Healing in the Borderlands of Belonging

Trusting the Journey of Black Girl Magic in Sweden

Ida Isatou Svenungsson

Supervisor's name: Wera Grahn, Gender Studies, LiU

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how coloniality of heritage, denial of racialization and forced passing impact Black women in Sweden. In response, it investigates practices of self-care adopted to buffer and cope with racism-related stress. Often, we connect self-care to spa-days, luxurious masks, and spoiling oneself as capitalism has translated self-care into one of its buzzwords for people to consume. It is characterized by the privatization of wellbeing rather than a collective endeavor, which feeds into a capitalist agenda (Michaeli, 2017). Queering self-care and adopting self-care as self-preservation in the words of Audre Lorde (2017), provides a holistic embodiment of Black feminist thought, especially for us facing intersecting oppressions. Healing circles as a method for this research provides a safe-space where experiences can be shared over the commonality of being Black women in Sweden. Moreover, separatist settings are found to hold therapeutic value as they limit the risks of being alienated when talking about a common identity. In extension, the healing circles of this research explore how representation in media and art provide possibilities of being included in a global community as a response to not having access to physical affinity groups. Concludingly, I suggest how healing circles can and should be integrated in gender and feminist studies as an intersectional methodology that further develops the possibilities of not speaking for the Other.

Keywords: healing circles, affinity groups, gendered racism, mental health, coloniality of heritage, denial of racialization, virtual inclusion.
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P.S. The orange-yellow background is a reminder of growth and that we do not have to write on the grounds of whiteness.
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INTRODUCTION

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare (Lorde, 2017:130)

When I read these words, or I should say, when I feel these words, everything falls into place. Audre Lorde (2017) manages to in a monumental way profess that self-care is of uttermost importance for activists, but more specifically for those exposed to different intersecting forms of oppression. As coloniality exists in a continuum, Black women are marginalized through controlling images and societal lack of access (Länsstyrelsen, 2018; Jerald, Cole & Ward, 2017). The quote by Audre Lorde (2017) made my head spin and I wanted to understand if and how Black women found paths of healing to cope and buffer against gendered racism in Sweden. By adopting healing circles as a method which stems from the lineage of separatist groups that build spaces of safety for women of African descent I want to oppose mainstream academic spaces of interrogation and alienation (Hill Collins, 2000). Conducting healing circles thus transcend the sole purpose of gathering material for a research as I was part of an intimate setting where I had to be vulnerable as I asked eleven Black participating women to do the same. Moreover, the study aims to create unity and community between women of the African diaspora by taking the opportunity to listen to new perspectives and stories.

As I was mapping out previous research of gendered racism and its mental health effects, the findings were discouraging to say the least. In 1991, Essed (1991) coined the term ‘gendered racism’ as a hybrid condition of racism and sexism. The concept together with research conducted by Black feminists and others, present the consequences that Black women suffer. Harrell (2000) suggests six types of racism-related stress that affect Black women in their everyday life which Jerald, Cole and Ward (2017) means lead to emotional anxiety and possibly negative coping techniques. A Swedish perspective suggests that Black Swedes, also referred to as Afro Swedes, are severely disadvantaged in all areas of life according to two government-funded reports (Mångkulturellt Centrum, 2014; Länsstyrelsen, 2018). According to Hübinette and Lundström (2014), Sweden is in a state of Swedish white melancholia. The melancholic state exists on the basis of understanding Sweden as an anti-racist country and on the other hand, a view of Sweden as a homogenous white country. These two conflicting ideas are being challenged by the presence of non-white Swedes. This research uses the concept of Swedish white melancholia to understand the dimensions of how gendered racism is expressed towards
Black women in Sweden. I will return to the clashing ideas of Swedishness in the analysis as they complicate the belonging of non-white Swedes in Sweden. El-Tayeb (2011) proposes that conflicting ideas regarding race is not solely a Swedish phenomenon, but rather a fracturing that is entrenched in a European racelessness; ultimately, leading to the exclusion of non-white European narratives in all fields of society (Länsstyrelsen, 2018; Sawyer & Habel, 2018).

In extension to gendered racism, Black feminists and intersectional feminists have articulated the importance for marginalized groups to access safe spaces and affinity groups, which this research explores (Peterson, 2018; Hill Collins, 2000). There is a gap in existing literature that explores healing circles as a methodological approach to address the experiences of marginalized groups. With specific reference to Sweden, there is a need to map experiences of gendered racism and the implications it has on the everyday lives of Black women. Moreover, healing circles as affinity spaces serves as a direct response to these realities. I use the concept of healing to refer to the possibilities of addressing and caring for collective and individual wounds of gendered racism to whatever extent possible for the different individuals. I refer to the focus group meetings as healing circles, as I envision them to move beyond a safe space of sharing difficult experiences to a place where we explore our Black girl magic. Black girl magic refers to the hashtag-movement initiated 2013 by CaShawn Thompson, #BlackGirlMagic highlights Black women in our diversity. #BlackGirlMagic is a celebration of women who have been marginalized and oppressed for centuries and still manage to shine; it is a recognition that it is nothing less than magical (Thomas, 2015). This is also how I use magic in this thesis, not as a supernatural power but as acknowledgement of the hardships of sexism, racism, colorism, classism that Black women face, and still thrive. However, as mentioned throughout this essay; the idea that Black women ought to be superwomen is damaging and it is not what this thesis suggests as it results in mental health issues and even premature mortality (Anderson, 2013). Instead, magic reflects what Lorde (2017) suggests as self-preservation and what Ahmed (2014) refers to as survival as a radical act as we reclaim what it means to be Black. I will return to the connection of the usage of magic in relation to mentioned authors in the third part of the analysis.

I wish this thesis could start with self-love and societal opportunities, but it does not. It starts from disadvantages; where I suggest that denial of racialization\(^1\) and coloniality of heritage...
permeates the possibilities of accessing and developing Swedishness. In extension, I explore how Black women’s mental health is affected by gendered racism in Sweden. Through the healing circles, we embark on a journey to understand our own Blackness and what it means to us, but also what it means together with the intersections of being Swedish and a woman. I refer to the participants of this research as sisters; as I almost immediately felt a sense of belonging to the participants of the healing circles. The understanding and community that was developed during the circles is something that remains dear to me, and I wish to show that through this thesis.

Lastly, I need to flag for triggering content. Racism and sexism and the brutalities that Black women experience is the problematic background that this research stems from. This thesis shares experiences and previous research on gendered racism both from a U.S. and U.K.-perspective as well as recent research from Sweden. For me, it has been calming yet enraging that I am not alone with my experiences and that I can recognize myself in these women’s stories. As this is an essay that aims for self-care, I flag for the first two parts of the analysis which can be emotionally draining whereas the last part of the analysis is more centered on self-care and healing. I remind the reader, especially a racialized reader, that the experiences shared in this thesis may trigger personal, communal and/or generational trauma of racism, sexism and other forms of discriminations.

This essay is for the person seeking solitude in seeing experiences similar to theirs. It is also for the anti-racist activist who is encouraged to listen. Listen and believe. Not listen and question the experiences. My tone changes throughout the thesis, and at times I might sound harsh to the non-Black reader and sweeter to the Black reader and that is exactly my intention.

**Research questions and aim**

The research questions aim to guide the thesis as it embarks on a personal yet collective embodiment of Black feminist thought. Besides conducting a research project that aims to explore healing in the borderlands of belonging, it provides the narrative of eleven Black Swedish women. Eleven different women who ought to be understood in their diversity that goes beyond this thesis. In extension, this thesis aims to combine the practices of great sources of inspiration through texts by Audre Lorde and other decolonial and/or intersectional feminist thinkers in a joint collaboration with academia to provide and develop a methodology of healing. The guiding questions are:
1. How is the message of non-belonging transmitted to women of African descent in Sweden?
   - How is the message expressed to the group?
   - How does it affect the group?

2. How are practices of self-care manifested by women of African descent in Sweden as radical acts of resistance and healing?
   - To what extent are different forms of media (music, literature, art, online platforms) valuable in the process of self-care?
   - What impact do safe spaces, such as separatist rooms, have in elevating self-care?

3. What are the methodological contributions of healing circles?

Moreover, the aim of this research is not to impose these questions onto the women in the healing circles; but collectively use different media, practices and emotions to understand how we relate to being Black women in Sweden. As this thesis holds methodological underpinnings of Black feminism, decolonial theory and intersectionality, I embark on a journey where the communication with the reader stems from the healing circles as a methodological contribution of not speaking for the Other. The tools of these theories help me in a critical way explore and display the consequences of social constructs that hold all people hostage in positions of privilege and disadvantage. Moreover, they provide an emphasis of a multilayered lens that points out the realities of those who were and continue to be involuntarily spoken for. As an extension, autoethnographical remarks are notably shown throughout the text and are highlighted in bold and centered, as I share my reflections. The choice of adopting an autoethnographical approach stems from the importance of claiming my story without trying to develop a general truth (Ellis, Adams & Jones, 2014) which further is discussed in the theoretical chapter.

**Thesis outline**

In the coming chapter, I share my personal thoughts on why this research is of importance to me, but also to the academic and activist field as I position myself in the chapter “I AM.”. To map out the field that this study situates itself within, the chapter of previous research presents mental health, Swedish racial melancholia as well as self-care and healing. Introducing research
on mental health consequences caused by gendered racism, the current field of racism-related research in Sweden, and healing as a method within Black feminist studies, I aim to present the gap that exists in binding these three areas together. Mentioning Black feminist theories; the methodological chapter, “Healing as methodology”, explores decolonial theory as the foundation of this research and Black feminist theories as point of departure for the methods used in the analysis. Following the methodological chapter, the reader will be taken on a journey that discusses how the healing circles were visualized, but also how they were carried out in practice. Moreover, an introduction of the participants is interlaced with ethical considerations. Previous research, methodology and material collection lay the basis for the analysis which has strong undertones of practicing Black feminisms. The analysis is threefold, where the first part is titled borderlands of belonging, followed by mental health and finally self-care as a radical act of resistance and healing. Lastly, I will provide some concluding remarks on the possible impact of this thesis, its contributions to the academic field and suggestions for future research.
I AM.

I live in an in between where both borders and bridges are created. Access and rejection are common in the land within me. I have learnt that my duality should be conflicting and a separation of the self. Choosing who I am and what I identify with has seldom been for me to decipher. People’s perceptions and ideas haunt me as I desperately try to figure myself out.

One thing I do know is that I am not half of anything.
I am double.
Never either or.
I am everything.

My location comes from the red Gambian sand of my father and the white Swedish snow of my mother. These geographical places are entrenched in me as I identify as Swedish-Gambian. Not half-Gambian, half-Swedish nor the m-word that often comes to mind when people aim to describe individuals with a Black parent and a white parent. It is interesting really; that my racialization, being Black and white is so desperately in need of a descriptive word. Luckily, when I am faced with the m-word today I can tell the user of the word of its degrading and dehumanizing meaning of implying that someone like me is a crossbreed between a horse and a donkey, knowing well which animal is suggested to be the donkey. Living in Sweden, my dual heritage is ever present, especially as a child. I thought about it daily as the teacher tried to pronounce my name. Ida went fast. Isatou not so much. I would dread the times we had substitute-teachers and would normally walk up to them to say that they could just call me Ida, as I pointed to my name on the class-list. It saddens me that I felt that I had to erase such a magical part of myself. Internalized racism led me to try as hard as possible to fit into the white rooms of my neighborhood. Despite having loads of friends as a child, there was still something missing. Meeting three of my best friends and sisters between the age of 13-15 is indescribable:

Awa Silke who makes me laugh so hard that tears burst out from my eyes.
Adama Cornelia, the Leo to my Capricorn and the safety of my soul.
Mam-Yandeh who does not often let me hug her but always lets my heart rest in her hands.
Sisters
Not by blood
But by our stories.

These three women, who were then girls, introduced me to a sisterhood that I did not know was possible. The ways we share and listen. The ways we find homes in each other. A sisterhood of recognizing oneself in others and hearing stories like they were coming from my own lips. It infused me with power as I was able to vulnerably share the stories that I had connected to shame. As I think back, I believe that it was extremely important for me to find people of dual heritage who had a Black and a white parent, to be able to figure myself out. To this day, we are still doing the work. Exploring, changing, evolving, repeating mistakes but always reminding each other of the magic we see in each other. Nobody can say where I would be today, or how I would relate to my intersections had we not created this sisterhood. It is therefore of fundamental value to me that the focus groups of this thesis go beyond research as I aim for a creation of an affinity space that might not have been possible to some of the participants prior to this initiative.

I feel so much pain due to the injustices and development of our Swedish society, like the pregnant Black woman who was brutally pushed down to the ground by security guards on a train in Stockholm because she was not able to present her ticket fast enough. Her eight-month pregnant belly pushed to the ground with five men around her, one of them pushing his knee onto her back. The reason for not mentioning her name is my uncertainty to whether she wants to be anonymous to the extent possible or not. Just two weeks before this event, a group of Black boys at the age of 12 were inhumanely treated in a similar manner by security guards. Security personnel who are the ones who are supposed to be there to protect us. The people to be called upon when we are in danger is not the case for Black women. Simply going out can translate to warfare where not even our unborn children are safe. Stories like these leave me powerless for days, and it was not until I started doing research for this thesis that I understood the impact that racism-related stress has on my mental health. I wanted to understand if and how it constrained other Black women, but I did not want to leave it at that. I wanted to explore the magic and the inspiration I find in Black women; women who stand their ground and women who manifest self-love by existing. Surviving.
I could have written a thesis about experiences of racism and sexism in Sweden, but it has been done. The stories have been told. Again, and again. Did you listen? Or was it your story that was told and ignored? I choose to write with you, not for you or about you. I wish to explore how we elevate ourselves and heal from a world that so fiercely wishes us everything but self-love. Sharing these stories, I hope to tell the story I wish I had heard at a younger age; practices of healing and self-care as radical forms of resistance to a white-heteronormative-ableist-oppressive world. Being on a journey of growth and exploring myself, I stumbled upon the concept of the erotic by Audre Lorde. Audre Lorde (2007) emphasizes the erotic as a creative energy that is fearless of joy and enhances satisfaction in whatever endeavor innate to women through a reclaiming of the self. It is a lens of experience shared with sisters, where we expand the self from the convenient and comfortable to a level of elevation of the joys of knowledge (Lorde, 2007). Setting out to find joy in research rather than focusing on all the things that are messed up with this world, I wanted to embark on a journey where I reclaim myself by trying new methods that I was not familiar with. Therefore, I have included poems, autoethnography and healing circles in this thesis in an attempt to develop and diversify communication with the reader. The theoretical underpinnings of these choices are discussed in the theoretical and ethical chapters.
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Gendered racism and its mental health effects

The effects of gendered racism and racism has a longer scholarly tradition in U.S. and U.K in comparison to Sweden where research has taken place in more recent years (see e.g. Länsstyrelesen, 2018; Mångkulturellt Centrum 2014; Ndow Norrby, 2017; Sawyer & Habel, 2014). Drawing from previous research, I present research from U.S. and U.K. to provide a brief overview on the mental consequences of gendered racism. Gendered racism refers to Essed’s (1991) idea of a hybrid condition of stereotypes and systems permeated by racist and sexist identity-trait which reinforce negative images through public discourses. To understand how racism affects the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing of Black women, Harrell (2000) describes six types of racism-related stress which will be addressed in the analysis in conjunction with the experiences of the women participating in this research. In addition to the six types of racism-related stress, Harrell (2000:45) acknowledges emotional stress as the:

…process of questioning observations and perceptions, replaying a situation in one’s mind over and over again, attempting to explain it to others, and entertaining alternative explanations can be stressful above and beyond the original experience.

