

RHYTHM AND “RESILIENCE”: BLACK YOUNG ADULTS AND POETRY

RHYTHM AND “RESILIENCE”: BLACK YOUNG ADULTS AND POETRY

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To God, who grants all gifts and wisdom.

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Finally, to the participants who represent the ones who are called resilient before being called by their names. May we never acknowledge your resiliency without acknowledging the structures that that caused you to become that way. May acknowledgment only be a means to an end. I recognize, that in my efforts to add your liberation, I may add to your captivity. But I share, because your narratives are captivating and have liberated my very being; I believe they can do the same for the world. As I begin this journey, may you continue to excel on your own. May you be recognized for *all* that you are, including resilient.

Abstract

Many Black young adults engage with poetry in its various forms on a regular basis. This interview study explores the reasons why eight Black young adults have decided to partake in poetry and examines how poetic practices have permeated the lives of those who actively engage with the art form. Critical race theories and narrative approaches were used to complete this work. These specific theoretical frameworks and research methodologies were applied as their major tenants allow for consideration of race, marginalization, social justice and storytelling. The work begins with an historical look at poetry in relation to present day poetics. The experiences of the participants involved are then featured. Finally, the author examines the most common themes expressed in the conversations she shared with the young adults. Through poetry, Black young adults were able to 1) find a release for their emotions and experiences 2) form and understand their identities and 3) have an impact their surroundings. Although the Black young adults involved in this research speak about the need for support, the lack thereof has not hindered them from sharing their poetry, or speaking eloquently about how poetry has affected them.

Hello. My name is Poetry
I'm going to try to explain this to you
How powerful I can be
Last time they clapped and snapped at the end but their faces spoke for them
They didn't get it... They don't really get me
Sometimes I, Poetry, take a while to sink in
So today, in the end, your faces may resemble them.
Still, I had a duty to come here and remind you of two things ...

1. Although the other genres within the arts have surpassed me in your practice modalities - Poetry will never disappear.
2. The lives of young Black adults matter... And they too... Regardless of your efforts, will not disappear...

Rather, them and me ---we've formed a bond. 'Cause see although you may not get me... They get me...

See I am often neglected
And I found out that the only way I won't be rejected is if I come through the mouth of one who is respected
Sadly enough it often doesn't matter what my subject is
Cause your thoughts are subjective
Your perspective of them, your perspective of me, Poetry
Has been tainted by a legacy of
Half-truth and fallacies
Just because it isn't Shakespeare doesn't mean it's not worthy of your ear
even Shakespeare said all of the world is a stage
and you've placed black young people in the wings
Thinking they'd give up, thinking they'd give in
But In me
They used those wings and flew
Right over your heads

And have mastered a craft
That you thought was dead
They've written
And rehearsed
And taken centre stage
Better yet
When put in the background
These youth have written rhymes real enough to create their own stage
Sometimes it sounds like music
Sometimes it sounds like rage
Regardless of what you hear
or what your preference is ..
Through me, Poetry
though limited - because of their race because of their age..
Through me, Poetry
young Black people have created change.
See you may not get it... But they do
The same ones you've deemed silent have used me to be loud
The same ones you've attempted to veil in shame have used me to become proud
They have written stanzas strong enough to break down stigmas
With imagery vivid enough to re-shape their identities
Alterations that could shake the nations
This is Rhythm and "Resilience"
But until the day,
When a poem can stand on its own...
I guess it's time to change the tone.

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Chapter One: An Introduction

In pursuing this project, I have engaged in the literature that focuses on the voices of Black young adults and leadership, arts-based social work, critical race theories and narrative methodologies. The framework of the research, grounded in critical race theories and narrative methodologies creates a lens in which the experiences of Black young adults who engage with poetry can be adequately captured. Within this framework, the voice of those marginalized is held at the centre of the research with the purpose of shifting current discourse around young adults in society with poetry as the entry point.

This work also intends to actively resist dominant ideologies that shape society's way of knowing and understanding. In my experience with social work practice and educational institutions thus far, my ability to think and act creatively has often been stifled. The opportunity to complete this work allows me to provide an example of scholarship which illustrates how concepts that intersect with social work can be discussed in alternative ways and still have an equal, if not greater, impact. With the privilege of completing research also comes the opportunity to teach. With this work, I plan to not only conduct research and share what is found but I also intend to share findings in a way that shifts what types of knowledge and communication styles those who participate in academia and the field of social work deem to be valuable and legitimate. This goal is rooted in my own experiences as a student and further inspired by bell hooks' (2003) text

entitled “Teaching Community” as it recommends that educators intentionally teach in a way that does not continue to add to the current forms domination and oppression that exist within society.

As further inspired by Brown & Strega’s (2005) text “Research as Resistance”, another objective of this work is “to make space and take space for marginalized researchers and ideas. We push the edges of academic acceptability not because we want to be accepted within the academy but in order to transform it” (p. 2). Specifically, this research allows me to be active in responding to the injustice that Black youth and young adults continuously experience. Long awaited, the topics included in this research have provided me with space that my education has not always allowed for; a space where myself, a young Black adult can use my voice in its several variations as a means of aiming to transform the communities that I am a part of and care for.

Research including Black young adults has typically covered topics such as violence, poor academics, crime and the abuse of substances (Anderson, 1990, 1999; Anyon, 1997; Noguera, 1995; Wilson, 1987 as cited in Ginwright, 2007). Although these subject matters may be a concern, it is important to recognize that they can be linked back to institutionalized racism. Racist ideas are enforced both consciously and unconsciously by the several institutions of power that exist within society (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). Rather than focus on the unfortunate results that have come from the tactics of those in power, this work aims to highlight an alternative reality that is also existent but not often presented within

the Black community; the reality that despite marginalization, Black young adults remain resilient. That despite inequality, these individuals continue to seek and create spaces that will allow them to speak, heal and grow.

Therefore, with recognition of the marginalization that Black young people face, this research considers how Black young adults are engaging with poetry. More specifically, the work explores the reasons why Black young adults write and perform poetry while describing what their experiences have been as they engage with poetic practices. In the initial sections of this thesis I consider literature on race, marginalization and the various forms of poetry. I then outline the theoretical framework and methodology rooted in critical race and narrative theories. The study design and methods will follow; in this portion of the work, I describe the interviews I undertook with the eight Black adults engaged with poetry. My findings section highlights that through poetry, Black young adults were able to 1) find a release for their emotions and experiences 2) form and understand their identities and 3) the opportunity to have an impact on their near and distant surroundings 4) exercise their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Furthermore, although the Black young adults involved in this research speak about the need for support, in the research, they explain that the lack thereof has not hindered them from sharing their poetry, or speaking eloquently about how poetry has affected them. In the discussion, I consider the implications of these findings for social work practice and research. I invite the voices of young adults into the thesis not only through my reporting of the words they spoke in

interviews with me, but also by placing their poetry throughout this body of work. I also provided the opportunity for individuals who were not interviewed to submit poems. Throughout this research, I do not interpret these poems, as it is not my intention to interpret or decipher what has been shared by the participants who have chosen to submit poetry but rather, to offer their voices to you as art to be seen, heard and reflected on.

•••

they told me blacker the berry sweeter the juice
but they didn't tell me it came with mental issues
and verbal abuse
only if they knew
or had a clue what was going on in my head

I'm always misled
i wish i were dead
but naw instead

i show em a smile every time i leave my house
i hold words in for a while before they leave my mouth

and when they do
I'm usually looking in the mirror
staring down a figure that looks unfamiliar
staring down my reflection is soo upsetting
never forgetting

the time i stay up till six in the morning
thinking about different ways to end the misery
if i only kept listening to that little voice
to make that choice
to end this boy

i probably wouldn't be standing here right now
looking into the crowd
hoping they understand
but then again
no one does
they just don't get
even if they read it
maybe if Trump said it
it would get more attention

i hope this issue we repping
is heading
all around town
so when they hear the sound
they must aware

so your daughter doesn't have to stare
in the mirror
thinking about her hair
caring about what to wear
more than whats going on up there
(point at head)

but i can relate
because whenever I get home alone in my dome
i start to think like...
don't you feel like that dim light in your room
reminds you of how dull your love life is compared to shit
on your Instagram or Snapchat filters
that make you feel like in real life you are one in million
I'm just chilling on a trillion thoughts in my head
thinking if i was dead would you miss me if i said
I love you right before the bullet hit my waist
and its twin brothers hit me in the chest and through the face

I'm chilling on a trillion thoughts in my mind
its hard to find myself in these times
when i feel that everything around me is a lie
like how i look you in the eyes and i can tell theres no true love inside
emotional suicide to my friends and familia
all the way from north side ATL
to Bramalea
to Square One
and downtown to Union Station
if you feel what i feel then you would think its amazing
that i could be in one room filled with 22 of my closest
aunty's nephews
but feel like I'm alone like a man in a drone
or Jesus if were stoned
or Waldo in a home filled with red and white bones
I cant condone

what I'm really feeling at this time
i just let my emotions wind UP
then spit it through these rhymes
lyrical crimes
because I'm always trying to kill the beat
but I think its something sweet when the beat talks to me

when everyone is sleep
and - so discreet
and when it comes to speaking their mind
they - try to hide
i don't have to see whats real
i - often feel
your false vibes
they have to die
they-they-they have to die

but here i arise
filled with pride
smile on my face
because i dried my eyes
so don't you run
and don't you hide
so just know everything is gonna be alright - D.HART

...

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

As highlighted by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) it is crucial to first consider how concepts of race and racism have been defined before seeking to understand and use critical race theory (CRT) as a means of understanding a particular topic. The concept of race has been long debated; scholars have included various perspectives as a means of defining the concept. The first of the two leading perspectives is that race is biological, while others believe that race is rather socially constructed (Banks, 1993 in Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Smedley & Smedly, 2005). Despite the ongoing debate on how race should be conceptualized, it is evident within society that racism is not only an idea meant to be defined, but also an everyday reality (Smedley & Smedly, 2005).

Poet and writer, Audre Lorde (1992) describes racism to be “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 496 in Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). To expand this definition Tatum (1997) highlights an explanation presented in Wellman’s (1993) text, “Portraits of White Racism” as he explains that racism includes a "system of exclusion and privilege..." (p.179). In agreement with Wellman (1993), this concept of racism being a system is crucial to consider as it broadens the frame of what society believes everyday racism to entail. When we consider that racism is more than the everyday personal one-on-one experiences between individuals, but also a system that creates spaces that foster exclusion and marginalization, we are

provided with an opportunity to form theories and conduct research that works against these experiences and the system at large.

As a response, critical race theory focuses on further understanding and transforming concepts of race and power while bringing liberation to communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Crenshaw (1995) explains that critical race theory "aims at reexamining the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness... to recover and revitalize the radical tradition of race-consciousness among African-Americans and other peoples of color" (p.14). When considering the nature and purpose of the data being collected, and using critical race theory as a lens for our analysis it is helpful to consider what scholars classify to be the major tenants. The text entitled "Critical Race Theory: An Introduction" Delgado & Stephanic (2017) describes the basic tenants of critical race theory. It goes on to explain that racism as an experience can be considered ordinary within society (Delgado & Stephanic, 2017). The idea of racism being an ordinary condition in society can be seen as it is often ignored or overlooked. Secondly, critical race theory speaks to interest convergence, a concept that describes the reality that the interests of Whites and those who are considered "elite" in society are constantly benefiting from the effects of racism. Finally, several critical race theorists speak to the social construction of race, the idea of race being formed through interaction between humans, rather than biological differences being the thing that creates difference (Haney-López, 1994).

When considering these ideas, it is evident that critical race theory provides the necessary framework needed to complete my thesis research. More specifically, critical race theory focuses on further understanding and transforming concepts of race and power while bring liberation to communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Parker & Lynn, 2002). When considering this reality, and critical race as a framework, it is important that researchers are intentional about how the study of social reality is being conducted (S. Baker Collins, Personal communication, November 9, 2016). Due to the ongoing of Black young adults (Weis, 1993; Cohen, 2010), I consider it important for me to do research in a way that provides opportunity for the voices of those silenced to be heard. In accordance with Lincoln et al (2011) critical race theorists base their questions around the assumption that power exists within society (Lincoln et al, 2011 in Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, according to Neuman (1997) rather than only highlighting what is occurring within society, critical race theorists also point out what issues may be at hand with the purpose of creating change (Neuman, 1997; Lincoln et al, 2011 in Creswell, 2012). Is it possible for mainstream institutional settings to transform their spaces in order to accommodate the needs of Black young adults?

Though critical race theory offers a framework that supports my research, there are tensions that are important to consider. In his text entitled "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?" Derrick Bell (1995) explains that a majority of critical race theorists are people of colour (Bell, 1995 in Bergerson, 2003). Furthermore,

Bergerson (2003) highlights the tension that White scholars have had when seeking to engage with critical race theory as they are viewed as outsiders. Due to the fact that White scholars have been historically discouraged from participating in critical race scholarship, Subotnik (1998) speaks about the cynicism that may be present among White audiences and suggests that this cynicism may have caused critical content to be questioned or rejected. Subotnik (1998) also explains that this tension may be the reason behind the lack of influence critical race theory has on public policy. Still, in the text entitled “The Equity Myth: Race, racialization and Indigeneity in Canadian universities” readers are reminded of the reality that scholars who are racialized continue to be marginalized in the realm of education (Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, James, Li, Ramos, & Smith, 2017).

Therefore, when completing my research, it is crucial that I consider the tension at hand, and consider how they may impact how my work is perceived and taken up by academics and members of society. Though I am aware of the tensions that exist, I remain compelled to frame my work around critical race theory because of its explicit commitment to social justice and intent to challenge dominant ideology. (Solorzano, 1997, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, in press; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000 in Daniel Solorzano, Miguel Ceja and Tara Yosso, 2000).

...

-CHORUS-

They hate my skin cause its black
But they love the way that i rap
They hate my skin cause its black
But they love my rhymes cuz its crack
I love my skin cause its dark
Rap god from the start
I love my skin cause its dark
Melanin work of art
Melanin work of art
Masterpiece from the start
They tried to keep us in the dark
Still find a way to top chart
Still find a way to top chart
Melanin work of art
They love the way that i rap
But they hate my skin cause its black

- VERSE 1-

Dont know what they told you before
But im here to kick down the door
Im here to wake that ass up
Im here to wake the mass up
Im here to take the mask off
Here to take flight and blast off
Why they hating on brotha
Why we hating on each other

Why you hate your skin colour
But you got it from your mother
I got love for my family
Oh they hate that, they cant stand me
If you cant stand, then sit down
Love will make its way round
Everyday i love my son
Yeh he was born with the crown
Everyday, everyday
They watch me like anime
Now watch me demonstrate
The darkness i penetrate
With the light at the pearly gate
The school of life educate
Educate educate
They just taught us how to hate
Separate separate
Like if im real then your fake
I want the pie and the cake
They see my style try to take
Smile in your face, stab your back
Born a God, no looking back
-CHORUS-
They hate my skin cause its black
But they love the way that i rap
They hate my skin cause its black
But they love my rhymes cuz its crack
I love my skin cause its dark

Rap god from the start
I love my skin cause its dark
Melanin work of art
Melanin work of art
Masterpiece from the start
They tried to keep us in the dark
Still find a way to top chart
Still find a way to top chart
Melanin work of art
They love the way that i rap
But they hate my skin cause its black

VERSE 2-

They want me to give up
But ill never give a fuck
Im a smart black man
Masterpiece, master plan
Work of art, yeh im priceless
Want me in the dark like bat man

Alegory of the cave
You still shleep, i cant save
Like the flow, they ride the wave
You got to hear, but no shave
Im getting the money abroad
They still hating on me, Oh god
Born to do nothing but win
Disadvantage colour skin
They cut our cake, cut it thin

I still ball above the rim
Pretty girl and her friend
I roll up like roll up the rim
Oh no they cant stop this
Oh no they cant top this
I like women like cars
I like em even better Topless
That melanin, watchu thought
Just a black man from the block
My raps cold but they hot
Thats why im headed to the top
Im the cream of the crop
Got the rap game on lock
Smile in your face, stab your back
Born a God, no looking back

•••

Chapter Three: A Review of the Literature

The following work offers a critical review of the literature that has been previously been researched on the topic of Black young adults and their engagement with poetry. Though past literature highlights several different types of poetry and ways in which the art form can be taken up, this thesis seeks to explore the art of written poetry, spoken word poetry, and the art of rap. To begin, a brief history of written and spoken word poetry, and rap as a form of poetry will be provided as outlined by several scholars. The latter half of this work will explore some of the ideas and themes discussed in literature that has previously covered the topic with the purpose of identifying if and where there are gaps within the research. When thinking critically about poetry in relation to Black young adults, we create opportunity to consider how social work as a profession can include the information discussed within our work.

