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ARTICLES

A Conceptual Falsetto: Re-imagining Black Childhood Via One Girl's Exploration of Prince

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Abstract A young Prince scoffed at a single story of identity, i.e., dominant social constructions of race, class, gender, and youth associated with inadequacy and confinement. Inspired by Prince, this autoethnography introduces a conceptual falsetto framework (CFF). Like Prince's falsetto which resists the constraints of his tenor voice, CFF resists the tenor of a single story of Black childhood—it goes higher. CFF calls Black scholars to (re)imagine Black childhood into ideologies of love (Delgado 1995 in *The Rodrigo Chronicles*; Dumas and Nelson, 86(1), 27–47, 2016; Duncan, 8(1), 85–104, 2002), by using reflexive practices to write about one's own childhood on multiple tracks. Identifying and examining the social/cultural and political material of their childhoods, Black scholars can produce new ideas and approaches to research on Black childhood more generally—swelling a new discourse on Black childhood from the margins of society into the public discourse. "Many feminist writers advocate starting research from one's own experience… using personal knowledge to help them in the research process" (Ellis 2004:48). I illustrate CFF by analyzing my childhood journal (1986–1988) which examines and emulates Prince's artistry. Findings reveal Black childhoods are spent resisting, creating symbolic universes, being in relationship, bonding around intellectuality and abstract ideas—choosing to love something and being in pursuit of it.

Keywords Prince · Black childhood · Autoethnography · Critical Race Methodology · Community Cultural Wealth

"I sing in falsetto out of necessity, my natural voice is falsetto."[1]

[1](Nelson 1981)

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Prince's falsetto is unmistakable. For me, a young, Black girl growing up on Chicago's Southside, the Prince falsetto held special meaning. I was nine years old when I began listening to Prince. By the time I was 13, I was jamming at a Prince concert.[2] While Prince, a fiercely independent youth from Minneapolis, was stirring up the music scene, I was transitioning from a young child, to adolescent gaining increasing independence. During this period, I experienced many changes. As I grew older, I went from being a kindergartener walking to school, which was a block away from my grandmother's house,[3] to a nine-year-old taking a nine-mile home from school via public bus.[4] Once home, and before my mom would arrive in the late evening hours, I cooked, looked after my dog, and did my homework. I would then join my German Shepherd, Brutus, in the den for our shenanigans, which included all kinds of horseplay.

Living in racially segregated Chicago, I attended a racially segregated[5] elementary school. Contrary to dominant views that depict Black schools as inadequate and low-achieving, Wacker Elementary School was not. I was offered many opportunities for artistic and academic creative self-expression. There was a student newspaper, "Pee-Wee Players" (a theater group), science club, math club, cheerleading, tumbling team, etc. We learned about African American history, and were emboldened to feel a sense of responsibility to our community. Change occurred when I left my elementary school and started a new, experimental "gifted academic center" at a local public high school that was predominantly Black with small groups of White, Latino, and Asian students. Despite my being there for three years (seventh grade–ninth grade), the school wasn't for me. I had been unable to establish the deep bonds of community and friendship I had developed in elementary school, and as a result, I transferred. In my new, suburban high school, Black were the minority. Also during this time, I lost two, beloved, great Aunts and my pet of 14 years. As Southside teenagers do—I also began attending Chicago's house-music parties with my girls, *liking* boys, working at a grocery store, learning to drive, and thinking about my future beyond high school. While Prince's songs of youthful independence were flooding my ears, I was also experiencing a burgeoning sense of independence.

Amid change, loss and transition into my teenage years, by the time I was 15 years old, Prince had become a part of my world, specifically my journaling process. I was just beginning to explore my feelings, who I was, what I wanted from my relationships and from life. Journaling was a way for me to both explore and express my feelings. By exploring Prince's art through journaling, I came to identify with Prince as the consummate craftsman in self-expression. For example, Prince uses his falsetto, in my view, as a vehicle through which to explore and express his feelings. For me, the Prince falsetto was the soft high note and the gut wrenching scream that articulated what could otherwise only be felt. After a poetic pouring out of the heart, Prince gave us a falsetto

[2] December 9–14, 1984—Rosemont Horizon, Purple Rain, (Austen 2016).

[3] Although there were schools in my neighborhood, my mom sent me to Wacker Elementary School because it was one block from my grandmother's home. As a working, custodial parent, my mom needed trusted childcare. Various family members lived at my grandmother's house throughout my elementary years. Being a "family house," there was always someone—mostly my grandmother's sisters—there to care for me. In those days (kindergarten through third grade), I would walk alone one block to school.

[4] Chicago Public Transit Authority.

[5] I attended elementary school 1976–1985, which was post the legal desegregation of school. My schools were segregated by fact (de facto), not by law.

that embodied what even carefully crafted, evocative words could not. In my mind, Prince was saying, "If you did not understand what I just said in the last bar—how much I need love, how much I am yearning for a phone call, how that 'Beautiful One'(Nelson 1984) got away, and how much I want to beg her back to me?—then I am going to help you feel what I mean in an unexpected, high pitched vocal that will culminate in just one piercing, orgasmic, almost-other-worldly, celebrating, arresting scream."

Author, and Prince blogger, Hoskins (2016) refers to the Prince falsetto when he describes the home recordings of a 17-year-old Prince:

> Only a few of the tracks have anything approaching vocal melodies; none have lyrics. But in the vocals, too, you can hear Prince trying on different registers, seeing what fits. In one track, he harmonizes with himself, opening with an eerie lower-pitched melody, then overdubbing in a midrange and finally an ethereal falsetto counterpoint. It's a technique he would use—to much less primitive effect—throughout his career, creating a choir out of multiple tracks of his own voice on songs like 1978's "For You" and 1987's "Adore." And while it would be overstating things to suggest signs of genius amidst the juvenilia, one thing at least is for sure: even at 17 years old, Prince's falsetto was unmistakable."

Through my childhood[6] explorations of Prince, I saw Prince, as a heroic storyteller, who laid the groundwork for the development of a new framework that seeks to (re)imagine Black childhood[7], a framework I term "conceptual falsetto." Using my childhood journal, this conceptual falsetto involves an exploration of Prince's childhood in comparison to my own. My aim is to create a Prince-inspired framework that provides a methodology for Black scholars to (re)imagine Black childhood outside a single, deficit narrative. Through the exploration of their own childhood narratives, Black scholars can begin the work of illuminating the multidimensionality of Black childhood—beyond a dominant American narrative that has reduced Black childhood to a one-dimensional, deficit-based tale of doom and gloom, i.e., underachieving, rambunctious, deviant, and violence prone (Cox 2015; Dumas and Nelson 2016; Ferguson 2001) The conceptual falsetto asserts, there is so much more. In the following section, autoethnography will be discussed and shown its relation to my development of the framework that is "conceptual falsetto."

Autoethnography and (Re)Imaging Black Childhood

Chang (2008:49) maintains "Autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self." This autoethnography is as much about Prince's childhood as it is about my own childhood. As a young, artistic, Black boy, growing up in Minneapolis, Prince was preoccupied with finding his voice; I was a young artistic, Black girl growing up in Chicago, also in

[6] I define "childhood" in the legal sense. This means childhood is defined as the period before a person is legally an adult. By the US law, this can be understood as 0–21 years of age.

[7] Although I am a "girl," my desire is to create an inclusive narrative that includes Black boys and Black girls. Conceptual falsetto aims to (re)imagine Black childhood more broadly. While a scholar who writes a conceptual falsetto may choose to focus on Black boyhood or Black girlhood, I choose to focus on Black childhood, especially considering I am looking at my own childhood as well as that of Prince's.

search of my voice. Autoethnography enables me to explore my childhood experiences while, at the same time, juxtaposing those against Prince's childhood experiences—all of which help me gain a better understanding of the intersections of culture, society, and Black childhood.

Neumann (1996:191) writes that autoethnography is a "discourse from the margins." Furthermore, autoethnography aims to capture "people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 2). As Midwestern kids whose families migrated from the South during the Jim Crow era, both Prince and I come from the margins of American society. As African American youth, both Prince and I were "in the process" of figuring out "this thing called life."[8] Autoethnography brings forth young people's narratives as works-in-process; children are figuring out "what to do, how to live," and making meaning of their lives from marginalized positions in dominant society. By foregrounding Prince within the context of my Black childhood "in the process," I aim to reposition Black childhood—not as an imagined adult living by adult expectations (i.e., adultified) (Ferguson 2001; Goff et. al. 2014) but as a childhood that is felt, and explored in its innocence—lived out in the now (Dumas and Nelson 2016).

Data Collection

"Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience" (Adams et al. 2015:0). Ultimately, this autoethnography is my story; it aims to achieve verisimilitude (Ellis and Bochner 2000:751) which is to "evoke in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible." In other words, like how one may experience a Prince falsetto—I hope the reader is stirred—feels connected and believes my story of Black childhood is possible.

For the purposes of this article, I read an array of publications about Prince. Unfortunately, much of the data I gathered from media sources and unauthorized autobiographies adultifies Prince (Bream 1984; Graustark 1983) or depicts once-child[9] Prince as an

[8] (Prince and the Revolution 1984a)

[9] A person's life narrative begins in childhood. Carolyn Steedman writes, (Steedman 1995:xi) [People] are: "human beings have bodies that grow through a process of development to full adult stature, and to an adult state; that story starts with childhood…" I introduce the term "once-child" as a referent to the living child within the developed adult. The once-child no longer physically exists, but the once-child lives as the foundational beginning of the adult person's life narrative. For example, both Prince and I are adults, we are biologically no longer children. However, our childhoods live in the catalog of our lives—in fact, the once-child is the first actor on the life stage of an individual. Because our childhood is our beginning, in some ways, the child still exists; the child is a foundational part of personal narratives; we often return to the once-child for self-reflection or to tell our stories. In my research on Black childhood, the term "once-child," honors the historical now of the once-child who lives inside the adults they have become, and who still speak through the adult they have become. Through my research, I aim to foreground the "once-child" as valid, and having voice, and the adults' childhood memory is privileged. Through interviews, personal archival documents, and personal artifacts, memory is triangulated and validated (Morrison 1990). Through the research process, the once-childhood is re-evaluated in the now—by examining the once-child's past doing, feeling, thinking, and saying (Alanen 2011; Boehm 2012; Dumas and Nelson 2016). Acknowledging the "once-child" is especially important for marginalized peoples, like black children, whose narratives have historically been dismissed, silenced, or completely erased from the dominant American histories (Bernstein 2011; Dumas and Nelson 2016; King 2005, 2011).

impoverished, oversexed runaway kid, painfully shy, with family problems (Bream 1984; Graustark 1983; Hahn 2003; Howe 2016; McPhee 2016). Most valuable were the interviews of Prince that I listened to and read going back as early as 1975, when he was a 16-year-old local legend, through the 1980s. Rather than rely on popular accounts, I sought to learn more about Prince's childhood by way of "participation, observation, and document review" (i.e., visiting the community, schools, various places he may have frequented as well as tapping into a social network comprising people who knew him personally, or knew of him) (Chang 2008: 49). To get a sense of Prince's childhood community, and more contemporary community, I traveled to Minneapolis twice: initially on August 31, 2016–September 3, 2016 and again, October 13, 2016–October 15, 2016. Over the course of one and one half hours, I toured Paisley Park Studios.[10] While in Minneapolis, I also attended two memorial concerts[11] and conducted ethnographic observations of Prince's childhood neighborhoods, which afforded me the opportunity to meet and talk with folks[12] who are presently working or living at sites[13] where Prince once lived, attended school, or frequented. I also had the opportunity to visit the James K. Hosmer Special Collections at Minneapolis Hennepin County Library to search for archival documents that would shed light on Prince's childhood.[14]

I spent time listening to the very Prince songs I enjoyed as a child, especially those he wrote as a youth. I read and analyzed writings and sketches from my childhood journal (composed between 1986 and 1988). Prince and I were born 12 years apart, thus I created a timeline of our childhoods to determine if there were any parallel experiences that would help draw social and cultural connections between Prince's childhood and my own.