In extension, unhealthy coping behaviors to gendered racism are identified as alcohol and substance use to deal with the controlling images of Black women in society (Anderson, 2013; Jerald, Cole & Ward, 2017). Jerald et al. (2017) identify ‘controlling images’ as part of structural inequality, where “stereotypes may be understood as the psychological manifestation of controlling images”: as their study with 609 young Black women shows. Taking departure from work-related stressors and wellbeing in connection to unfair treatment of Black women on the labor-market, Hall, Everett and Hamilton (2012) asserted similar findings of metastereotyping awareness stressors as Jerald, et al. (2017). As a response to the academic discussion, Miville and Ferguson (2014) explore intersecting experiences and contest that internalizing sexist and racist images have harmful impacts; thus, suggesting practitioners of psychology to critically evaluate how they are reproducing a non-intersectional approach and consider ways of combating that. Adopting Essed’s (1991) concept of gendered racism with an internalized perspective, Lewis, Williams, Peppers and Gadson (2017:477) use the concept of
gendered racial identity centrality which indicates “…how central the intersection of one’s race and gender identity is to one’s self-concept”. The outcome of their study suggests that stronger gendered racial identity centralities have a positive impact on coping mechanisms with regard to mental and physical health consequences. To clarify, gender, race and other social classifications are understood as social constructs that benefit capitalism and a continued Euro-U.S.-colonization of the world. It is not simply a colonization of bodies and socially constructed binaries of the outer, but more importantly a colonization of the mind and thought as mentioned both by Fanon (1967) and Lugones (2010). Previous research indicates a correlation between gendered racism, negative health outcomes and damaging coping techniques among Black women in U.S and U.K. However, I identify a gap in academic literature that explore practices of healing and self-care among women with African descent to cope with oppressive systems.

**Swedish racial melancholia**

Negative health effects ranging from microstressors to premature mortality are consequences racialized groups are faced with due to racist systems (see Harrell, 2000; Jerald et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2012). To contextualize the case of Sweden; the forerunner of racial biology and forced sterilizations on more than 60,000 Swedish people who were not conforming to, inter alia, racial norms; Sweden has “evolved” to a country that prides itself as a precursor of equality. Despite having a self-proclaimed feminist government, researchers (see e.g. Hübinette, 2012; Hübinette & Lundström 2014; Liinason, 2018; Sawyer & Habel, 2014) raise concerns about the non-recognition of Sweden’s racist past and the implications it has on today’s political climate and society at large. To illustrate, discriminatory words such as racial slurs are pushed with an agenda of being value-neutral, which Hübinette (2012:43) points out is entrenched in Sweden’s self-identity. As mentioned in the introduction, a condition referred to as ‘Swedish white melancholia’ is descriptive of Sweden according to Hübinette and Lundström (2014:433):

The idealisation of a homogenous past through the combination of the ‘white purity’ and ‘white solidarity’ periods of Swedish whiteness. It is this double-binding force of both having been perceived as the most racially homogenous and pure population of all white nations, and of having been world leaders on a moral level as the most progressive and antiracist country in the world, which produces all these seemingly contradictory feelings.
Having two rather conflicting ideas about Swedishness prohibits the development of including non-white Swedes as Swedish according to Hübinette and Lundström (2014). El-Tayeb (2011) takes a European perspective on identity, race and resistance to explore creolization of racialized minorities to understand the damaging effects of European racelessness as she writes:

This narrative, framing the continent as a space free of “race” (and by implication, racism), is not only central to the way Europeans perceive themselves, but has also gained near-global acceptance. (El-Tayeb, 2011: xv)

In a Swedish context, Keskinen, Tuori, Irni and Muliniari (2009) use the concept colonial complicity to describe the neglect of race and colonial heritage in contemporary Sweden. In extension, Liinason (2018) points out that despite Sweden’s image of equality, it lacks an intersectional approach to equality issues. Not incorporating how racism, sexism and queries of Swedishness affect its non-white population, Sweden upholds structures of white melancholia (Lundström & Hübinette, 2014; Sager & Muliniari, 2018). Even though Sweden is evolving as an equal country by e.g. claiming to have the world’s first feminist government (Regeringen, n.d), Sawyer and Habel (2014:1) asks “what stories are erased and silenced in the branding of the Nordic region?”. Exploring the experiences of Black women through the message of non-belonging in a so-called feminist country explores stories that otherwise are silenced and erased.

Self-care and healing

With feminisms constantly being scrutinized through different medias, feminists have been criticized as being overly concerned, indulgent and self-centered (Ahmed, 2014). As a response, Ahmed (2014) writes about Audre Lorde and self-care as warfare:

When you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action; a refusal not to exist until the very end; a refusal not to exist until you do not exist.

Together with the beliefs of Audre Lorde, Ahmed (2014) emphasizes that self-care is not about individual indulgence nor personal happiness, but about existing in a world eager to destroy you. Jackson-Best (2016) suggests key-practices of self-care as resistance, one of them being ‘Actual Work of Care’ by stepping away from neoliberal practices to encourage:
…simple things like eating well, sleeping well, loving well, speaking well, thinking well, and living as well are all techniques in the Work of self-care, and it’s our right and responsibility to pursue them radically and unapologetically. (Jackson-Best, 2016)

Correspondingly, Peterson (2018:101) sets the bridge between social justice activism and radical healing practices as a means of survival and writes “Most of us carry the deep pain of trauma and/or injustice around with us every day. Such pain can separate us from our inner radiance and self-love.” Michaeli (2017) mentions that continuing misogynist and oppressive practices develop from the contemporary social, political and economic systems, which according to Michaeli (2017:53) is done through privatization of responsibility, disregarding socio-economic-political factors of agony and the dismissal of self-care through anger and activism. Using the claim that self-care is collective, this thesis investigates the importance of rooms of affinity, representation and collectiveness. Avoiding the thresholds of neoliberalism, Murray (2015:269) suggests the distinction between self-esteem and self-respect. Consequently, Dutton (2014) broadens the spectrum by queering self-care to include space for coping responses that are deemed as non-normative by society. Adopting queer theory “is an anti-pathologizing process of destabilizing normative categorizations of gender and sexuality” (Dutton, 2014:5). On a similar note, Dross (2015) explores performative self-care that one does for others in comparison to doing self-care for oneself by describing it as:

…might mean lighting candles, putting on a Nina Simone album, and rereading Randall Jarrell’s The Animal Family. It could also mean BDSM, intense performance art, mixed martial arts fighting, smashing bank windows, or calling out a person who abused you. (Dross, 2015:3)

Dross (2015) is added to the writers who regard self-care as collective rather than individual as the capitalist society’s version of self-care stems from a desire of expanding productivity as Dross (2015) calls for an anti-capitalist collective care. Moreover, Dross (2015:5) reminds the reader that care is either repressive or liberating and it should “…nurture liberation, not domination- to bring people together according to a different logic and value”. Stepping away from neoliberal ways that reproduce forms of oppression, this essay aims to further challenge the conception of self-care as subject-based rather than collective-based by exploring collective healing.
HEALING AS METHODOLOGY

To address my research questions, I rest this research on the epistemological assumption that knowledge is attained through socially constructed understandings (Gilje & Grimen, 2007). This assumption derives from the metatheoretical approach of social constructionism. Social constructionism encourages researchers to be critical of what is perceived to be unchangeable truths. A social constructionist approach does not exactly provide a fixed theory but influences theories like feminist theory and ethnology. As all knowledge is perceived to be constructed, social constructionism provides a critical analysis as to why we perceive certain things as natural and taken for granted (Burr, 2015). To illustrate an example of social constructionism, Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) embarks on a travel between Texas and Mexico, culture, sexuality and gender. Gloria Anzaldúa’s book challenges norms and stereotypes within and between cultures as the book strives to encourage a new consciousness; a Mestiza consciousness:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. (Anzaldúa, 2012:100)

Borders within oneself are created as dualities that societally are constructed to be contradictory. Understanding knowledge as socially constructed also leads me to mention intersectionality, as the different constructs ought to be regarded in the matrix they appear in. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) introduced the term of intersectionality to discuss how a person is not e.g. just a woman but her skin-tone and class has to be taken into consideration in the attempt of analyzing situations and systems of oppression. Moreover, other identity-traits like religion, sexuality and ability play a key-role in how society treats her (ibid). By highlighting the importance of different social factors as combined, Crenshaw (1991) developed a theory that more holistically understands oppression. In extension, the factors are to be studied through their interlinking wholeness which is adopted by this research.

Decolonizing the mind

Diverting from postcolonialism, decolonial theory appreciates the anticolonial foundations of postcolonialism yet refuses to adopt the cultural determinism that permeates it. Decolonial thinking stems from decolonizing naturalized notions of knowledge as it requires transforming
knowledge-production in ways of listening, thinking and understanding subjects (Mignolo, 2011). To illustrate, Swadener and Mutua (2008:34) points out that:

> With colonization as a way of representing, producing/inscribing, and consuming the Other through the silencing and denial of agency, the centrality and primacy of specific institutions in the validation of what constitutes research and knowledge extend beyond what are often constructed as the geospatial and historical epicenters of the experience of colonization.

Adopting the tool of decolonizing creates possibilities for me to rethink and create new practices as I develop methodological contributions such as healing circles as well as a decolonial understanding to the experiences of Black women in Sweden. Swadener and Mutua (2008:31) phrases it well by describing that “decolonization is about the process in both research and performance of valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding indigenous voices and epistemologies”. Consequently, decolonial practices must always be aligned with activism. Lugones (2011) uses the concept of ‘coloniality of gender’ to expose the dehumanization of colonized beings, and moreover decolonial feminism to combat colonial and capitalist systems. Lugones (2010) holds the resister at focus, in similarity to how Hill Collins (2016;2000) places Black women at the center which I adopt as foundational to this research. Pivotal to decolonialism is that colonialism created the opportunity for capitalism to grow into the hegemonic system that it is today as it demands the subordination of the masses for the freedom of the few. By recognizing the impact of racialization, gendering and other forms of oppressive systems that work in favor of capitalism, we can develop decolonial strategies (Mendoza, 2016). Alice Walker (1983) coined the concept of womanism, which critically influenced the academic debate on feminism. The concept is a celebration of acting womanish by referring to African American women who show that they are in control. I include womanism as a reminder of being in control of presenting narratives that are by Black women and not only about Black women. Womanism developed in a time of mainstream feminism (white, Western, hetero, cis), which led it to be heavily critiqued due to its intersectional approach positioning Black women at its center. Simply rejecting Womanism on the basis of these accusations would be to disregard its fundamental values which clearly state the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to our analysis (Mori, 1992).
Capitalizing the letter ‘b’ in Black in this thesis is inspired by Hill Collins (2016:137) who early on used the method to oppose:

…practices that routinely disrespected Black people through the power to name. Large numbers of people self-define as Black, seeing themselves as part of a population group that receives distinctive treatment.

On a similar note, I use Lao-Montes (2007) concept of Blackness as something that goes beyond color and into a vast array of cultures and politics as well as the commonality of sharing a history that holds us together. Dillard (2014) redefines Black feminist thought, as understood by Hill Collins (2000), to suggest an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology with three core-concepts of spirituality, community and praxis. Spirituality does not relate specifically to a higher power but rather to the divine within us, which departs from African-centered thought. Considering the first version of Hill Collins’ Black feminist thought, Dillard (2014) criticizes the lack of global inclusiveness in the book. With endarkened feminist epistemology, Dillard (2014) locates Black feminist thought in a diasporic milieu where spirituality and knowledge production are interlinked through history, community and the contemporary. Adopting Dillard’s (2014) notion of endarkened feminist thought in this thesis entails a healing methodology of re-visioning African-ascendant knowledge to honor who we are. Moreover, activist praxis encourages actions and research that are permeated by an aim of social justice as well as a responsibility to the groups one is engaging with.

**Healing circles**

Harris (2018) writes as a reminder that one of the most important factors to evolve the collective is healing by pointing out that “We must cease to suffer trauma in silence and alone. We must call out and call in and gather in truth and stand in our magic”. Creating a collective safe space for this thesis envisions an environment of being able to speak one’s mind through experiences and emotions (Moloney, 2011). Acknowledging healing as a method, Richardson (2018:283-4) suggests four aims of conducting healing methods; “decolonizing the mind”, “finding and maintaining spaces of joy and affirmation”, “becoming less concerned with affluence and materialism” and “recognizing and fostering critical awareness”. As I adopt the teachings of how to carry out self-care for healing, I use Campt’s (2017) exploration of how sensory levels of listening to images creates an alternative understanding of suppressed histories. By using
several senses, Campt (2017) explores how the method resonates and affects the communities we are in. Campt (2017:42) emphasizes the importance as a Black writer to not be lazy listener, “As a black feminist, I must resist the lures and seductions of an easy reading” and encourages readers to continuously challenge themselves in knowledge-production. For this research I explore the participants’ experiences with several senses as it reveals issues that might have been otherwise overlooked. Adopting how Campt (2017) listens to images, I suggest that part of the focus group will be devoted to poetry and listening to its meanings beyond the words in a similar manner to how Campt (2017) analyzes images. Poetic inquiry serves as a guidance to the words we might not yet have (Faulkner, 2018). Morgan, Fellows and Guevara (2008) suggests the benefits of stimulus material to social sciences. Commonly used in market research, material presented by the moderator or participant can provide a common theme to explore together. Similarly to Campt (2017), Dillard (2014) encourages us to apply love as it is often missing in academic research. Love creates a possibility for deeper listening and nurturing of spiritual growth. When we apply love, we become intertwined with the research and not separated by the systems of Euro-U.S. research traditions. I apply love and listening through different senses both for the focus groups but also for the transcription as it is vital to note down pauses and vocal tones as silences and tones as well as body language may be clues of subjugation, anger, insecurities or other non-verbal emotions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2011). Expanding our ways of listening to narrators that may frame matters in ways we are not familiar to, requires researchers to develop a deeper sense of how to grasp knowledge, information and emotions which is a practice this research is invested in (Campt, 2017). The importance of adopting focus groups rests on the idea of an exchange rather than an exploitation which can be described by Lugones (2011:72) as a collective that is:

…guided by love, a strong erotics that becomes a social erotics. This inclination to others is powerfully motivating, inspiring, and energizing as it inclines us to learn from each other in complex histories of interdependence, including betrayal, as we respond to multiple oppressions.

In focus groups, participants are encouraged to take the lead in issues they see fit to discuss rather than the researcher facilitating and moderating the conversation toward a specific goal or theme. The typical researcher-participant power dynamic is diminished through group size versus the sole position of the researcher. Therefore, the researcher ought to provide opportunities where participants are free to control the conversation (Moloney, 2011). Leavy
(2011) refers to the production of focus groups as “happenings” due to what happens when narrators regulate the dynamic. Researchers then, need to be cautious and ensure a non-replication of domination due to privileged positions (Leavy, 2011).

