Been, Being, Becoming: An Auto-ethnographical Analysis of Black Youth in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Black youth often contend with negative external social constructions, labels, and categories, defining who they are as individuals and as racialized others. Regardless of the degree to which Black youth identify with these narratives of deviance, the expectations and assumptions within this discourse have consequences. This research project analyzed Black youth identity and racialization through the lens of my racialized experience of growing up Black in Canada. Thus, this study attempted to answer the following question: How have I as a Black youth made sense of the "narrative of deviance" as I created my identity during adolescence? The method used for this research was an auto-ethnographical approach, which allowed me to analyze my own life experiences and explore the themes in relation to academic literature on Black youth and adolescent experiences. As the primary researcher I coded the selected life experiences using MAXQDA coding software, analyzed them for major themes, and drew on the major connections that existed between the data and the existing literature. The existing literature represented Black youth identity as frequently being fraught with internal identity tension, varying levels of performative tendencies, and denial of individual recognition. My research found that throughout my life, I contended with social process that constructed Blackness, through creation, performance, and judgment, making my Blackness an object that was meant to represent a stereotypical image of a Black male.

Keywords: Blackness, youth, identity, performance, auto-ethnography

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father. I wish you were here to read this alongside me, but the love that you stamped on the world continues to live on through me and this work.

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> *I pray you, then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there. (p. 3)*
>
> W. E. B. Du Bois

Introduction

Black youth, as they grow up, must navigate not only their personal lives, but processes of racialization and associated criminalization of their social identity in North American society. This thesis explores the influence of racialization on identity for Black youth in Canada. Racialization, as defined by Powell and Roediger (2012), is the process in which "practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements" are used to perpetuate social stratification through characteristics that have been attached to groups of people (p. 4). Heden (2017) extends this concept of perpetuated domination, describing racialization as the process of imposing "racial identities to social groups, who would otherwise not identify themselves as such" (p. 34). While it may be viewed as an action, racialization is often experienced as a process that begins at birth and will manifest itself in many social institutions and dominant discourses through the life course (Powell & Roediger, 2012, p. 4). I will argue that racialization is also made visible in young people's negotiations of identity. Michalowski (2016), defines criminalization as the process in which unlawful actions are punished by law and acts that are "not illegal, [but are] considered to be evil, shameful, or wrong" (p. 184). These two primary definitions of criminalization are not only limited to actions, they can also be placed upon both behaviours and people (Michalowski, 2016, p. 184).

When understanding racialization and criminalization in this complex and experiential way, we can begin to analyze the ways in which identities are impacted by racialization processes. Dominant discourses (or privileged ways of speaking) influence the ways in which young people come to develop a sense of self and begin to create the identities that set the foundation for their future (Shahsiah, 2006, p. 1). This process of "externally imposed" social phenomenon that Shahsiah (2006) explains is particularly important to this study because of the implications for Black youth in Canada (p. 1). In Canada, the hierarchical order almost always positions "White" individuals at the top and Indigenous individuals at the bottom, however, Black people in Canada also exist near the bottom of this hierarchy (Thomas, 2014, p. 589). When attempting to define what *Black* means in the Canadian context, it is important to understand that many different races/ethnicities in Canada are considered Black, whether self-identifying or as being perceived as such. No one study could explicate *the* meaning of Blackness for Canadian youth; and this project also acknowledges the different identities that individuals may form. Although the identities that young people form in the Canadian landscape are diverse and dynamic, the opportunities and social capital that is offered to them is constrained by racial organization (Thomas, 2014, p. 589).

Racially dictated social organization is significant for Black youth who "face unique barriers and struggles" based on their perceived race or ethnic identity (Shahsiah, 2006, p. i). Shahsiah (2006) found that many of the participants she studied experienced ridicule and name calling because of their perceived racial identity (p. 38). Some participants discussed their belief that considering oneself *Canadian* was a privilege that they were not offered because of their race or ethnicity (p. 42). The stereotypes and racialized beliefs that exist within Canada will still reach youth and will still give them the opportunity to internalize these widespread modes of

thinking. Lemay and Ashmore (2004) believed that "self-perceptions change over time as a function of reflected appraisals, suggesting that people gradually internalize others' views" (p. 174-175). Although young people are often struggling with several life issues and "are in a stage in their life where the preoccupation centers on finding one's self," these life events are exacerbated by the tensions created by being a minority in Canada (Farmer, 2010, p. 369). In demographic terms, 25% of the population of Canada are defined as visible minorities, a significant portion of the overall population that may be experiencing the kinds of struggles highlighted in Shahsiah's (2006) work (p. i; Statistics Canada, 2017). A statistic such as this bolsters the official discourse of Canada claiming to be a multicultural nation, suggesting that the social arrangements that exist within the nation promote an "increasing ethnoracial and ethnocultural diversity" (Thomas, 2014, p. 590). What remains unanswered, is the significant way in which these diverse groups are structured in society and "how these cultures perceive themselves" within this organization (Jones, 2000, para. 10). To form a racial identity in Canada, minority youth must navigate along with the many challenges of adolescence, the issue of "externally imposed classification, categorization, labelling and essentially identification" (Shahsiah, 2006, p. 1). It is this aspect of identity formation for which this study is concerned.

Living in Canada does not shield Black people from experiencing discrimination and "in spite of Canada's long-standing official policy of multiculturalism, race remains an intractable problem for many Black Canadians" (Hasford, 2016, p. 158). Experiencing racial tensions is a by-product of the "white identity" being normalized while non-white identities are demonized (Dua, Razack, & Nyasha, 2005, p. 4). From a social constructivism standpoint, race and ethnicity is a social construct, suggesting that racial identities are created for "varying social purposes" (Steckley & Letts, 2010, p. 341). Yet, in Canada, a pervasive socially constructed *Whiteness*

exists as an inherent component of the dominant cultural narratives. Black people's identity formation is not only influenced but structured by the social pressures around them and the "white structures of dominance define the social order and categories and determine inclusion and exclusion criteria" (Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 339). Present day Canada sees these structures of dominance in a systematic fashion, as the multicultural landscape that the nation prides itself on disguises the racism that pervades both institutional and interpersonal relationships (Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 338). Although North America has a plethora of races and ethnicities living together within its borders, racialized youth still must face the "injustice, oppression and discrimination" that come with being a minority in a multicultural Canada (Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 339).

Shahsiah (2006) found that for many racialized youths, their first experience of being a racialized other was when they entered the Canadian education system (p. 34). Although many youth survive these transitions by conforming to the status quo, which are defined by White cultural normative practices, racialized youth are not always afforded this comfort (Tatum, 2004, p. 128). They exist within a world where their racialized status precedes any other identifying characteristics. With media communications growing exponentially and increased social media use, racialization does not always need to be an overt incident to have influence on an adolescent. Although Canadian ideal culture celebrates and values multiculturalism, the lived realities of exclusion and social reprimand would suggest otherwise. Perceived cultural differences give room to discriminatory beliefs that conflate differences with weaknesses, fostering a process of *othering* within Canadian society (Dua, Razack, & Nyasha, 2005, p. 4). Nagra & Maurutto (2016) found that many young people experienced multiple incidents of "intimidation, fear, and hostility" and perceived these to result from their racialized identity (p.

167). A case in point: “The experience of hate-crime victimization” is stronger for Black people in Canada and also occurs at a higher rate for those that have immigrated into Canada (Chongatera, 2013, p. 58). Although in Chongateras’ (2013) sample of 42,000 respondents only 1.6% reported a case of a hate crime, 13% are afraid of these crimes occurring to them personally (p. 55). Considering the fear identified in Chongatera’s (2013) research, Canada may not be as welcoming to racialized individuals as it seems on the surface (p. 55).

This study began as an exploration of these consequences of racialization and the power of racialization to inflict harm upon the individuals that are racialized. In 2017, there were 2073 hate crimes reported in Canada, a 47% increase from the incident rate in 2016, with “Muslim, Jewish, and Black populations accounting for most of the national increase” (Statistics Canada, 2018, p. 1). Malhi and Boon (2007) found there were members of the general public in Toronto that believed “African-Canadians are criminally disposed” displaying the ways in which the narratives of deviance of Black youth are socially constructed (para. 4). Groups who are marginalized by their race within Canada experience frequent confrontations with their racial identities and youth are no exception to this process (Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 344). Over one million Black individuals live in Canada (3.5% of the total population), yet almost 4 in 10 young immigrants have experienced racial discrimination based on the colour of their skin (Statistics Canada, 2017; Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 339). However, in their study Malhi & Boon (2007) discovered that many of their participants were unwilling to attribute moments of exclusion or unequal treatment to racism (para. 7). Avoiding the term racism when referring to these exclusionary events could be considered a move of resilience people employ to protect themselves from the notion that they are being treated differently because of their race. It could also be a symptom of a dominant discourse that historically has been reluctant to talk about these

issues in a natural or inviting way. A silence/ing of this conversation creates a power differential in which those who act in discriminatory ways avoid the harm of being called *racist,* while those who experience the harm must navigate the situation as to not respond in the form of retaliation. The common discourse of racism in Canada is one of denial, in that those who experience racism wish not to speak of it in those terms, and those who commit discriminatory acts have methods of justification to dissolve blame (Malhi & Boon, 2007, para. 1). This may have contributed to the challenges I experienced in my efforts to solicit the participation of Black-identifying students on campus willing to speak about their experiences. My own experience attests to the way that narratives of deviance have a profound effect on identity formation.

Narratives of deviance can dehumanize those who experience harm and ignores harm directed against Black youth. The Canadian multicultural narrative creates an alternative story about the existence of racism or racialized events. I argue that not only does this subtle form of denial restrict meaningful conversation about racialized events but that it has consequences that impact the life course and identity formation of those who are othered. Nagra and Maurutto assert that the consequences of this narrative of deviance cannot be denied because the "refusal to admit to the reality of racism is in fact a form of racism" (Nagra & Maurutto, 2016, p. 177). When considering the feelings of vulnerability and frustration that racialization can impose onto youth, to have racism as a process be denied, is to have ones identity denied. Denying the existence of racism in effect denies the lived experiences of youth who have no option but to face the day-to-day instances of discrimination that occur to them. Kubiliene (2015) when exploring this issue found that "perceived racism impedes academic achievement, psychological resilience (e.g. Bellmore et al. 2012) and is associated with delinquent behaviour (Deng et al. 2010)" (Kubiliene et al. 2015, p. 339). As of 2014, 26% of the youth in Canada were considered

"visible minority youth" (Department of Justice, 2016, p. 5). Of this group, minority youth who have been criminalized believe that their persistent racialization pushed them into that lifestyle (Manzo & Bailey, 2005, p. 287). These are the issues at play that influenced the development of the current project.

Ngo et al. (2017) found that immigrant youth involvement in criminal gangs increased because of their frustration and anger towards a Canadian society that considered them *less than* and pushed them to the margins of their communities (p. 65). These sentiments find a stronghold in the institution of education, in which youth are in a constant battle to maintain social desirability and good academic standing. However, for minority youth they struggle even more and experience "[vulnerability] to peer derision and social exclusion due to their limited English and learning disabilities" (Ngo et al., 2017, p. 70). Ngo et al. (2017) findings suggest that without the social capital to maintain a high standing among their peers, youth will close off in an attempt to find other sources of companionship and support. This is where criminal activities begin to have a higher appeal to the youth, for they have lost their trust and comfort in what most individuals consider mainstream society. A participant in Ngo et al's. (2017) study perceived the following treatment:

> If I do something and a White kid does something, they [teachers and principal] judge you differently. They give you different consequences. It's always the same. Some kid's thing goes missing and they point finger at me. And what else, you Black, you're not really smart, and they start looking down on you. Sometimes it got me mad enough to care, and I usually ended up lashing out with violence. (p. 71)

The perception of inequality in the school setting managed to influence this individual's behaviour immensely, leading to actions that may have otherwise been avoided. Children and

youth do not always have the capacity to understand why these situations are happening or what to do when they happen to them. This sense of injustice can manifest itself as **frustration, sadness, or violence**, as seen with the aforementioned participant.