Spoken word poetry has roots in the oral traditions of African cultures and takes on traditions of oral poetry used in the ancient days (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Also, referred to as "Performance Poetry", oral poetry was used greatly during the Civil Rights era (Parmar & Bain, 2007 p. 131). When considering the foundation of the art form, it is evident that the Black arts movement of the 1960's and 70's was influential in the development of the activity of spoken word (Weinstein & West, 2012; Smethurst, 2006; Smethurst, 2005 in Desai, 2017). In the 1960's, writers such as Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka penned and performed poetry with the purpose of reflecting on the experiences of their communities in order to

create social change while liberating those who suffered at the hands of injustice (Rambsy, 2013). An example of this type of poetry is seen in Amiri Baraka's poem entitled "Why is We Americans" performed on season 1 episode 4 Def Poetry Jam; a spoken word showcase hosted by hip hop artist Yasiin Bey:

Bu-de-daaaa. Bu-de-daaaa. Bu-de-daaaa. Bu-de-daaaa. Bu-do-do. Be-De-De-De-Bu-De-Bu-Bup-Boo-Boo.

What I want is me. For real. I want me and my self. And what that is is what I be and what I see and feel and who is me in the. What it is, is who it is, and when it me its what is be...I'm gone be here, if I want, like I said, self-determination, but I ain't come from a foolish tribe, we wants the mule the land, you can make it three hundred years of blue chip stock in the entire operation. We want to be paid, in a central bank the average worker farmer wage for all those years we gave it free. Plus we want damages, for all the killings and the fraud, the lynchings, the missing justice, the lies and frame-ups, the unwarranted jailings, the tar and featherings, the character and race assassinations. historical slander, ugly caricatures, for every sambo, step and fecht flick, we want to be paid, for every hurtful thing you did or said. For all the land you took, for all the rapes, all the rosewoods and black wall streets you destroyed. All the mis-education, jobs loss, segregated shacks we lived in, the disease that ate and killed us, for all the mad police that drilled us. For all the music and dances you stole. The styles. The language. The hip clothes you copped. The careers you stopped. All these are suits, specific litigation, as represent we be like we, for reparations for damages paid to the Afro-American nation.

Bu-de-daaaa. Bu-de-daaaa. Bu-de-daaaa. (Baraka, 2002 in Simmons, 2010).

In his piece, as he took the stage Baraka began poetic ensemble with a melodic hum. Soon after, he had the audience applauding and snapping their fingers in agreement. Although often differing in style, content and delivery, rap as a form of poetry has also been influential to its listeners. In 1979, the Sugarhill Gang's simple but catchy lyrics "I said a hip hop the hippie the hippie- To the hip hip hop and you don't stop" would start a trend that would turn out to be one of the largest

genres of music. Later, several forms of rap emerged, some mirroring the catchiness of the Sugarhill Gang, and others being like Baraka who used the art form as a means of spreading a political message. Still, according to Charry (2012, African oral traditions that existed centuries ago including chanting, public speaking, storytelling and reciting may have had an impact on modern day rap.

A rapper known specifically for using poetry for political means is Tupac Shakur, son of Black panther Afeni Shakur. On November 25, 1989 in an interview rapper Tupac spoke about the creation of a political group made up of young Black youth and young adults "The New African Panthers." When asked to describe his new group the poet responded by stating the following:

Many of our songs are politically oriented. Our raps are not the sorry-story raps everyone is tired of. They are about what happens in the real world. Our goal is to have people be able to relate to our raps, making it easier to see what is really happening out there. Even more important, what we may do to better our world (Interview recorded in Joseph, 2006).

In his interview, he shares lyrics from his song "Words of Wisdom". Similar to his other songs, these lyrics speak to Tupac feeling regarding his experience of being Black in an oppressive society. By use of the word "We", he takes the position of a spokesperson for his community:

"This is for the masses the lower classes
The ones you left out, jobs were givin', better livin'
But we were kept out
Made to feel inferior, but we're the superior
Break the chains in our brains that made us fear yah
Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us

Honour a man that who refuses to respect us
Emancipation, proclamation, Please!
Nigga just said that to save the nation
These are lies that we all accepted
Say no to drugs but the governments' keep it
Running through our community, killing the unity
The war on drugs is a war on you and me
And yet they say this is the Home of The Free
But if you ask me its all about hypocrisy
The constitution, Yo, it don't apply to me
Lady Liberty still the bitch lied to me
Steady strong nobody's gonna like what I pumpin'
But its wrong to keeping someone from learning something
So get up, its time to start nation building
I'm fed up, we gotta start teaching Chaldean
That they can be all that they wanna to be
There's much more to life than just poverty
This is definitely ahhh words of wisdom
AMERIKA, AMERIKA, AMERIKKKA
I charge you with the crime of rape, murder, and assault
For suppressing and punishing my people
I charge you with robbery for robbing me of my history
I charge you with false imprisonment for keeping me
Trapped in the projects
And the jury finds you guilty on all accounts
And you are to serve the consequences of your evil schemes
Prosecutor do you have any more evidence. (2Pac, 1991, Track 6).

On the album “2Pacalypse Now,” Shakur was determined to release rap that would highlight the everyday realities he and others faced in his community. On this album Shakur spoke about the police brutality he was a victim of, a song for children in foster care and teenage pregnancy (McQuillar & Johnson, 2010). An analysis of past poets, exemplifies the reality that poetry has been has been a site of enlightenment, encouragement and education. Though poetry has been taken up in several different ways by different people, the power it has to influence communities can be seen in its steadily increasing popularity.

Present Day Poetics

It appears that young people are seeking out and are being encouraged to engage with poetry in a number of ways and in a variety of settings (Jocson, 2007). As noted by Jocson (2011) topics that are usually covered by Black youth and young adults are “voice, identity, citizenship, and leadership in the twenty-first century” (p. 154). Desai’s (2017) works describes spoken word as having “a borderland discourse (Blackburn, 2005) that sheds light on issues of identity, race, gender, sexuality, poverty, and politics. It provides a countervoice to the political hegemony that holds da hood down. It is a form of resistance discourse that “educatains” the audience because you gettin’ your learnin’ on while having fun” (p.9). In accordance with Weinstein & West (2012) spoken word poetry with youth has often been associated within the school setting. In recent years, educational settings have begun incorporating spoken word poetry into the classroom by having workshops for students (Weinstein & West, 2012;

Smethurst, 2006; Somers-Willett, 2005). Landson-Bilings concept entitled “culturally relevant pedagogy” encourages the use of spoken word poetry and hip-hop as a means of improving the learning of adolescents (Alexander- Smith, 2004, p.59). In accordance with Gosine & Tabi (2016), hip-hop has the “capacity for strengthening marginalized communities, constructing affirming social identities, and inspiring activism” (p. 445).

Although the education system has begun incorporating spoken word poetry in the classroom setting as a means of engaging students, it is important to question the quality of what is being brought into the classroom. It is crucial to note that due to the lack of opportunity for creativity and cultural diversity in the classroom, youth have begun looking for spaces outside of school to express themselves (Jocson, 2007). For instance, Reyes' (2013) work discusses how spoken word poetry is being used by youth in academic settings. Readers learn about the author's ongoing battle to create and maintain spaces for youth where they can share their voices. Although this is important, it is also necessary to consider the reality that there may be external barriers that Black youth and young adults face when seeking to access these spaces. Because of the marginalization that Black youth and young adults face in and out of the classroom, it should not be assumed that their experience of engaging with spoken word poetry has the same benefits in every setting and that their desire to create and perform is enough to have them engage with the art. The work by Rodriguez & Brown (2009) begins the conversation about barriers by discussing the limitations that may also be a

reality when individuals share their voice. Particular questions within this research will aim to shed a light on some of these barriers as defined by the youth and young adults themselves.

As highlighted by Somers-Willett (2005) the spaces that youth and young adults engage with poetry are expanding beyond the classroom to include bookstores, pubs, and local cafes. Research has highlighted the experience of professionals creating spaces for youth and young adults to create and share poetry. Today, there are several community organizations that continue to host events and create spaces for youth to engage with spoken word poetry (Weinstein & West, 2012; Jocson, 2007).

However, in February of 2015, King's article entitled "*Behind the art – the struggle to support young artists*" readers gain invaluable knowledge about the difficulties experienced by youth and organizations in Toronto who seek to engage and create opportunities for youth to access arts programming. As described by the director of operations at the Toronto Arts Council, the arts are often "perceived as a frill, it's perceived as a nice to have, not an essential" (King, 2015). Although King's article does not speak specifically to the experience of Black youth, an article more recently written by the Toronto Star highlights the ways in which the province has strategized to "close gaps" for youth in the Black community as Black youth and young adults are "More likely to be in the care of Children's Aid [Society]. More likely to drop out of high school. Less likely to attend college or university" (Rushowy, 2017). When looking specifically at this

Black Youth Action Plan, there are many references made to improving and implementing programming that will benefit Black young adults within the province. Art, including poetry should not be left out of this plan when we consider the benefits poetry has on Black young adults.

As identified by Sparks and Grochowski (2002), for instance, spoken word poetry has been said to offer youth and young adults the opportunity to not only write their narrative, but express it in ways suitable to them. Through spoken word, youth are doing much more than reading their words aloud, youth engaged in this type of poetry are also actively learning to understand who they are in relation to their environment and using their own life stories to create political statements (Sparks & Grochowski, 2002). In Smith & Kraynak's (2009) text entitled *"Take the mic: The art of performance poetry, slam, and the spoken word"*, it is evident that those engaged in spoken word are not only encouraged to share their poetry out loud, but do so in ways that can change their environments:

Please don't be one of those soul-sucking zombie poets. Reach deep inside, pull out your pulsing heart, and fling it on the stage. Make the audience listen. Grab it by the throat...figuratively speaking, of course. Use your voice, your eyes, your body, your heart, your soul, and your mind to fire to life the passion, sense and subtiles of the poetic words you toiled over past midnight, Make faces, stomp, gesture, whisper, yell! Be the fool, the prophet, the lover, the king, or the kangaroo your poem demands you to be. Do whatever it takes to capture the crowd's attention. Keep it entertained, and communicate your poetry though professional impeccable performance (Smith & Kraynak, 2009, introduction page).

In slam poetry settings, where individuals share spoken word poetry, the belief has often been that these spaces are only competitive in nature, However, as

identified by Smith & Kraynak (2009), this is not always the case. On the contrary, it is also crucial to consider the sense of community that often arises from these creative spaces.

Research on the topic of poetry in relation to Black young adults is extensive. When we consider the poets of the past there is proof that poetry as a means of expression is something that has been present within society for several years. Still, in society today there are individuals who continue to engage with poetry. The following portion of this work will seek to analyze some of the reasoning behind this constant engagement.

Purpose of Poetry

Although it is evident that Black youth and young adults have been engaging with the art form, in various spaces, it is necessary to consider what Black youth and young adults face as they engage with spoken word in institutions they are a part of. In her book *“Youth poets: Empowering literacies in and out of schools”*, Jocson (2008) indicates that "Poetry is a timeless, valued form of expression" (p.700). However, it is crucial to consider the fact that several forms have been frowned upon and only certain types of poetry have been widely valued by society (Parmar and Bains, 2007). For instance, although there has been an increase in spoken word poetry being integrated in the classroom, it is crucial to note the way in which poetry has often been excluded from educational settings (Parmar and Bains, 2007). Specifically, because of the emphasis on poetry being

performed, many individuals in academia have considered spoken word poetry to occupy a lower status in comparison to other forms of literacy; some scholars have even failed to recognize spoken word as form of poetry at all (Parmar and Bains, 2007). In recognizing that spoken word poetry as a literary form has been denied by academics, while acknowledging the reality that Black youth and young adults are marginalized in society it becomes clear why their experience with poetry may differ from their counterparts.

Furthermore, though not always accepted or valued, research indicates that youth and young adults continue to engage with the art form of spoken word, slam poetry and rap (Low, 2011; Jocson, 2008). Additionally, although we know that spoken word poetry and slam poetry have become international activities, much of the current research is situated in the United States of America (Somers-Willett, 2005). In Clarke's (2012) text entitled "Basodee: An Anthology Dedicated to Black Youth" readers are provided with a glimpse of spoken word poetry and Black youth and young adults in a Canadian context. Clarke's (2012) text allows Black youth and young adults to express through poetry what it means to be a Black Canadian. In her work, Clarke (2012) allows those who contribute to share their experiences in essay format, stories and poems. It is in the autobiography of each artist placed at the end of the book, where readers are able to gain perspective on why an individual has decided to share their thoughts in their desired format. For instance, teacher and contributor Michael "Mikeraphone" Grandsoult has used poetry in its various forms "as a bridge for

learning and strives to promote passion and literacy” (Clarke, 2012, p.119). This idea which proves that Black young adults are being intentional about why they write which is consistent with Ginwright's (2007) text entitled "Black Youth Activism and the Role of Critical Social Capital in Black Community Organizations.” Within this text, Ginwright's (2007) counters the negative beliefs held about Black youth and young adults in society and demonstrates that these youth and young adults carefully consider their actions. Similarly, in Fields, Snapp, Russell, Licon, & Tilley's (2014) text readers learn that not only are youth and young adults considering their use of poetry, but many are also deliberate about the topics they discuss.

Sinding, Patton & Warren (2012) demonstrate how the arts can be paired with social justice work in their text entitled Social work and the arts: Images at the intersection. Throughout the literature, this concept of social justice is continuously mentioned. For instance, within Clay's (2006) work, an extensive history of how youth have used this art form as a means of doing social justice work is provided. Similarly, Stovall's (2006) work considers how social justice can be taught by using poetry and discusses the impact poetry of all forms can have on society. Though social justice may be guiding some Black young adults to engage with poetry it cannot be assumed that all young Black people engage with poetry for the same reasons. The more efficient way would be to ask Black youth and young themselves.

Jocson (2006) is one scholar who highlights the importance of seeing “poetry as practice, process, and product” (p.701). Within Jocson’s (2006) text, highlights how poetry is being used for purposes other than social justice. It is through poetry that individuals are able to explore their experiences (Bordelon, 2006 in Sinding et al, 2012). In Jocson’s (2008) text this reality is noted, but taken further as she explains that through poetry youth are able to share the truth (Jocson, 2008). Beyond sharing the truth about their surroundings, youth who engage with poetry are given an opportunity to further understand and construct their sense of self in relation to their surroundings (McCormick, 2000 in Jocson, 2008). To express this reality, author of the article entitled “From poetry to rap: The lyrics of Tupac Shakur” Edwards (2002) uses poet Tupac Shakur as an example of someone who spoke about his identity and how his surroundings impacted his work (Edwards, 2002). An example can be seen in Tupac's poem "The Rose that Grew from Concrete" as he uses poetic techniques to describe his reality:

Did u hear about the rose that grew
from a crack in the concrete?
Proving nature's law is wrong it
learned 2 walk with out having feet.
Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,
it learned 2 breathe fresh air.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
when no one else ever cared! (Shakur, 1999).

In this poem, Tupac uses metaphors to tell his story. In Adam Bradley's (2009) book "Book of Rhymes the Poetics of Hip Hop", the idea of using metaphors is also discussed as the idea of wordplay is described to the reader. As a central

component of rap, various forms of word play are used by the artist. In accordance with Bradley (2009) "wordplay comes in dozens of varieties, each with an explicit function in language and thought. Together they serve as an essential purpose for the rap poet, empowering them to fashion new connections between familiar words and ideas" (p. 92). In the example above, Tupac uses a metaphor to describe his own experience of living and growing in what he refers to as "the ghetto".

When considering the work of Tupac and other artists, spoken word poetry can be considered to be "a site/sight of resistance, reflection and rediscovery" (Desai, 2010, p.1 in Alim, Baugh and Bucholtz, 2011, p. 135). While actively resisting marginalization in society, the use of poetic techniques like metaphors allow individuals to express complex and ideas in an indirect and artistic way (Furman, Downey et al., 2008 in Sinding et al, 2012).