As a Black woman, I cannot stand outside of the research. My voice is heard throughout, although with a hope of sharing the space with the participants. Being an insider in a study requires that the researcher is humble to the experience in a way that is respectful of the views of other participants. The goal is not objective knowledge, but rather an understanding that our different subjective experiences carry the same weight. Including autoethnography gives nuance and a possibility of multiple understandings to otherwise object-focused research (Smith, 1999). The insider perspective that I have as a Black woman provides a chance of sharing complexities that could possibly be lost if conceived by an outsider. However, I also set space for the experiences that I do not share with the participants as Black people are not a homogenous group. I paraphrase Marr (2014) who suggests that we ditch the master’s gardening tools, in reference to Lorde’s “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”, for our own to grow a womanist methodology from the grassroots. I adopt a womanist autoethnography, with the means of including my own experiences within the research, to create place and space for the inclusion of knowledge-making that is subjective and disruptive of academic norms and regulations. Using autoethnography in combination with collaborative practices with participants of the community is the very basis of a womanist methodology (Marr, 2014). In extension, Adams and Jones (2014) suggest that autoethnography is inherently a queer method as it encourages fluidity, disruption of socially constructed “truths” and norms by refiguring mainstream methodology. This is also how queer is understood throughout this thesis. Autoethnography is claiming one’s narrative through reflexivity between the connection of the self and society. Autoethnography focus on the influence and impact of identities without an aim of providing a general truth (Ellis, Adams & Jones, 2014). It is important to note that autoethnography is not claiming that one holds all the answers, or that one’s experience is the only one that matters. Instead, autoethnography is an opportunity of being vulnerable to explore how the self and society correlates (Ellis, Adams & Jones, 2014). My autoethnographical remarks are heard throughout this thesis but also through poems and reflections that are centered in bold. By aiming to decolonize the mind through the methods of womanism, this thesis embarks on a journey of expanding academic methods to evolve self-care.
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND MATERIAL

One of the pillars of ethical considerations is that research should not harm the participants. As the Swedish Research Council writes (2018), research ethics provides tools for research to elevate its reliability, honesty, respect and accountability. Focusing on respect and honesty, consent was asked of the participants during the first meeting. In extension to their consent as participants I reminded the participants that they could at any time make a disclaimer to note that they did not wish me to include something. It was stated every meeting, however, none of the participants wished for anything to be excluded from the study. Writing on a decolonial foundation that encourages a disruption of normative procedures, I see it important to implement a decolonial perspective in extension to traditional guidelines as suggested by e.g. the Swedish Research Council (2018). Researchers have and continue to speak about groups; sometimes, with intentions they value as pure and beneficial to the community they are talking to. However, writing about a group runs the risk of assuming homogeneity due to one common identity-trait, which can result in research disregarding essential parts (Preissle & Han, 2014). Spivak (1993) argues for an abandonment of the whole method and encourages us to speak with participants. Regardless of the intention of creating a space that is non-hierarchical, it is impossible to ignore the predicaments that are innate to research. Groups that are oppressed by capitalist and colonialist systems have historically been positioned as the Other. Otherness is seen as non-confirming to the norms of Eurocentrism (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). Not deconstructing ourselves as researchers before entering any setting limits the scope of our research as we deny the ways in which we color the truths of our participants. Creating new systems through different ways of reading and listening to material and people are vital for an understanding that does not disregard nor misinterpret participants (Alcoff, 1991-1992). Described as ‘ethics of representation’, Preissle and Han (2014) point out that feminist researchers if any should know how it is to be misrepresented as the Eurocentric male-dominated academia have subjugated and objectified women and marginalized groups from the start of academia. Lorde (1984) reminds us as researchers to not focus solely on our differences but rather that we approach and recognize how those differences have an impact on our lives and in extension, our research. Being bold and being vulnerable as researchers are important factors as they empower us to grow.
Using the Facebook-group Afrogäris (a group for women and non-binary individuals with African origin in Sweden), I reached out with a message inviting members in Gothenburg to attend three meetings where self-care and healing among women of African descent would be discussed. Many were interested; unfortunately, most of them were located in Stockholm. However, two people whom I did not know prior to the meetings contacted me and wanted to join the sessions. Besides that, friends and acquaintances mentioned that they wished to join as well. My attempt to put words to my emotions after the first meeting cannot really convey how I felt. As we embarked on an intimate and sensitive journey together, I have chosen to keep the sisters anonymous. But for the reader to get a better idea of how I have understood the material collected at the healing circles, I will provide some details about the participants. Instead of unemotionally naming them informant 1, participant 2, etc., I relate their beings to healing crystals. Being on my own spiritual path of growing, I have come to have an interest in crystals and the effect they can have on us. I have named the women after crystals that I feel resembles them. I faced a dilemma as I initially did not want to share any background on the participants for them to be as anonymous as possible. However, as the process of transcribing and writing evolved, some patterns like the racialization of parents as well as upbringing-areas became evident as crucial parts of the participants’ identities as well as what this thesis came to evolve to. I shared with the participants that I wished to share these factors and they consented. Areas of diversity relate to areas where the norm is not whiteness but a mixture of multiple origins in contrast to predominantly white areas. The linguistics of area are to be understood in the context of Sweden as segregated. All participants identify as women and as Black with African descent.

Citrine is a woman with a heart with so much calm love. Despite being one of the youngest in the group her attitude is permeated by maturity. One of her parents is Black and the other one is white. She grew up in an area of diversity. Rhodochrosite is a creative woman who shows her emotions through the words she chooses. She studied in the U.S. and she is ready to take on the world. One of her parents is South-Asian and the other one is Black. She partly grew up in an area of diversity as well as in a white neighborhood in her later teenage-years. Selenite is a blessing through the confidence she carries herself and others in. A hype-woman who reminds us of beauty from within. Both of her parents are Black. She grew up in an area of diversity. Aquamarine is a sister who manages to brighten up every situation. One of her parents is Black and the other parent is white. She grew up in a white area. Sodalite is grounded in herself and has explored areas of self-identity as she put words to our emotions. One of her parents is white and the other one is Black. She grew up in predominantly white areas. Dumortierite brings
sharp comments that easily makes you laugh, always filled with an ironic truth. Both of her parents are Black, and she grew up in a white area. However, she mentioned that she from an early age was in areas of diversity due to family. Hematite bluntly and confidently shares her experience. Her energy is always on the move, exploring new paths of creativeness. Both of her parents are Black, and she grew up in an area of diversity. Lepidolite trusts her guts and is clear on her wants and needs for her own life. With compassion, she explores her own identity. One of her parents is Black and the other one is white. She grew up in a white area. Rhodonite shares her search with us wholeheartedly as she creates a space of openness. Both of her parents are Black, and she grew up in a white area. Carnelian knows what she wants, and she lets people know! A go-getter who spreads her vibrant laugh and confidence without any negativity. Both of her parents are Black, and she grew up in an area of diversity. Obsidian reminds me of acceptance, and to cut off the toxic energy that society imprints on us. She has one Black parent and one white parent. She grew up in a white area. The youngest is 21 and the oldest 27.

As one of the participants had English as their first language, we primarily spoke English during the sessions. However, as I spoke on theories of Black feminism, I chose to do it in Swedish to ensure that everybody understood the terminology used. The participant who has English as their first language was knowledgeable about Black feminism prior to the meetings. Whenever a situation occurred where a person did not find the English words for what they wanted to express, space was given for that person to share it in Swedish as we collectively translated it to English after. Due to different schedules and commitments, the size of the circles shifted over the course of what came to be four meetings. To the extent possible, I tried to transcribe the recordings of the focus-groups as soon as possible after the meetings to be able to note down facial-and bodily expressions as well as silences and emotions. One of the dilemmas I face as I conducted this study was how to ensure that I had interpreted a situation correctly. Reading through the transcript, I had some instances where I was not sure how to analyze the situation. Luckily, I was able to call the participants so that they could clarify what they had implied with e.g. a shoulder-shake or a laugh. By developing listening-skills, we create a space where researchers can learn rather than lecture. When the transcript was completed, the material was analyzed in connection to themes identified by the research questions which resulted in Borderlands of belonging, Mental health, and Self-care as a radical act of resistance and healing which are presented in the analysis. As I wanted the participants to be part of the process to guide the conversation, areas of specifically Swedishness and dual heritage came as two fields that were encouraged by the participants. Initially, I had scheduled that every session would be
around two hours but almost all four sessions ended up lasting four hours and just that fact says quite a lot about the crucial need that exists among Black women in Sweden to talk about their experiences.
ANALYSIS

Being the person who initiates different types of research-settings, I am not sure that it is fully possible to completely abandon hierarchical structures. Keeping ‘speaking with’ in mind, I aimed to create an environment that was welcoming with low music, munchies and an atmosphere of already knowing each other with the possibility of having different ideas about tranquility. The ensemble of sensory frequencies creates a knowledge-building which opens a path to border-thinking. Listening, rather than viewing, encourages us to “not accept what we see as the truth of the image” (Campt, 2017:33). Authors such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks, present the vitality of healing practices but not much has been picked up by academic research; rather it exists on its own as separate to academia. In extension, Hill Collins (2016:135) reminds us to ask ourselves “How does my work contribute to Black feminist thought’s overall oppositional stance toward systemic, societal oppressions?”. We can do that by centering Black women in our heterogeneity by using decolonial methods in our academic analyses. Moreover, a womanist methodology creates space for knowledge to be shared within a community without an external researcher placing their “objective” and possibly damaging notions to already marginalized groups. It is impossible to claim neutrality in feminist research, as everything we do is political with a goal of social justice. One difficulty lays in our different conceptions of social justice. Although, Black women do not solely own Black feminist thought:

…no one has more at stake in advocating for Black feminist thought as oppositional knowledge than Black women, this knowledge project cannot flourish without insisting that Black women as agents of knowledge be central to its production and consumption. (Hill Collins, 2016:140)

Adopting ‘speaking with’, use of sensory levels and Black feminist thought, this analysis takes the reader on a travel between Borderlands of belonging where your name has an impact on your future, and your national belonging is conflicted between inclusion and exclusion. It then moves, exhaustingly to the gloomy streets of stereotypes and racism-related stress to illustrate the mental health effects of gendered racism among the participants of the healing circles. Recognizing healing, the last part lets the sisters float in an ocean of possibilities as we wander into areas of representation in media and surroundings, trusting the journey and exploring the tranquility of healing circles.
Our circle started when the trees were still naked, when the sky was more often than not dark despite meeting at 6pm. As we got to our third meeting, the sun outside my top-floor apartment was starting to set much later and the candles that I had lit the first two circles would no longer give that warm and cozy feeling they once did. Instead, we had created an energy where our own light gave the room warmth. We met four times over the course of a month, where the first session served to introduce us to each other but also to the meaning of Black feminism and in extension, my thesis. We spoke on our basic values, locations of origin and culture as we introduced ourselves to each other, creating bonds of safety and calmness. These starting-points influenced how I carried out the healing circles. Moreover, I gained inspiration from the feminist-and womanist thinkers, authors of different fields including songwriters, poets, artists and storytellers. The four sessions travel from grounding and identity, to negative self-beliefs and racism-related stress to finally land in the impact of physical and non-physical groups of representation towards paths of healing. In every session, I included poems from Ijeoma Umebinyuo’s book “Questions for Ada”, as it deals with representation, identity, belonging and people of African descent in the diaspora and on the African continent. Connecting the different sessions to sensory understandings created a wholeness that is explored throughout the analysis.

Ellis (2014) suggests the incorporation of autoethnography as a tool to introduce the self to the reader which I use both in the analysis but also through poems/reflections highlighted in bold and centered in this thesis. Through these diary notes, I explore my emotions and thoughts. After the first meeting I wrote:

I feel fulfilled.
Excited.
There is so much to be found in each other.
Magic.
Tranquility.
Longing.
Hopeful.
Yet it already exists.
I can contribute.

-My diary, 13th of March
Exploring ourselves as researchers, decolonial feminist methodology suggests a decolonization of the mind. Placing myself as a vulnerable participant has therefore been crucial in conducting this research, which I do through the use of autoethnography as well as creating a methodological critique through healing circles. Doing research that is always safe for the ego will not generate too much but a boost to our self-esteem. Putting ourselves out there to recognize who we are and how to develop is part of the process.

**Borderlands of belonging**

I was unsure from the beginning if people would feel free to share their experiences, by adopting Richardson’s (2018) suggestion of four elements to create a common ground I aimed to create a space of healing. Besides a discussion of Black feminist thought with a focus on intersectionality and distinguishing dominations of power and privilege, Richardson (2018) asserts a place for the conception of what love and joy mean to connect with the participants’ own standpoints. Finding ways to ground the self in relation to a new group requires courage. Therefore, a set of questions of self-identity is useful as to where we ground ourselves geographically, politically, culturally and spiritually (Peterson, 2018:71). As a result of having plenty to discuss, a fourth meeting was added to ensure that we would cover the different themes connected to the research questions as well as the themes proposed by the participants. I wish to introduce you to the healing circles where women shared their time, their thoughts and their emotions as we embarked on a journey tormented by hurt, sorrow, stress but also a journey of self-care, love, and healing.

**Swedishness**

Landing in a conversation initiated by the participants, the concept of Swedishness served as a facilitator to explore our relation to belonging in Sweden. The sisters of the healing circle indicated their origin and/or their parents’ origin as they introduced themselves. During one of the sessions the concept of ‘home’ was raised as to if Sweden was their home. Answers varied from blunt “no’s”, to “I think this is my home” and that, “it goes in waves”. One sister envisioned an inclusive future of having multiple homes:

I try to focus on what I have here that is positive. All of me is Sweden and I would never be able to take that away. But a lot of me is not Sweden too… But I don’t think I have to be thinking of myself as having just one home, maybe… Like when I was in Kenya,
and I got back to Sweden I realized how at home I had felt there, and I had like a mini-depression. But then I worked with that feeling and I had to be clear with what it was that felt like home. What do I have here that triggers that feeling? So, I think that I am very open to new homes

-Carnelian

Carnelian explores the meaning of home and how the creation of a home in singular can be damaging, as it means that we cannot embrace new places that gives solitude. She on the other hand, flips the concept around to her benefit, framing the notion of home as a multiplicity that can offer her belonging in several places. However, sense of belonging is not always up to us to align ourselves with, which is mentioned by Lepidolite further down. In extension to Carnelian, Dumortierite expanded on how she relates to a place called home:

Am I going to go around my whole life looking for a place called home? Sweden is the closest thing I know to a home. So, I try to make this as good as it gets… I’m a foreigner wherever I go… But when I go on vacation, I am obviously Swedish.

-Dumortierite

The last part was added with a little smirk and a shoulder-shaking implying a ‘what to do’, as the women laughed in agreement. As I was transcribing the material, I called Dumortierite to ask her why she had shaken her shoulders and what that implied to her. She said, “I just feel like when I am abroad I notice how Swedish I am, that I identify as Swedish and that people recognize me as Swedish”. With irony and complexity, Dumortierite explains how Sweden is the closest thing to a home and place of recognition. Claiming Sweden on vacation, but not feeling at home in Sweden, was mentioned by a few. Lepidolite added:

I think we are all Swedish, we know that we have free education, and the standard is really good in comparison to our home-countries. So, we know that Sweden is a good country. But for me personally, I am around white people all the time. When I go into university, I am always the only Black person and it makes me extra aware of my surroundings. You get the looks. Looks of ‘do you go here?’…. Yet, I feel safe there. I know that no one will [physically², (Author’s remark)] attack me, but I still feel that I

² She raised her fists to visualize what she meant, and I made the translation of physical.
am not welcome in a sense. Everybody constantly reminds you that you are Black or that my last name is Swedish, and my first name is not. So, there’s always something for them to comment on. That’s kind of telling me that ‘this is not your home’. Even though I have a safe place to go. For me, home is not a place where people constantly remind you of your non-belonging, in any way; by their looks, words, or anything- that you do not belong.

-Lepidolite

Lepidolite expresses reminders of her non-Swedishness; of having surroundings which deny her access to belonging and Swedish identity. Yet, she recognizes Swedish welfare and the opportunities it could entail. The non-recognition of her Swedishness by her surroundings falls in line with Swedish white melancholia (Hübinette & Lundström, 2012) as it avoids conversations on what implication race has to the view of Swedishness. Hübinette and Lundström (2012) understands Swedish white melancholia as a condition that does not leave space for experiences like the one that Lepidolite referred to. Sweden has a long history of defining whiteness as purity which indeed impacted the amplification of race-biology as Sweden opened the world’s first institution of race science in 1922 (Hübinette, 2012). Conflictual feelings of opportunities and hardships are experienced by racialized individuals in Sweden as we are reminded of the way discussions on race-related issues are silenced. Here, El-Tayeb’s (2011) concept of queering ethnicity in Europe could be helpful as a way to understand a postnational Sweden and, in extension, Europe. In reference to colorblindness which El-Tayeb (2011) describes as an active process of suppression, I would like to suggest the phrase ‘denial of racialization’. As blindness refers to a physical condition, I see denial more fit as it is an informed mental state of choosing to suppress the consequences of how racialization conditions racialized Europeans in all their endeavors. The physical condition of blindness should not be conflicted with not understanding racism as colorblindness can wrongfully imply.

The findings of this research suggest that belonging shifts depending on context which is not only in the hands of the person, but dependent on one’s surroundings. Talking about belonging, the participants often reflected on their families as Rhodonite initiated a conversation by saying: “When I think about my parents, that’s when it gets tricky. Especially my dad. I know that he does not feel at home here. If it is not their home, how can it be mine?” The sisters mentioned that their parents’ luminous dreams of their home countries were not always shared by them.
Despite loving what their culture entailed, and the perspectives they received due to being exposed to different cultures, some mentioned that the dreams were not theirs, Dumortierite explains:

My dad wants me to move to his birth-country when he retires. At least for a couple of months but that’s not my home. I don’t feel safe there. They see me as a foreigner as well. So, I try to make it good here…

-Dumortierite

The ‘as well’ is to be seen in conjunction to how Dumortierite feels like a foreigner in Sweden, as previously mentioned. Inhabiting different cultures can be presented as having to choose, a choice that sometimes reflects our surrounding’s perception more than our own as a subtilty reminds you of your non-belonging. Moreover, Swedish white melancholia can leave the racialized Other in a state of being torn, expressing gratitude of what we have, yet critiquing the system that provides opportunities to a few. I would like to propose that in extension to coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2010), ‘coloniality of heritage’ exists as an ever-present state in Sweden. As described in the methodological chapter, coloniality posits the continuum of a global, colonized mind. We are all are exposed to it, but it affects us differently depending on our position in relation to (white, hetero, class, geographical) power. Coloniality of heritage implies a regulation on who is included in the concept of Swedishness, an exclusive club where whiteness is required. Even though racialized Swedes are exposed to hateful comments and physical assaults; the systemic and national idea of Swedish belonging is a discussion that moves slowly due to the denial of racialization. Presenting a research like this, I remind readers of a society that thrives on the denial of racialization; thus, maintaining the melancholic condition as mentioned by Hübinette and Lundström (2014).

**Splitting of the self**

Together with a globalized world, where borders are blurred yet reinforced stronger by nationalists, I wonder how the message of non-belonging, border-thinking and contradictions affect Black women in Sweden. As we discussed belonging in relation to our parents, there were different streams of experiences. Obsidian who has one white parent said that her relationship with her extended family is problematic, “Me and my sister are the only Black people in a very white family. And every time they have to make sure that we know”. She expanded by describing times when she was exposed to slurs regarding her skin-tone and hair,
as well as her being of dual heritage. Despite being Swedish, with a cultural Swedish upbringing, her extended family disregards her belonging with the motivation of a lack of whiteness which feeds into what I mention as coloniality of heritage. Whiteness here is more than the color of skin, but includes name, culture and perceived behavior (Ahmed, 2007). Closeness to whiteness and Swedishness do not automatically translate to feeling included as Swedish. Sense of belonging is contextual. It travels from complex concepts like safety and representation to an understanding of the society one lives in, Obsidian continues:

I am trying to define my Blackness, and it is very important to me. Like life-essential important to have my Black identity. When I grew up, I put so much energy and time proving to everyone that I am was not that [negative stereotypical, (Author’s remark)] Black person. I had [non-Black, (Author’s remark)] friends who were disappointed in me because I was not Black enough, and it broke me in a way. I think we have to define our own Blackness. I refuse to have anyone say, ‘you’re not this, you’re not that’. I feel that my Swedish family wanted me to choose…

-Obsidian

Providing a space where individuals of dual heritage can be the narrators of their lives was provided through the healing circles despite the fact that not all participants were of dual heritage. The problematics and the oppression that stems from binary opposites of gender, sexuality, class are well-researched within gender studies. However, there is a lack of research on the experience of individuals with dual heritage and what that entails for them in a Swedish context. A more globalized world will only translate to more people of dual heritage; thus, an importance in providing space where their experiences can be heard. As all other fixed concepts, the notion of belonging demands for a reconceptualization in a globalized world where borders are blurred out by people who debunk binary norms. Border-thinking as understood by Anzaldúa (2012) takes expression on several levels. From an early age, socially constructed binary opposites such as Black/white, young/old, rich/poor, woman/man are imposed on children. Children are made to understand which identity-traits are to be suppressed as they are trained to see differences between themselves and others. Some traits are visible, others are not. Anzaldúa’s (2012) writing resonates with a sense of fear, of rootlessness. As I have written in another essay and mentioned in the methodological chapter, la Mestiza suggests serenity to know that the sandwiching of different cultures blossom within us and creates new cultures, all on its own (Svenungsson, 2018:2). As we are reminded by Ifekwunigwe (2004) to
let Blackness and whiteness wash through as a way of incorporating all of our identities; we need to find new ways of understanding crossing identities that do not comply to the boxes set up by capitalistic and Eurocentric norms. When a person is not allowed by society to tell their own story, an inner war is created in the confusion of belonging, of not fitting in as one sister described:

I think being mixed, I have never been right. There’s always stereotypes, expectations, prejudice on how someone who is of my mix should look like. So, it doesn’t matter if I am in a white setting or wherever I am, I am wrong. I feel like I’m very unprivileged in that way. Like never right.

-Rhodochrosite

I have read these words many times and they continue to strike my heart with needles as my stomach twists. Never right. Rhodochrosite provides yet another example of the impact of coloniality of heritage as it regulates the possibilities of inclusion. In similarity to this experience, Anzaldúa writes:

The New mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity.... Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa, 2012:101)

It is a heavy feeling that is difficult to carry alone, and I know that if it were not for the sisters I met during my teenage years who also had a Gambian father and Swedish mother, I would not only feel wrong as a Swede, but also within my immediate surroundings. As a person of dual heritage, with a father who is Black and a mother who is white, I could recognize myself in how sisters of dual heritage resonated. As Fanon (1967) mentions, Black men have been portrayed as non-humans whom white women need to be protected from. Moreover, white mothers have been called traitors of the nation for creating Black and brown children. Growing up in a society that perpetuates a negative stereotype about Black people, and especially Black fathers; there was a consensus among the sisters with similar experiences that people are extremely fascinated about our parents’ relationships as Aquamarine mentioned that “Everybody is so interested in my parents, regarding how they met and being especially captivated that they met in Sweden”. There are countless times that people have been curious (or should I say obnoxious) about my parents, questioning how their relationship worked and the causes for their splitting. With media spreading a degrading picture of Gambian men and
Swedish women, the children of those relationships are made to feel like experiments by the societal inquisitions.

Racial belonging is a recurrent theme for the sisters who have parents of different national heritage and constitutes a sense of bewilderment. Speaking about the future, Rhodochrosite mentioned that she had at a younger age been encouraged by friends and ultimately by herself to have children with a white person as that mix would result in, according to the friend, “perfect babies”. It is not only racist but also extremely heteronormative. The idea of the mixed-race baby is often presented to me as a cute accessory which ultimately perpetuates the objectification and exotification of Black people and disregards the struggles it entails. In extension, being of dual heritage and having a proximity to whiteness exposes one to comments and discussions that are derogatory, Aquamarine tells: “When I’m at work they can talk really degrading about Black people like I am not Black, but at the same time a colleague has mentioned that they say even worse things when I am not around”. Through ‘forced passing’, as I suggest as a concept, individuals are, due to their proximity to whiteness, positioned in situations where their Blackness and heritage are not dismissed but somehow belittled and ignored. As mentioned, proximity to whiteness is not only connected to one’s skin, although this is included as well; it includes ethnicity, class and in the Swedish context both language and name. Being able to pass allows entrance to rooms where one’s Blackness can be excused by ‘not being that type of Black person’, which of course is highly racist as well. Sodalite explains:

Something like language that could be considered as a plus because it protects us from certain discrimination can also work as an opposite and expose us to certain comments. For me, I was thinking, that because of my proximity to whiteness people can say racist things to me because they don’t perceive me as that type of Black person. So, they can give disparaging comments, when it is really my mum who you are talking about and in that case my family and me. Like we are not who people think we are. So, it protects the comments being targeted at us, but it also exposes us to everyday trauma. Like, you are still talking about me.

-Sodalite

The concept of passing has mostly been used in the academic field of race and queer studies. However, through the healing circles and what Sodalite mentioned above, I see what I would
call forced passing. Forced passing does not only comprise race and gender, but perhaps more so sexuality, religion, ethnicity and other identity traits that are not physically visible. Rhodochrosite mentioned that “People just assume that I am heterosexual, and I find that really boxing”. Forced passing moves beyond passive and active passing as suggested by Williams (2004); as the individual rejects the label applied to them through forced passig. These identity-traits place individuals in situations where a belonging is forced onto them without their consent; situations where their identity is assigned according to the other person’s norm:

People don’t know, and things are said, and I take offence. I always get the question like ‘but you don’t look like a Muslim?’. My religion is between me and God, and not between anybody else.

-Selenite

Forced passing complicates situations as it pressures individuals to debunk the normative assumption people place on them. These situations occur from an early age, and names can in extension also be understood in the concept of forced passing. As someone who has been working as a substitute teacher, I know that it can be difficult to remember children’s name and, on top of that, learn pronunciations. However, I have during my short time of teaching found multiple ways that do not expose children to uncomfortable situations with regards to their name. For example, simply letting the whole class say their own names instead of reading the names from a sheet of paper. From the day we start school, the magic is ripped from our names and throughout the years to adulthood we understand that our names come with politics and power. Teachers saying, “I’m not even going to try to pronounce this” as experienced by Dumortierite to a room of six-year old’s desperately wanting to fit in. She continues, when recollecting the memory of daily name-lists in the classroom:

When you are a child, you just want to fit in. And they take that feeling away from you. It breaks you. It was so humiliating, and it made me so sad. I used to blame my parents a lot. I would always use to think that I would name my children very easy [Swedish, (Author’s remark)] names. So, it would not be so hard for them.

-Dumortierite

In contrast to Dumortierite’s experience, Rhodochrosite had another experience where she felt that her name did not fit the perception the other person had of her:
My name is very Swedish and international. But I have noticed that teachers lean in and like ‘oh, this is going to be hard’, but then they are like ‘ohhh, ahhh’, relieved and I really don’t like that.

-Rhodochrosite

Her name created yet another forced passing, which through the linguistics of names were granted to her without her wanting it. Experiencing an inner war as children and even adults, where we want to fit in but not at the expense of losing our origin, we are perplexed at an early age with the importance of our names. This experience feeds into the creolization (El-Tayeb, 2011) of what it means to be European today. As we start to familiarize ourselves with the power of our names, we are faced with a new situation as young adults. A sister mentioned her experience at a job-searching facility which is commissioned by the government:

At a job-finding facility they saw my name and they asked me if I could use my middle name when applying for jobs instead. Like he was really feeling bad for me. I refused to, and I kept my name, but I felt a kind of hopelessness. I applied for so many jobs and apartments, and I’ve given up. It is ridiculous. Once, I found an apartment on Blocket⁢³ and called the owner to see if I could see it, and they said no. Then I thought, let me just try and call back and say that my name is Lisa Nilsson [typical Swedish name, (Author’s remark)] and the person on the phone welcomed me to see the apartment. I was like ‘yea, I just called you 20 minutes ago, and you said it wasn’t possible and she just hung up…

-Obsidian

Applying for jobs and apartments without response. Not because of the lack of experience nor failing to meet the requirements; but not even being called in because of our names. In the fall of 2018, Länsstyrelsen⁴ in Stockholm released a report titled ‘Anti-Black racism and discrimination on the labor market’⁵, where the authors analyze unemployment, income, low- and high-status jobs, and managing positions comparing Afro Swedes with the other population in Sweden. The findings were consistent with those of other scholars and suggested that Afro

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³ Swedish advertisement website
⁴ County administrative board
⁵ Antisvart rasism och diskriminering på arbetsmarknaden
Swedes face a much more difficult path to higher positions as well as wages, in comparison to the population who are not born in sub-Saharan African nor have parents from the sub-Saharan African region (Länsstyrelsen, 2018). As a result of not changing our names like Obsidian mentioned, and being racialized as Black in Sweden, Afro Swedes are exposed to horizontal segregation which indicates a tendency of low-income jobs among Afro Swedes, as well as vertical segregation which implies that it is more demanding for Afro Swedes to reach higher positions both in regard to salary, but also status in relation to their educational levels. Consequently, Afro Swedes are underrepresented in managing positions. Moreover, when we do reach higher positions our salaries are barely 76-77% of the average salary of other Swedes (Länsstyrelsen, 2018).

From experiencing an inner turbulence as children, to being ignored in labor-markets, we should hope that our families could be our safe haven. But as mentioned earlier, Dumortierite mentioned how she made a promise to herself at a young age to give her children names that were nothing like hers and would comply to the Swedish norm. To illustrate an example that relates to the borderlands of belonging and especially to those of dual heritage, Obsidian told us that “I have white family members who still don’t know my name properly. They call me all sorts of names except for my name, and they laugh”. We are our names, we are the stories told by the syllables that are to be uttered with delicate sweetness. Instead, our names are used as a ridicule along with the color of our skin. We make our names easier, as Selenite introduced herself with two versions of her name adding that “well, that’s how Swedish people pronounce my name”. I am perplexed by the amount of times we change and bend our names so that they fit someone else’s tongue. And when we give the gift that is our name, it is thrown like a yo-yo for amusement and neglect.

I am Black.

The experience of forced passing and coloniality of heritage positioned the women of this research to incorporate their Blackness differently. Inhabiting different identities that are not always as visible as we feel them, our paths to claiming those identities can be difficult as one sister explained:

In recent years, I realized that the splitting of myself has not been helpful. It does not serve me. I have been thinking of my biracial identity as being double and like I am fully Black and fully white. It has been a complicated thing to wrap my head around.
Because it is strange to claim whiteness. But I do recognize that growing up in white spaces, there is a language I speak... I think language is really powerful, being able to frame my identity in that way has been really helpful for me. Especially in being able to claim my Blackness. It took me until I was 21 before I said that I was a Black person. I always just said that I was biracial. It was a really powerful thing when I was able to say like ‘yes, I am a fully Black person’.

-Sodalite

The path to Blackness in the group was dependent on factors such as cultural and racial centrality in the family, representation in one’s neighborhood and area as well as the parents’ parlance about race and heritage. As mentioned in previous research, Lewis et al (2017) relates gendered racial identity centrality to better coping techniques of gendered racism among Black women. Among the participants of this group, growing up in predominantly white areas resulted in a process of analyzing one’s Blackness which can be understood from the quote above by Sodalite but also previous quotes by Lepidolite, Obsidian, and Rhodonite. Hematite mentioned that:

When I moved to London that’s when I was like ‘oh my God, I am Black, my hair is curly’. And it is not that I am not proud, but I did not grow up with it, so when I got to see those [Black, (Author’s remark)] rooms, my eyes were open to understand that I was not alone, and it gave me so much energy.

-Hematite

The paths to understanding one’s Blackness is not only connected to sisters of dual heritage, but more so connected to the specific area they were raised in. The sisters that grew up in predominantly white areas such as Obsidian, Rhodonite, Lepidolite and Sodalite mentioned that it was not until they were over 20 that they understood and could claim their Blackness. Moreover, Citrine who grew up in an area of diversity with a white and a Black parent, mentioned that “It was not until I was about 18 that an aunty told me that I was Black and that I needed to understand that it is the way that the world will racialize me and treat me”. To not get misunderstood, it was not that they did not want their Blackness, but they had to frame their own Blackness in such a way that it would suit them in extension to increased representation of Black people in their online and offline surroundings, Rhodonite explains:
When I was younger I always reflected upon if I was white enough, it is a bad way of saying it and nowadays I reflect upon if I am Black enough… I need to be this or that. And I think that’s where all of my identity questions come in, so if I am not Black enough then what am I? I need to act this way to be perceived as a Black person…. It is messed up. Like you need to check the boxes and act a certain way, like certain things and be around certain people. It is a lot to keep up with.

-Rhodonite

Despite the non-existent recipe of what Blackness means and is, the concept of Blackness provides a layer of questions to the women of dual heritage as well as the women of this research who grew up in predominantly white areas. As I refer to Blackness and white rooms, I reflect upon what these concepts signifies. I easily define white rooms as spaces where white people hold the majority and power (also known as the whole world as a result of coloniality, capitalism and slavery). Blackness and Black rooms are more difficult to describe due to its heterogeneity, besides the obviosity of skin-color, and the history of racism; Black people have created a global community partly because of shared history and oppression. However, on an individual level, it is more abstract and difficult to connect specific traits to Blackness. Lugones (2011:70) writes about the racialized, gendered self with the words “Her construction as inferior is fictional but real because the fiction is upheld by power”. Becoming conscious of the power that is constraining us is decisive to the decolonial subject as we create paths differently yet collectively. The discussion suggests that border-thinking (Anzaldúa, 2012) is a more recurrent theme with sisters who grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods in comparison to those who grew up in areas with more cultural diversity. Both Carnelian and Selenite, who grew up in areas of diversity mentioned that they use their Blackness to their advantage. Having it easier to identify Blackness at an early age, along with the boxes dealt to us (race, gender, belonging), is presented as a possible source of tranquility in regard to race and belonging. To illustrate, two examples mentioned by Selenite and Carnelian who grew up in areas of diversity:

For me it is from my parents and my surroundings, and how they raised me to see my Blackness as a strength. Black as something normal. It is probably why I have never been ashamed of being Black. My Blackness, the difference makes it much more of a uniqueness.