Theoretical Considerations

Identity Formation Theory

Recognition and epidermal racial schema

The tensions that exist within the life course of Black individuals in Canada are unique experiences, however there are similar social inequalities that occur throughout the world. Franz Fanon (1952) explored these issues of racial inequality, originating from Martinique, France. His primary approach to critical race theory was the effects of colonization and the disastrous aftermath that occurs from decolonization. This research project draws on his theories of the dialectic of recognition, exploration of schemas, and the white gaze. The dialectic of recognition constitutes the relational interaction between two humans and the often-forgotten *privilege* that is recognition. Fanon (1952) suggests that individuals enter a relationship with other humans seeking recognition, and a failure to receive this recognition creates a totality of focus on the other party (p. 191) Not only does this process of recognition create a sense of equality, but it also creates a sense of self as Fanon aptly describes when he says, “they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other” (p. 192). A Black youth living in a White Canada may not receive this recognition of being. The recognition that should be occurring is seeing someone for who they are and accepting their identity as they present it to the world rather than as the world

expects of them. However, Fanon (1952) claims that Black people are not afforded this recognition because their identities have been decided for them by the world (p. 94). They are being denied the performance that often comes in social interactions for they are simply the Black stereotype that exists in the white imagination. Fanon (1952) experienced this denial first hand, as a young child and mother point at him in public and exclaim in fear that he is going to eat the child. Upon responding to them in a verbally aggressive way, the bystanders and mother/child collectively admonish him for his reaction. Fanon (1952) explains his reaction to this scene:

> I don't believe it! Whereas I had every reason to vent my hatred and loathing, they were rejecting me? Whereas I was the one they should have begged and implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? I made up my mind since it was impossible to rid myself of an *innate complex,* to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known. (p. 94-95)

Fanon explains the inner turmoil that occurs when recognition is denied and the concept of ones' sense of self is then questioned. Expression of identity must transpire at some point, and if a Black person cannot have that moment come because of identity denial, they must and will find other ways to express themselves. This expression may materialize itself in pro-social ways such as working harder, learned resilience, or identity strengthening. However, an important and misunderstood consequence of these denials can also manifest itself as delinquent behaviour and subsequent denial of mainstream social norms.

Fanon also explored the different schemas that exist inside peoples' being, which include bodily schema explaining the awareness and understanding of ones' physical body in the world. This physical understanding however is different for Black people, for they are not simply

another physical body among others, they are in fact a Black body that is "woven . . . out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" (Fanon, 1952, p. 91). This experience is described as an "epidermal-racial schema" in which one exists not as a human, but as a Black person in someone else's society (Fanon 1952, p. 91). I assert that Black youth in Canadian society feel this assault on their bodily schema, which leads to an othering that is inevitable and damaging to their sense of self and development of identity. This feeling of othering occurs when there is a *white gaze* upon the othered demographic, creating a sense that one is out of place where they are and placing upon them an identity that may be felt, but most likely is not lived.

Double consciousness

Theorist W.E.B Du Bois also explains the process of living as a Black individual in a primarily White society. He explores the effect of these processes in terms of identity and the performances that are required to put on as an *othered* demographic and the following internal tensions that are created while attempting to live in two different social spheres. Du Bois (2007) described this inner turmoil as a "double conscious" (p. 8). This means understanding oneself through the eyes of another and internalizing that image of identity that someone else has created. Du Bois explains the inner thoughts of a Black man in early 20th century America:

> He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (p. 9)

However, many individuals, both in 20th Century United States and in modern day Canada, know that there is not always that confirmation of *opportunity* and there is no separating

the two identities that have been forced upon them. There is a social tension, if not real than perceived, that exists between Black people and White society in North America. This tension leaves a stereotyped and demeaning image of Black individuals that live in the ghetto of the white imagination as Creese (2015) found. This may result in the internalization of these images by Black people who recognize their image in society and wrestle with their concepts of self as it occurs internally and as it occurs to them by others. Once these individuals have their identities not only denied, but decided for them, they will no longer feel like first rate citizens like the rest of society, and they will lose their reasoning to maintain a pro-social lifestyle among society. As Du Bois (2007) aptly put, "Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?" (p. 8). Black youth who are being racialized in a way that is completely out of their control, are being made to feel as if they visitors in the very societies that they live in.

Life course theory

It is hard to imagine that these racialized events that occur to Black youth and minorities all across Canada do not become significant turning points for those involved, and the life course theory offers further explanation of this process. Sampson and Laub (1992) explain life course theory as the pathways that individuals take throughout their lives and how those pathways are influenced by life events (marriage, employment, family etc.) and turning points (p. 65-66). This theory holds significance for analyzing the behaviours of young individuals who are consistently going through major life changes. These changes are highlighted in their experiences in school, changing peer groups, and the psychological and social struggles that come with going through puberty. However, in the life course of a Black youth, they must navigate these life experiences with the pressures that come with racialization. Although it may seem as if these experiences

would not vary that much due to someone's racialized identity, they do see change, as their life events are accompanied by historically oppressive social expectations, media perceptions, and negative stereotypes. The life course of a racialized person is altered by the events that they must live through and wrestle with through their day-to-day lives and life course theory would put emphases on these "major life events and their consequences for later social development" (Sampson & Laub, 1992, p. 66).

Another issue to take into consideration for the life course of Black youth is what is considered as a positive or pro-social life course. These issues arise when the historically dominant demographic has dictated what is normal or deviant for those who live in their society. For many youth, they identify with hip hop culture which will be explained in more depth subsequent sections, a culture that in the White imagination represents Blackness strife with violence, hyper-sexualization, and interaction with drugs. This lifestyle is not in accordance with the typical life course or expectation of a citizen in North America, therefore participation in this lifestyle may have negative influences on their opportunities for positive pathways, such as high-paying employment, in the future. Manzo and Bailey (2005) found that for young Black Canadian offenders "their refusal to conform to normal social types, to which some are outright referred to as looking and acting White," meant that they were depicted as "gangstas"' (p. 292). The life course theory can account for the various turning points in these youths' lives that influenced their criminal participation and overall understanding of themselves.

Field of Blackness

The understanding of self for Black youth is not limited to comparison to others and must also be looked at in the context of Blackness itself. Emirbayer & Desmond (2015) detail what they describe as "the Field of Blackness" (see Appendix A), a charted scale in which they present "a differential distribution of various types of assets, including racial capital from which [Black individuals] derive their racial identities" (p. 90). The Field of Blackness has two primary axes, with the x-axis measuring economical/political power and the y-axis measuring Black capital (p. 94). Black capital refers to the level of perceived Black authenticity, in that it measures the relevance, significance, and legitimacy that someone with high amounts of Black capital would have in the Black community.

Quadrant 1: high political/economical capital, low Black capital.

Quadrant one describes individuals who have high amounts of political/economical capital with low amounts of Black capital. Emirbayer & Desmond (2015) explain that often Black individuals who gain political or economic success must sacrifice part of their Blackness (p. 95). This can be attributed to North American society attaching political and economic success and privilege to White characteristics. Therefore, many racialized groups who ultimately achieve political and economic success have their racialized characteristics removed or suppressed and are believed to now be *more White* and *less Black*. Some Black youth are also socialized away from *acting Black* in hopes that their odds of achieving the White standard of success will increase if they do so.

Quadrant 2: low political/economical capital, high Black capital.

Quadrant two represents those who have low political/economical capital but have high amounts of Black capital. This quadrant is what most would understand as the stereotypical

Blackness that is frequently portrayed in media. In fact, even for academics this quadrant was once thought to be where all Black individuals ended up in terms of their Blackness (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2015, p. 96). This quadrant would describe "a racially authentic Black person," who acts and lives a life that can be seen as representative of Black culture (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2015, p. 97). This quadrant is now being challenged with modern society seeing a shift in what is considered authentic Blackness, and racialized people are learning to celebrate their racialized identity in any and all forms that it comes in. However, for the field of Blackness, this quadrant is significant because of its ability to address those individuals who have power and significance within Black culture regardless of their economic/political state.

Quadrant 3: high political/economical capital, high Black capital

Quadrant three represents Black individuals who "possess large amounts of political and economic capital yet still are regarded as authentically Black" (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2015, p. 97). For quadrant 3 individuals, they did not lose or sacrifice their Black authenticity to achieve their political/economic capital and in fact they are redefining what Blackness is by removing its socially constructed connection to "poverty or powerlessness" (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2015, p. 97). Yet, the anomalous nature of their status does not go unseen for many of these individuals, and their power and Blackness is often upheld in various ways. For those who are worried about their political/economic capital it is a concern of continuing their job in a sustainable way. For those who are worried about their Blackness, their reaffirmation often comes from taking part in culturally relevant activities or at times boasting their Blackness over those who could be considered to be less authentic (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2015, p. 97).

Quadrant 4: low political/economical capital, low Black capital.

Quadrant four explores individuals with both low political/economic and Black capital. This would be characterized as someone who although they are Black, they resist or deny that racialized label.. This leads to an individual who is usually part of the working class who rejects their Blackness, potentially to get closer to the White ideals of success, however, their endeavors fail in an economic sense. Emirbayer & Desmond succinctly describe this quadrant:

In their minstrelsy and profound contempt for the black experience, they embody, no less than do the figures of temporal achievement we associated with quadrant 1, the very antithesis of blackness, a negation of its autonomous principle so profound that it is impossible to imagine anything more lacking in black capital or authenticity (p. 98).

Fanon (1952) may argue that this quadrant represents those who seek recognition the most, however, the recognition most likely would still be denied because of colour-based racialization. To rid oneself of the race or ethnicity in hopes to acquire the privileges that come with another is a life course that would likely lead to further tension and inner turmoil.

Racialization and Criminalization

Narratives of Black youth

Black Canadian youth who have been denied a sense of self or a recognition of true identity must struggle with the fact that their White peers may have a societal advantage over them. This gap in-between themselves and the others that exist in their communities with them leads to a confusion of who they are and where their place is in society. As their identities are continually racialized, Black youth begin to create their own meaning in a society whose "social evaluations of them were more negative than positive" (Manzo and Baily, 2005, p. 290). Manzo

and Bailey (2005) observed that the Black youth they interviewed identified and embraced the social stereotypes that they had been exposed to, further distancing themselves from the dominant White society (p. 298). This demonstrates a cyclical nature of stereotyping, in which the stereotypes created about Black youth become internalized and performed, facilitating the belief that these stereotypes exist as an inherent characteristic. On the other hand, Kubiliene et al. (2015) found that "some African youths believe that a black person is stereotypically expected to fight back when confronting racism; therefore, if they walk away, they can demonstrate that the dominant stereotype is wrong" (p. 347). Stereotype avoidance is one of many ways that minorities in Canada attempt to manage their confrontations with racialization. However, the process of avoiding the situation does not deflect the harm that occurs when one is racialized, and regardless of the situation "living in a racially violent environment can be emotionally draining and hurtful" (Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 248).