These data enabled me to engage "deep and careful self-reflection [or reflexivity] to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 2). Moreover, as Chang (2008:49) asserts, these various methods of data collection allow one to triangulate sources to examine one's own experiences, but also to examine how one's experiences might parallel or connect with the social cultural experiences of Prince's childhood and Black childhoods more broadly.

Layered Account

To move back and forth between the "now" of the once-child, adult reflections, and analysis, this autoethnography is written using a layered account methodology (Boylorn 2008; Ronai 1995). Ronai (1995:395) maintains, "The layered account "enables ethnographers to break out of conventional writing formats by integrating abstract theoretical thinking, introspection, emotional experience, fantasies, dreams, and statistics." Boylorn (2008:415) describes layered account methodology as a writing technique that allows "researchers to write in a stream of consciousness structure which resembles the way we think about

[10] see Endnote 1

[11] Thursday, September 1, 2016. "An Evening with The Revolution," First Avenue; Thursday, October 13, 2016. "Official Prince Tribute: Celebration of Life and Music," Xcel Energy Center.

[12] see Endnote 2

[13] see Endnote 3

[14] see Endnote 4

and live in the world." I use the layered account to allow for fluid reflection on my childhood, my childhood journal entries, and my use of Prince lyrics as risky text (Simon and Armitage-Simon 1995). I intertwine these reflections with critical frameworks that illustrate the connection between my personal experience and larger social and cultural issues experienced by Black children.

Validity

Autoethnography is not only used to search for understanding in my own story but also to craft a conceptual falsetto that seeks to help other Black researchers search for understanding and multidimensionality in their own childhoods so that together, we might begin to (re)imagine Black childhood. I am not arguing that the autoethnographies of Black researchers should be the foundation on which we define Black childhood. On the contrary, I am asserting that a conceptual falsetto may help researchers begin to reflect on how to understand Black childhoods "in process" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 2). Engaging in reflexive practices about one's own Black childhood, may prompt Black researchers, who are also once-children, to begin the process of identifying the social/cultural and political material of their childhood lives. For non-Black researchers, I hope this conceptual falsetto helps readers think about how they engage the multidimensionality of Black childhoods in their own research. Across scholars of color and others, identifying and examining this material may produce new ideas and approaches to research on Black childhood more generally.

> *As an adolescent, I spent a lot of time in my room. I had a purple light and a stereo system that included a dual tape-cassette and record player. My Prince albums leaned up against the side of the stereo or stacked inside the glass door at the bottom of the stereo system with other albums—like a library. My twin bed was positioned under my window that touched the bottom of my headboard. My curtains were psychedelic—a relic of my father's retro decorating taste, leftover from when he lived with us and my bedroom was our den. My walls were covered with posters—Michael Jackson in a yellow sweater vest, random kittens, affirmations, ripped out pages from teen magazine, photos, etc. Prince stood on the wall across from my bed, draped in ruffled, white shirt, pants, sporting curled hair, standing confidently with red rose in hand—his penetrating eyes fixed on me as if wondering what would be our creative writing or sketching for the day's Princ(e)ing session.*
>
> *For a season,*[15] *during my childhood, I spent hours playing Prince's music, rewinding songs to try to hear the exact lyrics, re-writing the lyrics in my journal, examining album covers—Dirty Mind, Controversy, 1999, Purple Rain, Around the World in a Day—and sketching what I liked* (see Fig. 1).[16]

[15] Dates I wrote in my journal indicate years between March 10, 1986—December 1988. This would have been spring of ninth grade, through winter of twelfth grade. Essentially ninth through twelfth grade.

[16] A page from my childhood journal, illustrates a sketch. The sketch emulates the artwork on the inside jacket of Prince's Purple Rain album. I remember being particularly proud. I signed my name and dated the sketch "1986."

Fig. 1 My sketch of the album jacket inside Prince’s Purple Rain album. Circa 1986 (Nelson 1984)

Conceptual Falsetto: a Framework

A conceptual falsetto asks the African American researcher to engage in a reflexive framework that considers their childhood in four ways.

1. Try on different registers: Reflect upon what were the highs, mids, and lows of your childhood?
2. Harmonize with yourself: Be reflexive about your perspective and experiences as a child, and in social/cultural context.
3. Dream an ethereal falsetto counterpoint: Consider what is significant about the once-child in your story. Locate the ethereal, otherworldness in your story of Black childhood that is not considered in research. A conceptual falsetto should provide a counter-story that repudiates majoritarian narratives (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). A conceptual falsetto aims to complicate Black childhood by voicing “complex stories” that reveal the intersectionality of childhood and race in the lives of African American children (Bernal 2002; Covarrubias 2011; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; O’Connor 1999).
4. Create a choir out of multiple tracks: Use autoethnographic methods to join a collective of Black scholars who speak from the margins, and the heart about what Black childhood has meant to them. Beginning to (re)imagine Black childhood by examining how it has defined you, scared you, lifted you, broken you, blessed you, shaped you, paralyzed you, and empowered you—how Black childhood drives you on *multiple tracks*.

As mentioned earlier, a conceptual falsetto seeks to provide a framework for Black scholars to search for understanding in their own childhoods so that together, we might begin to craft a public discourse that (re)imagines Black childhood within the broader social conception of childhood. Dumas and Nelson assert “Black [childhood] is socially unimagined and unimaginable, largely due to the devalued position and limited consideration of Black girls and boys within the broader social conception of

childhood" (2016:27). Often adultified Black childhoods are looked upon as intellectually deficient, deviant, and simply not akin to "childhood" in the dominant imaginary (Ferguson 2001). I am not suggesting that the autoethnographies of Black scholars be the foundation upon which we define Black childhood. On the contrary, I assert engaging in reflexive practices about one's own Black childhood may help a new discourse on Black childhood swell from the margins of society into the public discourse. As Black researchers, who are also once-children, begin to identify and examine the social/cultural and political material of their childhoods, these artifacts may produce new ideas and approaches to research on Black childhood more generally.

During his childhood, Prince resisted being boxed into a single childhood story (Chimamanda 2009) by fiercely basking in his creativity and learning music on his terms. As a teenager and young adult, Prince scoffed at the single story of identity—i.e., dominant social constructions of race, class, gender, and youth associated with inadequacy and confinement. A falsetto also resists confinement—confinement to the limitations of a tenor voice, which is characterized as "normal" deep registers.[17] In other words, a falsetto defies the limitations of tenor registers; the falsetto goes higher. Prince's falsetto is a metaphor for his life-long opposition to limitations. Like Prince's falsetto resists the constraints of his tenor voice, a conceptual falsetto resists another type of tenor—the tenor of the single story.

As a story can be told in many ways, and is often not linear (Ronai 1995). Life is artful, poetic, and housed in our fragmented remembrances of the past. In developing a conceptual falsetto, memory becomes data (Morrison 1990). Therefore, it is important not to be wedded to a particular "research recipe" (Dillard 2000), as it may restrict the fluidity of childhood memories. In a stream of consciousness (Boylorn 2008:415), I write in order to illustrate Black childhood on *multiple tracks*.

> *I'm not sure how it all began, but my friends and I became loyal Prince enthusiasts at a very early age. Part of our social bonds was cemented over time spent Princ(e)ing.*[18] *We would challenge one another—who had the latest Prince album, who knew the lyrics, who saw Prince perform on television the night before, and who could convince their parents to take them to a Prince concert (which would be the ultimate assertion of one's childhood coolness).*
>
> *It was December 1984. A black room is filled with what seemed like thousands of anticipating dots. The dots chant, "Prince! Prince! Prince!" Finally, one light emerges—dim—from above the stage. A soft, cloud of purple hues slowly lower from the ceiling. A dramatic, shirtless, Prince angles his body under a make-*

[17] A falsetto is defined as a "method of voice production used by male singers, especially tenors, to sing notes higher than their normal range" (Anon n.d.-a, b, c). By definition, a falsetto voice seeks to do what is unexpected. A falsetto is a higher note, sung by a voice that is only expected to be low (only). By definition, a falsetto resists limitations.

[18] Princ(e)ing is a term my doctoral cohort member, Crystal Wise, and I use to describe time spent listening to, examining, and experiencing Prince. The consumption of Prince's artistry is an art form to itself. The time my childhood friends and I spent consuming, discussing, and analyzing Prince could be described as Princ(e)ing.

believe shower in a very real bath tub.[19] *Prince pretends to bathe as his props introduce him to the Rosemont Horizon. I remember the fog, the shouting, and can remember experiencing for the first time, an uncontrollable scream arresting my body and cannoning its way out of my mouth. I couldn't have held the feeling in if I wanted. I remember being stunned that my emotions had come unleashed. It was just too much, too thrilling, too wild, too outta' sight. Suddenly, I didn't care who was around, or what anyone thought—including my best-friend's Dad (who was our adult chaperone). I was 13 years old, and like an unsuspecting child, outside and hard at play, I had been interrupted—stung by Prince's audacity.*

My friends and I were enthralled with Prince's audacity to be different. Through exploration illustrated in storied songs, Prince spoke to us. This is not to say that we did not appreciate Prince's contemporaries such as Rick James, and Michael Jackson who, like Prince, called for us to dance, indoctrinated us to the funk, and gave us permission to act mannish from time to time.[20] *But Prince also challenged us to protest intellectually by rejecting any limitations that society attempted to impose on us. His music called for us to figure out who we were, what we were supposed to do for ourselves and the world. He became one of us—his voice seemingly in unison with ours as we belted out "Automatic,"*[21] *on bus rides home, afterschool. Prince was storying our experiences in a way that we could not resist. Prince was shaking up what it meant to be young and Black and gifted.*

Collectively, we are the first generation of Black youth living post de jure segregation. Our parent's childhoods were in part embedded in the Jim Crow South and their parents' Great Migration North.[22] With childhoods spanning the 1920s—1940s, our parents' and grandparents' generations were forced to endure a tripartite system of oppression whereby Blacks were consigned to an inferior place in society-politically, socially, and economically (Morris 1984). Furthermore, segregation meant Black children had to endure (and watch their parents endure) the adherence to humiliating social norms and abuses that lowered Blacks in dominant society. These norms were many, included not making eye contact with whites, and suffering public beatings, and lynchings for such egregious crimes as "being uppity." Children learned early through "race-caste training" (Davis and Dollard 1940; Frazier 1967; Johnson 1941) that expressing one's feelings when met with racial humiliations, violence, or

[19] December 9–14, 1984—Rosemont Horizon, Purple Rain Tour "Riding the wave of movie superstardom, Prince puts on an elaborate five-concert stand in Chicagoland (his first suburban trip), in 2-hour shows that eschew catalogue material, feature numerous costume changes, and have Jerome Benton (Morris Day's valet from the movie) serve as Prince's man Friday. He also takes an onstage bath" (Austen 2016).

[20] "Mannish" is a term used in my African American community to describe a child (girl or boy) who is trying to emulate adult behavior—particularly around innocent playful gestures of sexuality. These playful gestures could include childish flirting, saying you have a "girlfriend" or "boyfriend,". Being mannish is not deviant, but considered humorous behaviors where children playfully try to act out adult behaviors.

[21] (Nelson 1982b)

[22] see Endnote 5

otherwise bitter experiences was tabooed and even deadly. Davis and Dollard (1940:237–38) maintain living with "tabooed feelings" means that:

> In those immediate reactions [Negroes] do have with Whites, Negroes must always act differentially. In life, this means that the colored individual seldom expresses to white people, by word or by action, the frustration or resentment which he may feel toward them.