-Selenite
Our whole identity is about where we are from. We’re proud and we let people know. That’s how we function, and I will represent my neighborhood until I die. I had a Black mentor at my old work and he always said, ‘you will reach whatever you want because you’re so good when you put your mind into things, but don’t forget that you always have to work ten times harder’ and I have twisted that to my benefit, in my CV for example.

-Carnelian

Growing up with strong racial identity centrality is through the quotes by Carnelian and Selenite emphasized as a predicament to buffer against racism-related stress. Gendered racial identity centrality (Lewis, et al., 2017) suggests that one’s race and gender centrality can buffer against racism-related stress, and I would like to propose that it also buffers against a sense of rootlessness. In a country like Sweden, where the Black population is not so large, it is beautiful to be able to see Blackness as a norm. Representation is not only a matter of being represented in your surroundings, but it is also about the support that you get. It is vital for us to remember that splitting ourselves and buying into the ideas of not being able to inhabit multiple identities is a constraint of the self; of our beings. Obsidian mentioned “I think growing up in mixed rooms is the key”. The women within the circle who grew up in areas of diversity and also with a parent who shared the same racial belonging were more prone to talk positively about their experience as Black women and how they used Blackness to their benefit. These women did not approach Blackness as the act of avoiding the multiple of oppressions that Black people in Sweden are targeted with, but instead used their Blackness in a way that I personally aim to as well. The rationale I have presented was worded by a sister as:

It was not until gymnasium that I was in white rooms like that. So, when these structures came close to me, they did not damage me as much because I was already very secure in who I was rather than if it came when I did not feel as secure as I was. There’s a lot of things I cannot relate to that you are saying because I did not grow up in white rooms. I have a picture in my resume, I talk about where I am from in my resume, and I use it to my advantage. For me it [being a Black woman, (Author’s remark)] hasn’t weighed me down psychologically, it has been like the opposite. Of course, I am also in situations where I know that it is not as good to be a woman or Black but most of the times I try to go all out and that has helped me.

-Carnelian
Dumortierite, Hematite and Selenite agreed to not being able to fully relate to the experiences of being exposed to racism in white rooms through family members or due to the area one lives in. Carnelian reminded the participants of the healing circle that we will be, and are already an asset to the community that we are in. These women reawaken me to hold my head high and channel the vibrant energy of being a Black woman, as a sister affirmed that:

My ethnicity is a positive factor in my life because I feel that it builds me up to the type of person that I am today. To get a lot of perspectives. I understand that with Swedish being the norm, it can be seen as a minus, but I see it as a plus because I get so much more out of it. It makes me stronger. I have also thought about not putting my picture in my CV, but I’m like ‘I’m charmy. See me, it is a blessing!’ If I struggle, I struggle. I’ve come to peace with it. The struggle is going to build me, it is me. It is nothing bad, and it is going to make me tired. And I am tired sometimes. I’ve had the privilege to not have to speak about it [racist events, (Author’s remark)], because everyone else takes it. And maybe that’s why I am so positive. Like I don’t have to say anything, because people around me speak up. They are getting more woke… Because if I would say something, people would just be like ‘oh, she is just mad, and aggressive’.

-Selenite

Recognizing that we are tired, that it is tiring to exist in a system of oppression, is part of self-care. Being active not only in social justice movements, but in everyday life with encounters of gendered racism is personal and triggering of embodied trauma for us as Black women. To become aware of the negative effects embodied trauma has on our minds and community is important on a path of decolonizing our minds and systems of oppression. Not caring for the self falls right into the very systems set out to watch us fail (Peterson, 2018). With an exploration of intersections that deconstruct Eurocentric understandings, I hope we are more inclined to see beyond the boxes that have been imprinted in us. To see and understand the complexities of our blossoming beings where we narrate our identities.

Half-breed
Blandras
What are you?
I want one like you
Like an accessory
Skin as a commodity of cuteness
Reminded of never being right
Claiming our doubleness
Smashing walls of glass
    Boxes to tick
    Other
    Never either/or
    Always double
Mental health
This part of the analysis is in no sense a professional review on how to carry out therapy with Black women but rather, it aims to share the impact gendered racism has on Black women in Sweden. During the second meeting which dealt with the effects of gendered racism, the number of the group was extended from six to eleven (including myself) and I had to make some adjustments as the meeting went on. In retrospect, it would have been good if I rescheduled the meeting as I believe that I suffer from PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder) and it was difficult for me to keep my focus with many different energies; but together with the sisters, I managed to hold the healing circle. Prior to the second session I had collected stories about gendered racism from Fanna Ndow Norrby’s book Svart Kvinna6 to present to the group, which also affected me. At the second session, we explored areas of identity, talking about privileges and oppression. Moving on from our identity-traits we used the book Svart Kvinna by Fanna Ndow Norrby to relate our experiences to the narratives shared in the book to talk about negative self-beliefs. I wrote:

Tears.
Tired.
Torn.

With all the stories playing out in my mind together with the terror-attack where people were brutally murdered by a white supremacist, I cannot help but to feel hopeless. I feel hopeless, yet there is a rage building up. An anger directed at the silence by the bystanders.

-My diary, prior to meeting 18th of March

Stereotypes
The findings of this research suggest a comparable notion of metastereotyping as presented by Jerald, Cole and Ward (2017). The women of the healing circle reflected upon similar experiences of altering their behaviors due to perceived negative stereotypes about Black women in Sweden. We explored an awareness that causes stress and anxiety as to what the outcomes may be if one is acting in similarity to the stereotype, as one sister shared that:

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6 Black Woman (English translation of book title)
“When I was growing up, I would always hush my friends when we were a group of Black girls. Because I knew what people around us were thinking. So, I did not want to be that group of girls that they expected us to be. My friends would be like ‘but this is who we are’ and I would always be like ‘no’. I just wanted to fit in. Thinking about it now, it makes me sad. We should have been able to go out like any other young person and go out laughing”.

-Rhodochrosite

Several participants hummed, agreeing and emphasizing how they had acted in a similar manner or felt uncomfortable with friends due to the negative stereotype of Black people. Exploring the present day and the stereotypes that the women face today, Rhodochrosite continued to describe the stereotype that exists about Black women:

Very aggressive and hysterical. I feel sometimes people expects that of me as well. People expect me to be that person and I am really not, and they are just waiting for it. And I’m just like wait, nothing is happening. The stereotype of the Angry Black woman definitely stopped me from acting in certain ways. Especially when I was younger. Like if you want to be the angry Black woman, because you’re entitled to be, because something has happened. You’re not going to be angry and loud because you feel that’s exactly what they expect. So, you just sit there. Quiet.

-Rhodochrosite

As a response to negative stereotypes of Black women, several sisters mentioned that they would alter their behaviors depending on the diversity in the room. In comparison to Jerald et al., (2017:488), they did not mention that they would use any substances to cope with gendered racism and stereotypes. However, the participants agreed with the unnecessary scrutiny that occurs when being a Black woman. Code-switching (Hall & Nilep, 2015) on the other hand was common and is understood as a requirement to gain respect and acceptance that Obsidian, Rhodochrosite and Aquamarine mentioned as memories from their childhood. Code-switching suggests an alternation in language and behavior in response to disadvantage and asset (Hall & Nilep, 2015). As a result, code-switching was experienced as a suppression of oneself as a result of not wanting to be perceived as the negative stereotype:
I did that more when I was younger, I absolutely do it now as well, but when I was younger it came to an extent where for example I would go to a job interview and I felt like I couldn’t have a scarf or my natural hair. But now I am not doing it as much… Switching myself. I promised myself to say something.

-Obsidian

Code-switching refers to what Frantz Fanon (1967) writes about in his book Black Skin, White Masks. In relation to today’s Sweden, language and valuing whiteness as a requirement for success are ever present. With success, I mean both career-wise but also mental happiness and tranquility. According to Fanon (1967), language provides access to a culture when carried out with white masks, code-switching and suppression. What is visualized through the quote by Obsidian can be understood as trying to flee from oneself, but Blackness is not possible to flee from thus simply the creation of a mask. Selenite had another approach to code-switching:

Yea, I always do [code-switch⁷, (Author’s remark)]. But that is also me being able to adapt to new rooms. It is always a twist on how much I give of myself to someone. I know if someone is not comfortable about something specific. Then I won’t be like shouting it out at the person, I don’t want the person to feel uncomfortable. It is a good and a bad way, because I am suppressing a part of me, but I don’t want to be egoistic either. I feel like I am always comfortable with myself in different situations. I adapt to people around me. I would be loud because I really don’t care but I wouldn’t be too extra. I would laugh loud but not ‘snapping fingers’.

-Selenite

Despite claiming that they had left most of the code-switching to their teenage years, more than half of the participants were aware that they still switched. Interestingly, both Selenite as mentioned in the quote above, and Carnelian, who have strong racial gendered centrality experienced code-switching as somewhat beneficial altering to not have to deal with potential racist comments and conversations. Negative stereotypes of Black women place us in positions where we may alter ourselves as a safeguard. A similarity is seen in Hall, Everett and Hamilton’s (2012) research. As a response to cope with stressors, the women of their research shifted patterns of behavior “to ensure they did not live up to stereotypical beliefs held by

⁷ In response to “have you ever code-switched”
supervisors and colleagues” (Hall, et al., 2012:220). Despite different actions to avoid gendered racism, simply going out to dance comes with a baggage of an over-sexualization of Black women. As Black women in Sweden we have heard a lot and a sister recalled a night out:

One time at a salsa-club in Gothenburg, a guy was like ‘I use to go to Cuba to dance with girls like you, and it was such a long time since I danced with a mulatto’ and it continued, being even worse but I have repressed what he said.

-Aquamarine

The stereotype of being a m-word who should provide him with a dance, is connected to the color of our skin rather than the way in which we talk or carry ourselves; our behavior does not have an impact, as the other person bases their stereotype on our perceived gender and race. Black women in Sweden are exposed to stereotypes which are infected by gendered racism as well as negative and controlling images. This thesis, in extension to existent research by Hübinette and Lundström (2014) as well as El-Tayeb (2011) suggest that the stereotype of not being accepted as Swedish is common, and as a sister recaptured a university excursion as one of the times where her Swedishness had been questioned:

When I was studying, we went to two museums in Gothenburg. The first guide used the word ‘negress’ and the second guide was like ‘I bet you’re not used to this’ and I was like ‘to what?’ and he was like ‘to this cold’.

-Selenite

To some, these comments said to Aquamarine and Selenite may be innocent and meant without any harm. These comments however, illustrate the difficulty of not being accepted as Swedes in our supposed home-country which reinforces what I claim as coloniality of heritage, where the color of our skin is more telling than our claim of Swedishness. It manifests as a lack of comprehension of contemporary Sweden in all of its diverse glory. Moreover, it is straight up RACIST and should not be said to anyone regardless of their nationality or positionality. The many problematic things that non-Black people have said and continue to say to Black women can be read in Fanna Ndow Norrby’s book ‘Svart Kvinna’ to get a sample of the daily

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8 English translation: Black Woman
encounters of gendered racism in Sweden. The book is parted into chapters of hair, school, work place and more which were used as a tool of linking experiences during the healing circles.

Within the Black community, we are facing problems of colonial and racist remainders that are expressed through a coloniality of the mind. Coloniality preys on systems of unjust power-dynamics that favor the colonizer. Moreover, coloniality is as mentioned apparent in a continuum, it surpasses colonialism and permeates capitalist systems that reduce groups to oppressed. Not only are our means of production in a state of coloniality, but our language is also permeated by systems of oppression. As Black people we are facing racist systems that not only affect our prospects in life, but it creates clashes within the Black community through e.g. colorism, where one’s proximity to whiteness entails privileges both in Black and white communities in contrast to Black people with dark skin. One sister shared a heartbreak caused by colorism:

The first time I was really hurt was by another Black guy… who I really, really liked. It was because of my skin color that we couldn’t really get together. I think it is even more painful from someone that looks like you…

-Hematite

Nakano-Glenn (2008) describes colorism as a consequence of colonialism and slavery as it provides proximity to whiteness with privileges. As Black women, we are positioned in bizarre situations as our identity-traits shift depending on context. Our skin-tone comes with an immense history, it is no wonder one can get confused with all the stereotypes of our beings, as explained by one sister:

I feel like one persona is expected as somewhat wild and sexual, and especially on the dancefloor, whereas another persona or idea about me is that I am eloquent. I was at an event once with predominantly Black people and the organizer asked me to read a speech. I could not understand why, and he said that it was that I was so eloquent or elegant… And the other participants were darker than me...

-Citrine

The different oppressions we meet as Black women are, since colonial times, regulated for us to be against each other within our community. Unfortunately, the experiences of the women
of this research tell the story of history repeating itself. However, there is also a recognition of how privileges land within us and Lepidolite mentioned that, “I know that I am struggling as a Black woman but my fellow sister from Somalia struggles even more because of her ethnicity and the prejudice that exists in Sweden against Somalis”. Colorism and its intersections of ethnicity, nationality and class continue to posit light skinned Black women in places of privileges. It does not take away the experience of feeling in between or not sure of one’s Blackness. However, it is important to note that these experiences are to be seen in the context of opportunities and disadvantages that colorism entails. Light skinned Black women are more prone to see themselves represented in mainstream culture as well as able to access certain rooms. Thus, there is a need for the recognition of how gendered racism affects us differently depending on our intersections.

In today’s society, the concept of race is transmitted through social institutions such as family, media and norms which have the power to create negative racial stereotypes and/or the chance of instilling pride and tools of coping with how one is racialized (Harrell, 2000). Internalized racism takes expression through negative beliefs about oneself and/or the racialized group one is identified with. The damages of devaluing one’s existence is one of the many harmful ways through which racism operates (Miville & Ferguson, 2014). As one of the preferred outcomes, I hoped for us to recognize how our differences create possibilities of solidarity and sisterhood as the practice of healing circles is a method that is viable to the sensitive and traumatic experiences of Black women. Healing is not only a celebration of our communities but, as Richardson (2018) reminds us, it also functions as opposing systems that are upheld on the basis of subordination. Using healing circles as a feminist method creates space for insight that might not have been possible through other, more hierarchical research-methods. Moreover, talking about things that occur within the Black community provides a possibility of self-recovery and unity of the self and the community at large as we decolonize the mind by deconstructing systems of domination that permeate our thoughts and actions.

Little do they know
My magic is generational
   Communal
   Circular
Hundreds of years
Hundred times harder
Racism-related stress

As proposed in previous research, Harrell (2000) investigates health effects of racism through six racism-related stress types. I wish to explore these six types to understand if there is a commonness in the issues that Black women are faced with outside of the U.S.-context. As point of departure, Harrell (2000) lists six types of racism-related stress which clinical practitioners should take into consideration. The implication of racism goes well beyond individual incidents, as the effects of them are generated through generational, political, cultural and so-called subtle systems that permeate everyday-life of racialized groups (Harrell, 2000). The six types are racism related life events, vicarious racism experiences, daily racism microstressors, chronic-contextual stress, collective experiences of racism, and transgenerational transmission of group traumas. This study applies the six types to explore if and how the types affect Black women in Sweden. I wish to present these six stress types to disrupt Swedish white melancholia; to scream out that this is real, and that it affects us and our wellbeing. The first type of racism-related stress is referred to as racism related life events that are connected to personal experience and encounters with racism. Obsidian shares:

My family would call me mixed-breed or like ‘you’re not even racially pure’ and make fun of my hair. From their perspective it would be in a loving way like ‘here comes the troll’. And comments like ‘your hair is so difficult and costs a lot of money, you can’t shower too long’.