Tupac was not alone in his use of wordplay; within his text, Bradley (2009) also shines a light on artists like Immortal Technique, Eminem, Nas and Common to be skilled lyricists. Although there are similarities between Tupac and these other rappers, research demonstrates the fact that male poets like Tupac Shakur are often used as examples of the Black youth and young adults who are engaging with poetry Alim, Baugh and Bucholtz (2011). However, it is crucial to note that the experiences of Black male youth and young adults may not exactly mirror the experiences of other members of the Black community.

Furthermore, in Jocson's (2006) text, the experience of young women who identify as women of colour was described (McCormick, 2000 in Jocson, 2006). Through the use of poetry, these women expressed the ways in which they have struggled to challenge the misrepresentation of their identities as they had often been objectified. Still, there are female rappers who despite this continue to use rap as a form of expression. Rap legend MC Lyte recalls an experience when she was a younger as she stated "I was like, how else can a black girl of my age be heard all around the world? I gotta rap." For rappers like MC Lyte, poetry became a necessary avenue for expression in ways that other forms of communication would not allow (Bradley, 2009).

In accordance with Furman et al (2008 in Sinding et al., 2012) poetry has been used as a means of transforming minds from seeing particular people or things in stereotypical ways (Furman, Downey et al., 2008 in Sinding et al., 2012). In Hoffman's (2001) work entitled "Traacherous Laughter: The Poetry Slam, Slam Poetry, and the Politics of Resistance" the author explains the multiple techniques used by poets as a means of critiquing the negative beliefs in society including metaphorical language and humour. In a society that has constantly silenced the experiences of Black youth, this avenue for expression can provide Black youth and young adults with the support, feedback and validation needed in order for one to feel as though they are being heard (Low, 2011). Additionally, it is within these spaces where the audience, which may consist of

other Black youth and young adults, are able to learn about topics that relate to them and also become active in sharing their opinions and thoughts on the matter.

Though Black youth continue to express themselves and find innovative ways to share their work, it is likely that because of marginalization their voices will still go unheard in dominant spaces. Tyson (2002) explains that though the poetic genre of rap and hip-hop has attempted to prioritize the voices of those marginalized, the negative portrayal of these genres may be one reason the art form has not been widely accepted in society. In the past when poetry has been valued, it has been in the format of written text. When alternative ways of engaging with poetry have been used as a means of sharing knowledge, there has been resistance in society because these alternative means of communicating does not fit the normative model. In Gregory's (2008) work entitled "The Quiet Revolution of poetry slam: The Sustainability of Cultural Capital in the Light of Changing Artistic Conventions" he explains the model of slam/spoken word poetry and explains society's resistance by using the concept of "cultural capital" as it was created by Pierre Bourdieu in 1984:

to refer to the cultural currency, embodied in language and conventions, which is associated with high status groups in society. The richer an individual's cultural capital, the more he or she can be said to have absorbed the dominant culture. Bourdieu theorized that certain genres and art forms are perceived as being more 'legitimate' than others. Individuals with high status acquire tastes for and competencies in these 'legitimate' arts, giving them power over members of lower status groups, who lack such competencies. They maintain this powerful position by restricting access to cultural capital (p.4).

When considering this concept, it becomes evident why slam/spoken word poetry has not widely been accepted and valued. Racism in society has led to certain peoples' lives being valued over others. Not only are the lives of Black people less valued than whites, but because of marginalization their voices are often ignored. Therefore, even if the voices of Black young adults are shared, due to the oppression that exists in society their voices continue to be valued less in comparison to their counterparts. In Harris' (1993) text whiteness is said to be a "treasured property in a society structured on racial caste" (p.1713). Though whiteness can be considered to be invisible, it still remains to be a powerful force within society. Harris (1993), identifies that whiteness has been seen to be the societal norm. When considering this, it is evident why certain forms of poetry such as rap and spoken word written and performed by Black young adults that do not fall under the category of "whiteness" would fall short when considering cultural capital. Still, it is important to continue to challenge what knowledge is considered valuable in society and ask questions about why a piece of work or art has come to be valued (Jocson, 2008). Jocson (2008) encourages her peers and students to question which poets have been deemed "classic" and indicates that it is usually the voice of "dead white men" (Muller & the Poetry for the People Blueprint Collective, 1995 in Jocson, 2008, p. 701). These are also lessons that can be acknowledged by social workers who aim to create spaces for those marginalized to be heard. Beyond the reasoning behind why Black youth and young adults engage in poetry not being shared, and the lack of Canadian

literature on the topic; there is a lack of literature that is specifically rooted in social work frameworks. While filling in the gaps found in the current text on the topic, my research also aims at explicitly bridging the gap between various forms of poetry and social work with Black youth and young adults.

•••

cold, dark nights
where I was no where to be found
leaving my loving mother worried
asking herself, how?
In 2003, I was a thief for Halloween
Stealing, causing a commotion and creating a scene
throwing rocks at the innocent
laugh back at those times I reminisce
that night,
I made a big mistake
see the cops pulled up and I could've ran away
but I chose not to
that choice left me in a cell overnight singing the blues
left in there for hours
until my father picked me up
sitting in the passenger seat, left us both feeling distraught
when we got home,
we, fought angrily, silently
and all this happened at the age of 12
I wasn't even 13
on another cold, brisk November night
I had left myself in fright

earlier my boys caused mischief that night
assaulting another youth
I remember kicking him in the face with my boot
I got home later to hear the police wanted me???
Oh shoot!
See I knew what I did
but, no way was I going back to the bin
But they wanted to see me the very next day
And after school I took my precious time getting on the subway
I walked through the doors as nervous as a thief
there were thoughts going through my head
and times I couldn't breathe
until I was arrested
something I didn't foresee
then the officer sat me in the cell
and for the next 12 hours I went through hell
I cried, I tried to get some help
but then I realized there was no one left
and within that cell
I lost myself
I was stuck in that cold and lonely cell until later on the next day
I was transported downtown
in the early morning
I had my picture and my finger prints taken
and before my eyes
my life was soaring
I stayed handcuffed until four in the morning
it was hard to overcome the fear

I felt my life and self-esteem dripping through my tears
I made a few peers but found out for them
it was the means to an end
some were going in there for 2, 3 years some even 10
I was so surprised I remember closing my eyes
only to wake up in a puddle of my very own cries
so after that I tried and tried and tried (x2)
but I still never realized that my life was a prize
as long as the spirit of the most high lives inside
it doesn't matter how big it's size
as I write to you today to tell you about my experience
to free my mind from inner irritant
if I could change my life there would be no replacement
I had court dates for every day and although they were
brief it was one step closer to removing my mother's grief
so she prayed and prayed and prayed (x3)
until her son was free
walking and grimacing on both arthritic knees
after this experience

I widened my eyes
and was filled with sorrow
just trying and trying (x2)
and doing and doing (x2)
to live a better tomorrow - Randell Adjei

•••

Chapter Four: Methodology, Design and Methods

As a means of understanding the data collected, narrative theory as a methodology can be included in the analytical framework. As discussed in Riessman & Quinney's (2005) text, narrative approaches pay special attention to "sequence and consequence: events that are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997; Riessman, 2004 in Riessman & Quinney, 2005, p.394). Therefore, the focus is not only on what is said, but also *how* and *why* it is being said in that particular way (Payne, 2015). When analyzing data social science research also consider the context in which a person is speaking and understands that what is being said can change based on the cultural, social and historical space in which an individual is situated (Hunter, 2010). When hearing from multiple participants and inviting them to share their stories through interviews, researchers are able to capture multiple stories rather than presenting one "grand narrative" (Grbich 1999: 57 as cited in Hunter, 2010).

Guided by critical race theory and narrative methodologies, this research gathered qualitative data as a means of exploring the central question of why Black youth and young adults engage with poetry. To complete this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young Black poets within the Greater Toronto Area and surrounding communities. In order to answer the central question, several areas of inquiry were considered while completing interviews with each participant. To explore these areas of inquiry, there was

specific questions asked by the researcher geared towards learning more about the participant's poetic journey.

Recruitment and participants

Multiple methods of recruitment were used in order to obtain participants for this study. One method that was used as a means of accessing participants included an email recruitment script (Appendix 1). These scripts were sent to the holder of the participant's contact information. Several community organizations and community leaders who work alongside Black youth and young adults were contacted to be informed about the study and sent the recruitment email to potential participants on behalf of the researcher. There was also a poster recruitment used to access participants (Appendix 2). Community leaders were asked to post the recruitment poster on social media and within the spaces they work from. To maintain participant confidentiality, every individual interested in being a part of the study was asked to respond directly to the contact information listed on the recruitment email/ poster.

Another means of recruiting participants was through a direct participant email (Appendix 9). Direct recruitment letters were sent to individuals in my social / artistic networks who I knew may be engaging with poetry and may be interested in being involved in the study. In the end, there were eight Black adolescents who agreed to be part of the research. The research participants included four self-identifying females and four self-identifying males. In their interviews, the

participants shared their narratives about why they began writing and performing poetry and why they have continued to engage or disengage with the art form.

Methods

During the recruitment process, all youth and young adults who were invited to take part in the study were given the opportunity to decide how they would like to have their voice heard and presented. Individuals were asked if they would prefer being interviewed to answer a variety of questions around the research topic or if they would rather contribute a personal poem that expressed their views on the matter. Participants who agreed to take part by way of completing interviews were involved in an interview that ranged from 45 minutes to an hour in length. To meet the accommodation needs of those who wished to be involved, the option of completing the interview over the phone or through online video calling or in person was offered. Those who agreed to take part in an interview were involved in the decision as to where interviews would take place. Suggestions including community offices, public libraries, or local coffee shops in which the participant identifies to be safe were made by the researcher. Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded as a means of collecting data for the final research and asked to sign the consent form (Appendix 3) agreeing to this before the interview process began. During the interview process, participants were asked to answer a number of questions related to their engagement with poetry.

Your age now?

When did you begin writing poetry? (specific age, life experience)

How or why did you begin writing poetry?

Has your reason for writing poetry changed during your time as a poet? If so, how?

Some people say as a Black youth/young adult they write poetry to affect their communities - would you say this is a part of your purpose for writing? If not, what would you say you are more focused on?

Are there common themes in your work? How would you describe them?

[If relevant] Why are these themes so important to you? Is there something specific about poetry that helps you express these themes?

Have you ever shared your poetry with anyone or do you usually choose to keep your work personal?

[If relevant] When you have shared your work, what has that experience been like for you?

[If relevant] What has the response of your work been? (Community, Peers)

What are the plans you have for your poetry in the future?

Can you think of any barriers that may arise as you attempt to fulfill this vision?

Is there something important I forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience with poetry?

Once each interview was completed all transcripts and letters of consent was securely stored during the analysis process.

Chapter Five: Findings

One of my earliest experiences with poetry came from the artist Tupac Shakur. In his poem "Concrete Rose", Tupac uses the image of a rose growing out of the concrete to describe his experience of thriving despite his surroundings. Following the trend Tupac initiated, in this research as the interviews are analyzed, participant's names have been replaced with flower pseudonyms in order to keep their identities concealed. The pseudonyms that will be used are Lily, Zinnia, Cosmos, Yarrow, Sage, Sunflower Lotus and Aster.

There were eight Black young adults who engaged in this research. Though the participants all met the same eligibility requirements, no one narrative was the same as another. Still, when analyzing each interview, it was evident that there were common ideas discussed by many of the participants. In the following portion of this work, the common ideas have been grouped together as themes. The narratives shared by the participants highlighted: poetry being a medium for a release, a form of understanding and shaping their identity, a way in which they could impact their surroundings, a means for entrepreneurship and place where support can and should be offered. I would like to begin by examining the theme of poetry being a release for many of the Black youth and young adults included in the research.

The Release: “A lot bottled up inside”

When analyzing the stories told by the Black youth and young adults who engaged in this study, it is evident that through poetry they were able to experience a release. For some, poetry provided an outlet of release where they were able to empty themselves of particular emotion, others were able to release themselves from a difficult experience. For some, this release looked like a coming out of their current reality and imagining or creating a better alternative for themselves through poetry. In the analysis below, the stories as told by the participants, describe the releases they experienced in more detail.

In beginning the interview process, I believed it was important to ask the participants to describe why they first began engaging with poetry. When asked this question, a common trend occurred as many of the participants began sharing stories of difficult experiences they had endured. Though the circumstances differed for many of the participants, one reoccurring experience that caused the Black youth and young adults to feel as though they needed a release was reactionary to a loss they faced in their lives. One participant, Lily, spoke about the loss of a loved one being “the fuel” behind their decision to write. “The death [of] my cousin. Uhm, again, I didn’t know how to deal with that [or] express it in a vocal manner”. Death was not the only type of loss discussed by the participants. Apart from Lily’s experience, there were other participants who spoke in detail about the grieving process involved in the ending of a relationship with someone they cared for. For instance, Zinnia expressed that poetry as a

means of release was something that was unknown by him until he was encouraged by a friend of his to express how he was feeling through the medium:

I started writing poetry in grade 9, I would say I was 14-15 years old. Uhm [I] had my first girlfriend at-at the time and, she did things that weren't the best, and I was heartbroken, and a friend told me that, if I tried writing poetry I would feel better about myself- ZINNIA

The emotion of feeling “heartbroken” led an individual to recommend poetry as a means of addressing Zinnia’s feelings. This act of writing poetry as a means of release is one that Zinnia continues to engage with. Understanding the freedom that come in the release, motivates Zinnia to share with their peers today.

Throughout the interview process, many other participants spoke honestly about the various life experiences that led them to write. Although Zinnia was encouraged by a friend to write poetry as a form of release, in my interview with Cosmos there is a recollection of using writing as a form of release before knowing that this process was considered poetry:

[W]ell I went through sexual abuse, so, I would write down my feelings, and I'd actually rip up the paper and throw them in the garbage, and I felt that as I was throwing them away that uhm, that those feelings or those emotions were going away with uhm the paper. So, I started writing probably around 13, uhm but didn't really take it into consideration that I would be writing poetry per say until I was about 18 - COSMOS

Cosmos used poetry as a means of enduring a traumatic experience. The act of writing was used as a mechanism to not only identify her feelings, but also release them from her physical body, putting them on paper and separating herself from the experience.

Although Cosmos and Zinnia spoke about very specific events that led to their writing, for some, there is not a specific life experience or event that led them to begin writing, but rather poetry became a form of expression that they choose to integrate into their lifestyle. When speaking with Yarrow, she explained that engaging with poetry on a daily basis was a means of "keeping sane [laughs] in the world". The above statement highlights the reality that Black youth and young adults have recognized the need to release emotions and have made a choice to use poetry as the means by which this is done. This idea of "keeping sane" was also expressed by Sage, another poet who answered the question of why she chose to share her work with those around her:

My purpose for sharing is to get it out of my inside and [to] manage my emotions in the way that I feel like... like helps... it's-it's hard to express what I'm [laughs]... It's getting the emotions out, and getting them in a way that I could look at them and feel not really crazy, but maybe make them into something creative, that other people might relate to- SAGE

Through the act of releasing their emotions through poetry, young adults become capable of seeing their experiences as something tangible and separate from who they are. This participant speaks about "getting the emotions out" and becoming something she can manipulate or control to benefit herself and those around her.