For Black children, surviving in a Jim Crow world meant learning to accept your lowered place in society which included the masking of feelings related to your raced condition, and in many cases your humanity. For example, embedded in the memory of many African Americans is the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago who was brutally murdered because of an ill-advised whistle at a white woman in the Mississippi Delta. The abduction and murder of Till is an example of "dramatized systems of force" that have been acted out on Black childhoods throughout American history. Relating to Black childhood, Johnson writes:

> At an early age, [Black children] learn that the economic and social restrictions upon him [sic] as a lower-caste person are maintained by powerful threats of the white society, and that any efforts to rise out of his caste position will be severely punished. Both in the city and in the country, the disabilities which his caste suffers are maintained primarily by a system of force. This superior physical and legal power of the white caste is not left to his imagination but is dramatized periodically for the whole society in the form of beatings and lynchings (Johnson 1941:247).

In other words, racial murders of children, like that of Till, are part of an enduring and ghostly narrative that Black children's self-expression—Till's (erroneously reported) boyish flirtation (i.e., whistling)[23]—was a violation of his caste position. Huber et al. (2013:215) states these narratives live "embedded in the land" and "in our bones." Interviews of Prince suggest that these narratives of racial oppression also lived in his bones. At the 2017, International Purple Reign Conference at the University of Salford, in Manchester, Prince's cousin, Charles "Chazz" Smith, states that during childhood, he and Prince learned about the atrocities of the Jim Crow South from their respective parents. . . . "All the older people told us about their experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South. We knew the deal, 'cause they told us'" (Smith 2017). Huber et al. writes, "Living in the midst of these stories, and our interactions with them, they become part of who we are and who we are becoming" (Huber et al. 2013:215). A clip from a 1980 interview with Prince by Musician Magazine reporter, Graustark (1983:56), illustrates how 22-year-old Prince, understood the imprint of slavery and Jim Crow across generations.

[23] Contrary to popular belief—Emmett Till was known by friends and family as a jokester. In whistling at the white woman, Till was performing innocence—a boyish play whose goal was to get his cousins to laugh. This behavior is normal, as children grow up engaging in playful shenanigans. The terror of Emmett's story shows, that for a Black boy, play is deadly.

Graustark: And what's your last name? Is it Nelson?

Prince: I don't know…

Graustark: We should try to be as straight as possible with each other so I know what you're saying is being interpreted correctly.

Prince: Okay. I tell the truth about everything but my last name. I just hate it. I know how it's just the name that he had to go through life with, and he hated it too. So that's why he gave me this name and that's why he changed his when he went onstage. I just don't like it and I just really would rather not have it out. It's just a stupid name that means nothing to my ancestry, my father and what he was about.

Graustark, who is white, thinks Prince is being flippant by stating he does not know his own last name, hence the reason she misses the larger socio-political point here. Prince's thoughts and frustrations are very much connected to the history of slavery and the erasure of his family's name. Prince asserts his last name, *Nelson*, "means nothing to my ancestry."

Census records show, Prince is three generations removed from slavery. Prince's father, John Nelson, was the son of a sharecropper,[24] Mr. Clarence A. Nelson (Louisiana) and grandson of a slave, Ms. Diner Jenkins (Louisiana), (Anon n.d.-a; Hahn and Tiebert 2017). In this interview, Prince suggests that his given name severs him and his father from knowing their true ancestry. For him, the surname "Nelson" does not embody any meaning, it says nothing about his family's origins or who they were to become. Prince's rebuff of his family name (a relic of slavery), represents a generation of socially conscious, inquisitive Black youth who are in the process of "becoming" and searching to establish an identity beyond racial oppression.

I am a descendant of US slaves, and a once-child who, like Prince, is the first generation beyond those African Americans who fled to the North from the Deep South[25] as part of the Great Migration. As a child, these historical narratives were a part of who I was "becoming" and remain part of who I am. This connection impacts the ways in which I analyzed Prince's music as a child, and affects the way I experience Prince's music as an adult. From my perspective, Prince's audacity drives directly into feelings that were historically tabooed for Black children—weaving narratives that tackle issues of pain, joy, sexuality, justice, freedom, independence, spirituality, and love—fearlessly. During my childhood, Prince grew to represent a young, "heroic storyteller" who confronted feelings head on; feelings that I kept concealed. Perhaps I kept these feelings hidden because I was a youngster, or perhaps the difficulty expressing them was a result of "race-caste trainings" passed down through generations?

I maintain for a Black girl-child, my difficulty expressing my feelings was a combination of my youth and the generational effects of my family's raced position in society. I argue, Prince's ability to confront feelings head on in his storytelling is

[24] see Endnote 6

[25] Prince's family migrated from Louisiana, and my family migrated from Alabama. Historically, the Deep South is considered the region of the USA most dependent upon "plantation-type agriculture" and labor via slavery (Anon n.d.-a, b, c; Davis and Dollard 1940).

heroic because it is both risky and rebellious (Simon and Armitage-Simon 1995) given the intersection of his blackness and his position as a youth. Early on Prince's lyrics and stage antics have been described as "dirty," "nasty," "risqué," or "disturbingly immature" (Bream 1980); however, my readings of Prince lyrics as a child reveal text and images that "offer plot lines written to elicit reader identification with heroic characters who, while confronting dangerous situations and formidable tasks, pull the narrative through to a form of redemptive conclusion" (Simon and Armitage-Simon 1995:28). In other words, Prince's lyrics and images took risks creating vivid and magical "plot lines" with which I identified. The girls in his songs are dashing (Raspberry Beret), classy (Dorothy Parker), creative (Cynthia's Starfish and Coffee), hot (Hot Thang), nasty (Darling Nikki), bold (Girl in Uptown), trouble (Little Red Corvette), rescuing (Lady Cab Driver), beautiful, and elusive (Beautiful Ones)! Prince and these women confidently confront love, joy, freedom, pain, agony, quirkiness, romance, sexuality, and spirituality—oftentimes in lingerie and lace. Prince was always the brave heroic storyteller, unafraid to beg, if necessary, for a "redemptive conclusion" that defiantly placed him beyond the limitations American society may have constructed for a Black boy from the Midwest. For me, through his use of storytelling, Prince was an illustrator of how young people could pursue personal and collective redemption. For a young, Black girl, whose history is rooted in racial oppression, and more specifically the suppression of feelings, Prince's ability to freely create and tell these risky stories is extremely powerful.

Track 1: Childhoods Raced Black, Beyond Love Spots and Uptown

Prince was born three years after the murder of Emmet Till and four years after the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, case that made school segregation unconstitutional and six years after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Like me and my friends (mostly born in 1971), Prince's childhood unfolded in a different era, free from de jure segregation. We were the "new breed leaders"[26] meaning we were the first generation of Black children freed from the legalized racial oppression our parents endured in childhood—the first generation to take up this new freedom. But what did this new freedom mean, what could we do with it, and most importantly, what would this new freedom *allow*?

In a 1981 interview with journalist Robert Hilburn, Prince discusses being discriminated against while opening for the Rolling Stones in 1981.

> **Interviewer:** What was the incident at the Stones' Coliseum show when you left the stage early?
>
> **Prince:** When we went onstage, there were a lot of people throwing things and making noises and stuff. At first I thought it was fun, okay, and then I thought, "Well, we just better play." Dez, my guitar player, is just a rock 'n' roller at heart and he said, "Show 'em we can play, and then it'll simmer down." But there was this one dude right in front and I looked down at him—you could see the hatred all over his face. He wouldn't stop throwing things. And the reason that I left was I

[26] (Nelson 1981)

> didn't want to play anymore. I just wanted to fight him. I got really angry. It's like I'm feeling, "Look, I got twenty minutes. If you can't deal with that, well, we'll have to go outside and work it out." You know? How dare you throw something at me?

An article published in Ultimate Classic Rock Magazine, Bryan Wawzenek corroborates Prince's story of being booed and accosted at the Rolling Stones stage because of his race, and perceptions of sexual orientation. Wawzenek states:

> …the afternoon crowd began hurling racist and homophobic slurs at the band, and when that didn't work, bottles, cans, and anything else they could find.
>
> "Next thing I noticed was food starting to fly through the air like a dark thunder cloud. Imagine 94,000 people throwing food at each other; it was the craziest thing I had ever seen in my life," remembered bassist Brown Mark, who had just joined Prince's band. "I got hit in the shoulder with a bag of fried chicken; then my guitar got knocked out of tune by a large grapefruit that hit the tuning keys…" (Wawzenek 2016)

In addition to bassist, Brown Mark's account, Wawzenek also quotes an anonymous letter sent to Ken Tucker of the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, which Tucker received after writing a favorable review of Prince and the concert more generally. The letter reads:

> You obviously are a fan of that faggot nigger group or you wouldn't've lied about it. I just wanted you to know that us W.A.S.P. rock n rollers pay to see white performers and not niggers, faggots or tawdry critics like yourself President Reagan has proven once and for all that liberals, niggers, fags and minorities are out. Thank god for that. I can sure bet your ass on one thing, prince wont ***[sic]*** open up for the stones next time around (Wawzenek 2016)

Rock was the "property" of white musicians, and Prince was not white. Critical race theorists might associate Prince's experience opening for the Rolling Stones with the phenomenon of "whiteness as property" (DeCuir and Dixson 2004; Delgado and Stefancic 2012). DeCuir and Dixon write:

> When race emerged in human history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social system) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became "white") over non-Europeans (the peoples who became "nonwhite"). Essentially, whiteness became property, "whereby the rights to possession, use and enjoyment, and disposition, have been enjoyed almost exclusively by Whites (DeCuir and Dixson 2004:28).

Whiteness as property has impacted the social construction of childhood in America. It is not unreasonable to assume that these systemic privileges afforded to those who became white were also made available to their children (Bernstein 2011). Here, Prince experienced the expectation that whites are the only people who are permitted to actualize their passions. As is widely documented Prince did not want to be confined

to one genre, he wanted to explore music free from limitation. At the 1981 Rolling Stones concert, Prince's attempts to self-actualize were met with hostility despite the Civil Rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s.

Even at a young age, Prince rejected the notion of a single story. For example, in a 1978 interview with the *Minneapolis Tribune*, young Prince refuses to be solely seen as an R&B artist. Prince questions why he should be solely seen as an R&B artist when his "tracks" span multiple categories. In this interview, Prince calls out whiteness as property when he references The Bee Gees (a white group from England), who are not categorized as soul, although they sing R&B. Prince says:

> "I don't like categories at all," Prince said, reeling at the mention of a label for his music. "I'm not soul and I'm not jazz, but everyone wants to call me one or the other. The Bee Gees aren't called soul. They're pop or something. Whatever it is to whoever is listening to it is what it is. It's hard to categorize the record, so I try not to use any categories at all. There is not one categorization that all the tracks can fall into. Some are funk, some are hard rock and roll, others like "For You" could be classical, you know?" (Carr 1978)

Revolution guitarist, Dez Dickerson makes a similar assertion in a 1982 interview with journalist, Jon Bream. Dickerson asserts racism is at work in the music industry as Black artists are categorized and limited to only performing "Black" music. Dickerson states:

> Record companies are reluctant to sign a black person playing rock "n" roll. There's more stereotyping and pigeonholing of people musically than there has ever been. There is this notion that black music is for black people and rock "n" roll is for white people or people other than Negroid ancestry.

Prince's defiance of a single story is evident in his determination to express the depths of his musicology—i.e., mastering and performing music across genres. Still, the music industry's and some white audience's resistance to Prince's crossover into "non-Black" genres illustrate that despite the legal strides made during the modern civil rights era, some areas of American life were left un-impacted.