-Obsidian

I chose this example as I wanted to illustrate how racism is perceived as value-neutral (Huibinette, 2012) in Sweden. Not even within the homes of our family-members can Black women be safe from racism. Moreover, the quote from Obsidian serves as an additional example of the impact of coloniality of heritage as it upholds that whiteness is a precondition for Swedishness. Despite her family’s recognition of her cultural, Swedish origin; her Swedishness is questioned. The second type of racism-related stress, vicarious racism experiences, diverts from collective racism experiences as it concentrates on events where one is an observant of injustices rather than being the target of racist actions. To illustrate:

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9 English translation of what Obsidian referred to as 'blandras' in Swedish
If I go out with my white girlfriends, it would not be any special problems. But when I went out with my Black guy friends we weren’t welcome, and the police showed up and took one of them and it escalated very quickly. And that was a very clear example of privilege. Because I’ve never seen it live, I’ve heard of it. But now I’ve lived it as well…

-Carnelian

In this case, it was not the sister who was exposed to denial of access, but the friends she was with. However, being part of such a setting causes stress, not only in solidarity, but as a reminder of the system that enjoys using its power against marginalized groups. Vicarious racism experiences are easily confused with collective experiences of racism. Collective experiences of racism-related stress describe stress that is connected to sociopolitical systems of oppression targeted at specific marginalized groups. A previously mentioned quote where Lepidolite raised the fact, and I paraphrase, that she holds privileges due to her ethnicity and skin-color in comparison to Black people of other ethnicities, national background and skin-tone can be seen as a collective experience of racism-related stress as it does not target Lepidolite, but people of the groups which she identifies with. Moving away from personal and semi-personal encounters of racism-related stress, the fourth type, chronic-contextual stress manifests through stress related to institutional racism and how one is to endure within oppressive systems. An example mentioned is the lack of representation in professions, and more importantly the lack of access to professions for Afro Swedes. As explained earlier by Mångkulturell Centrum (2014) and Länsstyrelsen (2018), Afro Swedes face more difficulties in accessing higher positions and wages in relation to their experience and education in comparison to other Swedes. A sister reminisced her experience of living in the U.S.:

I saw people on the buses, in schools, professors and doctors. You talked about representation and I do not see us represented. Now slowly, our generation is getting up there I hope. But growing up, I didn’t see us at all.

-Rhodochrosite

Despite some hope that our generation will shift the homogenous professional sector that was not accessible to our parents, lack of representation is a mirror of social structures and power-dynamics which is permeated by institutional racism where many rooms are only accessible with the pass of whiteness. As mentioned by Länsstyrelsen (2018), the academic accomplishments by Black people in Sweden are not equivalent to the jobs nor the status of
jobs of our non-Black Swedish peers. When we do access non-Black rooms, the fifth type of racism-related stress of daily racism microstressors may cause a new level of headache and stress. Daily racism microstressors are daily degradations with underlying racist stereotypes and perceptions. In the Swedish context, Hübinette (2012) posits that Swedish language is permeated by colonial and racial oppressive phrases that are presented as value-neutral. As previously mentioned, value-neutral expressions feeds into the idea of Swedish white melancholia where not many things are perceived as racist; but rather value-neutral, which according to Hübinette (2012) stems from a denial of Sweden’s connection to slavery, race-biological research and colonialism. Drawing on a personal experience, a social science teacher once attempted to in her way complement me by saying “your hair is beautiful despite being of the negroid race”. At the age of 16, I was not sure what to answer. An insult dressed as a compliment. The disrespect of my grandmother’s hair and the coils on top of my cousin’s head. Comments like these are not a one-time thing, we are exposed to comments that remind us of power-dynamics and norms as they are presented to us as value-neutral and more often than not as a compliment which we ought to be thankful for. The sixth and final form of racism-related stress suggested by Harrell (2000) is transgenerational transmission of group traumas. During the healing circles, I explained transgenerational transmission of group traumas to the group as a shared and felt understanding of the historical impact that generations of our ancestors have been exposed to which we carry within us. This freight develops from a young age, and Selenite mentioned how it affects her in her everyday life, “What scares me are prejudiced people. It feels like they could do whatever to a human being… And they justify their actions based on their prejudice”. Carrying stress within us may cause us to act in certain ways as we internalize perceived racist behavior by non-Black people. Sharing an experience that I had last summer has made me reflect on how I carry traumas without being aware of them:

I had contacted a person regarding an apartment and she had seen my profile, with my name which is a typical Swedish name and when we decided to meet I had an anxiety attack just from the phone call. My mind started spinning about the possibilities of her acting in a racist manner when she would see that me and my boyfriend were Black, so I ended up not even seeing the apartment…

Describing events that cause stress related to transgenerational transmission of group traumas is complex and ungraspable to me even as I experience it. It is not until after that I realize why the turbulence of feelings has occurred within me. How events of racism-related stress occur is
vast. However, these six types indicate the many ways Black women are forced to buffer themselves against oppression. Dealing with racism-related events cause emotional stress for us. Emotional stress can be regarded as the emotional labor that goes into analyzing events where oneself or others have been racially discriminated. It goes beyond dealing with the emotions of injustice but includes the perplexity one feels when one’s experience is being questioned as a sister contemplated:

You have to have like a moral debate in your ear. Like nowadays I’m tired, you say whatever you want to say, and I won’t stand there and educate you. But at the same time, I feel like I am letting something down. Like I should have said something…

-Obsidian

The first Swedish government-funded report on Afrophobia was released in 2014 which mapped hateful crimes (physical and verbal) against Afro Swedes. The report concluded that Afro Swedes are one of the minority groups that are most likely to be exposed to hateful crimes, in all areas of society. Despite two reports (see Mångkulturellt Centrum, 2014; Länsstyrelsen, 2018) suggesting the unstable climate Afro Swedes face, the debate on race in Sweden is behind our time (Mångkulturellt Centrum, 2014). Adding to Harrell’s (2000) research, I suggest a seventh type of racism-related stress of extending physical encounters to online encounters of racism-related stress. Hand in hand with technocultural development, racism gains ground not only in face to face situations and systemic oppression, but it appears on social media as well. Obsidian mentioned that she had called someone out through a comment on Instagram and received a response from a person affiliated to Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR)\(^\text{10}\) writing “you f***ing wh**e, I will kill you n****r-pu**y”. As millennials, the participants are well-familiar with social media and debated both the negative and positive effects social media have on their mental health. Living in Sweden, the online community of ignorance had two main causes a couple of years ago. One of them included the freedom of naming a Swedish dessert ‘n***er-balls’, when the accepted name is chocolate balls. Groups were created to preserve a proposed Swedish tradition of having the freedom to use the n-word when ordering a dessert. The second cause was a debate on Pippi Longstocking; a world-famous, fictional girl who is depicted as one of the strongest and a national hero for children in Sweden in particular. Being published in 1945 many of us have a fond, yet troubling memory of Pippi Longstocking. As

\(^{10}\) Nordiska motståndsrörelsen
she comes to talk about her father, she describes him as the ‘king of the n*****s’. It was not until the edited version of 2015, that the famous children’s book changed the passage to say ‘king of Southern seas’\textsuperscript{11}. It sparked a massive debate on national television as well as online. Opponents to removing the word in the book were critiquing the change as devastating and as controlling the arts, but most importantly a threat to Swedish traditions. I mention these stories, as a sister highlighted that the Pippi-debate was the last thing she encountered on Facebook before she shut down her account. Three other sisters mentioned that they had left Facebook as a result of not being able to log in without being faced with discriminatory comments on general posts. Moreover, they expressed heartbreak and anger over the murders of Black people that were broadcasted on Facebook and the impossibility of choosing one’s feed on Facebook in comparison to other platforms as e.g. Instagram. Before finally deactivating their Facebook accounts, they mentioned that it could get so bad that they would call in sick to work because the hateful comments were too heavy to carry. The seventh type of online encounters of racism that I suggest responds to the technocultural development and the risks it holds for racism-related stress.

\textsuperscript{11} Author’s translation
Self-care as a radical act of resistance and healing
Having dealt with themes of coloniality of heritage, denial of racialization and online encounters of racism, I wish to invite the reader to the coping mechanisms applied by the participants of this research. This final part of the analysis is devoted to positive coping mechanisms and the many ways that Black women find techniques to incorporate self-care in their everyday life. This part serves to remind sisters of the affinity our community holds. This is not a “we are strong, we can do anything”-type of message. Although it is true that our capability is beyond measures, the perception of the strong, Black woman is harmful as it places unimaginable weight for us to carry. We should not have to carry everything we are carrying. Instead, I wish for this space to be a reminder to be careful yet courageous with our emotions, experiences and dreams. I wanted the fourth and last session that we met in my apartment to be a blossoming session, a gathering where we remembered the possibilities we create for ourselves and in extension our community. The focus was separatist rooms and practices of self-care, self-love and healing. We started the session with 15 minutes of writing down what it meant for us to be in separatist rooms, which was later on shared anonymously with the group. This task is methodologically foundational as I intended to write our story together through our oral experiences but also through the written word. As we moved on to practices of self-care, we used a big sheet of paper to share our thoughts. In the beginning of the meeting, I encouraged everybody to write down something that they felt they needed to hear. By the end of the meeting, the person beside would read the note as a reminder of the magic that we all hold.

Bare and exposed to the reflections of the crystal snow
Buds bloom on their own time
Some have had the sun shine on their skin
While others only remember the coldness of winter
As the sun starts to familiarize itself with the grey asphalt
Trees start blooming in cherry pink
As if earth had created mirrors

-My diary, 1st of April
Virtual inclusion and representation in music

As the sisters entered my apartment, they were met by musical tones of different Black, magical voices. For me, music has always served as a solitude, a reminder that I am not alone, and it has provided a space where I can let my emotions run free. At the end of every session, we played music videos by Solange, Janelle Monáe, Destiny’s Child and could not help but to dance, moving our hips from side to side as the sun set outside the window:

Music is healing and calming. Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin. What would we have done if we did not have Black female singers? I might be dead. It is from that music that I collect my strength, healing, inspiration and everything.

-Rhodochrosite

Growing up in Sweden, I thrived as I came to understand that Bubbles, a young Swedish pop-group, had two Black members. Together with Emilia’s Big Big Girl, I sang the songs loud and proud. Growing older and saving up money, I bought my first Alicia Keys album and I could proudly go to my school’s talent show and be an artist who looked like me. Being notified by a classmate at a young age that I could only be Scary Spice as I was not white, indicated to me that it was not with white artists I was welcome. However, with Black artists I felt a resemblance, not only with their looks but also with the musical tones that goes deep within me and is attuned to Black history and culture. Music allows narrating the story, using our own words, rhythms and understanding of experiences. An example of an artist who does that is Solange, loved dearly by us all and mentioned by Sodalite, “We love how Solange crushes boundaries for what a Black woman does; not only with beauty, but with architecture, style, scenery and dance”. An artist is more than a great singer, but someone as Solange uses different tools to reach out to an audience and especially her Black audience by claiming the narrator-role in all her endeavors. Another artist that crushes norms about what it means to be Black is Summer Walker:

I love Summer Walker and how she crushes norms. She is Black and has tattoos and piercings on her face with green or blue weave. She sings about love, relationships and

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12 Mel B in the 90s pop-group Spice Girls
sex. I got so happy when I saw how she looked. It balances out the idea of how a person that sings her kind of music should look like.

-Rhodochrosite

What both Summer Walker and Solange bring to the women of the healing circles is the idea that Black women can be anything; we can evolve in millions of ways as we combat and break the stereotypical and one-sided idea of Black women. Talking about Hip-Hop, RnB, Trap, Soul, and Dancehall, we shared an understanding of the derogatory message the lyrics sometimes has about women. Trying to wrap our heads around how our feminism conjuncts with the music, we also explored a discussion on owning the narrative. A sister pointed out the complexity:

I believe that many times, when stories are being told in Hip Hop, that it is often times their experience. And their only experience. It is how they have heard their family speak to their mother, aunty, sister, that is what they know. I mean we don’t think it is nice because we have lived another life. We have had the privilege of seeing healthy ways of speaking to each other. But that is how they see the world. And maybe they do not have the education or know better. It is their expression and experience, and I think that they should be able to share that. They don’t know anything else. I mean, we have the choice to not listen to certain types of songs because we do not agree with them, because they do not align with who we are. But for someone else it might, it might do something for them.

-Rhodochrosite

As the conversation mostly steered to Hip-Hop and Trap, the narrative told in the lyrics is often the reality that the artists experience. Taking much of our music from the U.S., we see similar patterns in Swedish Hip-Hop as well. It was therefore very refreshing when Imenella released music where she blasts out men who are trash. Perhaps not even as a response to music made to shame and objectify women, but more as an ode to be the queen that she is. Moreover, talking about the stereotype upheld in Hip-Hop culture of women’s bodies, Rhodochrosite mentioned that:

It is a fresh breeze when Kendrick [Lamar, (Author’s remark)] says ‘show me something natural, like ass with some stretchmarks’. It makes me happy. In comparison to the idolization of fake bodies.
Spinning away from music and into social media we discussed the possibilities of Instagram as a platform of representation, where we can choose a feed where we feel represented. Lepidolite mentioned that “It makes a huge difference. It is so empowering, and it makes me feel so good” and Obsidian added “Yes, being able to decide your own feed on Instagram in comparison to Facebook; now, I only have things that are like ‘yaasss’ and it is so nice”. Changing my own Instagram-feed more accordingly to the words mentioned by Kendrick Lamar above, served me in the way that I see thick and fat Black women feeling themselves; owning their bodies, in the extent possible in a patriarchal world, and sharing pictures where they celebrate themselves and bodies that are deemed as unhealthy, ugly and not beautiful enough for Western nor male consumption. The debate on to what extent body positivism is entrenched with feminism will have to be discussed in another essay. However, I understand that sharing pictures of almost naked bodies and listening to certain music might not be aligned with the feminist utopia I wish to see; with that said, it still makes me feel good, it challenges how coloniality has conditioned my mind to believe that one body-type is the only one accepted. With the help of representation on social media, the thickness of my thighs and the curves of my belly can roll freely. bell hooks (2005:xxx) writes:

Black women deserve to have multiple paths to healing, multiple ways of thinking about spirituality, multiple paths towards recovery... When we choose to heal, when we choose to love, we are choosing liberation. This is where all authentic activism begins.

bell hooks reminds us that Black women are entitled to various ways to wellbeing and healing, we have to be able to cherish and recognize what makes us feel good. Social media functions as an alternative channel where we, through hashtags and accounts, can see ourselves represented in a way that is not possible in Swedish mainstream media nor everyday encounters. In contrast to the negativities of social media and online encounters of racism, we explored how music, movies, written words and social media could help to empower Blackness as we split into groups. After the third session I wrote:

I bring with me the courage of creating rooms.
Rooms that may not have existed but that were created with a click.

Click it indeed goes
As we are shut down
Click and roll as the same faces pass by our feeds
Click as we unfollow the constraining shackles of what it means
To be us

-My diary, 25th of March

By progressively taking on historical and contemporary issues, Black women continue to design new systems of collectives that envision a more inclusive and interconnected future. Using a multifaceted understanding of self-care is crucial to comprehend practices of healing that do not rely on capitalistic gains. Hill Collins (2016) suggests that media outlets are being used as contemporary points of departure to develop Black feminist thought. A sister described her use on social media as:

I use social media to find more representation and I unfollowed all white influences. I am very interested in make-up and beauty, and I was thinking to myself that ‘why do I follow white influencers?’. Make-up for example, it won’t look the same on me. It will have the opposite effect, I will be reminded that the make-up is not available for my color. Wherever I go, there are white people everywhere; in shops and in magazines. Like everywhere. My job, my family and my friends. So why should I follow them on social media as well? My need to create a platform for myself is huge. When I feel sad or something has happened that is related to my skin-tone then I have platforms like Pinterest with folders of hair, make-up and fashion. Sure, it is sad that I have to create these rooms for myself. But for my own sanity, I must create these rooms.

-Lepidolite

I find that the general conversation regarding social media often gets trapped in debates regarding screen time or the pressure it puts on people to fit into the mold of social media influencers. However, as mentioned by the sister above, we can use social media to see realities that we do not see in our everyday lives. We can instill hope, develop knowledge, and be reminded of alternatives to Euro-U.S. norms. Moreover, social media can increase our understanding of the struggles of marginalized people around the world. Creating alliances with movements that center on other oppressive systems yet shares the overall aim of disrupting the white-capitalist-heterosexist-ableist-racist-sexist systems enhances a joint struggle. I would like to propose the concept ‘virtual inclusion’ as social media and online platforms provide an
inclusion that might not be possible through physical encounters, as exemplified by many of the participants:

Last summer I watched a lot of Black lesbian video-blogs, and it was so nice because it gave me hope because I haven’t seen it being portrayed in movies or anywhere. And I don’t know any Black women that are in a functioning relationship with kids or whatever. Social media gives a spot to things that have not been given space in mainstream media. And then I get to see two gorgeous Black girls have a sex scene, I’m like yey! Because I see myself.

-Rhodochrosite

Speaking on relationships, the lack of diverse fictional media lays the ground for creatives around the world to create what they see missing. The development of counter-narratives to traditional, mainstream media’s depiction of Black families and Black individuals, serves as an embodiment of Black feminist thought as Hill Collins (2016) pushes for alternative ways of knowledge sharing and development. Expanding on the theme of families, relationships and love, Citrine added:

I follow a family on YouTube where the mother is Black, and the father is white, and they have two children. One of the reasons that I follow them is that my mother is Black, and my father is white, but that combination did not work out so well… So, it feels good to watch it work.

-Citrine

As a child who also has parents whom are racialized in different ways, I have noticed a pattern of people’s involvement in our parents’ relationship. As mentioned previously, with specificity to the Gambian-Swedish context, there is already a layer of intrusive questions that reproduce racist systems which invalidate interracial relationships to an extent. The participants of this research, as well as personal friends who have parents where one is Black and the other one is non-Black, express how people they encounter at work and in their personal life feel very free to ask questions about the relationship of their parents. These questions are very intimate, and it should under no circumstances be on the person of dual heritage to have to answer to questions of e.g. their parents’ separation. In response, Citrine suggests a path to personal healing through virtual inclusion and representation of something she felt missing.
As well-established, the written word has for long been used as an educational site. Though, as young Black women in Sweden, we have not often been trained in primary school of the vocabulary that names oppression and discrimination; the written word gives us that opportunity as Rhodonite mentioned that: “I read a lot; articles, blogs and different posts online. I have learnt how to argue for my cause better, and the next time I express myself better, I know what to say”. When we find the words to express ourselves, we can mobilize in new ways. Correspondingly, Peterson (2018:67) writes, influenced by Audre Lorde that “Radical healing begins by becoming aware of how the traumas of injustice influence our own behaviors and the behaviors of others”. Being educated in Black feminism and Queer theory is unfortunately not part of the Swedish educational curriculum. Being in rooms of representation and using different forms of media entails a spreading of information that can be challenging to attain but nonetheless crucial for an understanding of societal systems. Moreover, and perhaps most important, Carnelian said “I use the written word as a reminder to myself. My background picture on my phone says ‘young, Black woman, be kind to yourself’”. We use the written word as small reminders of who we are, who we have been and who we aspire to be as Black women. We are envisioning a Black feminist futurity in the words of Campt (2007). Developing ways of listening, Campt (2017) describes the reality of a Black feminist futurity as something that has to be aspired by “living the future now” (Campt, 2017:17). A Black feminist futurity encourages us to live now as we wish for the future to be. In similarity to Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Audre Lorde and other womanists and feminists, a reality is envisioned where marginalized voices of today are bound to have their space. Recognition and representation are recurrent factors in how the sisters spoke about video-formats of social media:

I watch YouTube a lot. For hair-inspiration both on routines and hair-styles. Also, Black vloggers because you can recognize yourself in them, which I cannot do with my surroundings. You have a connection on a different level in comparison to a white person’s everyday life. Because their problems, are not really problems…. I mean it is still legit problems for them, but I cannot relate to them. I am struggling for my life. And to see Black people on YouTube, in their life, it becomes normal; like I am not the only one. Since I do not have these [Black, (Author’s remark)] kind of rooms, I can see it on social media instead and see that there are others who live like me. Also, to see that it is not always only about the struggle, but just the everyday life.

-Lepidolite
When I asked Lepidolite to clarify what kind of problems she could not relate to, she referred to white, mainstream YouTubers who share their lives with their online community; where the main struggle could be that their washing machine was broken. Thus, Lepidolite felt the need to create a space where the struggles that she is facing is represented, as a way of being virtually included. Subscribing to accounts that are run by Black individuals may seem apolitical, but I would claim that they are partly activists as they create the potential for personal growth and collective awareness. As Black bloggers, vloggers, influencers and Black people in general take space on social media, we can provide a counter-narrative to the story told about us in the news and mainstream media. However, views, subscriptions and social media at large is positioned within a capitalist system, but it holds the possibility to stir conversations which address and debate the realities of Black individuals. Social media, moreover, has the potential to enhance the conversation on marginalization and exclusion, but more importantly for this research; representation, as it functions as a tool for inclusion. Being able to see ourselves represented on social media and specifically virtual inclusion is a recipe on how millennials of the African diaspora use new tools to evolve. The diaspora is not only a place of displacement and violence but a trans-local project of resisting coloniality (Lao-Montes, 2007) as we, with the help of technocultural assemblages like virtual inclusion, explore the heterogeneity of Blackness.

**Trust the journey through self-care and healing circles**

In support of previous research, the healing circles confirm that similar racist tendencies in Sweden trigger feelings of racism-related stress among the participants. Previous research has suggested that actively distancing oneself from potential microaggressions can be connected to the lack of control of the situation (see Seaton, Upton, Gilbert, & Volpe, 2014) or avoidance as a coping-mechanism (see Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood & Browne Huntt, 2013). However, distancing oneself is presented by the participants as a healthy way of stepping away from situations that may be triggering for them as a form of self-care. Hematite, who grew up in an area of diversity shares her opinion:

> At a grown age, I don’t want to be lecturing people as to why they should not call people this or that or generalizing people. It should be an effort on the majority’s side to be like ‘what is going on here’. It can’t always come from the minority. Racism is a white person’s problem.

-Hematite
Hematite enrolls in a practice of self-care that is not connected to capitalism but rather a reflection and action that recognizes her boundaries. Murray (2015) emphasizes the financial gain by capitalism of self-love and self-care as related to self-esteem rather than self-respect by its idea of encouraging consumerism. By differentiating between self-respect and self-esteem, Murray (2015) points out that self-esteem recognizes evaluation of actions, whereas self-respect gives peace of mind by liking ourselves as we are. “As we are” is however problematic as it reproduces the idea that a ‘true self’ exists, something that social constructionism dissociates, as it reminds the reader of social constructions of reality (Burr, 2015). In extension, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) identifies socially constructed intersections that we might try to disengage with, but our existence is always mirrored in different socially constructed norms. Bridging commonalities and differences among us, as well as creating borderlands of belonging enables a stronger formation for social justice. Anzaldúa (2012) eloquently describes the blessings and challenges of having borders that are at times at war, and at other times bridges of understanding. Being situated at the border and inhabiting borders within oneself means being a mediator between differences.

According to Michaeli (2017), linking self-care to consumerism is done through three steps. First, privatization of responsibility where wellbeing is individual rather than collective. Second, disregarding the socio-economic and political factors of agony. Third, self-care is encouraged to be about massages and meditation rather than organizing due to anger and injustice which Michaeli (2017) points out as depoliticizing effects. Michaeli (2017:55) suggests:

Queering self-care also involves a suggestion to go beyond binaries of healthy/unhealthy, positive/negative ways of coping, thereby opening radical possibilities of what being well can mean for you, in this time and place.

What is mentioned above by Hematite serves as an example of connecting self-respect and boundaries rather than an attempt to increase her self-esteem. Queering self-care through boundaries and a recognition that racism is not for us to carry is a radical act of resistance as it places the responsibility of racism on the people that gain from it; white people. In extension to previous, Murray (2015) ends their doctoral dissertation by asking if practices of self-love can be reclaimed from its neoliberal meanings. Reading Black feminist thought, we might have a chance. I would suggest that one key-practice of self-care for Black women is to remind
ourselves that we are not obliged to educate people; especially not about topics related to our lives as Black women. It is not upon racialized people to educate white people on their history and deconstruct prejudice. It is upon the person in the binary powerful position to use that position and make a difference. We have screamed for long. Too long. Co-workers, teachers and citizens must be encouraged by politicians to combat racism as a national enforcement against oppression. Selenite mentions that:

The other person does not want to understand. Reflecting on yourself, it is not just ignoring it, but it shouldn’t affect you, but sometimes it does, and you cannot do anything about it. But when I get affected in a bad way I just try to say, ‘fuck it’. I try to be… I just try to be… I put it in God’s hands as well, try to see something positive. Is it going to build me up or tare me down? And if it breaks me down, then how will I build myself up?.

-Selenite

Radical healing serves to dismantle systems of oppression as we identify practices of gendered racism as we speak on our experiences. As explained earlier in connection to racism-related stress, emotional stress includes the labor it entails to describe racist events to people. Emotional stress is heightened when sharing events with people who are acting racist, but it can also heighten one’s emotional stress when sharing the event with friends and family as one might do this in white settings. Oftentimes, this can lead to Black women being placed in a vulnerable position as she can be subjugated to a questioning of her experiences. Obsidian shared that when describing her encounters of racism to a colleague he had mentioned that he understood her experience of racism as his red hair exposed him to, according to him, similar oppression and bullying by saying that “having red hair is the same thing as being Black”; implying that the two identities share the same struggle with bullying and chances in life. Not only does it take a lot of emotional energy reflecting upon traumatizing events, the implications of being silenced or pathologized (see e.g. Harrell, 2000) when sharing one’s experience is another factor of stress that affects Black women when experiences are responded to with skepticism. Therefore, adding to the practices of self-care, one can choose one’s surroundings to the extent possible as Sodalite explains what she feels is important in her chosen surroundings:
Friendships that are initiating, that people self-reflect, that I am not the only one inspiring, but that people are doing that work for me as well. Like a shared responsibility. I feel like I am always pushing the discourse. Like motivating some kind of self-reflection because of the way that my identity is set up. It would be nice if they did it themselves.

-Sodalite

With this last part of the analysis I wish to share the impact that separatist rooms can have on the wellbeing and resilience of Black women, and possibly for other groups as well. Expanding on Campt’s (2017) concept of using different senses, I explored what was felt in the healing circles. To further open up to each other and to our prior experiences of being Black women in Sweden, poetry was read during the healing circles to create a climate of sharing. I added poetry reading in conjunction to three key-practices mentioned by Jackson-Best (2016) which includes Grounding One’s Self, Work of Undoing and the Actual Work of Care. During the circles, I read poems from Questions for Ada by Ijeoma Umebinyuo, a contemporary Nigerian poet and womanist. When I discovered her poetry on Instagram a couple of years back, it resonated so well with me and I wanted to explore if the women of the healing circle felt a resemblance to Umebinyuo’s words as well. We explored her words and experiences as if they were our own. Moreover, the sisters were asked to bring their own poetry or words that had affected them as we shared thoughts and emotions. Poetry is not only a reflection of contemporary and historical realities, but it also functions as theory. Theories of life, of resistance and of love. Combining bodily-and mindful expressions, we can invoke on a collective embodiment (Campt, 2017) of experience by using poetic inquiry. During the sessions, I did not only adopt a listening to bodily expressions, but I also made sure that we used our bodies and the physical room in various ways. We varied from a circle with some distance on the couch and chairs, to tight circles on the floor as well as independently spread around the room. We shared similar experiences and sometimes sat in complete, comfortable silence; tasting and feeling the words of the poems. Despite being born in the era and development of online platforms, the sisters mentioned how the written word both in poetic-and non-poetic format served as a comfort and as a teacher.

For me, it feels like poetry put words to my emotions, things I am yet to verbally formulate. Telling my own experience through autoethnographic remarks is a liberatory method as it allows me to share my own narrative by connecting the personal to the cultural. As the
researcher, I embark on a travel, together with the reader, of self-discovery with possible therapeutic value for both of us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). More often than not, the words of those with similar intersections as I resonate with something that has not previously been challenged within me. It makes me feel like I am part of a collective that I have been searching for; a collective that has been exposed to oppression but still manages to create magic. All the quotes included by Gloria Anzaldúa have especially resonated with me as they express border-thinking. Moreover, I feel the power and critical thinking when reading Audre Lorde as my mind raises and evolves. Audre Lorde (2017:48) writes about the importance of poetry:

> It reminded me again of how important poetry can be in the life of an ordinary Black community when that poetry is really the poetry of the lives of the people who make up that community.

The global Black community and the Afro-diasporic perspective create a mult centered reconceptualization of the self, memories and power-dynamics to explore decolonial actions beyond nationalism as mentioned by Lao-Montes (2007). To stand in our own magic means disrupting norms and binaries created to divide and break us. The act of silencing has for long been used to keep marginalized groups from speaking their truth. However, ways have always been created among groups in the periphery. In similarity, the participants of this research show their courage by sharing their experiences to people before unknown to them. But they have also decided to share it externally, to you; the reader. You are welcome. Sharing their thoughts and processes to becoming women who stand in their own right as they are defining and redefining themselves. Not only for their own sake, but for a communal survival as a radical act (Ahmed, 2014). In Lorde’s (2017) words, it is self-preservation. To me, that is what is magical about these women; their resilience to create and trust themselves in all of their endeavors. Without adopting focus groups as a method together with the idea of healing circles, I see it difficult to reach the closeness that was created during the month I met with these women. Therefore, focus groups are a tremendous resource when enacting sensitive inquiries. Creating spaces which transcend the individual into the collective encourages nonhierarchical spaces which are innate to Black feminist methodology; thus, the possibility of the researcher becoming a participant rather than a silent and objective observer (Ellis & Berger, 2011). For instance, this research has entailed a platform that will continue beyond these meetings as a sister mentioned the difficulties of representation:
So even though it is sad, there are so many possibilities and if you just search for those rooms, keep your focus there, you can survive. Be positive and remember that we are not alone. Like now I’ve got you. Things can change.

-Lepidolite

Finding people who have walked a similar path can encourage us to trust in the greatness we have to offer this world and to ourselves. The message shared by Lepidolite suggests that the healing circles created for this thesis is part of a self-care regimen that highlights the possibilities of finding oneself in others through affinity spaces. Although being rather safely circled by our position as Black women, the healing circles enables a recognition of the privileges within the positions we inhabit that we do not think twice about (Peterson, 2018). Sharing self-identities/positionality is of priority as it enables us to understand from which position a person is speaking from. The healing circles facilitate consciousness-raising through an environment of learning from stories of participants which besides getting participants to share is a goal of the study.

As I straightened out my curls and being for years, trying to fit in to Eurocentric norms of beauty I cannot write about self-care without talking about hair. Neither could the participants of the group. A potential rejection of Blackness which travels beyond our hair, to our names and to our Swedish identity. Talking about self-care, all sisters mentioned their hair-routines as a way to relax and pamper themselves:

Hair-routines, or like taking care of my feet. Really focusing on myself, lighting some candles, spending time with me. Eating really nice, and not just stuffing it down. Fresh linen and a little jazz music.

-Hematite

For Black women, wearing our hair natural in all its different curls and coils is as mentioned affecting us negatively due to Eurocentric ideals not only of beauty but what is deemed acceptable at work-places. Moreover, hair-routines could to an extent be placed in the box of misogynist practices which fits into the patriarchal idea that Michaeli (2017) suggests as feeding into the oppressive idea of the creation of self-hate to indulge in self-care to uphold women’s attractiveness to men. The mainstream’s adoption of self-care is visible in capitalistic and neoliberal manners through misogynist ways which encourages women to “spoil themselves”.
Emotions have become a commodity where industries prey on self-hate rather than self-love. However, hair for a Black person is entrenched with European reduction of what it means to be Black; over-sexualized, animalistic and non-human (Fanon, 1967). As mentioned in regard to racism-related stress, sisters have experienced scrutiny and racism because of their hair and in response destroyed their hair to fit in to Eurocentric beauty-standards. Straightening chemicals that pulls out the curls of our hair and transforms them to conform to norms of straightness. Today, the women in the healing circle use online platforms to learn about their hair and how to care for it as an effect of virtual inclusion. Going against norms of beauty and the implications it can have on e.g. work opportunities is a radical act of resistance and a recognition of what has been deprived from us. Wearing our hair naturally without any chemicals is both in resistance of Eurocentric ideals as well as an affirmation and celebration of valuing the beauty innate to us. Although hair is a physical matter, it is also a manifestation permeated by socially constructed meanings and values.

Crowns of curls
Coils that find paths to defy gravity
As we float
In our own magic

Building on Jackson-Best (2016), the healing circles encourage ‘Grounding One’s Self’ to recognize that we are not where we are by accident. By honoring the self, we become mindful and grateful of the self and the community. The ‘Work of Undoing’ emphasizes a decolonizing of the mind not only independently but through collective practices of disrupting norms and actions of behavior as suggested by Jackson-Best (2016). Getting to know ourselves, through learning about others helped us navigate laughter and sorrows. An ultimate goal is to channel inner growth and understanding of the self, as part of a community that is rooting for all of us, despite oppressive systems. Challenging romantic love for others, Barlow (2016) explores how we can love ourselves by asking participants of a research questions like “When did you fall in love with yourself?” as an initiative to disrupt the gaze controlled by stereotypes of what it means to be a Black woman. As I asked the group “How does your soul make you fall in love with yourself?”, Hematite answered heartfelt:

Right now, I am really not comfortable. And, it kind of comes and goes but I’ve told myself that this year, I am really trying to find my own individuality, and my own
identity without too many influences whether it is news, social media or people. I feel that I am comparing myself more lately than I was before in terms of looks, where I am in life. I don’t want to. But it keeps on coming. I need to get out of that and let go. I feel myself getting older, getting more secure in myself but also more insecure in myself. So, I’m just trying to be more comfortable. You don’t need that outside affirmation all the time. I mean, we all need that sometime, but I do not want that to be the basis of my feelings of myself. And remembering that will make me feel good in that moment, not necessarily loving myself…. It is kinda just ways to make me feel better in the moment. I need to trust where I am, my feelings, if I am feeling down or if I am feeling happy. I need to trust that. It is part of my growth. So, I am just trying to feel comfortable with me feeling uncomfortable.

-Hematite

A statement met with compassion and recognition, especially from a sister that applauded the previous by saying:

Thank you for saying that. Because sometimes I feel so lonely, in feeling like… Am I doing what I am supposed to do? Am I where I am supposed to be? And I write in my journal, because I am trying to get better at acknowledging my feelings and thoughts. So, writing it down, even though it is scary, I can just turn the page and be over with it.

-Rhodonite

Being bounded by societal pressures, the constructed border creates bridges rather than separations. Conducting focus groups, is as mentioned, a practice for the researcher to let go and let the group steer its direction. To acknowledge the parts that the participants choose to focus on gives the researcher an idea on what is important to them (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2011). Our wounds do not only hurt and affect the self, but also our community (Peterson, 2018). Being open and self-aware of our own trigger points and experiences invites others to share thus establishing compassion which enables us to act from a grounded position towards both individual-and community wellbeing:

I think that’s where the relaxing part comes in, it is not necessarily that it is not work that you are about to do but friendships and relationships where I can share certain experiences but then I know that I am also signing up for a bit more explanation. And
sometimes it is okay to do that, but at times I just want to say what happened and not prepare myself for a reaction that might be another type of trauma. So that’s where it is nice to feel that I do not need to guard myself here. I can show up and just speak or listen. It is really nice.

-Sodalite

What Sodalite mentions, reflects on the separatist structure of the healing circles. Separatism in healing circles does not translate to a societal separatist agenda; but in this specific context, it centers Black women and their experiences connected to gender and racialization in Sweden. Healing circles ought to be exclusive in the sense that it revolves around commonalities which might not be accessible in our everyday life. Affinity groups provide the possibility of creating a space where we are not othered nor questioned of our realities as women in Sweden with African descent. As mentioned by Sodalite above, being part of an underrepresented and marginalized group, connection over a commonality is something we need as other spaces may provide alienation. Ultimately, healing circles can enhance disempowered groups to mobilize for equity. We need to acknowledge and feed into it with acts of compassion towards the self and the community (Peterson, 2018). Through self-care, we have the chance to elevate ourselves and heal collective wounds placed upon our bodies and souls (Richardson, 2018). The healing circles are not only characterized by a tranquil environment but serves as a point of learning about Black feminism and its theoretical underpinnings:

I have learnt that… sometimes you want to understand what it is someone base their discrimination on, if it is because I am Black or because I am a woman. And that there’s no way to find that out. And there’s no point for me to try and understand it. It was eye-opening for me, it made me realize that I cannot control the situation. Also, the way I feel discrimination has to do with how different categories land in me.

-Citrine

As mentioned by Citrine, we experience things differently thus healing is not a straight and boxed path. Ways if caring for the self depends on who we are as bell hooks (2005) reminds us of possibilities of not being constrained to a certain type of self-care. As a Black writer, writing with women with heritage from the African continent, I see it vital to incorporate the remarkable voices of Black and racialized women that. The constant sandwiching of cultures requires a methodological approach that is not only decolonial but an approach that takes its departure
from Black feminism with its sister of Womanism (Walker, 1983). Walker (1983) challenges traditional, Eurocentric feminism as elitist, with an aspiration of adopting womanism as inclusive of sexuality, race, gender, culture, background and ability for the survival of marginalized groups and society at large. Womanism is not only a response to mainstream feminism, but it bloomed on its own through years of storytelling and alternative methods to keep the Black American collective strong. The claim is yet a provocation as power-dimensions within academia become so evidently clear. Neocolonial systems hold the power to legitimate what it sees fit, with a demand that ought to favor capitalism and white supremacy. The purpose of creating oppositional knowledge is part of Black feminist thought to dismantle systems of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000). By encouraging holistic and decolonial self-identification, we are more prone to set bridges rather than borders between our identities thus recognizing a collective interconnection yet acknowledging the multiple effects of injustice (Peterson, 2018). There is a need for unity and discussing within a safe space:

This makes me very happy. That we are here together. I have been longing for Black women in my life that’s not my mum and my sisters. I want friends that are Black. I’m so used to being around white people. I feel at this stage of my life, I really need it. I am really glad that we have this opportunity.

-Rhodonite

By healing ourselves and the communities we are in, we can better shield ourselves by decolonizing our minds and embracing the possibilities of the collective (Peterson, 2018). Self-care practices which varies between hair-care routines, separatist rooms to online platforms balances us so that we can buffer ourselves, to an extent, against oppression. Community is not only physical nor temporal, but a constant sense of belonging to a bigger group which one shares a history and identity with. Although there is no recipe on self-care, it is important to explore what brings you solitude as a way to restore your energy. Moreover, recognizing stressors which you can respond to by prioritizing yourself. From the women of the healing circles and myself, I encourage you to do one of these today:

- Hype your friends up and believe that what you tell them is true about yourself as well.
- Tell someone that ‘it is cool’ as you provide space for them to share their emotions.
- Support Black businesses or other marginalized entrepreneurs.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Pamper yourself; sleep well, eat well, play loud music and shake that booty!
- Locate people who you can identify with face to face, on social media, YouTube, tv-shows, online forums etc.
- Be around people who you like and who sees the magic in you.
CONCLUSION

I mentioned in the beginning of this thesis that I did not want it to revolve around marginalization, oppression and the lack of access. As Black women, it is inevitable. It is part of our experience and the healing circles made the pressuring need for affinity groups more obvious. To answer the question of non-belonging let us be reminded of Rhodochrosite mentioning that she never felt right, I want those words to echo in your head as you are done with reading this essay. Let it ring so loud that you start believing that you are the one who is never right, never included and when it becomes almost unbearable; remind yourself of how your actions exclude people who are not included in Eurocentric and oppressive norms.

Mobilize. At the time of writing this, my eyes continue to tear up as I reread the words. I dread the moments when I have to read it, and I thought that it would get easier for each time; but it does not. This thesis is a reminder of the rootlessness that is forced upon us, through a coloniality of heritage where whiteness is a requirement for Swedishness. As mentioned by Dumortierite, she is never as Swedish as when she is abroad; away from the constraints of what it means to be Swedish.

The trap of inclusion in Swedishness, I suggest, revolves around a denial of racialization. The denial of racialization ignores the process of how colonialism, imperialism and Eurocentrism impact the idea of Swedishness. It feeds into what El-Tayeb (2011) suggests as European racelessness, a continent eager to sweep its race-biological research under the rug as it dismisses the concept of race. However, it is not that Sweden and Europe are blind to race, as that is an insult to the medical condition of blindness. Rather, it is a denial; a denial of racist systems and the impact that processes of racialization have on marginalizing and oppressing its non-white population. As this research answers how the message of non-belonging is expressed and affects the group; denial of racialization limits access to careers, expose Black women to racism-related stress, but more importantly it obstructs the possibilities of decolonizing Sweden. Yes, it sounds grand and I know that this is a master’s thesis, nonetheless I want to remind the readers of our responsibility as feminists and anti-racists to create an inclusive society. One of the ways that I hope that this thesis can contribute is that it shares intimate experiences to an audience that can use these experiences to tackle their own prejudice.

This research suggests that the women who grew up in predominantly white areas experienced a tougher time buffering against racism-related stress. Both Selenite and Carnelian expressed
that growing up in areas of diversity influenced them with belonging, and a collective of representing themselves proudly. In contrast, living in white areas created a sense of rootlessness as Blackness was not represented in their surroundings thus a difficulty in defining the participants’ own Blackness. Obsidian mentioned how her family members would remind her and her sister of their non-belonging due to their hair and skin which serves as one of the examples of coloniality of heritage. I present the concept of coloniality of heritage as the regulation of inclusion to Swedishness and in extension Europeanness, with the precondition of whiteness and a message of non-belonging. Coloniality of heritage permeates how citizens of Sweden are included and excluded depending on their socially constructed racial ancestry.

Black women claiming Swedishness, as we fill our mouths with meatballs, is not enough. It leads to a splitting of the self where we are repressed to explore our Black womanhood as Swedes. This research provides examples of trying to delete the magic from our names as we alter them to cater someone else’s tongue. Although we may try to limit the ways in which we alter ourselves; we are positioned in situations where a forced passing occurs. I refer to the concept of forced passing as an involuntary assumption placed upon the individual without their consent. It moves beyond socially constructed physical traits like race and gender, to include parents’ origin, sexuality, religion, functionality and other traits that are not visible. Forced passing swings us between inclusion and exclusion as our hair gets complimented at the same time as our grandmother’s is rejected. Forced passing posits us in situations where people freely share their prejudice, as Sodalite mentioned, and I paraphrase, when it is really her mum and in extension her that they are talking about.

As this thesis provides examples of the different kinds of racism-related stress that Black women in Sweden experience, I sought for a seventh type as I realized that the climate has changed since Harrell (2000) proposed six types of racism-related stress in 2000; consisting of racism related life events, vicarious racism experiences, daily racism microstressors, chronic-contextual stress, collective experiences of racism, and transgenerational transmission of group traumas. To add to Harrell’s (2000) research, I propose a seventh type of racism-related stress which I call online encounters of racism. Online encounters of racism shares path with technocultural development where encounters of racism are no longer isolated to physical encounters; online encounters of racism are permeated by personal attacks but perhaps more so general racist posts and comments. As a practice of self-care, three women in the group deleted their Facebook-accounts as they felt that Facebook served as one of the platforms where it was most difficult to regulate one’s feed as they experienced stress due to online encounters of
racism. Ultimately coloniality of heritage, denial of racialization, forced passing and online encounters of racism as this thesis presents, together with value-neutral language (Hübinette, 2012) and Swedish racial melancholia (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014) expose Black women in Sweden to racism-related stress. The experiences of racism-related stress ties in with Harrell’s (2000) research in the U.S.

The first practice of self-care that we as Black women should remind ourselves about, is that we do not have to educate non-Black people about why they are being problematic or racist nor engage with online trolls if it steals our energy. Hematite reminds us, and I paraphrase, that **racism is a white person’s problem.** In contrast to the negative impacts of social media, Facebook in particular, the participants mentioned how they use YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest to create spaces of representation for a sense of virtual inclusion. What I suggest as virtual inclusion may be the only option for representation for Black women living in places with mostly white people. I provide the concept of virtual inclusion as it describes a sense of belonging as individuals can steer their own feeds and tap into their own interests relating to their identity. What I use as virtual inclusion, provides representation as Rhodochrosite mentioned Black lesbian video-blogs and Citrine mentioned an interracial family. All participants indicated that they had changed their social media feed to a more representative feed of what they felt a lack of in their everyday life. Although platforms like Instagram and Pinterest serve right into capitalist gains; within those walls it also provides community and knowledge that we might not be provided with otherwise.

When I mentioned self-care, almost all participants translated self-care into hair-routines. As we explored what hair-routines meant to us, it was much more than complying to beauty norms; rather, it was breaking the norms that we had once envisioned as true. Through virtual inclusion, we learn how to care for our hair and how the different textures require different oils. Tips and tricks are shared as we cut off the last pieces of Eurocentric ideas of beauty. We reclaim ourselves, and our Blackness. We learn about ourselves through the knowledge that we can access through social media influencers but also through blogs and separatist groups, like the group which I invited women and non-binary individuals of African descent to the healing circles for this research. Virtual inclusion provides a valuable tool to share Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) and to live a Black feminist futurity (Campt, 2017) and is ultimately a practice of self-care that is manifested by women of African descent in Sweden.
Speaking on representation, music served as one of the first memories Rhodochrosite recalled when thinking about representation. She mentioned that it would have been difficult without Aretha Franklin, Mariah Carey, and Whitney Houston, as it is through them she has collected her inspiration and strength. With the speed and development of technoculture, artists are closer than ever to their audience. The participants mentioned that it is enriching their lives to see how Black women are crushing norms of what it means to be a Black woman; like the way that Solange uses architecture, dance and different scenery to accompany her music. Music may very well be one of my first recollections of attaching healing and belonging to something besides my family. When Alicia Keys sang, or Bubbles performed, I saw myself in them and I felt a little less of the border-thinking that was otherwise quite central. As Black women, we ought to have multiple paths to healing and feeling good as bell hooks (2005) reminds us; maybe not all of them will serve a feminist agenda but we will be happy in the moment and that is enough. Maybe we bloom as we see thick, Black women taking up space on Instagram, reading books by Audre Lorde, or as we drop it down low to some music by Cardi B.

Continuing on representation, the healing circles for this research constituted as a place of affinity over a shared commonality. The methodological contribution that healing circles can have to the field of gender studies and especially intersectional studies is immense. Healing circles invites the researcher to be part of an intimate group that shares a joint identity. It requires for the researcher to identify with that specific trait and to be clear with the participants that they meet due to that specific trait; be it sexuality and race, functionality and religion or other intersections that are marginalized in society and in academia. The researcher holds a responsibility to share a message not only from their own point of view but a shared and diverse message to proclaim diversity and activism when collaborating with healing circles. Healing circles do not only place research at focus, but more so collective healing as it aims to be therapeutic for the whole group. In the healing circles conducted for this research, Rhodonite expressed gratitude to Hematite for sharing her emotions as they reconciled with her current feelings of being comfortable with being uncomfortable with regards to being young women about to embark on different adventures. As I started this thesis with the words of Audre Lorde, I must also come back to the book that made my mind spin:

We are the hyphenated people of the Diaspora whose self-defined identities are no longer shameful secrets in the countries of our origin, but rather declarations of strength
and solidarity. We are an increasingly united front from which the world has not yet heard. (Audre Lorde, 2017:49)

As I reread A Burst of Light and other Essays by Audre Lorde, this quote made me think of the participants of the healing circles, and Black Swedes in general. With healing circles and community, academia can play a valuable role in not only producing knowledge but also sharing knowledge in creative ways than travels beyond academic journals and books. Knowledge must be available to all, especially to the ones who are part of producing it. The healing circles of this research provided a space for Black feminist thought to be shared, deconstructed and developed as we explored our differences and commonalities. The tranquility of being in a separatist group was explicitly mentioned by Obsidian, Lepidolite, Rhodonite, and Sodalite as the rest agreed. The impact of being able to share, send a text or go to the movies with the sisters of the healing circles shows that the bond created goes beyond this research. Healing circles provide a safe space where we do not have to safeguard ourselves against possible trauma as we share over mutual oppressions. As the silenced stories are shared within healing circles, we create ways of mobilizing and most importantly, find ways in which we understand ourselves as we resist Eurocentric oppressions through music, healing circles and virtual inclusion.

We share. We grow. We heal.
References