As these youth and young adults discovered that poetry was a useful way to experience a release, they began recognizing some of the consequences that might emerge, should their engagement with the art as a release come to an end. For Zinnia, the idea of maintaining sanity through the use of poetry is crucial to

his wellbeing. He also expresses that refusing to express himself and partake in this release can have immense consequences:

Uhm, I think [some things] uhm are hard to talk about with others. But when you release it by writing or by rapping, [it] gives you an outlet to not hold things in. I feel like if you don't find a release for things that you go through you become bitter, you become miserable and it eats you alive, and [by me] doing writing and doing rapping, I feel like that prevents that from happening - ZINNIA

Zinnia expresses that forms of poetry provide an alternative outlet in comparison to the most common forms of releasing emotions. Within his interview, the participant relates the release that comes through poetry with other alternative methods:

In general I would say, rapping and writing is just like any art form. It's like playing basketball, it's like working out, it's like painting, you know [there are] all different forms of releases that I think is very healthy... I have friends who... didn't have any way of releasing certain things so they keep it bottled up inside [and] the end result that was they went crazy, they had mental breakdowns, they had to be hospitalized for certain things because [they didn't] have outlets, you know, so I feel like you know having that outlet whether it's rapping, writing, painting, dancing, you know, singing, whatever the case may be, these things I think should be more put— this should be pushed more to the forefront because [it's] low-key saving a lot of people's lives- ZINNIA

Considering this statement, although this participant speaks about his own experience, he also speaks to the experiences of his peers in order to further elaborate on his thoughts. When asked to share any final comments on Black youth, young adults and their engagement with poetry, this participant chooses to repeat his belief on what consequences can emerge should a person not release their emotions and experiences. Although Zinnia highlights what he believes can occur should a person not access a form of release, the following statement made

by another interviewee highlights one reason why a Black young adult may feel as though they long for a release. When asked what themes were most prevalent in their writing, this participant explains that poetry has created an outlet where she was able to seek a release from her current reality and consider an alternate way of being and living within the world. As a variation from the most common way in which release has been taken up, Sage speaks about her desire to release herself from a specific physical and mental state in order to move into another more more desirable reality:

“I would say that there’s a—there’s a common thread of wanting to be more — to escape the confines of whatever my present circumstance has me - want to move past the physical, realm the physical pain, the physical appearance, just-I — to move into the soul, to move into things that we can't see. Like, [a lot of the] things that I write [have] to do with trying to...try to deal with the angst of being a soul in a human [body] [and] trying to deal with the, perplexities [of] life and, you know the fact that [the] universe is so big and we're so small but we find our situations to be the most important things in the world and perspective; how one persons' perspective on one thing is just of another, just trying to-I'm just trying to find answers for myself through the things that I write. And also find alternatives ways of being, and alternative like — dreams you know like, it's really escapism for me. [Cause] I write a lot when I'm in a sad sad broken place, and I'm trying to envision something where I can be a happy person, where I can, have the things that I always wanted that, [seem to] be so evasive in this world -SAGE

As seen in the above quotation, and the others highlighted within this portion of the text, many participants involved in the study experienced a desire to acknowledge and get rid of emotions and experiences by finding a release through poetry.

Identity: “I'm not going to be just a statistic right”

In accordance with Andriot and Owen (2012) there are specific identity theories that are crucial to consider when defining the term. Further comprehending the topic of identity expands our understanding and makes it *more evident* that the identities of the Black young adults can be directly impacted by their engagement with poetry in various ways. When considering each interview, many of the stories include narratives that describe how their engagement with poetry provided them with a space to form and understand their identities.

Midway through an interview with Lily, when asked why the themes of "redemption, hope, love" were important for him to write about and share, Lily explains that these themes had a direct impact on his identity. As he wrote about these themes in his poetry he was able to reconsider who he was in relation to the society he lived in. As stated by Lily, this reconsideration of who he really was and capable of being in comparison to what he previously believed about himself led to a reconstructing of his frame of mind. Lily explains that once he recognized who he truly was he was able to think critically about his identity apart from the negative experiences he previously had in society, through this he was able to change the direction of his life. Our conversation around this journey of identity formation is highlighted below:

The reason these things are important to me is because I feel like [these] themes uhm, they changed the course of my life, right? [When] my life was headed down a particular dark path, like there was no hope right? Uhm these particular themes were expressed to me, uhm, through rap and

poetry. Uhm... and they changed my life [inaudible]. They [gave me] hope. It made [me] see a light uhm in the darkness. It made [me] reconsider, uhm decisions I've made in life, or things that [I've] accepted that weren't necessarily true [you know what I'm saying?] Uhm, [these themes made me] realize I have more to offer, that I'm not going to be just a statistic right? Uhm, and so they're extremely important for me to incorporate in my art, in my pieces, because I just always think like, if I thought this way, as a Black youth, as a Black, you know young male, then there's another Black young male out there who has similar emotions. And he just needs to hear something that I have to say, that's gonna change his perspective, and make him take a completely different path in life as opposed to a path of destruction- LILY

The latter half of this conversation highlights a belief held by the participant. Lily indicates that he believes the experiences that shaped his identity as a young Black male may be similar to the experiences that shape the identities of other young Black males in his community. Rather than coming to a place of self-consciousness and then moving forward on his own, during our conversation he identifies how important it was for him to share this message of new identity with other young Black males in his community. Now that he believes that he has "more to offer" and does not need to be a "statistic" he has made it his goal to continue to share his message in the same form in which it was shared with him, rap.

Though Aster believes that other young Black males may relate to his experiences because of their shared identity, in Aster's interview the idea of intersectionality is introduced. Aster explains that although many individuals may share similar parts of their identity, he explains that all parts of a person's identity should be acknowledged in order to get a holistic picture of who that individual is.

This discussion arises when Aster explains that he often feels pressured to only share one portion of his identity through his writing:

Oohh uhh [this is] something I've been struggling with. Uhm. [There's] a theme of race, racism and discrimination. Uhm and there's also a common theme of love. Uhm. I write a lot about love, I believe love exists in so many different forms, and I think what I'm struggling with is, keeping the content ahh very diverse. I don't want to be, [just the poet] who talks about racism, I want to speak on [a] variety of different issues... like I think that within poetry we have this— there's this like notion that you're only supposed to talk about your trauma. You're only supposed to talk about all the negative. And I think it's really important to highlight, not just one part of my identity [uhm] which happen to be race, uhm, but to talk about a variety of different issues. I think, I'm not just a Black guy, I'm, ahh Christian, I'm a former athlete, I'm a crazy romantic. I'm-I'm a lot of different things. I'm Ghanaian, I think all these identities should play a role in my art, uhm and I think everyone has that diverse— uhm intersectional is the word I'm looking for, everyone has intersectionality. [We all have] different ways, our social identities intersect with one another, so when I write specifically about this one particular identity and what I face, within that context of that identity, [I'm] not doing justice to myself, it's about painting a whole, holistic picture. And oh, If I may add, [Sigh] We're— when you focus on just the one identity, you're not progressing anything, like [I] write in an effort to progress, ahh, communities and myself. Uhm when you focus on just one thing you pigeonholing yourself, you're not— like it's the same story over and over again. And it's not helping anyone- ASTER

As a young Black male, although Aster believes it is important to share a message that discusses race, racism and discrimination, he also believes it is important for his poetry to incorporate other topics that also make up his identity. Within this quotation, we see that Aster is self-aware of the many different parts of who he is. Therefore, despite societal pressures to speak about one part of his identity, Aster prides himself in writing and performing poetry that sheds light his various intersecting identities. Aster considers it crucial to urge his peers to also highlight the various parts of who they are. As they do this, Aster explains that

they can avoid being “pigeonholed.” He states that by writing about the various parts of his identity, he is able to progress as an individual as he leads his community into a state of progression.

Similarly, just as Aster felt as though there was a preconceived “notion” about what he should write and perform about, other poets involved in the study also spoke about the expectations other members of society had for them and their poetry in relation to who they were. One participant spoke at length about her experience being a Black female rapper. She explains that although people often appreciate her music as a rapper, she has witnessed people question her identity because of their own personal thoughts and beliefs around what a poet or rapper should look and sound like. In our interview she spoke about her recent experience when some of her social media followers questioned her rap based on her identity:

I hope I'm just able to resonate with more and more people, and I realized that as a female, black rapper, you know I— it's a little bit nichey, right? You know some people just don't expect it, [I've] seen weird comments. I remember one time, I posted my video on my fan page, and these French people... one of them commented on it was like tag their friend, and then the friend commented on it and was like 'Yeah it's dope, but she's a female' and then the next person responded back to their friend and was like 'Yeah, true, but you have to admit she manages' ON MY PAGE. ON MY FACEBOOK PAGE. MY FACEBOOK FANPAGE. These people had the nerve to comment on the fact that me, the message that I had, didn't make sense coming from ME! But 'It's a dope song though!' So I know that the stigma is there, and when you— you know the stigma is there despite the country, I have listeners in France, but half of France might not understand this message coming from me... I try to use that disadvantage to my advantage, but a disadvantage is not an advantage. And you can only pretend that it is- SUNFLOWER

Within this conversation, Sunflower also highlights the idea of intersectionality as she highlights the different parts of her identity; and refers to herself as a female Black rapper. Sunflower goes on to discuss the reality that with this identity also comes expectations and stigma. In accordance with Goffman (1986), stigma is directly related to social identity. In the case of Sunflower, her identity as a Black female is associated with preconceived stereotypes or societal expectations that cause her to be judged by others (Goffman, 1986). Although she attempts to use the stigma around her identity as an advantage, she explains that she knows deep down that stigma in itself is a barrier no matter what way she attempts to reframe.

The conversation about being a Black female and engaging with poetry did not stop there, in a later interview, when asked to share final thoughts on what her identity in relation to her art, Yarrow makes a passionate plea for society to value the voices of Black women who share poetry:

I think that Black women are powerful [and] they have such an incredible way of telling stories, uhm, that in my eyes, differ from all the other ways in which everyone else tells stories. There's uhm, there's a lovingness, sometimes there's anger, sometimes there's hurt, sometimes, there's pain, but there's always compassion. And yeah [and] I hope other people feel the same way when they hear a brilliant Black, Black woman poet do their thing- YARROW

When speaking about herself and other Black female artists, Yarrow provides some descriptive words to illustrate what she believes Black female poets bring to the poetry scene. As she describes characteristics, she goes back and forth by naming traits that would be considered positive and then describing another trait that would be considered to be a negative trait or weakness. Both of these poets

recognize what it means to be a Black women engaging with poetry. They are aware of the expectations that society has placed on them and the stereotypes that exist. By writing and performing poetry they have both been able to respond to criticism and critique both directly and indirectly.

These two participants were not the only individuals who spoke about their gender as a part of their identity and the impact their gendered identity had on their poetic. Lily spoke of being without hope, having a sense that he was going to be ‘a statistic’ – and wanting his poetry to speak to other Black young males whom he imagined have similar emotions. Though he wanted his poetry to speak to other Black males, Zinnia also speaks about his experience of expressing himself through poetry as a male:

Uhm I guess at the time, you know [I was] raised around an environment whereas like you know, [you] shouldn't be trying to express your feelings, or it wasn't... cool to cry or stuff like that, it's like, you got to be tough. So I felt like uhm, doing poetry was preventing my whole aura or ego from happening- ZINNIA

Despite this expectation, Zinnia has gone on to share his poetry in public mediums. He explains that in the past he has shared his work through blog post and Facebook. Although there was a time in which Zinnia’s engagement with poetry was questioned because of his identity, he has resisted the apprehension and continued to write and share his poetry. As seen within these quotations, although sometimes doubted and deterred because of their identities, both males found poetry to be a valuable avenue for expression. As demonstrated by the

participants, poetry became a means by which they were able to resist conceptions about what it meant to be a Black male and encourage their peers to do the same.

Furthermore, when Cosmos was asked to share her final remarks around Black youth and their engagement with poetry, Cosmos explains that she wants society to recognize what she has come to understand: through poetry, she has learned that the clustering of Black youth into one category takes away from the complexities of their identities.

Uhm. Hmmm. I think that Black youth in general are... very misunderstood, because they're clumped together. So one thing that I always like to express is that Blackness is not one thing, and I find that poetry is something that's actually taught me more of that, because I see many Black poets perform, and they don't all perform in the same way, they don't have all the same issues, so I think one thing that I like— would like to highlight in regards to poetry and Black youth, is that, we're not all the same we don't all have the same experiences, and uhm and it's unfair that we are clumped together, because for many other races that's not the case- COSMOS

During the interview, Cosmos explains that although Blackness is often considered to be “one thing”, through her engagement with poetry as she writes and watches other poets perform, she has recognized that Blackness is complex. She goes on to explain that the clustering of Black youth is unfair because this “clumping together” it is not a reality for other races.

When considering identity, another way this theme is highlighted by the participants is self-presentation. Black youth and young adults involved in this study felt it was important to be mindful of who they were presenting themselves to be to the public. This intentional act mirrors the idea of role identity and social

identity as described by Andriot and Owen (2012). In the portions below, we see the way the participant's role identity also impacted their engagement with poetry as their positions in the communities they came from shaped their interactions with others. Finally, we see how social identity; the way a "person's cognition, affect, and personality traits affect immediate person-to-person social interactions" (Introduction, Andriot and Owen, 2012).

When listening to their stories, I heard about the ways in which these individuals are intentional about what types of poetry they share, how they share that poetry and when they share it. Although this process of thinking before sharing was expressed by many of the participants, the reasons why they chose to be intentional varied based on their own lived experiences. When analyzing why the participants were intentional about presenting themselves in a particular way, three reasons were most prominent. First, many of the participants spoke about the need and feeling of needing to be responsible for their use of voice. Some also saw the benefit of presenting themselves in a particular way in order to minimize barriers for themselves in relation to society.

When speaking with Lily during the study, Lily explains that although he began writing to expand his vocabulary, and find himself, the type of content that is now written and released in the form of rap differs than what he once wrote and shared. In our interview, Lily spoke about the fact that he felt he needed to be responsible with what he was sharing with his community because he realized that he had the power to influence others:

When I first started it was about wanting to say something and ahh, just developing a voice. Now it's realizing that I have a voice and choosing what I use that voice for. Uhm, knowing that people do listen to me...I try to be a bit more responsible with my poetry- LILY

This idea around being deliberate and responsible was also seen in my conversation with Sunflower. As a rapper with a diverse audience, when Sunflower does decide to speak candidly about race, there is a lot of thought that goes into how she presents herself and her rap. Sunflower explains that although she wants to speak about particular topics, she does not want to be put in a particular "box" that will limit her from reaching a larger audience. When considering how to present herself and her views through poetic content Sunflower often considers how her ideas will be interpreted by those who hear what she has to say:

Yeah, when it comes to... telling a story from the Black forefront, uhm, at the end of the day, some people are just going to have to listen, and not be able to resonate with it. You can't tell a Black story and encompass other people because they're not Black. Uhm, so you can definitely try to sell a story in a way where the listener will be able to process it and understand, uhm but, [when I] wanna tell a story from the perspective of a Black human, I gotta just take that right from my heart, and I can't really do too much balancing or careful marketing when it comes to that uhm... I wrote a song that I didn't put out thus far, uhm and it talked about you know, police brutality from the Black perspective, and I had to be careful with that song! The reason it didn't come out was because... I had to change the wording because I felt like the wording would be processed differently by different races. And it's weird that that happens but, it's something that I recognize does happen like our social structure, [as] races we see police differently, and so it— although I might be telling a story that's message that's not incorrect in any way, [they'll take the] vast message and target, [and] say that I'm targeting all officers when that was never the case, so I have to manipulate how I say the message based on who the listener is. And... I guess I-yeah I guess you have to do that with gender, you have to do that with race, you have to do that with-with age, you have to do that with country, you have to do that with language.- SUNFLOWER

Although Sunflower has decided to manipulate how she shares her message and goes forward sharing her thoughts, for others, this fear of being wrongly interpreted prevents people from sharing their poetry with the public. This can be seen in my interview with Sage.

When asked to describe one of the barriers for writing and performing poetry, Sage explains that although she enjoys writing and sharing her poetry, because of the content she usually writes about, she considers what she shares with the public in order to protect herself from judgement from outsiders.

Hmm. I think I'm afraid, that if I share, [my] really personal poetry that people will see... as really lost... like really lost. Because — the thing I mean there's a lot of heartbreak and things, in my, in my past and that expresses itself in its words because I'm still trying to figure out why, you know, I can't get this certain guy to like me, or why I always revert to this kind of — why I find myself in this sort of situation, so I'll talk about that stuff and, I don't want people to think of me as like 'oh don't be like [that girl], you know, she still hasn't gotten her shit together after all these years' and it's all so plain in the things that I write about. So... I feel like it's hard enough to make progress, in my main field, which is the art, it's hard enough for me to move the needle forward, like why am I gonna expose myself...why am I going to give the ammo to everyone, even strangers [to] know exactly all the ways that I'm struggling, exactly the ways that I feel insecure, cause, like [that's] what my poetry exposes. So [the] barriers, I don't really wanna mess everything up for myself [laughs]. I don't want to make it harder for myself, like why am I going to do that?! [Laughs]- SAGE

This individual speaks about the fact that her poetry "exposes" who she is and what she is dealing with. For this reason, there is a fear to express her vulnerabilities with others. Sage explains that she chooses to present herself in a specific way that would not provide her audience with the "ammo" to judge her. Sage explains that sharing certain parts of her may create more barriers for herself

as an individual and an artist. Sage's experience is one example of the intentional behaviour that participants in this study actively engage in as they present their poetry.