Prince (1982a) opens his album "1999" with the affirmation "Don't worry, I won't hurt you, I only want you to have some fun."[27] This statement calls to a reluctant audience—perhaps an audience that is leery, that may have been duped in the past. Prince tells them they can get free from worries of destruction. For children raced Black, this notion of *destruction* has been real and continuous. As stated previously, historically, Black children have been excluded from dominant social, economic, and educational systems (Cox 2015; Davis and Dollard 1940; Ferguson 2001; Frazier 1967; Johnson 1941; King 2005, 2011). Dumas and Nelson (2016) argues that Black childhood needs to be (re)imagined. I maintain that to (re)imagine Black childhood we must acknowledge Black childhoods are also childhoods raced Black. I argue being raced Black is to be positioned in a spot *that* Delgado (1995) names "beyond love." Delgado writes:

[27] (Nelson 1982a)

> The main tasks, as I see it, is to deal with the problem of blacks' being, as I call it, "beyond love." For the vast majority, our society is prepared to offer neither entrée into the economic system nor love and concern. [Blacks] are excluded both from the economy and from networks of love (1995:47).

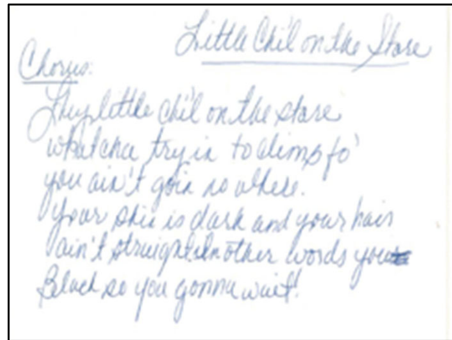
Building on the work of Delgado, Duncan (2002:137) asserts, "Delgado uses the concept beyond love to describe the condition of those who are marginalized to the extent that they are excluded from societies economy and networks of care and expelled from useful participation in social life. Not only are certain groups marginalized within society, Delgado notes, no one really cares about their plight. He argues that the majority of society perceives the conditions of the marginalized and excluded to be normal and simply as no cause for concern." I argue "beyond love" is not just a theoretical idea, but a material social and economic "spot" that is embedded in the lived experiences of Black childhoods. The "beyond love spot" is an unloving societal space which deems it *normal* to systematically create and dole out subpar opportunities for Black children (i.e., schools, healthcare, public services, after-school programs, arts funding, recess). The "beyond love spot" resides in America's dominant imaginary associated with Black childhood and therefore cannot begin to imagine loving, grand, equitable spaces for Black childhoods to play, explore, and flourish.

Nevertheless, from the margins, Black children still resist. Cox (2015:14) argues that Black children engage in "protest play" through creating stories to free themselves from the controls of raced society. Although Prince does not explicitly use the words *beyond love spot,* or *protest play,* Prince does attempt to free himself and listeners from the constraints of the *beyond love spot* through a narrative of *protest play.* Through music and poetry, Prince visualizes a utopia, playful but nevertheless, resistant; "*Uptown.*"

> Now, where I come from we don't give a damn
> We do whatever we please
> It ain't about no downtown, nowhere-bound, narrow-minded drag
> It's all about being free
> Everybody's going uptown
> It's where I want to be
> Uptown
> You can set your mind free, yeah
> Uptown
> … As soon as we got there good times were rolling
> White, Black, Puerto Rican, everybody just a-freakin'
> Good times were rolling
> She started dancing in the streets
> Ooooo, girl, she's just gone mad, you know
> She even made love to me…[28]

As described by Prince, Uptown is a state of being—where I come from/We don't let society/Tell us how it's supposed to be/Our clothes, our hair/We don't care/It's all about being there. The 'us' Prince creates is a network of young listeners who—like him

[28] (Nelson 1980)


Little Chil on the Stare

Chorus:
Hey little chil on the stare
whatcha tryin to climb fo'
you ain't goin no where.
Your skin is dark and your hair
ain't straight in other words you're
Black so you gonna wait!

Fig. 2 Little Chil' on the Stare (p. 49a)

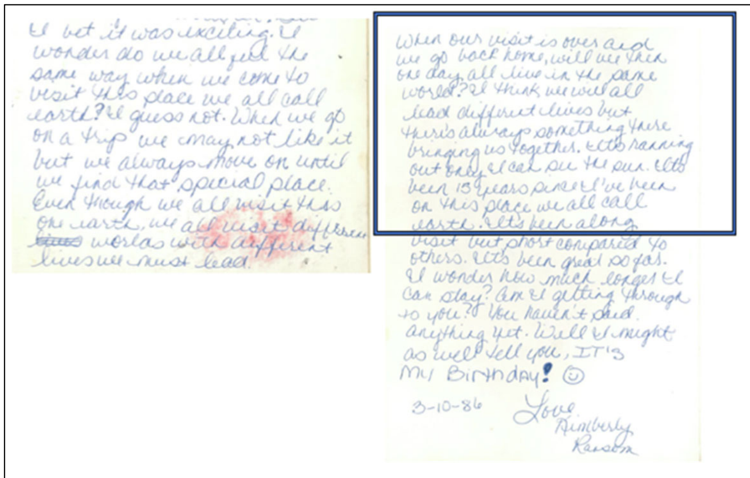
boldly assert "we do not subscribe to the limitations society has set for us." In a 1981 interview in Amsterdam, with Dutch journalist, Mike Boskamp, Prince talks about the meaning of "Uptown" (Boskamp 2015, 2016). The interviewer pities Prince as a Black American—the interviewer thinks Prince is lamenting about being poor and desolate in a "beyond love spot."[29]

> **Interviewer:** …now I must jump from that to a track called 'Uptown' on your album, now that I presume is purely autobiographical…am I right?
>
> **Prince:** No.
>
> **Interviewer:** Now from 'Uptown' There…it's…it's quiet disturbing, that ugh … you had to go through what you had…in other words you describe that you always wanted to be up there...and it was a good life… in Uptown… is that literally, literally how it was?"
>
> **Prince**: No. Uptown is more or less, um, a state of mind, and um... it has nothing to do with financial status, it all has to do with how free you are inside, and how good you feel about...yourself and how strongly you feel about yourself, and um what you stand for, your beliefs, and that's what that was about.

Prince crafts a "symbolic universe" (Mattis 2002:310) in which he maintains getting out of the beyond love spot is a state of mind. In the narrative of the song, Prince and his friends' protest play ends with a redemptive conclusion—every one of every color is "dancin' in the streets/*Ooooo*."[30] Everyone was so high on freedom that his initially reluctant love interest—who seemed to judge him because of his style—"went mad" and made love to him. Mattis argues creating a "symbolic universe" is to make meaning of the existential dilemma of "the meaning of life" and equity. Prince is a literary guide mirroring risky texts that construct "symbolic universes" to take on

[29] see Endnote 7

[30] I italicized "Ooooo" because Prince says sings the "Ooooo" in a very sexy, funky, and powerful falsetto, which pulls the listener into this redemptive moment. It is a climax and that "Ooooo" let's the listener know just how exciting this freedom is.


I bet it was exciting. I
wonder do we all feel the
same way when we come to
visit this place we all call
earth? I guess not. When we go
on a trip we may not like it
but we always move on until
we find that special place.
Even though we all visit this
one earth, we all visit different
worlds with different
lives we must lead.

When our visit is over and
we go back home, will we then
one day all live in the same
world? I think we will all
lead different lives but
there's always something there
bringing us together. It's raining
out but I can see the sun. It's
been 15 years since I've been
on this place we all call
earth. It's been a long
visit but short compared to
others. It's been great so far.
I wonder how much longer I
can stay? Am I getting through
to you? You haven't said
anything yet. Well I might
as well tell you, IT'S
MY BIRTHDAY! ☺

3-10-86 Love
Kimberly
Ransom

Fig. 3 Excerpt from my childhood journal creating a symbolic universe (p. 1-2a)

existential themes and meaning-making. In this symbolic universe, Prince implored me to be free to explore, question, and assert (Mattis 2002:310).

An excerpt from my childhood journal in Figs. 2 and 3 demonstrate my intention to appropriate Prince's writings in a manner that engages storytelling as "protest play" and crafts a *symbolic universe*. One poem (Fig. 2), titled "Little Chil' on the Stare *[sic]*," shows my understanding of being a child raced Black. In the poem, I show a Black child sitting in the stairwell of life with the desire to climb—to be successful. The poem indicates the child will have trouble climbing the ladder because he/she is raced Black.

Figure 3, written on my 15th birthday, marks the occasion to question and explore birth as a concept—how does one's birthplace create difference among peoples? I question whether or not we as members of the human race can live harmoniously in the same world, "When our visit is over and we go back home [heaven], will we then one day all live in the same world?" Here, I do not call for everyone to be the same—I call for a "same world"—an equitable space.

As young people, both Prince and I maintain that as Black children, we were thinking about and constructing a state of mind that temporarily frees us from the beyond love spot society has crafted for us as a child raced Black. Through his invitation to be safe, and free to "have fun," Prince situated himself as a heroic storyteller risking vulnerability by delving into his feelings and constructing "symbolic universes" that I could imitate as I began constructing my own narrative universe.[31] In a 2009 interview with Tavis Smiley, Prince talks about creating a universe in his childhood:

> I understood in [my father's] harshness he wanted me to excel, [he told me] "don't ever get a girl pregnant, don't ever get married..." when [my father] would say

[31] For me, as a child, Prince's writings illustrate, how to create a "symbolic universe" or imagine a world beyond what's in front of you. There is a euphoric, otherworldness that happened to me as a child—to see (and therefore) believe I'm better than how society renders Black children, and my people more generally. To create a "symbolic universe" is to have power, hope, and resolve that one can indeed create his or her own reality and meaning. The symbolic universe becomes creative resistance to a society that unlovingly renders Black childhood a deficient existence.

> these things. I didn't know what to take from it so I would create my own universe, creating your own universe is key to it – a lot of my friends are like that... (Nelson 2009).

Prince indicates while he understood his father was well meaning, he did not understand the knowledge his father was trying to impart about girls and relationships. This break in understanding could be the result of a generational divide, or different ideologies about how to navigate life which of course could also be a byproduct of the vast age difference between father and son as well as the Jim Crow environs that was very much a part of Mr. Nelson's rearing. By contrast, Prince's childhood was being lived out beyond the parameters of Jim Crow, thus allowing Prince to create his own universe, which was key to making his own meaning.

Track 2: Black Childhood and a Love Ethic

To (re)imagine Black childhood out of a beyond love spot and into *love*, it is important to examine, understand, and illuminate the various ways Black children explore and take up a love ethic. bell hooks (1994) argues that a "love ethic should be the core of all human interaction" (1994:247). hooks references self-help author, M. Scott Peck's (Peck 2012) definition of love to describe this "human interaction." Peck (2012) asserts that love is "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth. We do not have to love. We choose to love" (as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 247). Although society excludes Black children from societies of economy and networks of care (Delgado 1995; Duncan 2002), Black children *chose* love every day by embracing themselves and others in their communities. It is important to explore Black children's love ethic because "Black children are among the most invisible, the most underrepresented and misrepresented, of all (Dumas and Nelson 2016)."

As a very young child, Prince loved music. Prince and his mother have spoken about how as young as 3 years old, Prince was a musical child. It seemed to be his *essence*. This is evidenced by the things Prince was doing. In various interviews, Prince and his mother explain:

> A 16-year-old
>
> Prince states:"Around the time I was 8, I had a pretty good idea what the piano was all about. I had one piano lesson and two guitar lessons as a kid. I was a poor student, because when a teacher would be trying to teach me how to play junky stuff, I would start playing my own songs. I'd usually get ridiculed for it, but I ended up doing my own thing. I can't read music. It hasn't gotten in the way yet. Maybe it will later, but I doubt it" (Carr 1978).
>
> Ms. Mattie Shaw,
>
> Prince's Mom:When he was 3 or 4, we'd go to the store and he'd jump on the radio, the organ, any type of instrumental there was. Mostly the piano and organ. And I'd have to hunt for him, and that's where he'd be – in the music department.

