

THE UNTOLD STORY
Intergenerational Trauma and Black Women

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"If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl,¹
being aware of her displacement
is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat.
It is an unnecessary insult." ~ Maya Angelou²

¹ The word Black is capitalized throughout this paper to emphasize its cultural and political connotations.

² Maya Angelou. *I know why the caged bird sings*. (London: Virago, 2015), 6.

CONTENTS

GRATITUDE / 4

ABSTRACT / 6

FOREWORD / 7

INTRODUCTION: I Am From / 9

METHODOLOGY / 15

CHAPTER ONE: History of Black Women and Resilience / 22

History of Colonization and Slavery in Canada / 24

Say Her Name / 26

Healing Spaces/Making Space / 28

CHAPTER TWO: Identity: A Sense of Self / 32

Colourism, Segregation and Identity / 34

CHAPTER THREE: Storytelling and Healing / 40

Black Feminist Herstory / 42

Black Indigenous Story and Resilience / 44

Community Engaged Art / 46

CHAPTER FOUR: Artwork as Conclusions and Continuity / 50

Interventions in Civil Spaces / 52

Interventions in Cultural/Art Spaces/ 54

Interventions on Social Media / 55

MEDIA COVERAGE OF MY WORK / 67

BIBLIOGRAPHY / 68

IMAGES:

Self-Portraits (2016) / 22, 32, 40, 50

Strong Black Woman (2016) / 60

Freedom (2017) / 61

APPENDIX A: Photobook

GRATITUDE

My sincere gratitude to my beautiful family who supports me, unconditionally, through all the ups and downs. I love you all (and I'm sorry I swear so much but the swear jar idea has brought lots of candy). Thank you Grace (my daughter) and my three beautiful grandchildren, Aaliyah (twelve years old), Iniya (ten years old) and Journee (five years old). I truly appreciate the late night art-making, the laughter, the dancing, the singing and unhealthy snacks while watching Netflix.

I am grateful to my enslaved Black women ancestors, grandmothers, mother, aunts and the faces I will never see and the names I will never know. I am thankful for the stories I hold in my heart and the pain I carry inside, because it has made me determined and resilient. I thank my father (Percy) for always reminding me that I was loved and my mother (Catherine), who never showed her pain because she was a 'Black mother'. I thank my sisters, Gracie and Shirley, for the time we shared. Sometimes life isn't fair to young Black women with mental health issues. And to my nephew, Paul (son of Shirley), lost forever in the darkness called autism, I hope you realize that you are loved.

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#NoJusticeNoPeaceNoRacistPolice #WeWillWin #BlackLivesMatter

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ABSTRACT

The Untold Story, is an autoethnographic portfolio comprised of an exhibit, a filmed performance, a photobook and an essay. In these works, I employ family narratives, art making, analysis of secondary resources and community building to address the impact of intergenerational trauma on Black women's mental health. There have not been enough studies on mental health among Black women and many Black women do not recognize the signs, thus never report the symptoms to their doctor as they uphold the enduring position of a strong Black woman.

In response to these issues, the art making spaces that I create address the stigma of mental illness in the Black community and how race is not included in the mental health conversation. My research creates community and creative agency of Black women's mental health and opens conversations surrounding the stigma related to Black women and mental illness. My work highlights the history of Black women and resilience; the effects of trauma on Black women including Black trans women; and the importance of addressing and healing from trauma within spaces specifically for Black women, both cis and trans. In this essay, I address the underrepresented history of Black women in North America, starting with the history of enslavement. The creation of art-making spaces as a framework for my autoethnographic methodology enables me to delve into my family history of women in my family principally through storytelling and lived experiences.

FOREWORD

Growing up Black in the American south covers every inch of my canvas and I have spilled tears on many canvases because of this history of racism. My grandmother and mother experienced racism and sexism in Virginia and West Virginia. They rode in the back of the bus and drank from “Coloured” water fountains. This paper and portfolio project comes from two years of hard work, and merges the skills and knowledge of community arts and community development that I acquired from years of work in the Black community before entering the MES program with my studies in Environmental Studies.

In researching my own family history of mental health, I look to lived experiences and personal narratives. The course taught by Bonita Lawrence, *Black Indians and Native-Black Relations*, allowed me to focus on the broader issues that emerge from the history of slavery and colonization in relation to my Muscogee (Creek) ancestry. Understanding how colonization underpinned the trauma of slavery further explained intergenerational trauma.

My involvement with Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLM) moved me to reflect on police brutality, systematic racism and the occupation of public spaces, with a focus on race and gender inequality and violence against Black trans women. The field experience with *Tangled Art and Disability* provided me with an exhibition space to address my own trauma and mental health by creating therapeutic visual arts. I also curated the exhibit, artist talks and a healing gathering space. My Graduate Assistantship in *Crossroads Gallery* contributed to my ability to create community art-making spaces for shared stories through therapeutic conversation, music and art. I created performance and spoken word video work in the course Film 5050 Documentary Workshop.

This portfolio project helped me focus on the present day inequities and experiences of violence against Black women and address the history of resilience by Black cis and trans women. I was able to address the effects of trauma on Black women, cis and trans around mental illness. In addressing Black women's mental health today; I examined racism, sexism, disability and class as risk factors. I created shared spaces for Black women's healing and also address my own healing from intergenerational trauma. Using art practice as research increased my sensitivity to working with various materials. Working through the artwork for the final exhibition expanded my consideration of the meaning made by every element of an installation. I realized that although a bull clip could hang a picture sufficiently, by hanging the item with something like a clothes pin created a different meaning. This is just one example of the way I started considering materials and meaning making. Making works with different materials expanded my consideration of textiles, ink, images and performance in different ways. I have started to consider more details so that I can use symbolism through materials and objects in my ongoing work.

INTRODUCTION

Here, at the beginning of my introduction is a spoken work piece that tells where I am from and my story growing up during segregation in the southern state of West Virginia and how being a light-skinned Black girl affected my sense of self. *I Am From* reflects my search in my family history of pain, perseverance and resilience.

I AM FROM

It is my responsibility, as a free Black African descendant of enslaved ancestors who fought for

Freedom and Hope to proudly voice the untold stories of enslaved Black women,

like Harriet Jacobs, and question her absence in American history.

Jacobs hid in a crawl space for seven years to avoid being raped by her white master.

It is my responsibility to uncover the hidden past of Canada's violent contribution to the Trans-

Atlantic slave trade, inflicting pain and causing death to Black bodies. The murder of Marie-

Joseph Angelique who was accused of 'allegedly' burning an entire town in Upper Canada.

Her body was beaten, dragged naked through the street of onlookers, tortured, and hung.

Then burned to dust and left to dance in the breeze. These are stories of Black women's

resilience, survival and courage. It is my responsibility to claim my history.

I am a descendant of enslaved, Black and Native American heritage.

I am of stolen bodies placed on stolen land.

I am a daughter, sister, mother, grandmother and Black womanist.

A teacher, a student, an activist and an elder who now must lift the next generation of Black

daughters upon my shoulders to give hope and point them towards a better future.

I am from fried chicken and baked buttered corn bread and ‘sit yo ass down before I beat da shit outa you’ South. I am from childhood segregation where the residue of white supremacy left permanent scars of slavery upon my ancestors and created a deliberate division in Blackness.

“What you want, boy?” asked the old racist white man behind the counter, of my grown ass Black man, daddy. “They killed Martin. Lawd, now what we gon do?” cried my grandmother.

In 1968 ... white supremacy destroyed our King. Is Black “rest in peace” even possible?

I am from Black women standing in resistance with determination to be seen and heard.

Angela Davis stepped up, raised her right arm to the ancestors with a fierce fist,

revealing her huge soft afro and unapologetic high yellow skin,

a reflection of my own lighter shade of Blackness ...

because the history of the ‘brown paper bag test’ brings so much pain and anger.³

I am from remembering my only childhood friend was a skinny white girl, named Cindy

because I was too Black to be white and too white to be Black.

Separation and agony delivered tears to innocent Blackness.

I am from many titles: Yellow nigger. White nigger. House nigger. Still, a Black nigger.

I am from that forced whiteness upon Black enslaved female bodies, where the

percentage of European heritage attempt to steal my rhythm and downplay my

Blackness through a lighter shade of Negro. Bed Wench. Jezebel. Concubine.

Just another piece of chattel property in a white world.

I am from undocumented kidnapped Black African bodies, enslaved and displaced on stolen land

where the violent act of genocide consumed lives, destroyed cultures and languages.

³ Bill Peters. “Brown paper bag test.” Urban Dictionary. August 19, 2006. Accessed July 13, 2017. [http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=brown paper bag test](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=brown%20paper%20bag%20test). An actual test, along with the so-called ruler test in common use in the early 1900s among upper class Black American societies and families to determine if a Black person was sufficiently white to gain admittance or acceptance. If your skin was darker than a brown paper bag, you did not merit inclusion.

Missing landscapes of Black female bodies violently raped to produce more Black bodies,
abused and hung from tree branches to the cheers and unsympathetic eyes of whiteness.

I carry my ancestors' pains and inherited sickness in my swollen belly and aging body.

I am from AmeriKKKa's cotton fields in 'sun up to sun down' Alabama to broken promises and
'slave labour' in unsafe coal mines of beautiful racist West Virginia where the state senator was
a white supremacist. Senator Robert Byrd. Everybody knew.

I am from decades of black coal dust that consumed my father's laughter and captured his final
breath, leaving a deep hole in my broken heart. I never healed. I am from Black pain.

I am from the stigma of mental illness of hidden fear and shame. Who gives a fuck what the
neighbours will think? Diagnosed with mental illness and hidden away and called 'retarded'.

Black. Female. Poor. She never had a chance.

There is no joy in losing two young sisters to the shame of this invisible disease
and never knowing whether my own mother gave in to darkness which may have ended her life.
Uncovering an unspoken family history of mental illness, I struggled to keep my own anxieties a
secret because I was a Black mother. They always take the Black baby girls.

I am from six decades of anti-Black racism that now includes sexism and ageism.

I endure the pains of aging that excludes me from spaces where race, sex, class and age matter.

Angry Black woman. Strong Black woman. They have no idea.

I am from struggling in silence with a smile on my face and never complaining 'cause nobody
really gives a damn about Black pain. I am from hide the tears until the rains fall and then take a
walk without an umbrella. Nobody will know.

I am from never show weakness until you're alone behind closed doors
where brokenness creates what I call "my art practice". It's emotional. It's healing. It's my art.

I am from confusion, shame and fear and rusty razor blades kissing twelve-year-old flesh
releasing bright red blood of unknown legacy that disappeared into the earth.

As indigo coloured butterflies cruised overhead, the cutting ceased

Making a young future possible. Life continued that day.

Now I proudly strip away the ugly residue of white supremacy, acknowledging its' deceitful
beauty and cultural appropriated rhythm. I proudly embrace the deep scars of Black slavery in
order to heal. I only know that I am from the shores of West Africa to the fields of Alabama to
the coal mines of West Virginia to the present un-belonging. My given name is Gloria. In honour
of my ancestors and my parents, I continue to carry the slave name Swain, assigned through
European whiteness and captivity. Today I stand proud, naked and free.

Because I am from Blackness.

In this paper and portfolio project I engage with the question: How do Black women continue to maintain resilience throughout the intergenerational traumas because of the history of slavery?⁴ I examine the resilience of Black women starting by reflecting on my own lived experience. The methodology section outlines the use of art-making and community building as methods used to research, create, and share unwritten histories of Black women's strength, leadership and resilience. Chapter one, *History of Black Women and Resilience*, discusses Black women's survival and resilience in light of the intersections of race, gender, colonization and violence against Black women's bodies. Chapter two, *Identity: A Sense of Self*, is my own story of growing up in search of my own identity. Chapter three, *Storytelling and Healing*, examines my work creating community engaged and healing spaces for Black women. Chapter four, *Artwork as Conclusions and Continuity*, includes the many outcomes of my project in the form of an exhibit, *The Gathering*, my live performance, *Freedom*, and my photobook, *Until My Work Here Is Done*.

The major focus of my research considers mental health and intergenerational experiences of Black women in the context of North America, examining questions and concepts such as: How does the history of abuse against Black female slaves continue to have an impact on subsequent generations? How can mental health be addressed within community through art making and storytelling? Through a critical disability trauma perspective informed by Black feminist lens, I highlight the history of Black women and resilience; the effects of trauma on Black women; and the importance of addressing and healing from trauma within spaces specifically for Black women. My work addresses the underrepresented history of Black women in North America, starting with the history of enslavement. These untold stories of

⁴ Throughout this paper, I will refer to cis and trans Black women when using the term women.

intergenerational trauma are the vessels that hold a long history of violence based on sex, race and class.

This portfolio project includes *The Gathering*, comprised of the following six inter-related components that mediate upon history: a) *Self-Portraits*, a grouping of black and white photographs; b) a video, *Strong Black Woman*; c) three large abstract textured paintings, *Residue of Colonization, Keloids and Fabrics of Oppression*; d) *My Story*, a display table of ink drawings of figures in silhouette; e) the installation, *Life Span of a Black Slave Girl*; f) and a performance, *Freedom*. This project also includes the photo coffee table book *Until My Work Here Is Done* and this paper, *An Untold Story*.⁵

⁵ Gloria Swain. *Until My Work Here Is Done*. Columbia, SC: Create Space, 2017.

METHODOLOGY

As a community artist and activist, I use art making and community building within my practice and research. The design of my research is interdisciplinary and has three different branches of methods and takes an autoethnographic approach that draws from my own situated knowledge.⁶ I draw upon art practice in the form of spoken word, paintings, installation, socially engaged practice and photography; analysis of secondary research sources including scholarly articles, biographies, films and artwork; and community building practices which involves creating space for Black women, gathering audience responses in the form of guest book comments, audience discussions, presenting tours and talks as part of the exhibition. These methods and approaches inform the research towards this paper and my portfolio.

An autoethnographic approach enables me to explore and use shared stories of the women in my family through conversations and the use of family archive. “This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.”⁷ Through examining my lived experience and family stories, questions emerged about my family origin. This motivated me to conduct archival research into my family. I retrieved documents from Ontario Archives and U. S. Census where I found my father listed on the 1930’s Federal Census records in Childersburg, Alabama.

⁶ Autoethnographic involves a process of self-reflection that connects my lived experience to larger social and political contexts and issues.

⁷ Carolyn Ellis and Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner. “Autoethnography: An Overview.” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. Accessed March 03, 2017. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>.

This primary research included reflecting on family, my memories and connecting them to social conditions growing up during segregation in the southern United States. Also searching through slave registries and genealogical information revealed more about my ancestry and the oppression of multiple generations of my family. This portfolio project and paper involves connecting my lived experience to the broader social and political conditions, and then through art making which allow me to develop ways to address the adversity and to create events and space towards making positive change in family and community.

My research also includes an art practice approach, which is an important part of my activism. Creating space through socially engaged community building and gathering functions as methods to offer support, learning and healing. Art practice as inquiry and performance is a major part of my work. In my portfolio, I explore how spoken word, performance art, film and photography connect to themes such as: survival (mental, physical, cultural, economic and political), disappearance of Black women landscapes, or places of belonging. I consider work of Tiffany King⁸ and Sherene Razack⁹ who discuss Black women and resilience. The final component of this project is a combination of an exhibit highlighting artwork in conversation with other Black women artists and documentation of my performance, *Freedom. Freedom* responds to the story of a Black slave woman named Harriet Jacobs. The performance works through the impact of intergenerational trauma on Black women's mental health.

My art provokes greater social awareness and responsibility for mental health issues with a strong focus on Black women. In my artistic practice, I explore ideas about race, gender, disability and lack of space. Art has been an outlet and form of expression for my mental health

⁸ Tiffany King. *In The Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes*. Retrieved from

http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/14525/King_umd_0117E_14499.pdf;sequence=1, 2013.

⁹ Sherene Razack. *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a white settler society*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002).

and wellness journey. My depression is political and the direct result of anti-Blackness and the brutality shown toward Black people wherein race, gender, disability, age and status affect the links to accessibility of quality and affordable mental health care. There have not been enough studies on mental health of Black women and because of the stigma, many Black women ignore the signs and suffer in silence. The “superwoman” role might also contribute to underutilization of mental health care.¹⁰ In low-income communities, there are few accessible mental health service providers and fewer services for and by Black therapists. In addition, there continue to be distrust in the healthcare system due to the history of racial historical misdiagnosing, inadequate treatment and a lack of understanding.¹¹ Due to these conditions, I thought it necessary to develop an approach to making spaces for Black women and mental health conversations.

I use community building and socially engaged art approaches to create space specifically for Black women. In *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011), Pablo Helguera explains socially engaged art practice as a social action that can bring together and engage a group of people. These hands-on methods and approaches inform my research because the spaces I create offer collective and collaborative support, learning and healing. I work within the concept of transpedagogy.¹² Relying further on the work of Helguera, my art practice blends art making and the educational processes to provide a transformative experience for the learner. Pedagogy is at the core of the work and takes place outside an academic institutional framework.¹³

¹⁰ Cheryl L. Woods-Giscombé. “Superwoman Schema: African American Women’s Views on Stress, Strength, and Health.” *Qualitative health research* 20.5 (2010). (PMC. Web. 4 Mar. 2017), 668-683.

¹¹ Carla Shoff and Tse-Chuan Yang. "Untangling the associations among distrust, race, and neighborhood social environment: A social disorganization perspective." *Social science & medicine* (1982). May 2012. Accessed July 26, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3321124/>.

¹² Transpedagogy blends art and education to create knowledge production and exchanges.

¹³ Pablo Helguera. *Education for socially engaged art: a materials and techniques handbook*. (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 77-81.

This project uses critical pedagogical approaches where knowledge is shared collectively. Through this process, my practice involves collaboration with other Black women artists to address similar issues to create space for collective agency. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire encourages the student and teacher to learn from one another.¹⁴ To further use the work of Freire, *The Gathering* is an opportunity for Black women to acquire a critical awareness and reflect on their experience and struggles with other women which is a form of liberation.

This collaborative practice is important because it is the opportunity to make change in the lives of Black women giving them a specific space to gather to discuss their problems and heal. It is also an opportunity to focus on current racist police violence against Black bodies and the lack of media attention when crimes against Black women happen. Keeanga-Yamhatta Taylors' book, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, address the historical and contemporary negative effects of racism and persistence of structural inequality such as Black unemployment and mass incarceration.¹⁵ Taylor argues that the struggle against police brutality holds the potential to push farther for Black liberation.

My secondary research includes an analysis of history books, historical fiction films, journal articles, and the writings of Black feminist scholars Kimberle Crenshaw, Katherine McKittrick, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Tiffany King and Afua Cooper. I also look to other artists who are making a change in the world and I reflect on artists who use storytelling and art practice in healing. Camille Turner “combines Afrofuturism with historical research as her interventions, installations and public engagements bring hidden and erased histories to life

¹⁴ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum, 1970).

¹⁵ Keeanga-Yamhatta Taylor. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016).

through place-based explorations.”¹⁶ Turner is a Toronto-based media/performance artist, cultural producer and PhD candidate at York University, whose work questions Canadian identity and ideas of belonging. I am inspired by her work because it questions the erasure of Black history from Canadian narratives.

Anique J Jordan, multi-disciplinary artist, work is focused on creating a more inclusive Canadian history. One of Jordan’s works, which I took part in, was an exhibition in 2016 which was a re-creation of the Black British Methodist Episcopal church that existed in a neighbourhood called *The Ward* in Toronto in the early 1900s. Using the form of a church congregation, Jordan composed a re-enactment of a Black Victorian mourning scene that focused on Black Canadian histories and Black histories which are omitted from the archives. She actively seeks new ways of knowledge production that disrupts colonial histories.¹⁷ Jordan employs the theory of hauntology in her work to challenge dominant historical narratives.

d’bi.young anitafrika, artistic director of Watah, is a Jamaican-Canadian dub poet, monodramatist and educator. Working in a genre of socially-conscious performance she teaches youth by creating dynamic theatre and performance production.¹⁸ Her work employs gender, sexuality, race, class, etc. These Black Canadian women artists use critical art practice to create works inspired by socially engaged and participatory projects.

I also examine representations of Black women noting how stereotypes and labels, for example the strong Black woman or uneducated Black woman, are negotiated and confronted in the artwork by African American contemporary artist Kara Walker. Her room sized immersive installations incorporate black silhouette cut outs of iconic nineteenth century figures from the

¹⁶ "Canada Recast: Alternative Futures with Drew Hayden Taylor and Camille Turner." *Gardiner Museum*. Accessed June 13, 2017. <https://www.gardinermuseum.on.ca/event/alternative-futures/>.

¹⁷"Art Gallery of Ontario." Scratch & Mix Project Empowering Black Youth Through the Arts. *AGO Art Gallery of Ontario*. Accessed April 16, 2017. <http://www.ago.net/scratch-mix-project>.

¹⁸ "INKtalks." *INKtalks RSS*. Accessed April 17, 2017. <http://www.inktalks.com/people/dbiyounganitafrika>.

South.¹⁹ Her work *The Emancipation Approximation* (1999), *Cotton, Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress* (1994) and *Her Heart* (1994), explore race, gender, violence and identity. These contemporary representations of Black women during the time of slavery insert and create a sense of Black absence and presence that address traumatic histories and explore race, gender, violence and identity.²⁰

My research also examines the work of, Jamacian American photographer, Renee Cox to think through the representations of Black women in social, economic, physical and political positions of power. Her photographic work presents tableaux where Black women assume roles that convey power.²¹ Her work looks at race, the Black female body and feminism. Her images of empowering Black women contribute to my own work of performance and spoken word by inspiring me to share my experience as an aging Black artist and activist. I created a short video where I deliver a monologue that emphasizes the strength and resilience of Black women but also address the stereotype of the strong Black woman narrative.

