear slipping down her face. The mother comes up behind her, a smile on her face.)

RAINA

Is this funny to you mom? Is this some sort of joke to you? Did you plan this? This is your fault!

(Raina turns towards her mother)

RAINA

Mom look at me! I have burns on my face. I have rashes! My face is red mom! RED! And you're smiling? Your 'special cream' did this to me.

TRICIA

Sweetheart, this is good. I know this may not be what you want to hear.

(Tricia touches Raina's face.)

TRICIA

But I am so proud of you. You finally used the special cream. I have been begging you for years to use the special cream. Oh, darling this is amazing! Things are going to change for you now sweetheart. You are going to be so beautiful. So beautiful. Imagine the opportunities that are going to open for you now Raina! Just like your sister! Oh my God! We must get you a brand-new wig. A human one this time. One closer to your sister's hair! This is so amazing! Wait until I tell the family! Don't you worry, the burns and rashes will go away. Just keep using the special cream! I'll get you a brand new one! Don't stop using the cream. Don't wor-

RAINA

Are you kidding me?! You want me to still use your special little cream! Look at me mother! Really look at me! My skin is melting away. It's not making me light mother. My face is red… RED! These burns and rashes are going to scar mother. You think being lighter with scars is going to be better than how I looked before!? Are you serious?!

TRICIA

Of course! Raina, stop with the dramatics! The scars will fade. The red will fade and reveal your beautiful new skin. We'll get you some coconut oil. In the meantime, just stay inside. Then, when you are all good, we will go outside and show off your new beautiful skin. Trust me, it will be better than what you had before. You can't tell me you're not going to enjoy the privileges coming your way! This is going to be better than what you had before. You just need to keep using the cream. Your face needs time to adjust, that's all.

(Whispers to Raina)

You know, its probably because you're so dark that your skin is reacting this way-

RAINA

Mother! Enough! Do you hear yourself? You are not looking at me! Are you even seeing me? Please look at me mother. I was fine before. I used that special cream to please you.

(Raina turns away from her mother and looks at her reflection in the mirror)

I finally looked at myself in the mirror and applied the cream because I thought that would make you finally see me as beautiful. That it would make you love me like you love my sister. See me the say way you see her.

Don't you think I hear what you and the family say about me. It's always the 'darker one', the 'black one'. It's not like you all whisper about it. They still can't believe something as dark as me, came from you. Remember when Uncle Bernie laughed and asked you *'Tricia, tell the truth, you had to have adopted that one from Africa'.* And all you did was laugh back… like it was the biggest joke of the century. I hear you and my aunties talking on the phone, saying how you should have made me bleach earlier so I wouldn't draw so much attention to myself in family pictures. How you're doing me a disservice keeping me this Black. How I must be your wild child… your angry child… your problem child. Yes mom… I heard it all. I see the looks of pity passed my way. Like my blackness is something I should be ashamed of. I always wonder mom, if they even know my name… or am I just the Black one to them?

(Raina turns back towards her mother and makes eye contact. Tricia doesn't look at Raina.)

Do you remember when me and my sister were younger? We had this big mirror that you used to bring into our rooms to do our hair. You would sit us in front of the mirror. You would always start with my sister's hair. She was the oldest and she had the easier hair you would tell me. Her hair was so long... and she had these beautiful curls. You would tell her how beautiful her curls were… you would run your fingers through them, and a look of awe would cross your face. I would sit there and watch you do her hair. It was mesmerizing. You always looked so happy… and I loved watching you smile. You looked so at peace with her. It's like you two created some kind of bubble… some kind

of secret place of peace that I was not allowed into. You would sometimes stop brushing her hair and would graze her cheek and let her know how beautiful she was. How blessed she was. How fortunate she was. How happy you were with her.

And then you would do my hair. Your smile would fade with every brush of my coarse hair. You would yank and pull, yank and pull. You used to get so frustrated. But I always sat patient. Not making a sound. I was waiting you see. I sat there, patient and quiet, waiting for you to tell me how beautiful I was. How blessed I was. How fortunate I was.

But instead, you would look in the mirror and then turn me away from it. I didn't get it.

(Raina begins to act out her memory, holding an imaginary comb and embodying her mother)

'I'm sorry. I need to get you a wig or extensions. You would like them. I can't have you leaving like this… what will the other parents think if they see your hair and then your sisters. I wish you had hair like your sister. It would be so much easier for me. How beautiful you would be if you looked like her.'

I would just sit there. Silent. My eyes shinning. Refusing to cry. Burying every feeling under lock and key. I threw that key so far away in my mind so I would never feel the way I felt that day. I was afraid to look in the mirror for so long after that mom. Because you would always turn me away from the mirror… almost like you were afraid to see what stared back at you from it. I was afraid to see what made you hate me so much.

I tried my best to please you after that… I wouldn't ask for anything. Brought home good grades…. Learned to cook…always cleaned up after everyone.

(Laughs)

Remember that one time you and my auntie were talking and laughing, and she had said '*you should make the darker one apply for the house keeping jobs because those are the only jobs she'll get.'* Then you would laugh… and she would laugh. Yeah… I heard you but don't worry… I didn't let it get to me too much.