In conclusion, these quotations taken directly from interviews with the participants highlight the ways in which Black youth and young adults have questioned who they are, actively resisted societal expectations of their identity and responded by creating poetry that exemplifies who *they* believe they are.

Having an Impact: "My intent was to impact"

While some of the participants spoke about creating change in systematic ways, others spoke about the way in which they hoped to create change within the lives of those closest to them. The common idea and word that can be used to describe this desire to create change is "impact." Each participant involved in the study spoke about their intentions behind their poetry. Though many of the Black young adults did not begin their poetic journey with the belief or intent to change their surroundings, during their interviews many of the participants spoke about the changes they have already made in their community and changes they hope to continue to make as they write and perform their work. Within their interviews, the young adults express that they believe they can through poetry: offer instructions for life, change someone's direction in life; remind people that their story matters, bring a community down, or uplift a community.

For many, the decision to use their poetry as a means of impacting others came from the reality that they themselves were impacted by another individual who used the art form. From seeing the way that poetry impacted their life, many participants hoped they too could engage with poetry and have their writing affect those around them. In our interview, when asked why he began writing with poetry Lily describes his childhood experience with different Black poets. It is within this portion of Lily's interview where he explains that he hopes change the thought process of his peers as a means of causing them to change their behaviour, just as he was able to do through the art of and power of poetry:

I mean growing up where I grew up, a lot of these guys, their influence, their idols, their-their heroes were-were black artists, whether poets, or rappers, or singers, you know, that-that's where they got, instructions for life. [Laughs] Right? So, if I could become, something similar, then I can-I can also influence, I can also impact, I can also change the course of-of their thought process- LILY

In his conversation, Lily uses words such as "idols" and "heroes" in order to provide a descriptive example of how influential Black artists were in his community. Though the interviewees don't hold themselves in such high regard, they see the potential to impact their community and make decisions about how they will do so on their own poetic journeys.

While Lily speaks broadly about changing the direction of people's lives in his community through poetry, Lotus is very specific when he explains his intentions. When thinking about his work, and the power of poetry, Lotus has sought to "uplift" his community members. He does this by being intentional

about the content he releases as he recognizes that other poets that his community listens to can be impactful in a negative way:

Uhm... Like I said, empowerment, you know uplifting— especially uplifting my brothers, you know, instead of like talking about shooting and violence and stuff like that, talking about replacing all of that with knowledge and-and you know love, and uhm, you know coming together. Uhm just, community, you know, like community building instead of destroying.

It's important to me because I think, I think like— Black people we're so strong and powerful, like, we have so much potential, you know what I mean? And-and the fact that we're so far away from that? The majority of us are so far away from that, it hurts. And it hurt me, and it made me want to, you know, express myself through poetry, and-and-and say-and say how I felt. You know what I mean, in-in the hopes that it could reach people and change-change their behaviors.

Uhm, but I— the— in the grand scheme of things, I-I just want music in a whole, in— within the Black community to be more positive, you know? And I just want all that dumb stuff they're talking about, like shooting, killing each other, you know, taking these, these drugs that are killing you and not really doing much for you, like I want them to cut all that out like. 'Cause this is-this is stuff that is bringing our community down and not uplifting our community, and this is what, you know the youth are-are— this is what they have So if we change that with— by uhh — with the artists changing you know what they're saying then, that's going to change our-our community and the kids in our community- LOTUS

Within the interview, Lotus identifies why he believes the current poetry presented in rap music is negative for his community. However, Lotus does not stop there, he then goes on to explain what the alternative is and expresses that he is involved in creating this solution. Writing poetry about unconditional love has been particularly rewarding for Lotus as he has been able to share his music with his son. Within his interview, Lotus spoke with great pride about how poetry he wrote to uplift his community has been fundamental in the growth of his relationship between his son and himself.

Similar to the work of Lotus, Lily also speaks about love, but more specifically the love of God. In his work he prioritizes this message, believing that it's a message that can impact other people's lives in the same way that it has impacted his own.

Definitely my— the goal behind my-my music and my writing is to impact the cognitive state of mind, which is where your, you know, imagination is, your intuition, your creativity. Uhm, and you know plant seeds of-of goodness I guess, righteousness, Godliness, if I can get you to subconsciously think of God, in a different way [you know] what I'm saying? Not in-not in the way he might have been presented to you through religious means, uhm, but an honest way, then I successfully done what I've set out what to do, which is to change your mind about God, and make you reconsider God and, reconsider love, you know what I'm saying?- LILY

For Lily, there is a belief that substantial messages can be relayed well through poetry. He even suggests that certain messages may be better shared through poetic means rather than the most traditional ways of sharing. This individual has also been motivated to continue writing and performing with the intention to impact his community. When speaking about his poetic journey this far, he shares one of his most memorable moments. A moment that validated his motivation to create change through poetry:

Yeah so uhh in terms of impact I'd say uhm, I think the first few years, my intent was to impact, but I didn't know how to do that properly, and as-as I grew, and I-and I learned how to uhm I guess be more transparent and more relatable, I've seen uhm, my art impact, uhh my immediate community, and uhh, literally save lives. I had a-an individual message me last year, and say that, you know, my music, saved him from suicide, and I was like wow- LILY

As Lily expresses why he has chosen to use poetry as a means of impacting his community, he speaks passionately about poetry having the ability to “save

lives.” This is crucial to note as it highlights the reality that many individuals who listen to his rap are experiencing things within their lives that have led them to consider suicide. Furthermore, in this quotation, not only do we see that though the use of poetry this individual was able to impact a life, we also learn that the participant believes that there is an opportunity for one to grow in the way in which they impact. Lily speaks about learning how to impact his community as if it was a process or skill that one can develop or improve. This idea of learning how to influence a community through poetry connects to themes of leadership that are taken up later in the findings section of this work and again in the discussion.

Cosmos also speaks about the fact that she too “needed” poetry at a time in her life. Out of this belief, one of her goals for her poetry is to encourage all others to share their voices:

Uhm I would definitely say that, before anybody else, I write poetry for, young Black girls. Because that’s when I— that’s who I identified with when I needed poetry the most, so that is who my focus is, not to say that my stuff is only for them, but when I’m writing that’s usually my mai— like what I see. Uhm, but my main goal with my poetry is to remind people, regardless of their race, regardless of their gender, regardless of what their walk of life is, that their story matters, and that their voice is deserving of being heard- COSMOS

When speaking about who she was in relation to her work, Cosmos understood that her work may resonate more closely with young Black girls because of their similar shared identity and experiences. Still, although Cosmos expresses one of her target audiences, she goes on to explain that she believes her writing in the

form of poetry has the power to impact several members of society regardless of who they are.

While this artist spoke specifically, about impacting several people within her community, some participants were thinking of impact on a smaller scale. For instance, apart from impacting his community with his message of unconditional love, Lotus' main goal is to continue to please his number one fan, his son. As Lotus uses his poetry as a means of impacting his community, he has seen the way in which his poetry through the form of rap has also impacted the bond that he and his son share. This highlights the opportunity found in poetry to create and build meaningful relationships. In his interview, when speaking about the feedback he has received since releasing his latest project:

Uhm, you know, so whoever is interested they have access to it. But I think my number one fan is my son, and that's who I care about the most, and he, he's always asking to hear the songs, so that's-that's what makes me happy and-and, you know , that's-that's pretty much all that matters.

Lotus goes on to explain that his engagement with rap, has allowed him to impact the relationship with his son in a way that greatly differs than the relationship he had with his father when he was younger. When asked about the response he received when releasing his latest rap album, he explains that although he has not received much feedback on his latest released project, the constant feedback he gets from his son pushes him to continue to write poetry and create music.

Uhm it-it-it matters a lot to me because for one I grew up distant— with some distance with uhh with my relationship with my dad, so, so just having my son, you know, being able to enjoy and give that kind of feedback to me, it-it lets me know that, one that, I'm doing something

right. Musically, and just being a dad. Uhh and two, like he-he actually enjoys it, like you know what I mean, he's able to interpret it and I don't know how he's hearing it or whatever but he— what he's hearing, he's enjoying it and it he wants to keep on hearing it and, what I'm saying in my lyrics is positive, so that also adds to it, so I don't mind replaying it replaying it, you know what I mean cause, it's-it's not junk that he's hearing. Yeah I think it has to do with uhh, you know, my history uhh as-as a child and not-not having that— I'm mean— right now with my relationship with my dad is good, uhm, but you know just as a child growing up he— I didn't have him around like that, so for me to see that in my son, it just, it makes me happy.

Beyond making music that his son will enjoying rapping along to, during the interview, Lotus speaks about the pride he feels as he is able to write poetry and create rap music that his young son his able to listen to over and over again, music that is filled with substance and has a message he is proud of. In our interview, he refers to his community members, other black youth and young adults to be his "brothers and sisters." These are the listeners that he hopes to impact through his poetry. Lotus explains that he hopes to influence his community members by making music that will provide them with a sense of being uplifted and empowered:

Right now, definitely that is my focus. I definitely want to-I want to— like I just wrote a whole album and I just made a whole album, and the whole theme of it was unconditional love. So, you could imagine what the-what the lyrics were about, you know what I mean? Like it's more uplifting, and especially towards like my community like, the Black community you know? And trying to empower my brothers and sisters instead of bringing them down, which is what you hear in music, in rap music nowadays, you know?

This statement also highlights the reality that poetry can impact a common dialogue or idea about particular topics within society. As Lotus aims to shift what is presented in Rap music as a means of uplifting and empowering his

community, Cosmos also discusses that on her poetic journey she has been committed to change the dialogue around sexual assault:

There's so many stories of women being sexually abused and they held it as a secret. Uhm and I think that even though people know like there's—there's pi—there's situations where it's been going on in situations in families for years, and years and everybody knows but nobody talks about it. And I personally think you can't deal with something unless you're brave enough to talk about it and put it on the table, so uhm I've heard peo—people have asked me before, like 'Don't you ever get tired of speaking, or writing about sexual abuse?' and the answer is 'No', because there's no answer yet. So until there is a solution, I will not get tired.

Although many of the participants speak about the opportunity to impact people and impact discourse that surround them through the use of poetry, they also take time during the interviews to speak distinctively about some of the risk that exist as they impact their surroundings. For Cosmos one of the risk that she has come across is the risk of being "triggered" by the content she speaks on because of her own past experiences. Still, when she considers the impact that her experience being shared through the means of poetry can have on the lives of others who have faced similar things, she chooses to go on. During her interview, Cosmos speaks about the need to write and perform about difficult topics in order to impact society and have a solution be developed.

Definitely, uhm, for the-the sexual abuse one, it's going to be extremely triggering for me, and that's something for me, and that's something that I experience something often when I'm writing about sexual abuse, is that it's very triggering for me and I have to kind of move past uhm my own triggers, and what moves me past is knowing that it's not for me. It's—part of it is for me, but ma—the main goal is it's not for me, it's for, the eradication of such horrible experiences.

In this portion of the interview, Cosmos speaks about the ways she has learned to cope or maintain her wellbeing while seeking to impact her community. While Cosmos believes that her poetry can aid in the efforts to eradicate horrible experiences people face, Sage would disagree. Sage is one participant who was not devoted to creating some form of change through her poetry. The viewpoint Sage had varied drastically from the viewpoints of others included in the research. Specifically, Sage had a lot to say about why she doesn't associate her work with the ability to impact. She also provided reasons as to why she doesn't agree with others choosing poetry to be the means by which they create change:

Yeah, definitely not. I-I-I feel like that's such a huge burden to put on anyone to like, "affect their community" and I-I almost cringe at people who think that they're like, changemakers because, when I was younger, like I had like that blind optimism that I could change the world, but like as time has-has gone on maybe I'm jaded. But I just feel like it's-it's so — how-how dare you think that — like you could do — You can't really predict what the impact you're going to have on other people is, and just to assume that it's going to be a positive impact just because you standing up and say some words, to me is like-kind of self-centred and kind of like — uh kind of like — what's the word? Like making something more grand than it is. I-I personally think that it's just about... expressing, and sharing what you think and — like I don't think that it's that deep [laughs].

Though, Sage's perspective on the impact poetry can have on community differs from the other participants, her discussion offers some insight into why other poets or members of society may not feel poetry is a suitable way to impact community. Additionally, Sage's thoughts highlights the fact that although "blind optimism" was a reality of her past, where she felt as though she could change the world, her view point is now jaded. Rather than impact her community through

poetry, Sage believes poetry can be used more practically as a means of connecting with community members:

Yeah, just get-getting it out there, just connecting with people, I'd rather just see it as like a connection of like, showing vulnerability, and being like 'Hey I've been here too, and this is where I'm at right now.' And maybe it's kinda artistic, maybe it's kinda, interesting the way that you play with words, maybe it's thought-provoking. But I-I-I wouldn't wanna sit there and think that anything that I, put out could be affecting the community, because they community is like so wide and huge and—[You know], I think more practical things affect the community like, the cost of, I don't know, bread, like what? [More down] to earth things- SAGE

Overall, although many of the young adults do not know how much of an impact their work will have on their communities, they continue to share with hopes of creating a better world for themselves and their others. Just as Sage had her opinion as to why she does not share with the intent to change, Lily expresses his reasoning for not keeping his poetry to himself:

Uhm, I don't keep it personal just because again my-my intent is to enlighten and to-to perhaps share hope, share love, to-to relay a message of-of-of redemption and-and... and of hope, and so uhh I think it'd be pretty selfish of me to keep it to myself when as I mentioned earlier, poetry whether through rap or any other art form was what saved my life. And so uhh, I often believe that if I-that if I keep my art to myself, then I'm-then I'm contributing to-to someone choosing a path of destruction. When as opposed to me— if I share it, you know what I mean, it-it gives them an opportunity to hear it, perhaps relate to it, and then make a different decision. So I don't keep my stuff private I share- ASTER

Furthermore, for Lotus the goal may not be to completely change society, but to write poetry and share it as a means of balancing what types of messages are being spread throughout the community. In his interview, he speaks about the types of poetry that are prominent in society and the impact that that type of poetry has on his peers. One of his biggest barriers is the reality that the most

prominent message that is being spread through rap has been prominent for quite some time. Lotus that as he attempts to create change by using rap, he understands that he will be going against the messages many members of his community have come to value. Thus, although Lotus recognizes that he cannot eradicate that message, he uses his voice to create an alternative sound:

The biggest barriers are... I'd say the biggest barrier is the fact that, you know, for so long, the negative art forms, or the negative poetry a— is sort of has been being promoted (sic) and so uhm, a lot of people don't like change, right? And so just try to bring the same art for, but a different message to a community that's been listening to, embracing and accepting the same art form but with a negative impact for 20 plus years, that's the barrier, so now I gotta find ways to actually get them to listen and-and appreciate the message and-and the art form that I'm trying to share with them. So that's the-that's really the biggest, uhm barrier.

And-and that's the change we want to see. And that-and that, it-it-it could be uhh when you-when you express that love through music, that's-that's powerful, very powerful com— because everyone listens to music, every day, you know what I mean, music is in your ears it's in your face every day. So imagine the-the-the leaders or you know like the big artists today, especially in rap if they're, you know, rapping about positive things, it'll make a lot of difference. If you look back in the like 1990s or the 1980s and you see what they were rapping about, they were rapping about upliftment, and there was so much movements for the Black community that were you know unified, and you know, cer-certain communities didn't like that, so they-they plotted to-to you know create change and you could see the effects of that change now. We're just trying to come out from there- LOTUS

As seen above, many of the poets have impacted their family members, their close peers and communities. In Aster 's interview, he speaks about the reality that humanity as a whole can also be impacted as Black youth and young adults continue to choose poetry to express themselves and create change.

