Growing up African Canadian in Vancouver: Racialization, Gender and Sexuality

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Abstract. Vancouver is one of the most diverse cities in North America, with 49% of the population identifying as people of colour. However, residents who are racialized as Black or claim an African ethnic origin make up just over 1% of the population. These residents may constitute a hyper-visible minority in the local context, but they are firmly embedded in discourses about Blackness that transcend local geographies. Based on interviews with 35 adult children of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, this paper explores some of the ways that gendered and sexualized discourses of Blackness shape the lives of men and women in metro Vancouver. Interactions in public spaces include challenges to competency, honesty, and respectability, while private lives are marked by differences in heterosexual desirability that enhance the romantic prospects of men and limit those of women. The following discussion illustrates that processes of racialization are simultaneously gendered and sexualized.

Keywords: Black; African Canadians; racialization; gender; sexuality; discourses

Résumé. Vancouver est l'une des villes les plus diversifiées en Amérique du Nord; 49 % de sa population s'identifie comme faisant partie de minorités visibles dans le recensement de 2016. Néanmoins, les résidents qui sont racisés en tant que Noirs ou qui se réclament d'une ethnicité d'origine africaine ne représentent qu'un peu plus d'un pour cent de la population. Les résidents de descendance africaine constituent une minorité hypervisible dans le contexte local, mais ils sont fermement imbriqués dans les discours concernant les Noirs qui transcendent les géographies locales. S'appuyant sur des entretiens avec 35 adultes dont les parents sont des immigrants de l'Afrique subsaharienne, cet article explore les manières dont les discours genrés et sexualisés concernant les Noirs influencent la vie des hommes et des femmes dans le Grand Vancouver. Les interactions dans les espaces publics incluent des défis liés à la compétence, à l'honnêteté et à la respectabilité, alors que les vies privées sont marquées par des différences sur le plan de la désirabilité dans les relations hétérosexuelles : ces différences augmentent les chances des hommes noirs, mais limitent les chances

des femmes noires de rencontrer quelqu'un. Cette étude illustre que les processus de racisation sont simultanément genrés et sexualisés.

Mots clés: Noirs; Afro-canadiens; Racisation; Genre; Sexualité; Discours

Introduction

This paper is based on the findings of a larger study of second-generation African Canadians in Metro Vancouver (Creese in press), and explores how gendered and sexualized discourses of Blackness shape their lives. Previous research (Creese 2011) with first-generation immigrants from Africa has documented downward mobility and economic and social marginalization, while carving out spaces of belonging and actively building a resilient local pan-African community. Although I am a privileged White immigrant and an "outsider" to the local African community, I have worked as an ally with some members of the community for more than a decade,[1] and this research addresses issues that emerge from ongoing concerns about how the next generation is faring in Canada. This paper explores how gendered discourses of Blackness affect second-generation African Canadian women and men as they negotiate public spaces and private lives in a context where they constitute a hyper-visible racialized minority in a diverse metropolis.

According to the 2016 census, 49% of Metro Vancouver residents identify as people of colour and 41% are immigrants (Statistics Canada 2016a, 2016b). The majority of people of colour and recent immigrants in Vancouver have diverse Asian origins, with Chinese, South Asians, and Filipinos constituting the largest communities. Only 1.3% of all immigrants in Vancouver come from Africa, only 1.7% of all residents identify as having an African ethnic origin, and even fewer – only 1.2% – identify as Black (Statistics Canada 2016a; 2016b; 2016c).

Vancouver's population differs from those in other large Canadian cities. Larger numbers of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have settled in Toronto and Montreal, alongside other substantial Black communities from the Caribbean and multi-generational African Canadians. About two-thirds of all Canadians who identify as Black live in Toronto and Montreal (42% and 23%, respectively), compared to only 2.5% in Vancouver (Statistics Canada 2013; Statistics Canada 2016d). These demographics have strong effects on how second-generation African

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1. My collaborations with members of the local African community include research projects and serving on the board of Umoja Operation Compassion Society, a non-profit, African-centred settlement agency in metro Vancouver.

Canadians navigate their environment. For example, participants in this research were typically one of the only Black and African families in their schools and neighbourhoods; they grew up seldom seeing people who look like them in their day-to-day lives, and yet were immersed in discourses about Blackness emanating largely from American popular culture (Creese 2015; 2019; in press).