(Raina turns back towards the mirror)

I struggle everyday mom. I see how people look at me. When I go outside, I hear the comments… the expectations… the disappointment when I don't meet those expectations. I go out there and I'm treated different mom. And then I come home, a place that is supposed to be my safe place and it's the same thing. And you want me to hide myself under your special cream. What? Is this special cream gonna take care of me mom? Is it gonna take away the struggle mom? Is it gonna take away the look's mom? Make me love myself mom?

Well look at me mom? Is your cream working… because I'm still Black? Well… I guess the scars inside are showing outside now huh?

(Tricia takes a hesitant step towards Raina. Looks at her through the mirror. She reached out to touch her daughter, but lets her arm fall away.)

TRICIA

I….

(Raina looks at her mom, cuts eye contact and turns around and whispers)

RAINA

When are you gonna stop hiding mom?

(Raina passes her mom and exits the room, leaving her mother standing staring at the mirror)

End of Act Three, Scene 1

ACT THREE

SCENE 2

CHARACTERS:

Raina

(Raina enters her bedroom laughing to herself. She looks towards the audience and continues her laughter.)

RAINA

Did y'all see her face!

(Laughs)

She was about to cry. I had to get myself out of there!

(Raina continues to laugh while walking towards her vanity.)

Man, this worked better than I thought it would.

(Raina takes a seat at her vanity.)

Y'all are confused huh *laughs* Well… welcome to my life. I am always confused. Confused about why the colour of my skin always starts so much conversation. That's the beauty of it, I guess. I instantly become the center of attention when I enter a room with my family members. Their Black faces… excuse me… their light-skinned Black faces… pales. Don't wanna disrespect them by forgetting to add the *light-skinned* in front of the Black.

(mumbles)

Like the world even remembers. Little do they know that they will always be Black.

(Raina addresses the audience)

So anyway… I lied to my mother.

(Laughs)

Oh, don't look at me like that… like y'all never lied to your mothers. Oh please. Raise your hand if you ever lied to your mother… don't be shy now.

(Pause)

Yeah, that's what I thought. Anyway, it wasn't a complete lie. I just don't have these rashes and chemical burns on my face. Gasp! I know right. Just don't tell her. I actually didn't apply her '*special cream'*. Let me show you.

(Raina opens a drawer on her vanity and pulls out a small white jar. She walks to the center of the stage.)

Hmmmmph… Listen closely friends, because what I'm about to show you will you're your mind. I hold in my hand my mothers' special cream.

(Raina holds the white jar towards the audience)

Please hold the applause. This white jar holds the secrets to what my mother believes is the key to a happier life. A richer life. An easier life than the one I have now. *A lighter life*. Aha… see what I did there. Have I sold this white jar to you yet? Anyone wanna give it a go. It would make my mother so happy!... yeah… that's what I thought.

(Raina turns her back to the audience and throws the white jar in the garbage. She looks back at the audience, all signs of laughter gone from her face.)

Don't worry… I'm sure another one will show up. You see, for as long as I can remember, my mother and her family had a problem with how dark I am. That part of the story is true. I used to feel so terrible about myself… I hated myself. It was the only thing I knew how to do because that's what was taught to me. I have another confession to make…. My hate had gotten so bad one day, that I sat in front of that mirror right over there. I had stared at myself for such a long time. Tears streaming down my face. I just couldn't stop it.

You see, my mother had 'gifted' me that special cream. Every time the one she gave me expired; she would gift me with a new one. People get money, dolls, clothes… hell

even socks… but I got skin bleaching cream. She would just hand it to me at random. Sometimes I came home, and it had a nice bow on it. It was quietly waiting for me on my vanity desk in front of my mirror. And if I was lucky enough… it would greet me on Christmas morning, with its best friend… THE WIG! I quite like its best friend…the wig. I get a new best friend weekly. Guess I should consider myself lucky because the wig ain't cheap. Sometimes she comes straight… sometimes curly and if you couldn't tell, I'm wearing her right now.

(Raina shows off her wig. Swinging her hair back and forth and touching it for the audience to see.)

If you think this is beautiful… you should see what's underneath. I'll show you in a minute, but for now back to my story. My mother gifted me with skin bleaching cream any chance she got. She didn't have to say anything. I got the hint. The day I sat down and stared at myself in the mirror was my lowest day. I saw every flaw. Every imperfection. And I just wanted it to go that way. I can't tell you what triggered my tears that day… but I knew that the special cream would make my tears stop. I remember looking at that small white jar, thinking, how could a jar this small fix all my problems. Would it really fix my problems? I was clearly going delusion because I was having a full conversation with a jar. I remember it being such a struggle to open. When I finally got it opened, I was hit with the foulest scent. That scent stopped my tears right there and then.

(Awkwardly Laughs)

Guess I was right huh. Holy shit it smelled so bad. Y'all ever smell a dirty baby diaper? Well imagine that scent and multiple it by 10 and then add some liquid bleach to it. Man… that smell was so foul. I remember screwing up my nose, and holding that jar so far away from me. Finally, I took a deep breath and set it in front of me. I put my index and middle finger into the jar, and I felt the smoothest thing. It smelled like a baby's dirty diaper but felt as smooth as a baby's skin. I remember being so mesmerized by the texture. I just knew that it had to work. I took another deep breath, closed my eyes and rubbed the cream into my face. I took my time rubbing it in, making sure I didn't miss a spot. And then I opened my eyes. For some reason I was expecting to see a new lighter

version of myself. But no… when I opened my eyes, the same Black skin greeted me. I just looked at myself… about to start crying again because of course It didn't work. I remember my face beginning to screw into its crying face… but before it could, the pain hit. My face started burning.