[but I] think uhh, I think we as a people are made up of our experiences and our relationships. And it makes us incredibly unique but at the same

time makes us part of a collective of humanity. Right? And then every time we get to share these stories of our humanity, and— or-or explore these stories, we're progressing humanity. So I think that every time we-we get that opportunity to like, get on stage and to share our truths, ahh we can impact someone whether we know it or not. And I think for me, that's why I do it- ASTER

Entrepreneurship: "It Becomes a Business"

One question asked of the Black young adults who participated in the research was what their future goals were in regards to their poetry. When answering this question, all of the participants spoke with excitement and passion as they shared what is currently transpiring in their lives because of their engagement with poetry and what they have planned for the future. As Black young adults answered the question around future goals, it became evident that many of the participants value the opportunity to own their own business or product, and to lead within their community.

For instance, Lotus expressed that releasing his first body of work felt like a burden lifted off of his shoulders. Though he indicates that he believes it is necessary for him to take a break, he does on to state that he has plans to start his own personal business:

Well right now— like after I released it I feel like I'm just in that taking a break mode. I haven't been inspired to create something new, but I do plan on creating new music. I plan to do more writing, I want to collaborate— like I already have ideas to do a music company, some type of establishment for music.- LOTUS

Lotus speaks about his desire to collaborate and establish something of his own.

What became a way for him to release his anger and strengthen his bond with his son has now become a means by which he hopes to connect with his community and build a business he can lead.

Another individual who spoke about poetry giving them the opportunity to lead in their community is Aster. In our conversation, Aster spoke about the numerous ways he has been able to be a part of facilitating spaces for other youth and young adults in his community to engage with poetry.

Yes. It's been-it's been challenging, I don't think [laughs] there are many things harder than writing books. There's often times what you do on stage, might not translate well. And you have to find that medium. Again, I'm-I'm going to go to Nationals and compete at the Canadian, Festival of Spoken Word. I teach which is really cool, I get to go into high schools and just— I find contracts or just one off workshops with students and they get to write poems, often times for the first time. But's its really just all like cusping of like and help the young people ... be advocates for themselves and things they believe and things they want to write down.-
ASTER

Whether it is through teaching poetry in schools, or travelling to compete, Aster has found a way to turn his passion into something profitable. As he begins writing his book, he describes it to be challenging but explains that he plans to continue to lead.

Yarrow expressed how much of a shock it is for her to have gone from not having enough programming in her community, to now being able to think about her engagement with poetry being the thing that provides her with an income:

I mean it's been ground-breaking it's-it's-it has literally, been ground-breaking, for me, because I never thought in a bagillion years in— never thought in my entire life, that I'd be able to make and inspire to make a living out of poetry. Like that was to me not even, an idea, I thought when I was growing up that I'd either be like a doctor, teacher or actor, it was just one of those three. -YARROW

Yarrow went from believing that she would have to choose a different career path in order to make a sustainable income, to now seeing her poetry as a way out.

Although the opportunity to make money from her craft was not her initial reason for pursuing the art, Yarrow does not back down from the opportunity to be honored financially for efforts:

The way that I tell stories, especially in my poems, they're essentially, short stories and I-and I treat them like short stories. I perform them like poetry, and so, sometimes you know for me, pieces could take for— anywhere from 1 month to 3 months to write and so I think one of the barriers although I no longer— I'm— Thankfully...in a position where, if someone approaches me and wants me to do a performance for free, I could ask them, for an honorarium, and if you're not able to provide an honorarium, I am in a position where I can say no. You know like, my— initially though, I wasn't even thinking of honorariums or getting paid, initially, it was all about like, let me find as many places I can share my stories at, let me find as many places that I can find myself in this, because— it was—it was a hobby and still very much a hobby, but the older I get, the more it becomes a business, the more— of course it becomes a form a living, so you find— and I think this is along the spectrum, it's not really just with race, but I image it all around you know, people, going to-to artists, do the work for free and what—they're so smart they think that—they'll tell you that oh, you know you can there's a lot of exposure, if you come to our event, as if exposure is a form of currency. Uhm you know like, exposure, for me right now, it's you know I can get paid, and still get exposure bruh, like don't come to me with exposure talks, not me, so I'm in a grateful position where I can do that, but in terms of taking it to where I want it to, to go, if I could—if I could travel with my poetry, of course that takes money, and so,— I think that of course money with any forms of business, if you're trying to invest in your business, and you don't have money, it'll be challenging for— to be where you want it to be. -
YARROW

In this quote, Yarrow expresses her frustration around knowing she has the opportunity to be paid for her work, but is being offered "exposure" as an alternative. Yarrow expresses the importance of being paid what she is worth as

she spends a lot of time creating new pieces and perfecting her craft. Apart from Yarrow writing and performing poetry, she too uses her engagement with poetry to engage with her community as takes on many leadership roles. The challenge to balance her professional work and passion for poetry is what pushes her to push for her art to be profitable:

Uhh, I guess the other challenge is just like, you know, in the times where I'm not making a living off the art, I'm making a living through other-through other means and finding the balance. Because I'm not only an artist, I'm an artist educator, I'm a project coordinator working with high school students, I'm still [laughs] I'm still a student I'm trying to balance myself with, being a student, an event coordinator, and all these kinds of things where, where's the time to make the art, if I'm kind of scattered with trying to earn the money? - YARROW

One word that is highlighted in this portion of the interview is the reality that her poetry is a business. This thought is also considered by female rapper Sunflower. In her interview, she discusses what it means to build a business on her own and she encourages other members of the black community to earn a living for themselves through the arts, or other hobbies and interest that they have:

it is always at the end of the day, it is a disadvantage, but I'm trying to fight through, I'm trying to learn my business doing it, and I think one of the most important things— and this is one of the things I try to tell as a message in my music, because I do it myself, is I'm trying to get this money-I'm trying to get this by paying [Sunflower] through [Sunflower], I'm trying to create something, where I can pay myself and, I see a lot of young people doing it today, but I also see a lot of young people not doing it today. And I don't think people realize that one of the goals in life is to learn how to use this evil entity that runs our society that is money to our advantage, to be successful! And from a very young age we should learn how important money is, to live and sustain, and find ways that don't compromise you as a human being to make it, and to consistently have it coming in. Not through somebody else's hands, not where you know—

majority of it goes to taxes, so you can pay your bills, live the life the you want, have kids, do wh— you know, do what you want to do. And I feel like, young Black youth don't get that on a global sense, and I want that to be a more understanding—a more—a more wi— a more widely, recognized understand within the young Black community, specifically the young Black community. I just wish that, that could be something that, you know a narrative of young Black people that, you know that the average young Black person is just kinda you know striving to just make some money for themselves, because at the end of the day, that is ho— what our society functions on, and... you'll never know who you are spending your life trying to find ways to make money working for someone else-

SUNFLOWER

Both of these participants speak about the need for Black young adults to consider finances when engaging with poetry. Beyond earning a living, they both speak to the necessity of actively creating ways to earn an income through their passion for the arts, a way in which they are able to shake up systems that want them to work for free or for less than they deserve. Both these participants also speak with a sense of resistance in their tone and an urgency to be compensated for their work as they encourage other Black youth and young adults to do the same. In the interviews with the participants, it is evident that although the young Black adults have not always begun their poetic journeys with economic considerations in mind, as they engage with the art form they have been able to take on many entrepreneurial endeavours that have the ability to transform their lives in material ways as well as the more commonly considered representational ways.

Support: “Pushed to the Margins”

Though the reasons that Black youth and young adults choose to write and perform poetry vary, a consensus among the participants in this study is the need

for support. When analyzing the interviews, there is a call for support to come from members of their communities. For some, this support is expected from close family members, for others this support can come from fellow poets within the same community, and lastly, some of the participants are calling for those in roles of leadership to offer to support through various means. In the interviews highlighted below, the participants speak about their voices and efforts to engage with poetry not being highly regarded in their community. Some of the participants, express this neglect to be a product of perspectives on the art form, while others express poverty being a constant barrier for their poetic expression.

For many of the participants, their initial experience with poetry took place within the classroom. Although encouraged within school setting, the encouragement they once received has not carried through as they engage with poetry outside of the classroom. For instance, some poets involved in the study who feel as though writing has been beneficial for them have not been encouraged to release their emotions and creativity through the art form for various reasons. One participant involved in the study who engages with several art forms explains that her love for writing as a release has often been dismissed by those closet to her. In her interview, she expresses having to remind her mother of her desire to write and explain that it is an urge that will not waver. When asked how her family and peers have reacted to her writing Sage stated the following:

I mean I think it's dismissive. I-I think — up until recently I told my mom, I said 'Mummy look, I'm a writer' like... that's why I keep wanted to write things even after family members tell me that I should just keep it

to myself, cause, you know i-it's not going to go away, this urge to express is not going to go away- SAGE

Despite the "dismissive" nature by those around her in regards to writing, this artist speaks about the ways in which she has negotiated within her writing experience in order to continue to use the art form as a release. Sage also speaks about times where she was told to take her poetry off social media because of how others may react to it. Although she once shared on several mediums, Sage expressed being selective about where she now shares her thoughts:

Yeah [I think] it's deepened and it's become more of an outlet for me to discuss the things that I-that I feel I can't discuss in a wider area, like you know, in my Instagram stories, when I'm in a really wild place emotionally, then I can share and I can feel like uhm, I like sharing in my stories because the words because It moves quickly, and it's erased by the morning... so it feels [like a] safe place you know, whereas on Facebook, uhm if I was to share something, my mom's gonna probably call me and tell me that I should take it down, or tell me that it's too personal, or tell me that it's you know a-ask me I'm feeling depressed or something when the words are really not there as a cry for help it's just there as an expressive medium, and I just feel like sharing- SAGE

As a writer, Sage expresses feeling dismissed, unappreciated and misunderstood, she expands on this point when she speaks about feeling as though only certain poets are valued:

Yeah, and I don't- I don't feel like people appreciate artists, like, I mean maybe not yet. I think the artists that are appreciated are, you know, like maybe 35, like 40's maybe after they've published like books and things, but I think in the early stages of an artist, you know, you're treated like, the things you're saying are just-are not even worth like anything- SAGE

When thinking about support on a larger scale, the feeling of being ignored remains. In his interview, Lily express a need for the Black community to come together and support the interest of Black youth and young as they engage

with poetry. He says that although there are so many Black youth and young adults within his community expressing themselves through poetry, there is still a lack of support from those who did not engage with poetry themselves in the community:

It's-it's funny because I also feel like, as much as the Black community realizes that, you know, Black youth [and poetry are almost one], when I say one, I mean like they're so many Black youth who express themselves through poetry, yet I also feel at the same time that the Black community ignores that interest, for the Black youth, if that makes sense.

That's another uhm [big] barrier, is to have youth at a young age, who are interested in poetry, who express themselves in poetry, but those interest [are] often ignored, and by the time the Black community kind of wants to pour into them, they've spent so much time destroying that interest, that hope, that it's too late to start pouring into the Black youth- LILY

Lily expresses the idea of a community of Black youth and young adults needing to be "poured into." This idea can also be linked to the lack of emotional and financial investment that is provided to Black youth, young adults and their personal interest. Rather than Black youth and young adults being supported as they choose to engage with poetry, Lily explains that the opposite is occurring. Lily explains that the act of not actively acknowledging the interest of Black youth and young adults is the very thing that is causing their interest to become destroyed.

Yarrow has a similar experience, as she recalls growing up in an area where there was a lack of programming for herself and the other youth in her community. When asked why she began writing she expresses that one of the reasons was because she had a lot of "bottled up" creative energy that she wanted

to release, however; she often had to look far to find spaces that would foster her desire to express herself creatively:

Yeah I think it was like uhm, where we lived? ... I feel like now they're bringing more programs, you know, into the hood. But I remember growing up, that it was more so like, uhh you know, co-the community centre. Uhm. And it was more athletic, where looking back I-I wished uhm, there were more things that were accessible, uhh so that means being free and close by... could have jotted any creative energy, whether it be writing, or-or even playing instruments...I can't speak of course for the entire Black population, but I can speak for, you know, myself growing up, or, uhm that yeah there's just- there's not enough— at the time growing up I feel like for us especially. It's still very much the same now, they are available, but you gotta really dig deep. Uhm there's just not enough, not enough services being provided. And it's because of the simple fact that we—we're facing the barrier of poverty- YARROW

Yarrow links the reason for the lack of support and programming in her community to be directly related to the reality of poverty. As we spoke, she insisted that she cannot speak for the entire Black population but it is evident that other youth and young adults involved in the research feel similarly.

With the lack of support coming from outsiders, but the great number of poets that share a similar experience, when expressing his final thoughts, Aster urged his fellow poets to begin coming together in collaboration:

Uhm. I think this would be a message to the poets, I think, we need we need to stand together, we need to work together. Uhm often times, there's this fear of collaboration. But I think we need to support each other, and we need to write together, and we need to, I mean like if you look at like sports, like athletes work out together, uhm and they're not afraid to do it. Ahh. Tons of people in different fields work together, and I feel like within poetry at times we are afraid to work together, uhh we're afraid to work with people in different cities, uhm or who have different agendas. but I think that collaboration is a beautiful thing, where we can just see different perspectives and have different ideas. So I think my message is really for the poets, I think we need to support each other as well. -ASTER

It is possible that this fear that Aster speaks about stems from the creative nature that sometimes exist among poets. But despite this fear, he calls out for a unity among poets, and believes this unity will amount to great things.

...

I was praying that they would just cut her out, because I didn't want her to be infected by the filth I carried down there.

The filth of my abuser's hands - I didn't want her to know anything about the dirt that I carry down there until I sat her down and explained to her that not all dirty things lack cleanliness due to the absence of washing. I wash myself three times a day, and when the filth was still fresh I would spend hours each day trying to scrub him off of me, but some stains don't respond to washing.

Some stains remain.

I was praying that they would just cut her out, because every time I thought about my child forcing herself out of me I remember the way he forced himself into me.

My vagina has long been a resting place for violation, a resting place for breaking and entering, a resting place for people who don't know their place.

Both the innocent and the violent - Breanna Chanelle

...

Chapter Six: Discussion

The stories included in this research highlight the many ways and reasons why Black young adults have decided to engage with poetry. As indicated in the findings above, through poetry, Black young adults were able to 1) find a release for their emotions and experiences, 2) form and understand their identities and 3) impact their surroundings. Although the Black young adults involved in this research speak about the need for support, the lack thereof has not hindered them from sharing their poetry, or speaking eloquently about how poetry has affected them.

When considering the narratives shared through a critical race lens, it is crucial to discuss the importance of storytelling. As highlighted by Solorzano & Yosso (2001) within education, critical race theory recognizes the importance of experiential knowledge. For this reason, the stories told by students of color are deemed "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination" (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a,b, 1996; Olivas, 1990; Carrasco, 1996 in Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). When doing social work research from a critical race lens, the same belief should be applied. As social workers aim to create social change, storytelling should not be separate from our efforts. In accordance with Razack (1999), when teaching social change, storytelling takes centre position. For this reason, as these voices are analyzed, they are held in high regard and all experiences shared are considered factual. As we rely on the stories of Black young adults involved, two things must be

considered. As stated by Razack (1999) although storytelling is central to social change, it is crucial to consider the tensions that exist when relying on storytelling entirely. In her text entitled "Looking White People in The Eye" we are reminded that it is important to recognize the positions of power and privilege that we occupy when listening to stories in comparison to those who are telling the stories. Our positioning shapes our understanding of the stories and therefore has the capability of impacting how we hear them. As outlined by Razack (1999) it is crucial for us to give necessary "attention to the interpretive structures that underpin how we hear and how we take up the stories of oppressed groups" (p. 37). As Black young adults share their stories, it is necessary to recognize the racism and ageism in society that causes these voices to remain marginalized. As this research is completed, the belief is not that Black young adults have been *given* a voice, but rather this work has aimed to provide an additional space where their voices can not only be heard, but valued.

For many youth, the impacts of marginalization presently exist in their lives because of their race, age and other factors they themselves might identify. Additionally, their use of poetry as their chosen means of communication may also cause their voices to be further marginalized. Although it is becoming increasingly popular, poetry, including rap is still not considered conventional or classified as "dominant cultural capital" in society which would allow it to be valued by those who occupy positions of power (Carter, 2003). Aware of these boundaries, this research aims to analyze narratives that are often dismissed.