DISCOURSES OF BLACKNESS, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

The presence of African-descent communities in British Columbia can be traced to the mid-19th century in Victoria and Salt Spring Island, and to the early 20th century in and around Hogan's Alley in Vancouver (Compton 2010; Kilian 2008; Mensah 2002). This history is largely absent from public memory, as part of what Walcott referred to as "the absented presence of blackness in Canada" (2003: 136). African Canadians in Vancouver are immersed in a Eurocentric education system filled with negative imagery about countries in Africa (Diallo 2016), and also surrounded by popular discourses of Blackness that emanate largely from the United States.

Discourses of Blackness have a long lineage embedded in colonialism and trans-Atlantic slavery that transcend the boundaries of nation-states. Deliovsky and Kitossa (2013) argued that the Black/White European binary developed under colonialism constitutes a "moral and symbolic framework" that legitimizes the superiority of Europeans and the inferiority of people of African descent. They also argued that the social construction of Blackness is "deeply grounded in Western culture" and endures in anti-Black racism today as a signifier of "social value and moral worth."

Contemporary discourses of Blackness include negative stereotypes embedded in racist assumptions about intellectual inferiority and predispositions to violence and criminality that circulate throughout popular culture (Dei 2013; 2017). Diverse peoples of African descent in Canada are pressured to identify as "Black" (Dei 2017; Ibrahim 1999, 2006; Ibrahim and Abdi 2016; Kelly 2004; Walcott 2003). Blackness is at least partly an externally imposed identity in Canada, "a discursive space where they are already imagined, constructed and treated as 'Blacks' by hegemonic discourses and groups" (Ibrahim 2006: 44).

Blackness may be socially constructed, discursive, and imaged, but Dei argued that "there is also a materiality to Blackness and Black identity" (2017: 16), and that in societies structured by White privilege and anti-Black racism, we need to recognize that "race is also real" (2017:

15). Ideas about Blackness are linked to diverse social practices, shaping how other people perceive African Canadian men and women in ways that affect treatment in public spaces: the experiences of children in schools (Ibrahim and Abdi 2016), employees in workplaces (Creese 2011), or interactions with the police and other state institutions (Maynard 2017). As they work to disrupt these discourses, people of African descent also resist and redefine multiple Black and African subjectivities on their own terms (Barrett 2015; Dei 2017; Walcott 2003).

Contemporary discourses of Blackness in popular culture in Canada emanate largely from the United States, dispersed through the global dominance of American media, films, and music. Since the 1990s, one medium in particular – hip hop – has become "the face of Black America in the world today" (Richardson and Pough 2016: 130). Hip hop has become very influential in shaping discourses about Blackness in Canada and globally, especially among youth.

Discourses about Blackness are explicitly gendered. Black masculinity is associated with physical rather than intellectual attributes, particularly in the exaltation of athletes, as well as heterosexual prowess, violence, and criminality (Abdel-Shedid 2005; Collins 1990; 2005; Dei 2013; James 2016). Black femininity is associated with stereotypes about domineering and promiscuous women and neglectful mothers (Collins 1990; 2005). According to Rose (2008), the "gangsta-pimp-hoe trilogy" common in commercial hip hop builds on these stereotypes while glorifying street life, the charismatic "cool pose," and hyper-heterosexual Black masculinity (Arthur 2006; Jeffries 2011; Oware 2011). With the exception of some female hip hop artists, Black women in commercial hip hop are generally objectified as highly sexualized body parts (Collins 2006; Emerson 2002; Philips et al. 2005; Rose 2008; Stephens and Few 2007a), often emphasizing light skin tones, long straight hair, and fine facial features that seem Whitened (Queeley 2003; Stephens and Few 2007b). Collins (1990; 2005) argued that hip hop evokes representations dating back to slavery and reconstruction in the United States, a link that fosters its marketability to audiences that are not Black (Queeley 2003; Rose 2008). At the same time, powerful and charismatic images of Black men help to position Black men and women differently within the heterosexual market in North America.

Discourses about Blackness are highly sexualized. In North America, dominant conceptions of attractiveness are linked to White standards of beauty, with esteemed variants of femininity and masculinity associated with White, heterosexual, cisgender, affluent, slim, able-bodied men and women (Rice 2013). Leeds Craig (2003) argued that hegemonic conceptions of beauty are historically situated and express

"prevailing racialized social hierarchies." In North American popular culture, the Black male body symbolizes both an object of sexual desire and a potentially dangerous predator, while the Black female body is portrayed as sexually exotic or undesirable for failing to meet White norms of feminine beauty (Collins 2005; Craig 2003). Notions of exotica equate Black sexuality with a more primal state and reproduce racialized inequalities by reinforcing hierarchies of sexual desirability (Myers 2012).

American research in contexts where Black men and women form a very small minority has revealed that racialized notions of attractiveness position Black men in a more sexually desirable position than Black women (Wilkins 2012a; 2012b; 2012c). Across the United States, Black men are much more likely than women to form interracial heterosexual relationships (Childs 2005), while Black women face a combination of gender and racial disadvantages in the heterosexual market (Wilkins 2012c). This pattern is also observed in Canada, where 30% of Black men are in interracial marriages compared to 20% of Black women (Milan et al. 2010; Livingstone and Weinfeld 2015). As a result, Black women in Canada are much less likely than Black men to find romantic partners (Livingstone and Weinfeld 2015).

This paper explores how gendered and sexualized discourses of Blackness shape how second-generation African Canadians navigate public and private spaces in Vancouver. It begins by addressing some of the ramifications of hyper-visibility where only 1% of the population is racialized as Black. Research participants described what it is like to live "under a microscope," to have to work harder to prove their capabilities, and gendered elements of surveillance as potential threats or criminals. Interviews revealed that conceptions of Blackness not only shape interactions with strangers and acquaintances: they also affect the most intimate relationships. The second part of the paper explores gendered patterns in heterosexual romantic relationships. Most male research participants had partners and were dating local women from a diverse range of backgrounds (although mainly White women), while the majority of women were single and had only dated men who recently migrated from countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research is based on 35 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 men and 19 women whose parents migrated from countries in sub-Saharan Africa. All participants were born in Canada or had

migrated as children, and had attended school in Metro Vancouver. A diverse purposive sample was obtained by posting recruitment notices at African cultural organizations, settlement agencies, dance clubs, churches, and college and university bulletin boards, as well as via referrals from other participants.[2] Participants were asked about their experiences in elementary and high school, education and employment, challenges and accomplishments, family, friendships, romantic relationships, belonging, and identities. All interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2013.[3] Interviews averaged two hours in length, and were transcribed and coded using MaxQDA software (VERBI, Berlin, Germany). The following discussion draws from intersectional feminist and critical race perspectives to explore "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1991) among second-generation African Canadians living in Vancouver, relying extensively on their own words (Chilisa 2012; Hesse-Biber 2014). Each participant selected a pseudonym.

Participants were aged 19–36 and descended from 12 different countries, including Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, and Uganda. All identified as women or men, and all but one identified as heterosexual.[4] Nearly 30% were born in Canada, nearly 20% migrated before they were of school age, nearly 30% came in elementary school, and nearly 25% came to Canada when they were teenagers.

Studies of second-generation immigrants are central to understanding the long-term outcomes of immigrant integration, with debates about whether children of immigrants are prone to sink into the "underclass" with their parents or are more likely to enjoy upward mobility (Boyd 2009; Halli and Vedanand 2007). Age at the time of migration is known to affect outcomes for immigrant children, with younger arrivals faring better in term of educational and occupational attainment (Corak 2012). In my larger study, I explored differences between the "1.5 generation" (born abroad and partly raised in Canada; Rumbaut 2004; 2012) and the second generation (born and raised only in Canada). However, I found that both the 1.5 and the second generation navigate similar discourses about Blackness as they interact with peers and the wider Canadian society (Creese 2011; 2015; 2019; in press).

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2. Ethics approval was attained from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board, certificate number H11-01378.

3. Interviews were conducted by the author and a research assistant, Veronica Fynn.

4. One research participant identified as bisexual but expected a heterosexual marriage. All participants identified as either female or male; none identified as trans, gender fluid, or gender queer.

For the purposes of this paper, therefore, I use the term second generation to refer to all research participants, whether they were born in Canada or migrated as children.

RESULTS

Living Under a Microscope

African Canadians are hyper-visible in Vancouver due to a combination of racialization processes and their very small numbers. As Jay explained, this visibility leads to intense scrutiny of his behaviour: "I'm under a microscope being Black and being more visible because I'm not like everybody else." Similarly, Rylan talked about being viewed through a magnifying glass: "it's almost like it's a target on me and everything I do is magnified, right, as an African Canadian." These analogies illustrate how Black bodies are subject to enhanced observation and assessment. Not only are African Canadians hyper-visible, they are often prejudged through popular notions about Blackness. As a result, interviewees felt they had to work harder to prove their individual capabilities and disprove negative assumptions about their character. When considered in isolation, much of this scrutiny may seem trivial, but together it makes up what Essed (1991) called the "micro inequities of everyday racism," and what other scholars have referred to as "racial micro-aggressions" (Fleras 2016; Huber and Solorzano 2015).

Interviewees identified diverse forms of racialized scrutiny from mundane aspects of daily life, like how different clothing affects treatment in social situations, to contexts that can be life-altering, such as encounters with police. Male and female participants were aware that dressing well helps distance them from images of Blackness in popular culture and helps them navigate public spaces. For example, Bob commented that "[If] I'm going out to a bar I have to dress up a little nicer." Maxwell noted that wearing a suit distances him from the hip hop image of the gangster and reinforces his respectability:

> When you dress a certain way people think, oh you're just a thug, right. You're a Black guy, you're a thug…Like when I go to work I'm dressed up. So I go toward downtown and people are looking at me in a different way, 'oh it's a very elegant looking young man' versus if I were walking downtown wearing baggy jeans halfway down my waist. They look at me like 'ugh.' I'm still the same person but I'm just dressed differently.

For African Canadian men who engage in sports, wearing athletic sweat pants and a hoodie is enough to heighten scrutiny in public spaces. Michael said he was accused of shoplifting while grocery shopping after a volleyball game, so he no longer shops for groceries on the way home from a game – he has to go home and change his clothing. These encounters reflect discourses about Black men being prone to crime. Female interviewees had also encountered assumptions about criminality. For example, Tina said a security guard had followed her and her mother around while they shopped at a government-operated liquor store, concluding, "there's no reason other than the fact we are Black that I can think of."

Other interviewees commented that their appearance also factors into perceptions about their professionalism at work. Ayad faced criticism for posting a picture of herself "with my afro" on a professional networking site: colleagues suggested that the picture made her look unprofessional and recommended "a more professional picture…[with] a non-colourful shirt and your hair nicely pulled back." She said that what her colleagues were really saying is "try to look less Black." Jay said that a co-worker criticized his competence because of the way he dressed – even though he dressed like other coworkers and his attire had no bearing on the way he performs his job:

> I had a co-worker complain that my shoelaces weren't tied. I was wearing runners. I was wearing them and this woman was saying she can't respect, she can't respect me in a leadership role because I don't dress professionally, my shoelaces aren't tied…Why should the way I dress really affect how you respect me? It's the work I'm doing, not the way I dress.

Sarah, a Muslim who wears a headscarf, referred to extreme examples of how clothing affects treatment in public spaces. She said that because she wears a headscarf, people "see me primarily as Muslim." Being visibly identifiable as Muslim means that she is subject to a host of additional negative discourses that circulate about Muslims in post-9/11 North America (Nagra 2017). She said that random people come up to her in public spaces and ask questions like "what do you think of the burqa," or make comments about her, like the "elderly Caucasian lady [who] came up to me and said 'Al Qaeda.'" She also said that her attire occasionally elicits more positive interactions with strangers, like the smiles she receives on Canada Day when she wears "a red scarf with a Canadian flag sticking out of my scarf."

A common theme throughout interviews was that regardless of attire, other people routinely perceive African Canadians as less competent until they prove themselves. As a result, both male and female interview-

ees said they have to work harder than everyone else to receive any rec-
ognition. Denise said, "I need to do twice as much work as you for them
to recognize that I am working. And I feel like I go through that every
day." Similarly, Maxwell commented that "you got to work twice as hard
because they're not going to work as hard as you are, but they still get the
advancement." Betty said she tries to dispel assumptions about Africans
having poor work habits:

> That fuels my passion to just show you different, to show you that's not
> what I represent or that's not exactly who I am. I think it does force you
> to work a bit harder, for sure. To always be on your toes to make sure that
> you're not just this lazy person who is at fault. Like for example, I try not
> to be late, never late, because then you fall into the, you know, she's Black
> and she's African and Africans are late.

Similarly, Hobbes explained that he struggles to disprove perceptions
about Black men as not very smart or responsible. As part of this need
to prove his capabilities, he plans to get a law degree from a top-ranked
university, even though he has little interest in becoming a lawyer:

> I know it's a strange thing to want to prove but I think it's also proving to
> myself that I can do it. But it is also you know to kind of shift the perspec-
> tive and to gain credibility in a world where I don't think Black men are
> perceived as the most intelligent or articulate or carrying responsibility.

In contexts such as Vancouver, which has such a small population of
people racialized as Black, these everyday challenges to competency,
trustworthiness, and respectability need to be understood as embedded
in negative stereotypes about Black men and women that transcend local
geographies.

   For example, common ideas about Black men as violent and crimi-
nal often lead to the perception that the bodies of African Canadian
men are threatening. Discourses of Black male criminality, and over-
representation of Black men incarcerated in Canadian prisons, animate
police interactions with African Canadian men in Vancouver in ways
that are similar to patterns across the country (Maynard 2017) – even
though their small numbers mean that Black men cannot possibly con-
stitute a significant percentage of local criminal activity. Almost all
male participants in this research recalled situations where they had
been harassed and/or detained by police for no reason other than be-
ing Black. Terrence said he was charged with assault, even though his
White friend admitted responsibility and was not charged; the charges
against Terrence were later dropped. Lamar recalled being "arrested
at the fireworks" for trying to explain why he needed to find his out-

of-town friend before dispersing. Rylan said he was walking down the street with several Black male friends when two police cars stopped and "a bunch of police officers jump out, you know I get slammed against the wall and handcuffed." The police said they thought one of his friends had a gun, but it was really a flashlight. Several other participants referred to being stopped and questioned for no apparent reason while walking home or driving a car at night. They all felt that whenever something happens, like a fight breaking out at a bar, if a Black man is present the police will assume he is at fault, and some provided examples. As a result, they try to avoid this kind of situation, and if that fails, they have developed strategies to defuse interactions with the police. Terrence said:

> I always try and stay calm. Basically, you just don't give them a reason to end up locked up, right. And the funny part about that is, when you do that, police officers don't like that. And when you try to be civil and sensible. And when you know your rights, it's always like 'why do you know your rights?'"

Female interviewees recall far fewer interactions with the police. They noted that Black women are less likely than Black men to be perceived as threatening, so in general they experience less routine surveillance by police. One noteworthy exception is Stella, who said she was walking down the street in the middle of the day when a police officer pulled over in his car and asked if she was a prostitute:

> I wasn't wearing revealing clothes. I was wearing long pants with a t-shirt, covered t-shirt and I just couldn't understand why the cop stopped and asked me that. And I was like, 'why would you ask me if I'm a prostitute? What did I do? Did I stop any car? Did I stop anyone and ask them if they want anything? Why would you ask me that?' I felt dehumanized.

This example reflects the idea that Black women in public are involved in the sex trade and reproduces age-old associations between Black women and criminal sexuality (Maynard 2017). All of the above examples reflect popular discourses about Black men and women, which shape the experiences of second-generation African Canadians as they navigate public spaces in Vancouver. Some of these outcomes are gendered, including the heightened police surveillance of Black men, suggestions that Black women are likely to be sex workers, harassment of women wearing a headscarf, and assuming that men wearing athletic clothing are gangsters and thieves. At the same time, both women and men experience racialized micro-aggressions that challenge their general competence, professionalism, honesty, and respectability. Discourses of

Blackness also affect intimate personal relationships, and the next section explores how African Canadian men and women are positioned differently as potential romantic partners in the local heterosexual market.

Gender, race, and romantic relationships

Second-generation African Canadians growing up in the multi-ethnic, multi-racial metropolis of Vancouver form friendships with people from diverse backgrounds. Some have grown up in neighbourhoods that are predominantly White, while others reside in neighbourhoods with large populations of Chinese, South Asian, and/or Filipino descent, and high school friendships tend to reflect the ethnic diversity of the specific neighbourhood. Given the small size of the local African and broader Black communities in Vancouver, interviewees were usually one of the only African and Black students in their schools, and most had no Black friends during adolescence. A few had developed friendships with other African Canadian youth through family connections, church, or regional soccer teams.

These networks expanded as interviewees become adults and entered college and university,[5] where they tended to develop more connections with other young adults in the local African diaspora, including new migrants from Africa who came to pursue postsecondary education. Some interviewees had consciously gravitated to international African students in university, building stronger connections in the local diaspora as they got older. For example, Ashley met her current partner at university when he was an international student. She said, "my closest friends right now are mostly African [from] Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda." Denise has also extended her network in the African diaspora and, unlike in childhood, now routinely encounters "people who look like me." She commented:

> I needed to see the Black person, or see another Black person, or see people who look like me from time to time. Now as I'm older I have Black friends, I have people from Africa, not necessarily Uganda, but a community where if I'm needing to relate I don't have to wait for that Independence Day.

Some male interviewees said that in contrast to during adolescence, their key friendship networks as adults mainly involved the local African diaspora. Jay said, "as I've grown older more and more of my friends are

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5. All participants had completed some postsecondary education, ranging from a few courses to completion of a Master's degree: 29% had completed a university degree, 11% had completed shorter (one to two year) college diplomas, and 57% were enrolled in college or university degree programs.

Black." Jack commented that he has friends from Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Africa, Nigeria, Jamaica, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Korea, and some White friends from high school. Forlan listed friends from South Africa, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria. In discussing his friends, Lamar said, "most of them are Black but I have one White friend," someone he identified as being his best friend since elementary school. He explained that all of his other friends now come from the African diaspora because "when you go into a room you gravitate towards people who are like you." Friendships tend to develop out of proximity and similar interests and experiences, and many interviewees felt that processes of racialization were a basis for common experiences. Kweku said:

> I don't know what it is but when you meet another Black person like it's just, for me, it's easier to [connect] because you already share something in common. So, it's almost like they meet and they immediately trust and accept you.

Broader shared experiences of migration can also provide points of commonality. Michael noted that he has always been drawn to "second-generation immigrants." Due to the neighbourhood he grew up in, he has many friends of South Asian background. He commented that despite their different cultures, their common migrant backgrounds, family life, and personal struggles serve as a "bonding point." Betty made a similar observation about how she is drawn to others who share some experience of migration:

> The majority of my good friends, the ones that are just constant and rooted, are of immigrant status…who may have been born here, or born here and have a different culture and relate to a different identity.

Betty also said that at university she sought out "different groups of friends, but it was always with students who [are] interested in international issues…[and whose] parents are not from here." Some of Betty's close friends share her Ethiopian or broader African heritage and others do not, but all have second-generation identities as children of immigrants.

Interestingly, trends in romantic relationships differed markedly from the trends in adult friendship that were similar for men and women. Although the study population was small, interviews revealed three important gender differences related to romantic relationships: the likelihood of having a partner or being single, having a partner from a different background or primarily African descent, and having a partner raised in Canada or in Africa. The majority of male interviewees

had a partner from a different racial background who had grown up in Canada. The majority of female interviewees were single; if they had a partner, he was likely to be of African descent and raised in Africa.

Almost all interviewees expected to find a heterosexual spouse and to have children; [6] three were already parents. Men and women were seeking similar general characteristics in a romantic partner: the most common desired traits were being goal-oriented, hardworking, well-educated, family-oriented, sharing a common religion,[7] and having some connection to a recent experience of migration. The latter was often framed as a preference for a partner who has some cultural difference that distinguishes their family from mainstream Canadian culture.[8] A noteworthy finding is that the vast majority of men (88%) and women (74%) said that ethnic or racial background does not matter in their choice of partner – but there was a clear gendered difference in the backgrounds of people with whom they actually formed romantic relationships.

At the time of the interviews, most men (56%) had a romantic partner, and another 31% said they had previously had a partner; only 12% of male interviewees did not identify any romantic partner. Of their current and previous romantic partners, more than 70% were outside of the African diaspora – in most cases White women, and less often women of Asian descent. Only four of the male interviewees (24%) had partners of African descent, three of whom were raised in Canada, and one a long-distance relationship in their home country of Sierra Leone.

In contrast, at the time of the interviews, only 26% of women had partners, even though they tended to be older than male participants (mean age of 24.6 years versus 22.1 years), and three women were older than thirty.[9] Overall, 42% of women referred to having a previous romantic relationship, while 32% indicated they had never had a partner. All of their current partners were Black, and when we include former partners, nearly 70% were men of African descent. Only 31% of women had ever had a White partner, and none said they had a current or former partner of Asian origin.

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6. There were two exceptions: one woman is a survivor of sexual violence; she did not want a romantic partner but planned to adopt children in the future. Another woman wanted a husband but did not plan to have children.

7. Most participants (80%) were Christian, 9% were Muslim, and 11% identified as agnostic or atheist.

8. Examples include partners with recent European immigrant backgrounds, such as Italian, Ukrainian, Portuguese, Norwegian, Irish, and German.

9. Two of those women had never been married and one was divorced.

The pattern of women's relationships with men of African descent was particularly interesting. Of the nine current or previous boyfriends and husbands of African descent, all but two had migrated from African countries when they were adults – most as international postsecondary students. Only one woman had a romantic partner who was also a second-generation African immigrant, and another had a partner who migrated from Haiti when he was a child.

These gendered patterns cannot be explained by differences in individual preferences, especially given that such a significant majority of both men and women said that ethnic and racial background is not important when choosing a romantic partner: only two men and four women expressed a specific preference for a partner of African descent. Lamar said he had only dated White women in the past, and although race does not matter much, at this point he would "prefer Black." Luke said he had dated non-African women when he was younger, but that race mattered more as he got older and started thinking about marriage and children. At the time of the interview, he has a girlfriend from the local African community. He said, "I want my children to look like me, you know. When I say look like, I want them to be Black like me." Four women said they were only interested in romantic partners from the African diaspora. Reasons for this preference included "commonalities around culture" and "an analysis of race" (Shukre), the "mutual understanding" that comes from shared roots in Africa (Stella), desiring "a culture that complements my culture" (Linda), and only "look[ing] at Black guys" because it is "hard to relate" to those who are not African descent (Denise).

Many female interviewees who said they were open to romantic relationships with men of diverse backgrounds also expressed a particular interest in dating second-generation African Canadian men, although few had done so, and several explicitly ruled out relationships with men who had been raised in Africa. Jane said that while ethnic or racial background does not generally matter to her, she "would not marry an African" because of the different cultural expectations. Joy, whose partner was a second-generation African Canadian, also said, "I would not connect with someone who is from Kenya now." Tina said she is "definitely attracted to Black men," but "wouldn't date an African from Africa" because of their traditional views about women. Sarah also said that while race does not matter, her potential romantic partner "has to have a North American cultural background."

Some women who had previously dated men raised in Africa identified cultural clashes around gender as one reason why relationships flounder. For example, Emily explained that she was initially attracted

to international students from Africa because she was "eager to learn about the culture and I found that attractive in my partner." However, due to conflict about gender expectations, she was currently seeking a partner who was not raised in Africa and therefore more "open minded." Similarly, Claudia believed her independence contributed to breakups with two previous partners from different African countries. Shukre also acknowledged that "navigating gender stuff" has been a source of conflict in past relationships, although she still had a strong preference for men of African descent.

   None of the male interviewees commented on these gendered patterns. Some said they had never become romantically involved with second-generation African Canadian women because they rarely came in contact with any. However, many of the female interviewees were very aware of gender differences regarding romantic partners, and believed that African Canadian men are not attracted to women in their own community. Markor said that second-generation African Canadian men "would rather date people outside of the African race or descent," and Tina said, "I see them prefer dating White girls." Others noted that while most of the second-generation African Canadian women they know are single, men have little difficulty finding romantic partners. Betty, one of the older interviewees (aged 31), said that of the 10 second-generation African Canadian women she knows well, only two are married – the other eight are single and ask rhetorically, "so where are the men?"

   These findings support previous qualitative research in the United States (Childs 2005; Wilkins 2012a; 20112b; 2012c) and survey results in Canada (Milan et al. 2010; Livingstone and Weinfeld 2015). Overall, they suggest that second-generation African Canadian women have fewer romantic options than their male counterparts in the local heterosexual market in Vancouver. The dominance of White standards of female beauty, combined with representations of Black women in popular culture and negative discourses about Black femininity, appear to help shape the romantic prospects of African Canadian women.[10] Few female interviewees had ever dated men outside of the African diaspora, or even second-generation African Canadians who grew up in Canada. Most had found their partners from among international students who migrated to Canada from countries in Africa. Those men

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10. Heterosexual relationships are also shaped by the broader context of power differences between women and men, and class differences linked to different levels of education. In the American context, the mass incarceration of African American men also affects the romantic prospects of African American women (Collins 2005; Hill 2005).

grew up with Afrocentric beauty norms and may have been more at-tracted to African Canadian women, compared with men raised in Can-ada where White standards of beauty prevail. At the same time, men raised in African countries may also have more traditional expectations about gender roles, which can be a source of tension in relationships with women raised in Canada.

Additionally, popular culture in Canada helps position second-gen-eration African Canadian men as heterosexually desirable well beyond the African diaspora, even if – or because – they are also seen as poten-tially dangerous. This is especially so in Vancouver, where Black men are still scarce. Some male interviewees said they are careful to avoid White women who fetishize Black men. Bob said, "I don't date, period, women who [only] want to date Black men" because he does not want to try to live up to an "exotic fantasy" of what a Black man should be. Still, the sexual desirability of African Canadian men means that they have little difficulty forming romantic relationships with local women from diverse backgrounds, and most of the men interviewed for this study were involved in romantic relationships with White women.

Conclusions

This paper has explored how gendered discourses of Blackness affect second-generation African Canadian women and men in Vancouver as they negotiate life as a hyper visible racialized minority. Despite the very small size of the local African immigrant community, in a me-tropolis where just over 1% of residents are racialized as Black, these individuals navigate an environment in which discourses about Black-ness are ubiquitous. Their interactions in public spaces are shaped by the long history of racist stereotypes embedded in colonialism and slavery, along with images of Black masculinity and femininity in contemporary popular culture. Some interactions affect women and men in similar ways, such as routine questioning of their competency, professionalism, honesty, and respectability, which make it necessary to demonstrate capability and character by working hard to dispel as-sumptions that are made based on skin colour. Other interactions are clearly gendered.

Gendered discourses of Blackness shape interactions with stran-gers and acquaintances, but they also affect the most intimate personal relationships. The popularity of commercial hip hop, alongside the dominance of White beauty norms, combine to position African Can-adian men and women very differently in the local heterosexual mar-

ket. The dominant discourses about Black masculinity and femininity in North America tend to enhance the romantic prospects of African Canadian men while limiting the options for women. As a result, most of the male interviewees had partners, mainly White women. In contrast, most of the female interviewees were single; of those with partners, most were of African descent and had migrated as adults from countries in Africa. Thus, second-generation African Canadians must navigate processes of racialization not only in public spaces, but also in intimate relationships.

These results demonstrate that processes of racialization are central to understanding the experiences of second-generation African Canadians. Among these children of African parents, their positioning as Black overshadows any cultural differences between their diverse heritages. Anti-Black racism is an everyday part of their lives, whether expressed through micro-aggressions or more overt acts of discrimination. Racialization also crosses generational differences. First-generation parents of African descent are treated as permanent "immigrants" regardless of citizenship or length of residence in Canada, reinforcing their identity as African and not Canadian (Creese 2011). The Canadian-raised "1.5 generation" and second generation are more likely to identify as African Canadian, but their Canadian identity is seldom recognized and other people frequently ask where they come from (Creese 2019; in press).

Overall, this study has illustrated the importance of intersectional analysis by demonstrating ways that ideas about, and processes of, racialization are simultaneously gendered and sexualized. As a result, discourses of Blackness help produce both similar and different lived experiences among heterosexual men and women in the same racialized community. Scholars of migration and racialization in Canada and beyond must remain attentive to the diverse ways that processes of racialization are gendered and sexualized, with uneven effects on people's lived experiences in public spaces and within intimate relationships.

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