(addresses the audience)

You know when you are flat ironing your hair and you accidently burn your ear… imagine that feeling all around your face. It burned so bad I couldn't even scream. I just remember running into the bathroom and scrubbing my face raw. I wanted it off. Off! I remember moving into the shower and just laying down on the shower floor, fully clothed, face turned towards the shower head and just letting the water fall on my face. I stayed in there feeling the water turn from hot to warm, from warm to cool and finally from cool to ice cold. I had officially hit rock bottom. I remember looking in the mirror that night and I hated what I saw even more. The only thing I could recognize in my reflection, were the eyes that stared back at me. Those are the things that never changed. My face was red. Puffy. Blotched. I looked like a white person who got sun burned. I was ACTUALLY RED!

(Laughs)

Yep… imagine it! A person as Black as me, turning tomato red!

(Continues her laughter)

It's okay, you can laugh as well… its pretty funny when you think of it. I threw that special cream out after that… but like clock work, the special cream greeted me the next week again… courtesy of my mother of course. I didn't use it again, but that didn't stop my mom from purchasing it on a monthly basis. I was afraid to look at myself in the mirror after that for some time. The highlight of my days became coming home at night and pulling the covers over my head. There were no answers for me. Trust me… I tried… you will be surprised what comes up when you google *my psychotic mother is trying to make me bleach my skin and keeps giving me these special white jars because she doesn't like my Black skin and I tried it and it made me feel worse about myself and I feel like I am stuck in a deep dark hole surrounded by laughing eyes that don't SEE*

me and I'm constantly sad and tired and I hate my reflection and I just can't…. Well that's how far I got… word limit.

Safe to say googling didn't help and there was only so much of *Keep your head up, you'll be alright,* that I could hear from my friends. So, I just slept. I would come home… lay on my bed and pull the comforter of peace over my head. I would submerge myself under it. In that darkness… I found peace.

I just couldn't figure out who I was. Where I came from? Who had answers? So, I took care of myself the only way that I could… sleep. It would dim the pain for a few hours. Until my reflection reminded me of the pain my comforter tried to hide. I just couldn't pull myself out of the place I was in. I continued like that for quite some time. It's strange because, here I was, feeling like a brand-new person, and no one noticed. Or maybe they didn't care? Who knows?

(Raina walks towards her vanity and sits down facing the mirror. The audience can see her face through the mirror. She reaches into a second drawer and pulls out a moist make up remover wipe. She stares at her reflection.)

The first time I saw myself, was after watching an episode of *'How to Get Away with Murder'.*

(Raina turns around in her chair and faces the audience.)

Listen if you haven't heard about that show… I feel sorry for you. Stop wasting time and watch it! You have NO excuses! It is on Netflix! Who has Netflix?

(Raina waits for the audience to respond)

Don't be shy… raise those hands. Okay, for those of you who don't have their hands up… look around. I just gave you access to Netflix. Remember to ask nicely for the password and don't forget to smile. And to those of you with the passwords… don't be stingy… life is already hard enough.

(Raina laughs and turns back towards the mirror.)

As I was saying, the first time I saw myself was after watching an episode of *'How to Get Away with Murder'.* Viola Davis, who is the lead actress on the show. She was slaying the episode!

(Raina looks off into the distance)

I was captivated by her. Here was this Black woman, dominating the room. They all respected her. She demanded it. She didn't cower. She was unapologetic. People saw her. Listened to her. And the best part, a white man worked for her and answered to her. She was their leader!

(Raina looks back at her reflection)

and she looked exactly like me. She wasn't society's version of Blackness…. She was mine. At the end of the episode, she sat in front of her vanity… just like I am right now.

(*Raina begins to act out what she is doing.)*

She looked at herself in the mirror. She took off her rings… her jewellery. Then… she removed her wig. Never shying away from what the mirror was showing… like I often did. She removed her fake eye lashes. She just teared them off. The she took out a make- up wipe and wiped off the face she put on in the morning. Then she just looked at herself. Then a man came in… and kissed her cheek in such a loving way.

(Raina touches her cheek. She takes a final glance at herself in the mirror and turns and faces the audience, revealing her makeup free face. The burns and rashes are no longer there. Her wig is no longer there. Raina looks at the audience in silence.)

What… you didn't think I was gonna spoil what came after that did you.

(Laughs)

Y'all better use those Netflix passwords I so gracefully gave to you.

But that scene… it meant everything to me. Everything. That night… I went in my room and did the same thing. I cried again for the first time since after the special bleaching incident. But these were my freedom tears. Tears that brought me the feeling of strength inside of weakness. I remember being so scared. Scared because I finally liked

who I saw… from my coarse hair… to my thick bountiful lips. I just liked it. And day by day… I am working my way up to loving it. Everyday I try and spend some time looking at myself in the mirror. No… its not out of vanity but its my time to see myself for myself. I don't do it for my family, my mother, my sister, my friends, you or the world. I do it for me. Where the only opinion, the only eyes that matter are the ones staring back at me. I wake up and I read a powerful quote back to myself that has been embedded in my mind… it was written by Audre Lorde and it says, 'If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.' I spent too long letting other people define me. Look where it got me? Buried under a comforter. I won't let my mom… my family crunch me down anymore.

And that's why lied to my mom. I wanted her… needed her… to see what she could have done to me. What her preferences… her gaze could have done to me. These rashes, scars, burns… it's a lie that I created with makeup. Shout-out to YouTube tutorial videos and I guess the make up companies who have every single colour but the one I need to match my complexion. Tragic ain't it… but that's a story for another day.

Who knows if my mom will change her ways after this… but I know just from the look on her face that I got her to think and reflect today. I hope she can change her views… I hope that see can see that me loving myself, loving my dark-skin in its entirety. I wish she knew that her special white cream is pain… it's the real inferior one. But that's for her to figure out and dig through. She must find that dark root and pluck it once and for all. Until then…. She can't love anything with that much hate. Her hate hides behind that special white jar. But that labor is not mine. My labor is figuring out the self reflected to me in that mirror over there and loving and caring for her the way she needs to be cared and loved.

Anyways… I am tired of talking. I basically laid my family feuds on the table for strangers.

(Raina turns and walks towards her vanity and sits down facing the mirror. She turns her head and looks back towards the audience.)

Ummm… y'all can go now… no disrespect… it's getting weird with all of you staring up at me like that… you can leave my room now.

(Raina returns her attention to her reflection. She looks at herself… and smiles.)

End of Act three, scene 2

ACT THREE

SCENE 3: FAMILY FEUD pt. 2

CHARACTERS

Tricia…….. Mother

(Tricia is sitting in front of her chest of drawers. She pulls open the last drawer and pulls out a sage root and matches. She stands up and looks in the mirror connected to the chest of drawers. She strikes the match, lighting it and brings it to the Sage root, lighting its ends. She puts the match out and watches as the fire burns the end of the sage root. Gently, she blows on the end of the sage root, watching as the smoke from the sage root engulfs her. She closes her eyes. Taking in the smoke. She sighs, opens her eyes and puts out the sage root. She looks at herself in the mirror, staring with wide eyes.)

TRICIA

They say the sage is supposed to help with healing. Cleansing of the mind. A freeing from negative energies. The smoke creating a vast halo of positive energy… power. A new beginning from its ashes. But it just doesn't work for me. The same dark brown eyes, the ones with the sad stories, don't purify. When I open my eyes… there they are… piercing strong, vibrant and alive, and looking directly through me. These eyes of my mother… her mother…These eyes that refuse to let me forget.

(Tricia looks down)

My mother's eyes have made their home in Raina. She's her splitting image. Strong, vibrant and alive… and she doesn't even know what it means for her.

(Tricia looks towards audience.)

Their stories will haunt her… and before she knows it… she will become them.

(Tricia shakes her head and looks away.)

You must think I'm crazy.

(She hastily puts away the Sage root and matches)

Hmmm… ha! The nerve of you people to sit there and judge me. No! well, I am not crazy! I am not hateful! I am not ignorant! And I don't hate myself or my daughter. I'm just trying to protect her. Make sure she doesn't have the hardships, the same end as my mother… her twin.

(She looks towards the audience)

You all think you can judge me. You have no idea the sacrifices and work I must do! And it's YOUR fault why these dark brown eyes will win! You won't let her forget. But I… I will do the work for both of us. I will take care of her… protect her. She won't have the same end as my mother. Once these changes have been made, she will walk with power… like her sister… like me.

(Tricia turns away from the audience and opens the last drawer of the chest of drawers. She pulls of various types of wigs, from straight, to curly, hair extensions, hair buns and throws them into the middle of the room. Tricia walks to where she threw the wigs and sits beside them. She smiles.)

These are the first step.

(Tricia looks towards the audience.)

Oh please. Y'all only like the Black hair when it doesn't have the naps.

(Laughs)

and let me tell you, Raina got the naps. No matter how I hard I brushed them… they just never went away. A constant reminder.

(*Imitates a memory of herself brushing Raina's hair)*

'I'm sorry Raina. We will fix it. We will make it beautiful.'

(Tricia looks back towards the audience)

Y'all can sit there all high and mighty, but you know I'm right. In school, hair was always my identifier. Unlike the other girls, it brought me love, attention, it made me fit just enough. They would ask me what I did to get my hair so curly, so long. They would be bombard me with questions, demanding answers. I would just sit there…

(Imitates a memory of her younger self)

'Yeah, yeah… its all me… oh yeah, I guess you can touch it… yeah its so soft… yeah I just put water and conditioner in it… no it's a natural… I don't think I'm mixed with anything… I mean I guess I can't be Black with hair like this.'

You see, they wanted hair just like mine. Mine! Not there's. When my answers didn't work for them… that would end our friendships. I guess we were too different after all. I did tell them the truth…My new mom always did my hair. She wouldn't let me dye it or cut it… change it. I wanted braids like the other girls, but my mom will yell *'No! Tricia, braids are not proper, not acceptable for outside'.*

I didn't get a characteristic like the others. Just the hair. The hair was my self-identifier. *'The girl with the good hair', 'the girl *pause* with the hair'.* My hair was my skin. My hair was my inner self. My hair was my expression. My hair was my identifier. My hair was… overwhelming. I didn't know myself outside of my hair. So, I took care of my hair. And as a result,

(*Looks at the audience)*

my self… Right? I loved the days when I would deep condition my hair. Locked away in a bathroom. Just me, my music and my hair. I used to imagine all sorts of things. It was my time to reflect. One time I imagined what would happen if I ever cut my hair. I felt so lost in that moment. I mean, would people even recognize me? Would I lose my beauty? My privilege? My identity? My self? Who would I even be then? What would happen to me? Would they see me still? Still love me? Would *I* still love me? When my imagination got away from me in those moments, I would quickly rinse the conditioner, using hot water. Its almost like I wanted to melt away those thoughts….

I wish Raina got my hair like her sister. She got my mothers hair

(Tricia picks up a straight wig and idly combs her fingers through it. Tricia speaks to the audience.)

The same naps that you claimed to love? Exotic? Different? The ones you love to touch? The ones you wanted to get rid of so your hair can be just like mine. The same

hair that was a crime to wear it in its true form until recently. Didn't y'all just make it legal? Well that doesn't matter… not for my Raina… she won't be the object of your touch. She will be different. She will wear these wigs. It will make it easier.

(*Tricia holds up the straight wig to the audience.)*

I know it… and you know it! Just look at this one. Beautiful isn't it. She can wear this to a job interview. There will be no distractions. She will get the job for sure.

(Tricia puts the straight wig down and holds up a long curly wig.)

And then when she gets more comfortable in that work space, I will give her this one. Not too out there, but the perfect in-between. These curls will stay in place. She won't have to worry and stress over whether its neat and tidy. So smooth, so beautiful. She can run her fingers through it… see.

(Tricia shows the audience the wig)

They're going to love these. Raina will look back one day and thank me… for making it a bit easier. She just doesn't know it yet. I just need her to keep using the special cream and it will all come together.

(Tricia begins cleaning up the wigs off the floor)

I know Raina thinks her natural hair is beautiful too… but your society won't see it… that beauty. Hell… you all know we live in a society that treats people who are as dark a Black as my daughter as… nothing… inhuman… replaceable. And no… its not all Black people. And I'm a prime example of the different treatment.

(Whispers)

But that difference means I'm exiled from both worlds.

(Tricia walks back to the chest of drawers. She puts away the wigs and stands facing the mirror. She stares at herself.)

"I am the history of the rejection of who I am". Too light to fit or understand the Black crowd… to dark to fit into the white crowd.

(Tricia turns and stares at the audience)

You see, the society we live in never fails to let me know I'm not Black enough or white enough. But they fail to tell me what I am, where that puts me. Sometimes I wonder if I should even claim my so-called Blackness… its not like it claims me. But… I'm not going to complain about it…No, No No. Not being Black enough is what gave me enough power to survive in this world. I wish my mother had this power too… but I'll make sure Raina gets it.

(Tricia walks back towards the chest of drawers, opening the same last drawer. She pulls out a small white jar. She opens the jar, grimacing a bit, and puts her index and middle finger in it. She twirls her fingers in it and then brings the white gloop to her face. Looking in the mirror, she slowly applies the white gloop, rubbing it into her face.)

I wish I could put the gloop in these eyes. You see, the woman who carried the history behind my eyes … my mother… would always tell me to never let anyone take away my story. She would always bring me into the kitchen with her when she would make dinner. My brother and sister would sit on the floor. Too young to do anything but sit and watch. My mother and I would sit at our small dining table, kneading white flour…making dumplings… my favourite at the time and she would tell me stories. About her mother, my grandmother and the life they had led.

(Tricia continues to apply the white gloop.)

You see My grandmother was my mother's hero. Mother said she worked on a sugar plantation on a small Island. My mother said she would always beat the sun on who can get up the earliest. The sun never won that competition.

(Tricia laughs and stops applying the white gloop.)

She would make sure she and her younger sister had breakfast… bread with cheese and sometimes sausage and always, always some bush tea. On some days, when she got older, my mother said she would join my grandmother on the field. Never her sister though, she didn't like the sun. But my mother… my mother loved it. The sun kissing their skin when it reached its highest point in the sky. She told me she would look up at

it sometimes as she stork the sugar, throw soda on it and then hit them with the locomotive.

(Tricia Laughs)

I had no idea what she was talking about. Still don't. The only locomotive I know is that dance.

(Looks far into the audience)

Anybody know it? I think it goes like this.

(Tricia begins doing the locomotive while laughing. She stops and looks far into the audience.)

Well… I think it goes like that.

I remember looking at her in such awe. Those piercing dark brown eyes that held so many stories. So much history. Those tired yet beautiful dark brown eyes.

(Tricia takes off her shirt. She begins to put the white gloop on her torso while facing the audience.)

She was the strongest woman I knew. There was nothing she couldn't do. The hardest worker. She taught me how to cook. How to take care of myself and my siblings until she came home after the sun left the sky. Her beauty was blinding. I remember I used to sit and stare at her. She had two other kids but sometimes it was just us… and she made me feel so loved. Her beautiful Black babies.

(Smiles)

Those were the days I used to spend countless hours in the sun… it was my best friend. I wanted to be dark and beautiful like her. I would sit my siblings right there in the sun with me. I wanted the sun to kiss us like it kissed her. I used to ask her why I don't look like her… why my Black was so light. She would look and me and say

(Imitating the memory of her mother's voice)

‘Patricia Agnes, you are gifted to be a Black woman. Your Black is magic. You are magic. Don’t let anyone steal that magic’. But she lied. She didn’t tell me that the magic faded away the further away from home we went.

It was the long hours… the two jobs… raising 3 children by her self that took my mother. Two days after my mother left, her younger sister came for us. I remember she looked just like us. I remember she had on this giant hat and held an umbrella over her head. No rain to be found anywhere in the sky. My auntie… our new mom… gave us a new home and a father. He was as white as they came with the biggest white smile.

They had this giant yard and I would love to run and play in it. My auntie… my new mom didn’t like that.

(Embodies the memory of her Aunt.)

‘You will make yourself darker! You will spoil your beautiful skin! You will ruin it if you keep this up, come inside out that sun!’ She would take me into her room and rub me down with this white gloop. Her special white cream she would say. It will make everything better she would say. Don’t let your skin get so dark Tricia, I know your mother wouldn’t want that for you. I don’t want that for you.’

My friendship with the sun ended that day. My aunt… my new mom, taught me the ways to keep my skin as pretty as can be. She saved me.

(Tricia closes the white jar and puts back on her shirt. She puts the jar away and faces the audience.)

Y’all can think what you want. Even if those piercing dark brown eyes won’t let me forget, this special cream will. It lets me keep my worth, my beauty.

(Tricia begins walking)

I walk with my head held up high. I walk with beauty. I walk with care. I walk with a strength that’s not seen as too strong… too intimidating… but just right… A reflection of where I stand in my worlds.

I just want that for my daughter. I want to share it with her like I do her sister. Her sister doesn't have to worry. I don't have to fix her. She got her fathers eyes. Raina got mine… my mothers. It's not Raina's fault. I just know the whispers will stop as she gets lighter. They will see her beauty then.

I need to get her some more cream. Maybe a new brand! Her skin doesn't like that one.

(Tricia walks out of the room)

End of Act Three

ACT FOUR

SCENE TITLE: THE ACT OF POLITICAL WARFARE

CHARACTERS:

Shadima

Dezma (Dez)…… Best friend of Shadima

SHADIMA

And then from the downward dog to the cobra… deep breath in, and out. Hold that breath. Then to mountain pose, hands reaching out to the sun. Stretch it out. Deep breath in… and out. Then release it all. Woosah.

(Shadima walks over to her vanity and picks up the water bottle. She takes a sip and addresses the audience.)

Man, I just love yoga! I think it's the best discovery that came out of moving here. Yoga has introduced and help me see the strength of my body. Showed me my body in a new light. That feeling of release coming from your body. The tension leaving your body. Yoga has helped to open parts of myself that I didn't even know I was hiding away. But man, it's expensive!

(Addresses audience)

Raise your hand if you have ever done yoga at a professional studio?

(Waits for the audience to respond)

So, you know what I mean when I say its expensive. Man, that feeling of release and freedom is for the rich. I remember the first time I walked into a yoga studio. A study partner in one of my classes had recommended it to me. She said it helped her release all the tension and stress that she held in all day. And trust me I had stress, frustration and anger. Imagine sitting in a lecture room for 3 hours, learning about a history that sounds nothing like what I grew up hearing. Learning about the inferiority of the Black

community and looking at images of people who looked nothing like you. Or better yet that time they made you sit there and do the power flower to

(imitates professors voice)

'teach you about the social structures in society and where you stand'.

Imagine my dismay when he revealed to us who wielded the most power in society. Let me give you a hint, the only thing we held in common was that we were both able-bodies. I have 1 out of 16 things in common with the most powerful identity. Or when the professor poses a question and you feel all eyes in the room turn to you for an answer, because suddenly you have transformed into the answer book for Black history. Like newsflash, I am not a barrier of this information, revert your eyes to the man who is supposed to have the answers as per his PhD. But instead of saying all that, I pretended like I was not aware what was happening and started sketching in my book.

So, as you can see, I was well in need of some release. Now I wish my so-called study partner had prepared me for what I was about to walk into. Everything was white. Both literally and figuratively. The person at the desk asked me if I was lost. I'm looking around hoping my google map app led me into the wrong place. So, I finally look at this lady and said '*I hope so… is this the yoga studio' She* gave me the look…

(Shadima looks at the audience)

you know that look… that subtle once over that they don't think we see. Then her face morphed into a giant smile.

(Shadima imitating the lady's voice)

'Yes, ma'am this is the yoga studio, are you looking to pay for some classes.' I said yes ma'am, I am.

(Shadima imitating the lady's voice)

'She's like well you're in luck, we have a special today. First class is $15 and just for $60 dollars, you can get 5, hour long classes.'

I did an internal gasp. I thought she was pranking me. A special that's $60.00! This had to be a joke. This is borderline theft! Listen I just moved here from Nigeria for school. I've only been here for 5 months. I am on a student budget, an international student budget at that. There must be some discount for this special. I mean I could ask my mother for the money, but have you met my mother. I can hear her now

(Shadima imitating her mother's voice)

who is 'dis yoga? Heyyyy… I did not send you over there to look at no yoga! Focus on your book. I send you to study to be a lawyer, who is dis yoga! You see how you call me to stress me out, raise my blood pressure… bout yoga! Talk to your father cause 'dis cannot be my daughta!'

So, as you can see, there is no way I can ask my mother. But instead of saying all of that, what came out of my mouth was *'I'll just take the first class for 15 dollars.*

Now I am not one to feel self-conscious about my body. I know I am not a small girl. I ain't sitting around eating no salads. I love every thick, voluptuous, what you would call *plus size*, curve on my body. My body was something I grew to love. Usually I wouldn't think twice about the knee-high tights and matching sports bra, but that day in the yoga studio, I wish I wore longer tights and t-shirt. It's hard to explain what I felt in the moment. Truth is, there are no words for it. I just remember wanting to shrink myself into the smallest corner. I was hyper aware that I was out of place and that just added more stress to the stress that I walked in with.

Now don't think those whispers from those people could ever stop me from going back to that class. That was more their issue than it would ever be mine. They best believe if they see me again, I would be wearing the exact same thing, self-conscious or not! Those whispers had nothing on the price! 60 dollars! 60! Dollars! That's groceries! Transportation! Now truthfully, I knew after hearing those prices, I wasn't going to return. So, I went home and researched YouTube videos about yoga for beginners. I found a lot of Black women doing yoga, a lot of them who looked just like me, and thus I found my new instructors. I got a new yoga mat and here we are. I created my own little yoga studio in the comfort of my room. I got sage burning in the background, soft

instrumentals playing. No preying eyes. No worries. Just me. It's my own sanctuary and it cost me little to nothing.

(Shadima looks at her watch)

Oh man… talking to y'all made me forget that I still needed to clean up. My friend Dezma, or as she would prefer to be called Dez, is coming over in a bit.

(Shadima begins rolling up her yoga mat.)

I met Dez in my first year of University here. We stayed on the same floor in our residence building. In our first house meeting we instantly clicked. It could have been that we were the only two Black women in the room.

(Laughs.)

But who knows?

Moving to Canada, I knew that there would be a lot of white people, but I didn't expect they would be everywhere. In my lecture rooms surrounding me, teaching me about *my* history, in my residence building sleeping right next to me, eating right next to me. Even in the bathroom, brushing their teeth next to me. I was living a culture shock. Every single second of every single day. That I wasn't prepare for. Seeing Dez in that room brought me comfort. I felt relieved to say the least. We've been friends ever since. 3 years this year. It had been three years of learning and growing together. A hard three years. Contrary to popular belief, we were both two very different people. Dez grew up in Canada and I grew up in Nigeria. I was raised to be African. Dez was raised to be Black. That my dear friends, made a big difference. I didn't learn that difference until we were chilling in my dorm room that first year. Dez was on her phone, on a social media site and I was on my bed, doing some art sketches while watching a movie. She then looked at me and said…

(Shadima embodies the memory of her friend Dez.)

DEZ

Don't you wish you could be a Kardashian?

SHADIMA

Huh? Who?

DEZ

Kardashian! So, you could be Black. I mean look at them.

(Dez shows Shadima her phone.)

They have the same stereotypical features of a Black woman except on their skin, their race, it is not condemned. It's praised, worshipped even. People want to look like them, be them. People get surgeries to look like them. Imagine Shadima, your curves, your body in all its Blackness being loved? Desired and not fetishized. Our lips becoming normalized in all their fullness. A Black man wanting to date you, be with you. Seeing you in the lenses of respectability, superiority and power, instead of their mother, their aunties, their sisters. Where we can wear what we want, and it becomes the latest fashion trend. Talk how we want, and it not considered ghetto, ratchet… but our own language. We can walk and do what we want without a worry. We don't have to be drenched in coconut oil, shea butter, waist snatched to the Gods, face made up, false baby hairs on display, smoothed down and designed in a way its not supposed to be and always in little to no clothes, to be considered *cute.* Imagine a world like that Shadima.

I know what you are thinking Shadima, but I'm not ashamed of wanting that. Dreaming of that. I grew up different. I grew up with the nickname *Black Like Tar.*

(Awkwardly Laughs.)

The only gift a Black man ever gave me is that nickname. The Black men that grew up here with me looked and reacted to me the same way a white colonist would react to Black power. It's not all of them, but most. I have heard the *I don't date Black girls, Black girls are ugly, Ugh, they have too much attitude, I don't want to be with a Black girl*. *I want light-skinned babies….*

They can't praise another woman without bringing down another.

Like most white men, they don't see superiority, respectability, escape… love, when they look at us. They see their scapegoat. The thing they can run to, so they can unburden all their feelings and worries onto when they enter their dark space. We are just there to listen, teach and guide them. Fight their fights for them. Build them back up. But when it comes to us doing the same thing when we get to our dark space, they are either no where to be found or staring at us, telling us to *'man up'.* Then we have our parents pushing 'You will study to be a doctor, a lawyer', because all they ever see us as, is being the people needed to heal people or fix other people's problems. And if we don't… we become disappointments in their eyes. I've turned into an apologizing idiot living here Shadima. Constantly apologizing for things, I didn't do. I apologized to my bed yesterday for walking into it! My bed! That's how conditioned I am. Conditioned to not offend anyone… even my damn bed.

My upbringing was one of strength to prepare me for the battles that I would face everyday living here. Being a Black woman means your history, gender and race that shape and determine your present and future. It is never you, your self, because that doesn't matter in the face of those three things. We are haunted by those things. Force to live their meanings everyday. We internalize these things. The stereotypes. I have watched countless Black men dumb their selves down because it came as such a shock and surprise when the teachers realized they were smart. Their pants getting lower day by day. Their face getting harder. I have seen Black girls become angry. Loud. Hateful. It was funny. They were the free entertainment. I remember in high school, one of our Black female teachers tried to make a Girl's club at our school for Black girls. But everyone took offense, people felt excluded. It wasn't fair we got a club and suddenly, everyone wanted to be in a space for Black girls.

Shadima, do you know that if you never came up and introduced yourself to me, we wouldn't be friends. I didn't expect you to talk to me. To continue to talk to me. I wouldn't have approached you. But I'm glad you did.

So yes, for that small escape, I would love to be a Kardashian… that way I can be Black…. unapologetically.

(Shadima returns to herself. She looks towards the audience.)

When Dez told me that, I didn't know what to say. I took her by surprise when I just embraced her. There were no words to be spoken in that moment. That night, I made her stand in front of the mirror. I stared right at her eyes through the reflection and made her repeat these words after me *You are worthy, You are powerful, You are beautiful. Your skin is worthy, Your skin is powerful, Your skin is beautiful. You're enough.*

That night, I sat awake for a long time. I reflected on what Dez said. She was right. I grew up in a space surrounded by Black people. Those stereotypes about Black people weren't involved in my day to day life. Of course, we had other problems. Black people always find a way to divide ourselves.

But it is strange coming here… to Canada and seeing the stereotypes as an outsider of the society. When I came here, I wasn't as self-possessed as I am today, but I had the foundation of my self already cemented. Those stereotypes couldn't break me, and they didn't affect me in a negative way or change the way I live my life.

Living here… I see the power of where I grew up. Surrounded by people who looked like me and loved it. Embraced it. Worshipped it. Celebrated it. My identity as a Black African woman was something I always knew. Where I'm from, more people look like me. But coming to this society, I see how the stereotypes can change and break a Black woman. You don't see your self anywhere. It becomes hidden.

Dez was hidden.

Being surrounded by those stereotypes, regardless of how self-possessed I was, I had to remind myself daily of who I was. I found myself not making as many jokes in front of a white person. For some reason I just didn't think they would get it, nor did I want to be looked at as a clown, their personal jokester. I started to pull back and evaluate myself. I do see the ways of which I express myself have changed a lot since moving here. They change depending on who's around me. I'm hyper aware of my self every where I go. I've realized that it takes a greater deliberateness to show and see my Black as beautiful in this space. I had to make myself conscious of it, remind myself out of fear of losing myself. I had to do that because I learned quickly that people won't do that for

you. And quite frankly, I found it exhausting. But regardless, living here, I found it healthy to just look at myself and remind myself of my beauty, that I'm not different from anyone else just because my skin is dark. My body is a bit thicker than the norm. That my mood has nothing to do with my Blackness. That the clothes I decided to wear had nothing to do with my Blackness or size. That my intellect had nothing to do with my Blackness. That was me.

I needed Dez to see herself. That night, I took my sketches to canvas. I drew a self portrait of Dez from memory. When I gave it to her the next day, she was all like

(Shadima imitates Dezs' voice)

Shadima, it's beautiful.

I remember looking at her saying I'm glad you think so, cause its you. Her face of surprise and confusion was enough to make me laugh for a week. After that, I started giving her some things that helped me remember who I am. I recommended some social media pages that painted Black women in such a powerful and positive light. One time, we tried out facials. We had two different types of facials, a Black charcoal mask and a Sheet Mask. When we put on the Sheet mask, we laughed at our self in the mirror '*Look Dez, we are finally white!'*

(Laughs.)

Then we tried on Black charcoal Mask.

(Shadima looks towards the audience)

Have y'all ever tried this mask… its painful! It comes as a Black sticky substance. It sticks to your face like glue. And let me tell you…the removal of the mask was pain like I never felt before. Each pull to remove it felt like it was taking a layer of my skin with it. When we finally got it off, with tears falling from our eyes from the pain, I saw all these white spots on the mask. All the things that were clogging my pores. It was the nastiest thing I ever seen, and I couldn't believe that came from my face. I looked at Dez and we just laughed and laughed. But let me tell you something…that pain was worth it. My face looked so clear… clean… and it felt… light.

I kept making Dez pictures. Mostly of Black women. Drawing and creating these images was my calm. My peace. My self-expression in physical form. And I love just surrounding myself with images. My walls couldn't hold anymore images, by time that first year was done, and neither could Dez's. I gave her some of my favourite quotes from Black women, from Ethel Water, Lucille Clifton, Ntozake Shange, Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Dionne Brand, Maya Angelou, Carol Moseley- Braun, and so many more.

(Addresses audience)

I encourage y'all to look those women up. I hope you wrote their names down. If not come find me afterwards and I'll tell you all about them.

One day when I went to Dez's room to hang out, I saw that she started putting the quotes around her mirror. When I asked her why she did that, all she said was that it was her reminder. There were two quotes that stood out to me that day. They read *'Pain is important: How we evade it, how we succumb to it, how we deal with it, How we transcend it',* and the second read '*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.'* Both quotes written in power by Audre Lorde.

(There is a loud knock at the door. Shadima runs towards it.)

Oh man, that must be Dez! We are gonna hangout now aha. Talk to you all later.

FIN