Measuring success for Black youth also brings in considerable complications, for their success is suppressed by the "dominant cultural narratives" that work to display these youth as unintelligent and violent individuals (Hasford, 2016, p. 159). Narratives of deviance such as these leads to discrimination in the process of hiring and promoting Black youth in the workplace because they are perceived to be untrustworthy employees. For many Black youth, they have a "perceived exclusion from employment, based largely upon underachiever racial characterizations" (Hasford, 2016, p. 164). To address this issue youth may attempt to avoid stereotypes, work harder to counter the beliefs, or avoid the world of employment entirely. This creates an epidemic of Black youth who are believed to be poor employees when they are hired and more youth who have internalized a message that has been saying they are not good enough. The cultural narrative in North America does not see success for Black youth in the sphere of

standard employment. Instead they see them as entertainers, athletes, or career criminals (Hasford, 2016, p. 159). A respondent in Creese's (2015) study explained this phenomenon:

> So you can be good at sports, good at dancing, you can be sociable, you can be loud and bombastic, but you can't be smart. You can't be serious. You can't be critical. (p. 211)

The goals for Black youth have been pre-determined for them, limiting them to media portrayed images of Black people, and stereotyped expectations that are both unreasonable and unattainable. The default assumption that the second quadrant on Field of Blackness represents all Black individuals, particularly Black males, pervades even the minds of youth who are still finding themselves. Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) argue that for many *bourgeois* and *white people* mean the same thing, whereas Blackness would represent the *proletariat*. The goals of Black youth, then, are not reinforced with positively, instead they are nudged towards submission. For Black males with the presumption of artistic or athletic skills, their success in these fields is expected, so when they do succeed their achievements are diminished because society thinks that it is "easy or natural" (Creese, 2015, p. 210). For Black female youth, their success is even more limited, for they do not have goals that are expected of them. In fact, their images in popular media are characterized as promiscuous, uneducated, exotic, and at times aggressive (Creese, 2015, p. 215). Young Black women are subjected to images of "heterosexual eye candy" who are lighter in skin tone and with narrow body features (Creese, 2015, p. 204). For these females, they are being subjected to White standards of beauty, which again leaves the youth in a dilemma, for they can never fully achieve this *White beauty*, yet their physical attractiveness is not valued in North American society. This does not leave room for positive social characteristics and their measurement of personal accomplishment is clouded by peers and media portrayals that tell them otherwise. Black females are stripped of their identities by this

denial of recognition of who they could be. Their self-worth is difficult to maintain as the White beauty of North American society overrides their belief of having sexual attractiveness (Creese, 2015, p. 203). They must work to look elsewhere to find their sense of self and find a foundation for their identity formation. For all Black youth this process of identity denial and social tension has the potential to lead them down a path of delinquency in an attempt to find out who they are.

Blackness and identity.

"Identity is a life story or set of stories that adults have internalized in order to make sense of their life to themselves and others. Youth are expected to develop a core identity that is reasonably stable and sustainable while living within a society that is characterized by change" (Greenberg, Grekul, & Nelson, 2012, p. 301).

As Greenberg, Grekul & Nelson (2012) explain, identity is a negotiated concept that is defined by the experiences an individual lives through and the way in which those experiences are incorporated into a cohesive sense of self (p. 301). Black youth, however, are going through this identity formation while a categorization of their identity is being externally placed upon them. Furthermore, Black youths' categorization may not fall in line with their preconceived sense of self, leading to a tension filled existence that significantly influences how they continue to form and solidify their place a changing world (Lemay & Ashmore, 2004, p. 174). Placing these increased pressures onto Black youth who are forming their identities puts barriers in their life path. These obstacles require them to navigate a social world while they are continuing to manage their developing selfhood.

Black people in North America encounter constant and consistent social depictions that attempt to dictate the type of individuals that the, *are* or *will* become. Seeing how they are perceived in the wider society does not go unnoticed and some "Black persons may internalize societal depictions of themselves as resources to motivate them to behave in manners consistent with those stereotypes" (Manzo and Bailey, 2005, p. 287). For those who find themselves in one place on the Field of Blackness, may see the world telling them they belong in another, removing their ability to have autonomy over their sense of self and leaving them subject to further identity strain. Youth are not any more prepared to tackle daily discrimination than an adult, and much of this thesis searched for how this interaction with discrimination will form their identities going forward during their life course. Black male youth are bombarded by images of them as "hyper-heterosexual, homophobic, and violent" leaving little room for positive identity traits that would foster a healthy lifestyle (Creese, 2015, p. 204). This image leaves Black youth in a very hard situation, for if they are not always on their best behaviour they are simply feeding into the stereotype of a scary Black male. *Authentic* Blackness for many is rooted in the second quadrant of the field of Blackness, which holds many of the common place stereotypes that exist around Black people. Blackness is not represented by important historical and cultural ideals, instead the popular imagination sees Blackness as a caricature of itself, simply embodying the narrative born out of banal labels. It is difficult to not internalize these stereotypes and to not see them for the damaging instances of racism that they are. In Gillian Creese's (2015) study, one participant explained the situation in this way: ''I know people's perception of me as Black made them think of me as less" (p. 208). It becomes clear that these stereotypes are not harmless, and that Canada is not hidden from these racist situations that arise. Black youth identity includes the ways in which they can navigate a social landscape that has immense pressure and expectations for who

they will become as individuals (Hasford 2016:159). These social constructions of race and their following stereotypes are unavoidable. Farmer (2010) explains:

> The power of racism, as the source of stereotypes, … [with] terms such as 'criminals' and 'evil doers' are fantasized as people of color because of the power of racism. This race-based language affirms what is already accepted as fact-based knowledge in many minds. (p. 371)

As Farmer (2010) puts it, these issues may be socially constructed and factually unfounded, but many people in North American society believe these stereotypes to be true. Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin (2014) found that these negative media messages provide Black youth with the norms that exist within society and suggest to them their expected social behaviour (p. 371). These youth are then provided with a schema for their mental and physical being that is simultaneously what is expected of them and vilified once fully realized. This is exemplified with hip-hop or rap music, a common cultural phenomenon that Black youth either identify with or are assumed to identify with because of their perceived ethnic identity. Hip hop itself was a cultural blossoming of culture, mainly found in poorer neighborhoods, and was defined by its artistic expression of break dancing, DJing, rapping, and graffiti (Creese, 2015, p. 204). This cultural development took form as a representation of an entire demographic, and hip hop now represents what many in North America believe to be essential Blackness. Creese (2015) argues this:

> Hip hop now lives in the ghetto of the white imagination…the art form becomes a commodity, and is made to represent an essentialized Blackness: the Blackness of the white imagination. (p. 205)

This ghetto that lives in the collective conscious of White North America pervades the minds of those in which it was created for: Black people. This process of the "ghetto of the white imagination" that Creese (2015) spoke of is now a critical space for socialization involving Black youth, both for themselves and their non-Black peers (p. 205). The expectation of hip hop expression through Black youth creates a pathway in which these individuals interact within and in-between social circles. Creese (2015) found that "hip hop culture constitutes a primary filter through which non-African youth engage with their African-Canadian peers" suggesting that images of Blackness are being internalized by almost all youth who live in North American society (p. 205). Although this process is providing a method of cultural communication for the youth experiencing it, it is enforcing a culture onto individuals who may find no importance or connection to its content. Black youth racial identity, personal identity, and sense of self is removed, their Blackness seen not as an ever changing spectrum as the Field of Blackness portrays, but instead as a problem.

Criminalization of Black youth.

The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) attempts to ameliorate the deleterious effects of criminal justice interaction by providing fair, proportionate, and rehabilitative measures of justice (Department of Justice Canada, 2013, p. 2). What the YCJA fails to account for is the societal pressures that alienate Black youth and push upon them the presumption of criminality. Ngo et al. (2017) believe that "minority membership in gangs is a symptom of larger societal issues, such as poverty, discrimination, segregation and urbanization" (p. 64). However, there are minimal policies in place that account for the societal issues that plague the Black youth involved in criminal activities in Canada. According to the prevailing narratives of deviance,

Black youth are fulfilling what they were always going to do, which is lash out in violent and criminal ways. Black youth themselves, they feel that "if this is how society sees me, I might as well act in this way" (Manzo and Bailey, 2005, p. 296). Portrayals of Black youth in media as criminals is also intensely damaging because "youth will accept Black character portrayals and media images as valid models of acceptable and expected behaviors" (Adams-Bass et al., 2014, p. 370). Therefore, the perceptions of Black youth as criminals works towards creating Black criminal youth, in that they will internalize this collective cultural perception of their criminal characteristics. When confronting these racialized images of themselves, Black youth will often find a peer group that will accept them for who they are, potentially because of shared feelings of being othered. Ngo et al. (2017) explains the consequences of othering youth:

> The unravelling of identities experienced by the respondents during their adolescence created a void in social identity and connections, which propelled them to seek membership in alternative social networks. Respondents developed friendships with other socially disconnected individuals, who introduced them to alternative groups, such as an established social clique. (p. 75)

Although these cliques that are created are not always criminal in nature, they have the potential to create a new sense of what social norms are after being rejected by the wider society around them. As the identities of Black youth get repeatedly criminalized and racialized their life trajectories get changed as well. They are being redirected away from pro-social norms due to the rejection of their participation in mainstream society. Those who want to achieve Emirbayer and Desmonds (2015) economic and political success find themselves removed from that possibility as their Blackness is used against them. Criminal lifestyles become more appealing to youth who have slowly had "an unravelling of their self-concept, sense of citizenship and ethnic

identity and their sense of belonging" (Ngo et al., 2017, p. 76). If Black youth do turn to criminal lifestyles, they are then punished more aggressively than necessary with the belief that they are a major threat to the safety of the community. Salole and Abdulle (2015) explain the process of high intensity punishment:

> Underlying the repeated decisions to turn away from helping young people is the growing sentiment that youths, particularly minorities of color and class, constitute a threat to adults and the only effective way to deal with them is to subject them to mind-crushing punishment. (p. 127)

This oppressive practice of punishing Black youth more severely than is necessary only serves to perpetuate social systems that fear Black individuals and attempt to control them through law and social policies. Workplace punishments take part in this practice as well. Hasford (2016) found that "[Black youth] were subjected to unfair discipline through excessive punishment for minor mistakes or inequitable administration of workplace rules" (p. 164). Black youth seem to be disproportionality criminalized and punished compared to their White counterparts subjecting them to unequal punitive measures and demeaning levels of discipline.

Research Question

As the discussion so far has illustrated, Black youth often contend with negative external social constructions, labels, and categories, defining who they are as individuals and as racialized others. Regardless of the degree to which Black youth identify with these narratives of deviance, the expectations and assumptions bound within the discourse has consequences. This research project will examine Black youth in Canada and how racialization and criminalization impact

identity formation. Thus, this research will attempt to answer the following question: How did I as a Black youth make sense of the "narrative of deviance" as I created my identity during adolescence?

Aims of the Study

This study hopes to use my life experiences as a Black youth in Canada to help understand the processes and consequences of racialization and criminalization. I aim to a) explore the narrative of deviance as it was experienced by myself, b) expose the consequences of the narrative of deviance, and c) explore the ways the narrative of deviance impacted my identity.

Methods

This research study analyzed the process of racialization and criminalization as it was experienced by me by using an auto-ethnographical approach. To achieve this, as the primary researcher, I examined my own life experiences and explored, selected, and examined various significant life events that informed by narratives of deviance.

Autoethnography

The work of Heewon Chang (2008) in their book *Autoethnography as Method,* has been crucial to both my understanding of auto-ethnography and to this studies approach to the methods as a whole. Although other academics have been drawn on to emphasize the importance

of auto-ethnography in this project, Chang's (2008) work was the primary source that was used as a guideline to properly execute this methodology.

Youth who are considered visible minorities often have to negotiate their sense of self as an *other* in a society that is longing to organize individuals by their race and/or ethnicity. For Black youth, their narrative of deviance is vocalized by the very institutions that they are required to operate in, suggesting sentiments of "you do not belong here" or "you do not exist at all (Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 345/346). How does this narrative impact the youth it is attempting to tell the story of and where does this story end when it involves a real Black youth who doesn't know what to make of the tale? To further explore the narrative of deviance and the tangible consequences that result from its existence, I analyzed my own life through an auto-ethnography.

What is auto-ethnography.

Auto-ethnography is a research method that allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific individual and their experiences with a phenomenon with the hopes of understanding a wider sociological concept. This method allows researchers to draw from "highly personalized accounts" that will explore the significant intersection of *personal* and *society* offering a new vantage point for the social sciences (Wall, 2008, p, 39). With the emphasis on a personal qualitative analysis rather than quantitative driven analysis, auto-ethnography allows the social sciences to understand how identity, personal importance, and life-course are altered by sociological phenomenon and vice versa (Wall, 2008, p. 39). When considering the *who* in terms of auto-ethnography, the name suggests the answer, in that the researcher will be studying themselves. This method can be a difficult one due to the personal nature of the content, but it is

also highly reflexive, resulting in an intimate story that allows the audience to take part in the experience under study.