> When he was five, he composed his first song by using two rocks. He says he graduated to bigger rocks and bricks before his writing began to improve and he took up piano at age seven. He could hear music even from a very early age… (Bream 1984)

Prince and his mom, Ms. Mattie Shaw, indicate that as a young child Prince was curious about music. His mother's account suggests that Prince had some freedoms to roam and explore musical instruments in stores of which he took full advantage. A five-year-old Prince "composed" his first song—creatively using the earth's materials instruments (i.e., two rocks).[32] Prince and his mother both indicate that seven-year-old Prince started piano and by eight, he was not only beginning to master it, but was also beginning to resist limitations as evidenced by his refusal to go along with piano lessons he found "junky." Paying attention to Prince's activities as a child reveals his exploration of, and love for music, not to mention the freedom to explore music.

> *A reflection on my childhood journal giving attention to what I was saying, doing, feeling, and thinking* (Dumas and Nelson 2016; Elias 2009)*, reveals I was a child who had a desire to self-actualize through her love of writing. Like Prince, I wanted to do what I loved and like Prince, I spent a lot of time being creative. My father says,*[33] *as a very young child, I would* "*do nothing but write and draw all the time.*"[34] *My childhood journal is indicative of my fixation with writing and drawing. The journal includes 72 pages of written text which comprises poems, sketches, letters, and photographs. The content spans themes of family, friends, spirituality, love, and social issues. The figures included in this study are illustrative of the contents of my journal and evidence of my love of writing and drawing. In* Fig. 4*, I begin the journal with an assertion about the power of the poet as written by Paul Lawrence Dunbar* (Dunbar 1922) (Fig. 4).

> *I rewrote a poem by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, entitled* "*The Poet.*" *I don't remember where I first encountered the poem, nevertheless, the poem speaks to the poet's power to* "*sing of love*" *from a youthful heart, while also capturing the sour* "*deep notes*" *experienced in the complexities of life. Dunbar speaks to the spirit world of the poet—the muse that comes from some other worldly* "*high peak*" *whose* "*tongue*" *has the power to speak with both love and the clang of brokenness of the world. In other words, at an early age, I understood and wanted to explore the power and complexity of the tongue which for me was—poetry.*

[32] Ms. Shaw did not indicate the name of the song.

[33] Ransom. C. 2016. Personal communication with Kimberly Ransom. December 24.

[34] This quote is in reference to a conversation with my father circa 2010. As the director of a youth program in Chicago, I was curious about how talents children exhibit in childhood manifest in adulthood. This made me curious about my own talents as a child. I asked my father what I spent most of my time doing as a child. His response was "writing and drawing."

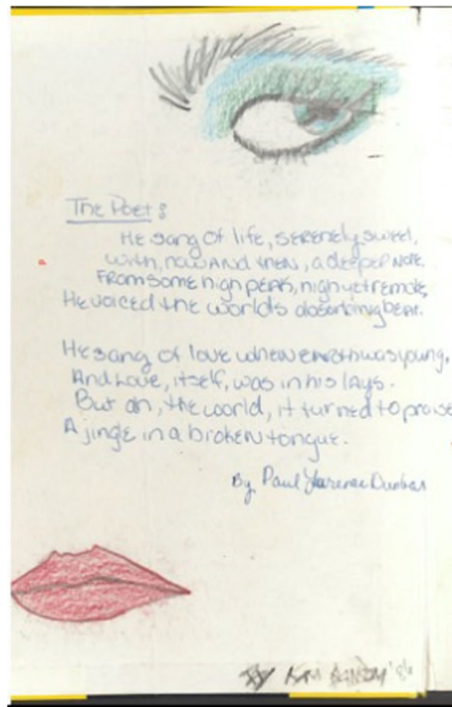


Fig. 4 First page of my journal. "The Poet" by Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1922)

Track 3: Black Childhood, Change, and Community Care

Still a child, at 12 years old, Prince left home. Popular narratives about Prince indicate he was asked to leave his father's home after being caught in a compromising position with a girl (Bream 1984). Prince moved in with his classmate André Anderson (aka André Cymone). Popular narratives about Prince's childhood often omit the fact that this decision was made only after Prince's father, John Nelson, had a conversation with Ms. Bernadette Anderson, André's mother (Hill 1989). Ms. Anderson's ex-husband was the bandmate of Prince's father, John Nelson. Although Prince lived under Ms. Anderson's roof, Prince's father provided him with a weekly allowance (Hill 1989:71). While other accounts depict Prince as a homeless and abused kid from a broken home (Bream 1984; Hahn 2003; Nelson 1981), my research uncovers a less bleak picture—one that is not often discussed. Although a young Prince faced family challenges, he also seemed to be engulfed in a caring web of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). Yosso asserts, "Community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by People of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso 2005:77). Hill (1989:67–68) writes:

> For an itinerant adolescent to just step into a hard-pressed single-parent family might seem a bizarre, if not plain improper way for people to carry on. But set the

> situation in context and it seems significantly less strange – if in certain ways no less sad. In Black American society, it tends to be considered less unconventional to take on responsibility for the children of broken homes, without automatic recourse to agencies of the state, than it does among whites.

In African American communities, there is a tradition of community members looking out for one another's children. Although Prince was having difficulties with his nuclear family, these challenges in no way warranted an intervention on the part of child and family services. Through his own navigational, social and familial capital (Yosso 2005), Prince (and his parents) broadened the definition of family to include the parent of his best friend, Andre. Prince's mother often referred to Ms. Anderson as Prince's "other mother" (Hill 71). Prince himself reveals his *other mother/son relationship* in his 1992 song, "The Sacrifice of Victor," when Prince writes, "Bernadette's a lady, and she told me/'Whatever you do, son, a little discipline is what you need'."

Prince's relationship with Ms. Anderson shows how the "other mother" can assume the role of mentor in a Black male child's life; and in so doing support the child's aspirations in ways their biological parents may not understand (Collins 1994; Cooper 2007). For example, Ro (2011:6) writes:

> Mattie, however, didn't support Prince's musical aspirations. She wanted him in school, and later in college. She sent him to different schools, where he maintained high grades, but Prince viewed his studies as "pretty much my second interest. I didn't really care about that as much as I did about playing." Since music had destroyed his parents' marriage, he explained, "I don't think she wanted that for me."

Some may argue that Ms. Shaw's sentiments reflect that of many parents who do not want their children to grow up to be artists. However, an examination of my and Prince's childhoods shows our parents' generation may have internalized dominant ideas about the limited opportunities for Black children to self-actualize beyond fields designated for Blacks, not because our parents believed Black children are less capable, but because our parents witnessed and experienced restricted career opportunities for Blacks, while "the sky is the limit" was the adage by which many whites lived their lives. Nevertheless, Prince parents allowed him to connect with "other mothers" and community members who were a part of a network of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). This community offered Prince support and opportunities in his quest to self-actualize (i.e., allow his talents to be fully realized as a musician). For example, Prince's engulfment in community cultural wealth is apparent in a 2012 interview with bandmate and childhood friend, André Cymone. Cymone says:

> My mother was the director of the YWCA, so she would have us playing every kind of little local gig, every school function. Homecoming, things like that," Cymone remembers. "There would be school proms, we'd play that kind of stuff, everywhere. This is stuff people know nothing about, as far as the early band we were in—me, Prince, and Morris—because we used to play a lot of those things. I

remember one gig in particular was really the most hilarious thing because we were late—I mean, we were like really late—they had hired us to do the prom thing. We were late, and they were waiting outside. Because back then, they couldn't just play records. People didn't want to just hear, there wasn't like a DJ thing. Back then, they wanted live music. When we finally got there, we played, and it was a great, great show, and they really loved it, and appreciated it (Kalbacher 1981).

Furthermore, in a 1981 interview, Prince discusses his sense of community support and self-actualization among his peers when Prince was 17 years old. Prince's narrative illustrates community cultural wealth at play among the Black children:

We jammed a lot with other bands, "There was a lot of competition around '75. It was a time when there was a lot of spirit. It was nice back then. I think that helped me come out of myself… We got in a lot of trouble from other band members if we copied anything (from them), and we gave them a lot of trouble if they copied anything (from us), so it was a real competitive thing. You had to be as out as you could and as different, and as much you as possible (Kalbacher 1981).

André and Prince reveal that as Black children, they were supported by a network of community cultural wealth who believed in their musicology. Figure 5, an excerpt from (Cox 1984:12G), illustrates an example of the community cultural wealth in Prince's community. Here, we see a young Prince had a network of mentors that the author describes as being accessed through an underground of "basements."

From André's mother serving as a makeshift booking agent to friendly battle with other kids to the community that hired their bands for gigs—a pre-teen and teenage Prince was immersed in a community that wanted to listen. Prince and André's story foregrounds Black children's use of community cultural wealth (i.e., navigational, familial, social, resistant, aspirational capital) (Yosso 2005) to self-actualize. These

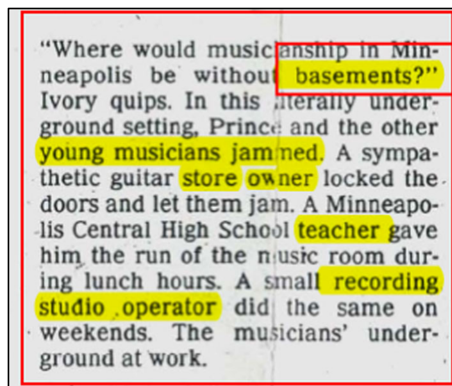

"Where would musicianship in Minneapolis be without basements?" Ivory quips. In this literally underground setting, Prince and the other young musicians jammed. A sympathetic guitar store owner locked the doors and let them jam. A Minneapolis Central High School teacher gave him the run of the music room during lunch hours. A small recording studio operator did the same on weekends. The musicians' underground at work.

Fig. 5 This excerpt from (Cox 1984:12G) illustrates an example of the community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) in Prince's community. Here we see a young Prince had a network of mentors that the author describes as being accessed through an underground of "basements"

young people chased music, and were able to leverage musical opportunities through the love and support of the Black community's network. Furthermore, Prince's childhood story reveals his "agency to interrogate the presumed rightness of adult interventions…" that wanted him to get a "regular" job (Dumas and Nelson 2016). The meaning of childhood that Prince, the heroic storyteller, creates is about self-actualization—despite the opinions of the adults in his life. Prince's unwavering pursuit of music is a story about love—the love of doing what you feel is your purpose.

> *As a child, I also had adult friends. What Prince calls, "other mothers"*(Swensson 2012). *These were aunties or women on my block who I would talk with—usually my mother's friends. Two that come to mind are my Aunt Sue, and my neighbor, Carla. Carla was a significant "other mother" in my life. She was magical in my childhood eyes. Carla had no problems asserting her understanding of freedom. She had married (and divorced) a white man; as a hippie and fan, she followed Bob Marley and refused to wear bras. Carla always bucked the "system"—she didn't work unless she felt like it, she was always reading and learning and talking about not letting anyone "control your mind." I vividly remember her telling me "… you betta be readin' sh*t." She had taken college courses for years with the goal of lifelong learning. She was never driven by money—her small apartment was a palace. She cursed a lot—with love. I remember her telling my mother, "this little muthaf**ka right here, she's going to be somethin'—a lawyer or somethin"—she been here before.[35]' You see how her mind work? She deep. Yeah, this little girl… you watch…" For me, buried in Carla's expletives were sentiments that affirmed my essence, meaning my gift, or the things I naturally liked to do—which was thinking, talking about, and writing ideas. For me, this translated into creative writing and art. I appreciated Carla. She respected my essence, did not seem to see it as a hobby—but as something I could actually do in the world. Like Prince, it is important to note that Carla was born in the 50s, a decade after my parents. Although Carla was significantly older than me, she had also lived out much of her childhood during desegregation, whereas my mother and father came of age in the Jim Crow era.*
>
> *My Aunt Sue, one of my grandmother's eldest sisters, was also an "other mother" and friend. I went to Aunt Sue's house each morning before walking to elementary school (two blocks from her home). Aunt Sue lived in the house my grandmother, Ollie Rose, purchased several years after migrating from Alabama in 1959. Aunt Sue was tall and thin and walked with a slight limp because one of her feet had been amputated. She would laugh at my outward expression of repugnance for some of her cuisine, that she considered delicacies; this was part of our fun. For me, Aunt Sue was a link to that world, the world of Alabama. Her presence was a connector to a past I did not experience. I enjoyed her stories of life in racial segregation and our conversations about politics, her language, her laughter, and her willingness to enjoy "childish" things with me—like watching the cartoon, "Woody Woodpecker." I'm sure she enjoyed my willingness to watch*

[35] "Being here before" was a saying used by older people in my community to identify children they thought were wise beyond their years or old souls. They'd been on earth before.

"*the stories*"[36] *with her. These were all connecting factors that fueled a friendship between a ten-year-old girl and a 70-year-old woman. Aunt Sue was a loving window to my past.* Figure 6 *is evidence of how I saw "friendship" as a phenomenon that spanned across adults and children in my family and community. Aunt Sue's name is among the friends listed.*

Having the support and respect of "other mothers" validated and encouraged my continued interest in the arts beyond that of hobby. While Carla believed in my talent for thinking and writing, Aunt Sue fueled my interest in history with her stories of Alabama. As Ms. Shaw (Prince's mother) worried about Prince pursuing a career in music, my parents were concerned that I would choose a career path that would not sustain me economically. These women were reared in an era when Black people did not get to 'just go off and explore like many whites did… you have to eat.' Pursuing humanities in college—i.e., creative writing and history was out of the question. I had to figure out a way to keep that love alive through networks of people and opportunities that believed I could be creative and survive.

One caveat, despite my parent's views, they also did not hinder me from engaging with the arts. Similar to Prince's parents, who were in Mr. Nelson's jazz band (Bream 1984; Hahn 2003; Hill 1989), my parents (and other family members) were artists and connoisseurs of art in their own right. My mother wrote poems, my father took me to museums, and plays, and would blast and belt-out Howling Wolf on long car rides. My grandmother played guitar, piano, and was an avid painter. But for my entire family, art was to be experienced, a hobby, to be enjoyed and tucked away. It was not a serious pursuit because one had to "survive" (i.e., earn a living) and Blacks typically did not survive off risky occupations like arts, history, sociology, and English.

While my parents understood, there were "social and economic forces that would facilitate or impede [my] agency [as a child]" (Dumas and Nelson 2016), their willingness to expose me to the arts was part of the "materiality of my social environment that impacted how [I] constructed [my own] childhood" (Dumas and Nelson 2016). In other words, while I understood I was not supposed to set my sights on the arts as a career, it was clear that the adults around me loved the arts. Although I was never able to take part in formal creative writing or arts programs as a kid, the encouragement of *other mothers* like Carla and Aunt Sue, along with exposure to arts in everyday practices of my family, were enough to foster in me the agency to (at least) keep doing what I loved, and Prince was the sort of "big brother" who was literally in my ears prodding me to be *funky*.

Although I never met Prince, and as a child myself, I did not know much about Prince's childhood, I knew there was something about the stories Prince told in his music that affirmed my creative agency, as a young person. My time spent Princ(e)ing affirmed for me that my love of sketching and writing was a play space worth exploring. Journalist, Touré (a once-child of the 70s and 80s), said it best when he asserted:

[36] The older women in my family (my grandmother and her sisters) watched daytime soap operas, which they called "The Stories." Aunt Sue particularly enjoyed, "All My Children."

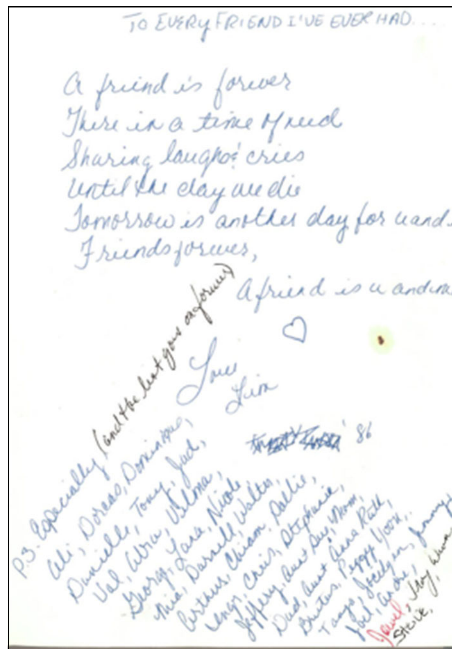


Fig. 6 Poem and note illustrating my childhood thoughts about "friendship"

[Prince] spoke to the things we cared about, our desires, our fears, our longings, and that's a larger part of why he became an icon,…He was a knowing big brother, helping Gen Xers know who they wanted to be in the world (Mason 2012).

In 1986, my room became a playground to examine life and creativity. It was that year that I started a journal. Crafting an autobiographical timeline of my childhood revealed that between the ages of 12-18 represented a period of tremendous change in my life. As was mentioned earlier I experienced the loss of my two close relatives as well as a longtime pet. I transferred from my elementary school after having been there for six years—leaving all of my friends. I began attending a newly developed gifted program at a local high school, but found it very difficult to make friendships equal to the friendship bonds I developed in elementary school. Nevertheless, I graduated eighth grade, entered high school and began to think about what I was going to do with my life. Boys started noticing me and vice versa. I was allowed to 'group date' with a parent chaperone (i.e. hang out with a small group of boys and girls) and attend local dances during Chicago's House Music Era. At 16 years old, I had ovarian surgery, and remember vividly laying in my hospital bed, feeling a sense of pride as I watched the 1987 re-election of Chicago's first African American mayor, Harold Washington. These events were accompanied by feelings of fear, love, confusion, excitement, resistance, and optimism. According to my journal I was also concerned about social issues including drugs, racism, and sexism. In

retrospect, it appears I started a journal in part because I was trying to figure out "this thing called life."[37]

Track 4: Black Childhood, Open Letters, and This Thing Called Life

In my journal, I emulated Prince's method of introducing an artistic work as a "letter to someone" (Kalbacher 1981). Returning to Fig. 4, I embedded Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem in a sketch of a mysterious eye and lips; I emulate the inside jacket of Prince's "Purple Rain" album, essentially riffing off Prince. Accompanying the poem, on the second page, is an open letter discussing the idea of birth—from me to an audience… "It's raining out. Only I can see the sun...Am I getting through to you?" I emulate how Prince starts three of his albums[38] with an open letter, inviting the listener to participate—in love's embrace. For example, Prince gathers an "us," whom he calls the "Dearly beloveds." He gathers the Dearly beloveds in order to help one another tackle life, acknowledge the afterworld, and embrace optimism:

Dearly beloved

We are gathered here today

To get through this thing called life

Electric word life

It means forever and that's a mighty long time

But I'm here to tell you

There's something else

The afterworld

A world of never ending happiness

You can always see the sun, …

(Prince and the Revolution 1984b)

In Fig. 3, drawing upon Prince yet again, I attempt to use my writing to evoke a collective "us" who help one another think about what it means to exist—birth, optimism, time spent on "earth," and belonging. My journal was not limited to an

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37 (Nelson 1982a)

38 Prince's albums "For You" (Nelson 1978) "1999," (Nelson 1982a) and "Purple Rain," (Prince and the Revolution 1984b) all begin with a sort of open letter to listeners, calling them into a universal us.

imagined "us." Prince's works challenged me to use my creativity to write my personal narrative, share it, and engage in dialog with others. As a teenager, dialoguing with others through writing and discussion became a way of figuring things out. Ellis (2004) states:

> In personal narrative texts, authors become "I," readers become "you," participants become "us." Participants are encouraged to engage in personal relationships with the authors/researchers, to think of themselves as co-researchers, to share authority, and to author their own lives in their own voices. Readers, too, take a more active role as they are invited into the author's world, aroused to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives (p. 46).

Prince weaves "personal narrative texts writing himself as the I," in conversation with the reader/participant "you," while crafting shared evocative stories that speak to an "us" (Ellis 2004, p. 45-46). In a 1981 interview with journalist, Gene Kalbacher (1981), Prince discusses creating personal narratives and communicating with listeners. He states:

> Records are like writing letters to somebody, and doing a gig is like talking to the person face to face. The difference is that you feel the response right away when you're in concert. I think that when you get your first fan letter, you start thinking you're reaching somebody, and it makes you want to keep going…just knowing that somebody is listening…and I don't care if they don't like it, … I just want them to hear it and know that I have the privilege of telling them.

Although Prince says here that he "doesn't care if [listeners] don't like" his narratives, he also maintains he is motivated by the thought that "you are reaching somebody." For Black children to "reach somebody" is to exercise agency to connect to a larger "us." Connecting to a larger "us" is to be "social beings" with "collective perspectives" (Dumas and Nelson 2016).

Prince reached me and pushed me to think about love in its many variations. Emulating Prince, I began to craft a voice out of my personal narrative, which became a sort of open letter—to myself, to an imaginary "us" and to a very real peer network. I would write and share my personal journal entries with friends to discuss various philosophical topics related to love; love of self, love of others, and love as a concept.

Track 5: Black Childhood and Love as a Concept

Amid highs and lows of teenage life, which included boy crushes and changes of varying kind, I was still Princ(e)ing. I would often sketch out Prince's lyrics, perhaps using Prince's lyrics to creatively find my own words within his. Figure 7 illustrates a self-portrait of a breakup with my first boyfriend. While I may not have been able to express my emotions about the loss of my teenage love, Prince's love song, "*The Beautiful Ones*" (Nelson 1984), created a backdrop that allowed me to understand my own sense of loss. In the drawing, I sketch "the vision in [my mind's eye]." The vivid

Fig. 7 Excerpt from my journal. Here I sketch song lyrics from "The Beautiful Ones" (Prince 1984). The sketch reveals that I use Prince's lyrics to contemplate love, hopes, dreams, dealing with disappointment, and negotiating the idea of "past"

paint brush dripping with red paint represents love, and my attempt at creating love with another. The black and white pencil sketch of me and my boy crush represents memories of a past relationship and a failed attempt at love.

Prince's writings inspired me to write about abstract ideas like the past and memories. Figure 8 illustrates a poem from my journal that considers photographs and memories. In the poem, I express my love of photos, memories, and the importance of documenting the past. In this poem, I ruminate about the past and the importance of documenting it. The picture to the right is a cousin (by marriage) who I had lost touch with after the death of my Aunt Sue. Aunt Sue was our babysitter and therefore connector; when she died, so did the tie that bound us. This excerpt is an example of my working through change as I explored love associated with loss. My journaling and attempt at emulating Prince's writings, illustrate my need to document feelings associated with my lived experiences, which include friendships, relationships, heritage, and family; for me, memory became a way to chronicle life. I resolved in Fig. 8, that

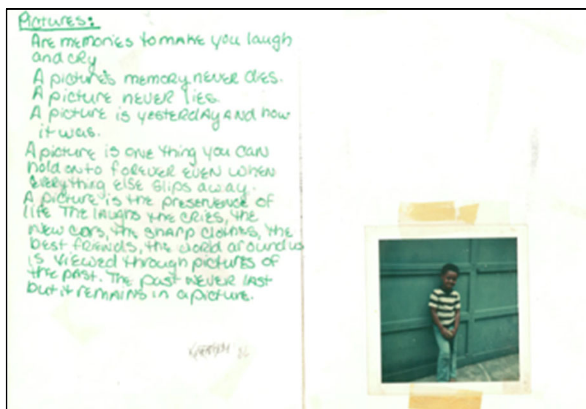

Fig. 8 This excerpt is an example of my exploration of love in relation to memories, relationships, heritage, and the importance of documenting life. The picture to the *right* is a cousin whom I had lost touch with

pictures help document life in ways that sustain memory and therefore allow one to, among other things, acknowledge, hold on to, cope with and savor the past.

Track 6: With Love and Sincerity, My Life with u i Share[39]

Conclusion

Through this conceptual falsetto, which examines my childhood explorations of Prince, I reveal how Black childhoods are spent resisting, creating symbolic universes, being in relationships with friends, and bonding around intellectuality and abstract ideas; choosing to love *something* and being in pursuit of it; experiencing complex changes as they transition from childhood to adolescence; surrounded in a supportive community cultural wealth network which can support Black children's multiple needs and passions; and figuring out love—related to family, friends, and romantic crushes. Although these findings cannot be generalized across all Black children, the evidence presented shows that Prince and I—two Black youths who never met—engaged in some of the same things as we were growing up in the Midwest. Perhaps we were connected on "the lands" of Black childhood—through history (descendants of slavery ancestry and the Great Migration), geography (Midwest), and creativity?

This conceptual falsetto suggests that Black childhoods are composed of more than doom and gloom. Black childhood is a complex multidimensional state of being, where young people simultaneously grapple with childhood and being a raced child. There is untapped beauty in their stories. "The beauty I still see" in my story of Princ(e)ing my way through 1986–1988 is that of a young Black girl who followed the creative lead of a young Black boy into a conversation and exploration of creativity, intellectuality, and love. "The beauty I still see" in Prince's story is a young Black boy who never gave up on himself as he sought to define himself, for himself. A young Prince also engaged in a love ethic as he chose to be in conversation with other young people through stories written in song. Black children's every day efforts to engage in a love ethic are not generally associated with the American imaginary of Black childhood nor scholarly research.

Prince asks young listeners to consider the needs of the spirit, which includes love. I ask researchers this same question. What about love: Black children's need for, and pursuit of love—through their lived experiences and their pursuit of their passions? Given the histories of children raced Black as beyond love in American society, a discourse on love should be an obvious step however, as bell hooks (hooks 1994:243) maintains, "there is no powerful discourse on love emerging either from politically progressive radicals or from the Left. The absence of a sustained focus on love in progressive circles arises from a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit and an overdetermined emphasis on material concerns."

In life, sometimes, the once-child collides with the adult. In some instances, it can be glorious, joyful, and proof that the once-child indeed lives – and is still searching to

[39] (Nelson 1978)

fill the needs of the spirit. In 2004, my nine-year-old self, collided with my adult-self. She (my once-child) worked toward the meeting. She joined the New Power Generation Music Club, she sat in my (the adult) office at work, and feverishly watched Prince's website waiting for tickets to Musicology to be released. She took my money, paid $75.00 for just one front row ticket. On April 10, 2004, she urged my grown-up self to get in my car and drive 2 hours to Champaign Urbana, not just to see Prince in concert, but to get on stage and dance. She got there early, and with no shame, the nine-year-old spoke with a security guard near the stage, asking him to pull her on stage when Prince made his ritual call for audience members to join him—for a funky time. Sure enough, mid-concert, Prince made the call, her eyes found, and locked with the security guard. She jumped in the line and shuffled with the other bodies toward the stage. Before I knew it, she was up there—we were up there—dancing our hearts out, with Prince draped in a white suit, the band members all around playing with no hint of an end. I danced, and danced, and danced, and danced, with so much gratitude, amazement, and reflection for the once-child who lives and still propels me to follow my dreams. I, a 30-something, professional, a director of a youth program, might have never dreamed I could will myself to dance with my childhood hero—nevertheless sometimes the living once-child answers the needs of the spirit. I guess she is the beginning of who I am, and shows up to support who I continue to become. As a kid, she always wanted to believe all things are possible—that life has a "higher floor"—and she shows up every now and then to make her point.

My point here is: Black childhood needs a story at a higher register. A conceptual falsetto provides a framework for Black scholars to explore and examine their once-child. Through the autoethnographic reflections of Black once-children, the conceptual falsetto aims to reveal new areas of research on Black childhood that are yet to be taken up. Perhaps there is more to explore within these themes related to Black childhood, i.e., resistance, creativity, friendship bonds, intellectuality, "other mothers," community cultural wealth networks, pursuit of passions, and Black children's love ethics. With this conceptual falsetto, I deposit two stories of Black childhood into what I hope will become an archive of conceptual falsettos—a collective imaginary of high notes on Black childhood—a beloved spot—where the innocence and humanity of Black childhood has space to *stretch out* in its multidimensionality, be explored, understood, respected, and loved.

What it all boils down to means nothing except love. As long as I got that, I don't need money. If I went broke, it wouldn't faze me. Love and music. As long as I got that, everything's cool. Everything.[40] *–Prince*

Endnotes

1Getting tickets for the Paisley Tour was an event. The possibility of Paisley opening for tours had been announced in August 2016. The wait for tickets would be a nail-

[40] (Bream 1979)

biting experience as Paisley sought to secure permission from the City of Chanhassen to open Paisley Park as a museum. I purchased VIP tour tickets on Saturday, October 1, 2016, however, by Tuesday, October 4, 2016, it was announced that the City of Chanhassen had not approved the zoning of Paisley Park as a museum; all tours were cancelled. I scurried around the internet, thinking this news had to be a hoax. Learning the cancellation was not a hoax, I emailed Chanhassen's Mayor Laufenburger, appealing to the City to consider those of us who purchased tickets, and pleaded for a reversal of the decision. By Thursday, October 6, 2016, the City of Chanhassen allowed limited tour dates/times. Tickets were available. However, all previously purchased tickets were refunded to customers, and those customers had to take their chances at securing one of a limited number of tickets. Fortunately, my friend Crystal and I would secure two tickets for a tour at 9:00pm on Saturday, October 15, 2016.

Despite the tumultuous whirlwind of trying to secure tickets, the tour ran smoothly. We arrived 30 minutes early (as instructed by Paisley) to a pick-up location, which was a parking lot located near Paisley. We, along with other 'friends' of Prince (Prince didn't like the idea of 'fans' and preferred the term 'friends'), were escorted to Paisley by charter bus. Friends piled on the bus wearing their purple garb, concert t-shirts, purple hair, purple lipstick – no purple stone was left unturned as most everyone had their own expression of their love for Prince displayed on their person. The ride to Paisley was quiet, as a collective we knew Prince would not be there, and no matter how excited we are to see all that Prince built at Paisley, the ache of his absence is an unspoken presence riding on the bus with us. We arrive at Paisley. The gate, once filled with tributes from around the world, opens and we drive in. Once the bus stopped, the crowded riders move orderly, and silently off the bus and wait in line to enter the smooth white palace. Ahead, a ceiling of clouds hint at what might be inside. I look to my right in a parallel line and see an African American woman is there with her young daughter, maybe ten years old, who is dipped in purple ribbons, barrettes, and clothing. I smiled and thought of my 11-year old-daughter, Ella. When would I bring her to Paisley? In true Prince style, upon entry, all cell phones were taken and secured. We were assigned a tour guide, and off we went. I couldn't help but stare up and around, and behind me, and forward – everything was alive – truly another universe, a creative space to play. Shortly after entering Paisley, and walking by a wall of award winning albums, we were escorted to the *urn* (which reportedly holds Prince's remains) – I couldn't stop, I glanced but didn't fully look. I kept left to a small room, which was a glassed and housed exhibit for public viewing. Inside, the room was adorned with artifacts from the "Controversy" era. Prince's album jacket served as the small room's wallpaper. Prince was staring over at me in his lavender jacket - behind him, newspapers headlining the issues of the early 80s. On a stand, next to a guitar from the period – was Prince's notebook. The tears flooded me. I couldn't stop crying; silently, but overflowing, I was overcome with emotion. His notebook touched my heart, just as his writing had pricked my heart in childhood. This was the urn I would pray over – the hallowed ground I would stand on, and thank the heavens for this beautiful life. My eyes ping-ponged the page. A heart scribbled over the 'I' in Prince, doodles around the edges of a developing song. It reminded me so much of my childhood journal and what Black kids do in their private spaces. Black children do many things in their spare time, some Black kids—like Prince and I—write. I stared at the notebook trying to devour it with my eyes. I just stood for a moment, with my once-child and his, and basked in that beauty, before letting go and moving on through the tour. After moving through several rooms dedicated to particular eras and albums, we were escorted into Prince's office. The

tour guide said everything "was as Prince left it. Nothing has been touched." My eyes were a fly whizzing around the room trying to land on anything significant. A drawing sat on one small desk – I asked if Prince had drawn it? The tour guide wasn't sure. A stack of books behind his desk. By then it dawned on me that although we were forbidden to take photos, I *could* possibly write things down. I hurried to scribble down what he was reading, which was (listed from top to bottom), The Bible, The Complete Rhyming Dictionary (which I also own), The Secret Teachings of All Ages, and a book on Egyptology. This was pretty funny because I know a lot of friends I grew up with who have these books on their shelves. Prince's former drummer, business manager, and longtime friend, Kirk Johnson conducted a portion of our tour. Mr. Johnson discussed Prince's prolific work ethic saying, "I played with Prince from 1990-1996. He asked me to come back [to the band] but "I didn't want to go back in," it was exhausting. You knew if you worked with Prince, you were going to put your all and then some." Johnson, K., Paisley Park Studios. Personal communication. 2016. October 15. I understood this exhausting energy of Prince. In 2004, during the Musicology Live 2004ever Tour, I joined the New Power Generation Music Club, and I had the opportunity to dance on stage twice with Prince. Once at the University of Illinois Pavilion in Champaign Urbana (April 10, 2004), and once at The House of Blues Chicago (July 25, 2004). I was so excited, but once I was selected, and started dancing, I understood what Mr. Johnson was relaying to our group. For the first two songs, I bathed in the music of my life, I reveled in the moment, I tried to take in everything and above all, I kept dancing. By what seemed like the fifth song, I was exhausted – Prince was not. He played and played and played. I think it's difficult to understand the magnitude of Prince's endurance until you're in it, performing alongside Prince. Mr. Johnson's aversion to "going back in" was not a slight against Prince, but an acknowledgement that you must be *ready* because Prince's work ethic was through the roof—he ain't gone stop.

Mr. Johnson also showed the group video clips that have not been shown publically. The clips were not related to childhood. Relating to childhood; during the tour, I had an opportunity to take a photograph behind Prince's piano. Everyone knows Prince is a self-taught artist, and he has openly said he doesn't read music. On Prince's piano, he had taped and extended over all keys what looked like his own musical language. Of course, I had no way of confirming this, but it appeared that he created his own musical language upon which to read. I wondered if this was accurate, and if so, when did he start crafting this language – childhood?

As I moved through the various studios, Prince was everywhere, and so was my childhood. As my childhood bedroom was equipped with a red light for my writing sessions, Prince's studios were dimly lit, with potpourri, floor candle stands, and a Ping-Pong table amid his piano and other instruments. I had a Ping-Pong table in my basement. Walking through Paisley studios, I could get a sense of how Prince set the stage for his creativity to unleash itself as well as his playful entertaining. There were rooms for band practices, rooms for concerts, rooms for artifacts dedicated to the musical eras spanning his career. There were what looked like rooms for meditation, or relaxation, a small diner-like kitchen, his two doves in their cage hanging above in the foyer. On a wooden mantle in Prince's recording studio, sitting next to a red velvet chaise, and purple candles in tall black holders, rest a framed picture of his father. As you walked through Prince's Paisley Park—the clouds, the notebook, the stories, the studios, the history, the accomplishments and the playful places, you got a sense of a well springing out of a once-child who was able to dream, create, and magnify his love

for music. Through the stories of people who touched Paisley, the tour also reveals Prince's ability to attract love and share love through a community built on music. My time spent touring and observing Prince's childhood neighborhoods suggests Prince may have found his profound love of community during his lived experiences in childhood.

[2]I had informal personal communications with two administrators at the Sabathani Community Center (September 1, 2016), formerly Bryant Junior High. Booker, C., Executive Director. Sabathani Community Center. 2016. Personal communication, September 1. Anderson, P., Program Manager. Sabathani Community Center. 2016. Personal communication, September 1.

(Swensson 2012). Hart. N., Best Academy. Personal communication, September 1. It was an informal personal communication with Ms. Hart on the playground of Best Academy, (which is formerly Lincoln Junior High School). This is the location where André Cymone (Anderson) met Prince. Ms. Hart worked at a local library and was volunteering at Best Academy on this day. We also had a long talk with Ms. Hart. She is blond, wears glasses, and very academic looking. She is working with a gray haired woman who is on the opposite side of this corner of the park, bending down painting multicolored squares onto concrete that create an illusion of a bridge from one patch of grass to a gazebo-type structure that housed a makeshift library in a case which sits in one corner of the gazebo. The area was only a small slice of a very large, empty, concrete playground. There were some oversized lawn chairs in primary colors across from the "bridge." A large mouth had been painted on the ground – burping up the words "love" and "freedom." Lacing the fence that enclosed the park are laminated pages from children's books.

Ms. Hart, the blond academic looking woman, was the local librarian - who as a child was a part of a hip-hop dance troupe that Prince hired to dance at his club "Glam Slam." Ms. Hart recalls, "We danced for two months and then [Prince] was on to something else." She smiles, "You know Prince never did anything for too long, he was always moving/changing." She explained that it was a great opportunity – and how they practiced nonstop, dancing every weekend. She pointed to the other side of the concrete lot and told us that Prince's grammar school, John Hay, used to stand in front of us (on the Lincoln School lot - left of the school building we had just visited). The school "John Hay" was torn down. Ms. Hart mentions folks who live (and lived) in the surrounding community of Lincoln Junior High School, which she says includes Notando Zulu (a Black storyteller, who does lots of work with youth), and "Cornbread" James Harris (Jimmy Jam's dad). Hart reveals a community that included a young Prince, scouring local kids for talent, and whose friends grew up near him. Walking from the school to Prince's home with Ms. Anderson (André Cymone's mom) revealed just how close Prince's house was to the school and various community networks.

[3]In addition to various informal conversations with community members, I also visited the following community locations:

Dakota Jazz Club (August 31, 2016), Prince frequented this Jazz Club, and he was known to do impromptu performances. Dakota Jazz Club had a show on the evening of August 31, 2016, featuring jazz singer, Jane Monheit and trumpeter, Nicholas Payton. The club is located on the first level of a larger mall. Its doors are covered with pluggers advertising local events. We pay the $35.00 cost of admission and join the growing crowd, to wait 20 minutes before we are allowed into the club. We are escorted through

the dim room, past a small stage to an intimate, round clothed table. The club is intimate, and reminds me of Chicago's jazz showcase, but Dakota has a balcony where our waiter confirms Prince had a favorite table. According to various reports, Prince frequented the spot and would sometimes perform (impromptu). After guests are seated, the trio, led by Jane, emerges. Jane is a voluptuous, white woman, jazz singer, who seems confident although she admits she has a cold. The trumpeter, an African American man, sits cool and collected in sunglasses beneath Dakota's dim lights. Jane announces her and the preppy looking drummer (her husband) were in the process of moving across the country and all their CD's are still packed, which is why they don't have any to sell tonight. Jane is personable, relaxed, and gives an equally relaxed intimate performance in the intimate Dakota that is reminiscent of a 1940s super club. I can see why Prince liked the place. It's small, intimate with a small stage in the center of the room. There are really no bad seats. The small venue may hold 100 people. The stage may be 10x10 from my eyeballing. The club is dark, candlelit, and the walls have large vintage photos. One photo strikes me and I stare at it a moment. The photo reads, "Everyone deserves a second childhood." Perhaps this small venue, located in Prince's hometown, was a get away – a small place to listen, to experiment, and to perform – not as the big larger than life star, but as the kid from Minneapolis, who loves music so.

I visited the Purple Rain House (September 2, 2016), which was the location for the filming of the Purple Rain movie. The Purple Rain house is located in the local community, not far from Prince's childhood neighborhood. Although the house was locked and empty, I could tour the periphery of the building and look inside. The building's size and location gave me a sense of the homegrown nature of Prince's early career efforts and his desire to engage the community. Through various personal communications with community members I met during the trip, I was told Prince would often include community members in his work. For example, during our personal communication, Ms. Booker explained that Prince's reference to a "five and dime" store and a "boss, Mr. Magee" in the song "Raspberry Beret" are based on a real store and store owner. Also, Prince's his high school crush, Kim Upsher, had an appearance in a scene at First Avenue in the movie, Purple Rain.

I visited Electric Fetus Record store (September 2, 2016), which is a record store patronized and promoted by Prince. The store is also local, located not far from Prince's childhood neighborhood. A personal communication with a store staff member confirmed Prince's periodic visits. An Instagram post from Electric Fetus dated April 16, 2016, thanks Prince for coming into the store on that day. Prince acknowledges his April 16th visit via his Instagram account when he writes, "FETUS, THANX 4 THE TUNES! ROCKED STEVIE'S TALKING BOOK ALL THE WAY HOME! #RecordStoreDay." (Nelson, P. Instagram. 2016. September 2.).

My first visit to Paisley Park (September 2, 2016) I didn't tour the studio, as tours were not available. I read/observed fan tributes along the fence surrounding Paisley. I took photos of various memorial items that illustrated people's reasons for 'connecting' with Prince.

Lake Minnetonka Regional Park. 2016. September 2. I went here to get a feel for the location of this lake (which was featured in Purple Rain) and if it seemed to be connected to Prince's childhood lived experience. The park was huge and therefore impossible to determine where Prince playfully convinced Apollonia to 'bathe in the waters of Lake Minnetonka.' However, visiting the area revealed the beauty of the lake

as well as how local residents use the area for boating, picnics, and other summer recreational activities. It appeared to be the perfect place for teenagers to run off to for young fun. The location is only a 19-minute drive from Paisley Park.

First Avenue. 2016. "An Evening with The Revolution," (September 1, 2016).

Capri Theater, Site of Prince's first concert (1979) as a Warner Bros. artist. 2016. October 14.

Xcel Energy Center. 2016. "Official Prince Tribute. A Celebration of Life and Music." October 13.

I visited Andre Cymone Andersons' childhood home (1244 Russell Ave. N.), where Prince lived for a significant portion of his teen years. Although I didn't enter the home, walking the community to the Anderson's home gave me a sense Prince's childhood travel to school (John Hay and Lincoln Junior High School). Both schools are in walking distance from Ms. Anderson's home—maybe three to four blocks. The community looks to be a working/middle class area. Many residents appear to be African-American. There are two churches on the corner located two doors away from Ms. Anderson's home. One church is Seventh Day Adventist, the other appears to be Baptist. The streets are quiet.

We also visited the site of Prince's early childhood family home. The location is accessible on the internet. To protect the current residents' privacy, I don't list the address here. When we arrived, the owner, an African-American male, was sitting on the front steps. Admittedly, I didn't feel comfortable asking his name, but did ask if it was okay for us to take a picture of the house, to which he agreed. He told us the original home was demolished, (Anonymous. Personal communication. 2016. September 1), and verified his house sat on the location of Prince's former childhood home. The current resident also indicates lots of people drive by to see the house, including Prince.

[4]Wolfson, G., Special Collections Librarian. Personal communication, 2016. Minneapolis Special Collections at the Hennepin County Library, 300 Nicollet Mall, Fourth Floor, Minneapolis, MN. 55401. October 14. Within the James K. Hosmer Special Collections, I reviewed documents related to Prince, Prince's childhood, and documents associated with Prince's childhood community, particularly elementary and high schools Prince reportedly attended. Documents retrieved from the James K. Hosmer Special Collections at Minneapolis Hennepin County Library were related to Prince's childhood, which include his teenage years. I reviewed local and national newspaper articles. Local newspapers included more 'home grown' accounts of a young kid, who was a talented and extraordinary musician (Bream 1980, 1984; Carr 1978; Cox 1984). I found a mix of magazine articles, some of which track Prince's early career as a teenager (Graustark 1983; Ivory 1984; Kalbacher 1981). The collection also includes books on Prince, some of which are out of print or not easily accessible (Nelson 1992). Of particular interest were yearbooks from Prince's Central High School. The Central High yearbooks span Prince's sophomore and junior years of high school and illustrate the context of Prince's high school experience including activities, academics, race, administration, etc. In addition to sources directly associated with Prince, I also found local newspaper articles on Bryant Junior High, Prince's middle school. The articles regarding Bryant spanned the years Prince would have attended the school from seventh to ninth grade (circa 1970-1973). During these years, the school was tangled in the implementation of a heated racial desegregation plan, which was mandated by law (Anon 1972).

[5]Prince's father was born in Louisiana and census records indicate he may have spent part of his childhood in the South before moving to the North. Census records and Hahn and Tiebert (2017) reveal John L. Nelson's mother, Carrie (Nelson) Ikner, who was widowed circa 1930, moved to the North in the Great Migration. Census records indicate she may have distributed her four of her five children throughout the South (Tennessee, Alabama, New Orleans and Arkansas), with trusted family or friends, bringing only her eldest daughter, Gertrude, to the North. It is unclear how long Prince's father, John L. Nelson lived in Louisiana beyond 1920; however, census records indicate at 13 years old, John L. Nelson may have lived in Tennessee (Aunt) or Arkansas (Grandmother) before migrating to Minneapolis, possibly in his late teens near the death of his mother, Carrie. Prince's maternal grandfather, Frank Shaw, migrated to the North from Arcadia, Louisiana. Similarly, my mother spent most of her childhood in rural, Pickens County, Alabama before migrating to the North with her parents, Ollie Rose and Arthur Neal, Sr. in 1959. As a teenager, my paternal grandmother, Prennie (Blanton Ransom) Andrews, migrated to Chicago circa 1940, when her father was threatened with lynching.

[6]Sharecropping was a "debt peonage" (Ransom and Sutch 1972) system enforced by white southern planters to profit from the free labor of Blacks – essentially re-enslaving them.

[7]This interview with journalist, Mick Boskamp, was conducted prior to Prince's first concert in Amsterdam. I found the interview on Boskamp's Facebook page along with a photo of Prince performing at The Paradiso. The description on Facebook reads, "My interview with Prince on the 29th of May in the year 1981 at the Sonesta Hotel in Amsterdam was prior to the concert he gave in The Paradiso. That concert was the best performance I ever saw. And the room was almost empty! After I did the interview, I thought that Prince was silent most of the time. Well, listening back after all those years (and you have to listen carefully due to a bad recording Walkman) it is quite okay. I interviewed Prince. Not a lot of people can say that..." The interview is corroborated by a posting of the full interview on Mix Cloud.

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