I extend my autoethnographical approach to my work in community building. I create spaces for art making, sharing and conversations about mental health with other Black women. Examples of my community building were evident in my open house event held at York University's *Crossroads Gallery* where students, staff and community were invited into the space to gather and make art.

¹⁹ Kara Elizabeth Walker is an African American contemporary painter, silhouettist, print-maker, installation artist, and film-maker who explore race, gender, sexuality, violence, and identity in her work.

²⁰ Laura Barnett. "Kara Walker's art: shadows of slavery." *The Guardian*. Accessed April 17, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/oct/10/kara-walker-art-shadows-of-slavery>, 2013.

²¹ Katherinejlegry, ~. "Posts about Renee Cox (artist photographer) on a Girl Power Academy." Artist/photographer: Renee Cox. Accessed April 16, 2017. <https://girlpoweracademy.wordpress.com/category/renee-cox-artist-photographer>, 2017.

Claiming space is part of the work I do. There is a lot of frustration with the anti-Black racism in art spaces in Toronto, which can be isolating for Black artists. Most of these spaces are white male dominated spaces that do not allow or limit Black artists to show work. I have been fortunate to find gallery spaces where I am able to show my own work but I was always the only Black woman in each of these art spaces. Going into spaces where I am not normally invited is important to me because these opportunities allow me to invite other Black women artists to share the space. During my artist talk in September 2016 at *Tangled Art and Disability*, I invited four other multi-disciplinary Black women artists to take part in a discussion. For me, it was similar of the strong female presence in *Daughters of the dusk*.²² It was a critical moment of political and cultural change because we had taken over, and filled, a white art space where we are normally not invited.

Claiming space is integral to building community with Black women, which was the reason for this event. *The Gathering*, reflected my own story of how racism impacted my life during segregation in the southern United States. This reflection included telling a story through performance of how the history of slavery affected the lives of Black girls born into slavery. In my painting and video work I portrayed the stigma of mental illness in the Black community and how race is not included in the mental health conversation. Through this gathering I brought together Black women and provided space where they were able to connect and speak together about their lives, art making, healing and community.

²² Julie Dash. (Screen Writer). *Daughters of the dust* [Motion picture]. (USA: Kino on Video, 1991).

Chapter One: History of Black Women and Resilience



Narratives that address the physical and mental oppression of Black female slaves are limited because most personal slave narratives were written by former male slaves, under the guidance of anti-slavery movements that rarely addressed female experience so not to shock the white Victorian audiences they approached for aid.²³ In this chapter I will discuss the hidden history of Black women in North America, starting with enslavement, to reveal the untold stories of the resilience of Black women facing intergenerational trauma through a long history of violence. I will then discuss how my artwork responds and seeks to build on a movement of resilience for and with Black women. To reflect on first-hand accounts of determination and

²³ Carla Wilson. "Black History and the Class Struggle." *Black Women's Narratives of Slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction*. February 4, 2005. Accessed July 09, 2017. <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/archieves/oldsite/2005/Slavery-841.html>.

endurance during slavery, I examine Harriet Jacobs' (1813 – 1897) survival narrative.²⁴ Jacob's personal experience as a slave inserts an important narrative into male dominated stories of Black American slavery where sexual violence against women is often omitted.²⁵ Escaping sexual violence was a way of survival for Jacobs because there were no laws to protect Black women and girls. Enslaved women did not have legal claim to their own bodies and were considered property where physical and sexual assault was not considered a crime. Jacobs hid in the crawl space, above her grandmother's kitchen, for seven years to escape being raped by her slave owner. Her story influences my own determination to tell my story and my work to empower Black women to heal through storytelling.

Another documented case in 1855 was Celia in Missouri; a nineteen-year-old Black enslaved girl who was hanged for killing and burning her master when he attempted to rape her. Historian, Melton McLaurin, addresses how gender and racial oppression rendered enslaved women powerless to protect themselves from sexual assaults. McLaurin argue how the moral ambiguity caused by slavery is often reconciled in the courts, whose rulings alleviate white Southerners' crises of conscience when confronted with the "hard daily realities of slavery".²⁶ To make sense of the endemic continuing violence against Black women, it is necessary to look at the history of slavery.

In *The Repeating Body* (2015), Kimberly Brown writes about Black women's resistance and traces the history of the violence of slavery. Her work looks at writers such as Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, and visual artist Carrie Mae Weems who all address how Black women's bodies were repeatedly abused and raped during slavery. Making these conditions

²⁴ Harriet Jacobs and Marie L. Child. *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: Written by herself*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²⁵ Ibid.,3.

²⁶ Melton McLaurin. *Celia, a slave*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991.

visible Brown's writing about these artist's places Black women's bodies at the centre of the history of slavery to give an understanding of the impact slavery had and continues to have on Black women.²⁷ My work draws from the history of slavery and Black women and slavery and looks at the continuing violent impact of intergenerational trauma, that emerged out of slavery and continues to be passed from generation to generation. Brown's work addresses the history of enslaved Black women have been omitted or neglected by American and Canadian historians.²⁸

History of Colonization and Slavery in Canada

During French and British periods of colonization in Canada, slavery was legal. Between 1629 and 1833, there was a reported 4,185 slaves in Quebec.²⁹ Black slaves were considered strong and healthy and more expensive than Indigenous slaves. Many of the Enslavement of Black Africans was introduced by French colonists in New France in the early 1600's, and lasted until it was abolished throughout British North America in 1834.³⁰ Slaves lost their African names, families, identities and history. Many slaves lived and worked in the homes of wealthy and prestigious Canadian families.

Author and scholar, Tiffany King focuses on the south and attempts to dispel misconceptions that the south is one big plantation.³¹ But slavery also happened in Canada as noted by authors such as Katherine McKittrick and Afua Cooper. McKittrick asserts evidence of slavery in Canada by writing that Marie-Joseph Angelique (1733), an enslaved Portuguese-born

²⁷ Kimberly Juanita Brown. *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Monique Polak, Special to The Montreal Gazette More from Monique Polak, Special to The Montreal Gazette. "Slavery in Quebec: Shedding light on a largely unknown history." Montreal Gazette. February 11, 2017. Accessed June 06, 2017. <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/slavery-in-quebec-shedding-light-on-a-largely-unknown-history>.

³⁰ Natasha L. Henry. "Black Enslavement in Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Accessed June 06, 2017. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-enslavement/>.

³¹ Tiffany King. *In The Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes.*, 2013.

Black woman was hung and burned in Upper Canada, Montreal.³² Angélique is documented in Quebec history because of her crime. In the book, *The Hanging of Angélique* (2007), Cooper writes the details of the violent hanging of this Black slave woman in Montreal. She was accused of setting a fire in Montreal to cover up her alleged escape but she never admitted to setting the fire.³³ Was she guilty of this crime? After torturing her and even shattering her leg bones, she never confessed. Yet she was found guilty.

Physical and sexual abuse was frequently inflicted on Black female slaves by white slave owners. Angela Davis looks at how enslaved Black women on plantations were potential victims of rape. She points out that Black women have always embodied an opposition to white male rule and have actively sacrificed not only their lives, but their families and community while resisting.³⁴ Davis' writing addresses the effects of trauma on Black women and examines the intersecting systems of oppression that include race, sexual orientation, gender identity, race and class.

Sherene H. Razack also discuss issues of settler violence against Indigenous women. In her book, *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, Canadian postcolonial feminist scholar, author, and activist, argue that race, space and the law contributed to the injustice in the murder of Pamela George.³⁵ Pamela was a twenty-eight year old woman of the Sauteaux (Ojibway) nation who was a mother and prostitute and was murdered by two young middle class white men in 1995. Her killers were convicted of manslaughter and not second degree murder.

³² Katherine McKittrick. *Demonic grounds*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 115-120.

³³ Afua Cooper. *The hanging of Angélique: The untold story of Canadian slavery and the burning of Old Montréal*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press. 2007).

³⁴ Angela Y. Davis. *The Black woman's role in the community of slaves*. (Somerville: New England Free Press, 1971).

³⁵ Sherene Razack. *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a white settler society*, 2002.

Say Her Name

The continued evidence of Black women not being protected by laws is reinforced within an ongoing history of violence against Black women. For example, in Montgomery County, Mississippi (1963), five Black women were stripped naked, slapped around and forced to say, “Yes, sir” to police after leaving a voter registration workshop.³⁶ Later as I reached my teens and started taking an interest in anti-Black racism, I learned about a Black woman named Fannie Lou Hamer and that her story had brought nationwide attention to police brutality during the civil rights movement.³⁷ In 1963, Hamer suffered permanent kidney damage when she was severely assaulted in a Mississippi jail after attending a training workshop. And today, anti-Black racism and sexism in policing continues.

Thinking through violence against Black women I reflect on my experience with domestic abuse within two marriages and do not believe that abusive behaviour is inherent to any class, culture or race. Carolyn West’s article “Thin Line Between Love and Hate” (2008) asserts generalizations about Black men’s social behaviour. She argues that due to socio-economic marginalization, Black men are more prone to violent behaviours towards Black women.³⁸ West’s research does not resonate with my life experience. My first marriage was to a Black man and my second marriage was to a white man, both were violent and abusive. Such stereotyping of domestic violence brings me to look at the current deaths and abuse of low-income Black women at the hands of police and while in police custody. Due to systemic racism, police pose a violent threat against low-income Black women.

³⁶ Tasha Fierce. Black Women Are Sexually Assaulted and Killed By Police. Why Don’t We Talk About It? Retrieved November 17, 2016 from <http://www.alternet.org/activism/black-women-are-beaten-sexually-assaulted-and-killed-police-why-dont-we-talk-about-it>, 2015.

³⁷ “Fannie Lou Hamer.” *Biography.com*. January 17, 2015. Accessed May 2, 2017.

³⁸ Carolyn West. Thin Line Between Love and Hate. *Dr. Carolyn West*. Retrieved from <http://www.drcarolynwest.com/media>, 2008.

Scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality that reveals “how discrimination is structured.” Intersectionality encompasses in a single word the simultaneous experience of the multiple discriminations of sexism and racism oppressions faced by Black women within structures of disempowerment.³⁹ I acknowledge this violence and the resulting deaths in my work by participating in the *#SayHerName* campaign. I have listed the written names of these women in black ink on fabric installations and on paper banners. By making the names visible I am honouring the two hundred and ten known cases of Black women killed by police, those who died while in police custody and also included are Black trans women who have been murdered.

In addressing institutional systemic racism, I critically reflect on my lived experience. The continuities of systematic racism are evident in the recent police encounters with Black women today and are a continued example of how violence against Black women and their rights as citizens are ignored. This leads me to review violence against Black trans women who face devastating amounts of violence because of race and class. In turning my focus on specific needs of Black women’s healing, I include gender violence while discussing the pain of interlocking racisms through the works of Jin Haritaworn who argues that anti-homophobia and anti-sexism are more gender related than race related.⁴⁰

Trans women are victims of violence not because they are trans but because they live in a transphobic world. In her article, “*How Society Shames Men Dating Trans Women & How This Affects Our Lives*”, Janet Mock writes about the conditions facing Black trans women and argues

³⁹ Kimberle Crenshaw Williams. “*Traffic at the crossroads: multiple oppressions.*” In *Sisterhood is Forever: The Sister’s Anthology for the New Millenium* Ed. Robin Morgan. (New York: Washington Square Press, 2003), 46.

⁴⁰ Jin Haritaworn, Jin. *Queer lovers and hateful others: Regenerating violent times and places.* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 72.

that violence against trans women goes unchecked and uncharted because society blames trans women for the brutality they face.⁴¹ Mock writes:

Until we begin checking how we delegitimize the identities, bodies and existence of trans women and stigmatize the men who yearn to be with us, we will continue to marginalize our sisters, pushing them further into socially-sanctioned invisibility, left in the dark to fend for themselves with men who don't have the space to explore, define and embrace their attraction to various women.⁴²

Mock challenges the biological view that trans women are not real women and continues to advocate on their behalf by arguing that trans women are women.

Healing Spaces/Making Space

Thinking through this history brings to mind the resiliency I witnessed as a child. Growing up, I remember how all the women gathered around my grandmother and the other elder Black women in the community for conversation and guidance. My grandmother, Mary Martin, was also the mother of the church, which meant she wore white and had a special seat in the church where she led the songs and prayers. These gatherings took place in her front yard during the summer and when it was cold, or they would gather in the church basement. I remember overhearing my grandmother say to one of the younger women, "You know the lawd don put no more on your shoulders then you can handle. Come here, child and let us pray for you. It gon be alright." When the women began praying, the kids stopped playing and became quiet until the prayer ended. This was a social and spiritual gathering of Black women coming together to help one another and heal.

⁴¹ Janet Mock. *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*. (New York. Atria Books, 2014), 161.

⁴²"How Society Shames Men Dating Trans Women & How This Affects Our Lives." *Janet Mock*. Accessed May 03, 2017. <http://janetmock.com/2013/09/12/men-who-date-attracted-to-trans-women-stigma/>.

Taking from lived experience, my final project *The Gathering* consisted of a social and spiritual gathering of Black women coming together to help one another and heal. *The Gathering* was a re-creation of my Grandmother's healing space, but was also an exhibition and socially engaged event comprised of photography, painting and performance, all focusing on Black women's intergenerational trauma past, present and future. Also, this event offered two wellness facilitators who shared creative techniques for physical and emotional health approaches with the women in attendance. Acknowledging generational healing, I invited my daughter, Grace, to demonstrate self-defence techniques, which symbolize a different future that potentially changes patterns of behaviour and experiences. These small gestures are the beginning of addressing the intergenerational trauma that my daughters, granddaughters and I carry as Black women.

As a socially engaged event I also opened discussion and brought awareness about mental health through art practice, creative and wellness approaches. I facilitate these gathering spaces using collective storytelling to address trauma from the impact of slavery, sexual violence, loss of family and the erasure of Black women's contribution to society, which continues today. Collective storytelling is created when I open the floor to women to share their histories, art practices and their lived experiences as Black women. My research is nested within the intersecting systems of oppression (e.g., gender, racism, sexism and class) and addressing a lack of community space for Black women to gather in this way. These gatherings and art-making spaces are a framework for my autoethnographic methodology, which enables me to delve into my own family history. Learning the narratives and lived experience of women in my family informs my arts based practice, which explores the role of storytelling and art practice in healing.

I believe that it is important for Black women to address and heal from trauma within spaces specifically for Black women. It is difficult to speak about Black pain in a non-Black environment. What does a healing space for Black women look like? I have created a Black women's art space and outlined the framework to focus on mental health and invited other Black women to contribute where they could participate and feel a part of the project. These gatherings focus on mental health issues and self-care. As bell hooks discusses, Black women have always taken care of others while hiding their own personal struggles. hooks explains, Black women have "built-in capacities to deal with all manner of hardship without breaking down, physically or mentally."⁴³ This results in the pressure and the expectations of Black women trying to live up to the strong Black woman narrative. The gatherings provide a space of generosity and understanding to provide an outlet of varied expressions for Black women.

My work with black and white photographs, *Self-Portraits* (2016), is a series of images of me wherein my face is hidden in each expressive pose. These emotive gestures were my way of visually conveying a resistance and response to the way the mental health system treats Black women based on my experience of being made to feel invisible and not having a voice in conversations surrounding mental health in the Black community. This lack of voice and invisibility relates to a broader absence of Black people in Canadian written history.

Scholar and curator Andrea Fatona writes about a sense of absence and presence in the artwork by Melinda Mollineaux. Her exhibit and photographic series, "*Cadboro Bay: Index to an Incomplete History*" (2006), include large sized pinhole photographs showing present day locations in British Columbia where Blacks once celebrated Emancipation Day picnics. Alongside these landscape photographs are absent of human figures; Mollineaux included text written in graphite on the gallery wall. These stories were of imagined conversations and

⁴³ bell hooks. *Sisters of the yam: black women and self-recovery*. (New York: London: Routledge, 2015), 7.

interaction at the picnics. The text was her way of placing and inserting the people into her photographs without literally adding figures. This work reinserts an underrepresented Black history back into the narrative of Canada. Mollineaux's archival research and photographs work in response to how Blacks are erased in Canadian histories and landscapes.⁴⁴ Acknowledging invisibility, absence and presence by introducing underrepresented histories is an act of resilience and honours the lives of Black women.

⁴⁴ Andrea M. Fatona. "In the Presence of Absence: Melinda Mollineaux's Pinhole Photography." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2006). doi:10.22230/cjc.2006v31n1a1761.

Chapter Two: Identity: A Sense of Self



Black feminist writers bell hooks, Saidiya Hartman, and Afua Cooper focus on the historical violence against Black women, which is linked to slavery and colonization. The resilience of these women as they endured the mental and physical toll relates to my own resilience. An analysis of this research highlight important power dynamics related to sexism and racism. In this chapter I will examine the intergenerational impacts of slavery on multiple perceptions and manifestations of Black identities. I will then consider the effects of colorism on my sense of self and reflect on the issues that emerged from my experience during segregation and the racist aftermath of slavery. Author and activist Alice Walker is credited with first using the word colorism (also known as shadism) as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race

people based solely on their color.”⁴⁵ Light-skin preference had been common practice in the black community for generations.

Joy Degruy Leary, an internationally renowned researcher, educator, author and presenter addresses the impact of generations of slavery on Black people. She opens her discussion of how the Black community can heal in her book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring and Healing* (2005).⁴⁶ Dr. Leary's theory is that slavery is a “historical watershed event regarding which Black Americans would be loathed (and dangerously ill-served) to soften memory, but toward which they should, indeed, purposefully stride as an area of rigorous study and research.”⁴⁷

Leary goes on to define post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) as a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today.⁴⁸ Leary’s work also looks at conceptions of idealized beauty that focuses on the light skinned slaves, whereas dark skinned slaves were seen as inferior.⁴⁹ She explains that when individuals adopt and impose the values system of slave masters on themselves and their community that these actions are symptoms of PTSS. This internalized racism manifests in the belief that whiteness is superior and that Blackness is inferior.⁵⁰ For example, even today, lighter skin is perceived as privileged and therefore some Black women bleach their skin to make it lighter and straighten their hair.

⁴⁵ Alice Walker. *In search of our mothers' gardens: womanist prose*. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1984), 290-291.

⁴⁶ Joy DeGruy Leary. *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing*. (Milwaukie, Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, viii –ix.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,139-140.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,139-140.

Thinking through this syndrome I reflect on my own identity, and consider how the history of violence against Black women from slavery up to today has manifested in my own experience and self-image. I have experienced divides within the Black community based on skin tone, also known as colorism. This lateral violence is often associated with perceptions of mixed race people including Black and Indigenous identities.

Colourism, Segregation and Identity

As a child, growing up in the southern United States during the 1950's segregation, I was always told I wasn't Black by my siblings. I was bullied and called names and this eventually took a toll on me. At age twelve, I began cutting myself. I remember going to bed every night and praying that I would wake up with dark skin like my father who had a very dark complexion. I remember in elementary school when the white kids sat on one side of the classroom, the Black kids sat on the other side of the room, and the light-skinned kids were seated in the middle. These were assigned seats. When my older brother, who was also a darker complexion, would bring my lunch, he would place it in the teacher's hand rather than give it directly to me. This was painful. And now, six decades later, I am still confronted by the same colorism. Colorism being a particularly form of bias segregates Black people within their own community by instituting that one shade of Black is more inferior to the other.

Untold Story, looks at my lived experiences of having a lighter shade of skin colour than my siblings. The ancestral pains of slavery, separation and displacement of family, sexual assault by white slave owners and the ongoing impact of anti-Black racism resonate as part of living through racism and colonization. The various shades of Blackness continue to determine differential kinds of treatment amongst Black people today. Omi Michael and Howard Winant

writes that anyone with at least one-thirty second Negro blood was Black.⁵¹ In the black community; colorism began after African slaves were brought to North America and manifested in the privileging of lighter skin colour by slave owners. For example, biracial children of slave owners were often given preferential treatment, obtaining skilled household positions which were often less taxing on the body, in comparison to slaves with darker skin. In their book, *Racial formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant describes the one drop blood rule, which is how American courts and law books historically confirmed that a mixed race person should be categorized as a Black person.⁵²

Colourism continues to have an impact in the Black community because it continues the legacy of white supremacy. The term colourism, like racism, sexism, ageism and colonization continues to delay our healing from slavery. As a light skinned girl, growing up during the late fifties and sixties, I could not accept how some white people treated Black people in our small town. One of the words used to identify Black men was ‘boy’. It broke my heart to hear old white people refer to my father, a hardworking grown Black man with a family, as ‘boy’. This was sad and difficult for me to write about but it is part of the history of being Black in West Virginia during a time of overt racism in America. He was powerless and did not fight back because the South was built on fear and anti-Black racism. I always thought his smooth dark skin was flawless and beautiful. I wanted to be dark like my father and my siblings as I was the only light-skinned one in the family.

I remember always waiting outside to hear my mom yell for me to come inside, “Bring your black ass in this house.” But she never did. I would stand patiently while my siblings were

⁵¹Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1980s*. (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 9-15.

⁵² Ibid.

called inside by name with the ending, “Bring your black ass in this house.” And when my name was called, it was always, “Bring your high yella ass in this house.” High yella, occasionally simply yellow (dialect: yaller, yellor), is a term for persons classified as Black who also have a high proportion of white ancestry. It is a reference to the golden yellow skin tone of some mixed-race people. As mentioned earlier, it also used to describe persons classified as black according to the one-drop rule, despite having primarily white European ancestry. Russel-Cole, et al analyze how skin colour and facial features contribute to tensions and shows how hurtful racism within the Black community can be.⁵³ In their book, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium (1993)*, the authors write, “Within the United States, lighter skin tones initially came about because of “White masters[s] having sex with [their] own female slaves,” which led to the preference for lighter tones because of the relationship to European roots.”⁵⁴

Staring into my mirror today, I still see my mother’s image; I see her hairline, eyes, nose and thick southern Black woman’s body. But I have always thought I looked like her and that made me smile. Yet, for as long as I can remember, she always told people that I looked like my aunt. And I thought my mom and her sister looked alike even though my aunt was a slightly lighter shade of caramel colour than my mom. And as I continue to age, I see the same freckles and moles on my face that once covered the face of my mother and my aunt. Was it because of me being light complexioned? I have always felt different from my siblings and knew there was a problem with being light skinned in a family of ten siblings and only one, me, had light skin.

My mother was a creamy light brown shade and my father was a beautiful deep dark brown tone that I always thought was so lovely. So, my nine brothers and sisters were all

⁵³ Kathy Russell-Cole and Midge Wilson and Ronald E. Hall. *The color complex: the politics of skin color among African Americans*. (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1993).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

beautiful various shades of golden and dark browns, except one sister who was called 'red'. But only the colour 'yellow' seemed to be different and ugly. I hated my skin and my soft hair. I grew up feeling excluded and not belonging. I fought, physically and verbally daily, to be called Black and to be included but that never happened. Where did I come from? Why was I the only light-skinned child in this family? As a child, I was confused and ashamed about my skin color and what it revealed about light-skinned slaves, many times it was a reminder of rape by the white master. Looking at my family and acknowledging their dark skin tones, I would ask if I was cursed or just a reminder of the pain of slavery in the Black community?

Some people, black and white, continue to believe that light skin and nice hair is better than dark skin and nappy hair. "Colourism has its roots embedded deeply in the history of colonialism," writes Elica Zadeh, a scholar and writer, who writes about how Black female slaves were raped or willingly had sex with their masters which produced mixed-race, light skin children.⁵⁵ This action created a division between dark skinned and light skinned slaves, especially relatives, which was evident in my own family. While dark skinned slaves worked in the field, light-skinned slaves were house slaves.⁵⁶ I remember being called a 'house nigger' by one of the darker skinned kids in my neighbourhood, when I was younger. I cried. Carrying this experience all through my life has had an impact on how I see myself still not truly being fully accepted and included in the Black community. This is a direct result of the segregation used amongst slaves to produce the long-standing superiority of white skin. I hope that sharing this personal detail from my life will wake people up about how child hood displacement and bullying based on colourism can affect some people throughout their lives.

⁵⁵ Elica Zadeh. "Light skin v dark skin: where it all started." *The Voice Online*. Accessed April 13, 2017. <http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/light-skin-v-dark-skin-where-it-all-started>, 2014.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The discrimination created by the impact of colourism left me feeling like a stranger in my own family, community, and in my own skin. I was too Black to be white and too white to be Black. In not being able to identify with either race, I turn to cultural theorist Stuart Hall whose work looks at identity as the way we perceive ourselves internally but also how we are positioned and perceived through representations and from the outside of our being by other people. In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (1993), Hall writes:

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.⁵⁷

As a Black feminist, I find Hall's analysis relatable to this discussion, which also draws from my own lived experience as a light-skinned Black person. In the film, *The Stuart Hall Project* (2014), he describes his life in Jamaica and speaks about being darker than the rest of his family and feeling like an outcast because of his skin colour.⁵⁸ I, on the other hand, was lighter than my family and felt like an outcast for the same reason. People react to trauma differently. Even today, I still find myself feeling unwanted by some Blacks, especially some females with darker complexions. As a little girl, I remember anytime I hurt myself, my maternal grandmother, a beautiful golden-brown complexion, would always remind my mother that she was only taking me to the hospital because I was light skinned therefore I was never taken to the hospital and today, I carry permanent scars that would have normally required stitches. I believe I went through my entire life putting my physical and mental health aside because of that

⁵⁷ Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 225.

⁵⁸ *The Stuart Hall Project*. Directed by John Akomfrah. Performed by Stuart Hall. February 28, 2014. Accessed June 13, 2017.

incident. But I was fortunate to have found a creative outlet, through art making, which continues to be spiritual and therapeutic.

For many light skinned Black people, there is no conflict. While both of my parents are Black, my father dark-skinned and mixed with Black African and Creek Native American and my mother is light almond coloured and a mixture of Black African and Irish (if I remember correctly), only two of their ten children were born with lighter skin. But of course, this goes back generations, during slavery, where whiteness was forced upon Black women and families.

Anthropologist, Stephanie Bird looks at how light skinned mixed-race people struggle to be recognized.⁵⁹ She talks about some of the challenges that include racism and from within racial groups, known as colourism. Looking at the history of biracial and tri-racial people in the United States and in European families, she reflects on the traumas of people who struggle for recognition and acceptance because of their racial backgrounds. My light skin evokes a reminder of the violence my ancestors faced and memories from my childhood of exclusion, where violent verbal and physical attacks were inflicted on me because of my skin colour.

As a child, I hated this kind of reminder of alienation and thinking of myself as ‘Other’ when it comes to race. My light skin marked me as separate from being a part of the Black community and from my own family. Despite everything I experienced as a child, during segregation and anti-Black racism in the southern United States, today, I consider myself a Black woman and the validation I received through the love of my dark-skinned father supported my sense of identity and self.

⁵⁹ Stephanie Rose Bird. *Light, Bright, and Damned Near White: Biracial and Triracial Families in America*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009).

Chapter Three: Storytelling and Healing



As an Elder, it is my responsibility to share lived experience and encourage other Black women to tell their own story. “Storytelling is how Black women maintain resilience. Families share stories that illuminate and combine their separate experiences into a meaningful whole. Families narrate both their best and worst life experiences and in this way, pass down a heritage of remembrances from one generation to the next.”⁶⁰ In this chapter I examine the way storytelling is healing and affirms a sense of belonging. I do so by analyzing the stories of my life and use a critical race and gender analysis to address trauma from the impact of slavery, sexual violence, loss of family and the erasure of Black women’s contributions. I regard these theories and ideas as support for my work.

⁶⁰ Laurel J. Kiser and Barbara Baumgardner and Joyce Dorado. "Who Are We, But for the Stories We Tell: Family Stories and Healing." *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice and policy*. September 01, 2010. Accessed June 13, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3010736/>.

In looking at how storytelling is healing, I reflect on the work of Toni Morrison in her book, *Beloved* (1988), where the character, Sethe, revisits her painful past where she took the life of her daughter, Beloved, so that she would not become a slave.⁶¹ As a descendent of African slaves, researching and learning about slavery is both painful and healing because it allows me to address pain and resilience passed down generation to generation. The character Paul D *in Beloved*, along with women from the community take part in group therapy to help Sethe share her pain with the larger community and move on from the past. Because each woman has experienced violence and trauma, they can connect with Sethe's pain by recognizing their traumas and heal.⁶² Sethe had to confront her past trauma in order to heal.

I create spaces where Black women can build community, gather and reflect. This kind of exchange and social space is what feminist scholar and educator bell hooks proposes as a healing space to recover and reclaim a sense of wholeness.⁶³ I create these spaces in response to the lack of community spaces where Black women can gather to address intergenerational trauma focussing on mental health and wellness and address. My work highlights the stigma related to Black women and mental health and confronts our absence in the media coverage of depression, in mental health programming and within the medical professions where Blackness is not represented. How can stigma associated with mental illness in the Black community, which goes along with racial discrimination and a fear of institutional racism, be addressed through community art-practice? How do art-based interventions effectively enhance mental health status for Black women? These are questions I address through my work.

⁶¹ Toni Morrison. *Beloved*. (New York, NY: Plume/Penguin, 1988), 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶³ bell hooks. *Sisters of the yam: black women and self-recovery*. (New York: London: Routledge, 2015).

My art work seeks social change and transformation. The work of Black feminist scholars in critical race and gender analysis contributes to my understanding of the issues I address in my work. Their writing and theories examine systemic oppression and racism related to the lived experiences and stories of Black women. I feel that these theories and writings support my work. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality describing overlapping social identities resulting in oppression, domination, or discrimination. Crenshaw's argument is that Black women are discriminated against in the legal system because of racism and sexism that renders Black women invisible and without legal recourse.⁶⁴

Black Feminist Herstory

Black scholars and activists challenged the status quo of white feminism. In "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," Andre Lorde challenges Mary Daly for the ongoing history of white women's unwillingness to acknowledge the words of Black women. Lorde writes,

Mary, I ask that you be aware of how this serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women—the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background, and that non-white women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization.⁶⁵

Lorde's letter asserts the limitations of Daly's perception of female experience exposing the exclusion of Black, Indigenous women and women of colour from the "herstory".⁶⁶ Lorde's intervention in writing this letter moves me to continue the work of inserting the herstory of Black, Indigenous and women of colour.

⁶⁴ Kimberle Williams Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color". In *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. Eds. Martha Albertson Fineman, and Rixanne Mykitiuk. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 93-118.

⁶⁵ Audre Lorde. *Sister outsider: essays and speeches*. (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2007), 69.

⁶⁶ Herstory is history written from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the role of women, or told from a woman's point of view.

The art making spaces I create take up the pedagogical theories and self-help practices of hooks. She advocates for an education that goes beyond the classroom with her discussion on the absence of spaces for healing.

The issue for us as black people is that very few people feel that we deserve healing. This is the reason why we have very few systems that promote healing in our lives. The primary system that ever-promoted healing in black people is the church, and we see what is going on in most churches today. They've become an extension of that material greed.⁶⁷

In this article, hooks examines how the media parades the sorrows and the mental illnesses of society's rich white people and does not include Black people. In her book, *Sisters of the yam: black women and self-recovery* (2015), hooks look at ways to help Black women with low self-esteem heal. The yam, also known as a sweet potato, is used to symbolize the African female diaspora wherein the yam provides nourishment for the body and is also used to heal the body.⁶⁸ For example, hooks uses her insight as a Black feminist to teach self-help through support groups spaces for Black women on college campuses.

Why is it that the clear majority of people who are diagnosed with mental health issues have a history of suffering from some type of childhood trauma? As survivors of childhood trauma, we carry the link between historical trauma, silence and survival of Black womens' bodies. I am a single mother of two adult daughters and grandmother to four. It is important for my work to document my own story as a Black woman and how my experiences relate to racism, sexism and not having a voice in society. My passion to continue art-making and an education was interrupted at an early age, by inherited health issues and unplanned financial obstacles; and, of course, single parent responsibilities. I graduated high school in 1976 with a business diploma

⁶⁷ bell hooks and George Yancy. "bell hooks: Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness." *The New York Times*. December 10, 2015. Accessed June 06, 2017. https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/bell-hooks-buddhism-the-beats-and-loving-blackness/?_r=0.

⁶⁸ bell hooks. *Sisters of the yam: black women and self-recovery* , 295.

in West Virginia and soon after started college for journalism. But due to an unplanned pregnancy at the age of twenty-two I withdrew from college and became a full-time working mother with very few options.

It was quite normal in small southern Black communities for women to become mothers and to stay at home and take care of the children while the men worked. My role models were my grandmother and mother who were dedicated stay at home mothers; I always believed in doing what I wanted to do and I wanted to work and take care of my daughter. As a single mother, it really bothered me that my daughter's father's name was not allowed on her birth certificate because we were not married. So, to ensure her identity and to eliminate future confusion for her, I married and became a housewife and a mother, reluctantly taking his name, which was expected of women at the time.

Black Indigenous Story and Resilience

I prefer the last name Swain because it is my father's name. Percy Sevoir Canary-Swain, was of Native American (Creek) and African-American decent born in Alabama. From the stories told of how enslaved Blacks were named upon arrival to America, I have reason to believe his last name, Swain, was a slave name given to my ancestors by white slave owners as I have uncovered evidence. In an Alabama 1860 - 1870 slave owner list that named J. G. Swain as owner of one hundred and five slaves which matches the surnames of the slaves on the census list.⁶⁹ American literary critic, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes that there were various ways that former slaves received surnames and there were instances of enslaved families passing down a surname through several generations. Some slaves kept the master's surname after they were

⁶⁹"Talladega County Alabama 1860 slaveholders and 1870 African Americans." Accessed June 07, 2017. <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ajac/altalladega.htm>.

freed to maintain the family connection to a name.⁷⁰ As a little girl, I remember hearing stories of how African slaves, horses and dogs shared the same last name to identify whose property they were. I learned that my great grandmother, Carilla Keith, was of the Creek nation and African. She was also mixed with Scottish and that may have been due to the white slave owner impregnating one of his slaves. The ancestral homeland for Creek Native Americans is Alabama and Georgia, which is where my ancestry research led me.⁷¹

The history of my father begins in Childersburg, Alabama in 1912, which was initially inhabited by the Coosa Indians. Research reveals that a Spanish conquistador, Hernando DeSoto, arrived with his army in search of gold in 1540. Eventually the Indigenous people were forced out as settlers took over the land. By the antebellum period, Alabama had evolved into a slave society.⁷² Both groups were enslaved well into the 19th century. The anthology, *Confronting the Colour Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (2002), examines the relationship between Indigenous nations and Blacks in North America since slavery.⁷³ In fear of a rebellion, the white-settlers purposely separated Africans and Indigenous people through teaching Africans to fight the Indigenous people and paying Indigenous people to capture escaped slaves. They then introduced the Indigenous people to slavery.

The current states of Florida, Georgia and Alabama were where the Savannah and Santee Rivers Native Americans began using slaves to work as forced labour. Brooks writes, “In 1738, Creek Indians who lived along the Chattahoochee River (which divides the present-day states of

⁷⁰ Henry Louis Gates Jr. and NEHGS Senior Researcher Meaghan E. H. Siekman. “Tracing Your Roots: Were Slaves’ Surnames Like Brands?” *The Root*. June 16, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2017. <http://www.theroot.com/tracing-your-roots-were-slaves-surnames-like-brands-1796141007>.

⁷¹“Creek Indians.” *Creek Indians Genealogy - FamilySearch Wiki*. Accessed June 07, 2017. https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Creek_Indians.

⁷² C. M. Hudson and C. C. Tesser. *The Forgotten centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 1521-1704.

⁷³ James F. Brooks (Editor). *Confronting the Colour Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America*. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

Georgia and Alabama) agreed that they preferred the masters of the land be the Spanish who “enslave no one as the English do.”⁷⁴ My grandmother, Eunice, gave birth to my father before she was married or maybe she was married to another man at an early age because my father and his siblings have different last names. As well, he was listed as a boarder on the 1930’s U. S. Federal Census records which indicates another name for his mother. It seems that Swain was her maiden name but he never spoke of his family. His silence gave me the impression that he struggled with his identity.

I define myself as a Black feminist because of my experience with racism, sexism, oppression and identity and this makes it easier for me to produce this work. I could better relate to my own struggle with identity after reading Indigenous scholar Kim Anderson’s book, *A Recognition of Being* (2000), as she researched her identity and obstacles faced by Aboriginal women in finding their place in the world and forming an identity.⁷⁵ Her work prompts me to address my own struggles in attempting to understand my Black and Creek identity in the wake of colonization. Colonization has had a negative social, economic and political impact on Black women through generations in the form of sexism, racism and ageism.

Community Engaged Art

Community engaged art practice is important in my healing and part of my self-care process. What works for me may not work for everyone but I have always found comfort in art. After many chronic health issues and unsuccessful treatments, I lost the mental capability to focus on what was happening at the time. It was a dark and difficult time but somehow, I survived and became a self-proclaimed community activist. Fighting for homeless people with

⁷⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁵ Kim Anderson. *A recognition of being: reconstructing native womanhood*. (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2000).

mental illness is also an outlet for my own pain and making art is a means of healing and identity recovery. Even as a child, I was able to find safety and healing through art whenever my siblings teased me about my skin colour or my speech problems. And today community art continues to play an important role in my recovery process. As an aging Black feminist and multidisciplinary artist, it is important for me to continue my art practice in my own healing process. Lorde writes, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”⁷⁶ In my article, *Activism & Self-Care*, I write about the importance of self-care when doing the work of an activist and focus on my own self-care practices as an artist and community activist.⁷⁷

Returning to school, at my age, offered opportunities to create art and to escape some of my anxieties. But during the first couple of weeks at University I faced challenges, which almost sent me back into a world of isolation. I felt humiliated and disrespected and had a piece of paper thrown towards me by a service desk employee. This humiliation quickly sent me into an anxiety attack and made me second-guess if I was ready to return to school and whether I would be able to deal with any additional stress I felt that was associated with racism and possibly sexism. This story is important as a moment that was a turning point in my life. As I reflect on this experience, I realize it has had an impacted upon my support for other mature students with mental health issues.

In looking at my own self-care, I reflect on the health issues I face as a Black woman and refer to Shanesha Brooks-Tatum, who highlights the emotional labour and violence experienced by Black women in everyday events. She explains that it is “understandable, though not acceptable, when we understand the confounded stress associated with daily encounters with

⁷⁶ Audre Lorde. *A Burst of Light, Essays*. (London; Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1988).

⁷⁷ Gloria Swain. “Activism & Self-Care.” *The Peak*, 2017, 49-50.

racism, sexism, and heterosexism.”⁷⁸ I stood up for myself when I experienced racism in a public service department and I was successful in raising the issue at hand by standing up to that person and also contacting the head of the department. I made my voice heard and by advocating for myself, I was advocating for other Black and People of Colour. I wrote an official complaint to the university head and I explained how this mistreatment affected me as an older Black woman with mental health issues.

My next visit to the financial department was quite pleasant and respectful. This was an introduction of what was to come, and how people treat other people, especially people who look different than them. I think I was prepared because I had survived a childhood of mistreatment and pain. Looking back on my troubled childhood, I reflect on the quote by Maya Angelou, “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat.”⁷⁹ Our journeys are similar, yet different because Angelou was unhappy being too dark and I grew up being ashamed and unhappy with being too light.

How do we address the mental toll on Black women throughout history? Mentioned earlier, Leary speaks about healing and asks, "Have you discovered your unique gift and shared it with others?"⁸⁰ She encourages telling our stories to uplift others because storytelling is an important part in building resilience. Angela Davis writes, “When we consider the impact of class and race here, we can say that for white and affluent women, this equalization tends to serve as evidence for emotional and mental disorders, but for Black and poor women it has pointed to criminality.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Brooks-Tatum, Shanisha. “Subversive Self-Care: Centering Black Women’s Wellness.” *The Feminist Wire*. Accessed April 13, 2017. <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2012/11/subversive-self-care-centering-black-womens-wellness>, 2012.

⁷⁹ Maya Angelou. *I know why the caged bird sings.*, 6.

⁸⁰ Joy DeGruy Leary. *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing.*,191.

⁸¹ Angela Y. Davis. *Are prisons obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 67.

The use of storytelling in my community art-practice allows me to address the stigma associated with mental illness and address racial discrimination and the fear of institutional racism in the Black community. Sharing my experience opens conversation and save future generations from dealing with mental illness and discrimination.

Chapter Four: Artwork as Conclusions and Continuity



Until My Work Here Is Done

My photobook, *Until My Work Here Is Done* (2017), illustrates how art transforms public spaces, builds community and solidarity with reflections on the social systems that govern and how people coming together, in collective voices, create social change in the Black community. In this chapter I will discuss the change I have sought to contribute to through my art practice and activism. I will also reflect on what I have learned through these projects and the many connections I have maintained with people and social justice movements.

The photobook looks at my community art practice and showcases my social justice work.⁸² I create healing spaces for gathering specifically for Black women, cis and trans. Within these spaces focus is placed on specific needs of Black women and investigate sexual and gender

⁸² Gloria Swain. *Until My Work Here Is Done.*, 2017.

violence. There are not enough spaces in which the pain of interlocking racisms can be addressed. hooks addressed the need for a place where one can seek shelter, comfort, and nurture for their soul; a place where one learns dignity and integrity, along with faith. hooks clearly address the need to create social spaces where Black women can gather and reflect where healing and recovery take place.⁸³

How do art-based interventions effectively enhance mental health conditions for Black women? In collaborating with other Black women artists, I recognize that each person brings a certain degree of expertise and I see it as an opportunity to exchange knowledge regarding a shared interest. To address healing from trauma within spaces specifically for Black women, cis and trans, I look at the role of creating safe spaces for storytelling and the connection between gender, race and space. From my experience and observations, white women usually avoid Black spaces but Black women seem to have to enter white spaces due to a lack of their own spaces.

Resilience resonates through my work as an artist and activist because I am determined to make change through my art work. My art activism involvement with Black Lives Matter Toronto, Occupy INAC, Girl Crush, Social Justice Week at Ryerson University, Marvelous Grounds, Black Futures Now and Tangled Art & Disability exposed me to the narratives that discuss intersections of mental disability, race, classism, gender and sexuality. These experiences allow me to address my own trauma and mental health to create emotional and therapeutic visual arts. I seek to create a space of generosity for addressing racism, sexism, ageism and stereotypical labelling.

In 2016, *Tangled Art & Disability* invited me to create an exhibition, a series of artist talks and a community healing space that brought Black women's mental health and wellness to the forefront. As a Black feminist, I share the importance of space and place for sharing

⁸³ bell hooks. *Sisters of the yam: black women and self-recovery*, 2015.

narratives and art reflective on race, gender, class and mental disability in art-making. Using art as activism, my work includes activities that engage audiences to reflect, create and heal.

Through an ongoing social engagement, my work focuses on the stigma about mental illness using art to explore trauma and present my own journey with mental illness, which encourages dialogue surrounding mental illness and its social impact, especially on the Black community.

Mental illness impacts all people, regardless of age, race, religion or status. Through my artwork I seek to address the social and cultural stigma that prevents people from addressing their illness.

My participation in the following events are documented in the photobook.⁸⁴

Interventions in Civic Spaces

In March 2016, I took part in the fifteen day Black Lives Matter-Toronto (BLMTO) TentCity occupation (pgs. 6 -12) of the Toronto police headquarters at 40 College Street. This action was in response to the lack of criminal charges laid against the police officer who shot and killed Andrew Loku in 2015, a Black man with mental illness. This occupation was also in response to the refusal of Ontario Special Investigations Unit to release the name of that officer; the murder of Jermaine Carby, a 33-year-old man killed by Peel police; 21-year-old Alex Wettlaufer who was also killed by police; and the reduction of the city's Black cultural festival Afrofest from two days to one (which was later restored). On the final day, the movement marched to Queens Park to raise the core issue of systematic racism within the police department with Premier Wynn.

In April 2016, I stood in solidarity with OccupyINAC at the Toronto Indigenous and Northern Affairs office, 25 St. Clair Street East (pgs. 13 – 16). This action lasted for nine days and was in response to the youth suicide crisis in Attawapiskat. This was a transformative

⁸⁴ Gloria Swain. *Until My Work Here Is Done.*, 2017.

experience as I joined in to take over, yet another, public space in the name of social justice. It was transformative because it helped me reflect on the social systems that govern.

July 2016, saw BLM-Toronto halt the Toronto Pride parade in a fight for the rights of Black LGBTQ2 youth and adequate distribution of funding.⁸⁵ The demands were later met and changes were put in place for the upcoming Pride parade. The most controversial issue that arose from the demands were the request that police officers not be in uniform and refrain from wearing weapons while taking part in the parade, as well as removal of the police float, because many of the participants, especially the LGBTQ2 people of colour (POC) are triggered by images of fully uniformed and armed cops. This was social change making a difference to improve people's lives and to reclaim the original activist space, function and spirit of Pride parade, which had gradually, over the years transformed into a corporate celebratory weekend that marginalized Black, Indigenous and People of Colour from the LGBTQ2 community.

In January 2017, I took part in the *Water is Life* protest in front of the Toronto Trump Tower (pg. 22) in solidarity with Standing Rock. And in February, I was part of the televised protest No Ban On Stolen Land (pgs. 23 and 24) that occurred in response to the American travel ban, which saw thousands of people take to the streets in front of the U. S. Consulate chanting against Islamophobia. The sensationalist media coverage of the demonstration resulted in photos with captions that re-inscribed racist stereotypes. For example, a photograph (pg. 24) of me singing "no ban on stolen land" was splashed on the front page of an online news paper with the word ANGER above the image of me. I suppose as a Black woman activist and artist, I will

⁸⁵ News, CBC. "Toronto Pride agrees to list of demands after Black Lives Matter Toronto halts parade for 30 minutes." CBCnews. July 03, 2016. Accessed July 17, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/pride-parade-toronto-1.3662823>

potentially be portrayed in a negative way through the media and an implicit racism emerges from visual culture through such representations of angry Black folks.

Interventions in Cultural/Art Spaces

In August 2016, I took part in the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) performance (pg. 28), curated by artist and activist Anique Jordan titled "Mas' at 94 Chestnut Street". It is very important, for me as an aging Black woman artist, to support and collaborate with young Black woman artists because as an elder, I have the responsibility of looking after and supporting the next generation. This performance was Jordan's vision of what Black life would have looked like in Toronto if it had been documented from the early 1890s.

My solo art exhibit in September 2016, *Mad Room, at Tangled Art & Disability* was a re-production of my actual Mad Room (pgs. 17 – 21). The exhibit ran for three months and was met with critical acclaim and came to a close during the first week of December, 2016. The exhibition focused on Black women's mental health and successfully raised awareness, opened conversation, and promoted effective self-care through art. With over fifty art pieces, two installations and a video artist statement, the exhibit symbolized institutionalization, forced medication, domestic abuse, sexual abuse and the stigmas that come with Black depression and disability.

Also during the month of September 2016, I curated my own #BlackLivesMatter photo exhibit (pg. 29) in Crossroads Gallery at York University documenting my time at Tent City, which was met with some resistance by one young white privileged student. His comment, "all lives matter" in the exhibition guestbook and the phrase itself used in opposition to "Black Lives Matter" attempts to erase the fact that Black bodies are under attack and are constantly targeted

by police where there have been a high number of unarmed Blacks, many with mental health issues, killed by police in North America.

Bringing November 2016 to an end, I took part in the Ryerson University Social Justice Week showcasing several of my #BlackLivesMatterToronto photo collection and my intergenerational trauma-based art pieces (pg. 30). I was also honoured to be a guest speaker presenting art for social justice and my activism work addressing the mental health system on behalf of people of colour (POC).

Still focused on violence against Black women, my work for International Women's Day in March 2017, involved creating an art installation (pg. 26) as memorial, on York University grounds. This memorial was for the two hundred and ten Black women killed by police, who died in police custody and also Black trans women murdered. The collaboration continued with me assuming the role of SAGE lecturer to the Watah Theatre in March 2017 (pg. 30). It was an honour to take part in the Audre Lorde Festival where I spoke about my work in art activism.

Interventions in Social Media

The online LGBTQ2 online website, Marvellous Grounds (pg. 29), was launched as part of the opening ceremony of my Black Lives Matter Tent City photo exhibit, where I was recognized as the first author.⁸⁶ The essay, “*300 Hours: What I learned about Black Queer and Trans Liberation at BLMTO*”, written in November 2016, documents my time at Tent City during the occupation by Black Lives Matter Toronto.

⁸⁶ Gloria C. Swain. “300 HOURS: What I learned about Black Queer and Trans Liberation at BLMTO Tent City by Gloria Swain.” *Marvellous Grounds*. September 28, 2016. Accessed April 15, 2017. <http://marvelousgrunds.com/blog/300-hours>.

In February 2017, I launched an online #BellLetsActuallyTalk campaign (pg. 26) which, surprisingly, became a social media success. It was one of the most shared online events on social media, according to Twitter and Facebook stats. The purpose of my intervention was to send a direct message to the Bell *Let's Talk* campaign about the lack of racially diverse representations in their advertising campaign. Bell *Let's Talk* seeks to dispel the stigma and silence around mental health issues, while also raising funds for mental health initiatives. I believe that everyone should be included in conversations about mental health. The official Bell *Let's Talk* campaign copy presents a smiling person holding a cell phone with different captions referring to talking about mental health. All of the actors in the campaign are white and evident through their tailored clothes appear wealthy which excludes the voices of marginalized people of colour. Every year in Canada, this campaign displays billboards to encourage people to talk about mental health. But these conversations are far from inclusive. This reinforces stigma for those not represented in the campaign and results in an impression that talking about mental health is a privileged position. When one is not reflected in these conversations they are rendered invisible and voiceless.

Painting is part of this process of addressing stigma. I create large canvases of abstract and geometric paintings using shapes, lines and bold colours to reflect self-expression and for visual storytelling. I play with colours. In some works I create flat blocks of contrasting colours in the form of geometric shapes. In some of my paintings I use bold impasto brushwork that lightly blends colours so each strand of hue is distinct and vibrant. I use acrylic paint as my medium because of the way it blends with other mediums to create texture or smooth surface. The tools for my work vary from fine brushes, wide bristles to all sizes of palette knives. I create layers of colour, sometimes with infinite variety of tones. I apply finishing coats to seal and

protect the surface and colour of my paintings and invite the audience to also touch my paintings. I want my paintings to open dialogue about mental health and social issues, and to create spaces that encourage the community to experience the pleasures of art-making.⁸⁷ Touring people through exhibitions of my touchable paintings engages more senses and creates these conversations.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, *The Gathering* (2017) is a re-creation of a healing space in the form of an art exhibition and a socially engaged event (pgs. 38 – 52). The exhibition was comprised of photography, painting, film, installations, spoken word and a live performance with a focus on Black women's intergenerational trauma past, present and future. This gathering event also offered two wellness facilitators who shared techniques for physical and emotional health approaches through spoken word, rap and self-defence techniques. I sought to open discussion and bring awareness about mental health through art practice. This sharing wellness approach inspires Black women to share their experiences through conversation, laughter and sharing of food. Food has always been an important part in the Black community when gathering.

The three large acrylic textured abstract paintings, titled *Residue, Keloids and Fabrics* brought my work full circle. For these pieces, I chose a large brush and white acrylic paint. The colour white illustrates the *Residue of Colonization* and white supremacy that continues to negatively impact Black lives today. The texture was created by several applications of paint to create layers. The black canvas covered with images that resemble scars represents the how the Black slave bodies healed after being whipped by the white slave owners. The invisible scars of slavery continue to lay upon the backs of descendants of Black African slaves. To create the

⁸⁷ Gloria Swain. "Beyond Race, Sex, Age and Disability: Intergenerational Trauma and Transformative Healing Arts for Social Change." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, (Forthcoming).

Keloids texture, I dipped tissue paper into a clear varnish to give a different texture which made it easy to shape into the form of a scar. For the third painting, *Oppression*, I chose to use the colour grey because life is not just black and white. Several applications of grey paint were applied to the paper until the desired texture was achieved. Again, I coated the entire canvas with low gloss varnish to allow viewer interaction with my work.⁸⁸ I also use photography in a photo series of three large black and white photographs titled, *Self-Portrait*, that represent the missing landscape of Black women in North American history and my own anxieties as an aging Black woman through the intersection lens of race, sex and class.

My installation of three dresses, *Life Span of a Black Slave Girl* was inspired by Harriet Jacobs's narrative. She writes, "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away."⁸⁹ She continues, in her writings, saying that at nearly twelve years old, when her mistress passed away was when she realized that she was a slave. Her new master began to make sexual passes towards her.⁹⁰ Jacobs reveals that because her grandmother was older, she was only sold for \$52.25 as the master had no further use for her.⁹¹ The three dresses I created each represented a stage of life of an enslaved Black woman. The small dress is from a six year old, the larger one is meant for a twelve year old and the largest dress is for an older slave woman. I made the dresses with white cotton material and on each dress I wrote in black marker the names of Black women killed by police.⁹² I then doused the dresses in water, which caused the ink to run and for the writing to be obscured. I thought about the labour of women and the way laundry would be done by hand. I then twisted the dresses, wringing them out further

⁸⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁹ Harriet Jacobs and Marie L. Child. *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: Written by herself*. (1987), 28.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁹¹ Ibid., 37.

⁹² Linsey-woolsey is a coarse fabric, most common in the United States during the Colonial era, but also among the lower classes in England for the past few hundred years.

distressing the garments. The tension and stress of the clothes was similar to the abstract paintings I make in the emotional and expressive gestures that convey difficult histories. These dresses also reference how a slave girl became the age to produce more slaves, which was vital to my production because my research began and ended with the topic of violence against Black slave women.

Another installation in this exhibition was comprised of a display table displaying fifty-one, three by five ink silhouette figure drawings, *My Story*, created as a way of using pictures as a narrative strategy and a way to tell my life stories. Audience members were also allowed to rearrange an assortment of small ink canvases, on the miniature easels, to tell and create their own stories. It was after I first created these drawings I learned of the large-scale installations of Kara Walker that also uses silhouette figures. Drawing from sources ranging from slave testimonials to historical novels, Kara Walker's work features mammies, pickaninnies, sambos and other brutal stereotypes of Black people in a host of situations that are frequently violent and sexual in nature. Initially audiences condemned her work as obscenely offensive, and the art world was divided about what to do, as they did not recognize how the work was addressing and bringing the history of slavery and anti-black racism to the fore.⁹³ Similar to Walker's images that are about racism and social and economic inequalities, my ink sketches reveal how racism, social and economic inequalities affect my life.

⁹³ "Kara Walker Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works." *The Art Story*. Accessed June 15, 2007. <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-walker-kara.htm>.



Photo Credit: Polina Teif

The video, *Strong Black Woman*, uses the form of a spoken word performance and karaoke to portray on my personal journey with a diagnosis of manic depression. The video is comprised of a continuous shot of me facing the camera sitting in front of a black backdrop wearing a black t-shirt and wearing a Black Lives Matter pin. The video has written text on screen that emphasizes particular spoken phrases such as “Remember to smile, You have to be strong, Invisible” illustrating the silence, stigma and frustration I face, as an aging Black woman within the mental health system. The monologue is my story, which I share to raise awareness and open conversations surrounding Black women and mental illness.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ This documentation video of this performance is available for viewing at <http://www.gloriacswain.tumblr.com>.



Photo Credit: Kelly Lui

This performance symbolizes moving on from the intergenerational trauma in the Black community by shedding the social fabric of oppression. In the performance *Freedom*, I use spoken word to convey the arrival of Black African slaves into white colonialism, using movement and layered coloured fabrics that signify the layers of colonization, scars of slavery and resilience and strength of Black women. This performance was inspired by the story of Harriet Jacobs with the installation of the three dresses. *Freedom*, concludes my research and the sharing of my own experience with intergenerational trauma.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ This documentation video of this performance is available for viewing at <http://www.gloriacswain.tumblr.com>.

I use face painting as a form of transformation and spiritual healing in my performance. The design I use is my way of creating a mask and the colour white represents colonization that link the performance to my art work. I chose to use white speckles my face with dots because I'm familiar with that type of face art through various African events and found the design interesting. I have been fortunate to learn that my ancestors arrived to American from West Africa during slavery, I was concerned about using this practice in my performance and did not want to be disrespectful or to appropriate this form of art. African-Americans descended from Africa, so do not need their own permission.⁹⁶ I hope to learn more about this form of art through future projects and research.

The facilitators contributed to the performance to establish a future of hope and healing for the next generation. Aisha Brown, a young Black woman comedian, who addresses her own struggle with depression through spoken word, rap and comedy.⁹⁷ My daughter, Grace Cacciatore, speaks and demonstrates self-defence activities because physical health has a positive impact on mental health.⁹⁸ The audience of young Black women were able to identify with these two facilitators who were well received.

On a long piece of white cotton fabric I wrote in black ink the names of two hundred and ten Black women who were killed by police. I soaked the fabric in water causing the ink writing to run turning the white fabric a mottled grey. I twisted and wrung the cotton fibres to remove the water like doing laundry by hand. This texture piece is called *#SayHerName*. I also used the same process in small white cotton fabrics with the names of the women in attendance. I have a my responsibility to *#SayTheirName*. The following list presents some of the names of Black

⁹⁶ "To Dot Or Not To Dot?: My Thoughts On The Whole Can African-Americans Appropriate African Culture? Debate." OkayAfrica. September 29, 2015. <http://www.okayafrica.com/news/to-dot-or-not-todot-thoughts-on-the-african-american-cultural-appropriation-debate/>.

⁹⁷ Aisha Brown is a North American comic who uses humour to speak about depression.

⁹⁸ Grace Cacciatore is a certified Personal Trainer and Kickboxing instructor who teaches self-defense.

women killed by police, died in police custody and Black trans women murdered. Police violence against Black women and transgender women is largely ignored by North American media. The low turnout, when a Black woman is killed by police, is just an example of the continuation of the historical erasure and violence against Black women. When you read these names, please read them aloud:

Tomasa Africa	Delicia Africa	Netta Africa	
Carolyn Adams	Rhonda Africa	Shelley Amos	
Tanisha Anderson	Venus Renee Baird	Carolyn Sue Botticher	
Rekia Boyd	Anna Brown	Martina Brown	
Eleanor Bumpurs	Cheryl Burton	Marcella Byrd	
Miriam Carey	Alexia Christian	Derrinesha Clay	
Erica Collins	Brenda Faye Cooper	Jacqueline Robinson Culp	
Michelle Cusseaux	Danette Daniels	Shantel Davis	
Mattie Debardebeleh	Monique Deckard	Sharmel Edwards	
Emily Marie Delafield	Delorse Epps	Marie Fares	Shelly Frey
Janisha Fonville	Sheneese Francis	Pamela Frowner	
Anita Gay	Denise Gay	Pearlie Golden	LaToya Grier
Kim Groves	LaToya Haggerty	Mya Hall	
Yvette Henderson	Teresa Henderson	Denise Hawkins	
Darnisha Harris	Korry Gaines	Yvonne McNeal	
Kendra James	Laveta Jackson	Karen Day Jackson	
Meagan Hockaday	Kathryn Johnston	Aiyanna Jones	

Cora Jones	Sophia King	Anderson Kitt	Eula Love
Summer Marie Lane	Nuwnuh Laroche	Audrey Marshall	
Kesha Williams	Tariska Wilson	Vernicia Woodard	
Sharon McDowell	Alicia McCuller	Della McDuffie	Natasha McKenna
	Iquisha Middleton	Adaisha Miller	
Eula Love	Laura Nelson	Kayla Moore	Rebecca Miller
Tyisha Miller	Gabrilla Nevarez	Jacqueline Nicholson	
Margaret LaVerne Mitchell	Mary Mitchell	Heather Parker	
Charmene Pickering	Mackala Ross	Aura Rosser	
Little Doll Power	Jimmi Ruth Ratliffe	Quenyia Tykia Shelton	
Latricka Sloan	Yvette Smith	Alma Shaw	
Elloise Spellman	Alberta Spruill	Yolanda Thomas	
Sonji Taylor	Alesia Thomas	Laporsha Watson	
Patricia Thompson	Virginia Verdee	Shulena Weldon	
Brenda Williams	Desseria Whitman	Shulena Weldon	
Shenequa Proctor	Kyan Livingston	Mitrice Richardson	
Laportia Watson	Angeline Watt	Latandra Ellington	
	Derasha Armstrong	Robin Taneisha Williams	
Kisha Arrone	Sahlah Ridgeway	Barbara Dawson	
Bettie Jones	Michelle Cusseaux		
Kentel Jones	Nizah Morris	Kindra Chapman	Joyce Curnell

	Ralkina Jones		Raynette Turner
Gynnya McMiller		Kimberlee Randal King	
			Symone Marshall
	Deborah Danner	Karryn Gaines	Sandra Bland
	Malissa Williams	Keara Crowder	Aura Rosser
	Angelique Styles	Mesha Caldwell	Jojo Striker
Tiara Lashaytheboss Richmond		Jaquarrius Holland	Ciara McElveen
	Chyna Doll Dupnee		Alphonza Watson

and the many other Black, cis and trans women, known and unknown, who have lost their lives to racist police brutality.

The Place of Art in Research

“Gloria Swain’s art spoke to me because it was honest, personal, and introspective. The pieces that stuck out to me the most were a painting of four ghostly figures which Gloria later explained were the ghosts of her ancestors who were looking after her, and a long scroll on which Gloria had written all the names of black women killed by white police officers in the past few years.”⁹⁹

It is important that my work speak to and for Black women who no longer have a voice and for those who continue to hide their pain behind tears and silence. In order to heal, we must acknowledge the history of Black women and their resilience and the continuous violence against Black women’s bodies and the impact of intergenerational trauma upon today’s Black women. Through my art I assert the importance of Black women to gather in spaces where healing from trauma is possible through sistering.¹⁰⁰ As Black women, we must focus on our mental health and to challenge the strong Black woman narrative by being unafraid and

⁹⁹ Shailee Koranne, “Tangled Art Gallery: Redefining Disability Arts.” *The Strand*. 2016. Accessed July 26, 2017. <http://thestrand.ca/tangled-art-gallery-redefining-disability-arts>.

¹⁰⁰ June Chau. *Mad Room: Black artist lays bare struggle with depression, anxiety*. September 22, 2016. Accessed July 26, 2017. <http://rabble.ca/columnists/2016/09/mad-room-black-artist-lays-bare-struggle-depression-anxiety>.

unashamed to strip away the oppressions placed upon our bodies and the inherited pain that lies inside our bellies. Since slavery, Black women have endured devastating amounts of violence because of race, sex and class and this cannot be separated from colonization. The impact of physical and sexual violence, and even death, continues to distress Black women today.

Through bravely sharing my own story of resilience with mental illness and trauma in spaces, created specifically for Black women, my work has inspired others to challenge stereotypes placed upon Black women.¹⁰¹ This work provokes greater social awareness about the important history of Black women and address the absence of spaces for healing and storytelling. The feedback from artist talks, interviews, participants comments, published works and media coverage is proof that spaces and conversations regarding Black women and mental health is an important social issue.¹⁰² Resilience through storytelling and gaining a sense of self creates healing spaces for Black women. Methods such as autoethnographic, media analysis, art practice and social practice enable me to create spaces for Black women. I will continue my work as a Black feminist artist and activist creating spaces for Black women to gather, share and heal through art-making and conversation.

¹⁰¹ Amanda Parris. "For this activist, art is a lifeline – a way to cope with personal and generational trauma CBC Arts." CBCnews. June6, 2017. Accessed July 26, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/for-this-activist-art-is-a-lifeline-and-a-way-to-cope-with-prsonal-and-generational-trauma-1.4193046>.

¹⁰² Andra Heinrichs."One Canvas At A Time." Shameless, 2017, 36-37.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF MY WORK

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