Within this work, although there are eight participants who shared their stories, it is understood that there are several voices missing from the discussion.

In her 2009 TED talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie shares a talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story." In her speech, Adichie (2009) discusses the misunderstanding that can arise when we only hear one story about a particular group of people. Furthermore, as expressed by one participant interviewed, Black youth and young adults tend to be clustered. When this is done, it causes society to view all Black young adults in the same way. In this research, it is recognized that the voices of these young adults represent a small percentage of all Black young adults in Ontario that engage with poetry. Considering this, it is recognized that the story told in this research is not the only story. Although there are voices missing from this narrative, it is pivotal to present the poetic realities of the eight participants involved in this research rather than neglect all narratives on the topic.

Finding Release

The idea of poetry as a release appears in other researchers' studies about the impact the arts can have on an individual's wellbeing. According to Chavis (2011), there are historic accounts that prove that poetry has been used as a form of healing. Shamans and medicine women and men have incorporated portions of poems as part of their healing processes. To heal from their circumstances, they would undergo the act of chanting poetry. Chavis (2011) also proves that the

healing properties of poetry that have been used historically as the text features the poetry presented in the Biblical Psalms. Chavis (2011) explains that this can be seen as David tended to the needs of Saul by reciting psalms. These findings support the idea that poetry assumes a special importance in sustaining hope in the lives of individuals who feel that their life situations seem hopeless. Poetry has taken on a therapeutic role to many of the Black youth and young adults included in the research, as many express that they have been able to experience a release because of their engagement with the art form. When analyzing the data, it is evident that this release meant different things to different people.

In accordance with Dryfoos (1990) "Adolescence is a time of normative developmental stress and anxiety. For inner city youth, the developmental challenges can be exacerbated by environmental hazards" (Dryfoos, 1990 in DeCarlo & Hockman, 2004). In the interviews included in this work, these "environmental hazards " varied for each participant. However, what remained consistent was the fact that poetry allowed each individual to cope with, or distance themselves from a particular difficult experience. Some of the young adults involved in this research described poetry as more than being an art or form of expression. Poetry became a tool that was intentionally used when going through a crisis or traumatic experience. For some, this experience looked like the loss of a loved one, for others it felt like the stress of feeling trapped. One participant provided insight that poetry was one of the tools involved in her healing process after being sexually abused. Research highlights the reality that

poetry been used as a treatment method for treating children who have experienced sexual assault.

For instance, in Mazza, Magaz and Scaturro (1987) text *Poetry therapy with abused children. The Arts in Psychotherapy* the benefit of including poetry in individual and group settings are shared as they state the following: "The differential use of poetry in the treatment of abused children has promise as an ego-supportive technique that facilitates self-expression" (p.91) Furthermore, Bowman and Halfacre's (1994) research study describes poetry as a therapeutic alternative to traditional therapeutic forms. It is suggested that formal, traditional verbal techniques and methods have been considered threatening for individuals who have been subject to abuse and have little trust in adults (DeMaria, 1991 and Naitove, 1982 in Bowman and Halfacre, 1994). Therefore, as an alternative methodology poetry that provides opportunity for individuals to feel express themselves and be validated (Bowman and Halfacre, 1994). Although the young adults involved in this research have not always noticed that their engagement with poetry has acted become a method used for coping and letting go in their lives, they continuously returned to its techniques in order to release themselves from particular experiences. As participants were able to write out their feelings and experiences, they were able to see their circumstance as something they could control, something they could hold on to and let go of when needed.

Additionally, in the interviews, although there was no explicit question asked in regards to mental health, many of the participants made reference to their

mental health as they explained how and why they have participated in poetic practices. As social workers who are often involved in discussions and practice around mental health, it is necessary to get to a point where we can identify when individuals are speaking about their mental health though they may not be using the “accepted language”. Although Black young adults involved in this research speak about their mental health, they do not speak about their experiences accessing formal mental health services. Research suggests various answer as to why. Similar to many other spaces in society, research shows that marginalization/stigma is also a reality within the medical field. Specifically, as outlined by DeCarlo & Hockman (2004) the Surgeon General explains "that the customs of African American urban adolescents and other ethnic minority children are neither well understood nor adequately served by the mental health community" (p.47). If Black youth and young adults have an encounter within the mental health sector, and feel their experiences are not being validated there is a possibility that they will begin to distance themselves from those spheres.

When analyzing the interviews, it is evident that the topic of mental health is not foreign to Black young adults; however, the young adults address their mental health in different formats. What this research has shown is that Black young adults have used poetry as a tool to release what they have "bottled up". Similar to the example observed in DeCarlo & Hockman's (2004) text, rap and other poetic forms have been used by the Black young adults interviewed as a means to analyze their thoughts, shift their actions and maintain their wellness.

Although rap can often be undervalued because of the negative perspectives many have on the art form, Gardstrom (1999) explains that through rap individuals have been to address their feelings of anger and anxiety. According with, Arnett (1991), young people who listen to rap music have been able to release feelings of aggression and in turn experience feelings that are more calm (Arnett, 1991, in DeCarlo & Hockman). With this understanding, it is evident that despite the negative perspectives on rap as an art, there are also benefits to those who partake in it.

Identity

Participants spoke a great deal on the direct impact their engagement with poetry had on their identity. According to Beverly Tatum, identity is complex (Tatum, 2000). In her work, Tatum (2000) explains that as one's identity is often shaped by who they believe others consider them to be. This idea can be related to the concept of the looking glass self as coined by Charles Horton Cooley. As described by Cooley, the looking glass self describes how one imagines others to view them (Tice, 1992). In the interviews included in this research, this idea is expressed as many of the participants spoke about their identity in relation to society. When considering the marginalization and ill treatment of Black young adults in society, Erikson (1968) highlights a reality that is useful to consider. According to Erikson (1968) individuals that belong to a group that is oppressed may often internalize this oppression (Erikson 1968, in Salazar & Abrams, 2005). It is evident that through the art Black young adults have been able to resist

oppression and gain an understanding of their true identity. For example, as Lily engaged with poetry, he was able to come to an understanding that he was "more than a statistic." This thought highlights the reality that some Black young adults are aware of the low expectations held by society for their lives, but continuously choose to resist.

Furthermore, in the research, it is shown that Black young adults are often intentional in the ways in which they choose to present themselves. This act of self-presentation may also be a way in which the participants were able to actively resist societal expectations which can lead to internalized oppression. One poet involved in the study expressed that as a young Black male, poetry was not something that he was encouraged to participate in. He explained that as he wrote poetry, he considered his ego and what it meant for a male to be engaging in poetry. This echoes the idea found in research surrounding the construction of Black masculinity. In society, Black males have continuously been stereotyped as being threatening and aggressive in nature (Ferber, 2007). In the interviews, we see that the young adults are aware of the ways in which they are seen but still, choose to write and perform poetry in a way that is suitable for themselves. This proves that for the participants, an act of resistance does not always have include letting go of the labels placed on them, but sometimes, embracing those labels and highlighting the strengths those labels have is where strength is exemplified.

In accordance with Sparks and Grochowski (2002) youth and young adults who engage with poetry are actively learning to understand who they are in

relation to their environments. As they understand themselves, they are able to begin to use their own life stories to create political and social statements. As youth and young adults begin to understand who they are in relation to the societies they live in and how policies shape their experience, it is possible that tensions may arise. As observed in the interviews, Black young adults involved with poetry must consider their identity and how their identity shapes what they write, how they write and who they choose to share their poetry with. In Langston Hughes (1926) text entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" Black artists who engage with poetry may feel as though they have to conform to the dominant way of writing and presenting their art in order to be accepted by other poets (Hughes, 2000). Hughes (2000) tells a story about a Black poet who he believes "struggled" with his identity:

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet--not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible (p.1)

Although this tension was considered a struggle in that context, many of the Black young adults involved in this research told stories about their desire to be able to highlight all parts of their identity through their art. One participant in particular spoke about the pressure to continuously write about race, racism and

discrimination because of the color of his skin, while wanting to write and be recognized for having multiple identities working together to form who he is.

In understanding this tension, we come to recognize the courage it might take for Black youth and young adults who write and perform poetry to express themselves authentically in whatever way that looks for them. As Black youth and young adults seek to impact their surroundings through poetry, they are constantly putting themselves at risk for further marginalization as they are speaking out against a system that is against them. For this reason, there are several poets who will intentionally choose to write and present one part of their identity, without claiming other parts of their identity. While this fact may not be considered a “weakness” for all poets, like the one speaking in the dialogue above; it becomes detrimental when Black young adults who want to share all parts of their identity in their work must conceal parts of them as a means of maintaining safety, security and full citizenship in their communities (Stovall, 2006).

Comparatively, some Black youth and young adults are not afraid to conceal any part of their identity. Instead, some of these individuals use poetry as a means of publicly expressing how they feel about the marginalization they have faced in society (Ginwright, Noguera, Cammarota, 2006). As seen in Ginwright, Noguera, Cammarota’s (2006) text, readers learn about Damon, a biracial adolescent who writes honest poetry that represents where he comes from and what community he identifies with. Damon’s poetry as described by Ginwright, Noguera, Cammarota (2006) highlights the reality of what it means to be Black in

America. While some Black youth pride themselves in reflecting the realities of their lives (Ginwright, Noguera, Cammarota, 2006), others may believe that the content that is spoken about through rap and hip-hop has the ability to perpetuating stereotypes about Black youth and young adults in society (Adams & Fuller, 2006; Reyna, Brandt & Tendayi Viki, 2009). Within this completed research, it is evident that the participants think carefully about their content and their character. This can be seen as study participants speak openly about the personal reflections they do on themselves in relation to the communities in which they live. Many of the poets in this work act on this self-reflection by surveilling their actions and the actions of their peers. Poets involved in this work expressed how passion for the art can often be affected by the need and responsibility to maintain and/or project a specific identity.

Impact

The desire to impact through the means of poetry was a common theme among the youth and young adults that participated in the research. This act of writing and performing poetry in order to shape their surroundings is not uncommon. When considering poets, organizations and events in the past, it is evident that poetry has been a popular means by which Black people have been able to participate in shaping public realms and their own private personal relationships.

As Black youth and young adults begin to understand and shape their identity, their critical consciousness is developed. Critical consciousness

represents how oppressed individuals critically “read” and act to change their social conditions, and consists of critical reflection and critical action components (Freire, 1973, 1993 in Diemer & Li, 2011)

In accordance with Ginwright, Noguera & Cammarota, 2006, the development of critical consciousness is crucial in order for youth and young adults to have the power to shift their lives and their surroundings. Poetry provides Black youth and young adults with an opportunity to heighten their critical consciousness as they begin to understand who they are and how they relate to their society. In accordance with Ginwright and Cammarota (2002), it is crucial for youth and young adults to come to a place where they begin to understand how larger societal structures and the policies that make up those structures cause them to become further oppressed (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002 in Ginwright, Noguera & Cammarota, 2006).

Through poetry, Black young adults – including those who participated in this study - are able to raise their consciousness around who they are and what is occurring in their communities (Jocson, 2006). Once consciousness has been raised, avenues for expression associated with poetry encourages youth and young adults to share ideas and knowledge found in poetry with their peers. For instance, the activity of slam poetry provides a space where poets are able to voice opinions or thoughts that are important to them and receive a response once those opinions have been voiced (Stovall, 2006). In a society that has constantly silenced the experiences of Black young people, this avenue for expression can provide Black

youth and young adults with the support, feedback and validation needed in order for one to feel as though they are being heard (Low, 2011). Additionally, it is within these spaces where the audience, which may consist of other Black youth and young adults, are able to learn about topics that relate to them and also become active in sharing their opinions and thoughts on the matter.

Furthermore, we learn through the stories shared by participants in this study that impact also matters on smaller scales. Through poetry, participants were able to shape their relationships and immediate communities. The research has also shown that as young adults are impacted by the art, they inspire others to impact their community in a similar way. When analyzing past poets, and the poets included in this work, it appears as though poetry as a method of creating change has become a chain reaction. This is best illustrated in a statement made in Lily's interview:

I mean growing up where I grew up, a lot of these guys, their influence, their idols, their-they heroes were-were black artists, whether poets, or rappers, or singers, you know, that-that's where they got, instructions for life. So, if I could become, something similar, then I can-I can also influence, I can also impact, I can also change the course of-of their thought process- LILY

Participants also spoke about the art form being one that was influential. Many studies have been completed on the effect that the art forms have on their audiences. Barongan & Hall's (1995) text highlights the necessity of examining rap in the same regard as other forms of art . While the participants involved in this research see the impact their poetry can have on their communities, many

discuss the responsibility they feel to impact the current state of rap. Research has shown that with rap music being specifically known for its lyrical content, it is very much possible that the lyrics shared by the artist can be affecting the behaviour of their listeners. As the participants speak about needing to create rap that will benefit their community, it is evident that they too believe that rap is influential. The views held by the artist that aim to create new rap correlates with work that specifically considers that today's most prominent rap lyrics are can be misogynistic, deemed to "promote" violence and commercialization (Bradley, 2009). DeCuir & Dixoson (2004) explains that one of the major tenants included in critical race theory is counter storytelling. An example of this method of resistance can be seen as Lily and Lotus focus on creating rap that highlights a separate reality than what is often presented in their communities.

As a counter argument, some poets explain that the content included in their work does not seek to "promote" any one specific thing but rather shine a light on a part of their everyday reality. An example of this can be seen as Rapper Ice- T has decided to call his music "reality rap" rather than labeling it gangster rap as it highlights authentic experiences (Bradley, 2009). Underneath the label of T.H.U.G L.Y.F.E (The hate you give little children f***** everyone), Shakur was determined to create a code of the streets that would limit the drug wars and violence that existed in his community. However, because of the common perspectives on rap and his identity, his plans were not well supported (McQuillar & Johnson, 2010).

Entrepreneurship

In a society where, Black young adults are marginalized, poetry has become a way for participants to create avenues of opportunity for themselves. The marginalization that young Black people face has often resulted in: exclusion from society, a lack of control over one's own life, a lack of resources throughout an individual's life and low self-esteem stemming from stigmatizing attitudes (Kagan, Evans, Knowles, Smith, Burns & Burton, 2002). When analyzing the interviews involved in this research, many of the young adults expressed that poetry as a practice provided them with new opportunities that weren't often presented to them. Since their participation with poetry, many participants spoke candidly about their plans for the future and explained how poetry would shape their pursuits. For many, poetry became more than their passion, many expressed that they turned their poetry into a pay cheque. These participants have recognized that they can turn their poetry into a profitable product and have gone on to use their gift to their advantage. One participant expressed that her poetry was going to be the means by which she was able to overcome the barrier of poverty her and her family have faced.

The impact of poverty on this participant's life is not an isolated event in Canadian society. Beyond the broad definition of poverty that is discussed in Canadian literature, concentrated urban poverty is also a reality (Hanjal, 1995). As described by Hanjal (1995), concentrated urban poverty is any location where more than 40% of the population that resides in the area live below the poverty

line. Though the majority of research on this idea is found in American literature, Hanjal (1995) explains that this is also a reality for Canadians. Although Hanjal (1995) does not believe Canada's issue of concentrated urban poverty can be directly caused by racism and discrimination as it is in America, he recognizes that an individual's race can impact where they live and ultimately impact the chances offered to those people.

In a society where, Black young adults are marginalized and limited opportunities are provided by outside sources, it is crucial to acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments made by those who are not often catered to, but determined to escape the confines of poverty. The conversations included in this research highlighted the theme of entrepreneurship and leadership. As expressed by the participants, entrepreneurship and opportunities for leadership in their communities became a remedy to the poverty-stricken environments some of the young adults were subjected to. The education system within these communities are one example of how the lives of Black young adults can be impacted based on where they reside. The underachievement of Black youth and young adults within education is a topic that has often been discussed in research. Importantly, Smith, Schneider, and Ruck (2005) relate this "underachievement" to the reality that "social stratification mechanisms such as racial discrimination, prejudice and restricted economic opportunity that affect serve to limit or block the academic achievement and motivation of African American students" (p.348). Relatedly, Mickelson (1990) explains that a lack of social forces causes many minority

students to feel as though they opportunities they will be able to access in their society is limited. Entrepreneurship and positions of leadership have allowed young adults to respond and resist the systematic barriers that have been placed before them in society. Through poetry, the young adults in this study have been able to create opportunities for themselves and their peers.