When understanding how specific demographics of people operate, it is important to recognize that the individuals that prescribe to a specific group have autonomy in the ways in which they interact, represent, or omit their culture (Chang, 2008, p. 21). This individuality helps these groups thrive in their diversity and promotes a deeper-rooted cultural foundation (Chang, 2008, p. 21). Auto-ethnography opens the window to this individuality, recognizing individual identities for their novel experiences and respecting the unique representation of their culture that they may or may not be portraying. What I have done with my auto-ethnography is utilized its ability to analyze culture in this individually represented way in hopes that my unique perspective provides insight into how Black youth negotiate the narratives that surround their identities. This was done while still acknowledging that my unique life experiences are but one viewpoint that collectively display how Black youth interact with their identity and Canadian society.

Understanding the sense of self is significant for many social science research methods, but for auto-ethnography it represents a much more centralized theme. Chang (2008) explains how it "focuses as much on examining self autobiographical as on interpreting a culture for a non-native audience" (p. 33). Therefore, when looking at the foundation of auto-ethnography, the self represents the majority if not all of the data that will be used to explore a specific culture. The self, in this study, will be me, and I hope that my life experiences offer insight into what life is like for Black youth.

Data Collection

Auto-ethnography data collection varies slightly from more conventional qualitative research methods. The data used in auto-ethnographical research are primarily personal memories or experiences of the principal researcher. This requires for the data collection to be structured in the way that it is collected/selected, but also requires the research to be reflexive in the ways in which they decide to use specific life events.

When collecting the data, I systematically created a work structure to allow for a thorough yet consistent understanding of the memories I was using to support my study. I created a work schedule for what time frame I was going to collect data in and how frequently I would dedicate time for this collection. My work schedule began on January 31st, 2020 and ended on March 6th, 2020. This allowed for a 5-week stretch that was dedicated solely for the collection of data that can be used for the study. During this 5-week stretch I required that I work either a 1-hour minimum per day or a weekly total of 7 hours. This daily time allocation allowed for a consistent workload being completed but also created a weekly safety net for the days that could not meet the 1-hour minimum required.

For this study, I chronicled an autobiographical timeline in which I analyzed memories that were relevant to the research question (Chang, 2008). I conceptualized these as *happenings* (those life events I selected to analyze for this project) in large part because they shed light on the narrative of deviance, displayed my Blackness in a significant way, or showed how these two situations impacted my identity. To create an autobiographical timeline, I thought back to the first instance in my life that I remember one of these happenings and took note of that experience, the year, and the details of the event itself. By starting with this happening, I created a starting point from which I could continue to current day from, effectively making the starting

point for my timeline. From this point on I would think through the years and reflect on if any happenings occurred during those time frames. Although I did approach these reflections attempting to get as many relevant happenings as possible, I tried to avoid searching too hard for an happening for a specific stretch of time. The frequency of these events through my life, and most other Black youth, is so high that I chose happenings that were accessible in terms of memory recall and significant in relation to the topic.

Through this process I catalogued a total of 10 happenings through the years of 2004 – 2017. This created a 13 year stretch that detailed happenings that were significant enough to stand out. These happenings, all catalogued and explored in as much detail as memory would allow, created the foundational data that would be analysed in this research study. When writing the happenings, I wrote in a specific structure for most of them to collect as many details as possible from each event. For each happening this included a title, specifics, event, and a section that was primarily more reflection and/or analysis. Once I was completed writing a happening excerpt, I would start working on the next one, leaving each happening untouched after the initial writing. Given that the happening was deemed described once I had completed it, there are minor grammatical errors or structure inconsistences that come with an unedited document. However, since I did not go back to edit or adjust the happenings, the emotions and memories that were evoked on the initial writing period maintain their integrity without influence of future impacts.

Data Analysis

The happenings were first coded for actions codes in the MAXQDA coding software. This resulted in 560 codes over ten separate happening files. I then followed this up with

thematic coding, exploring each coded file for themes. The themes that emerged (Performance, Disconnect, Confusion, Casual Process, Ownership, Resistance, and External Narratives) were then cross-referenced with my literature review to analyze for similarities or differences. This allowed me to look through the literature and see what stood out in regard to similarities, differences, or novel discoveries through my data. Once completed, and both the happenings and the literature were analyzed for themes, I consolidated the discovered themes to assure they best represented the data and goals of the project. Resulting from this came my major finding of Construction of Blackness with three sub-sections of Creation of Blackness, Performance of Blackness, and Judgement of Blackness.

Ethics

The ethical concerns involved in this project are low, due to my involvement as the researcher and only participant. However, I put myself in the situation where I will be sharing intimate and potentially emotional draining. To address any potential harms from the project, I was in active communication with my supervisor, letting them know how my research is going, and asking for help as needed.

Results and Discussion

Chart of Happenings (Organized in Order of Original Writing Date; See Appendices B-K for Full Excerpts)

Title of Happening	Date of Happening	Action Code Count
You Say the N-Word (B)	2006	64
Allen Iverson Jersey (C)	2004	28
You're Not That Black (D)	2007	43
Called N**** (E)	2009	111
Kicked Out of Convenience Store (F)	2008	77
I Thought You Were White Over the Phone (G)	2013	47
He Doesn't Look like a Thief, He's White (H)	2017	39
The Perfect Shade (I)	2017	42
Wow You Really Are Black, Huh (J)	2009	57
Hair (K)	2005-2015	52

Construction of Blackness

My data has revealed the specific ways that the narrative of deviance has constructed both my Blackness and Blackness in the minds of others. Blackness, claims Fanon (1952), has meaning, yet this meaning is not created by Black people, instead it is already in place for us (p. 113). For me the meaning of Blackness, the construction of my racial identity, seemed to exist before my awareness of it, but my involvement was critical for its construction. It was important to realize that although my happenings displayed the ways in which I experience racialization, they also exemplified how I took part in the racialization process. This construction of Blackness was not a simple act that occurred to me, it is and was a continuous process that had many

different stakeholders. These stakeholders each played different roles with different consequences, and these roles were critical in my understanding of self as a Black youth in Canada. This Blackness was both expected of me and created by me, suggesting that my Blackness was a performance that I needed to achieve to uphold the narrative of deviance and fulfill both mine and others expectations. My performance was often inadequate, either leading to me not being Black enough or being so deviant that my Blackness was declared a negative. This negative reaction was one of many judgements of my Blackness that others felt was required for my sake as much as theirs. Thus, the major themes of my study will be focusing on the creation of Blackness, the performance of Blackness, and the judgement of Blackness, as was seen throughout my life.

Creation of Blackness

The creation of Blackness was a significant finding in my happenings, exemplifying what Blackness was and how it was represented in the minds of those around me. This creation of Blackness perpetuated narratives of deviance, with external narratives and my own sense of self being constructed through a racialized identity. Blackness, as mentioned by Fanon (1952), is represented by Black people in a body that is "woven…out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" (p. 91). I reflect upon a story of presumed identity in the happening "Allen Iverson Jersey" (see Appendix C), in which I detail my Grade 4 birthday. For this birthday one of my closest friends at the time gifted me an expensive looking Allen Iverson jersey and the expectation upon her face made it seem like this should have been a perfect gift. However, this gift was not accurate, and I was unaware of the significance of the gift at the moment that I received it. Yet I did receive it and years later I started to reflect on why. That expectation that I

should love this gift exposed the narratives of what young Black men should like. “I was a young Black male, [and] the world had predicted my interests is basketball”, however, this was an interest that had no foundation (Allen Iverson Jersey). I had never watched basketball, but in the mind of my friend and presumably her parents who helped her buy it, I did. Hasford (2016) may have an answer to why this gift was given to me in his explanation of the perceived characteristics that Black males should inhabit. Hasford (2016) explains how “entertainment, sports, and crime a[re] primary trajectories of Black vocational success” (p. 159). This is not to say that my friend anticipated that I would become a world class basketball player, but it implies an inherent interest in the sport that I was expected to have. To get a gift connected to the sport of basketball with no previous mention or interest of the sport personally, suggests that there were existing clues to what someone like me should like. There is an image of how Black people exist in the popular imagination and this construction is outside of the control of those racialized as such (Creese, 2015).

This formation of Blackness also occurred when I was confronted about the use of the N-word during my grade 6 lunch break. I was requested by my friends to say the word because as seen through the eyes of my classmate, “Why wouldn’t you use it? You’re Black. You say n***” (You Say the N-Word, see Appendix B). There existed a comfort for my friend with the word, that I had not and most likely never will achieve. Yet I was expected to use the word, it was supposed to be a word that comes out of my mouth. Why? This time it was more blatant, because “[I’m] Black” (You Say the N-Word). At this point in my life I had never said the word, until I was pressured to simply moments later, but my Blackness and my identity had no relationship with this slur. However, for my friends on that day, I did. Blackness as they saw it in that moment represented the ability, want, or potentially power to use the N-word. I felt confusion as

I was not aware that was something I was *supposed* to do. My Blackness was not fully actualized at this point in my life. Growing up in a household led by my *White* mother, with my father alive, but not closely involved, Blackness was not an everyday concept for me. This is why my conversations about Blackness with others were often my biggest exposure to what I now call the narrative of deviance. Givens et al. (2016) calls this "the stereotypical notions of black manhood", suggesting that there are existing ideas surround Blackness and Black manhood (p. 167). According to the field of Blackness, there is a stereotypical *Black* person that exists in the second quadrant of the graph. As previously mentioned, quadrant two details Black people who have high Black capital but low economic/political power, leading to the subjugated individual that although may be "racially authentic" are not seen as a "man among men", as Fanon (1952) forewarned (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2015, p. 97; p. 92). My racial educatin was a process of learning what these existing ideas were because I had little exposure to what Blackness was as a lived experience. My Blackness was not something I was aware of or understood, and my interaction with Black culture was limited. My exposure came from these interpersonal relationships and from what Givens et al. (2016) would explain as the "small-scale" microaggressions that get deployed in these interactions. When, in 2009, the N-word was weaponized, instead of evoked, against me, I once again learned of what people thought of me, that word, and Blackness (Called N****, see Appendix E). In a passing moment in junior high that at its core was eventless, I was called the N-word. I had done nothing to the person who called me this word, in fact, it was so *out-of-the-blue* that I could barely register that it had occurred. Nonetheless, a classmate had seen their Black cohort walking past and decided to call him a racial slur. The feeling of being called this word "attack[s] in several places" explains Fanon (1952), with my racial identity being plucked out of day-to-day life like an object, leaving

me with the shadowy remains of Blackness. Fanon (1952) shares his feelings on what the N-word does to him when he says:

> I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, the grinning *Y a bon Banania* (p. 92).

This sentiment is not localized only to Fanon, as my happening detail a similar experience:

> No one deserves to be called a racial slur. But not only was I called this word, I was unprompted, spontaneously, mysteriously, but painfully called n**** when I was simply walking to get water. A word that not only explains itself when it is exclaimed, but comes with the weight of history, the weight of the world and those within it. That word feels like a life being with bones of pain and soul, that when used in that context brands its history upon you like the black plague. (Called N****)

This "disorienting" process removes the ability to confront the *other,* claims Fanon (1952), with recognition not existing between two individuals. What exits becomes only a symbol of Blackness that exists for all.

This Blackness was something that I struggled with, not because it did not make sense, but because it was something new. However, it was new for me, the Black kid, when it seemed to be straightforward for everyone else. This casual nature of racialization was always jarring for me, as experienced when I was asked about my use of the N-word in such a comfortable manner. The discourse of denial that Malhi and Boon (2007) discuss may explain how these intense

moments of racialization can occur in such mundane and minute occurrences. There is a resistance to attributing the narrative of deviance and racialization to a potentially harmful process, leading to a construction of Blackness that is automatic for others yet complicated for me. This creation was completed by others as well as myself and this occurred primarily through my performance of what I thought Blackness was.

Performance of Blackness

The performative nature of my racial identity was an attempt to achieve the Blackness that I had perceived to be created. Givens et al. (2016) details "how black male youth shaped their racial identities by drawing upon stereotypes", and I found myself doing this, displaying my racial identities by internalizing the narratives of deviance surrounding me and attempting to perform them to the standard that was *expected* of me. As seen in "Hair" (see Appendix K), my physical traits were one place where I could declare and perform my Blackness. My hair "bec[came] a place holder for my Blackness", allowing me to enact my racial identity without having to display any overt actions (Hair). There was a disconnect involved in my identity, where "being Black was not being me, it was a performance" (Hair). I did not know throughout this stretch of time in my life where I would fall on Emirbayer and Desmonds (2015) Field of Blackness, yet it seemed as if those around me had racial certainty. For the friends, family, and strangers in these happenings, they at times held me up to the standard of the second quadrant, stereotypical Blackness, and at other times as will be explored in the **Judgement of Blackness** section, it was ushered closer to quadrant 1 with low levels of Blackness. In my eyes, my hair became a bridge, creating a pathway over the disconnect that existed between me and the external narratives that were pervasive throughout my life.

As seen in “You Say the N-word”, there was an expectation of me to use the N-word to fulfill the image of what language is used by Black youth. This expectation stared me in the face and “once I cave and say the word, I feel defeat. It came with a history of Blackness. This situation was demanded by others and my Blackness was not only expected to be performed but was commanded to exist through me” (You Say the N-Word). The *history of Blackness* that exists within the N-word is attached to the beliefs that surround us as Black youth. My performance both created Blackness in this moment and proved that Blackness existed within me. It was a perfect situation of the audience demanding a performance and an actor knowing their line(s). Hasford (2016) “found that dominant cultural narratives about Black youth produce a series of theatrical games, contending racialized dramas that reproduce oppression through re-enactments of racial scripts and characterizations, or that resist oppression through strategic performances of the self” (p. 162). In this moment, the racial scripts that were produced completed my friends’ expectations of how I should present myself as a Black youth.

“Called the N-Word” has two major events in the excerpt, both events involving being called the N-word in the same place in the same grade. Throughout the day after being called the N-word the first time, I heard stories of my friends physically confronting the student, stories that I was not pleased to hear because it prolonged a negative experience. Alas, at the end of the day when I saw the same student walk through the hallway, I did what I thought I should do. As I was at my locker and he was walking past behind me with his friend, I pushed him on his chest hard against the lockers opposite mine. Words were exchanged and he seemed more scared and confused than confrontational and few words were exchanged. The confrontation was soon ended by a passing by janitor and that was the end of that. Hasford (2016) speaks on how racial scripts can be used to resist oppressive racialization processes through performance, and this was

my attempt at resisting the feelings of being demeaned and insulted. While I do not want to imply my actions were fully attributed to playing a role, this performance must also be understood as a situation where racial discord creates tension both outside and inside of those involved. The second time I was called the N-word, I was in the process of being overly verbally aggressive to a classmate, mocking what he was eating. In reaction to my verbal attack he responded by calling me the N-word, to which I responded by pushing my hand against his forehead, making it hit the glass door behind him. This ended the scene, both performances complete, both actors displeased. I seemed to have learned from the first event, with my actions coming faster the second time this word was used against me. This adaptation to the experience of racial slurs is crucial in that one must learn how to manage life events but responding with more violence is harmful to the victim, perpetrator, and perpetuates racialized beliefs (Sampson & Laub, 1992, p. 66; Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 339).

The peak of this aggressive threatening performance came to fruition in the happening "Wow You Really Are Black, Huh" (see Appendix J) when I threatened to "jump" another student. I was unjustifiable verbally attacking another student during gym class. He was someone that caught a lot of ridicule from other students and perhaps this set an example in terms of bullying and made it seem like a viable option for me. When this student inevitable responded to me, I threatened to *jump* him, an implication that I will beat him up at some future point. After I said this, one of my friends who overheard the confrontation said to me "wow you really are Black, huh" (Wow You Really Are Black, Huh). That moment was fraught with emotions, embarrassment and guilt at what I had said to a classmate, confusion at the *Black* statement from my friend, and regret that the confrontation occurred in general. My aggression was a moment of posturing, putting myself into an interaction where not only do I come out on top, I assure that I

am not the lowest classmate on the social capital ladder. Yet, this was not the case, and as my friend made me painfully aware, my performance fulfilled a prerequisite of Blackness. Givens et al. (2016) spoke to an interviewee about this process of posturing:

> Sometimes as black men we feel the need to kind of puff our chest up, when we, when we get out here, and you know, and, and present ourselves to be bigger than we seem before...You know what I'm saying, so I want y'all to keep that in mind when, you know, sometimes, we all do it. I get it, last Thursday, I felt like I had to walk out here with my chest up...I felt like I needed to, to be, strong, like hard. You know what I mean, because I was really hurting. I was hurting really bad on Thursday. Y'all seen it, I was, I was hurting. But I felt like I had to be like [He sticks his chest out to demonstrate] (p. 174)

This *puffing of the chest* feels like a necessity for Black males, and the social processes that make us feel small must be combated by us trying to portray ourselves as **large**. Creese's (2015) participant who stated, "I know people's perception of me as Black made them think of me as less" represents this feeling of social dismissal and performing this exaggerated form of aggression becomes a "method of expressing and validating masculinity" (p. 208; Sidhu, 2013, p.6).

These performances fall upon me as they were negative actions that have no excuse. But the emotions and situations that led up to these instances exist outside of the event itself, and my performances were an attempt to fulfil what I thought a young Black male should be. My Blackness seemed to be a necessity to me, and it felt like a requirement to perform. As Fanon (1952) touched on wanting to be a "man among men", Du Bois (2007) echoes this sentiment, explaining how many Black people strive to achieve normalcy living in a majority *White* nation without "without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows" (p. 92; p. 9). This repetitive theme

of wanting to experience a life without a performance, and without judgment of that performances value or worth appears among academics throughout time and once again in the exploration of my happenings. The creation of Blackness is problematic, and the performance of this Blackness can create tensions, yet the most confusing of events may occur in the following judgement of Blackness.

Judgement of Blackness

The judgement of Blackness section entails the situations in which my performance of Blackness is assessed for its accuracy or authenticity. In my happenings, judgement most frequently occurred when my worth was being qualified through my Blackness or my identity being considered *Whiter* than it should be. This occurred in "The Perfect Shade" (see Appendix I), when an acquaintance casually mentioned how my skin colour was the *perfect shade* and emphasized that it was good that I was not any darker. What most likely seemed like a compliment to her, was an intense moment of racialization for me, when my skin colour became objectified in a way that made me feel like it was an accessory. It made me painfully aware of my Blackness, an experience Fanon (1952) described as "peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body" (p. 85). I was reviewed, as if a product, but instead of a five-star review, my Blackness was rated on a scale of *Too Black and Not Black Enough.* The theme of not being Black enough comes up overtly in the happening "You're Not That Black" (see Appendix D), a passage in which I detail my friend's judgement of my Blackness, who claimed my characteristics were not Black enough. In this excerpt, my friends at the time outwardly said to me "you're not that Black" and continue to detail the ways in which I fail to reach their image of Blackness such as my voice, interests, and physical

characteristics. This casual topic of my failure to perform Blackness properly came to a shock to me and I attempted to challenge them by asking if I sounded *Blacker* and watched basketball, would I be *Blacker* to them? They responded with a no. The judgement was in and I was not Black enough, even hypothetically:

> "My appearance and voice and interests deemed me not Black enough, giving light to the details that create the narrative of deviance. Based on my Blackness, I should be this, I am not this, thus I am not **Black**." (You're Not That Black)

This was a natural conversation to them, as if my racial identity was an obvious topic that everyone had thought about before. Yet, for me, I was a stranger in a conversation surrounding my own identity.

Racialization was a matter-of-fact topic, as showed by my boss in "He Doesn't Look Like a Thief, He's White" (see Appendix H), when they voiced the titular statement. The thief who was regularly stealing from our store "[didn't] look like a thief", in fact all you had to do was look at him according to my superior. He was White, and the absence of a specific type of racialized label made it a surprise when he committed a criminal act. I resisted to engage in this conversation by refusing to speak in a way that would imply I agree with them, but internally I was surprised that they said this to me to begin with. Once again, the narrative of deviance manages to be a consistent, natural, and pervasive topic of conversation to people, yet when I end up in the conversations there is a sensation of discomfort. The thief was judged by the colour of his skin, but not in a way that was demeaning, but instead suggesting that his actions are beneath his racial background. What racial background is performing well when they are

stealing; This is the thought that ran through my head, and Farmer (2010) might provide an answer:

> Davis (2003) highlights the power of racism, as the source of stereotypes, pointing out that terms such as 'criminals' and 'evil doers' are fantasized as people of color because of the power of racism (16). This race-based language affirms what is already accepted as fact-based knowledge in many minds. (p. 371)

Farmer (2010) claims that "race-based language" simply upholds the narrative of deviance, suggesting that racialization is a deep-rooted part of popular discourse in North America. I experienced this discourse, yet, it is not natural for me. The societal measuring stick that others use to measure my racial identity is rarely something that I anticipate. This is not to suggest that I do not partake in the same discourse for I live in the same society, however, when it occurs to me it seems to be an automatic process for others that leaves me in a state of minor shock. This shock, Du Bois (2007) would argue, comes from "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 8). Seeing into the discourse that not only racializes others, but racializes you, creates Du Bois' (2007) double consciousness, creating tension from the external eyes that create an image over my internal identity (p. 9).

Many times, the judgement of my Blackness impacts the way that superiors interact with me. In "I Thought You Were White Over the Phone" (see Appendix G), my boss, the one who both hired me and was my direct supervisor, shared her mental image with me one day. After my application, this supervisor gave me a call, inviting me for an interview. This was a pleasant talk and I went into a smooth interview and came out with the job. A few months after this, while on the job, the following interaction occurred:

> "Manager: "You know when I first called you to interview, I thought you were White"
> Me: "What?"
> Manager: "Yeah, I thought you were White over the phone. You kind of have a White voice. So I was surprised to see you were Black"

This interaction once again surprises me due to its casual nature, but it went further than that. Regardless of my supervisor's intentions, it suggested that her interaction with me was based on the assumption that I was *White.* This assumption may have been harmless, but the insidious side effect of racialization is I can never know if I was treated better or worse, or even more simply, ***different,*** because of this assumed Whiteness. When I was picked out of a crowd and told to leave a store in "Kicked Out of a Convenience Store" (see Appendix F), I felt this same judgement, yet this time the judgement came with full knowledge of my Blackness. While shopping with my group of friends after school in a convenience store, the manager of the store approached us. He angrily asked if we even had any money, and suddenly pointed me out and asked if I had any money on me. I responded no, taken aback, because my friend was treating me that day. Regardless of my intent, I was told to leave the store and the rest of my friends (who were not Black) shopped. I believe that this manager was performing his role the same way that I perform mine, however, his role including *othering* me and physically repelling me from a social space. The assumption made with his judgement reflected what he thought I may do, which would have been steal or create issues. When this story made its way to my father, his response began with confusion but ended with anger. He immediately was under the belief that I was wronged by this store manager and wanted to confront him. Although I did not allow this confrontation, my father did provide a guideline for how I should react and reaffirmed my feelings that I had been treated unfairly. Stories came out through my life about how my father also experienced judgement based on the colour of his skin, and now that my skin colour became

a qualifying factor, I started to understand the feeling. As a Black youth, it felt as if the assessment of my Blackness and the perception of discrimination was a rite of passage. Perhaps it is not the event itself that caused this feeling, rather, the liberating ability to be angry about it as my father was.

Kubiliene et al. (2015) discusses how "a strong ethnic identity" can provide protection against racial discrimination, or a judgement of Blackness. Growing up, my racial/ethic identity was not strong, suggesting I may have been more vulnerable to the negative effects that racialization result in (p. 348). Kubiliene et al. (2015) also found that "youths tend not to fight when they do not think any positive change will occur" (p. 348). My inability to respond to any of the superiors in "Kicked out of a Convenience Store", "I Thought You Were White Over the Phone", or "He Doesn't Look Like a Thief, He's White" could be this assumption of a failure to achieve any positive change, with open resistance to their behaviour being considered futile. Yet, years after these happenings occurred, I reflect on them, hoping to challenge the beliefs and open eyes in regard to the consequences.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to the nature of the honours program, there were slight restrictions on the overall amount of work that could be taken on. Future projects will benefit from having more time and resources available at their disposal. Initially this project had a goal to conduct focus groups to pair with the auto-ethnography, however, due to participant attendance and time constraints the focus groups were unable to be held. This project is limited by the narrow scope of auto-ethnographical research and hopes that future academics can explore the topic of racialization

and Black youth identity on a larger scale. This area of research would also benefit from looking closer at gender as a significant impact on racial identity. Although this study did analyze gender as seen through Black male youth, there is a gap to be explored to see the ways in which various gender roles impact racialized youth.

Conclusion

The "practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements" that Powell and Roediger (2012) used to define racialization, create the spaces that exist where Black youth negotiate their identity. Blackness, is not simply a race, label, or demographic, instead it comes with a discourse that gives a silhouette for what Blackness should be. This silhouette offers Black youth a guideline for how they *should* act, and how they are *expected* to act. The collection of identities that are offered to Black youth, argues Givens (2016) are limited in what they offer, typically suggest Black youth are criminogenic, uneducated, and uncapable in the popular social imagination. This social imagination is critical in understanding how we as Black youth see ourselves. The narrative that it creates, is one of deviance, and if not that, it creates a narrative that is out of our hands. The inability to control our own narrative, to demand the recognition that Franz Fanon pleas for, creates tension and confusion. Through language, actions, and social roles, Blackness is created. This creation felt like it was out of my hands, but the weight ended up on my back. This resulted in me believing I needed to perform to achieve this Blackness and to lighten the load that had been thrust upon my racial identity.

Performing up to the standards of expectations that are set up for you is difficult for everyone who interacts with social spaces. However, Blackness, as a performance, is a difficult

social stage to enter. As seen in "Wow You Really Are Black, Huh" the very performance of my Blackness was used against me. The failure to achieve Blackness was then countered with the failure that comes with succeeding to perform Blackness. My identity was misunderstood by me, leaving me with the feeling that my identity was not my own. A double consciousness began, my identity as I (mis)understood it, and my Blackness as others around me saw it. Attempting to reconcile these two identities resulted in further confusion and racial judgment. My performance, of course, had to be judged.

My Blackness was often compared to Whiteness, suggesting that I failed my racial performance resulting in my racial identity being more *White.* This assessment came in a few different forms, stemming from my voice, skin colour, interests, and abilities. This superficial qualifying of my race confused me more, as my Blackness was deemed *not-good-enough* based on arbitrary characteristics. Being judged on a Blackness that I was struggling to understand only worked further complicate my identity formation.

Over time, these events seemed to become fewer and further between. In "Hair" my hair represented my Blackness, but in my second semester of university I cut all of my hair off. Yet, this did not take away my Blackness? In fact, going to a Black barbershop felt to me like a more authentic version of the Blackness I so desperately searched for. Kubiliene et al. (2015) would explain this strength as coming from my deeper connection to my "ethnic identity (p. 341). My understanding of myself was beginning to change from a performed Blackness to a James Blackness. It was me exploring my identity while accepting that **my identity is Black**. Without my hair I no longer needed a physical trait to "perform my Blackness silently", it was no longer an object of my Blackness, a "a siren on the top of my head" (Hair). In fact, my Blackness was found in other arenas, it was **mine**, and it was **authentic**. One of these social spaces was the

Black History Month Planning Committee on MacEwan University Campus. I was invited to join this committee as I was working on this project. This was a moment of invitation, rather than imposing, and there was no performing in this sense. This authenticity was not based on Emirbayer and Desmond's (2015) Field of Blackness, it was authenticity that I found within myself. There was no longer a question of ownership over the Blackness that was created, and I rid myself of the performance that I felt I needed to display. It was James.

> *I hope not that you feel the pain, nor that you know this anger, no, I only hope that you remember. Remember what was felt when simple words were said, remember what was thought when imperceptible looks were had. Remember the story of one that echoes the story of Many.*
>
> James Odera

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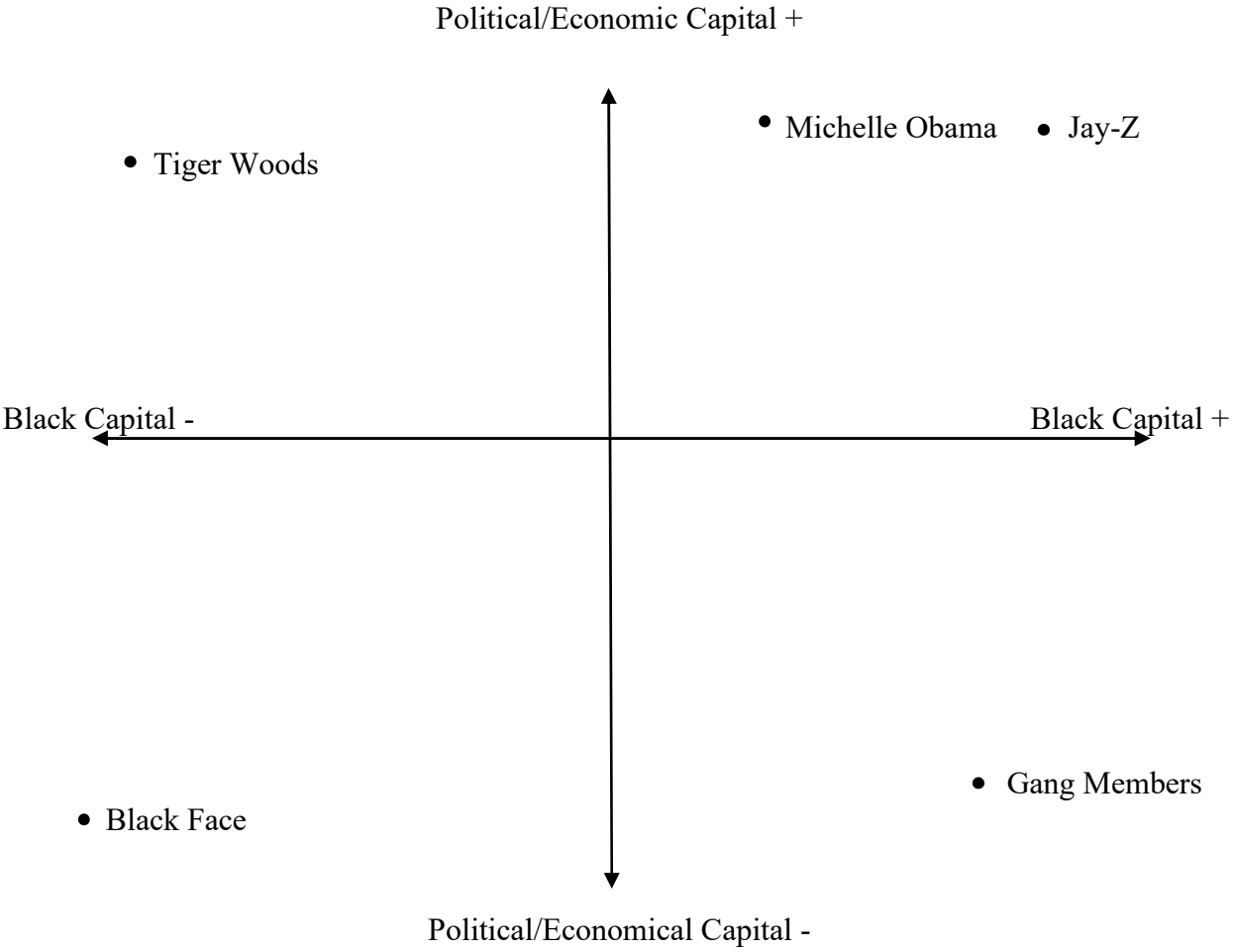
Appendices

Appendix A – Field of Blackness Chart



Appendix B – You Say the N-Word

You Say The N-Word

Specifics

- Grade 6
- Lunch time
- 3 Friends
- 2006
-

Dialogue

Called over by friends

"Hey James come over here"

At this point they have already been talking amongst themselves and I am being called into an active conversation. They are sitting in the gym/cafeteria waiting to be let outside for our lunch recess.

Pseudonym: "Hey James, you say n**** right?"

Myself: No response

- Emotions
  - Confusion
  - Embarrassed
  - Nervous
  - Anxious
  - Angry? (That someone used that word but I do not know why)

Pseudonym: "Why wouldn't you use it? You're Black. You say n***"

Myself: I don't know, I have said it

- This is a lie to fit in. Maybe to get them off of my back. A way to prove that I say it without actually saying it. I have never said this word and this is my first interaction with it on a personal level.

Pseudonym: "Come on say it!"

- At this point I can feel the others really wanting me to say it. It felt like a weird game. I also reflect back on this time and wonder if he could sense

that I was uncomfortable with it. Or was he trying to get me to say it so he could be more comfortable with saying it himself as a non-Black person.

Myself: I try to be quiet and avoid it but there is this tense, quiet, loud, awful silence that is telling everyone "he is going to say it"

" Ok n****"

I say trying to make the word sound quieter, but they heard it and no matter how quietly I spoke that word it felt like I was screaming it. A word that branded itself on my tongue, a word that in itself through my Blackness onto me.

Pseudonym: "Ok there"

- He seemed to be satisfied at this point, the conversation could move on, our recess could begin. He expected me/wanted me to say it and singled me out as a Black kid. That expectation weighed on me, was I supposed to identify as that word? I felt like I was a loser for having to be coaxed into it. I felt as if I was failing at something by not being able to say it casually, but once I said it, I hated it. It felt awful, it felt like an alien had embedded itself onto my soul, but an alien that everyone saw was coming except for me.

Language

The language used in this situation was one of expectation. The racialized narrative that was expected of me was challenged at this point. It was a narrative that I was unfamiliar with, and a performance that I did not know my lines for. This word represented widespread discourse that somehow traversed all across the world but at this moment found itself staring me in the eye, **expecting** something. Expecting this narrative of deviance, this narrative that Black people say N****, this narrative that me as a young black child should be saying it too. And when I failed to perform it naturally it was summoned/requested/demanded by someone else.

Socialization

This could be the considered one of the earlier times I was confronted to be Black. Although there was the basketball jersey that was gifted to me, as a child that had never seen/watched/heard anything about basketball, this moment was different. This moment was a direct interaction with those social variables that I found significant enough to spend my time with. Their expectations were my job to meet. My friends created a situation in which they wanted me to act in a certain way and it was a demand that I felt I had to meet. I felt bad once I did say N****, however, it also felt like I barely passed a test that was going to dictate whether I could continue with them to recess.

Appendix C – Allen Iverson Jersey

Allen Iverson Jersey

Specifics

- Grade 4
- Birthday
- 2004
- Birthday gift of an Allen Iverson jersey (Sixers)

Event

This event was at my grade 4 birthday party. It was a fun day; I had my closest friends over. The day went by smoothly and I anxiously awaited the moment all birthday kids are longing for. Presents. I started with my friends' gift (closest at the time). Their gift was in a nice box and I was excited because I knew they were somewhat well off (better off than me). I slowly begin to open the box and start to reveal fabric of some sort. Oh no…clothing… But when I fully open it I can see it is a very specific type of clothing. It is a basketball jersey. It was a clean black with red and white trim, blue colouring around the name and numbers. 3. Iverson. A dud.

I did not know what to do with it, I vaguely felt as if that was a name I should know and I could tell that it was a nice gift but I had no context for it. I had never watched basketball, never seen *IVERSON 3,* I mean I guess I knew Michael Jordan played with bugs bunny. But I put on the same show may kids have and always will continue to do. The ungrateful performance of saying "Thank you! This is so awesome!" a very uninspired, timeless, "Wooow" of submission to a gift that was not wanted.

Reflection

At this moment I did not realize why I got this gift. I knew that it was a gift that was decided to be given to me which only added to my confusion/frustration to receiving it. It was something I was **expected** to like. A few years after I remember bragging about having an Iverson jersey. It was a narrative I was beginning to understand. I was a young Black male, I the world had predicted on of my interests is basketball and I have an Allen Iverson jersey to prove that I am somewhat accurate. I am that black male. I am me. This jersey represents so many things to me. My good friend and potentially her parents got me a gift that they thought I would love. They cared about me and I cared about them. And for them they thought I cared about

basketball. And hey if they were right and I liked it, that jersey would have been a fantastic gift. Alas, **they bet on Black,** but in the end, I was red.

Appendix D – You're Not That Black

You're Not That Black

Specifics

- Grade 7 (Junior High)
- Close Friends
- Told I'm not that Black

Event

This event, to keep anonymity, will be kept vague, and although I am reflecting on a specific event, this was a repetitive theme throughout my junior high experience. This theme also continues to my present-day life however it is more nuanced and unexpected.

This event was me hanging out with my friends, discussing music, games, movies, whatever grade 7 boys talk about. Then the discussion of my Blackness came up. My voice wasn't black enough my interests aren't black enough I don't dress black enough. All of these narratives that I am at this point aware of yet still resist/cannot attain/misunderstand/fail. I even responded to their comments by saying

Myself: "Why am I not that Black? If I sounded Black would that make me Black?

Pseudynonem: "No"

- Even my attempts at trying to understand my failed blackness was futile.

The narratives that are so pervasive in Canada's/Edmontons understanding of Black people, that even my friends (who in this specific event were not white) were under the impression that the narratives should hold true in reality. They held enough substance that they called me out for not matching their idea of who I should be. This was another forced confrontation of my blackness. It was an imposition of the narrative of deviance that exists within Canada. This narrative was one that is itself a mode of deviance, yet I was deviating even from that. Resulting in a failure to be Black, however, my blackness could not be removed, so where did I end up. Was this itself an instance of Dubois double conciesounes? Was I existing within myself but also within a world that saw me as something else? I argue it is. Concious

number one was my identity as I understood it at the time. It was me, James, Grade 7 (12), Black, afro?,. The second consciousness came from the narrative that was thrust upon my sense of self. This narrative in this situation itself came in two forms, one was the narrative that *this is how Black people act,* and the other was that I was not acting that way. There was no winning. I was wrong in who I am, but that also wasn't ok because of who I am. How many people are told so explicitly, *you are not acting the way the world wants you to.*

Appendix E – Called N****

Called N****

#1

Specifics

- Grade 9
- Happened twice
    - Hallway by Gym (somehow it happened at the same place each time)
- Two different people
    - One was out of nowhere
    - The other was in a confrontation

Event

The first time this happened was at lunch time in Grade 9. I was walking with a group of my friends (3 others) and we are walking down the hallway towards the gymnasium because that was the closest water fountain. At the doors of the gym there is a group of younger students (Grade 8), one of which I recognized from my homeroom. As we walk past the group of Grade 8 students to get to the water fountain the student that I recognize from my homeroom makes a comment, the content of which I cannot hear. It was directed towards me, his friends looked at me as he said it, my friends looked at me after he said it, and I was just looking at the water fountain. My friends and I drink from the water fountain and turn around to walk back from the way we came. As we are walking past the following conversation occurs:

Friend 1: “James, did you hear what Pseudonym just said?”

Myself: “No..?”

- Thinking nothing of it. I did not even realize on a full conscious level at the moment that the younger student had said anything of any substance

Friend 1: He called you a n****”

Myself: “What?? No, did he actually?”

- Not only had I not heard someone speaking to me, but I didn’t hear them call me a racial slur.

Friend 2: “Yeah man, he just called you a n**** as we walked past”

- The confirmation made me more confused, how did I not hear this. Why was there something like this that I had to hear.

Myself: “Wow what the f***”

- This reaction was not one of anger. It was confusion, not only because I had not fully heard the verbal stamp that was sent my direction, but because I wasn’t doing anything to deserve that stamp. No one deserves to be called a racial slur. But not only was I called this word, I was unprompted, spontaneously, mysteriously, but painfully called n**** when I was simply walking to get water. A word that not only explains itself when it is exclaimed, but it comes with the weight of history, the weight of the world and those within it. That word feels like a life being with bones of pain and soul, that when used in that context brands its history upon you like the black plague.

Throughout the day my friends and I discussed what had happened. Not only did we discuss it but word spread among other people that I knew that this other student had called me a word that most don’t say. To my surprise this event continued even without my presence. One of my friends later that day ran into the younger student in the hallway. He literally saw him and ran into him to knock him into a cavity in the wall that holds a fire extinguisher. This was retribution for what had happened to me. Someone had told me that this happened, almost to be comforting. And to be honest it was, not because pseudonym needed to be punished in my eyes, but at least this time, my experience of the word was not an expectation that I just say it/take it/ live with it. My friends were resisting it on my behalf.

Another incident happened after the second one. The friend who first asked me if I had heard the comment saw the individual in the hallway as well and gave him a similarly aggressive and physical response. This was setting the stage for what would be the final act of my great performance. It was the end of the day and this time **I** saw pseudonym in the hallway. For a split second I knew I had to make a decision, either I approach him the way my friends do or I do not approach him at all. Fight or ignore. These were not my only options, but I felt as if they were. I see him walking past me as if nothing is happening, maybe faster than usual hoping that I do not turn around from my locker. But I do see him and I do turn around from my locker. I push him as he passes me and he goes flying into the lockers.

Myself: “Hey man, where the f*** do you think you’re going?”

- Cliché, boring, **expected,** what narrative am I filling now.

Pseudonym: “What? Hey I don’t know..”

Myself: “I heard what you called me”

- I don’t know what the point of this was. I didn’t hear him. I knew it happened. I have to assume he thinks I heard him. Maybe I just don’t know what else to say

Pseudonym: “Look I’m sorry I ….”

- He is scared, his friend is trying to get me off him, he doesn’t really know what to say and I don’t really know what I want him to say. I doesn’t matter, the event gets stopped by the janitor (beloved janitor at that) a teacher down the hall I remember is watching almost making sure nothing happens, but something already happened. I don’t know what they were waiting for. I let the younger student go, I walk away with my friends. They don’t seem impressed. I don’t seem impressed. Its over. I go home. Thinking about what happened, why it happened, how I felt, and also dealing with the fact that I tried to intimidate a younger kid. But had he not hurt me first.

#2

Event

This event was less drawn out than the first. However, they both serendipitously occurred in the same location. The gym doors beside the water fountain. This event however begins and ends in slightly different ways. There was an acquaintance I had. He was a friend but I was also not a great friend to him and this created a relationship in which neither of us quite cared about the other. An apathetic relationship to its core. This situation was not as heartless though. I was mocking him for some reason. I was making fun of the food he was eating, it was instant ramen noodles dry out of the bag. I implied that he was eating poison/crack. Reflecting back it was an innocent enough of a joke, but I learned years later that he had a severe stomach health issue. Innocent enough. Its always innocent enough for someone isn’t it.

I mocked his lunch and what he was eating, I remember us standing outside of the gym doors and I must have made the joke one too many times because he cut off my rampage by saying

Pseudonym: you n****

This time I had experience. This time I knew how to react. The feeling was still confusion, that didn't change. But my ethereal being reacted faster this time. I pushed my hand forward, not in a punch but in a shove, right against his forehead hard. Hard enough that it made the back of his head bounce off of the glass window behind him. That was it. The interaction was over. We had made our trade. He called me n*** and I hit him. We did not talk much after that in junior high but we ended up talking slightly more once highschool came around. I didn't feel happy about what had happened. I did not tell people about this interaction as if I was posturing. I was not situating myself in the context of a social world. I was already situated. This was the trade.

Appendix F – Kicked Out of Convenience Store

Kicked Out of Convenience Store

Specifics

- Grade 8
- Happy Mart
- After school

Event

This event took place after school in junior high one day. Me and a group of friends would walk home together every day in junior high school. There was a convenience store that was directly on the path of our walk home and we would go in after school and get slurpees, chips, or candy. This day we walked in to get candy I believe, it wasn't warm enough for slurpees yet. We all go in and start looking at what we are going to get, but we don't all have money. My friend was going to cover me since I didn't bring any money that day, so I was still picking stuff out that I wanted. This is when the manager? Of the convenience store starts aggressively walking in our direction.

Manager: "Do you have money?"

- He says as he looks around at all of us

My friends and I: "yes"

- The answers here were mixed, a few of us did and a few of us didn't.

Manger points directly towards me: "You. Do you have money?"

- As he was pointing towards me I could feel my anxiety rise. No I did not have money, I didn't realize that was a prerequisite for coming in.

Myself: "..no, but I.."

Manager: "Then leave, we don't want you in here with no money. Get out."

- At this point I was trying to explain to this adult that although I didn't have money I was going to get something through the kindness of my friend. But he didn't hear the rest of my story. The story was finished for him, I had no money so I had to leave. This story would be less frustrating to me if I didn't know that multiple of my friends did not have money and they simply weren't going to get anything. But I got singled out and embarrassed as I had to tell the man I had no money and could do nothing to defend myself. I left the store and waited outside as my friends shopped. I saw through the

window, once I was out of the store the issue seemed to resolve itself. He left my friends alone and they continued shopping, those who had money of course

Reflection

This is a complex memory to reflect on because of the multiple angles of it. I know now that the convenience store manager was worried about theft, especially because there were students from my school that probably were stealing from his store after school everyday. Soon enough we actually had to leave our backpacks at the front door if we wanted to enter. So the context of this event was one where this manager was dealing with the pervasive junior high thief. The reason why I am choosing this as an epiphany is because of the way I was singled out. It seemed as if that adults pointed finger made its way through a full group of children before it found its way to me. Its true target. And from what I saw I was the only person who was asked and once I was removed, he was content with the rest of the group shopping. I can only assume that there was something about me that he thought was going to be a higher risk than the others. At this point in my life I would not have stolen anything from that store, I would have been way to scared. But he thought I would. And he removed me entirely from a space in which others now had the privilege to continue existing in. I was literally sent to the outside world and had to look in. The fact that the only black kid in the group got singled out and removed could be a coincidence, but the reaction of my father when I talked to him about the story a couple of weeks later seemed to prove other wise.

I was pulling into a 7/11 parking lot with my dad to get gas. This 7/11 was down the road from the convenience store in which the first event occurred. I told him that I was happy we are going to this one, I got kicked out of the one down the street.

Dad: “What?”

- His response to what I told him wasn’t because I couldn’t hear me. I could feel the anger already coming from him.

Myself: “Yeah the manager kicked me out of the store because I didn’t have any money”

Dad: “Were you doing anything wrong?”

Myself: “No we had just walked in and were just looking at candy when the guy came over..”

My father’s response to this was one of anger I could see. He was figuring out what he wanted to do. He said to me “Lets go over there now”. He wanted to go confront the man. I told him it was fine and ok. I didn’t want to have to go do that. I felt like I was caught in-between two things. One was my angry father who wanted to confront the potentially racialized experience that I had. The other was this angry manager who I was scared of that seemed to not like me for some reason. Those were two worlds I didn’t wanted to get caught in between. We did not end up going to confront the manager of the other convenience store. But seeing my fathers reaction almost gave me a guideline for how I should have felt. I was wrong in someway, but wrong in a way that was significant enough that my Black father was offended. He was more angry than I

was, which for me must have meant I was not angry enough and that I indeed was wronged. I was wronged because of the expectation of the narrative of deviance. I was expected to steal, so I had to be dealt with.

Appendix G – I Thought You Were White Over the Phone

I Thought You Were White Over the Phone

Specifics

- 17 Years old
- 2013
- First Job (Details?)
- Manager speaking to me as an employee

Event

This epiphany occurred during my first job. This was my first job and I had been working at this location for a few months at the time. I had gotten the job through a brief application followed by an interview. I felt as if both of those went well and it clearly went well enough since I was hired for the job. I enjoyed this job, I got to work with people that I liked and work around media that I enjoyed. One day I was speaking with my manager, we had a fairly informal relationship, when she says to me:

Manager: "You know when I first called you to interview, I thought you were white"

Myself: "What?"

Manager: "Yeah, I thought you were white over the phone. You kind of have a white voice. So I was surprised to see you were Black"

To this comment I just attempted to end the conversation as smoothly as I can. I felt offended, especially since I have been told that before. I laughed it off and changed the subject to something that was not related to me.

Reflection

This is a small moment I reflect on every once in a while. To tell me I have a white voice and that my *real* race was surprising to her, it once again represents a failure to adhere to the set out racialized expectations that so many Canadians consciously/subconsciously hold. I have to be told that I sound white, an absence of Blackness. There is a dialogue/verbiage/speaking voice that is expected of me. My racialized experience does not only affect my physical body, it effects the voice that represents my thinking mind. What happens when I fail to achieve this sonic form of Blackness is what surprises me. So many people seem to be comfortable with telling me that I don't sound the way I should. The narratives around voice are so effectively racialized upon Black people, that those who see a misstep in a racial performance are comfortable with bringing

it up when they notice it. There is a possibility that this narrative is so strong for their schemas of racialized others that they feel an expectation upon themselves to say something about it. “Hey, you aren’t acting right, that’s ok but I want you to know that I know”.

Appendix H – He Doesn't Look Like a Thief, He's White

He Doesn't Look Like a Thief, He's White!

Specifics

- Workplace
- Manager
- University student
- 2017

Event

This was an interesting event to me because it had opened up a window to how others think about physical appearance, maybe more than I do (at least when it comes to particular races). I was called into my managers office to look at something. When I get into their office, they show me a computer screen with footage from our security cameras. They tell me to watch, and as I do I see a young man walking through the store with his backpack, occasionally looking over his back to see who is watching him. When he feels as if he is out of sight, he will take product off of the shelf and shove them into his bag. Once he does this he walks around some more and repeats the process until he decides he has enough and leaves the store. This type of customer was common in this retail store, in that we had many people who would steal simple by waiting until they weren't seen and would stuff items into a bag of some sort. After the video ended the following conversation occurred:

Manager: "You saw him, right? You would recognize him if he came back?"

Myself: "Yes"

- I don't know if this is true, even the best security cameras are often grainy in their black and white filming.

Manager: "Ok, good. I just can't believe people, who walks around a store and just take things like that. And look at him! He doesn't look like a thief! He's White!

- This is the moment when I was once again shown the narrative of deviance and the way that it actualizes in people's day to day lives. He's white. He does not look like a thief. However, if he wasn't white, maybe he would.

Myself : "Yeah, it's a shame that people do stuff like that"

- This is my attempt to address one part of her comment but not the other. I was taken aback that she would say that, especially by me. I'm not sure if this is a result of not caring, of the belief that this is how everyone thinks, or if some part of the way I act invites this type of conversation.

Reflection

This memory has always been interesting to me because of the casual nature of the conversation. There was something so simple about it. This thief subverted expectations the way that I have in the past. Except instead of being Black and *acting white,* this white male was being White and acting …*What?* What type of person could have been stealing and would have made sense in this context? My manager effectively crossed out White, so would it be Black, Indigenous, Southeast Asian? I will never know, but I did do something very apparent to me. It made the invisible thoughts that many people have visible. There is a line that separates white and non white individuals, an aura around those that are racialized, an aura that comes with stories, narratives, stereotypes, etc.… This aura for my manager may give her preparation for who is going to steal, whether it is correct or not, in her head she is following a simply guideline. But this person's aura was not matching up. Their deviance was not expected. The narrative of deviance is for others, not for young white males.

Appendix I – The Perfect Shade

The Perfect Shade

Specifics

- 2017
- 2nd year of Sociology
- Girlfriends acquaintance
- Comment about me in car

Event

This is a rare event in which I was racialized but was not there to witness the process. My girlfriend and I were heading home from school, she was driving, but she needed to drop off one of her classmates. This was a classmate I do not know much about, but she seemed friendly enough and the three of us had a nice conversation on our way home. My girlfriend drops me off at home first and then continues to drop her friend off at home because she was out of the way. Later on my girlfriend and I are together and she tells me about her conversation with her friend. Apparently, I came up as a topic, this was the following conversation:

Acquaintance: "Your boyfriend is black right?"

- Race as a master status/conversation point

Girlfriend "Yeah"

Acquaintance: "He is like the perfect shade! I dated a Jamaican guy and he was just too dark. He was so Black, and all of his friends were crazy/wild/energetic"

Girlfriend: "Oh yeah.."

Analysis

This event is quite a unique one and might be the only *epiphany* in this study that I was not directly related to in its actions. The comment of "the perfect shade" is complex to tackle because it brings up many implications and one overlaying concern. One implication is that if there is a "perfect" shade, then their must be an "imperfect shade" or a wrong shade. It is also implying that she is qualifying me as an individual by my skin colour. The comments she made about her ex-boyfriend are concerning in many ways not only because of her comments about him being too dark/too black, but because of her comments about the friends as well. She seemed to correlate the darkness of their skin with how they were acting, saying she couldn't hangout with them/date her boyfriend because of how dark he is, but backing that up with explanations

that are completely disconnected to skin colour. Although I am certain she thought she was giving a compliment, the language that she used is problematic because of the place in which it comes from and the ways in which that language has been used historically to discriminate against people (CITATION). The overlaying concept that is at work here (or at least one of them) would be the white standard of beauty. There is a white expectation for what beauty is in many societies around the world (CITATION) and it often values white physical characteristics over non-white. This is an issue because of the harmful effects it has on racialized groups who will effectively never achieve the standard of beauty that has been set out of their reach. My skin colour was considered "the perfect shade" but it made me very aware that I was a shade of anything. Being aware of your race/blackness/ethnicity is one thing, but being told that you are perfect shade makes you feel exoticized/tokenized/novelty.

At around the same time, (same month most likely) there was an instance of me walking home from the 7/11 across the street from where I lived (different 7/11 than from other epiphanies) and as I was waiting for the light to change a car drove past me and a young Black man leaned out of the window and yelled "**Light skin**!!". This is another instance of value being placed upon the shade of my Blackness. An expectation from white communities or those who follow the white standard of beauty see my lighter skin as a good thing. This man who yelled out of his car sees my lighter skin as a negative, at least that is how it was perceived. There is a belief that darker skin can represent *more blackness* and that same belief can permeate racialized groups so that they believe the same thing. Whether my skin colour was ideal or not I was made very aware of it in both instances, making me confront my race. It was pulled from the shadows of my identity, the casual nature of it was removed, and the spotlight was shone down.

Appendix J - Wow You Really Are Black, Huh

Wow You Really Are Black, Huh

Details

- Grade 9
- Gym Class
- Friends

Event

This is one of the lower moments of my recollected events. This event occurred in grade 9 gym class. We were outside this day playing soccer or something that required a field. The class was just about to end and we were congregating towards the edge of the field as we waited for the teacher to tell us to head back. As we were waiting around one of my classmates was standing around minding his own business. I am not sure what he was doing specifically but I do remember that he was one of the kids in our class that we all felt was ok to bully. I remember constantly calling him out for wearing jeans under his sweatpants. I began to talk to this classmate and a confrontation occurred. The inciting incident is not what was memorable, and even what he said to me in the conversation felt like it was irrelevant. There were an essential two sentences spoken in this occurrence.

Myself: “Hey man *** off. I’ll jump you.”

- I have never said anything like that to someone before or after this event and I have never *jumped* anyone. This was posturing of some sort, however, it did not pay off, if that’s what I was looking for.

Friend: “Wow you really are Black, huh”

- Another interesting moment for me, the words that represent the narrative. The words that give life to a story line I am not always aware of. But this time I played the role perfectly. I really was Black..

Reflection

This moment is critical in my life because of how terrible the events are. I threatened a kid for no good reason, as if there ever is a good reason. I told someone I was going to *jump* them, with no real gusto behind it. No meaning in the actions I was uttering. But the meaning

was found in the relationship I had forced upon this classmate of mine. Of me being the aggressor him the victim. If I had to guess why I said this, I think maybe it was an assumed position that I thought I should take. There had recently at my junior high school been incidents of physical altercations, perhaps I though this was the appropriate response. I did not feel good saying it but my aggression felt like the proper response. I did not feel cool saying it but my upper hand in an unfortunate situation made it feel like that was what I was supposed to say. In my head at least.

My friends response of "wow you really are black huh" has always rung through my head. Wow you really are who you are supposed to be. You really are the person who would threaten another classmate for no reason. You really are playing into the expectations the world has given me for Black people. There also was disgust/unimpressed emotions in the voice, my posturing led me no where. I was perhaps not playing my role at certain points, but at this specific instance my role was playing, my performance impeccable. I really was black at this moment. And Black represented all the awful feelings I felt in that moment, the wrongness that comes with verbal assault, the scared/angry/confused feeling that **I imposed** upon someone else. That was blackness. In that moment me being Black was me being aggressive, mean, a bad classmate. Wow, the stories are true, that's what blackness is and you are it.

Appendix K – Hair

Hair

Details

- 2005 – 2015
- Afro

Event

This is not an event, per se, however, it is a continuous part of my life for a large stretch of time. This event was my hair. For about a decade I had a large afro that I rarely cut and would comb out every day to as large as I could get it. A had this hair style starting back in grade 5. This is the last time I remember getting a major haircut and oh was it ever a major one. In grade 5 I got a haircut from my mother. I remember sitting down to get the haircut and then looking in the mirror and having my heart drop. The hair cut was "bad", whatever that means to a 10-year-old boy. Nonetheless, the next morning I had to go to school with a haircut I was uncomfortable with. I remember getting to school and thinking that everyone was paying attention to me and laughing at me, to the point where I got upset and the teacher called my mom. For almost a decade that was the last time I got my haircut.

What was important about this haircut throughout this timeline was its ability to become a place holder for my blackness. I grew this hair out, it was a conversation piece with friends and strangers alike, it was an ice breaker, a fun game, a goofy part of my life. But it also said to the world, I am Black. This is how I wanted to represent myself and the nice thing about hair is that it speaks for itself. It doesn't sound white or not watch basketball, it's a time-tested hair style that have been represented by Black folk throughout history. With this hair on me I was able to perform my blackness silently. This proved to be true throughout the time that I had it when I would have various people through my life actually think I was "full Black" although only my father is Black. The afro worked to become such a crucial part of my personality that I had issues separating myself from it. A crutch that allowed my performance to be completed without having to learn my lines.

This haircut came to an end in 2015, after my last exam of my first semester of university. I went down to one of the only Black barbershops I know in Edmonton and just told them to cut it all off. And cut it all off they did. Interestingly enough, now that I have had time to reflect on how my life was changing around that time, this was also the period in which I was becoming more comfortable in my young adulthood. I was going to school, working, living on my own, and tired of having my personality as a siren on the top of my head. It was also the beginning of the process of me becoming more comfortable with my identity and as a consequence my blackness.

This process of understanding my sense of self is still occurring present day, however, and cutting off my hair and creating an identity with my existing characteristics was exciting, hard, and revolutionary for me. Now my sense of self and Blackness comes from various places, and perhaps it is occurring in a more natural form. Hair as a significant physical trait is not unnatural or weird for anyone, but for me I was using it as a place holder for a sense of self that I could not see, could not perform, could not understand, and could not be on my own.