In a study conducted by Walstad and Kourilsky (1998) on Black youth and their perspectives on entrepreneurship, Black youth were more likely to "strongly agree" to questions on entrepreneurship in comparison to their white counterparts who responded mostly by "agreeing" to the questions. In the study, Black youth identify specific reasons for wanting to valuing entrepreneurship: "(1) be your own boss (66% of blacks versus 51% of whites); (2) build something for the family (66% versus 42%); (3) earn lots of money (63% versus 41%); (4) use your skills and abilities (50% versus 38%); and (5) overcome challenges (28% versus 18%)" (p. 6). In the interviews, the participants involved in this research speak about their plans to release rap albums, write books and playwrights and create their own organizations. Poetry provided a space for these young adults to earn a living while engaging with an art form they are passionate about.

Support

Although research shows that young Black adults benefit from their engagement with poetry, the participants included in this research describe their need for support. As the idea of support is described by the participants, it is

understood that this support can come from a variety places. For some, there is a call out for funding to be provided for art programming in communities. The Individual who spoke specifically about this concern described her experience of living in a community where there was a lack of funding provided for young adults and the arts. A reason for this can be linked to Hanjal's idea (1995), of concentrated urban poverty. In this case, the place in which Yarrow lives can have a direct impact on the opportunities given to her and others who occupy that particular community.

In a society where, Black young adults are marginalized and limited opportunities are provided by outside sources, it is crucial to acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments made by those who are not often catered to, but determined to escape the confines of poverty. As Black young adults are marginalized by others in society, one participant calls on the elders in his community to provide support to the young adults who participate in poetic practices. The participant refers to this theme of support as a "pouring into." Within his interview, Lily expresses a need for the elders in his community to begin to show interest in the efforts and endeavours of young adults. Lily's discussion highlights that although this support may not come in the form of finances, there is an opportunity for emotional support to be provided which will ultimately lead to the empowerment of Black young adult's efforts.

This disconnect between the young adults who write poetry and the elders in their communities can also be seen in literature. Furthermore, "the construction

of "black youth" as a social category also suggests, at least implicitly, that there is a disjunction not only between them and young whites but also between young blacks and their parents" (Cashmore & Troyna, 2013 p. 7). Research highlights that as Black young adults are supported with their poetry, they are also being supported in their developmental growth. According to Travis (2013), "The empowered individual is less likely to feel hopeless or helpless; less likely to feel victimized; less likely to perceive continued adversity. The empowered individual is actively working to fulfill their perceived potential by using their existing knowledge, positive attitudes and interpersonal skills" (Travis, 2013 p.144). According to Travis (2013), the feeling of connection is important in the lives of young adults. When young adults feel a connection, other parts of their development also thrive such as their confidence and character.

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I am trying to find my place in this,
like trying to find my misplaced favourite mitt
only to realize I never really had a place that was mine that fit in the first.
And while I place this first, I could probably cut and insert this excerpt at various
points in my life and it would still stand correct.
Yet here I am, standing corrected in thinking I have found a suitable shelter when
I have simply encountered the eye of the storm; this temporary calm was not my
doing; my search continues.
For a place to reign where there is no rain.
Where there is no shame but ease like a ship on the calm seas, where all there is to
see is blue; this is what ships were meant to do.
Where they were meant to be.
And I am still trying to decide what is the place for me.
I've possessed temporary residency in various spaces and have found a best –
complacently as opposed to contentment and complacency isn't what I want to
contend or become content with.
Trying very hard to keep this separate from race but it is very difficult to find
comfort in a place that you cannot deny finds a way to place different values and

treatment on our lives. My search continues.
For a venue I can go to where I can wear my own shoes and know that they are
the right ones.
Where I don't have to hold my tongue and not make a sound,
Or know that my hands are not bound
Where I can stand proud with my head -- and not my hands -- up
And have nobody frowning or looking down.
A place where I can rest easy knowing that I don't have to stress seeking what I
have already found.
A place where I don't have to hide or pacify what's inside,
But I can demonstrate it with pride.
I am not looking for a place that is perfect.
I am looking for a place that is mine.
I am looking for a place of comfort.
I am looking for peace of mind.
I am looking for a peace that is mine. -Kyrel Thompson

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Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Implications for social workers

As social workers, it is crucial for us to think critically about how we engage in practice. In an ever-changing society, it should be our responsibility to adjust our methodologies in order to ensure we are doing effective work with those we engage with. When analyzing the interviews included in this research and past literature written on the topic, it is evident that poetry can be used as practice model for work with marginalized young adults. Our efforts to improve the lives of those marginalized, should always be rooted in the voices of those experiencing the marginalization.

Often as social workers and academics, we brainstorm in private and hope that our work will affect those we interact with in public settings. The assumptions we make will never be as impactful as the voices of those we serve. In accordance with Thompson (2017) “If you want to claim to help all people-people of colour, than you have to look at the methods they are using to cope and don’t discredit them because they don’t fit the norm that that is the dominant whiteness” (K.Thompson, personal communication, August 27, 2017). Although there are popular models, methods and techniques that we turn to in our work, we must always consider if those strategies are the most efficient. As this work has begun to resist dominant ideologies around Black young adults and poetry, it is my hope that research on this particular topic will continue.

Future Research

Although past research has focused on how an analysis of pre-written poetry can impact Black young adults, this work has aimed add to that discussion by highlighting the benefits of young adults writing and preforming their own poetry. Although several of the goals for this research were met, there are still several ideas that can be covered in future research. For instance, the opportunity to speak with a larger group of youth and young adults would have added to the narratives shared and offered greater perspective on the topic. Additionally, within this research the participants that decided to be involved were all over the age of 20. In the interviews, many of the participants explained that some of their first experiences with poetry took place when they were still in school. In order to advance this discussion, future research should aim to hear from the voices of youth who are still in the classroom in order to gain further understanding on how the poetry and their experience within the classroom intersect. Furthermore, due to time constraints, all individuals who provided poetry to be featured sent material that had been previously written. In opportunities for upcoming research, it would be interesting to have youth and young adults provide poetry written specifically for research purposes in order for the art to be added to our analysis.

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APPENDIX 1

**Email Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information**

**Monique Pitt BSW:
Masters Candidate in Social Work
Study Title:
Exploration of Black Youth/Young Adults and Poetry**

E-mail Subject line: Black youth/young adults and Poetry

To community members,
Monique Pitt, a McMaster student, has contacted (name of organization) asking us to tell our community members about a study she is doing on Black youth and Poetry. This research is part of her Master of Social Work program at McMaster University.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in Monique's study please read the brief description below and or **CONTACT MONIQUE PITT DIRECTLY** by using her telephone number or McMaster email address. **Tel: 416-574-7470 or pittmk@mcmaster.ca.** The researcher will not tell me or anyone at (name of organization) who participated or not. Taking part or not taking part in this study will not affect your status or any services you receive here at (name of organization name).

The following is a brief description of her study.

Hello, my name is Monique Pitt and I am inviting you to take part in a 45-60 minute one-on-one interview that will take place in the evening or weekends at a convenient time and place for you (Not at organization name). I will work out those details with you. I hope to learn what Black youth think about their engagement with Poetry in relation to the society we live in.

If you decide to be apart of this study, you can stop being in the study up until June 30, 2017. If you choose to be in the study, you can choose to not answer questions if you are not comfortable. Additionally, if you wish to participate but there is a conflict of interest, you may not be able to be included in this research.

For the purpose of this research, a range of recruitment methods will be used and only a small number of participants will be included to complete the interview

process. However, if I have already selected the participants that will be interviewed and you still wish to share your experience, I am also looking for poetry on the topic to be submitted separately.

If you decide to contribute a poem to this study, you will have the option of having your real name appear as the poem's author. If you are also being interviewed for the study, you should also know that in writing up the study, to protect confidentiality I will not connect the stories participants tell me in the interviews with any of the poems. However, if you do use your real name as the author of the poem, readers of my thesis will know that you are linked with this study. People might assume that because your poem is in the study, one of the stories is yours as well, and it will become more possible for people to guess which stories are yours. Please keep this in mind when you make decisions about how to participate in this study.



I have attached a copy of this information letter to this email. That letter gives you full details about my study.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,
(name of person)
(position if applicable)
(name of organization)

APENDIX TWO
RECRUITMENT POSTER



Appendix 2: Recruitment Poster

**BLACK YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS WHO
WRITE OR PERFORM POETRY NEEDED FOR A STUDY**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
***BLACK YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH
POETRY .***

You would be asked to: Participate in a one on one interview.
Your participation would involve *one* session that will be about 60 minutes long.
In appreciation for your time, you will receive
a gift card valued at \$20.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:
Monique Pitt
School of Social Work
Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance
by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.**

Monique Pitt Phone: 416-574-7470	Monique Pitt Phone: 416-574-7470	Monique Pitt Phone: 416-574-7470	Monique Pitt Phone: 416-574-7470	Monique Pitt Phone: 416-574-7470	Monique Pitt Phone: 416-574-7470
Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca	Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca	Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca	Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca	Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca	Email: pittmk@mcmaster.ca

APPENDIX 3
LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

DATE: _____

Exploration of Black Youth/Young Adults and Poetry

Principal Investigator: Monique Pitt
School of Social Work, McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
E-mail: pittpittmk@mcmaster.ca Phone: 416-574-7470

Supervisor of Research: Christina Sinding
School of Social Work, McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
E-mail: pittpittmk@mcmaster.ca Phone: 905-525-9140 ext

What am I trying to discover? You are invited to take part in this study because of your engagement with poetry. I hope to learn about the experiences of Black youth/young adults who are engaging with poetry in relation to the society they live in. I am doing this research for my Master's thesis at McMaster University.

What will happen during the study?

During the study you will be involved in one interview. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will take place in person if possible, however if needed the interview can also take place over the phone or over online video. With your permission, the interview will be recorded.

Here are the interview questions:

- Your age now?
- When did you begin writing poetry? (specific age, life experience)
- How/Why did you begin writing poetry?
- Has your reason for writing poetry changed during your time as a poet? If so, how?
- Some people say as a Black youth/young adult they write poetry to affect their communities - would you say this is a part of your purpose for writing? If not, what would you say you are more focused on?
- What would you say is the common theme of your work? Why are these themes so important to you? Is there something specific about poetry that helps you express these themes?

▪

Have you ever shared your poetry with anyone or do you usually choose to keep your work personal ?

- [if relevant] When you have shared your work, what has that experience been like for you?
- [if relevant] What has the response of your work been ? (Community, Peers)
- What are the plans you have for your poetry in the future?
- Can you think of any barriers that may arise as you attempt to fulfill this vision?
- Is there something important I forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience with poetry?

As part of this study, I also invite you to write a poem about the themes of this study. You can send this to me ahead of time or bring it with you to the interview. If you do not wish to write a poem, you can still be involved in the study.

Are there any risks to doing this study?

There are some risks involved in this study. You may feel uncomfortable and uneasy about answering certain questions about your past experiences. You may find it stressful to share stories about yourself with someone you do not know. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

The research may or may not benefit you directly. I hope to learn more about how Black youth/young adults engage with poetry. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will contribute to scholarship and to community initiatives in this area. You may benefit by being able to share your experiences with someone outside of your social circle.

Payment or Reimbursement

As a participant in this study, you will receive a 20\$ gift card as compensation for your time and input.

Who will know what I said or did in the study?

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. I will not use your name or any information you tell me in the interview that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Since the community of Black youth/young adults who engage with poetry is relatively small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

If you decide to contribute a poem to this study, you will have the option of having your real name appear as the poem's author. In writing up the study, to protect confidentiality I will not connect the stories participants tell me in the interviews with any of the poems. However, if you do use your real name as the author of the poem, readers of my thesis will know that you participated, and it will become more possible for people to guess which stories are yours. Please keep this in mind when you make decisions about how to participate in this study.

Information you provide will be kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed (May 2018), the information will be destroyed.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or up until approximately May 31, 2017 when I expect to begin writing my thesis. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August, 2017. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study:

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at: pittmk@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support E-mail:
ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Monique Pitt of McMaster University.

- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time during the interview process or up until approximately May, 2017.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

Yes
No

2. I agree that a poem I have written can be included in this study. The name I wish to have associated with the poem is:

3. Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.
Please send them to me at this email address

Or to this mailing address:

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results ____

4. I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

Yes. Please contact me at:

No

Appendix 4

Exploration of Black Youth/Young Adults and Poetry

Researcher: Monique Pitt

Oral Consent Script

Introduction:

Hello. I'm Monique Pitt. I am conducting interviews about Black youth/young adults and

poetry. I'm conducting this as part of my masters research at McMaster University's Social Work Program in Hamilton, Ontario. I'm working under the direction Dr. Christina Sinding of

McMaster's department of Social Work.

I found your name by searching for Black youth/young adults engaging with poetry, your name was suggested to me by (name of contact person).

First, I would like to explain what will happen during the study:

I'm inviting you to do a one-on-one interview over the telephone, face –to-face, or by online video that will take about 60 minutes. I will ask you questions about your experiences with poetry such as “When did you begin writing poetry?” “What you say is the common theme of your poetry?” “How has your community/peers responded to your poetry?”. I will take handwritten notes to record your answers as well as use an audio recorder to make sure I don't miss what you say. We can set up a time and place that works for us both.

You may be wondering, “Are there any risks to doing this study?”

There are some risks involved in this study. You may feel uncomfortable and uneasy about answering certain questions about your past experiences. You may find it stressful to share stories about yourself with someone you do not know. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. If you decide to contribute a poem to this study, you will have the option of having your real name appear as the poem's author if you do use your real name as the author of the poem, readers of my thesis will know that you participated, and it will become more possible for people to guess which stories are yours. This should be kept in mind when you make decisions about how to participate in this study. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Benefits:

The research may or may not benefit you directly. I hope to learn more about how Black youth engage with poetry. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will contribute to scholarship related to this area of research. You may also benefit by being able to share your experiences with someone outside of your social circle.

I will keep the information you tell me during the interview confidential. Information I put in my report that could identify you will not be published or shared beyond the research team unless we have your permission. Any data from this research which will be shared or published will be the combined data of all participants. That means it will be reported for the whole group not for individual persons.

Voluntary participation:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary.
- You can decide to stop at any time, even part-way through the interview for whatever reason, or up until approximately May 31, 2017 when I will begin writing/submitting my thesis.
- If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you.
- If you decide to stop I will ask you how you would like us to handle the data collected up to that point.
- This could include returning it to you, destroying it or using the data collected up to that point.

- If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.
- If you have any questions about this study or would like more information you can email Monique Pitt at pittmk@mcmaster.ca or contact her directly by phone 416-574-7470.

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administration, Development & Support

(ROADS)

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I would be pleased to send you a short summary of the study results when I finish going over our results. Please let me know if you would like a summary and what would be the best way to get this to you.

Consent questions:

- Do you have any questions or would like any additional details?
- Do you agree to participate in this study knowing that you can withdraw at any point with no consequences to you?

APPENDIX 5: RECORDING VERBAL CONSENT

Exploration of Black Youth/Young Adults and Poetry

Monique Pitt

RESEARCHER'S LOG FOR RECORDING VERBAL CONSENT

Participant's Unique ID number (i.e. 08-A01)	Participant's name	Date:

APPENDIX 6: COMPENSATION LOG

Poetry in the Margins: Black

Youth and Spoken word Poetry

Monique Pitt

RESEARCHER'S LOG FOR

COMPENSATION

Participant's Unique ID number (i.e. 08-A01)	Participant's name	Date/description of compensation received :

Appendix 7

Oath of Confidentiality for Assistants Working for the Researcher

(Check the following that apply)

I understand that as:

an interpreter

transcriber

audio assistant

video assistant

research assistant

other *(Please specify)* _____

for a study being conducted by _____ of the

Department of _____, McMaster University, under the
supervision of Professor

_____, confidential

information will be made known to me.

I agree to keep all information collected during this study confidential and will not
reveal by speaking, communicating or transmitting this information in written,
electronic (disks, tapes, transcripts, email) or in any other way to anyone outside
the research team.

Name: _____ Signature:

(Please Print)

Date: _____

Witness Name: _____ Witness Signature:
